

“Hold the Line at 99”: Reflections of Identity, Race, and Relationships in the
Professional and Educational Experiences of Retired African American Teachers

A Dissertation
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

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IN PARTIAL FULLFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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May 2018

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my committee, Drs. Christopher Johnstone, Karen Seashore Louis, Timothy Lensmire, and Muhammad Khalifa for their invaluable guidance and input in this dissertation. I am especially thankful for Chris, whose role in my academic development spanned years and continents.

I am thankful for my friends and colleagues who assisted in identifying participants for this study. They include Trisha, Roberta, Ruth, Renee, Keith, Theon, Charlotte, Steve, Mike, Spider, Mary, Anna, Rebekah, and Elizabeth; and for the participants who shared their time and their stories with me, and who trusted me. This study would not have been possible without their dedicated efforts.

I am thankful for my friends, near and far, my fellow travelers on the front line, whose prayers, wisdom, laughter, and fellowship have encouraged me throughout this research process. They include Natalie, Eric, Robyn, Nicole, Kristin, Shirin, Christin, Carissa, Andrew, Marsha, Margaret, Tony, Terence, Ricky, Augustine, and Quasi;

And for Travaris and all the wonderful Kid's Club kids.

I am thankful for my colleagues, for Grad Admissions and Student Development, for Kim, Wanchen, Nancy, Tristin, Tricia, Dan, David, and Lesley; for Shirin and the International Graduate Student community; and for my current and former supervisors, Allison, Sheree, Geoff, Dennis and Trisha.

I am thankful for my LIIE 2014 cohort, Bethany, Jenn, Seun and the rest. I could not have asked for a more intelligent and kind group of scholars to share this journey with;

And for Beth and Terry, for their generous editorial support.

I am thankful for my mentor, Mary, whose interest in me has emboldened my calling;

And for my sisters, Lynn, Felicia, and Tai, who always keep it real.

Most of all, I am thankful for my loving family, starting with my parents, BJ and Lynda, who have provided an unwavering and lifelong commitment to supporting my personal and professional endeavors. This study would not have been possible without their childcare support, housing during transitions to and from Ghana, and endless encouragement and dedication to my success; and for my siblings, Sarah, Daniel, Anna, Elizabeth and Rebekah and their families; and for my husband, Anthony, who has been the primary champion of my academic pursuits and my commitment to social justice and who reminds me that there is meaning in the struggle. And to my children, Trinity, Whitney, Kingsley, and Kingsford, who most or much of their lives have been structured according to the ebbs and flows of my schooling and of the research process and who have cheered me right through the finish line where their goldfish were waiting. They are my joy and my reason.

Dedication

To the survivors of the Middle Passage, and to their children, and to their children's children, and so on.

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the reflections of identity, race, and relationships in the professional and educational experiences of retired African American teachers. The findings contribute knowledge to the field of education about how race mediates collegial relationships through identifying how racialized dynamics are remembered and understood by African American teachers within the context of their careers over time. The study amplifies the voices of Black educators in historically White-dominated professional and academic spaces. The stories and perspectives of retired African American public school teachers about their teaching careers can be a starting point for seeing, understanding, and appreciating the complexities and nuances of promoting racially just organizational dynamics in US public schools.

Through this phenomenological study, I answered the following questions:

1. In what ways do retired African American public school teachers describe the historical and contemporary context of US race relations in schools and in society, and the implications for urban public schools, especially in relation to their own work?
2. In what ways do retired African American public school teachers conceptualize their personal identities and collegial relationships in the context of their workplaces over time?
3. In what ways did retired African American urban public school teachers evaluate how, when, and why race was talked about, if at all, either formally

or informally in schools?

I organized the findings of this study into three main themes that emerged during individual interviews with ten retired African American public school teachers in Chicago and the greater Chicago area. The themes include: 1) the perpetuation of the myth of racial progress: national-level racism; 2) the problem of racial segregation for schools and societies: school-level racism; and 3) the potential of relational networks for enhancing racial justice: prospects for change. The findings demonstrate that strengthening teacher relationships through facilitated cross-racial dialogue may be important for improving the professional experiences of African American teachers and ultimately for addressing systemic injustices as a way forward for accomplishing racial justice in schools and society.

Key Words: cross-racial, social networks, identity, dialogue, professional development

Foreword

As a White researcher married to an African immigrant to the United States and as the mother of two bi-racial daughters and two Black sons, the topic of this study is important to me in personal and professional ways. In addition to my close personal ties to the realities of race for people of color in the US and abroad, three key life experiences guide the development of my research paradigm. First, my professional experiences in diverse teaching contexts in the United States and Ghana inform my understanding of racial justice in schools both locally and internationally. My volunteer work and pre-service teaching in Chicago Public Schools exposed me to the phenomena of poverty, violence, and academic achievement disparities in under-resourced schools, but it was outside of the US that I discovered the centrality of power and oppression in social reform, and more specifically, in school reform. At the time, I situated the under-achievement of the African American children I worked with as the problem itself, rather than as the symptom of larger social problems. As a strong supporter of individualism and hard work, I was determined to help my students draw themselves up by their bootstraps (Freeman, 1998). I had limited understanding of how people in positions of power create policies that marginalize the most vulnerable members of society while upholding perceived democratic ideals of individualism in a presumed meritocracy (Glaude, 2016; Khalifa, 2010; Picower, 2009). I am aware that for a greater portion of my professional life, my Whiteness has shielded me from seeing institutional racism, and the White supremacist ideologies embedded deep within my own heart, more clearly (Kivel, 2011).

Second, my personal experiences as a White minority in African and African American communities prompted me to narrow my research focus to Black-White relations, specifically. The intent of this narrowing is not to place Black people at the center of race narratives to the exclusion of Asians, Indians, Latinos/as and other marginalized groups. Scholars warn that a contribution to discourse on race focused exclusively on Black-White relations without an expressed concern for other groups could contribute to the Black-White binary paradigm which “obscures the oppression of other marginalized groups” (Luna, 2003, p. 226). However, commonalities exist between all oppressed groups, and each group carries a unique narrative of oppression. In this case, it is the narrative of oppression as a function of the legacy of slavery and the ongoing Black struggle for civil rights that is addressed. This focused approach on the Black experience, in addition to my personal and professional experiences in Black communities, helped inform my understanding of the deep, contextualized experiences of the African American teachers I interviewed. Understanding the oppression of multiple groups was outside of the scope of this project. Thus, the intent for setting narrow parameters is not to exclude the stories of others but rather to affirm that more work is needed to understand and remedy discrimination against each marginalized group (Kim, 2004; Luna, 2003).

Finally, having lived in two cultures deeply connected by the trans-Atlantic slave route, I have become more aware of the importance of history in understanding the pervasiveness of past and present racial injustice. I have toured former slave castles on the coast of Ghana and examined the ways colonial oppression shaped and continues to shape Ghanaian society and schools. Meanwhile, the tragic death of Michael Brown in

2014 at the hands of law enforcement officials prompted a fundamental shift in my understanding of the state of race relations in US America and proved instrumental in my decision to return to the US to examine racial justice issues at home. Transitioning from studying educational development in post-colonial West Africa to urban US America, my vantage point for understanding race relations and school reform now encompasses a broader and more interrelated global context.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The goal of this study was to investigate and analyze how retired African American public school teachers in Chicago and the greater Chicago area understand their personal identities, their conceptions of race, and their professional relationships across lines of racial difference. The study is motivated by my concern for social justice in urban education and its focus is on the culture of adults in schools. While ample scholarship addresses social and racial injustice within the classroom context, fewer studies have examined the phenomenon at the collegial level and through the lens of the African American teaching experience. The findings contribute to scholarship around issues of race in the US, organizational diversity, and school reform, specifically considering how teachers navigate complex issues of power, identity, history, and relationship within their workplaces. I approached this study through the lens of Critical Race Theory, with accompanying attention to Social Network Theory and Racial Identity Development Theory. I used the Critical Race Theory lens because my participants talked about systemic issues and societal power structures in their reflections of their racialized professional teaching experiences. I drew from Social Network Theory and Racial Identity Development Theory because I sought to understand better how the participants make sense of their teacher identities in relation to the broader social network of education. The extent to which race or racial identity mediates teachers' social networks links these two supporting theories together.

This study is based on the premise that the concept of race, though highly contested, remains a pervasive issue in the United States and in other White majority

societies around the world (Kivel, 2011), and the prejudicial or preferential treatment of people based on racial categories is a global phenomenon (Norwood & Foreman, 2013). Many studies focus on material indicators of racial wellbeing including income (Hoover & Yaya, 2011), health (Williams & Collins, 2001), and education (Ladson-Billings, 2004). These and other studies highlight substantial differences in overall wellbeing between racial groups, and show that the disparities persist over time (Rohde & Guest, 2012). Racist policies and the racial ideas that sustain them have devastating effects for Black lives and for society evident in racial disparities in education, health, wealth, police killings, and incarceration rates (Kendi, 2016). Racialized policies include discriminatory rules or practices in law enforcement, housing, banking, employment, and education that create disproportionate disadvantages for certain racial groups. Racial ideologies normalize racial policies by explaining racial disparities as deficiencies within the groups themselves and justifying relegating people of color to unimportant, powerless, or marginalized positions in society rather than examining structural discrimination. These ideologies may manifest themselves in the subconscious minds of children and adults whose belief systems have been formed within a White supremacist society.

While views on race are contested, the guiding premise of this study is that despite politically backed and widely embraced notions of a “post-racial” society (Glaude, 2016; Harvey, Banks, & Tennial 2014), the same legal and societal structures that institutionalized slavery, justified Jim Crow segregation, criminalized Black Americans, and created the current mass incarceration crisis in the United States continue to assign racially distinct groups of people into subordinate political, social, and

economic positions (Alexander, 2012; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). As civil rights lawyer Michelle Alexander says, “we have not ended racial caste in America, we merely redesigned it” (Alexander, 2012, p. 2).

This evolving but pervasive structure of White supremacy permeates all major social institutions including schools, churches, and media outlets, and an imbalance of privilege, power, and opportunities for White people results in persistent social inequities for people of color (Gardiner, 2009). Seminal literature on race in the United States explains the phenomenon of racism as it is expressed in a particular setting (Alexander 2012; Glaude, 2016; Kendi, 2016). Further, ample studies, including thousands of books and publications, stories, music, theatrical productions, and all forms of intellectual and artistic expression have conveyed the reality of structural racism in the US. Still, individuals within systemically racist societies often fail to recognize the realities of ongoing racism that people of color know and experience every day. Kendi (2016) says, “there has been a not-so-glorious progression of racism, and educational persuasion has failed to stop it, and Americans have failed to recognize it” (p.507).

People socialized within these institutions internalize messages of White superiority and Black inferiority while White normativity renders the social benefits accrued to Whites, and Whiteness itself, unnoticeable (Morris, 2016). Lawyer and social justice advocate, Bryan Stevenson, asserts that we live in a society shaped by “a narrative of racial difference” where some members of society are valued more than others (Stevenson, personal communication, September 6, 2016). This valuing differently, however, is often overlooked or denied, particularly in an era of color-blind ideology that

sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva explains as an assumption that racial difference is no longer relevant in US society. Bonilla-Silva claims that “as much as Jim Crow racism served as the glue for defending a brutal and overt system of racial oppression in the pre-civil rights era, color-blind racism serves today as an ideological armor for a covert and institutionalized system in the post-civil rights era” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, p. 3).

The causes of racial inequities remain contested within empirical literature. Some scholars perceive them as symptoms of larger, structural social injustices (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) and others perceive them as the consequences of poor decision making or a lack of motivation among people of color themselves (Conyers, 2002). While deficiency theories, as they are called, have been set aside in recent decades for explanations with less obvious racial tones, implicit or subconscious biases remain. Recognizing divergent perspectives across the literature for understanding racial inequities and racial oppression reveals the contested nature of race relations and racial understanding.

US public schools are one context in which the effects of racial oppression are particularly salient (Moody, 2011). Within this context, teachers’ collegial relationships are an important part of the formal and informal social networks within which knowledge, innovation, and resources flow (Daly, 2010). Teacher relationships offer a unique context for studying the relational dynamics of educational change. For example, collaborative work teams are considered promising for their capacity to improve teaching, enhance organizational learning, and foster a heightened sense of community through embracing the human-centered nature of education work (McPherson, Smith-

Lovin, & Cook, 2001). However, these benefits are bound by the capacity of the team to function effectively together. One approach to enhancing work groups effectiveness is fostering conditions of trust and care.

Scholars demonstrate that increased trust and care in collegial relationship are helpful for mediating risk and vulnerability (Bryk & Schneider, 2003), developing a sense of dependability in long-term relationships and integrity in those of shorter duration (Louis, Murphy, & Smylie, 2016), providing a base of mutual support (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Mulford & Silins, 2003), and developing a “basic regard for the dignity of others” (Kochanek, 2005, p. 7). The ways Black teachers understand their personal identities, conceptions of race, and professional relationships across lines of racial difference is important for understanding how race mediates the relational network of teachers in a context where race is often not talked about (Pollock, 2009).

Contested views about the realities, causes, and consequences of race in the US cut across and between races, complicating conversations and considerations for the way forward. Some perspectives are historically more dominant than others, potentially generating further confusion, as different groups maintain separate yet intersecting narratives of race. A lack of common understanding of history and of the current racial climate, and a failure to talk about past and present realities in ways that honor the experiences of Black people can hinder cross-racial dialogue and relationships. Consequently, this racial disconnect may hinder the development of effective cross-racial social network patterns and ultimately hinder racial justice efforts in schools.

This study is situated at the intersection of three primary bodies of knowledge: race in the US, organizational diversity, and school reform. As such, the reflections of retired African American teachers, who have the ability to reflect upon decades of purported “progress” in the US in terms of race and racism, are viewed within the broader societal structure that mediates and informs organizational policy and practice at the local school level. I highlight the links between these bodies of literature to explain more comprehensively the interplay between ongoing challenges of school reform that improves Black education, of race as a category of organizational diversity, and of the experience of being Black in the US more broadly. It is necessary to consider participants’ responses within the context of race in US America over time to understand why decades of school reform efforts have produced no gains in the academic achievement of African American students (Tatum, 2017).

An exploration into the history of race in the US reveals how power structures are maintained in direct contradiction to its founding democratic principles (Glaude, 2016). This perspective is helpful for understanding why the wealthiest country in the world lags far behind on measures of equity and meeting the basic human needs of its people. For example, according to the Social Progress Index that measures basic human needs, foundations of wellbeing, and opportunity, the US ranked 18th despite ranking 5th highest GDP per capita (Porter, Stern & Green, 2014). Education is one such measure, and persistent racial gaps should be considered with an understanding of schools in the context of US culture and society, and the US in the context of global racial dominance and colonial oppression. Not only are academic achievement levels divided by race, so

are measures of teacher representation in schools, of the wealth, safety and wellbeing, of political and ideological perspectives, and so are the stories that make up the nation's incomplete and incoherent, disconnected social fabric.

An in-depth exploration into the lived experiences of retired African American teachers, particularly because they offer the luxury of a longer range of reflection over time, aids in understanding this division and offers direction towards points of resolution, as race relations among colleagues remains a largely unexamined area of school reform. The goal then, of this study, was to explore through a structural lens retired African American teachers' understandings of their personal identities, their constructions of race, and their professional relationships over time. In doing so, the study revealed important insights into the state of race relations in the US and the ways perceptions of power and privilege complicate generally accepted organizational diversity strategies for building effective professional relationships among teachers.

This qualitative study included in-depth interviews with ten retired African American teachers in which they recalled memories of their educational and professional experiences over time. The findings shed light on the complex interplay of power, identity, history, and relationship in schools and underscore that school reform efforts must extend beyond the classroom to consider pervasive racist structures that continue to make life difficult and unsafe for Black people, acknowledging that the silencing of this phenomenon hinders a more unified and meaningful approach. Therefore, the African American experience is an appropriate starting point for seeing, understanding, and appreciating the complexities and nuances of promoting racially just organizational

dynamics in US public schools.

Statement of the Problems

For the purpose of this study, the challenge of promoting racially just organization dynamics in US public schools is situated within three larger problems: 1) the complicated state of race relations in the US that is evident in divergent political ideologies and contested conceptualizations of persistent racial inequity; 2) the potential limitations to organizational diversity approaches including inattention to power differentials within diverse groups; and 3) the historically narrow approaches to school reform efforts including those focused on the classroom context to the exclusion of the broader societal structures within which they operate.

Positioning the condition of racial disparities in schools and societies as a symptom of these larger problems can provide a new paradigm for addressing the complexities of power and privilege and the ongoing consequences of a racially divided and wounded United States. Under this premise, the contested nature of race, the limited conceptualization of organizational diversity, and the historically narrow approaches to school reform are explicated as independent issues yet linked according to their implications for racial justice efforts in US public schools. The thread that ties these ideas together is power. As such, I state the problems this way to highlight the possibility that power and perceived power differentials across lines of racial difference may challenge dominant US neoliberal notions of individualism and meritocratic value systems that obscure structural racial oppression and perpetuate post-racial ideologies.

The Complicated State of Race Relations in US America. The nature, definition, and causes of the construction of race are complicated and contested. Race is a social construct created to justify the superiority of one race over another and racial groups are artificial and merely the social manifestation of this construct (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002), yet its consequences are real. While former constructions of biological race categories have been formally denounced (UNESCO, 1950), the dehumanization and super humanization of certain members of society according to the color of their skin remain. Racial categories are neither trans-historical nor fixed, and no longer hold any moral, biological, medical, or intellectual grounding (Baker, 1998), yet racial constructions continue to operate as social realities that guide perception and behavior (Lewis, 2003).

Even the social significance of race as a dividing line is contested, particularly in a proclaimed post-racial society (Harvey, Banks & Tennial, 2014). Teachers who assume a post-racial ideology may consider racism “a thing of the past” (Brown, Carnoy, Currie, Duster, & Oppenheimer, 2003, p. 6; Dei & McDermott, 2014, p. 1). Discussions of race, often referred to throughout the literature as “race talk,” are often silenced, ignored, diluted, or discussed superficially for fear of offending others (Sue, 2013). While race talk appears to have been successfully quieted and race has become a normalized aspect of society (Khalifa, Jennings, Briscoe, Oleszweski, & Abdi, 2013), ample literature calls institutional racism the “new racism,” packaged in subtlety¹ and perpetuated by

¹ The term “subtle” in this study is used to denote a comparison of current racial manifestations against the more overt forms of the past. Its use should not imply that the effects of racial oppression on the daily lived experiences of Black people are in any way subtle.

colorblind approaches in schools where racism tend to be understood only as overt discrimination or individual prejudice.

The historically bound and ever evolving conversation of racism, discrimination, prejudice, and oppression covers complex and divergent ground within a physically and ideologically segregated nation with conflicting race narratives. As such, opposing viewpoints reveal the contested nature of race in society and its problematic implications for moving forward towards racial equity and social justice. The challenge is that even among scholars and practitioners who seek social justice, perceptions of race, racial groups, and racism differ widely, and not simply across lines of racial difference, but also within. Many White scholars present compelling studies of White supremacy and racial dominance (Kivel, 2011, Lewis, 2003; Wytsma, 2013) while other White scholars claim emphasizing racial dominance and oppression undermines democratic principles and reinforces anti-White racism (Horowitz, 2000). Within the context of school reform, both the common tendency to avoid talking about race (Pollock, 2009) and the contested nature of race (Blockland, 2003) prove problematic for enacting positive change.

Potential Limitations to Organizational Diversity Approaches. The tendency to avoid talking about race in organizational settings is evident in how organizational diversity is discussed and analyzed within the literature. This study is set within the context of organizational diversity to understand better how teachers interact with their racially dissimilar others and to identify how race mediates teachers' relational dynamics. Despite a wealth of research on organizational diversity (Bacharach, Bamberger, & Vashdi, 2005; Ely & Thomas, 2001; Mannix & Neale, 2005; Van Kippenberg &

Schippers, 2007), and inconclusive findings regarding the effects of diversity on professional work teams (Bakar & McCann, 2014), few studies examine the unique effects of power imbalances in racially diverse work teams (Konrad, 2003).

Differences across various social identities including gender, ethnicity, age, religious affiliation, and economic status tend to be influenced by privileges reinforced by cultural norms. The concept of racial difference is particularly embedded within notions of hierarchy as it is a social construction created for the justification and social acceptance of oppression and dominance (Baker, 1998). Gillespie, Ashbaugh, & Defiore (2002) contend that in studies on racial diversity, oppression and dominance must be considered. In the business literature, however, diversity tends to be largely conceptualized as mere demographic difference and thus fails to account for structural mechanisms that often dictate phenomena of power and oppression at play within diverse groups of people.

Within the literature, the mechanisms that govern formal social groups such as work teams remain under examined (Ruef, Aldrich & Carter, 2003). Van Knippenberg and Schippers (2004) call for more complex conceptualizations of diversity and for more empirical attention to the processes assumed to underlie the effects of diversity on group performance. Joshi, Liao, & Roh's (2011) study of workplace demography reveals that systems of power and privilege may limit the involvement and contribution of some team members within an organizational context. Organizational diversity scholars seem to prioritize discussions of interpersonal and intercultural differences in studies of the effects of diversity on work teams in US workplaces (Gelfand, Erez, & Aycan, 2007;

Joshi, Liao, & Roh, 2011; Mannix & Neale, 2005; Van Knippenberg, 2007), overlooking more critical approaches that may identify individual or social injustices (Ely & Thomas, 2001). This tendency to focus on cultural difference while avoiding the possibility of power dynamics could lead to improved levels of intercultural competence but still fail to generate understanding of power imbalances across lines of difference. Increased attention to structural reform may direct professionals to leverage their positions of power rather than simply get along with dissimilar colleagues in order to effect institutional change.

The Historically Narrow Approach to School Reform Efforts. Much of the diversity research that specifically examines racial justice in schools focuses on teacher education (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1996), children within the classroom context (Cochran-Smith, 2003), or teacher to student relationships (Picower, 2009). Fewer studies examine the ways teachers relate to one another in cross-racial professional settings. The question of how teacher-to-teacher relationships are influenced by understandings of race appears to be under-examined, including how teachers negotiate and make meaning of their racial identities within their professional contexts. While much scholarly work has contributed to school reform efforts at the classroom level, shifting the focus towards teacher-to-teacher relationships in racially diverse school settings invites a careful examination of the potential dynamics of power and privilege among teachers in professional practice.

Extensive research has been conducted on facilitating more equitable learning opportunities for students in the classroom (Ford & Sassi, 2014; Gay, 2010; Goldenberg,

2014; Howard, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1990, 2009; Milner, 2011; Nieto, 2004; Walker, 2010). Fewer scholars, however, have examined approaches for creating more equitable workplaces for teachers. One approach, the development of a collaborative community of educators, is linked to enhanced teaching and learning effectiveness (Conley, Fauske, & Pounder, 2004; Louis, 2007). Given the racial diversity prevalent in schools, healthy professional relationships can serve as a model for students regarding the ways adults work together across lines of cultural difference. Such practices are particularly urgent as schools are one of the most important institutions for the socialization of youth (Khalifa & Briscoe, 2015).

Despite historically narrow approaches, school reform efforts within recent decades have demonstrated a shift away from “restructuring” and toward “reculturing” (Miller, 2008). Seymour Sarason (1996) warns that school improvement initiatives require fundamental shifts in school culture. He highlights the importance of situating school reform efforts within the broader context of institutional change. As such, he insists that recognizing the role of power within the culture of the school is paramount to integrating school reform through an understanding of the larger social context. Ample scholarship addresses racial justice in education (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Howard, 2008; Khalifa, 2010), diversity in organizations (Bacharach, Bamberger, & Vashdi, 2005; Ely & Thomas, 2001; Mannix & Neale, 2005; Van Knippenberg, 2007), and school reform (Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2009; Louis, 2007; Noguera, 2003; Sarason, 1996). However, a gap remains. More work is needed to understand better the lived experiences of Black teachers and to identify the extent to which these teachers and their colleagues

can promote racial justice in their classrooms as well as create racially just work relationships with each other (Louis, Murphy, & Smylie 2016; Ng, 2015; Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Dittmann & Crosby, 2008).

These links seem yet to be explored through the lens of race—either relating to the composition of professional relationships or for understanding race within schools that have a multi-racial teaching faculty. Both the collective and individual identities of Black teachers may inform the ways they navigate their collaborative professional activities. Identifying how Black teachers perceive their own racial identities and make sense of their professional relationships in racially diverse work contexts may reveal important insights for sustained school and societal change. This depth of understanding may unearth a level of consciousness not yet discussed in the race in the US, organizational diversity, and school reform literature.

Statement of Study Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore retired African American US public school teachers' understanding of their personal identities, their constructions of race, and their professional relationships within their teaching careers over time. The focus of the study was the culture of adults in schools with an emphasis on how teachers of color negotiate power, history, identity, and relationships across lines of racial difference.

Significance of the Study

This study of how retired African American public school teachers reflect on identity, race, and relationships in their professional lives contributes to the literature in several ways. First, exploring collegial relationships through the lens of race helps shift

the discussion of racial justice and school reform from the classroom context to the societal level. It also prompts researchers and school leaders to consider dynamics of race and power within their discussions of organizational diversity and professional learning communities. Since links have been made between healthy collaborative educational workspaces and student learning, this study helps substantiate these claims and revealed where additional research is needed.

This study provides scholarly insight into how Black teachers as minoritized professionals understand race dynamics to inform and contribute to social justice education discourse related not only to school reform efforts within the classroom context but also within teacher relationships. The results of this study may provide US school teachers and administrators with key insights to understand more thoroughly the complexities of race and racism. The findings reveal practical considerations for promoting racial equity in the professional workplace and by extension more racially just schooling experiences for children. Further, the findings reveal theoretical implications for this line of study, as scholars have not yet sufficiently addressed how Black teachers navigate their relational networks within this context. The attention to power in this study is an important approach for considering how Black teachers understand their personal identities, constructions of race, and professional relationships-particularly within public schools.

Context of the Study

The context of this study is the Chicago and the greater Chicago school districts within which my participants spent much of their professional lives. This study is

informed by 20 in-depth interviews with ten retired African American public school teachers and the professional and educational memories they narrate. As described in the demographic biographies in Chapter 4, the specific contexts of the schools the participants attended and taught in vary. Some taught in predominantly White schools, others in predominantly Black schools, and others in racially and ethnically diverse schools. Every participant taught in schools with mostly White teachers. While the teachers' professional experiences is the focal point of this study, the educational contexts within which these teachers went to school may also inform their understanding of race relations in education. Some participants were educated in all Black segregated schools in the South, others attended predominantly Black schools in Chicago, and some were educated in racially and ethnically diverse schools. The context of large urban and suburban school districts and their surrounding communities where most African Americans teachers are employed was fitting for answering the research questions.

Research Questions

The following research questions serve to initiate dialogue and further clarify the direction of inquiry for this study:

1. In what ways do retired African American public school teachers describe the historical and contemporary context of US race relations in schools and in society, and the implications for urban public schools, especially in relation to their own work?
2. In what ways do retired African American public school teachers conceptualize their personal identities and collegial relationships in the

context of their workplaces over time?

3. In what ways did retired African American urban public school teachers evaluate how, when, and why race was talked about, if at all, either formally or informally in schools?

Value Premises

The motivations for which I engage in racial justice work are informed by several interconnected factors. Various attitudes, values, and personal experiences inform my ontological and epistemological perspectives, including the assumptions I hold, the ways I approach this work, and the outcomes I hope to achieve. Therefore, I assume an intersectional approach for examining how my various social identities are positioned as relative privilege or oppression within different settings (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). I am a White, cisgender female, heterosexual, middle-class educator from a predominantly White, middle-class, Midwest suburban community in the United States. Inspired by Foster (1997) *Black Teachers on Teaching*, I consider this work part of what she considers to be a growing movement among social historians to record the experiences of Blacks (p. xix). However, as a White scholar, I am sensitive to the vast number of sources produced by White people that tell a story about Black people. I attempted to learn from some of their scholarly shortcomings, most importantly intentionally or unintentionally exhibiting little agency in how I tell the participants' stories. I am cautious of scholarship that continues to treat Black people as "acted upon, rather than actors themselves" (Williams, 2009, p. 3). I am cautious of promoting societal change models that center the perspective of the privileged group, with members of the

disadvantaged group included only in their role as victims of discrimination (Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins, 2002). My views of social and racial justice are largely informed by my understanding of the Biblical concept of *shalom*, a desire for completeness, soundness, welfare, and peace for all people (Brown, Driver, & Briggs, 2000).

Much work has already been accomplished by the resilience of Black people and the White allies who support them (Boyd, 2015; Gardiner, 2009), yet much work remains to be done (Lensmire, McManimon, Tierney, Lee-Nichols, Casey, Lensmire, A. & Davis, 2013). Desmond and Emirbayer (2012) present one of the more hopeful frames for addressing racial justice work, in which they imagine three “ends”: 1) a society where racial domination is addressed intelligently; 2) a society that embraces racial justice in all its arenas; 3) and a society that values and practices multiculturalism. This study of one small subset of society, Black teachers’ professional experiences in racialized educational environments, may offer guidance on how teaching professionals can approach racial justice more intelligently, holistically, and genuinely in their own lives and in their schools and societies.

Theoretical Frameworks

I used a the lens of Critical Race Theory approach to examine my participants’ stories and understandings, with additional theoretical considerations informed by Social Network Theory and Racial Identity Development Theory. Both Critical Race Theory and Social Network Theory provide ways to consider how the formation of teachers’ identities, conceptualizations of race, and understandings of their collegial relationships is affected by power structures in professional contexts. Overlaying Critical Race Theory

with a Social Network Theory lens resulted in a clearer picture of how Black teachers' individual understandings of power, identity, history, and relationships intersected with how they participated in relational networks or deemed them important for their work. As such, I examined the embodied experiences of retired Black public school teachers through personal narratives uniquely located within their larger social, cultural, political, and economic contexts (Berry & Warren, 2009).

The following chapter includes a more detailed analysis of Critical Race Theory, Social Network Theory, and Racial Identity Development Theory including some of their strengths and weakness as theoretical tools. The contested conceptualizations of race are considered, and particular attention is given to the ways neoliberal ideologies such as individualism and post-racism may advance or impede collegial relationships. Critical Race Theory was a helpful tool for exploring the extent to which the participants perceive race and power as relevant within educational institutions and specifically for adult interaction and collaboration in schools. As such, Critical Race Theory as a theoretical framework provided an appropriate lens through which to examine teachers' understandings of their personal identities, conceptions of race, and professional relationships across lines of racial difference.

Study Delimitations and Limitations

Several internal and external factors account for the delimitations and limitations of this study, respectively. One delimitation to this study was the parameters on the sample. Qualitative case studies are best conducted with a small and relatively heterogeneous sample, so I studied only a small sample of retired African American

public school teachers. That they all maintained their teaching careers into retirement can also be a delimitation as it does not account for the experiences of Black teachers who, for various reasons, stopped teaching.

The primary limitation of the study is my White identity, particularly in a qualitative study where the researcher is considered the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009). The results of this study may be limited by my incomplete or inaccurate interpretations of participants' responses, or by participants' hesitation to disclose their ideas more fully. Strategies to help mitigate these limitations are described in Chapter 3 and include building trust through personal transparency and vulnerability. In Chapter 2, I linked experiential and scholarly knowledge from seemingly disparate academic disciplines to increase collective understanding and fill in the gaps at their intersection. In Chapter 5 I outlined the findings and in Chapter 6 I concluded this study with a discussion of what the findings might mean for US schools and societies.

Key Terms

The following key terms are used throughout this dissertation. Definitions are drawn from scholarly resources to allow for terms to be used fluidly within the context of this study. Key terms for this study include:

African American - Americans with total or partial ancestry from any of the black racial groups of Africa (US Census) or descendants of enslaved Africans (Martin & Fabes, 2008).

Black - people of acknowledged African descent (Tatum, 2017, p. 95)

Culture - the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another (Hofstede, 1991, p. 5)

Diversity - a characteristic of social grouping that reflects the degree to which objective or subjective differences exist between group members (Van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007, p. 516)

Ethnicity - a sense of common ancestry based on cultural attachments, past linguistic heritage, religious affiliations, claimed kinship, or some physical traits (Cornell & Hartmann, 1998, p. 19)

People of Color - groups in America that are and have been historically targeted by racism including people of African, Asian, Latin American descent and Native Americans (Tatum, 2017, p. 94)

Race - a human group defined by itself or others as distinct by virtue of perceived common physical characteristics that are held to be inherent (Cornell & Hartmann 1998, 24)

Racial Identity Development - the process of defining for oneself the personal significance and social meaning of belonging to a particular racial group (Tatum, 2017, p. 96)

Racism - the inferiorization, or the denigration of a group due to its putative biological inferiority; and antipathy, or the “bigotry, hostility, and hatred” towards another group defined by its putatively inherited physical traits (Blum, 2002, p. 8)

White - people of European descent (Tatum, 2017, p. 94)

White Supremacy - a political, economic and cultural system in which White people overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of White superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of White dominance and non-White subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings (Ansley, 1989, p. 1024).

Summary

While ample scholarship addresses social and racial injustice within the classroom context, fewer studies have examined the phenomenon of race in education at the collegial level and through the lens of the African American teaching experience. In this study, I considered the historical and societal contexts of Black teachers' professional experiences and contributed insights to scholarship otherwise largely focused on teaching and learning experiences within in the classroom. The goal of this study was to explore through a structural lens retired African American teachers' understandings of their personal identities, their constructions of race, and their professional relationships in the context of a racist society over time. The findings revealed important insights into the state of race relations in the US and the ways power and privilege complicate generally accepted organizational diversity strategies for building effective professional relationships among teachers. They also shed light on the complex interplay of power, identity, history, and relationship in schools and underscore that school reform efforts must extend beyond the classroom to consider ongoing racist structures that continue to make life difficult for Black people.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Three main bodies of literature inform this research: race in the US, organizational diversity, and school reform. Within these broad areas, scholarly contributions to specific education related issues provide the academic context for this study. Central to this study is the articulation of Black-White race relations within historical and contemporary scholarship and its implications for schools and societies. Drawing from various sources on current and historical US race relations, I attempted to provide a comprehensive discussion of race as a social construct and to examine some of the ways race is contested and conceptualized across different political and social ideologies within the US. In this chapter I also identified various theories of racial, ethnic, and cultural identity development, with particular attention to Black racial identity. A scholarly review of US race discourse was included in this chapter to set the stage for exploring African American teachers' professional experiences over time uniquely through the lens of race.

In addition to theories on race, I reviewed theories related to how diversity is managed in organizations in order to provide a broader frame of reference for relational dynamics among diverse staff in schools. An emphasis on teachers as professionals and schools as organizations (Louis & Marks, 1998) reveals practical links between the organizational and educational literature. Corporate and organizational resources reviewed in this chapter provide insight into organizational behavior and provide helpful perspectives for how teachers might interact with one another in their workplaces. Here, I focused on organizational dynamics of workplace demography, effectiveness of work

team diversity, theories of difference, and cross-cultural dynamics of employee interaction to help set the context for cross-racial relationships among teachers. In this review, theories relating to relationships between individuals and their diverse work teams helped to identify cross-racial dynamics within teachers' professional relationships.

Finally, I examined the literature on contemporary school reform efforts beginning with an emphasis on social and racial justice that frame this study. In the chapter's final section, I explored key educational issues relating to teacher relationships including facilitating critical dialogue and trust. I linked these issues back to Social Network Theory as a lens for explaining teachers' professional relationships and participation in relational networks. I also traced the rise of professional learning communities and the factors that are presumed to enhance their effectiveness (Louis, 2016). At the intersection of these three bodies of literature is a small but important gap in educational research that specifically examines race dynamics within teacher-to-teacher professional relationships.

Race in the US

The contested nature of race and racism in contemporary US discourse is complex and often linked to political ideologies and economic policies. While extensive outlines of the origins of race in US history and the contemporary US political landscape are beyond the scope of this study, a brief overview of the politics of race provide a basic structure through which to understand and account for various ideas, intentions, and motivations across different political agendas. The historical and contemporary ways race is debated within politics include varying perspectives of the role of government, the

belief in individuality and meritocracy, and the disputed notion of the US American ideal.

In an era of post-racism², race-specific remedies such as Affirmative Action are deemed divisive and unfair, and the problems facing the Black poor are considered to be caused by cultural deficiencies within Blacks themselves (Logan, 2014). Taylor (2016) notes that blaming Black inequality on Black people is not a new development. Structural critics who counter Black inferiority, including Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, date to the 1960s. They use the term “institutionalized racism” to redirect undue attention on Black responsibility to the policies, programs, and practices of public and private institutions that perpetuate Black poverty and marginalization (Taylor, 2016).

Further, the ways the nation’s history of slavery is told is often subjected to post-colonial ideologies including the erasure of history in public school curriculum and discourse and the over-representation of White dominant perspectives. The extent to which White supremacy and institutional racism still oppress Black people and communities remains a politically divisive issue. Racial division is further complicated by varying individual conceptualizations and historical and contemporary meanings of race and racism. As such, Kendi (2016) categorizes divergent approaches to racism not according to racial groups (Black and White) or as political parties/ideologies (Democratic/liberal and Republican/conservative) but as according to one’s stance

² Post-racial is a term to measure racial progress or describe a society or time period in which discussions around race and racism have been deemed no longer relevant to current social dynamics. Popularized in the Obama era (Coates, 2015), Bonilla-Silva (2015) characterizes “post-racial” America as the subtle, institutional, and seemingly nonracial mechanisms and practices that comprise the current racial regime (p, 1358), from the 1960s – present (Hughey, 2014).

towards racial justice. He identifies three approaches to racism that are helpful for explaining people's understandings of and orientations toward race: 1.) Segregationists, 2.) Assimilationists, and 3.) Anti-Racists. Segregationists are racists who support the idea that racial groups are inherently unequal and blame Black people for racial disparities. Assimilationists are racists who argue that Black people *and* racial discrimination are to blame and encourage Black people to adopt White cultural traits and/or physical ideals. Anti-racists are those who reject both positions and believe that the enslavement and subordination of Blacks to Whites is a function of White racism and "the sole cause of racial disparities in this country and in the world at large" (Kendi, 2016, p. 10).

Ample scholarship emphasizes the systematic nature of exploitation and oppression by White supremacist structures and the complicity of White people who benefit from these structures (Alexander, 2012; Glaude, 2016; Kival, 2011). While many scholars argue that racism can only exist within the power holding dominant group in society, David Horowitz (2000) counters this notion, claiming that anti-White racism is equally as destructive, yet remains overlooked. Further, Horowitz considers the liberal approaches of racial justice efforts as an attack on Whiteness and a war against American democracy (Horowitz, 2000). Kendi (2016) offers a possible explanation for Horowitz' unsettling assertions, explaining how, over time, people operating in self-interest define their racist ideas as nonracist, leaving "Americans thoroughly divided over, and ignorant of, what racist ideas truly are" (p.5).

Widely differing approaches and understandings of race are further complicated by racial segregation (Johnson, 2014). For example, the impact of segregation and

desegregation on Black achievement in schools remains contested in the literature. Some studies show that Black students who attend mostly White schools fare better academically, achieve higher graduation rates (Ashenfelter, Collins, & Yoon, 2006), and demonstrate increased educational persistence and have lower drop-out rates (Guryan, 2004) than Black students who remained in segregated schools. Other scholars indicate desegregation provides few benefits to Black students and may be related to declines in African American outcomes (Johnson, 2014). Rivkin (2000) found that a higher proportion of White classmates tends to lower the test scores of African American high school students.

While a comprehensive study of the effects of school segregation and desegregation on Black youth over time is beyond the scope of this study, a brief overview of the literature demonstrates that racial inequity in schools is a complex matter tied directly to historical and ongoing societal inequity³. Racial housing segregation continues to subjects Black Americans to unequal access to housing, education, jobs, community resources, and capital. Within segregated communities, legalized oppressive practices such as dumping toxic waste, de-investing in social services, and militarizing law enforcement go largely unnoticed by White people in predominantly White communities who struggle to imagine the possibility of legalized racial oppression (Bennet, 2004). The contested ideologies of race coupled with racial segregation result in very different vantage points, understandings, and racial narratives and ultimately

³ Social justice scholars distinguish between inequalities and inequities, naming inequalities as unavoidable differences and inequities as differences generally considered avoidable and unjust (Clingerman, 2011).

produce an imagined post-racial society in the minds of those whose privileges confer upon them the opportunity to not know otherwise.

The Politics of Race. Increasingly subtle racist political ideologies and economic policies have bolstered support of post-racial ideology. Massey and Denton (1993) claim, "this lack of overt racism, however, did not mean that prejudice and discrimination had ended; although racist attitudes and behaviors went underground, they did not disappear" (p. 84). The ascent of Barack Obama is claimed to have contributed to the idea of a post-racial society. According to Taylor (2016), "the success of a relative few African Americans is upheld as a vindication of the United States' colorblind ethos and a testament to the transcendence of its racist past" (p.4). Those who uphold post-racial ideologies claim the nation has moved beyond racial oppression and those who affirm a colorblind stance consider de-emphasizing race in political discourse helpful for improving racial disparities. For example, to many US Americans, Obama's presidency and the discourse of the "new politics of race" that emerged draw upon colorblind ideology's basic insistence that "we have already achieved a largely colorblind society, in which race has little relevance to the life chances of non-Whites" (Logan, 2014, p. 672). Some scholars question the extent to which Obama's leadership improved the conditions of Black Americans and other marginalized groups (Glaude, 2016). To other Americans, Obama's election produced significant racial progress and a hope of change. Either way, White and Black voters across political affiliations recognized the significance of Obama's presidency when they elected him to the US presidency twice.

While many US Americans expressed pride in the presumed racial progress of

Obama's presidency, others expressed fear and anxiety about the possibility of the nation's threatened racial hierarchy. Kendi (2016) asserts, "everyone who has witnessed the historic presidency of Barack Obama-and the historic opposition to him-should now know full well that the more Black people uplift themselves, the more they will find themselves on the receiving end of a racist backlash" (p. 505). Indeed, with Obama's election, the Black voter turnout was nearly equaled to that of Whites for the first time in history (Roberts, 2009). Subsequent political backlash followed Obama's presidency, including a series of strategies such as imposing literacy tests, curtailing early voting, and requiring identification in order to vote in future elections. These Republican-led strategies accomplished significant voter suppression (Anderson, 2016).

Analyses of the post-election voting patterns that produced Donald Trump's 2016 election revealed "a nation divided along racial lines" (Tatum, 2017, p. 63) and starkly different voter motivations across race. Black people were keenly aware of Trump's history of supporting racial discrimination in housing and employment (Anderson, 2016) and yet their opposition, suppressed through political backlash, proved insufficient for preventing his win. African American CNN political commentator, Van Jones, calls this phenomenon "White-lash" claiming, "this was White-lash against our changing country" (Tatum, 2017 p. 64) and brought about a wave of support for "Making America Great Again." Anderson (2016) contends that Trumpian politics have "shaken Americans out of their complacency that democracy will just run on its very own, are now taking ownership of this nation, of what it means-inclusively-to be in the United States" (p. 174). Despite the hint of optimism evident in Anderson's (2016) assertion, the extent

which this awakening has occurred among US Americans who remain mostly isolated from non-White communities is questionable, as support for Trump remains. As racial tensions become more prevalent, particularly in schools across the nation, many White Americans choose to isolate themselves in their White communities where Whiteness remains the unexamined norm and post-racial ideology remains unquestioned.

Racial, Ethnic, and Cultural Identity. Throughout the segregated history of the US, racial identity development theories have been important for understanding how individuals process their personal identities and civic responsibilities. Each person develops various identities and the sum of these is called the “personal” identity. A variety of terms are used throughout the literature to describe the multifaceted conceptualizations of racial identity development. Cross and Cross (2008) use the term Racial, Ethnic, and Cultural (REC) Identity to suggest “the discourses on racial, ethnic, and cultural identity overlap at the level of the *lived experience*” (p.156). Regardless of the specific term used, the positive affect that individuals feel toward their racial or ethnic group is a critical component of identity development and is associated with positive adjustment (Umaña-Taylor, Lee, Rivas-Drake, Syed, Seaton, Quintana, Cross Jr, Swartz, & Yip, 2014).

Approaching REC identity through a critical lens focuses on the dynamic nature of identity development and examines the social context within which identities are formed, including structures and institutions that “constrain identities and are often the root of injustice and oppression” (Martin, Nakayama & Carbaugh, 2012, p. 175). A critical perspective on REC tends to emphasize the role of history, economics, politics,

and discourse in examining how people and groups form their identities without overlooking the agency of the individual in developing their own identity, resilience, and coping mechanisms as they navigate society and social structures. According to Phinney (1992), racial identity is “an aspect of self-concept and social identity that derives from individuals’ knowledge of their ethnic or racial group membership and the significance and meaning they attach to that group membership (Phinney, 1992). Racial identity encompasses a sense of belonging, feelings of pride for one’s group, and participation in key group activities (Phinney, 1992). A number of studies indicate that positive racial identity reduces the impact of discrimination (Cross & Cross, 2008; Umaña-Taylor, 2016). Cross and Cross (2008) assert, “the power of racism, ethnocentrism, and stigmatization is revealed by the fact that people with demonstrably complex group identity profiles find themselves “constrained” by the salience of race and ethnicity in everyday life” (p. 156).

The concept of the group identity ultimately leads, then, to the possibility of the “in-group” and “out-group” characteristics described by Ting-Toomey (2012). Social Identity Theory studies the dynamics of in-groups and out-groups, including how emotional attachment to the group plays a key role in the formation of one’s social and personal identity (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012). As the sense of belonging and safety within one’s in-group is enhanced, the tendency is to subsequently position the out-group against that comparison. Ample studies point to this phenomenon across cultures and racial groups to demonstrate strong in-group favoritism and out-group biases and prejudice (Ting Toomey & Chung, 2012).

Studies of REC identity development within the context of Black college students on predominantly White campuses indicate the potential of racial identity for adults. Strauss & Cross (2005), in their study on minority college students, identified five identity competencies that may be relevant to the way Black teachers navigate their REC identities in their workplaces. *Buffering* refers to encounters with racism and discrimination; *code-switching* is the ability to move back and forth from one's primary racial-ethnic culture; *bridging* is to be willing and able to create and sustain lasting cross-racial friendships; *bonding* are those activities or experiences that support healthy attachment to ones REC group; and *individuality* refers to the development of personal identity beyond race and cultural classifications or norms (p. 156-257).

Ogbu (2004), in his study of oppositional collective identity, considers the importance of cultural identity (the correct way of behaving) and language identity (the correct way of speaking) from the point of view of the minority group. The oppositional or non-oppositional relationship between the minority and majority group's cultural and language frames of reference may determine the difficulty individual members of the minority group have in adjusting to the expectations of the dominant group. Black adults may attempt to adopt a "raceless" persona, or choose to "act White" to navigate their White environments with greater ease, or during slavery time [and into the present], to survive (Ogbu, 2004). Other adults express their racial identity through race-conscious, REC-group-affirming attitudes (Tatum, 2017, p. 176). Tatum (2017) says, "though they may work in predominantly White settings . . . African American adults who are again actively exploring what it means to be Black in the context of a stressful work

environment, for example, are likely to choose to spend most of their non-work time in the company of other Black people” (p. 177).

The Civil Rights Era proved instrumental in developing group-affirming attitudes in the racial identity of Black communities. The use of the slogan “Black is Beautiful” helped increase racial pride and strengthen collective identity and the Black Power movement encouraged Black self-determination and separatism. One important concept of racial identity among Black Americans is DuBois’ (1882/1903) use of the term “double consciousness” to describe the internal conflict experienced by Blacks in an oppressive White society. In his book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, DuBois (1882/1903) says of being Black in America, a Negro is, “born . . . into a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world” (p.5). He continued,

it is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (p. 5).

The Black Power Movement also reinforced this double consciousness and the oppositional collective identity (Ogbu, 2004). Cross’ Model of Nigrescence is consistent with DuBois’ double consciousness. In his model, Cross proposes that encounters with

racial discrimination may trigger the exploration of racial identity among African American youth (1991).

Martin, Nakayama & Carbaugh (2012) add that racial minorities are more likely to encounter their identity earlier in life than people with majority race identities because the latter might tend not to think about their unexamined race identity (Fergesun, 1990 as cited in Martin, Nakayama, & Carbaugh, 2012). Other research on racial identity examines the effectiveness of identity for protecting against racial discrimination (Stock, Gibbons, Walsh, & Gerrard, 2011) and on dominant group members' actions that create conditions of negative stress on subordinate racial and ethnic groups (Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson, 2003). Key aspects of developing a strong sense of racial identity include self-identification as a group member, a sense of belonging, pride in one's group, and involvement in the activities of one's group (Phinney, 1992). The potential of these "protective factors" is most fully realized when youth understand themselves as members of a society within particular ethnic, cultural, religious, or political traditions (Spencer, Fegley, & Harpalani, 2003). Williams, Aiyer, Durkee, and Tolan (2014) indicate remaining rooted in one's ethnic identity protects against stressors such as discrimination and negative feedback. Extensive bodies of research seem to confirm the positive link between the protective role of ethnic identity and personal wellbeing (Brook & Pahl, 2010). This line of research proves helpful for examining how Black teachers' childhood experiences may inform how they navigated their personal and professional identities in societal institutions controlled by White people.

Colorblindness and a “Post-Racial” Society. Despite ongoing division between racial groups, conservative agendas and neoliberal policies sustain contemporary colorblind and post-racist approaches to race relations in the US that render enduring racialized structural barriers “invisiblized” (Khalifa, Dunbar, & Douglasb, 2013). Similarly, Kendi (2016) says, “if the purpose of racist ideas had always been to silence the antiracist resisters to racial discrimination, then the post-racial line of attack may have been one of the most sophisticated silencer to date” (p. 499). Within education discourse, many scholars and practitioners have adopted what Bonilla-Silva (2015) calls the ‘colorblindness approach’ to understanding the contemporary role of race in schools. Silva’s (2006) work highlights colorblind racism as an institutionalized system in the post-civil rights era and a general resistance to discussing systemic issues of oppression (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Two types of colorblindness include color-evasion, which is the denial of racial differences by emphasizing sameness, and power-evasion which is the denial of racism by emphasizing equal opportunities (Neville, Awad, Brooks, Flores, & Bluemel, 2013). Teachers who assume these colorblind approaches in their practice claim to “not see race” in a proclaimed effort to treat all students fairly and create equal learning opportunities for everyone. One form of the denial of racism in colorblind racial discourse is minimization, in which one considers racism no longer important and upholds the unacknowledged dominant perspective of White America (Brown et. al, 2003). In the era of colorblindness, it is no longer socially permissible to use race, explicitly, as a justification for discrimination, exclusion, and social contempt (Alexander, 2012).

Alexander (2012) critiques colorblind ideology and questions the motivation behind “not seeing race.” She frames colorblindness and its accompanying societal implications rather as a necessary means to maintain the racial caste system in the United States. Taylor (2016) similarly highlights that colorblindness is more than the denial of racism. She calls colorblindness a “critical weapon in the arsenal of the politically powerful and economic elite” (p. 72). Countering the notion of “not seeing race,” Alexander asserts “we should not hope for a colorblind society but instead for a world in which we can see each other fully, learn from each other, and do what we can to respond to each other in love. That was King’s dream—a society that is capable of seeing each of us, as we are, with love” (Alexander, 2012, p. 244). She continues,

it may be necessary for us, as a society, to pay careful attention to the impact of our laws, policies, and practices on racial and ethnic groups and consciously strive to ensure that biases, stereotypes, and structural arrangements do not cause unnecessary harm or suffering to any individual or group for reasons related to race (Alexander, 2012, p. 244).

Evident here is Alexander’s (2012) situating of colorblindness at the structural, rather than the individual level. The important juxtaposition of the possibility of colorblindness as a genuine approach to racial equity against colorblindness as an intentional effort to maintain systems of oppression reveals neither tend to be discussed honestly, and both, Alexander (2012) argues, produce the same result: the perpetuation of a structurally racist society.

While the goal of 1960s landmark civil rights legislation was to remove racial

discrimination and establish a race-blind standard, the extent to which colorblind policies provided the best means of achieving racial equality remains contested. Many scholars cite individualism, neoliberalism, and free-market principles in schools and societies as the political destruction of democracy, civil service, and social justice. Giroux (2003) says neoliberalism, “imagines human agency as simply a matter of individualized choices, the only obstacle to effective citizenship and agency being the lack of principled self-help and moral responsibility” (p.191).

Jones and Calafell (2012) specifically identify the ways resistance efforts are constrained by the ideologies of neoliberalism which also influence notions of culture and identity. These ideologies manifest in political rhetoric and policies that call for dismantling social welfare programs (Kotz, 2002) and reducing other “entitlements” such as health care and social security (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004, p. 309). Gooden’s (2012) study of Black principal leadership demonstrates a defense of post-racial, neoliberal practices with no consideration for the blatant disparities suggests a strong presence of White supremacist thinking about minoritized students. While educational disparities across lines of racial difference are acknowledged, school reform efforts that name structural racial injustices as the cause and thus as the target of their efforts are lacking.

The production of post-racial narratives has a profound effect on shaping school communities (Lewis, 2003) further complicated by the interaction between discourse and everyday racialized practices that reproduce “White space” in educational institutions (Moore, 2008). Unfortunately, the culture of ignoring race in favor of a colorblind approach has become so common that many Whites teachers fear talking about race in

any capacity that leaves them open to accusations of racism (Modica, 2015). While several studies have found that colorblind ideologies are widely embraced by teachers and administrators (Goldenberg, 2014; Pollock, 2009) and have negative outcomes for students (Bonilla-Silva, 2006), fewer studies, if any, report findings that support the colorblind ideology itself.

While talking about race in schools is considered “taboo,” racial biases and cultural misunderstanding often manifest in the form of subtle racial habits known as micro aggressions. The term was first coined by Chester Pierce in the 1970s and is used to describe the daily slights and insults experienced by Black people in the United States and has broadened to include marginalized groups around the world. Racial micro aggressions are verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual racial slights and subtle insults aimed at people of color (Solórzano, et al., 2000). Psychologist Derald Wing Sue provides a more detailed description, defining macroaggressions as “the brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual-orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group” (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007, p. 271). Indeed, micro aggressions are a phenomenon not constrained to the United States. Willis’ (2015) study examines encounters with macroaggression of Black female study abroad students on account of their race and gender. Such affronts, though often unintentional, have been documented to cause psychic, emotional, and physical harm to the targeted individuals (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). Sue (2010) explains that micro aggressions are particularly prevalent

within colorblind ideology because conscious awareness of people's biases and prejudices conflict with their personal identity as good and moral human beings. As such, they avoid talking about race and preserve their own self-image while silencing the voices of the oppressed (Sue, 2010).

Another form of subtle racism, related to colorblindness, is aversive racism. Aversive racism is manifested indirectly (Pearson, Dovidio, and Gaertner, 2009), and an aversive racist may not exhibit explicit bias but holds implicit racial biases against Blacks. This ambivalence between espousing racial tolerance and fairness with deeply rooted racial biases have a particularly detrimental influence on interracial interactions. The sense of ambivalence combined with ongoing segregation and subsequent lack of familiarity and misunderstandings of Blacks and Black culture may result in discomfort and fear among Whites. This discomfort, however, is often subconscious, and the fear of being called racist in interracial interactions causes some Whites to withdraw while the relational processes that perpetuate racial bias among Whites, in terms of their assessments, decisions, and interactions, remain unexamined. Indeed, internalized stereotypes and biases often reside outside of conscious awareness or control. As evident in the various manifestations and motivations for colorblind ideology, the motivation for silencing honest dialogue about race may be a conscious or subconscious self-interest in protecting hierarchical positions of societal power by maintaining the status quo.

Critical Race Theory. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is one approach to addressing the silencing of oppression, as Critical Race Theorists are interested in studying and transforming the relationship between race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic,

2012). Critical Race Theory is a helpful tool of analysis for exploring the extent to which power and authority are perceived as relevant within educational institutions and specifically for adult interaction and collaboration in schools. Although CRT has been largely used in legal research spurred by the work of Critical Legal Studies scholar Derrick Bell (Khalifa, Dunbar, & Douglasb, 2013), its use has expanded and is now a widely recognized theoretical lens across many disciplines. Ladson Billings and Tate's (1995) study proved influential in introducing CRT to the field of education (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004), and since then, CRT has become prevalent in the field of education for addressing racism. Critical Race Theory differs from other academic inquiry disciplines in that it contains an activist dimension. Scholars not only try to understand how societies organize themselves, but to transform them through data analysis and social critique.

The basic tenets of CRT include "ordinariness," "interest convergence," and "social constructionism" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Many critical race scholars have demonstrated that these tenets have important implications for how racial equity is addressed in schools (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Milner, 2008). "Ordinariness" refers to the difficulty of addressing race, particularly due to colorblind notions of post-racial ideologies that use Black success to deny ongoing racial injustice. Bell (1980), in his critical analysis of *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954), defines "interest convergence" as the principle in which "the interest of Blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of Whites" (Bell, 1980, p. 523). Milner (2008), used interest convergence as a theoretical tool to examine curriculum and instruction in teacher education, highlighting how interest convergence may be a helpful

tool for discussing the implications and consequences of race in the field of education. CRT considers “social constructionism” in race as central to the way that people of color are “ordered and constrained in society” (Travino, Harris, & Wallace, 2008, p. 7). Critical Race Theorists in the social sciences hold the perspective that race, dis/ability, gender, and other forms of human demographic difference are socially constructed in particular ways relative to differential exchanges of power (Agosto, 2014, p.3).

Solorzano and Yosso (2002) examined how critical race theory in education can be used to challenge the “intercentricity of racism” that silences and distorts non-dominant epistemologies and perspectives and upholds “deficit, racialized notions about people of color” (p.23). CRT can be an effective tool for countering deficit storytelling and presenting research that centers on the experiences and knowledge of people of color (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Critical race theory is an especially important framework for school reform because it can be used to amplify historically underrepresented voices in educational research, thus providing a “counter script to mainstream accounts of their realities” (Tillman, 2002, p. 956). Montecinos (1995) asserts that racism creates, maintains, and justifies the use of a “master narrative” in storytelling where “monovocal” stories are told and where unexamined and unacknowledged White privilege helps maintain racist narratives (p. 294).

CRT may be a helpful theoretical framework for examining professional relationships between Black and White teachers. Khalifa and Briscoe (2015) document an autobiographical counter narrative in the form of their own experiences interacting with district-level administrators about racially oppressive discipline and achievement gaps in

a large urban school district in Texas. Using filmic representations of interracial relationships in their analysis of *Remember the Titans*, Cranmer and Harris (2015) employ CRT as an interpretive lens to investigate the role that media play in race relations (Cranmer & Harris, 2015). In this study, the CRT framework reveals the influence of stereotypes in interactions with leaders and the biases that favor White over Black leadership (Cranmer & Harris, 2015).

Critical race studies illuminate important challenges and complexities of addressing race relations in education from the perspectives of the racially marginalized. Thus, CRT as a theoretical framework and methodological tool would also be helpful for glean insights from Black teachers about their work environments. An explicit acknowledgement of race and racism in educational theory and practice contributes to a richer, more comprehensive explanation of the challenges facing Black teachers in the United States (Howard, 2008), particularly in an era of colorblindness.

Racism in US Public Schools. The United States has a long history of racially unjust school systems from denying basic literacy to slaves in the 19th century to inequitable resource allocation in decades surrounding the desegregation of schools to contemporary debates on the role of race in a colorblind society (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Pollock, Deckman, Mira & Shalaby, 2010). Even after discriminatory laws in public schools were eradicated, racist overtones in schools and constructions of race in public schooling continue to manifest pervasive yet often overlooked racist themes. Some of these inequities include deficit thinking that lowers teachers' expectations of their Black students (Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004), the criminalization of Black youth that

leads to stronger disciplinary measures taken against Black students (Howard, 2008; Khalifa & Briscoe, 2015), and cultural misunderstanding of teachers that cause them to overlook the cultural capital of their Black students (Khalifa, 2010).

Racial disparities between African American and White students are evident across educational outcomes including academic achievement (Howard, 2015) and graduation rates (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2010). Gallup polls confirm that there remains a persistent divide in the perceptions and measures of racial equity between Black and White Americans (Gallup, 2016). Racial disparities, along with stories that document the educational experiences of students of color in the United States, serve as key indicators of ongoing racial discrimination (Anderson, 2010; Howard, 2008; Wang, 2013).

While academic achievement is a complex matter and should not be addressed to the exclusion of other social factors such as poverty, crime, and family stability, these complex factors should be considered within the context of US education's history of legal racial injustice. Racial injustice in the US is an institutional system that privileges White identities and ideologies and sets the ideal White standard of humanity against which others are judged (Morris, 2016). "White privilege" refers to the system of social advantages and benefits that accompany being considered White (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p.78). Therefore, subconscious bias may remain unchecked when White people in White societies are not compelled to think about the benefits they take for granted every day.

Within the field of teacher education, confronting racial injustice includes encouraging teachers to examine their racial identity, the ideologies they bring to the

classroom, and the impact those ideologies have on their teaching practices and interactions with students (Grant & Sleeter, 1993). However, addressing the topic often leads to emotional “paralysis” (Kivel, 2011) due to the widespread uneasiness and discomfort that most White people feel when discussing issues of race (Gay & Howard, 2000). Harvard University researcher Mica Pollock (2010) calls the difficulty White teachers have talking about race both within and beyond the school setting “colormuteness” (Pollock, 2009). This paralysis can be mitigated within work contexts by facilitating honest, open conversations among teachers about uncomfortable issues such as White privilege (Dickar, 2008).

Noguera and Wing (2006), in their book *Unfinished Business*, describe the lessons they learned about the importance of acknowledging White privilege and the reproduction of inequities in schools that reflect greater societal structures. These researchers conclude that their efforts at closing the achievement gap were not successful in part because they failed to consider the larger societal racialized ideologies that permeate the teaching context (Noguera & Wing, 2006; Rothstein, 2004). This broader perspective for understanding White privilege in schools is important for the work of negotiating racial identities and talking about race in professional and organizational settings. It is important to frame professional relationships within the larger societal structures that may influence how teachers in increasingly diverse work contexts approach their professional activities.

Diversity in Organizations

As workplaces become increasingly diverse, understanding the potential benefits of diversity in teams and minimizing potential challenges to performance has become increasingly salient (Mannix & Neale, 2005, p. 31). Research that centers on the complex effects of workplace demography and the effects of cross-cultural engagement among colleagues has become increasingly prominent in the organizational diversity literature in the past few decades (Gelfand, Erez, & Aycan, 2007; Joshi, Liao, & Roh, 2011). Organizational diversity scholarship has focused on how diversity contributes to work group effectiveness and the conditions under which diversity enhances or detracts from work group functioning (Ely & Thomas, 2001). Prevalent topics include research in work team motivation and “the factors that energize, direct, and sustain effort across cultures, cross-cultural negotiation and dispute, and teams and leadership” (Gelfand, Erez, & Aycan, 2007, p. 479). Diversity in organizations is often conceptualized as differences between individuals on single or multiple attributes such as gender, age, race, ethnicity, educational background, and functional background (Williams & O’Reilly 1998). Workplace demography is the relational and compositional demographic attributes of individuals and collectives. These two concepts relate to each other as the relational effects of individual demographic dissimilarity relates to individual outcomes as well as the compositional effects at the work-group level (Joshi, Liao & Roh, 2011). The ways individuals perceive their similarities or differences relative to the group or to their leader is known as “relational demography” (Chattopadhyay, Tluchowska, & George, 2004).

For example, a single Black member of an otherwise all White teaching staff may experience a high degree of difference from the otherwise rather homogenous group.

Workplace diversity is a controversial topic (Van Knippenberg, 2007) and findings about the effects of diversity on work team effectiveness remain largely equivocal and inconclusive (Joshi, Liao, & Roh, 2011), pointing both to the positive and negative effects of diversity within work teams (Kerr & Tindale 2004; Van Knippenberg, 2007; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). The positive effects of diversity on organizations include an increase in the variety of perspectives brought to a problem and to opportunities for knowledge sharing and greater creativity and quality of team performance. The negative effects of diversity include increased social divisions, out-group biases, and negative performance outcomes for some groups (Mannix & Neale, 2005) when workers' demonstrate a lack of interest in and understanding of their team members. Although some types of diversity appear beneficial, studies focused on race and gender have demonstrated both positive and negative outcomes for work group effectiveness (Williams & O'Reilly, 1998).

Within the education literature, teacher work group effectiveness has garnered much scholarly attention, particularly building on findings that link the development of a collaborative community of educators to enhanced teaching and learning effectiveness (Conley, Fouske, & Pounder, 2004). In organizational literature, work teams are often understood as a work redesign strategy aimed toward enhancing worker interdependence and increased self-management, thereby increasing members' responsibility for the group's performance and outcomes. This emphasis on developing collaborative teams

focuses on “how positive leaders can help develop teams that have the energy and motivation to go beyond the minimal requirements of their jobs and to support one another” (Murphy & Louis, 2018, p. 99). This approach emphasizes support, empowerment, and responsiveness to employee needs and is particularly helpful for examining how and why teachers interact with one another within the workplace. Further, Murphy and Louis (2018) note the responsibility of the Positive School Leader to pay attention to complex team dynamics so that they can take humble and swift steps to correct errors. They assert, “if handled carefully, this attentiveness will reinforce the well-being of individual team members, the team, and others who are not on the team (p. 114). In line with this perspective, proposed organizational changes may fail because of lack of attention to human needs, existing power structures, and inherent symbolism of existing and proposed organizational arrangements (Sowell, 2014).

Perspectives of Difference. Important considerations in diversity research include how differences between work group members are perceived and how group members’ attitudes about teams affect group process and performance. Three theoretical perspectives are helpful for answering these questions: the social-categorization perspective, the similarity-attraction perspective and the information/decision-making perspective (Mannix & Neale, 2005). The social categorization perspective views differences between work group members with the potential to engender the classification of others as either in-group/similar or out-group/dissimilar. Within this perspective, ample research links higher levels of group homogeneity with increased social cohesion and group commitment (Harrison & Klein, 2007), job satisfaction

(Wharton, Rotolo, & Bird, 2000), and positive sentiments (Mueller, Finley, Iverson, & Price, 1999).

A similar view to the social categorization perspective is the similarity-attraction perspective which focuses on interpersonal rather than intergroup similarities, primarily in attitudes and values (Williams & O'Reilly 1998). Byrne's (1971) early work on the attraction-similarity paradigm reveals the tendency of individuals to be attracted to those who they believe hold similar attitudes to themselves and rate those individuals as more intelligent, knowledgeable, and well-adjusted. The similarity-attraction approach is consistent with a trait-based view of demographic diversity that assumes that surface level differences, such as diversity in race or age, also imply differences in underlying attributes, such as values and beliefs (McGrath, Berdahl, & Arrow, 1995).

Consistent with research on social categorization, similarity-attraction theory demonstrates that work group members are more positively inclined toward their group and the people within it if their group members are similar to themselves (Van Knippenberg, 2004). Fundamentally, both theories point to the same general conclusion that people prefer to work with people like themselves (Mannix & Neale, 2005) and both perspectives align closely with the findings of Social Network Theory relating to group conditions most conducive to forming close ties. Similarities or perceived similarities are named throughout the organizational diversity literature as a primary motivation for forming relationships (Mannix & Neale, 2005; Van Knippenberg, 2004).

The fundamental importance of social categorization within the colorblind racial context is the acknowledgment of the general human tendency to perceive others as

members of social groups, in turn activating racially biased thoughts and feelings, which may be expressed in ways that systematically disadvantage Blacks Americans (Dovidio, Gaertner, and Saguy, 2015). In this way, emphasizing colorblindness can reinforce ideological and structural biases that promote hierarchical relations between groups. Inequalities across groups result in different social realities for group members, which substantially shape the everyday lives of members of advantaged and disadvantaged groups (Demoulin, Leyens, & Dovidio, 2009).

The information/decision-making perspective presents a contrasting and alternate view to the social categorization and similarity/attraction perspectives by emphasizing the positive effects of work group diversity on group performance (Mannix & Neale, 2005; Van Kippenberg, 2007). The information/decision-making perspective approaches workplace diversity from a different starting point; assuming diverse groups are likely to possess members with different opinions and a broader range of task-relevant knowledge, skills, and abilities. The wider range of skills and knowledge represented within the group offers a greater selection of resources that may be helpful in addressing non-routine problems (Van Kippenberg, 2004). Within this perspective, broader frames of reference may also set the stage for more creative and innovative group performance because the need to integrate diverse information and reconcile diverse perspectives may stimulate more creative thinking and prevent groups from moving to premature consensus on issues (Van Kippenberg, 2004). Social identity complexity theory might offer additional insight into this dynamic as well, both with respect to individual teachers' openness to bias and the possibility that more complex social identities among group

members might lead to overall increases in creative thinking and problem solving.

However, a critical review of these theoretical frameworks reveals a certain inattention to the effects of power imbalances and their effects on group performance.

These studies, while dealing more directly with international and intercultural diversity, have important implications for diverse teacher relationships, discussed in the paragraphs that follow. Yet while increased diversity in organizations has prompted a surge in research regarding its effects on the processes and outcomes of diverse work teams, little research to date has explored the specific roles of racially constructed positions of power and privilege in the ways teachers relate to one another.

The Demographic Divide. As demographic shifts change the cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic makeup of school populations throughout the United States, there is an urgent need to reframe education accountability discourse and policies to accommodate more diverse perspectives (Cooper, 2009). Despite increasing diversity in student populations in US public schools, the teaching force remains largely White (Irvine, 2003). Students of color are expected to make up 56 percent of the student population by 2024, yet the elementary and secondary educator workforce is still overwhelmingly White (US Department of Education, 2016). Further, the most recent US Department of Education Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), a nationally representative survey of teachers and principals, showed that 82 percent of public school teachers identified as White. This figure has hardly changed in more than 15 years; data from a similar survey conducted by the Department in 2000 found that 84 percent of teachers identified as White (US Department of Education, 2016).

Given the rapidly rising non-White student population and the continual disproportionate number of White teachers in the work force, school leaders and educational institutions must “accept these changing dynamics and prepare teachers for educating learners who possess very different experiences than their own” (Dalton, Sable, & Hoffman, 2006, p. 6). This phenomenon of the increasing cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic difference between teachers and their students was first coined “the demographic divide” by Gay and Howard (2000), was then substantiated by later studies from Gay (2010), Milner (2008), and Brockenbough (2014). The demographic divide reveals the historic need for teachers who are prepared to engage their largely non-White student population in the classroom. The history of the demographic divide is linked to the remnants of segregation (Kozol, 2005; Orfield & Eaton, 1996) that pushed Black teachers out of the teaching force in the post-segregation era with heightened barriers for access (Frankenberg, 2006). Since that time, some White teachers who themselves were educated in highly segregated schools have had little contact with African American students (Frankenberg, 2006; Gay & Howard, 2000; Sleeter, 2001). Frankenberg’s (2006) study reveals not only did White teachers, on average, attend elementary schools that were over 90 percent White, they teach in schools where almost 90 percent of their colleagues are White and over 70 percent of students are White. Consequently, throughout their lives, they have inhabited “different worlds” than their students (Gay, 2010). This divide may lead to cultural misunderstandings in behavior, language, and learning styles, also known as “cultural mismatch” (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Addressing cultural mismatch and focusing on preparing White teachers to teach

more effectively in diverse settings could overlook an important focus on increasing both the diversity of teacher representation and the cultural understandings teachers hold about each other. According to the US Department of Education (2016), White teachers constitute 81.9% of the US teaching force while non-Hispanic Black teachers constitute 6.8%. Relative to the population (73.6% White and 12.6% non-Hispanic Black). This demonstrates a clear underrepresentation of Black teachers in the US teaching force. This underrepresentation exists both comparatively to the number of African American adults in the US population, as well as against the number of African American students in US schools, resulting in many US school children who cannot identify ethnically with their classroom teacher (Delpit, 2006). Unfortunately, both structural and material barriers exist to hiring and retaining more teachers of color in the US teaching force, including recruitment and selection criteria that tend to favor White teachers (Epstein, 2005; Irvine, 2003) and the teacher credentialing process including standardized tests on which Black candidates score disproportionately low (Frankenberg, 2006). Within teacher education programs at universities, teaching candidates of color often feel marginalized in programs that have mostly White students and faculty (Miller & Endo, 2005).

This imbalance in the racial composition of teachers provides an important backdrop for examining the ways teachers understand their personal identities and professional relationships in schools. The effects of the demographic divide on students has garnered much support from educational researchers (Brockenbough, 2014; Gay & Howard, 2000; Kozol, 2005; Milner, 2008). These scholars generally focus on the varied ways in which the demographic divide proves challenging for students. Fewer studies

have examined the personal identities and professional relationships of non-White teachers and whether these teachers join social networks to support their White teaching colleagues with cultural understandings of their often largely non-White student population (Boutte & Jackson, 2014).

School Reform

Social justice education has gained increased attention in school reform efforts in recent decades and is now considered a hallmark of educational practice (Wang, 2013). While the term is politically volatile and subject to interpretation (Shoho, Merchant, & Lugg, 2011), social justice education calls for direct, intentional efforts at preparing teachers to recognize, name, and combat inequity in schools (Spalding, Klecka, Lin, Odell, & Wang, 2010) and promote equity for all children regardless of race, class, ethnicity, or disability (Shoho, Merchant, & Lugg, 2011). Social justice calls for the identification of diversity, recognition of oppression caused by differences, and action to alleviate injustice (Stables, 2005). Much of the scholarship attributes the responsibility of leading social justice efforts to school administrators who are considered “morally obligated to foster equitable learning opportunities for children regardless of racial, socioeconomic, gender, cultural, disability, and sexual orientations” (Evans, 2007 p, 250). This focus may overlook the importance of the collective responsibility of social justice education among teachers and stakeholders in the school community (Goldenberg, 2014).

A significant portion of social justice education studies focuses on pre-service teaching (Cochran-Smith, 1995, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Milner, 2003), specifically

preparing White teachers for their diverse classrooms. Fewer studies seem to focus on preparing teachers for effective collaboration with diverse colleagues, administrators, and parents. Sarason's (1996) consideration of the connection between power within the culture of the school and how one views their professional identity could be an important starting point for shifting the focus away from the classroom towards examining how teachers make sense of their collegial relationships, particularly considering the possibility of power dynamics at play in racially diverse professional settings.

Racial justice is a subset of social justice education that specifically addresses inequities of power justified by socially constructed racial categories. Racial injustice remains a pertinent issue that affects professional relationships across all organizations including schools (Pollock, 2009). Racial justice in education is linked widely within educational scholarship to culturally relevant pedagogy (Ford & Sassi, 2014). Culturally relevant pedagogy is an important but narrow approach situated primarily within the classroom context and teacher-to-student relationships and thus might fail to consider both the cultural features of the school and broader institutional structures that impact classrooms. Therefore, one advantage of a racial justice lens for understanding diversity in workplaces is the heightened awareness of racially constructed systems of power and privilege that may impact collaboration. In this effort to understand better how teachers' perceptions of their personal identities in US public schools mediate their capacity to create and participate meaningfully in social networks, a racial justice framework could undergird and provide ample rationale for the importance of improving race relations in schools.

Teacher Work Teams and Professional Learning Communities. The rise of professional learning communities (PLCs) began during the 1990s when the concept of teachers as professionals emerged and school reform efforts focused on developing professionally enriching teacher work groups for boosting student achievement (Conley, Fauske, & Pounder, 2004; Louis & Marks, 1998; Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996). Early studies in professional learning communities focused specifically on how relationships among teachers affect student learning. The development of effective teacher relationships within social networks, particularly how those relationships are managed across lines of social and cultural difference, has been linked to student experiences and treatment in school (Delpit, 2006; Harry, Klingner, & Hart, 2005) and student learning (Earl & Katz, 2006).

The purpose of professional communities is not merely to improve teachers' well-being or to improve their professional orientation but to make a difference for students (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Other scholars made similar earlier claims regarding the connection between professional learning communities and their impact on student achievement (Beck, 1992; Sergiovanni, 1994) and the development of a collaborative community of educators for enhanced teaching and learning effectiveness (Conley, Fauske, & Pounder, 2004; Louis, 2007). The concept of professional learning communities provided alternative approaches to school reform than the dominant emphasis on changing the curriculum and expectations for student learning (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Viewing teachers as collaborative professionals presents a stark contrast to the historically isolated nature of teaching (Lieberman, 1985).

While no universal definition of professional learning communities exists (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace & Thomas, 2006), there is scholarly consensus that professional learning communities are groups of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an “ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way” (Toole & Louis, 2002, p. 245). Harrison, Price, Gavin and Florey (2002) define the professional learning community as an organization in which teachers are expected to engage in collaborative work and discussion, and where there is a consistent focus on teaching and learning. DuFour, DuFour, Eaker and Many (2006) similarly define a professional learning community as educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve.

Scholars name a variety of characteristics of professional learning communities, including: collective responsibility (King & Newmann, 2001; Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996; Leithwood & Louis, 1998); reflective professional inquiry and dialogue (Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996); and tacit knowledge converted into shared knowledge through interaction (Fullan, 2001). Other scholars add a similar concept of organizational learning, citing evidence that links organizational learning to higher achieving students (Marks, Louis, & Printy, 2002) and collaboration (Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996). Within some professional learning community literature, the larger organization such as the school or district is considered the Professional Learning Community, which is then organized into a set of high-performing collaborative teams focused on student learning. In this case, a team is defined as a group of people working interdependently to achieve a

common goal for which members are held mutually accountable (DuFour, et al., 2006).

One key component of professional learning communities as they relate specifically to the study of professional relationships is the focus on teacher interaction. The notion of community implies that the focus is not just on individual teachers' professional learning but on professional learning within a community of learners defined by shared beliefs and understandings, interaction and participation, interdependence, and concern for individual and minority views and meaningful relationships (Stoll et al, 2006; Westheimer, 1999;). Central to the notion of school community is an ethic of interpersonal care permeating the life of teachers, students, and school leaders (Hargreaves & Giles, 2003; Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996) Nel Noddings' (2013) work in this area provided substantial contributions to a new paradigm for approaching effective teacher development and the ethics of care. Noddings' (2013) approach to the ethics of care, also described as relational ethics, prioritizes concern for relationships within the development of a context of shared learning.

Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) emphasize that the context in which a teacher works is important for promoting collaboration. They conclude that the context must be "one that embodies a particular culture of teaching, a particular set of working relationships among teachers and their colleagues which bind them together in a supportive, inquiring community, committed to common goals and continuous improvement" (p. 36) Many education researchers and practitioners embrace the idea of collaborative and collective work efforts (Conley, Fauske, & Pounder, 2004; Louis, Murphy, & Smylie, 2016; Stoll et al, 2006). Collaborative efforts encourage teachers to

become active and conscientious learners, based on the belief that public education must respond to and prepare students for a complex and rapidly evolving world (Hargreaves, 2003). Group as well as individual learning is supported (Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996), along with mutual trust and respect among teachers. Scholars name a variety of benefits to teachers when they choose to participate more actively in collaborative efforts including the potential to enhance organizational learning. Collaboration offers opportunities to improve teaching skills, educational decision making, and student assessment through day-to-day work interactions as well as “an appeal to educators’ democratic sensibilities and the human-centered nature of education work” (Conley, Fauske, & Pounder, 2004, p, 664). Fullan and colleagues indicate that learning happens best when it occurs within the context of community and that, “good policies and ideas take off in learning cultures, and go nowhere in cultures of isolation” (Fullan, Bertani, & Quinn, 2004, p. 9). Developing professional learning communities is considered promising for capacity building and sustainable improvement in schools (Stoll et al, 2006).

Despite a growing body of literature on professional learning communities and teacher work teams, there remains a gap within the contemporary PLC literature that addresses race or power as potential mediating factors for collaborative efforts among teachers. Across the literature much work has examined the ways PLCs function and some studies emphasize the link to social justice education, however, Laura Servage (2009), in her analysis of professional learning community publications, makes the important assertion that “a strict focus of collaborative efforts on improved student

learning is unlikely to be successful if participants are unable to have conversations about systemic issues that produce achievement gaps with glaring correlations to race, language barriers, and/or socio-economic status” (p.160). Ultimately, such an approach might more carefully consider how teachers view their own racial identity, their constructions of race, and their professional relationships, in addition to their contribution to the formation of a shared culture. One view of culture is “an enduring independent phenomenon that consists of some combination of values, beliefs, and assumptions that organizational members share about appropriate behavior” (Louis, 2007, p. 477). This perspective of shared culture might powerfully shape teachers’ understandings of how they might better leverage their various position of power to access supportive resources for themselves or on behalf of others through building a network of social relationships. In this sense, this research builds on an extensive literature base concerning the collegial dimensions of teachers’ work including their participation in professional learning communities (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001) and understanding better the role of relational networks in school reform (Daly, 2010).

Critical Consciousness and Dialogue. The concept of critical consciousness from the perspective of dialogue and shared narratives has been closely linked or said to have been derived in part from the work of Brazilian education activist Paulo Freire (2003). Freire (2003) advocated for dialogue in fostering a critical consciousness among oppressed people about their conditions. Many scholars suggest increased dialogue within and across groups encourages an experiential component to social justice efforts (Patel, 2011). Lisa Delpit’s (2006) work on shared dialogue between White and Black

teachers provides a foundational theoretical backing to this approach within the school reform context. Her study addresses the lack of dialogue between White and Black teachers around race and culture and their relationship to the education of Black children. Delpit's (2006) findings suggest that educators of color often feel that their deep, contextual understandings of their students' communities and cultures is devalued by White educators are often unaware of their relationship to the culture of power and as such, their teaching perspectives and understandings are normalized as common sense rather than culture-specific.

In Blumer and Tatum's (1999) study, teacher dialogue and collaborative participation in workshops on racism in schools resulted in a increased understanding of the effects of racism as a major barrier to educational equity. In their study aimed at closing the racialized achievement disparity in a US high school, Noguera and Wing (2006) advocate for open and truthful dialogue about race as an essential part of the process of school reform (p. 164). Further research into how teachers understand and make sense of racial injustice might reveal important insights into why and how they approach racial difference in their professional contexts. Glaude (2016) cautions that without a knowledge of historical and current injustice, people unknowingly subscribe to "racial habits." These racial habits perpetuate the value gap and maintain the underlying belief in the US American ideal "that the United States is a nation committed to liberty, freedom, and the unfettered pursuit of individual dreams" (p. 33). Racial habits are important for understanding and interrogating how teachers demonstrate a genuine celebration of diversity and multicultural education often without realizing their own

deeply rooted racist ideas.

As theorized by Freire (2003), dialogue is the tool that transforms societies. He says, "...since dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialogues are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanized" (p. 89). Freire (2003) asserts that dialogue, when rooted in love, humility, and faith, "becomes the horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence" (p. 91). This notion, set within the public school context, may reveal the importance of ongoing dialogue among cross-racial teaching staff about teachers' racialized identities and the ways in which divergent views can be best utilized for creating more racially just educational experiences for children and how sustained dialogue might have a profound residual effect on school and societal reform, particularly in highly racialized societies.

Social Network Theory and School Reform. This conceptualizing of teachers' personal identities within the context of professional relationships presents a strong link to Social Network Theory by addressing how teachers understand their identities and develop connections not only in order to "get things done" (Anderson, 2010, p. 559), but also to leverage complex power dynamics in mutually beneficial ways. According to Daly (2010), social network theorists "suspend or challenge assumptions about the meaningfulness of organizational boundaries and forms, asking instead how patterns of stability and change might be explained by the web of relations through which ideas, information, resources, and influence flow" (p. xi). A social network is said to exist wherever distinct social actors are connected by relationships, also called strong or weak

ties (Rivera, Soderstrom, & Uzzi, 2010). In this study, the similarities between the characteristics of strong, weak, and absent ties is considered, particularly considering the value of the tie (strong or weak) rather than a binary nature of the tie (present or absent).

Social network analysis offers more than a description of the ways individuals are connected in societies. Knoke and Kuklinski (1982) argue "network analysis contains a further explicit premise of great consequence: the structure of relations among actors and the location of individual actors in the network have important behavioral, perceptual, and attitudinal consequences both for the individual units and for the system as a whole" (p. 13). As such, Social Network Theory considers the constraining and enabling dimensions of patterned relationships among teachers and their racially diverse colleagues. Social networks shape actors and at the same time actors shape networks through their assumed agency, the stories they tell, and the narratives they intentionally or unintentionally reproduce. Further, it is the narrative of racial difference in the United States that Stevenson (2016) calls upon the actors to change.

Alan Daly (2010) is widely recognized as a leading scholar in Social Network Theory applied to school reform. In his book, *Social Network Theory and Education Change*, Daly (2010) provides an in-depth analysis of the key tenets of social network theory within the context of schools as relational networks. His work highlights the potential of relationships and the restorative and transformative power they hold particularly within the relationships between educators through which change efforts flow. The premises of his approach to school reform through the lens of Social Network theory guide this study-that relationships and collegial support are central for the

retention, increased professionalism, and engagement of educators, that the stronger the professional network, the more likely educators are to engage in deeper levels of conversation, and that henceforth building and supporting professional relational networks is an important approach to sustainable change (Daly, 2010). While Daly (2010) does not express a focus on social justice approaches to change, his emphasis on the importance of relationships allows for a strong conceptual justification for applying social network approaches to social justice education. Change within the context of social network theory and education is more directly related to the phenomena of change in organizations, rather than an emphasis on the moral or philosophical motivations for change.

Other scholars have also contributed to the research on social networks and school reform (Coburn, Mata, & Choi, 2013; Penuel, Riel, Krause, & Frank, 2009). Coburn, Mata, and Choi (2013) in their study of teachers' social networks, highlight the importance of social interaction and professional learning communities for educational improvement efforts, emphasizing "leveraging the power of teachers' social and professional relationships to encourage instructional improvement and organizational change" (p. 312). Daly and Finnigan's (2011) study of districtwide reform efforts in under-performing districts in California reveal the importance of performing network analyses rather than focusing only on technical compliance and accountability. Their study highlights an array of interconnected factors that often apply to US urban contexts including increased accountability measures, high staff turnover, and leadership challenges (Daly, 2009). These challenging environments make low-performing schools

less attractive workplaces that tend to be staffed with insufficiently trained teachers with lower levels of commitment (Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002). Due to the intensified challenges within this context, Daly and Finnigan (2011) contend that network data analysis provides insight into which individuals within the district are in the best structural position to move knowledge and practice throughout the system. Their findings suggest that a coordinated effort at building ties within groups of administrators and between different levels of employees in the system is critical for enhancing an organization's overall capacity for change. Additionally, establishing lateral ties between clusters of school site administrators serving similar student populations to generate new knowledge is also considered helpful for facilitating improvement through enhancing knowledge ties that build social capital and enable each site to best assimilate and replicate new knowledge. Additionally, frequent interaction fosters trust and social closeness (Rivera, Soderstrom, & Uzzi, 2010; Uzzi & Lancaster, 2004). This study, along with other studies that highlight the importance of school cultures that are trusting, interactive, and collaborative (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Louis, 2007; Penuel, Riel, Krause, & Frank, 2009; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008) suggest considering relational links as agents of change. This scholarship applied to racial justice work might also point to the importance of relational networks and increased collaboration, trust, and knowledge transfer as promising for promoting racial justice efforts in schools.

Teacher Relationships and Trust. Granovetter's (1983) seminal work on relational ties within social networks provides a groundwork for the definitions and characteristics of different types of ties along with their various uses within networks.

The characteristics of strong ties reveal close similarities with the characteristics of social justice efforts. Granovetter (1983) claims the strength of a tie is a combination of: the amount of time, the emotional intensity, and the intimacy invested within the relationship. As such, the role of trust and perceived trustworthiness in developing strong ties is an important consideration for enhancing teacher relationships (Rivera, Soderstrom, & Uzzi 2010; Uzzi & Lancaster 2004). Strong ties require longer time commitments, more frequent interactions, and stronger sentiments of friendship. Defined and characterized this way, strong ties may form the relational basis by which social justice work is carried out in interpersonal relationships within organizations. In such organizations, the tasks of activism and skills required are complex, and the level of trust required tends to be high (Bergsieker, Shelton, & Richeson, 2010).

This link, however, poses significant challenges for developing cross-racial relationships, as evidence shows that more perceived similarities between actors result in stronger ties and increased likelihood that a friendship will develop (Granovetter, 1983). McPherson, Smith-Loving, and Cook (2001), in their study of social networks, found that people display a strong tendency toward homophily, defined as the principle that contact between similar people occurs at a higher rate than among dissimilar people. Homophily “limits peoples’ social worlds in a way that has powerful implications for the information they receive, the attitudes they form, and the interactions they experience” (McPherson, Smith-Loving, and Cook, 2001, p. 415). This finding indicates increased similarity between two individuals increases the likelihood that they are to establish a connection. Homophily is helpful as an organizing concept due in part to its historical connection

with demographic differences such as race, ethnicity and gender. For the purpose of this study, a more nuanced definition of homophily, informed by the early work of Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954) includes value homophily based on values, attitudes and beliefs. This conceptualization of homophily considers of the important role of *perceptions* of similarity/dissimilarity, internalized racism, and bias on the formation of relational ties.

The key tenets of Racial, Ethnic and Cultural Identity Development and Social Network Theory together provide the theoretical lens through which Black teacher's narratives of their personal and professional lived experiences in US urban schools are understood. Each lens potentially offers unique insights into the ways individuals with their complex perceived and socially constructed identities operate within equally complex social institutions, namely schools. Emirbayer and Goodwin (1994) assert network theory broadly serves more as a perspective or a paradigm rather than a prescriptive theory and hence lacks some of the theoretical strength to carry out empirical studies. However, the theory does hold to certain assumptions about fundamental issues including the relationship between the individual and society, the macro and the micro, and the structuring of supra-individual patterns of relational networks. It rejects the notion that human behavior or social processes can be explained solely in terms of the categorical attributes of individual actors or their collective identities (Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994). The premise here with relevance to this study is the importance of questioning explanations of social behavior as the result of individuals' common possession of attributes and norms such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, or religion, rather than "as the result of their involvement in structured social

relations" (Wellman 1983, p. 165).

This premise further complicates the dynamic of teachers' understanding of their personal identity and professional relationships through the lens of race as their behavior within these relationships but not explained exclusively by them. Social network studies consider that the nature of groups is largely determined by the intersection of the individual actors within them (Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994). As such, this study draws inspiration from Thomas (1966) and Simmel (1955) and other theorists who "regarded social facts as ecologically embedded within specific contexts of time and space" (cited in Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994, p. 1415). Social Network Theory provides an additional consideration for understanding the professional experiences of African American teachers, yet it not the core theoretical framework. It is a lens through which to conceptualize teachers' understanding of their personal identities, constructions of race, and professional relationships within their professional work places over time. The themes that emerge might find resonance and meaning in ways that inform and inspire other teachers and individuals also concerned with racial justice.

Conclusion

Within this literature review I explored the major themes and ideas pertinent to understanding the phenomena of race relations and the impact of race in in US public schools. I considered the implications of colorblindness in a post-racial society for teachers' collegial relationships. I further examined the key tenets of workplace diversity and teacher work teams to denote the various ways Black teachers may understand their professional experiences working in US urban and suburban schools. I drew upon the

business and educational literature to outline the salient concepts that emerge from several studies to summarize and explain the multi-faceted dynamics that can affect teachers' professional relationships. The thread that unifies these bodies of literature is systemic racism and the potential impact of racial hierarchies on healthy and supportive relational networks in educational workplaces. Race permeates all spheres of public life, and an in-depth analysis of organizational behavior and diverse collegial relationships is neither complete nor particularly helpful without a careful examination of the dynamics of power and privilege.

A critical analysis of the literature reveals that while each area of study is widely researched and substantial contributions have been made, there remains at the intersection of the three bodies a gap in exploring the ways race informs how teachers understand their personal identities and professional relationships. Focusing on the experiences of retired, African American teachers over time, I considered how the cross-racial professional collegial experiences of Black teachers tend not to be represented within organizational diversity, school reform, and racial justice discourse. To this end, in this dissertation I sought to explore how racial hierarchies and racially divided histories may consciously or unconsciously impact effective collegial relationships among teachers in schools. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the epistemology, methodology, and research methods used in this study. It describes the research participants in brief, outlines the analytic approach, and clarifies limitations and delimitations of this study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This research was a descriptive qualitative study informed by phenomenological perspectives (Dahlberg, 2006). I chose a qualitative research design because it best aligns with my research questions that focus on meaning and context and address “the everyday concerns of people’s lives” (Merriam, 2009, p. 1). In this study, I sought rich descriptions of how retired teachers interpret their experiences, how they constructed their personal and professional identities, and how they make sense of race in education over time. Rich descriptions are those that draw upon quotes and excerpts to convey what the participants shared about their understandings and experiences as Black teachers over time.

Qualitative research is useful for centering the perceptions and experiences of persons who are affected by a particular occurrence or set of social conditions (Hays & Singh, 2012). In this case, I examined the experience of being Black in a profession dominated by Whites. Qualitative research methods can be helpful to understand the nuances of marginalization and to guide action that seeks to ameliorate various social conditions (Hays & Singh, 2012; McNiff, 2013). This type of research is characterized by designs that are flexible rather than fixed (Robson, 2011), and inductive rather than deductive. An inductive approach allowed me to construct themes and categories from the data I gathered and then attempt to reflect the perspectives of those who do not have prominent voices in academic scholarship (Hays & Singh, 2012; Merriam, 2002).

Joseph Maxwell (2012) presents an interactive model of qualitative research in which the relationships among the various components of the design are conceptualized as interconnected and interdependent. That is, no predetermined logical strategy is

selected in advance. In this study, I expected and later experienced substantial and ongoing construction and reconstruction of the design throughout the research process in order to best answer the research questions and respect the research participants' time.

Phenomenological Orientation

In this study, I drew upon the inspiration of Edward Husserl, the father of phenomenology (Hays & Singh, 2012) whose understanding of people's "way of being in the world" (p. 617) seemed the most appropriate, rigorous, and respectful way to approach this study. According to Patton (2002), Husserl's "most basic philosophical assumption was that we can only know what we experience" (Patton, 2002, p. 105). This study was designed to be informed by phenomenological perspectives as this research included "lived or experiential meaning" and attempted to "describe and interpret these meanings in the ways that they emerge" (Adams & van Manen, 2008, p. 614). Employing phenomenological perspectives, my goal was to describe my participants' experiences and reflect on those experiences without imposing my own value statements into the research (Overgaard, 2015). My goal was to bracket my prejudices and assumptions so that, consistent with the phenomenological tradition, I examined the unique lived experiences of the participants and identified common and divergent experiences across their narratives (Cornett-Devito & Worley, 2005). In this study, I attempt to describe the experiences of Black retired teachers who taught in either predominantly Black or White schools, or both, and their understanding of those experiences, which informed a better understanding of schools in US society and race in the US more broadly.

Critical Research

Although I initially approached this study from an interpretivist frame, I soon began to see the value of a critical frame to help explain the findings. I came to critical research because in this study, a predominant early theme of the conversations was power, which is a central tenet in critical approaches to the study of education. In interview after interview, participants discussed systems and structures that govern the historical and contemporary ways that Whites and Blacks live and work. Conversations pointed to how Merriam (2009) describes the study of power, in terms of “who has it, how it’s negotiated, what structures in society reinforce the current distribution of power, and so on” (p. 10). As such, the phenomenological analysis of Black teachers’ reflections of their lived experiences is appropriately overlaid and compatible with a critical perspective, as the participants’ experiences were constructed in such a way that reflected oppressive power relations.

Research Participants

The participants of this study were ten retired African American US public school teachers across a range of K-12 grade levels and academic disciplines. There were eight female and two male participants who ranged from 60-70 years of age. Pseudonyms are used to protect the participants’ identity. Most of the participants retired within the past five years and two of the 10 participants are still engaged in some form of paid work, either as college instructors or K-12 educational consultants. Three of the participants hold a PhD and each of them has at least one Master’s Degree. All were Illinois certified teachers. Six participants grew up on the south side of Chicago and attended predominantly Black Chicago Public

Schools, two were educated in segregated all-Black schools in the South (Mississippi and Alabama), one was raised in and attended predominantly Black public schools in Detroit. One participant was raised in a diverse suburb of Chicago and attended ethnically diverse public schools. Two of the participants were, for the first few years of their educational career, the only Black teacher in the school. Their birth years range from 1935 to 1961 and they retired between the years of 1995-2017.

I used a purposeful, targeted approach (Patton, 2002; Maxwell, 2001) to select potential participants that met the criteria for my study. Purposeful sampling, also called purposive sampling (Palys, 2008), is a sampling strategy in which specific settings, people, or activities are intentionally chosen for their capacity to share information that is relevant to the study. Purposive sampling is helpful for selecting “information-rich” participants who are most qualified to offer in depth insight central to the purpose of the inquiry (Patton, 2002). My sample consisted of African American public school teachers from Chicago and the greater Chicago area. I chose Chicago and its surrounding suburbs because I live and have taught public school in Chicago and its suburbs and because more retired African American teachers tend to be found in large urban contexts for a variety of historical and social reasons. I limited my sample to those who had at least 20 years of public school teaching experiences in order to understand how race impacted the professional lives of teachers over a sustained period of time. Retired teachers in their 60s and 70s (the demographic of this sample) were also able to tell me about their childhood experiences in school in the 1930s and 40s as part of explaining the arc of the phenomenon studied. In this study of Black experiences in education, I limited my

sample to African American participants who are the direct descendants of enslaved people from Africa. I acknowledge potential differences in life histories and understanding of race in the US between descendants of enslaved people and immigrants from the African diaspora, as descendants of slaves are the direct recipients of generations of racist and discriminatory policies.

I limited my sample to those who had taught in public education settings, as these settings are most directly impacted by broader national, state, and local policies and are those that have a history of segregation and desegregation. Many participant responses touched on these issues and described the ways power and decision making mattered for their lived experiences as public school teachers. Most of my participants taught in the two largest districts in Illinois, the Chicago Public School District and the U-46 Public School District. Finally, I limited my sample to teachers in Chicago or the greater Chicago area, recognizing the importance of Chicago as one of the five largest destinations of the Great Migration, along with New York, Detroit, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia.

Wilkerson (2010) says of the Great Migration, the period when former slaves migrated northward for new opportunities in industrialized cities; “its imprint is everywhere in urban life.” She says, “the configuration of the cities as we know them, the social geography of Black and White neighborhoods, the spread of the housing projects as well as the rise of a well-scrubbed Black middle class, along with the alternating waves of White flight and suburbanization—all of these grew, directly or indirectly, from the response of everyone touched by the Great Migration” (p. 10). The Black population

in Chicago increased from 44,103 to more than one million and “by the turn of the twenty-first century, Blacks made up a third of the city’s residents, with more Blacks living in Chicago than the entire state of Mississippi” (Wilkerson, 2010, p. 11). These historical and social considerations inform urban education and the schooling culture in the North, and in Chicago, specifically, that may differ from other regions, even from other large, urban cities.

Methods for Data Collection

I collected the data in this study from 20 in-depth, semi-structured, individual interviews with ten participants. In-depth interviews were most suitable for gathering descriptions of participants’ reflections and understandings, as the participants’ thoughts were paramount for understanding how they make meaning of their personal and professional identities within their work places (Breakwell, 2006; Creswell, 2012, 2013). Additionally, interviews are most suitable for gathering information about phenomena that are not observable. In this case, I sought historical knowledge that largely exists only in the memories of the participants. While the facts of their memories may be verified with maps, school census data, and historical educational policy documents, personal interviews allowed me to ask questions about the meanings they attach to the memories, and “enter into the other person’s perspective” to find out how they interpret the world around them (Patton, 2002, p. 340-341). I used open-ended questions during the interviews to draw out more information from the participants and them and encourage them to explain their responses. Additionally, I allowed the interview questions to evolve and take shape according to their responses and the responses of previous interviews

(Hays & Singh, 2012). I did not use a fixed set of interview questions, rather I had a selection of topics that I drew from during each interview.

I initially planned to interview eight participants for this study, based on Creswell's (2013) guidelines for effective phenomenological studies. After eight continuous months of seeking potential participants and conducting interviews, ten participants both agreed to and followed through with the interview process. I interviewed each participant twice, with a span of one to nine weeks in between interviews. The follow up interviews served three purposes: 1) to ensure the validity of the themes drawn from the first interview; 2) to allow participants to add additional insights that may have occurred following our first conversation; 3) and to probe further about issues that emerged in other participant interviews. At the start of each follow up interview I provided an overview of the previous interview and asked participants to verify the accuracy of my summary. The full transcriptions, most around 30 pages of text, were made available to participants upon request. The length of time between interviews conducted earlier on in the study was longer than more recent initial interviews because I waited to conduct follow-up interviews until I had more initial interviews already completed. This strategy was intentional as I hoped the themes that began to emerge in subsequent interviews would then be brought back to my initial participants for further understanding, to clarify, or to add new ideas. I concluded based on the amount of information the ten participants provided that no additional participants were necessary and that the information had been saturated (Merriam, 2009).

Interviewing Procedures

I began each interview according to my interview protocol, by asking participants to tell me about why they decided to become a teacher. This question was helpful for gaining background information on the participant, building trust, and hearing some of their initial ideas and overarching reflections of their teaching career. I then followed with one or all of a series of eight questions for the first interview and no prescribed questions for the follow up interviews. I maintained no predetermined order to my questions or to their specific wording, but I guided the interview conversation according to specific areas of interest throughout (Merriam, 2009). I used probing questions and clarified for deeper understanding as necessary to gather a thick description of the participants' experiences (Hays & Singh, 2012). The interviews took the form of conversations, much like how DeMarrais (2004) defines an interview as "a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to the research study" (p. 55). The interviews broadly focused on participants' memories of their childhood experiences in school, understandings of their personal and professional identities, collegial relationships in schools, and their understandings of race in schools and in society over time.

Some participants were more inclined than others to focus on their relationships with students. While this was not the focus of my study, stories of highlights in their teaching career, classroom activities, and transformative relationships with students mattered as they revealed and confirmed what in the end became an important theme, that is, the resilience and motivation for teachers of color to persist in their careers despite

challenging circumstances. This theme and others are explained in greater detail in Chapter 5, but it serves as an example of the semi-structured nature of the interview procedures in this study. I attempted to center the participants as the experts through focusing on the topics and insights they chose to reveal according to what mattered most to them. The follow up interviews provided an opportunity to check with respondents for accuracy of interpretation and to explore unusual or unanticipated responses (Merriam, 2009).

Research Relationships

One essential component of the research design was the plan for developing relationships with the participants of the study. The concept of creating healthy research relationships is widely discussed in the literature and proves instrumental for ethically accessing the information needed to answer the research questions. I found understanding the complexity of the nature of research relationships was key to navigating the unique types of relationships I developed during this study. As a younger, White researcher, gaining trust from older, Black participants was crucial to the success of this study where the racial dynamics of the research relationship were generally subject to cultural mistrust.

Throughout the interviews, I attempted to develop trust with the participants by demonstrating interest in their lives, identifying and discussing connections or shared interests, and sharing my motivations for the study. For example, my participants and I exchanged stories of how we know the mutual friend who connected us for the study. The most important goal of my interviews was to create an intimate, self-revealing space

where the participants felt comfortable disclosing personal and sometimes very painful memories with me. I shared some of my own racial encounters I experienced with my Black husband and the fears I have for raising my Black sons in the US. I found I was best able to create a safe space by minimizing, as much as possible, the extent to which my presence mediated the participants' responses. I did this by leading with authentic self-revealing of my own limited understanding of the topic and desire to learn. While I took care not to lead participants or prompt specific responses, consistent with critical theory, my primary concern in the interview process was to amplify the voices of my participants and gather a depth of insight sufficient for co-narrating their story for a wider audience (Merriam, 2009). This required acknowledging power dynamics in the research relationship and inherent in the interview and revealing aspects of my personal orientation towards race.

Data Analysis

In this study, I began data analysis at the onset of data collection, a strategy informed by Coffey and Atkinson (1996) who encouraged simultaneous data collection and substantial analysis. I reviewed each transcription in full once and wrote summaries of each interview before I began coding the data. I developed preliminary ideas about categories and potential relationships between the data and captured the essence of the conversation including nuances such as tone, facial expression, and mood not necessarily captured in the transcription. According to Merriam (2009) the rigor of a qualitative analysis is found in "the researcher's presence, the nature of the interaction between researcher and participant, the triangulation of data, the interpretation of perceptions, and rich, thick description" (p. 166). In

this study, I made every effort to report ample quotes, details, and conversational nuances and carefully craft sufficient support for convincing readers of the conclusion I draw.

In addition to transcribing the interviews soon after they were conducted, I also coded the data throughout the data collection process using the coding software, Quirkos. Doing so allowed me to focus my second interviews and the first interviews of some of the later participants according to the themes that began to emerge. I developed a Code Book through identifying emergent superordinate themes, themes, and subthemes based on at least three participants making a statement or expressing a similar thought or experience. Ideas that were not as commonly mentioned or referred to across participants were also coded and designated for future study.

After I developed my initial categories, I reviewed the transcripts multiple times in order to reflect deeply on the emergent patterns and meanings of my participants' experiences with meticulous attention to language (Saldaña, 2015). I attempted this meticulous attention by considering the tone of each participants' comments and the depth of emphasis they place on each idea and why. I considered whether the way they talked about their ideas revealed their understandings of how their themes might connect in a web of interrelated factors. I observed whether participants generally maintained an interest in individual level racism, thus focusing on personal relationships, or whether they tended to discuss race and racism from a more structural standpoint, emphasizing policies and procedures that reproduce racial oppression.

Finally, I considered whether participants described the phenomena from an inductive or a deductive approach, and decided, in the end, to categorize the findings from large

structural themes down to their related effects on teacher relationships in schools. By the end of the eight-month process I became more familiar with my data. Through the process of coding and re-coding, I developed a series of conceptual maps of various arrangements of categories and codes, arriving, finally, at the organization of findings that I provide in Chapters 4 and 5. I chose the final structure because I felt it told best the participants' stories about the data from a Critical Race Theory approach. I acknowledge that the structure of the findings suggest cause and effect, locate problems, acknowledge power and imply different meanings about the relationship of the themes to each other and to the wider context. For example, in earlier iterations of conceptual mapping, I centered teachers' experiences as the main themes, and what those experiences might mean or what caused them as the subthemes. In the final outline, I attempted to set the structure such that the themes constituted some of the root causes, and the subthemes as evidence of or contribution to those causes. I came to this conclusion by taking various claims, quotes or stories and stepping back to see more clearly the larger factors or context for the story.

Trustworthiness Strategies

The qualitative trustworthiness of this study was of particular importance given my role as a White researcher conducting a phenomenological study about race with Black participants. As such, I took care to minimize participant vulnerability in my presentation of their biographical sketches in Chapter 4 and of the findings in Chapter 5. I attempted to demonstrate consideration for the participants' experiences in every stage of the research process from the conceptualization of the research design to the data collection and analysis, to the reporting of the findings. To accomplish this I used the trustworthiness strategy of

member checking, or respondent validation, to solicit feedback from my participants about my descriptions of their educational and professional backgrounds and experiences. I did this to communicate to the participants my intent to interpret and report the details of their personal and professional experiences fairly and carefully. I sent a draft of the Participant Biographies to each participant for their review of the accuracy of content and tone. Four participants responded with suggestions and corrections. According to Maxwell (2005), member checking is the most valuable strategy for “ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and the perspective they have on what is going on” (p.217). During the interviews, I asked clarifying questions using phrases such as “what I think I hear you saying is...” This gave participants the opportunity in the moment to correct a misguided interpretation or add additional insights to add clarity and understanding. I also used member checking between interviews when I started the second, follow up interview with a synopsis of the previous interview. One of the more telling member checking moments was during a second interview with April when I presented a summary of one idea from the first interview. Her facial expression and response suggested I may have misunderstood and revealed that more questions were needed.

I also used the strategy that Merriam (2009) calls “adequate engagement in data collection” which involves getting “as close as possible” to my participants’ understanding of the phenomenon (p. 219). I did this in a few different ways. I committed a relatively long time to each interview as I did not want the participants to feel rushed, nor did I want them to feel what I sought from them was all I cared about. Often times I spent many hours with a participant, and I learned that deeper insights may take time before they are revealed.

Sometimes, the participants and I chatted in what seemed to be mutually meaningful conversation 30 minutes after the official interview had ended. I found that to the extent I was able to get “close to” the participants, I learned more about their personal lives and gained a better understanding of how they might view their experiences. For example, Carol and I talked extensively after each interview about social justice efforts she engages in within her community.

Another way I sought to engage with the data is to read extensively about the time period and social context within which their stories were situated. I drove through the streets of Chicago’s south side identifying schools, street corners, and other landmarks named in my study. I visited some of the communities my participants grew up in and where they spent most of their teaching careers. I tried to acquaint myself with Black culture of the decades relevant to my study. I listened to every song or movie mentioned and read every book recommendation offered. I talked with Black colleagues about my findings throughout the study and I questioned the extent to which I proposed findings that fit what I was looking for or otherwise know to be “true,” rather than relying solely on what the participants chose to tell me. These informal discussions helped produce a final result that was more trustworthy. I specifically chose Black colleagues their expertise in this case is twofold, they are well acquainted with academic research, and they know what it is like to be a Black professional in the US.

I also used examples of negative case analysis (when a participant’s comments runs contrary to a noted theme) and included findings that seemed to contradicted the emergent theme or the general ideas of the participants collectively. In this study,

evidence of negative case analysis was located only at the collegial level, never within the context of race in the US. This observation indicates that teacher's experiences differ significantly from one participant to the next, especially in how they understand their cross-racial teaching relationships, but the struggle of being Black in US America and its connection to schooling is consistent across all participants.

Another trustworthiness tool I use in this study is what Lincoln and Guba (2000) call "reflexivity" defined as the process of "reflecting critically on the self as researcher, the 'human instrument'" (p.183). I outlined in deliberate detail some of my life experiences that help explain my various biases and assumptions. The goal of reflexivity is to delineate not just the values and expectations I brought to the study, but the ways these values influenced the conclusions I drew. Ultimately, the trustworthiness of a study depends on my own credibility as a researcher. None of my participants knew me prior to this study, and I have no previous publications with which to promote my ideas. While I attempted to build rapport with my participants in my own initiative, I suspect they responded with such vulnerability and openness to my research questions because of their trusting relationship with a friend in common. Perhaps because of their respect for our mutual friend, the participants seemed to trust me, or at least trust my intent, which is to engage in careful and thoughtful research that upholds the dignity of all people.

In this chapter I provided details regarding the methodological approach to the study. In the next two chapters I report on the findings. In Chapter 4, I provide a brief overview of the educational and professional experiences of each of the participants so that readers can understand better the key informants of this study. The participant overviews are followed by

Chapter 5, in which I present the macro-level findings of the study. These findings were the themes that emerged from conversations across all research participants.

Chapter Four: Participants

Sylvia

Sylvia was born and raised on the south side of Chicago. She attended elementary school at a racially mixed Chicago Public School with primarily White teachers. She expressed fond memories of her teachers and classmates and recalled not thinking about race until 1968 when Dr. Martin Luther King was killed. She grew up in a working-class family and some of her close relatives participated in the Civil Rights Movement. After her family moved during her late elementary school years she began attending a predominantly Black elementary school with mostly wealthy, well-educated Black teachers. An additional move later, she finished her elementary education at a predominantly Black school with mostly White teachers and a White principal.

Sylvia graduated from a public high school with mostly Black students and mostly White teachers. She called her experience there “wonderful” and the graduation rates were excellent. She did not have any problems with her teachers. She said, “they were excellent teachers, both Black and White.” She recalled how the teachers got along, worked for the betterment of the students, and focused on school pride. Sylvia attributed her motivation for becoming a teacher to the great educators she grew up with who focused on “encouraging students to be the absolute best they could possibly be.”

During college, Sylvia realized a significant difference between teachers of different races. She reflected on one particular teacher who told her she would not be able to finish school [due to the birth of her first child]. Sylvia sensed this teacher held very negative views about Black people. Sylvia graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in

Elementary Education as later a Masters of Arts (MA) in Special Education. She was one of few Black teachers to pursue a career in Special Education at the time. She said her resilience and her strong sense of identity were fostered by her mom, her aunt, and God. She realized early on that every negative experience in life prepared her for opportune moments to connect with and help students facing similar difficulties. She said, “everything you go through is not for you, but God preparing you. It’s not for you, it’s for someone else.” She believes in giving her strength to someone else to strengthen them.

Sylvia claimed racial employment discrimination in education and unjust hiring practices impact the number of Black teachers in schools today. She advocates for White teachers to experience different cultures and contexts and in doing so, find out “what it’s like.” She expressed profound frustration with the election of the current president and a concern that White people not properly educated are “just believing what they are told or what’s on TV.” She emphasized the link between schools and societies, namely societal ills that have grown worse over time due to intentional structures that perpetuate racial disparities, including White district administrators who maintain power and decision-making within White, male-led organizations. She considers the problem of race in US public schools today to be “huge,” evidenced by in-group hiring practices, inequitable funding, racially biased testing, and racial disparities in student achievement. Sylvia retired in 2016.

Charlotte

Charlotte was born in the South in 1948 and moved to Chicago when she was eight years old. She attended all black schools with “fabulous” Black and White teachers.

She said, “At this school, hard work, excellent teaching by a racially diverse faculty, achievable goals, and high expectations were the norm.” Charlotte expressed a fond appreciation of her family life and community structure. She noted that her parents helped her recognize she was not limited because of her color. They always encouraged her to do better. “Maybe I had blinders on,” she said, “I don’t know, but, you know, it just seemed to work.” She recalled having to ride on the back of the bus in the South but not wanting to sit in the back when she came to Chicago. She explained with a smile, “the bus would move and you would slide around because you sat on this one seat that would go across the back of the bus, so I wanted my own seat!” But she did not know as a kid why that was, because her parents never talked about it. She named that experience among others, as “just part of life, and you just did what you had to do in order to survive.”

Charlotte always wanted to be a teacher. She recounted with laughter how as a child she would bring home church programs and set up a makeshift classroom with her friends in the apartment building hallway where she lived. Years later, she earned a Bachelor of Arts (BA) Mathematics Education and “absolutely loved the experience.” While she has fond memories of her childhood and professional experiences in schools, she asserted that the racial climate in society has worsened significantly over time. She described a complex societal system of the mass incarceration of young Black men, poverty, family values, employment, and communities divided by race.

Charlotte named funding concerns as her primary disappointment in schools. Assuming the position of Assistant Principal of the School Budget, she said she saw a

“whole different perspective on what schools are about when you’re looking at it from the perspective of money.” She named inequitable funding structures and attributed them to both race and class. She identified the complexity of never having enough money for appropriate resources, staffing, and reduced class sizes, but was unclear as to how to make it fair. She claimed there should be some other way to distribute monies other than based on the value of your property, because “when kids are not well educated you run into all sorts of problems that cost even more money.” She claimed, “people say that money doesn’t matter but it absolutely does, when you don’t have it. It definitely matters.” Overall, her philosophy about improving schools is to focus on spending money equitably on the front end, “rather than trying to curb societal problems at the back end, which is totally difficult to do.” She confidently named quality teaching as another important component of improving education, and passion as the most important characteristic of an effective teacher. Within that context, she argued, “color shouldn’t matter, you must have well prepared teachers who care about students. Having the knowledge but not being able to share it and pass it on to the students is not worthwhile. You’ve got to be able to relate to students no matter what color.” Charlotte retired in 2008.

Cynthia

Cynthia always wanted to become a teacher. She comes from a family of educators, including her great aunt and uncle. Her relatives were the first to graduate from the local high school she later graduated from in a small integrated town in the Chicago suburbs where she grew up. Cynthia attended mostly White public schools with

all White teachers. She described her close knit childhood community where everybody knew everybody, parents respected teachers, and children generally understood that the purpose of school was to get an education. She said, “every once in a while you might run into a teacher who you considered afraid of Blacks or maybe you would say racist, but for that part, it wasn’t bad.”

Cynthia had never had a Black teacher until college. She said her college experiences exposed her to another type of Black, an educated Black, that she previously had not been exposed to. Cynthia graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Physical Education (PE) and became a PE teacher in the Chicago suburbs. After about 10 years as a PE teacher she earned a Masters of Arts (MA) in Counseling and became a school counselor which she calls, “the love of her life.” After 20 years as a school counselor she spent the last three to four years of her career as an Assistant Principal.

Cynthia attributes her ease of adjustment in White or Black contexts to growing up in an integrated community. She said she can teach anywhere because she was exposed to different people. She is familiar with different cultures and she is not easily influenced by negative media. She asserted, “it all goes back to stereotyping and what you are exposed to and what kind of parents you have.” She was able to get along fine with her colleagues because, she said, “I can get along with a bear. See I know how to kill you with kindness. Psychology, I can kill you with kindness and can’t stand your guts.” She laughs,

See there’s a technique to everything. But I knew how to deal with, see I was raised with Whites, I went to school with Whites, a lot of these teachers who lived

in the city went to Black schools all their life and it's their first time dealing with Whites. So it's a whole different ball game for them then me and the background I came from.

Cynthia attributed her sense of identity to her strong mother who raised her and her seven siblings with three firm house rules: "number one you were going to school; number two you were going to church; and number three you were going to take care of yourself." Cynthia said her identity lies in her strength and her religion. Overall, Cynthia expressed a concern not just for Black people, but for the whole country. Deeply concerned by the current president, she named the ignorance of the American people and their failure to recognize the actual problem as a barrier to resolve it. She said, "that's the whole problem, the whole country is in trouble." She fears the forces that are breaking down families are getting stronger. She insisted that creating lasting change must start by changing the heart of the country, "internally you got to change the heart of these educators." Cynthia retired in 2007.

April

April grew up in rural Alabama and attended school in a segregated three room schoolhouse. She said while the mantra at that time was "separate but equal" it was not equal by any means. She said the teachers did excellent work; many of the Black students who had gone there went on to higher education and went on to do great things. The teachers did a great job, in her opinion, but the resources were lacking. She notes that all of their textbooks came used from the White schools and were around 20-30 years old at the time.

April reminisced about the relationship between the teacher and the community back then, “it was so great at that time, they were always encouraging.” The value of education was also reinforced in the community and in the church. She named the church as “all they have,” and as their primary support network, holding the community together. April remembers talking about race in school, especially when they read about and critiqued the accuracy of the constitution and other policies and records. In the segregated schools, she claimed, the teachers had the chance to talk to the students about “stuff like that.”

During April’s 3rd grade year she went to a different school where her older siblings attended. She returned in 4th grade to her previous school until 7th grade when they closed the school due to its substandard condition. She then integrated into the White school. She recalled the immense challenges her older brother encountered attending White schools. She said, “they would have to escort the Black kids into the classroom that day. The FBI agents were at her parents’ home almost every day.” Her brother was the first African American to graduate from the integrated school, but it did not come easy for him. He faced constant violent ambushes and attacks in the hallway. She said, “but the high point for me of going to the school was having a library, because that never happened in my life...because the library in the community was not really public, you know, it was really segregated.”

After graduating from high school, April attended a nearby state college with mostly Black students. She earned a Bachelor of Science (BS) in Business Administration, finishing a 4-year degree in three years. She then moved with her

husband to Illinois where she worked in the corporate sector for seven years. She then earned a Master of Arts (MA) in Elementary Education with middle school endorsements in social studies and language arts and became a 3rd grade teacher in a Chicago suburb. One of April's major critiques of the public education system over time is the shift towards an over-emphasis on data where teachers are "looking at data all day long and not teaching as they should be." She claimed the consequence of this trend is that "the life has been taken out of teaching, the humanity out of it." She said, "you know, it's almost mechanical now." In addition to expressing her frustrations about standardized testing and the way it does not always accurately assess student understanding, she also expressed the importance of hiring more teachers of color to serve as role models for Black students. She believes Black students need to see that they too can become a teacher. She said they need to "begin seeing their culture differently and learn how to think about social justice issues on a more critical level." April retired in 2015.

Arthur

Arthur grew up partially in the South of the United States with his 13 brothers and sisters all together. He was at the lower end of his siblings and calls it "a good experience." He walked two to three miles to school each way. He said he never thought anything of it. Integration at that time was not even a discussion for Arthur or others in the South. Arthur had all Black teachers and the administration at the district headquarters were all White. He said, "in terms of the school system, they were all Black or all White schools. There was no exception when he was growing up. Overall, he was

content and pleased with the school he attended. The teachers and fellow students were all Black “and that was just it.”

In reflection of his childhood schooling experiences, he spoke frankly of the resource disparities that marked his early education. He said, “equal is what they were supposed to be, but the White schools always seemed to have all the stuff.” He said they used to have to go to the railroad side and pick up coal that the trains left off to heat the school. He never saw any White kids going to pick up coal to heat the school. He remembers as a boy going down to where the White people had a school. They would go down there and dig in the trash for pencils and little short pieces of crayon because they did not always have them where he attended. He wondered whether the Board of Education gave Black schools anything back then. He imagined if they were given supplies in school, “they wouldn’t have to be going to the trash picking up short pencils and stuff like that” and concluded, “it probably just didn’t happen.”

Arthur left home in 1952 and went to Chicago. There he worked during the day to support himself and attended evening high school. The demands of attending school and working far away became too much for him, so he left and joined the army where he earned his high school GED. After he was discharged he returned to Chicago and worked full time as a bus driver. He also started attending college to become a teacher. Arthur decided to become a teacher partly because he came from a family of educators and was inspired by his family. His brother was one of the first in the family to become a teacher “and that goes back,” he guessed, “70 years ago now, thereabout.” Arthur wanted to relocate back to the South and wanted a job. At the time, he wasn’t a college graduate, so

he decided to go into education because he thought it wouldn't be as competitive as other professions. Additionally, he felt he could make a contribution as a role model, especially for young Black men. Despite never relocating back to the South as he intended, Arthur spoke fondly of the land he still owns there and visits regularly. He feels fortunate to have his land. He attributed land to survival and discussed the importance of autonomy and being able to grow something. Most of all, he stated that he likes his land because "it's so peaceful." He said, "I can go on my property and feel free to do whatever I desire."

After Arthur finished his Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Elementary Education and Masters of Arts (MA) in Inner City Studies he started substitute teaching. He went on to earn a Master of Science (MS) in Social and Emotional Disorders and a Doctorate in Counseling. He spent his teaching career in special education in various schools throughout the Chicago area. Overall, Arthur claimed he had a good experience, because "[the students] made it a good experience and I think they respected me and liked me from that standpoint, you know, because I treated students fair and good . . . and then parents were excellent parents, they appreciated me and they thought a lot of me and they were supportive of me." Arthur retired in 2004.

Carol

Carol grew up in Detroit where she attended predominantly Black schools. She experienced the Detroit Rebellion⁴ first hand in 1967 and graduated from high school

⁴ The Detroit Rebellion, also called the Detroit Riots of 1967, is considered one of the largest civil disturbances of the 20th century. The event is considered a turning point in Detroit's racial history, including spurring White Flight and motivating a growth in community activism.

1975. Her mother was a home economics teacher and her father was the Director of Health Education for the City of Detroit. Carol attributes much of her personal identity as a student to her family. Because her parents went to college, the expectation was that she would go to college. She recalled that when there was not that expectation, children tended not to go to college. Additionally, her father's high expectations of academic achievement motivated Carol to excel in school.

Becoming a teacher was not Carol's original plan. She recalled back then she was always fascinated with a keyboard, so she thought she would become a court sonographer. She then considered going into music, and so directed her focus there throughout high school. In college, she started taking courses and spending time with young children and realized teaching is what she wanted to do. She took a job as a classroom teaching assistant because she was working and going to school at the time. She recalled that job, "sealed the deal" for her and she would never go back to anything else.

Carol graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Elementary Education from a state college in Illinois and taught in the area for several years before accepting a teaching position in a mostly White school district in the Chicago northwest suburbs. She earned her Master of Arts (MA) in Educational Technology and continued her career as an elementary school teacher in the district for many years. She contrasted her childhood educational experiences in all Black Detroit Public Schools with her son's educational experiences in predominantly White schools. The impact of the racial dynamic, she said, occurred to her when her son was in first grade and asked her how many White kids were

in her class growing up. She told him there were none. He then asked her if she had any Black teachers. Cindy said, “And I said ‘yeah,’ and he sat back into his seat and he goes ‘wow! Black teachers!’”

Racial identity development is important to Cindy as a teacher and as a parent. She reflected on her own racial identity development as a child and realized that while there were probably no books with children who looked like her in them, everybody in her community looked like her. She contrasted this reality with the experiences of her children growing up in the suburbs of Chicago, where nobody looked like them. She recalled conversations she had with her children about the adaptations they had to make in that community regarding access to products that match their skin tone. She demonstrated advocacy in school by asking for African American students to be placed in her class and at home by contacting children’s toy producers requesting Black dolls for her daughter. Throughout her career, Cindy engaged in meaningful dialogue with her colleagues and administrators about race. She said, “and so over the years I feel like not only did I educate kids but I educated the staff as well.” Cindy retired in 2017.

Juanita

Juanita was born and raised in a mostly White and Asian middle class Chicago community and went to neighborhood schools in the Chicago Public School system. She was raised in a middle class home but she felt the neighbors were better off and more educated. She said they, “talked proper and everything.” Juanita described her close-knit neighborhood where everyone knew their next-door neighbors and where the rules and regulations regarding what the children could and could not do were clear and enforced

by parents. At night, children ran the streets and felt safe. As a child her family never moved, but shifting demographics and increasing populations resulted in school transfers and new schools for her.

Juanita's church was in the community, as was a community center where sewing, cooking, and African dance classes were offered along with other recreational activities to keep the youth occupied. She reminisced on the time when kids used to go Christmas caroling and come back to the church and drink hot chocolate. Juanita characterized the neighborhood as "black businesses all up and down 63rd street. We can go there, the food places on 47th street, rib places on every corner, churches on every corner, you know, so we had our own that we didn't have to go out of the community."

Juanita framed her childhood schooling experiences with purpose and self-determination. She said, "it was something that had to be done, you had to go to school. It was hard for me but I had to go." It was not until high school that Juanita noticed that, "those people, the White (teachers)" basically got into their cars and went straight home to their nicer neighborhoods. She recalled few White children in her schools. Overall, she did not think much about her expectations of Black or White teachers. She just went to school and understood, "there is no such thing as a teacher liked you, didn't like you. You had to go to school, that's the bottom line. You had to get your homework done. That was the bottom line." She remembered her Black teachers in junior high as motherly and affirming, and cites her Black male math teacher who called her a genius for answering a problem that nobody else could answer. Juanita described racialized housing segregation, saying,

let me just say this...I was on 43rd, if you passed 47th street, then you got into the White community...We loved walking in their neighborhood and wished we lived in those big houses, so we would walk down the street but we never bothered them. In that neighborhood it didn't bother us, but if you went to the neighborhoods to the west you would have to run for your lives in those White neighborhoods.

By high school, the demographics had changed. The White kids moved out and the Black kids moved in. Juanita graduated from a vocational high school with mostly Black students and mostly White teachers. She recalled the Black teachers always treated students differently than the Whites because "there again [the Black teachers] know the mothering part of what people need and yet they also knew the stern hardness of what you need." "Again," she repeated, "the bottom line is this: you need to get your education. Your parents want you to get it, so they were tough." Race was not talked about much in Juanita's childhood home except for conversations surrounding "the situation with Dr. King, when everything was burning up and, like I said, the political scene." She recalled that the grown-ups took care of the business, letting the kids be kids.

Ever since she was young, Juanita knew she wanted to be a teacher. She would take chalk from school and "play school, do problems and stuff on the wall." Juanita earned her associates degree and then graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (BA) Elementary Education from a state college with all White teachers. She remembered, "not a Black one in sight. Oh, was it rough." After subbing for some time, Juanita taught a 5-6th grade/kindergarten split position. She then enrolled in the Teacher Corps program

through her undergraduate institution and was placed in a multicultural high school in a southwest suburb of Chicago. Juanita retired in 2007.

Eric

Eric was born and raised on the south side of Chicago and attended Chicago Public Schools. His parents were the first Black home owners on the block. The student racial makeup of his elementary school, he noticed, became less and less White each year. He said, “by 3rd grade, it was an all-Black school.” Looking back, he recalled when he was growing up the teachers that made the most impression on him were the Black teachers. One particular Black male teacher was a role model for him. Eric said, “[this teacher] always, always wore suits. He was clean, he was always dressed, and everybody knew that. He always wore suits and everything.”

Eric’s father worked two full-time jobs and his mother was a Chicago Public School teacher. People would say he grew up in the ghetto, but, he argued, the ghetto means the surroundings were all the same. He said, “yes, the surroundings were the same, but my family wasn’t poor. We weren’t rich, but we were able to get everything we wanted and that we needed.” Overall, he said, “we did ok.”

Eric attributed much of his childhood identity development to his mother who was a firm believer in the value of education. He said he got his education from his mom and his work ethic from his father. While most kids on his block did not end up going to college, Eric went because his parents instilled the value of education in him and “he knew he had to go to college.” Eric earned a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Technology Education. He thought he was going to go back to the south side to teach, but he was

offered a job just after graduation to work for a public school in Chicago's north west suburbs, where he would be the first Black teacher in the district. After visiting the school and the surrounding communities, Eric had reservations about taking the position. His mom said, "it shouldn't be a problem, you know who you are." In reflecting on his teaching experiences there, he said, "the kids accepted me a lot faster than my colleagues did." Later, Eric completed his Master of Science (MS) in Computer Education and Administration and Supervision and became an Assistant Dean at another high school in the area where he was the first Black certified staff member in the building. He then became a dean and for 14 years was the only Black administrator in the district.

Eric is a strong believer that students "don't care how much you know until they know how much you care" and his teaching career testifies to his exemplary care for students. He completed his PhD in Curriculum and Instruction just after his mother's untimely death, knowing that was what she would have wanted. He said, "my doctorate was pretty personal and my mother used to always call me 'professor.' And I used to say 'why do you keep calling me professor?' [she replied] 'because you gonna get your doctorate one day.'" Eric retired in 2014.

Abigail

Abigail grew up on the south side of Chicago with her grandparents and aunt. She attended two Chicago Public Schools from Kindergarten through high school and had mostly Black teachers. The class sizes were very large, most with 40-48 students per class. Abigail said back then it truly took a neighborhood to raise the children and she recalled fondly that everyone on her block knew each other. Her grandparents owned

their property in addition to owning various buildings and businesses in the community. She noted the difference property ownership makes in the social fabric of the neighborhood. The residents in her neighborhood owned their own buildings and they were proud of how they kept their buildings. The residents enforced strict community guidelines, such as prohibiting children from playing on the lawns. She said that in the area in which she lived, residents were very fortunate not to have experienced the gang activity that terrorized some of the surrounding communities. During her morning walk to school, neighbors would sit on their porches and call out, “you make sure you listen to those teachers and you learn something.” Describing the community feel to her neighborhood she said, “it was so great.”

Abigail does not recall any major problems throughout early elementary school, but in fifth grade her teachers realized that the majority of the students in her class could not read. The teachers responded with small group interventions and an emphasis on individual student accountability. She called this group of teachers “her godsend,” as they brought the reading group together and formed clusters of students pulled from different areas of the neighborhood. The students called themselves, “the Olympians.” Abigail’s teachers took the Olympians to their homes to show them “how they lived, what could be done, how to study, and how to act and how to react.” The teachers took her little cluster downtown and showed them history, Black history, and how to be proud of themselves.

Among peers, she thought she and the other children were all the same, but realized once they went out of the nucleus of their neighborhood, that they were not the same as the surrounding communities. She described having to change her demeanor as

she moved outside of her neighborhood and be more cautious about where she walked and how she talked to people. She felt the travel throughout different parts of the city helped break down some of the stereotypes that she held. She found out the students had more in common than she thought. Abigail recalled that most of the children in her neighborhood went on to college, especially the girls. Many young men were drafted into the Vietnam War soon before Abigail graduated from high school in 1966.

Though Abigail attended a predominantly White institution of higher education, she completed her student teaching experiences in schools that serviced a predominantly Black housing project in Chicago. She felt that experience helped prepare her and other future teachers of color for teaching in inner city schools. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Elementary Education and Special Education with minors in Speech Language Pathology and Music. She went on to teach in a nearby community before relocating to a northwest suburb of Chicago where she taught in various predominantly White schools. She earned an Master of Arts (MA) in Educational Leadership and Supervision. Abigail retired in 1995.

Denise

Denise grew up on the south side of Chicago. She attended a predominantly Black public elementary school comprised of approximately 75 percent African American and 25 percent White teachers. She attended two Chicago Public High schools. The first school consisted primarily of Black students and teachers, the second was a predominantly White school with mostly White teachers. Denise changed schools at start of her Junior year after she stood up for a good friend and retaliated against her teacher's

unfair grading. After the incident, her mother forced her to transfer schools. Even as a child, change was not easy for Denise. She would cry when she moved up to the next grade at the end of the school year and hated to leave her teachers.

Denise's switch from a predominately Black high school to a mostly White school was when she said, "race clicked for her." She had always been in an African American environment, but because the new high school was about 90% white, she observed that all the White kids were talking about college and what they were going to do after college. She said one student would sit on one side of the auditorium while her friend sat across, "and they would sign language to each other so they would be talking. And I was just so fascinated I was like 'wow ok.'" Denise then learned sign language when she was in college. She was inspired by her observations of the White students' goals. She said, "I was like, ok well, if they can do this I know I can do this. And I guess I kind of became competitive in my mind."

Denise earned a Bachelor of Art (BA) in General Education and Special Education, a Master of Arts (MA) in Educational Administration and Reading and a PhD in Education Policy. Her teaching career began as a substitute teacher in the Chicago Public School district. She then went on to teach special education in various schools throughout the city of Chicago. Denise initially only wanted to teach African American students and felt upset at first when she was transferred to a more racially and ethnically diverse school on the northwest side of Chicago. Denise said she carried herself in a way that the students "weren't quite sure of what I might do, you know I mean that's just who I was." She said at that school, "that's where I learned to be a teacher . . . those kids

taught me how to be a teacher. The parents, you know, parents trusted me because they invited me to their homes for dinner.” In her teaching placements on the South side of Chicago, Denise taught mostly African American children. She taught a diverse group of Hispanic, Black and White students at the North side school. She finished her career after serving as a Special Education consultant in the Central office downtown for 25 years. Denise retired in 2007.

Summary

The brief overviews of the demographic profiles of each participant provide background context for understanding their reflections of identity, race, and relationships in their professional experiences. One common characteristic of the ten participants is that, as a whole, they described fond views of teaching. Many of them expressed knowing as children that they wanted to teach and feeling motivated by their desire to impact children. The participants’ differences in age, gender, year of retirement, where they went to school and where they taught, their family structure and exposure to racial difference may have affected their perceptions of how race was enacted in their professional experiences. As the participants’ backgrounds and childhood education experiences shaped their views on their teaching practice differently, each participant told a unique and nuanced story about their professional racialized experiences that demonstrates the complexity of race as it plays out in schools. In the next chapter I attempt to weave together certain ideas from each participant as they contribute to the findings that emerged.

Chapter Five: Findings

In this study I explored retired African American US public school teachers' understanding of their personal identities, their constructions of race, and their professional relationships within their teaching careers over time. I focused the inquiry on the culture of adults in schools with an emphasis on how Black teachers negotiate power, history, identity, and relationship with their colleagues across lines of racial difference. The themes that emerged were: 1) the perpetuation of the myth of racial progress, including the difficulty of extricating individual identity from national-level racism; 2) the problem of racial segregation within schools and neighborhoods and its impact on individual experiences of school-level racism; and 3) the potential of relational networks for enhancing racial justice as a prospect for change.

Throughout my study, the participants' conceptualizations of identity, race, and relationships in their professional workplaces were complicated by the intersection of their personal identity as teaching professionals with their collective identity as Black Americans. Race factored into the participants' teaching experiences in varied ways, but consistent across all of their stories was that the challenges of being a Black teacher did not deter the participants from focusing on their own sphere of influence, primarily student relationships, in and out of the classroom. Further, their reflections of race in society was a critical concern, suggesting that the Black teaching experience should be understood within the broader historical and sociological context. As such, I organized the themes in a way that explicitly emphasizes the importance of societal manifestations of racism on school relationships, recognizing that school reform scholarship may jump

too quickly to Black teachers' and students' experiences in schools before taking the time to digest the realities of being Black in America. The findings address historic and ongoing racial oppression, racial segregation, and racial misunderstanding that occur at structural levels. They are presented in this chapter as a collective story of the participants' reflections of identity, race, and relationships as minoritized professionals.

The first theme engages the first research question: In what ways do retired US public school teachers describe the historical and contemporary context of US race relations, in schools and society, and the implications for urban public schools, especially in their own work? By providing an overview of the participants' framing of the contemporary context of race first in broad terms before describing the implications for schools, especially in their own work, these older teachers suggested that their experience of race in schools could not be separated from national history and current events. However, within this context, the participants often chose to ignore the noise so that they could focus on teaching. Structurally and politically, educational development cannot be separate from what goes on at the national level, but at a pragmatic level, the distinction is that the participants chose to focus on the students in front of them at the moment and throughout their professional careers.

The second theme engages the second research question: In what ways do retired US public school teachers conceptualize their personal identities and collegial relationships in the context of their work places over time? By discussing their direct and indirect experiences of historical and ongoing racial segregation, the participants suggested strong effects of residential segregation on their personal identities and

collegial relationships in schools. The third theme answers the last research question: In what ways did retired US public school teachers evaluate how, when, and why race was talked about, if at all, formally or informally in schools? By offering explicitly that race was not talked about, except when talking about children, the participants pointed to the way in which limited school-level dialogue and depth of collegial relationships perpetuate the myth of racial progress. They followed this assessment with a discussion of the importance of talking about race more, particularly within the context of deepening collegiality through critical dialogue and trust. I framed the findings starting at the national level. I then transitioned to communities before concluding with a focus on schools.

Theme 1-The Perpetuation of the Myth of Racial Progress: National-Level Racism

One of the most prominent themes that emerged from the participants' descriptions of the historical and contemporary context of US race relations in schools and in society, and the implications for urban public schools, especially in relation to their own work, was the enduring effects of history on their own experiences of race and racism. The participants' stories of systemic racism included examples of ongoing racial injustice and the structural contributors in schools that keep the narrative of racial progress so vibrant. The sub-themes discussed in this section include "Two Steps Back: Assessment of Racial Progress;" "We Bees in Trouble:" The Role of Political Leadership; and "Chained in a Different Way:" Contemporary Context of Race. Together, these sub-themes present a clearer picture of the participants' common understandings of the realities of being Black in America that surfaced as prominent in

their reflections of how these realities play out in schools, which varied from one participant to the next.

The term “racial progress” prompts a nuanced understanding of the connection between the contemporary racial context and the long and complex history of the fight for racial justice. Racial progress is an evaluation of US race relations over time, measured by both objective and subjective indicators of the well-being of people of color in absolute terms and relative to that of Whites. Participants assessed racial progress through comparing the overt racial discrimination of the past against a different, more subtle, and decidedly worse, present racial condition. The term “myth” situates the findings as a counter-narrative to the notion of a post-racial US that emerged shortly before the election of Barack Obama.⁵ I use the term “perpetuation” to denote an emphasis on intentional, strategic efforts to sustain systemic racial power imbalances.

“Two Steps Back:” Assessment of Racial Progress. The overwhelming response the participants provided in their assessment of current race relations in society is that the country has moved “two steps back” from the progress made in previous decades. Sylvia described the backwards racial progress she has seen over time by comparing her schooling experiences and the experiences of Black children today,

⁵ The national media played a significant role in elevating this idea. Burnham (2008) notes that the New York Times contributed to this assumption by publishing an op-ed piece by Matt Bai arguing that Obama’s election foreshadowed “the end of Black politics” (p. 43) Burnham, L. (2008). Obama's Candidacy: The Advent of Post-Racial America and the End of Black Politics?. *The Black Scholar*, 38(4), 43-46. See also Steele, S. (2008). Obama’s post-racial promise. *Los Angeles Times*, 5. And Arana, M. (2008). He’s not Black. *The Washington Post*, 30.

including her son. She and other participants attributed racial regression to overall societal regression, particularly in the breakdown of the close-knit community schools described in several of the participants' demographic biographies in Chapter 4.

Addressing the racial climate in schools today, Sylvia continued, "this is 2017 right now, this is what they are doing. [Policy makers] are still making sure it's not a level playing field."

Juanita shared similar views about the lack of racial progress in the United States and focused on the Trump administration. When I asked Juanita about racial progress, she laughed and said, "It's gone backward, [the Trump administration has] taken us backward." Black people still do not have "a seat at the table." She said,

so what changes are made? None. So, [the Trump administration] took us back, because they were literally baby steps, little bitty gain, not a lot, not when you're not at the top and you're not sitting at the table, because they don't want you there.

Even Oprah Winfrey, a popular African American entertainment magnate, Juanita argued, "made a lot of wonderful changes" but was never able to sit at society's decision making table. Juanita said, "hey, we got a lesson from one of the best people coming up on TV, Ms. Oprah Winfrey, who thought she had [power] and she did... she made a lot of changes, but she was kept off the top." Juanita continued,

and you still fighting. So yes, we made a little progress because during the times back in the '70s when they were wanting to have a little power and better housing. Yes, we were able to get a little bit of better housing, see, yes, we were able to get

a little bit of education, but it's going backwards, we are going back, it's going back.

Juanita's assessment summarizes a common understanding among the participants that societal conditions for Blacks today have actually worsened due to ongoing racist policies that compound challenges and maintain dominant power structures over time.

April expressed a slightly different assessment of racial progress, noting the complexities of more opportunities for some Blacks compared to the past, yet an overall racial reality that is "different" than previous decades. She compared her experiences as a child in an era of legalized segregation and the current conditions in the US, "[the conditions] were bad back then, but the dynamic is different, the climate is different. I think they are bad, in both respects. Years ago, and now, they are a different dynamic, and they affect society differently." Later April explained the difference between the past and the present as a shift from an overt racialized climate to one that has become more subtle and more easily dismissed. She made this point by recalling some of her memories of growing up with overt racial discrimination in the segregated South such as using segregated public bathrooms. She concluded,

so that's why I'm saying it wasn't good, but what's happening now is not good either, you know. So even though there is more opportunity for me, things should be further along as a society and it's just not...there are fixes that can happen and people are just not looking at that.

Abigail reflected similar understandings of the trajectory of racial regress, responding, "hmm...I think we've taken a few steps forward, but more steps backwards." I clarified,

asking about racial discrimination in the US, “so it’s not a thing of the past?” She replied, “I’m afraid not, I’m afraid not, yep. It’s still here, it’s not as blatant in your face, but it’s definitely still here.” She attributed this backwards movement to media, the news, and like several participants, the current political leadership in the US, starting at the Executive level.

“We Bees in Trouble:” The Role of Political Leadership. Seven participants provided unsolicited examples of the Trump administration in their assessment of the backwards progress of race relations in contemporary society. Eric expressed the president’s role in reversing racial progress saying,

Donald Trump has given these people a voice, you know, ‘let’s make America great again,’ that’s ‘let’s make it White again.’ He makes us feel like we have gone backwards in time, you know. And I think it’s gotten worse now, he is a very divisive president, he has divided this country.

Cynthia compared the former and current presidents, also convinced the country has regressed. Trump’s lack of support for Obama frustrates her. She cited the progress Obama tried to make and the new administration’s refusal to work with him and concluded, “so, we are going backwards. There is no progress. I think the race thing is worse now than it was before, than before the Civil Rights Movement, because it’s terrible now.” “So as far as race,” Cynthia said, “we bees in trouble.”

Sylvia spoke passionately about the damage the current administration is causing the poor, regardless of race. This consideration of the intersection of racial progress and the context of an overall societal decline was mentioned also by Cynthia in reference to a

decline of societal values of education and family, along with an over-politicized approach to school reform. She said, “Again we are going back to the biggest problem, it’s society.” She said in reference to the challenges of poverty, hunger, under-educated parents, and unstable homes that school children face each day, “all of this is society’s mess, you got teachers who don’t want to be bothered, can’t stand you, don’t want to be there, it’s a vicious circle and I don’t see anything anywhere with promise.” Sylvia’s comments about policies that disproportionately hurt poor Blacks contain a fuller story about race, class, and power in schools, as she went on to tie the current administration to ongoing racial inequities in schools. Naming funding disparities and inadequate resources, she said, “it’s not fair that one school is getting all this stuff and the kids who are really struggling are getting nothing. It’s just not fair. But that’s what goes on.”

Eric acknowledged the progress that was made up until the current president, saying “I think we are better off than we were 60 years ago, I mean we’ve come a long way. And just because we had a Black president, it doesn’t mean we have arrived. We still have a long way to go.” Eric acknowledged that racism is power. He said, “And even though Barack Obama was president, Obama didn’t have the power. He was the president, but power came from Congress who were majority White.” His framing of racism as power helps explain that while opportunities and experiences for individual Black people may have changed or improved over time, systemic injustices are sustained by a White dominant power structure.

“Chained in a Different Way:” Contemporary Context of Race. The participants’ focus on the current administration in their assessments of racial progress

may indicate a certain longevity of the Black experience that is different from that of White people who may now experience dismay. While the participants were clear that the current administration reversed the hope that Obama ushered in, the sustaining force behind the narrative of racial justice is neither new nor subject to reflections of race that shift with each new president. While broad racialized dialogues emboldened in recent years may represent the current racial climate, the disproportionate rates of incarceration and police violence towards Black people represents the embeddedness of a system of racial control that has never changed, only evolved. This nuance reveals the historical and ongoing structural racial divide in the US from which the participants spoke about their experiences and its consequences of racial disparities for Black teachers and students.

Denise recalled becoming more familiar with racial disparities evident in prison populations through her college experiences in a sorority that offered volunteer services to inmates. She expressed her concern with the damage done to inmates in prison. She said,

you know, I went through [Vietnam War protests], and then another thing that captured my interest at that time in college was the fact that so many African American males were incarcerated. So, as a member of the Black Student Union, we used to visit the state prison once a month and so that kind of put me in a space where I had to pay attention to the fact that, you know, the preponderance of inmates, detainees, were African American, whether they were guilty or not, and then what happens to them on a mental level, social level, economic level when they come out?

She described a predictable pattern of racial injustice in law enforcement from start to finish, including racial profiling when race or ethnicity is used as grounds for suspecting someone has committed an offense, setting impossibly high bail that detainees or their families cannot afford, and wrongfully charging suspects. Denise lamented, “the person of color is gonna get more (jail) time every time . . . but they are sitting in jail and nothing can be done.” April further described the ways that implicit bias impacts sentencing of youth of color, noting that when a Black teenager commits a crime, the entire Black race is criminalized, whereas when a White teenager commits a crime, they are treated as an individual. Carol also spoke about the role of mass incarceration in perpetuating ideas of Black inferiority and criminality. She said, “and what people don’t understand is that that’s what’s happening. They just see the statistic, they don’t see how it is, they just see ‘oh look, this many Black men are in jail, they must all be criminals.’”

Juanita told a similar story about a child named Kwon. She always told Kwon, “you can’t do what they do . . . if you see them doing wrong, don’t follow them because you are going to be the one who gets caught.” Juanita explained that Kwon went with his White friends to a party and one of his friends was shot. Consequently, Kwon was arrested. Juanita told Kwon, “you can’t do what others do. The odds are always against you because now, being a Black man, they are totally against you, totally.” Framed this way, schools are also understood to generate equally bleak outcomes for some Black students. Inequitable treatment in school is widely examined in scholarship, including the pervasiveness of deficit thinking and Black students receiving harsher or more frequent punishments than their White counterparts. Sylvia described her observations of this

phenomenon in schools, naming the discrepancy on how punishments were often enacted for Black students. According to Sylvia, inequitable treatment by race was obvious to her and to Black students, but not to other teachers or administrators.

Abigail further described her understanding of the state of racial progress. She said,

When...you think the United States has more people in prison than any other country in the world, the majority of them being African American and other minorities, there is something wrong with that picture... So that tells us there is something wrong with our judicial system, our policing authorities... When you think about those people ... and when they come out ... a lot of times they are not able to vote so a lot of times it's kind of like slavery time, you are being chained but in a different way.⁶

Each of the participants quoted above noted that the myth of racial progress was confirmed by the over-representation of African Americans in the prison system. This over-representation reported by the participants was not a response to individual criminal acts, but a systemic process designed to keep Black people in a subordinate position in the United States.

Further, while the over-representation of people of color in prisons may be one of the most sustained examples of the myth of racial progress in America, the Black Lives Matter Movement (#BLM) characterizes the participants' understanding of the national contemporary context of race. When I asked about their understandings of race in society,

⁶ This idea of being "chained but in a different way" is expressed by Alexander (2012) when she names mass incarceration as "the New Jim Crow."

five participants discussed their perceptions of the Black Lives Matter Movement. With three participants I referenced #BLM as a possible frame for understanding the contemporary racial climate and with two, the participants raised the topic in direct comparison with the Civil Rights Movement. These participants connected the contemporary movement to their childhood experiences with race and police brutality and described how the movement has unearthed a subconscious understanding in Black people of why they fear police.

Carol's reflection on the movement offered a depth of insight into what police brutality may mean for race relations and school children today. She was 10 years old during the Detroit Rebellion of 1967, she said that watching the recent movie, *Detroit*⁷ was like reliving her experience and its consequences for her:

[When] I saw the movie and I saw how abusive [the police] were, I thought *that's where it came from*.... So, you know, it's one of those things and stuff gets blended into your personality and you don't know how it got there.

She went on to share a story about White friend who did not understand why, when the police came to the neighborhood, Carol would not approach them. She said,

to see [the movie], I knew, again, at 60 years old, I know not to go up and say something to a cop and ask him a question about why are you in my yard. No, he is in my yard, I am in my house. I'm not going there to talk to him because I don't

⁷ The movie *Detroit* (2017) depicts a historical account of the Algiers Motel Incident during Detroit's 1967 12th Street Riots.

want to be a statistic....And it couldn't have been Black Lives Matter....it couldn't have been that because I had that before Black lives mattered.

Sylvia also spoke passionately about law enforcement, recalling the moment her son was almost killed by the police, "my own son," she said. She recounted the details. He was just running down the street and the police stopped him. They were looking for a suspect and they claimed he matched the description. She recalled realizing that the description of the suspect was "nowhere near her son." She cited these realities as evidence that "it is really a belief that Black people should be jailed, Black people should be arrested, should be killed, even when they are doing nothing, nothing." She continued, "that's why there's Black Lives Matter. You know, are you gonna just go kill somebody because they raise their arms? Because of a traffic stop? ... I'm sick of seeing it all the time."

Eric also noted that events highlighted by the #BLM movement and other social media platforms have brought greater public attention, but have been "things that we have known that was happening all along and everyone else could just deny it, but now you have videos of it, you know, this and that." He referred to the 1991 beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles, saying,

Black Lives Matter came about because now you see all this stuff on video, it's all we see now. . . It doesn't say that White lives don't matter or Blue lives don't matter, but it's saying these are things that people always try to deny ... And then when we show people sitting up there in the cars, hands up, and still getting 16 shots and then they want to come back and say he was coming toward them, and the video shows, no it wasn't. Like I said, it's not trying to take the light off of

anything else, it's just to show that what people are saying, we have been saying it for a long time, but we've never had proof.

His understandings highlight that while the movement is a recent phenomenon, police brutality is not new. Taylor (2016) noted, "it has existed, in some form or another, since the abolition of slavery" (p. 17). Eric commented further,

the Black Lives Matter movement, just like Kaepernick taking a knee during the pledge,⁸ was to shed light on the brutality ... These are things that we already knew about, it was just things we couldn't prove or it was our word against theirs.

Carol reiterated the importance of videos, saying "and if it were not for these things (her phone) being able to record it, they would still say we are making things up."

There was consensus among the responses that the #Black Lives Matter movement was merely a mirror held up to society that revealed what Black teachers have known for decades – that the dangers faced by Black Americans are often ignored or suppressed by public institutions. Pamela talked about personal incidents with law enforcement to reinforce this point. For example, one summer day in her suburban neighborhood she noticed an officer had three young men down on their knees, with their hands behind their heads. The boys were running around the neighborhood playing with dart guns and someone called the police saying they were shooting at each other. The boys were no older than 13, and she said, " 'don't say anything, you call your parents,

⁸ The San Francisco 49ers player Colin Kaepernick knelt during the Pledge of Allegiance on August 26, 2017 to raise awareness of the oppression of people of color and ongoing issues with police brutality and the political controversy that ensued.

you call your parents, right away,' ... and the cops were saying 'shut up and get in the house.' I said, 'call your parents.'”

The memories recounted by Carol, Sylvia, Eric and Abigail reveal the personal, daily challenge that they feel White people do not understand, but they also point to conceptualizations of identity, race, and relationships that emerge from the depth of the Black experience in US America. This is important for a study of race in schools, especially when the racial experiences of adults are rarely talked about. Within the context of a proclaimed post-racial society, the participants' instinctive familiarity and sensitivity to race provides a lens through which to understand why racial progress is considered a myth. This perspective helps reveal that racial patterns evident today have long existed, but the mechanisms that produce those patterns have evolved, making racialized experiences in schools remarkably complex. This macro-view of race in the US provides the context for examining the racialized experiences of teachers in schools.

Summary of Theme 1. In this theme, I relayed the participants' descriptions of the historical and contemporary context of US race relations. Countering a narrative of post-racism that emerged prior to and gained significant traction with Barack Obama's election, the participants offered their assessment of racial progress and some of the contributors that sustain it. The participants' experiences demonstrate that both subtle and overt systemic racism is pervasive. All ten participants acknowledged the reality of state-sponsored racial violence as they spoke about the long-standing challenges of being Black in ways that they have always known, that are only now getting national attention in a post-2008 America. When asked about the state of racial progress in this country,

five participants declared, “we’ve taken two steps back,” indicating that the current condition for Black people, compared to the past, is worse, evidenced by the 2016 presidential election, police brutality, and the over-representation of Black people in prison. Others noted that the racial climate in the US has changed, acknowledging that it is different and indicating that while Blacks are afforded more opportunities than in the past, dominant power structures and social conditions have not changed.

This theme is particularly salient and I devoted substantial attention to it for two reasons. First, much of the interview time was spent listening to my participants share stories of their lived experiences and assessments of “racial progress” over time, particularly in the current context of #BLM and state-sponsored racial violence. Their stories that focused on the racial climate in society revealed the inherent complexity of reflecting on identity, race, and relationships in the participants’ professional workplaces. Second, the participants’ assessment of the current state of racial injustice juxtaposed with the contested ways race is conceptualized in schools reveals the complexity of race in US America. This theme, then, prompts the question, what factors contribute to such different narratives of the current socio-political context? In other words, how does this happen? The participants’ stories generated the second most prevailing theme, The Problem of Racial Segregation for School and Societies: School-Level Racism.

Theme 2-The Problem of Racial Segregation for Schools and Societies: School-Level Racism

The second theme that emerged from this study is that one significant contributor to enduring structural and symbolic racism in schools and society is racial segregation.

This theme was evident throughout the participants' conceptualizations of their personal identities and collegial relationships in their workplace over time. The problem of historical and ongoing racial segregation emerged in their stories of growing up in segregated communities, teaching in segregated schools, or living in largely segregated neighborhoods as adults. The importance of segregation for teachers is its link to racial separation and consequently, racial misunderstanding and division. Even when teachers and students come together in schools, they often live separate lives outside of school. Williams and Collins (2001) describe the physical separation of the races and enforced residence in certain areas as "an institutional mechanism of racism that was designed to protect Whites from social interaction with Blacks" (p. 116). Through these stories, participants collectively identified racial integration as a starting point for societal change. Charlotte said,

I don't know how you change society other than having people live together, and we can't make people live where they don't want to live, you know, so again it's the exposure and I don't know, how do you do that?

She laughed and sighed, "it's just a difficult problem to overcome."

In this section, I recount participants' stories that highlight consequences of the historical and contemporary racial divide for the equitable flow of information and resources between students, teachers, schools, and communities. I then dedicate most of the section to the implications of residential segregation on Black teachers' understandings of their racialized professional experiences in schools. Hence, the emergent sub-themes include, "*White Teachers Don't understand.*" *Constrained Social*

Networks; “They Tend to Promote Their Own:” White Comfort and Racialized Hiring Practices; and “Is that How You See Me?:” Stereotypes and Micro Aggressions in the Workplace. I organized these sub-themes according to how the consequences of housing segregation build on each other and compound the problem further in schools.

“White Teachers Don’t Understand:” Constrained Social Networks. All ten participants explained their perceptions of how racial segregation and isolation can result in peoples’ lack of exposure to information, opportunities, relationships, and resources outside of their social networks. The participants’ understandings of the consequences of racial segregation were broad, each offered unique insights that collectively spoke to the importance of integrated social networks for thriving schools, work places, and communities.

The most prominent explanation of racial segregation in schools cited by the participants is that because Black and White people have inhabited different spaces from slavery to today, they experience different sets of problems, resulting in an overwhelming feeling that some “White teachers don’t understand.” The separation often shields individuals from experiencing and responding to challenges because, as Charlotte said, “it’s not in your face.” Cynthia described the same phenomenon in the context of White teachers in Black schools lacking awareness of societal concerns in the Black community. Similarly, Carol told a story that demonstrates a lack of understanding by White teachers. She recalled talking with the White principal of her mostly White school about how the very few Black students in the school were assigned to different classes within the grade level. Carol recalled,

And I said, ‘please don’t separate them out like that so that there is one in each class. Everybody, no matter who you are, you want to look around and see somebody across the room who looks like you. They don’t even have to be friends, as long as you can look around not feel like you’re the *only* one because it takes a while I think for kids to adjust to that’. . . and she said she totally understood that, and that she had never thought about it before.

Sylvia described the connection between racial segregation and constrained access to different resources that inspire learning. Like Charlotte, Sylvia noted that if minoritized children are exposed to a variety of learning environments, books, and resources, they can fare just as well as others, and her own life as evidence: She was born in the inner city, grew up in poverty, and experienced trauma as a young child. However, her connection to resources and learning materials, and her own subsequent educational achievement led her to speak passionately about racial inequities in the allocation of resources across schools. Juanita described the lack of understanding in the context of some teachers’ unawareness of vast disparities in physical resources across schools and districts, saying “White people don’t get it.” She described her experiences on September 11, 2001 (9/11), where there were no TVs in the classrooms and when one was hooked up on the stage, “somebody had to stand there holding the antenna in order for children to experience what was going on.” She went on to say,

Our schools are old, they weren’t equipped, and we were working with the old stuff. . . . So that’s why I say there is no respect. But these schools need to be brought up to the 21st century, because the allocation of resources isn’t fair.

I asked her if there were ever any White teachers whom she felt were aware of the disparities in resource allocation and who were fighting on behalf of poor or Black students. She said, “No, nobody did.” She reported that what teachers in schools like hers do is “just go and buy what they can with their own money.” She bought resources for the students, just to be able to “keep it going.”

Additionally, the idea of the lack of exposure to adequate materials and resources includes limited access to helpful information that flows through healthy social networks. Abigail’s stories about her own high school experiences with her White and Black guidance counselors stemmed into a larger conversation about how some students remain less aware of opportunities and possibilities beyond high school or even college. Abigail said,

just the exposure, period, you know. In college, I did not hear from the counselors about what’s next after you graduate college. Grad School, I did not hear Grad School, I did not hear that, I did not hear advanced degrees . . . it was like OK, you graduated, good, bye-bye.

Abigail went on to discuss how race constrains social networks in the workplace, referring to the “glass ceiling” that prevents some teachers from accessing the professional information or resources they need to move forward. She said, “you have to keep pushing and pushing and little things, you know, you hit that glass ceiling, you know, you want to get there, you get there, and you still can’t get little things like information.” She feels a sense of being kept at the margins:

you ask somebody for some information and they give you the information but not enough for what you want to do. And I find that, is it just me, or did I not get it? And then when I talk to other people, they say, ‘oh yeah they tell you enough, but they won’t tell you so that you can go above or beyond what they are doing or how they are doing it.’ And it’s just kind of eh, and then you have to go and find out the other way.

For example, she remembers asking about scholarships for her granddaughter and feeling as if the school counselors would

be like ‘oh yeah, scholarships, and she can get this scholarship’ and I will say ‘oh yeah, what is that?’ and they say ‘just go online,’ and then I gotta dig through all of that, they got it and then I gotta work for it, go all around Robin Hood’s barn to get something, but all you have to do is, oh yeah here it is (shuffles papers), which most African Americans would have done that in a New York minute.

Within the context of a discussion about the school-to-prison pipeline, Charlotte said, “you know, give them an opportunity. A lot of [incarcerated youth] are so brilliant but because they haven’t had the opportunity or the exposure, you know they are trapped in these prisons and you know they should be educated.” Missed opportunities seem to be the thread that ties together the various ways participants explained the lack of exposure to information and resources that should flow through social networks. Massey (2001) asserted, “opportunities and resources are unevenly distributed in space” (p. 391).

Evident in the stories my participants shared were the missed opportunities caused by

lack of exposure to information, opportunities, relationships, and resources that can expand students' and teachers' realm of possibilities.

“They Tend to Promote their Own:” White Comfort and Racialized Hiring Practices. The concept of “White comfort” surfaced numerous times in participants’ reflections of persistent racial segregation and its implications for their personal teaching relationship dynamics. One way the concept emerged was in the context of hiring practices motivated by White comfort. Sylvia described, “so, you have a certain person in mind because they wanted to fit in. White people have to feel comfortable. You can only work with people you feel comfortable with.” She expressed frustration that White people have to feel comfortable all the time, when Black people feel uncomfortable the majority of the time. According to Sylvia, without the problem of White comfort, there would not be racism. In our conversation, Sylvia urged White teachers to venture into predominantly Black spaces to find out what it feels like to be uncomfortable.

The participants cited racially discriminatory hiring practices motivated by “White comfort” and a desire to maintain homogenous workspaces as a prominent example of overlooked and ongoing racial injustice evident in their professional experiences. April named hiring practices as an example of “racial progress, or a lack thereof.” April’s strategy was to be a substitute teacher in suburban schools, which, “gives you a really good in” however, she experienced rejection when she applied for a permanent position. She said, “When it comes down to hiring you, they want to keep you as the sub.” She claimed hiring practices are directly related to race and motivated by racial bias. She said, “It’s just this mindset of colorblindness so you tend to hire people

who look like you...And I think that's what discouraged Blacks from going into education." Arthur similarly attributed racialized hiring practices in Chicago Public Schools to White favoritism because,

first of all, they tend to promote their own. So obviously, if there is any way, they will look out for [other Whites]. Often, if Blacks are qualified for a position, but they have to be qualified and basically overqualified than their competitor.

The participants' stories are similar to Morris' (2014) explanations of racially discriminatory practices imposed upon Black teachers for decades. These findings are consistent with the literature that name structural and material barriers to recruiting and retaining more teachers of color in the US teaching force, including recruitment and selection criteria that tend to favor White teachers (Epstein, 2005; Irvine, 2003), and the teacher credentialing process including standardized tests on which Black candidates may score disproportionately low (Frankenberg, 2006). Further, with the loss of Black teachers in schools, their cultural representations are overlooked, and the structures continue to "render Black teachers invisible as teachers of their own or of other ethnic backgrounds, while casting White female teachers as heroic figures" (Foster, 1997, p. XLIX)

During her interview, April talked about how hiring practices are motivated in part by an interest in maintaining racial homophily. She said, "they continue to hire young White women, a continuation of everyone looking the same, it's just like corporate America." Sylvia and April's understanding of racial discrimination in hiring reflects Lin's (2002) emphasis on the reproduction of social and cultural capital within social

networks through mutually beneficial reciprocal symmetrical relationships. Juanita also spoke of her own unpleasant experiences with hiring practices. She felt her application was overlooked and that the school to which she applied was deliberate. She said, “Oh, let me just say this, I just think it was strategically planned not to have African American teachers in [this district].” She also shared her concerns about racial discrimination in hiring practices across professions today. She said,

because we are not at the top, still, in providing jobs for people. I’m concerned about my people, in getting jobs, I don’t know, because of the prejudices that is way open now, this gonna be very difficult for them to get these jobs.

Abigail indicated that she had a difficult time even finding a place to live in the community where she taught, so she lived in a neighboring town. She said, “even to find a place to live in this community, that’s why I’m in [a nearby town], I had a hard time. Some of the African American teachers that were moving into this community, they had to sue... what was it Graf Park, they had to sue to live there.” Abigail’s housing experiences in the suburban community where she taught reveal an important link between employment disparities and racial segregation. For example, Abigail initially interviewed for a teaching position in Michigan. Flint, Michigan, at the time, was all White. She interviewed there and the principal told her they would love to have her but, he said, “Abigail, I’m gonna be honest with you, there are no African Americans in Flint, you will not be welcome, you won’t like it, and believe me you don’t want to be there.” Even when qualified, several of the teachers experienced either outright discrimination or

subtle reminders that their race was seen as a deficit and that their knowledge and skills were unwanted in the workplace.

“Is That How You See Me?:” Stereotypes and Micro Aggressions in the Workplace. One way that the participants conceptualized the effects of racial segregation on White teachers’ racial assumptions is in the form of stereotypes and micro aggressions. Micro aggressions are defined as the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership (Sue et al., 2007). Most of the stories of micro aggressions were told by Black teachers in all White or mostly White school districts. Abigail told numerous stories about her experiences as a Black teacher in White schools and as a Black person in a White community, summarizing the list as “just a whole bunch of little issues.” She shared about how when she went shopping, the White cashiers would ask, “you live here?” I interjected, “these are not little issues,” to which Abigail replied, “yes...yes. Things like that. So, that was kind of rough, but you can go through it.” Abigail’s description of the issues as “little” is consistent with the literature that describes micro aggressions as “everyday occurrences that may on the surface appear quite harmless, trivial, or be described as “small slights” but have powerful negative effects on [the target’s] wellbeing (Brondolo et al, 2008).

Abigail also described occurrences of micro aggressions from colleagues, again calling them “little things,” like during a game at a staff Christmas party, teachers assembled teams and Abigail noted how people changed teams to avoid being on hers.

This time, her principal noticed. She told him, “you did have more people on your team, but I’m on this team, so now you don’t, it’s just you and me.” She said, “he looked at me and said ‘what?’ and I said ‘yeah.’” Her principal asked how long this behavior had been going on, and she said ever since she had been at the school. He said to her, “‘I did not really notice that, but I see what you’re saying here because it’s just the two of us.’ Yeah, exactly.” Abigail explained the discrimination she felt from them as a product of racial separation. This discrimination, according to Abigail, is overcome in part by White people getting used to being around and working with Black people. She concluded, “then they get kind of used to us just being in the community.”

Five of the participants expressed specific frustration about how White teachers do not understand Black history or culture. Sylvia described the lack of understanding of a White colleague who asked her what she felt were “really crazy questions,” such as whether she had toys growing up or whether her family owned a car. Sylvia reflected on this unfortunate collegial conversation: “on the one hand I should have been insulted, and on the other hand she was ignorant and the only way I could help her was give her some information, some real information.” The grace extended appears to be a common response from the participants, particularly evident in Eric’s stories mentioned earlier. Eric said,

I always say prejudice comes in two forms, ignorance and hate. I have to be able to understand the difference. Now, the feeling is the same, it still hurts. But you have to understand where it’s coming from.

Eric shared similar experiences of racist assumptions and offensive comments that he received as the first Black teacher in the district. When Eric's colleagues commented on his assumed interest in watermelon, he denied it because he did not appreciate their offensive display of cultural misunderstanding. However, Eric grew up down South and used to "steal them, bust 'em open with a brick, and eat watermelon all summer." But one thing he decided, he "wasn't eating watermelon in front of White people." He continued,

[the teachers] didn't know how, you have to realize, it was new for them to deal with a Black person on their level. You know, they were from the suburbs, very few were from the city, and if they were from the city, they weren't from the part of the town I was from. So, they never had to do this before. I'm sure when they went to college they wouldn't have to deal with Black people. So, for me to come in on their level kind of shook their world. For me, that's the world I grew up in.

Abigail was more overt than some in confronting her colleagues about micro aggressions, starting with her experiences as one of very few Black graduate students in her Master's program. She described micro aggressions in team dynamics such as during the final presentation of a group project. When various group members were thanked for their specific contributions, Abigail was thanked for bringing the food. Abigail told me,

I looked at them and I said, 'we have been together over two years and you are thanking me for the food? Is that how you see me?' I was livid, I was so livid, and they were so surprised, and I said 'listen to what you just said to me, thank you for bringing the food?' She said they responded with denial and minimization, trying to say 'like oh we didn't....'

However, for Abigail the damage was done. She also recalled a time when she was teaching and needed a room unlocked. Nobody in her department carried identification cards, yet the security officer asked to see hers. When Abigail mentioned the incident in a meeting, her supervisors replied that they had never been stopped. Abigail responded, “exactly. You have not been stopped, but I have been stopped several times, in this building, on this campus asking for IDs because ‘that’s my J-O-B’ (Abigail’s assumption of the security officer’s reported rationale for asking).”

Abigail does not think her colleagues’ discrimination was deliberate; rather they were not conscious of it. Often when she talked about her experiences openly with her colleagues, they responded in surprise. The surprise may be linked to cultural normativity that is understood at a subconscious level by the majority group members and often only felt by those outside the norm (Tropp & Pettigrew, 2005). She recalled a time when the idea she shared was overlooked in a meeting until another staff member offered the exact same idea. “Tell me how that is different from what I just said a few minutes ago,” she insisted, “tell me.” Everybody got quiet and nobody answered. She said to them, “that’s what I’m talking about.” When she talked to other people in other professions, they had the same struggle. She claimed that the evidence that Black people “have come together as professionals is when they call [White colleagues] on it, immediately.”

Abigail recalled sharing honestly with her colleagues about moments such as when she was coming in the door behind someone else and they let the door shut even though her hands were full. Abigail confronted her colleagues when she had said good

morning to them, and they kept on walking. Again, they responded with surprise and an explanation of their good intentions. “I know, but you have to do better, we have to do better” she told her colleagues. “When you are doing that, don’t think that these students around us don’t see that, they do.”

Summary of Theme 2. In this theme I recounted the reality of ongoing racism in schools and other work places and the lingering professional outcomes for Black teachers that the participants attribute to persistent segregation. Collectively, their stories reveal the way historical and ongoing racial segregation contribute to a pervasive and unattended to misunderstanding between some Black and White teachers. The participants consistently linked racial housing segregation to the ongoing challenges of teacher relationships in schools. White teachers, they told me, tend not to live in Black neighborhoods, even if they teach in predominantly Black schools. The participants’ analysis is consistent with Jones’ (2014) assertion that racial divides result in Whites not being socially positioned to understand the experiences of people of color because they are not part of their social networks. Motivated and sustained by a concept the participants called “White comfort,” racial segregation separates White communities from the societal challenges that many Black communities face daily. This lack of exposure to personal interaction with Black people can lead to assumptions of Black inferiority, creating conditions in schools where White teachers make intentional or unintentional racial assumptions about their colleagues, often in the form of easily dismissed nonetheless painful affronts to Black culture.

While historical and ongoing racial housing segregation was not an initial focus of

my study, the prevalence with which it came up in my conversations with participants demanded attention to its consequences in societies and implications for schools. The theme connects racial segregation to school reform by revealing how teachers bring their unique sets of understandings, misunderstandings, and biases, formed by societal contexts, into work with them each day. As organizational leadership and school improvement initiatives continue to focus more on conducive workspaces for teacher as contributors to productivity and outcomes, the participants' experiences seem to indicate that how people live their separate, personal lives impacts the way they care for one another and collaborate in the work space. Within this theme, I shared teachers' experiences with racial segregation and considered the consequences of racial separation for collegial relationships, namely evidence of constrained social networks that limit relationships, resources, opportunities and information as well racial misunderstanding and sustained racial injustices in hiring practices and in other professional experiences of Black teachers.

Theme 3-The Potential of Relational Networks for Enhancing Racial Justice:

Prospects for Change

The participants' ideas about national-level racism combined with their collective understandings of how racial segregation plays out in schools, informs the structure and relevance of the third emergent theme, which shifts attention to the potential of healthy and effective relational networks for enhancing racial justice in schools. I use the term "potential" because my participants hypothesized about what might improve the condition of Black teachers and students in schools today. As a whole, this theme

addressed why the participants seem to consider healthy teacher relationships important for accomplishing racial justice in schools. This study, in the end, was about the Black teaching experience and as such, it was a study about teachers who know what it is like to be marginalized and minoritized as professionals. All participants talked about persistent, ongoing racism embedded in the historical and contemporary societal context in deep and profound ways, revealing the structural divides that are important for understanding and articulating professionalized racism in schools.

According to the participants and consistent with the literature, race - in general - was not talked about in school except when talking about students. As such, Black teachers seemed to lack a safe space to raise concerns about collegial relationships and responded by focusing on student relationships within their classrooms. Those who chose to engage their colleagues despite stated challenges often felt they invested as much energy in educating White teachers as they did students. Those who did not choose to engage made a strategic choice to tolerate the challenges in order to devote their energy to their sphere of influence. Still, the wide range of reflections of teaching relationships across the participants highlights the complexity of engaging in race-related conversations among teachers in schools.

I organized the participants' stories within this theme in a way that highlights their collective understandings of how personal and professional identity, school culture, collegial relationships, and talking formally about race in schools are important steps towards producing healthier teacher relationships and strengthening the classroom environment within which racial justice efforts are expected to succeed. The sub-themes

that support the idea of teacher relationships as promising for racial justice include “*It Starts at the Top: School Culture and the Role of the Administrator*”; “Don’t Give Up the Fight:” *Identity, Belonging, and the Resilience of Black Teachers*; and “*Nice in their Own Way*” *Teacher Relationships, Critical Dialogue, and Trust*. These themes center on the participants’ professional experiences while mapping on to a progression of strategies drawn from scholarship that name healthy school culture as paramount for promoting justice in organizations and enhancing critical dialogue and trust. I shift attention from the participants’ reflections of the implications of teacher relationships and White teachers’ racial attitudes to the importance of how Black teachers think about themselves and their own work in schools. Finally, I relay their understandings about the significance of facilitated collegial dialogue for countering bias and improving teacher relationships.

“It Starts at the Top:” School Culture and the Role of the Administrator. The participants’ assessments of the racial dynamic among teachers was most often described with the context of the broader school culture. One theme that emerged frequently throughout the interviews was that some schools as a whole are better working environments than others. The participants claimed that in schools that demonstrate an overall healthy school culture where teachers feel a sense of safety, belonging, and morale, the racial dynamic was also better. The participants situated racism in schools among a variety of other “isms” that function to maintain power imbalances and justify valuing others differently. A focus on developing a healthy school culture in an effort to confront all forms of injustice and dominance appropriately frames the participants’

collective experiences. Cynthia emphasized that racism exists as a subset of “an overall broken and declining moral culture in America.”

Abigail, Sylvia, and April highlighted important links between healthy school culture and healthy teacher relationships. Creating a school culture that promotes and protects safe work spaces allows teachers to talk about injustice and equips them to take a unified, proactive, collaborative stance towards educational inequity. Sylvia’s assessment of the culture of one school where she taught further supports the connection between unhealthy school culture and unhealthy racial dynamics. The school culture was not conducive for healthy professional relationships, hence the racism that Sylvia experienced was one of many tensions that hindered belonging and morale. Similarly Carol said, “I think it largely depends on the culture of the school; whether or not the school makes an effort to be inclusive, whether or not the school puts an emphasis on diversity.”

While Sylvia struggled to find a sense of belonging in what she experienced as a toxic school culture, April, Charlotte, and Abigail experienced an overall sense of belonging which they attribute to a positive school culture. Abigail described her experiences in a school environment that she considered a positive space where people realized they had more in common than they thought. She attributed this positive space to the teachers and the school leader. Similarly, April said,

at this particular school, I really felt a part of it and accepted, yeah, I really felt a part of that school, and the principal let me know that. It was just a good culture, I think it comes down to the principal. So, what’s at the top trickles down.

April's summation that the school leader can influence school culture aligns with decades of school leadership research. Sylvia, Carol, and Cynthia also named the importance of the role of the administrative leadership in developing a positive school culture. Sylvia described this importance when she said, "the principal really guides the staff." She talked about how when an effective principal comes into the school, "they make a really good, cohesive group." She said, "if you are a person who was raised to believe in equality, or you developed that over time and became a principal, you are going to find a staff that is not going to be discriminatory and has high expectations."

Carol's experiences at two different elementary schools in the same district further support the importance of administrative leadership in developing a healthy school culture. She said at one school, she saw things she has never seen elsewhere: "I have never, ever experienced people being rude to each other and [in this school] it was acceptable." For example, Carol cited a moment in a staff meeting when the opinion of another non-White teacher was dismissed aggressively. Carol expected the administrator to jump in, but she did not. Consequently, Carol decided she would not talk in the meeting. She said, "it was very disturbing...and I feel like all of that negativity that occurred came from the top, because [the principal] needed to put a stop to that, and she didn't." The lack of administrative leadership in fostering a healthy culture wove itself throughout the school. Carol recalled that the students and the teachers were not respectful. She knew she did not want to be there. She told me, "they said 'are you sure you don't want to stay?' and I said 'no, no, no, no, no.'" She lamented that there could

have been some very good opinions in the room that were not being heard because “who is going to speak up after that?”

“Don’t Give Up the Fight:” Identity, Belonging, and the Resilience of Black Teachers. The focus on the organizational culture and adult relationships in schools shifts the emphasis from preparing teachers to engage students in diversity to preparing teachers to talk about race and name their own collegial shortcomings. After decades of education research that skirts the issue of racist ideas embedded deeply within individual teachers’ implicit biases, my participants revealed that much work remains in naming racism among adults and providing structured opportunities for collegial relationships to develop. Cynthia’s claim that social justice issues are, “in the hearts of teachers” offered a helpful analytical lens to appreciating the history, resilience and significance of Black teachers. The theme of resilience seems to be tied to identity and belonging, and demands special treatment in its own right to highlight the Black struggle over time. If teachers are systematically impacted by a lack of deep collegiality, they must somehow maintain a sense of self-respect as professionals without organizational support. Juanita said,

get your education, keep fighting, don’t give up, don’t give in. If we can do that, I think we can try to get respect. Not that we try to get their respect, but we can get much more respect. Keep fighting, don’t give up the fight. If my ancestors did, made it to Harriet Tubman, she came on a wing and a prayer. And she saved some people.

When I asked participants about identity and belonging, every participant cited factors outside their profession - family and community - as significant in the

development of their personal and racial identity, even when they believed that they were in a supportive school. Instead, participants saw the identity that they developed in their out of school contexts as preparing them to be successful in schools whose professional staff were predominantly White. Regarding being the only Black person in the district, Eric said it goes back to what his mother told him, “you know who you are.” He remembers in 8th grade how his mother pulled him aside and asked him why he walks with his shoulders slouched. He recalled her telling him, “you look pathetic, you need to pull your shoulders up and put your head up.”

Pamela asserted that her early exposure to racial difference helped develop her sense of identity and contributed to her sense of belonging, even among mostly White teachers. She said, “like for me, I was exposed to a lot of things, a lot of role models.” Pamela revealed the link between racial exposure, identity development, and a strong sense of belonging and morale in the work space. Regarding her identity as a Black teacher among mostly White colleagues and students, Pamela said, “it was kind of rough, but you can go through it.” She continued, “...Was it hard? Yes, but you know, when you are hit with that so often . . . every step, you know those hurdles. How can I either go through it, go around it, whatever, I got to make it happen.” This ability to remain focused on the goal and determined to teach despite the challenges permeated the participants’ stories, particularly those participants in predominantly White schools or under-resourced Black schools. Each of the teachers described scenarios where they had to stand up and be strong each day in their professional lives because of the racialized dimensions in schools. They did not have the luxury or privilege to not think about their

racial identity in a professional setting, yet they maintained their focus and passion for teaching. To Charlotte, passion is the most important characteristic of a quality teacher.

She reflected on her own experiences as an administrator:

I think it might have been my attitude, you know, that I refused to accept anything less ...To me, I gave everything I had when I was in that classroom. Some people did not have that same passion about making sure their students were learning ...so the culture had to change, you know, because I wouldn't accept anything less. I mean you are dealing with people's lives.

Charlotte's emphasis on the importance of passion in the workplace reveals the significance of schools leaders creating organizational cultures where teachers can engage safely and passionately with other teachers across lines of racial difference.

“Nice in their Own Way:” Teacher Relationships, Critical Dialogue and Trust. Freire (2003) advocated for the role of critical thinking in dialogue in education saying, “without dialogue, there is no communication, and without communication, there can be no true education” (p. 93). This notion, set within the participants experiences in the public school context, and may reveal the importance of ongoing cross-racial dialogue about teachers' identities and the ways divergent views can be utilized best for creating more racially just schools and societies. Cynthia thought that a team of teachers would function better if the school culture functioned better, including talking about culture, race, bias, and discrimination. Regarding critical dialogue, Abigail said,

I think everyone has their biases. I know I have my biases, and sometimes it takes another person to remind me or show me that I do have these biases. And then

when I go, ‘oh I need to work on that or change that,’ or when I see a group of people, ethnic people, or people from a different religion, you know, what goes through my mind is sometimes, I will go, ‘will they accept me?’ because I am willing to accept them, I want to learn more.

Abigail continued, “we have to talk to our kids and things because we all have our biases, kids pick up on that.” Her last statement points to the importance of healthy relationships in schools to model healthy cross-cultural understanding for students, as teachers’ often unspoken confusion about race may leave unquestioned assumptions about Black inferiority. Abigail went on to describe the subtle but ever-present division she felt between herself and her White colleagues. April felt the White teachers would not feel comfortable initiating friendship. To her, the White teachers prioritized protecting their own comfort rather than “walking outside of that boundary” to make her feel comfortable. April’s story revealed one of the more notable findings relating to racial separation and collegial relationships, that White comfort often resulted in polite relationships that were neither terribly unpleasant nor particularly strong or engaging. She said, “that’s what I’ve always felt, [White people] are nice enough, like polite enough, but it’s not like oh, ok, I really want to have a friendship with you.” Abigail described her understandings of her White colleague’s politeness similarly, saying, “the staff was nice, in their own way.” She proceeded to tell a variety of stories that suggested that while polite, White teachers consistently demonstrated small but noticeable ways that they did not want to engage with her. She indicated that the staff may have thought they were being nice to her, assuming their polite interpersonal dynamics hid their racial prejudices.

To April, White politeness felt like a jab. She said, “I mean, they are not going to make themselves feel uncomfortable to make you feel more comfortable.”

In the face of ongoing national-level and school-level racism, the participants developed particular resiliencies that helped sustain them through their careers. Teachers generally tended not to rely on outside sources, administration, or other teachers for support and resources. Their relationships to their students were central, and within their own classrooms they created safe spaces for themselves and for their students. Relationships with other teachers did not occupy a central place in their teaching memories. Hence, in addition to the White comfort and White politeness that appeared to hinder the positive effects of teacher collaboration, another complex dynamic of teacher relationships is evident is the juxtaposition between participants’ focus on their own sphere of influence and evidence of a level of indifference toward or acceptance of hindered teacher relationships and constrained collaboration due to race.

My conversation with Arthur illustrates this point best. After he told me he thought his school was a nice place to work and that the atmosphere and relationships with the staff were good, generally speaking, I asked him whether he sensed teachers treated each other fairly. He said “no.” In his experience, some teachers did so more than others, but he did not think all teachers were treated equally. He cited collegial support and information sharing, particularly for new teachers, saying “you hear people come in and it’s a new teacher, you know, advising them, coaching them...[but] if I asked for information I could probably get it, but it wasn’t too much volunteered.” As the conversation progressed, Arthur provided further insight into his understanding of how

race mediates collegial relationships. He connected the way racial inequities among colleagues played out in teachers' relationships outside of school. He said,

you really don't socialize especially outside the realms of the school, as far as I can tell. It was just school, you know, meetings were, you socialize, and you went to talk and whatever, but you know, there is only one cafeteria, one gym, one social room, so you kind of had to do that, you didn't mean to do it.

In Arthur's experience, information sharing and collegial support were hindered by race, but compared to overt racial discrimination, he said, more or less, it was fine. He noted, however, that people were treated differently in more subtle ways: "But I have seen a difference because I had a coworker, she was Caucasian. When people came in from the central office, they treated her with more respect and she got more attention than I did."

Beyond housing segregation and living separate lives outside of schools, teachers tend also to congregate within their work places around people they know or share cultural norms or practices with. As like teachers congregate, shared experiences reinforce relationships and strengthen new racial divides over time. Eric explained this as, "when teachers come out here [to his district] and they go 'why don't these teachers mingle?' 'They ain't got nothing in common with you. Ok, why don't you go over to them and try to learn about them?'" Arthur expressed a connection between racial housing segregation and racial and cultural divides evident among adults. He said, "it's going to take time for things to get together, you know, people move into these different neighborhoods because, first of all, it's so much segregation in terms of housing, that's what one of the bottom lines of this is." He continued,

if you don't live in the neighborhood, then the people are not going to get used to you. ... Kids gonna be kids, playing ball, you got a basketball, they will play with you. You got a bicycle, they will ride with you, that's it.

The participants' stories may indicate that a teacher's ability to promote racial equity at the classroom level begins in a school culture that fosters this kind of restorative work among adults. Denise later described the importance of critical dialogue. She said, there has to be honest conversations between teachers about what their perspectives are around race, what they learned as youngsters, what they believe, and how that all manifests now in their teaching practices and behaviors, because they are truly influenced by those things, their backgrounds, and family. There is a link between how they understand these issues and how they teach in the classroom.

Further, Denise addressed the necessity for teachers to "unlearn certain behaviors around what teachers believe and what they understood as a child that is reflected in other people." She continued, "and that can only happen if they have their language, their activities, and their behavior reflected in conversation in professional development communities around what I believe and what I understood as a child that is reflected in other people."

Denise went on to link the issue of learning and unlearning through dialogue to the larger issue of history that was covered at the beginning of this chapter. She said, I think today's context needs to be understood in the progression over the years, through time. Actually many of the impediments to racial and economic

inequality are repeating themselves as we speak. It's cyclical...that's why it's important that all students understand the development of the United States, if it came from their countries and melted together to form one country, no ethnic group should be more important than another. It's a total understanding.

This understanding includes teachers and students gaining a more comprehensive understanding of US history, specifically the fight for Civil freedoms throughout the decades that highlight the importance of citizen agency and the development of a new social imagination (Ming, 2017).

Eric's remarks expand on Denise's. Regarding critical dialogue and conversations about race, he claimed, "an open conversation does a lot." He reflected on some of his experiences dialoguing with his White colleagues, saying,

It does a lot, and it may affect different people in different ways. I know we have had incidents where we were talking and people were in tears as far as what people have seen and this and that, and people weren't crying because they were insulted but that's where, you know, they were finally able to express this pain, and their feelings were out. And it's a lot of people haven't experienced that, you know. I've been fortunate enough in the 39 years of education I've always had to have the conversation and let people, you know, talk about how I'm feeling and this and that. I've never been one to bite my lip to anybody.

However, such opportunities were rare in these Black teachers' experiences. According to them, the myth of racial progress and historical and ongoing racial segregation make

critical dialogue and trust both difficult and underemphasized in schools. Carol described this dilemma:

[White teachers] don't want to believe they live in a racist society. They want to believe that since Carol Harding is at our school, look, look at where we've come. Look at how she can sit in a restaurant and she can try on clothes and swim in the pool...it's because people want to believe that they have no bias. I think people want to believe that there's no need to have this conversation because, just look around us, everything is fine, because they are seeing it through their eyes, you know.

Carol went on to say that she found herself stepping back from engaging in hard conversations about race, even with people she knows outside of school:

I have to have delicate conversations sometimes because a friend of mine has a relative ... and so the wife is like, 'I can't understand what all this hoopla is' ...so you know there is kind of a delicate line, but I think people think they are already aware. They think, 'I don't need to be woke.'

Abigail also described White teachers' resistance to professional development workshops on racial justice and racial identity development saying "they would not feel compelled to go ... because they feel it doesn't pertain to them, it pertains to the Trump voters or it pertains to somebody other than themselves." Abigail went on to describe an imaginary scenario in which teachers choosing their workshop find their top few choices already full, potentially leaving an undesirable race-related workshop as the only remaining option . She imagined these teachers may sit in the workshop, roll their eyes and say,

“why am I here, why are you offering this?” She imagined them asking, “why are you seeking out employment for minority people? If they wanted to be here they would come here.”

Abigail’s remarks reveal a nuanced interpretation of the complexity of professional development and the limitations of it within a racially divided society where most White people believe “I don’t need to be woke.” However, according to Denise, there is great promise in professional development and “an ongoing learning process in a learning community of teachers,” but the usual offering of one-off training may not help to overcome a history of White supremacy and racial oppression. Throughout participant responses there are acknowledgements of the tension between an embrace of more facilitated discussion of race in professional development settings, along with a deep knowledge of the unlikelihood of uprooting history through professional development. Indeed, Abigail noted that racial justice “progress” is not that easy, and concluded by saying,

I think professional development would be awesome. But I don’t think people would be open to it right away. I think you would have to dole it out in small doses...because it is a delicate topic, it has to be handled carefully so that you’re not offending the White people in the room ... But at the same time, you have to say it, you have to make them know, ‘you don’t really know. Because you can’t.’ Not until you’ve had exposure to what is going on can you fully or partially even understand it because, you know, when you tell me that all lives matter, you’re not getting it. You’re not getting it. You’re not getting it. You know, it’s not about

that. It's not about the flag, taking to the knee, it's not about that, you know....I think it goes back to 'you don't know what you don't know.' And you don't know what biases you have until you explore the biases that you have, you know. But in the case of race, [White people] don't want to admit that they don't know. Because that would be bad to admit that you don't know.

Abigail claimed post-racial ideology contributes to teachers' lack of interest in professional development training on race. She imagined a White teacher with a 'colorblind' mindset might say "because I don't see color, I don't need to be in on that class." Her next comment framed a contemporary state of racism in US schools:

because obviously, nobody is going to say now all the Black kids sit on this side of the room and all the White kids sit up in front. And maybe what they don't realize, maybe they are not guilty of it, but what they don't realize is the unconscious biases that they bring in.

The collective understanding of the participants is that if teachers and school leaders do not start talking to each other as colleagues, their deeply embedded racial assumptions may remain unquestioned. Their subconscious and unquestioned assumptions are fueled largely by racial segregation and a progression of White misunderstanding that compounds over time. It does not, as evidence shows, work itself out on its own without intentional, facilitated dialogue in safe and trusting work spaces.

Summary of Theme 3. In this theme I drew upon the participants' notions of fostering teacher relationships, critical dialogue, and trust as prospects for change. According to my participants, developing a healthy school culture is the starting point for

creating safe spaces within which teacher collegial relationships may be strengthened through facilitated critical dialogue. When I asked about supportive relationships, the participants talked about the importance of school culture and the role of the administrator in creating safe and healthy workplaces where racial difference was not just tolerated, but accepted. However, their descriptions of their own experiences with small slights and avoidance in collegial relationships is evidence of the degree to which even a reasonably safe and respectful culture may be insufficient to create parity of experience between White and Black teachers much less professional integration.

The premise underlying these teachers' experiences as educational professionals is that racism in US schools is normal, "it is the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color" (Stefancic & Delgado, 2012, p. 7). More surprising was their optimism that there was, in spite of situating their experiences in a deep history of racism, an optimism about the value of cross-racial dialogue. In this way, identifying patterns of healthy and effective collegial relationships by addressing how race is talked about among teachers, formally and informally in schools, may be one step forward towards enhancing racial justice in schools. Ultimately, the participants discussed the challenges of fostering depth in collegial relationships as requiring a profound shift in White peoples' understandings of racism and racial justice.

The findings suggest that collegial depth has historically been challenged by structural realities that mediate more effective teacher collaboration. The findings reflect varied experiences, but even among the "good" examples there was a lack of teacher collaboration in part due to the ongoing segregated lives teachers lead. Healthy racial

dynamics were connected to the overall culture of the school. Participants named the role of the administrator as paramount in developing and protecting safe professional workplaces for adults. Because of persistent structural racism and ongoing segregation that sustains it, professional development as it is currently constructed may not be sufficient. However, the participants suggested that ongoing professional development may make White teachers more aware of and sensitive to the structures that create increased racial disparities in schools. The participants seem to suggest that “hearts” may not change unless White people develop personal relationships with people of color and educate themselves about structural racism. Further, that may not happen unless there is a school culture that promotes acceptance. Hence, the work begins, as Cynthia said, “in the hearts of teachers” and as such, requires strengthening relational networks through facilitating critical dialogue and trust among teachers.

This is a very different approach to school reform than training on culturally relevant pedagogy or even becoming more aware of the possibility of implicit bias towards students, evidenced in standardized testing and disciplinary action, for example. The participants seem to have said sustainable school reform approaches should focus on improving the capacity for teachers to develop healthy relationships with one another within a healthy school culture that addresses all forms of social injustice. In this sense, racial injustice is about race and it is also about power. As Eric said, “racism is power.” Perhaps most importantly, no participants had “the answer” to correcting state-sponsored systemic racism where racial prejudice and marginalization is built in to the fabric of the country. Thus, linking individual transformational work among individuals and groups of

adults in schools to counter systemic challenges may be an important "way forward" for Black teachers and students and for the freedom and well-being of Black people in the US.

Summary of the Findings

The ten participants I interviewed shared a range of stories drawn from their childhood experiences growing up in US America and their professional experiences with teachers during the past four decades. They spoke not only of their educational and professional experiences but also of the broader socio-political contexts in which they attended and taught school. The participants responded to open-ended inquiry questions centering on their personal identities, their constructions of race, and their professional relationships in schools. From a careful review of their stories, I identified three emergent themes that connect each story. These are the perpetuation of the myth of racial progress: national-level racism; the problem of racial segregation for schools and society: school-level racism; and the potential of relational networks for enhancing racial justice: prospects for change.

The themes were organized accordingly to relay what my participants know about this topic through their lived experiences in the profession over time and to highlight what they feel would be yet helpful for school leaders, teachers, and policy makers to know. Ample space was intentionally dedicated to recounting common narratives of racial oppression in US America, followed by a unique but familiar vantage point of racial segregation in schools. In this study, I presented teacher-to-teacher relationships, set within the complex ecological contexts of schools as social networks, as a new angle

to address school reform. In the next and final chapter, I apply these themes to the benefits of strengthening collegial relationships and promoting racial justice, particularly in light of persistent racial segregation and state-sponsored racial violence towards Black people in US schools and societies.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Summary of the Study

In this phenomenological study, I listened to the stories of ten retired African American teachers from the greater Chicago area to gain practical insight into their lived experiences and their understandings of their personal identities, constructions of race, and professional relationships over time. A large portion of education literature is devoted to creating safe and inclusive classrooms for students, yet less attention has been directed towards evaluating the professional experiences of teachers. The stories the participants shared about their personal and professional lives offered helpful perspectives for understanding the scope, causes, and consequences of historical and ongoing systemic racial injustice that make life - not just school - difficult for Black people. This study is set within the context of organizational diversity to understand better how teachers tend to interact with their racially dissimilar others and to identify how race mediates teachers' relational dynamics. Consistent with the critical race theorist's shifting attention toward systemic racism and power in addressing educational inequity, the participants' stories both affirm the direction of critical race theorists in education and illuminate areas of teacher professional development that should be addressed further.

In this study, I focused on what Black teachers know, how they know it, and what they understand it to mean for the way forward. The findings reveal that 1.) Racism is an ongoing problem in US society that creates direct and indirect challenges for Black teachers and schools, and by extension, their students and communities; 2.) The problem

of race is compounded by racial segregation, both by limiting exposure to ideas, relationships, and resources beyond one's local networks and by perpetuating material and ideological racial divides; 3.) Through talking about race in the context of facilitated dialogue within a healthy school culture, teachers' relational networks may be strengthened, in turn strengthening the potential for collaborative racial justice efforts.

While every participant said race should be talked about deeper and more often than it was, race is still a taboo topic and often the only time race was discussed in schools is when talking about children. The unfortunate reality is that Black people have been talking about racial oppression for hundreds of years but still have not secured much leverage with their claims. In a presumed post-racial society where teachers tend to avoid dealing with the problem of race, the participants decided any prospects for change must start by getting to the hearts of teachers. As Cynthia said, racial justice work involves changing the heart of the country, to create a more caring society, "one individual at a time." As such, as a whole, they consider individual teacher relationships as key in confronting historical and ongoing systemic injustice, further exemplifying the importance of critical dialogue and trust within collegial relationships.

Discussion

In Chapter 2, I presented Desmond and Emirbayer's (2012) work as what I understood to be one of the more hopeful frames for engaging in racial justice work. They frame their approach in the context of three "ends": a society where racial domination is addressed intelligently; a society that embraces racial justice in all its arenas; and a society that values and practices multiculturalism. In this study, the

participants' understandings of their personal identities, constructions of race, and professional relationships, bolstered by scholarship in race, education, and organizational diversity, convey important findings that align with these ends and offer a compelling vision of what racially just schools, workplaces, and societies might look like. In this section, I discuss the meaning I derive from the findings of this study and potential implications for schools and societies accordingly. Further, I adopt Desmond and Ebirmeyer's (2012) levels of change which include: 1.) ourselves; (2) our inner circle; (3) our institutions; and (4) our nation. This organizational approach is consistent with the participants' emphasis on racial justice work in the hearts of teachers, facilitating cross-racial collegial relationships within healthy school cultures, strengthening social networks within schools and societies, and national truth-telling of state-sponsored racism.

A society where racial domination is addressed intelligently. In a post-racial era, the findings of Theme 1: The Perpetuation of the Myth of Racial Progress: National-Level Racism, demonstrate that racial justice work must begin with the facts. Through guided discussions about race, teachers may begin to form an accurate and shared narrative of the nation's horrific racist roots that continue to produce racial inequity in schools and societies. Addressing racial dominance intelligently requires developing a clear understanding of systemic racism and the evolving ways it manifests in schools, particularly in light of the confluence of other societal ills that remain too readily overlooked and not thoroughly understood. Addressing racial dominance intelligently means identifying at its core the greed and economic self-interest that drive unjust policies and destroy generations of human lives to benefit a select few. Indeed, "to work

toward racial justice, we must know precisely what we are working toward” (Desmond & Ebirmeyer, 2012, p. 263).

However, Kendi (2016) calls into question mere intellectual understanding as an effective approach to ending racial injustice. W.E.B. DuBois said in 1935 that “today there can be no doubt that Americans know the facts, and yet they remain for the most part indifferent and unmoved” (p. 266). As such, responding to racial dominance intelligently must extend beyond a comprehensive intellectual understanding of the destructive nature of racism to include personal encounters that invoke change. To address racial domination intelligently is to acknowledge that facts and intellect may not motivate the desires of the heart. Affective experiences are sometimes needed to jolt people into new awakenings, much like the movie *Detroit* did for Carol, that heighten race consciousness and reveal a new depth of understanding about racial realities.

A society that embraces racial justice in all its arenas. The notion of a society that embraces racial justice in all its arenas is consistent with the participants’ understandings that racist ideas that permeate every institution are a consequence of much larger societal ills. The findings demonstrated in Theme 2: The Problem of Historical and Ongoing Racial Segregation: School-Level Racism, reveal that racial separation compounds racial problems as White and Black people tend to live separate lives. Sheltered within their exclusively White networks, White people have the privilege of excusing themselves understanding of the scope of racial injustice. As such, embracing racial justice efforts in all its arenas involves recognizing that schools exist within societies and then situating educational equity within strengthened social networks that benefit everyone. In a society

that embraces racial justice in all its arenas, teachers and school leaders may recognize that affective experiences powerful enough to change hearts require proximity (Stevenson, 2016). W.E.B. DuBois acknowledged in 1935 that Americans “muddle along with their own affairs, and scarcely can be expected to take seriously the affairs of strangers or people whom they partly fear and partly despise” (p. 266). As such, racial justice efforts should seek to counter the negative effects of Black and White teachers living separate lives that relegate their affective cross-cultural learning experiences to the misrepresentation of Black culture in the media and perpetuates subconscious racist ideas and racial misunderstanding.

A society that values and practices multiculturalism. The work, then, must start with the hearts of teachers as the multicultural community they form through individual, collegial, and national truth telling serve as a model for students. Strengthening collegial relationships may be one important way to educate and motivate teachers to become more intellectually informed and personally engaged in racial justice work in schools. Teachers who are trained and equipped for promoting diversity, inclusion, and multiculturalism in their classrooms may then begin by modeling healthy relationships with other teachers. Through critical dialogue and trust building facilitated by school leaders within a healthy school culture, teachers may begin to confront, renounce, and deconstruct their racist ideas and replace them with a more healthy social imagination that exposes and challenges racial policies in schools and society. There must be a commitment to reparative or restorative justice and to policies that can effectively foster systemic change, developing in teachers a deep and relentless commitment to fighting

systemic racism, first as it manifests within them as individuals, and then as it functions in schools and societies. As such, teachers who are truly for promoting racial justice and multiculturalism in their classrooms must first commit to developing more inclusive multicultural work spaces and making predominantly White work spaces more safe and enjoyable for Black teachers.

Future Research

The results of this study suggest more research is needed to understand better the many nuances of contested political and ideological conceptualizations of race that extended beyond its scope. There is a growing body of research dedicated to post-colonialism in education that addresses the way colonial oppression informs peoples' thinking over time (Khalifa, 2012). Other important and related future studies include: Black teachers' conceptualizations of quality classroom teaching; an in-depth examination of post-colonial ideologies in Black educators; discrimination and the underrepresentation of teachers of color; and the role of colleges of education in preparing teachers for diverse collegial relationships. Additionally, an instrument that measures White and Black teachers' awareness of historical and contemporary issues of race and commitment to social and racial justice may be helpful from a social scientific approach. Further, it is important to attend to a more nuanced understanding of gender, class, socio-economic status, and other social categories that remained entirely unaccounted for in this study, as Black teachers' various social identities inevitably intersect to inform their experiences in schools. hooks (1994) argues that sexism, racism, and classism are inextricably linked, and therefore, their intersection must be considered

for a more meaningful and accurate analysis of oppression.

In addition, future research may examine the experiences and understandings of teachers who changed professions, either into teaching, or out of teaching, at some point within their career. Identifying the internal and external motivations for career transitions for teachers could reveal more depth about racial hiring practices, racial discrimination in the work place, and motivation, identity, belonging, and resilience. Future research may also examine how Black teachers' early education experiences in segregated schools in the South, along with their eventual migration north, impacts their understanding of race in Chicago's urban and suburban schools. Researchers may also examine similarities or differences in the findings from this study as compared to a sample of retired teachers who taught throughout their professional careers in the South. Isabel Wilkerson's study on the Great Migration may prove an interesting starting point for examining understandings of Black teachers of their childhood experiences in segregated schools in the South followed by integrated schooling experiences in the North. In this area, more scholarship is needed to understand better the complexities of school segregation and desegregation efforts prior to, and following, *Brown*. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, future research could include how administrators of color understand and account for accurate renderings of US American history, both in the written curriculum and integrated formally into professional development opportunities for teachers.

Concluding Thoughts

From the onset of data collection I found one of the most intriguing aspects of this study to be the significant disconnect in the participants' assessment of race in US

America and some of their assessments of their collegial relationships in schools. When I asked the participants questions about their collegial relationships, they overwhelmingly responded with fewer ideas and stories than I had anticipated. In an effort to understand why, I broadened the scope of our conversations to race in US America at which point their understandings consistently flowed more readily. This curious gap between my participants' descriptions and ample supporting evidence of pervasive racial conflict in US America and their relatively shallow descriptions of their collegial relationships causes me to consider what it this might mean.

Perhaps because of generations of legally sanctioned overt racial discrimination and horrific racial injustices, their professional relationships with teachers seemed fine. Collectively, the way they described race in schools was with a deep familiarity that comes with generations of Black experiences in White supremacist systems that inform how Black people worked for, and now presumably with Whites, many of whom do not understand or acknowledge this. As such, the way Black teachers seemed to tolerate racism in their professional workplaces is that they focused on community, self-determination, and empowerment by creating safe and inclusive spaces within their own classrooms. Further, their feelings of powerlessness against systemic racism may lead to greater acceptance of their all too familiar racial realities. This may fail to expose the full dimensions of ongoing racist ideas and corresponding racial habits (Glaude, 2016). Their understandings prompt consideration of the importance of reconciling a common historical narrative, whereby should White teachers know the history of race in their own profession, they might be more inclined to think differently, interrogate their

subconscious more readily, and wonder, together, whether their polite action or presumably unnoticed inaction communicates something to their Black colleagues inconsistent with what they teach their Black and White students. Their stories together, however, may reveal that this finding of collegial indifference between my participants and their White counterparts may have something to do with the resilience and ability of Black teachers to navigate the racist terrain. Perhaps after 400 years, they were entirely used to it. Some called it “survival.”

The reality of being Black in America is not new, nor is the racial condition changing for many Black people. The reality of racial disparities in schools are not new, nor are the achievement gaps closing. Until hidden biases are acknowledged and until systems that oppress and ideologies that normalize racial habits are challenged, racism will remain fixed at the core of a nation understood from its roots to be right and true (Lensmire, 2017). The nation’s collective failure to deal more honestly with its history of racial terror motivates my concern, but the lived experiences, the unnamed tension, and the hidden wounds of Black teachers motivates my quest for understanding. It is my hope that this work provides insight into how teachers make meaning of race not just for their classroom practice but for themselves as relational and professional beings, hopefully promoting more racially just schools and ultimately a more racially just society for all people. This work should be motivated by understanding, respect, openness and inclusion, and rather than bias, fear, and hard lines that cut off and exclude. I summarize this discussion with a concluding story:

By the time, Abigail reached 9th grade, a new high school was under construction in her Chicago south side community. The existing high school at that time was an integrated school. Half of the students were White and half were Black, while most of the other schools in the Chicago south side area were either all White or all Black. Opening this new school would redirect most of the Black students and some White students away from the integrated school.⁹ Over the years, many of those White families ended up leaving the community, and their White children no longer attended the school. Abigail recalled vividly the racial divide, most notable when leaving the building in the evening. She said, “you could see the division, the White students were going that way, and the Black students were going that way, and so there was a streak.” Abigail’s school was on 97th and so, she told me,

it was a saying: ‘hold the line at 99,’ which means that the White people who lived north of 99th street did not want African American families moving over into that community and so they would have issues if they went over those boundaries.

Systemic racism is embedded deeply into the roots of US foundations through American exceptionalism, White supremacy and the justification of the de-humanization of enslaved African people. It is possible then, that in an era of colorblindness, teachers can quietly and innocently deny ongoing racial oppression while unintentionally marginalizing,

⁹ Richard Rothstein (2017) in his book, *The Color of Law* provides a convincing argument that this type of strategic plan serves as an example of the persistence of de jure, or “of the law” segregation, calling de facto segregation, a myth. He says, “Half a century ago, the truth of de jure segregation was well known, but since then we have suppressed our historical memory and soothed ourselves into believing that [segregation] happened by accident or by misguided private prejudice” (p. xii). He claims most segregation is open and explicit government-sponsored segregation. This assertion supports Kendi’s (2016) important claim that racist policies precede racist ideas.

underestimating, or de-valuing their Black colleagues and tacitly perpetuating the racial divides that strengthen the aims of the nation's White male supremacist oligarchy regime. As W.E.B. Dubois (1935) said nearly a hundred years ago and it remains yet true, "the problem in America is the problem of the color line" (p.3). Nonetheless, it is my hope that these accounts will amplify the voices of historically marginalized group to provide a more complex understanding of identity, race and relationships (Foster, 1997) The participants' decades of experiences offer a rich depth of insight about how the past impacts the present and about how historical and contemporary race relations impact school and societies. The participants' collective approach to persistent systemic racism is to begin in the hearts of teachers as the starting point for school and societal reform. Strengthening teacher relationships through facilitated dialogue in a healthy school culture may increase cross-racial understanding and potentially enhance collaborative racial justice efforts in schools and in the communities and public spaces within which teachers live and work. Progressing towards a vision of democracy and freedom and justice for all in this way may offer a glimpse of what building a full humanity might look like. Indeed, this is a glimpse of shalom.

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Appendices

Appendix A: IRB Informed Consent

Title of Research Study: Reflections of race, identity, and relationships by retired African American teachers

Researcher: Mary Yeboah and her Academic Advisor, Karen Seashore

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

We are asking you to take part in this research study because you are a retired, African American US, urban public school teacher

What should I know about a research study?

Someone will explain this research study to you.

Whether or not you take part is up to you.

You can choose not to take part.

You can agree to take part and later change your mind.

Your decision will not be held against you.

You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Who can I talk to?

For questions about research appointments, the research study, research results, or other concerns, call the study team at:

Researcher Name: Mary Yeboah Phone Number: 630-520-3074 Email Address: yeboa016@umn.edu

This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB) within the Human Research Protections Program (HRPP). To share feedback privately with the HRPP about your research experience, call the Research Participants' Advocate Line at [612-625-1650](tel:612-625-1650) or go to www.irb.umn.edu/report.html. You are encouraged to contact the HRPP if:

Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.

You cannot reach the research team.

You want to talk to someone besides the research team.

You have questions about your rights as a research participant.

You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this study is to understand retired African American teachers' reflections of their personal identities, their constructions of race, and their professional relationships within their urban US public school teaching contexts over time. The focus

of this study is on the culture of adults in schools with an emphasis on how teachers negotiate power, privilege, history, identity, and shared goals across lines of racial difference.

How long will the research last?

We expect that you will be in this research study for 5-8 hours during 2-3 interview sessions throughout the months of May and June, 2017.

How many people will be studied?

We expect about 8 people will be in this research study.

What happens if I say “Yes, I want to be in this research”?

Research participants will participate in one initial 1-2 hour interview followed by 1-2 follow up interviews

Research participants will interact only with the primary researcher

Interviews will be conducted at quiet restaurants or coffee shops in a location convenient for the participant

The interviews will be conducted during the months of May and June, 2017

Interviews will be conducted 2-3 times

In-depth interviews will be conducted with individual research participants

Research participants may be asked for permission to be contacted for future research

Audio recording will be used to record the interviews

What happens if I do not want to be in this research?

You can leave the research at any time and it will not be held against you, including if you initially agree to participate in the study and change your mind later. If you decide to leave the research, please contact the investigator so that the investigator can find alternative participants. Depending on the amount of data already collected at the time of withdrawal, the data may be used with permission.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?

There are no anticipated risks of this study, however, as the content of the research questions includes personal information, such questions could evoke strong emotive responses. Taking part in this research study should not lead to added costs to you.

Will being in this study help me in any way?

We cannot promise any benefits to you or others from your taking part in this research. However, possible benefits include taking part in this research study might improve the experiences of other teachers.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

Efforts will be made to limit the use and disclosure of your personal information, including research study and medical records, to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the IRB and other representatives of this institution, including the University of Minnesota. We will not ask you about child [or elder] abuse, but if you tell us about child [or elder] abuse or neglect, we may be required or permitted by law or policy to report to authorities.

Will anyone besides the study team be at my consent meeting?

There will be no participants at the interview other than the research participant and the investigator.

Will I have a chance to provide feedback after the study is over?

After the study, you might be asked to complete a survey about your experience as a research participant. You do not have to complete the survey if you do not want to. If you do choose to complete the survey, your responses will be anonymous.

Optional Elements:

The following research activities are optional, meaning that you do not have to agree to them in order to participate in the research study. Please indicate your willingness to participate in these optional activities by placing your initials next to each activity.

I agree I disagree

_____ _____ The researcher may audio record me to aid with data analysis. The researcher will not share these recordings with anyone outside of the immediate study team.

_____ _____ The researcher may contact me in the future to see whether I am interested in participating in other research studies by the principal investigator of this study.

Signature Block for Capable Adult

Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research.

Signature of participant _____
Date

Printed name of participant

Signature of person obtaining consent _____
Date

Printed name of person obtaining consent

Appendix B: Letter of Participant Invitation

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Twin Cities Campus

*Department of Organizational Leadership,
Policy, and Development*

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*206 Burton Hall
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June 24, 2017

Dear Colleague,

Congratulations on your retirement! I know you worked hard to get there and I'm sure you've gathered a wealth of insights along the way. I am interested in hearing some of your stories, experiences, and reflections as an African American public school teacher.

My dissertation project involves a topic that I've become more curious about through my experiences as a teacher and school principal. I've noticed a lot of educational research focuses on the student experience, but fewer studies consider whether schools are enjoyable places for teachers to work. Yet, in my experiences, healthy teacher relationships are necessary for creating healthy classroom environments for kids. I wonder how teachers reflect on their professional experiences. I also wonder how teachers develop relationships with other teachers, who they trust, and why.

As a retired teacher, I imagine you have a depth of wisdom to offer that comes with the longevity of your teaching career. Would you be interested in sharing some of your experiences with me over coffee or lunch at a location that is convenient for you? If so, please contact me for more details.

Thanks very much and I look forward to hearing from you. Kindly,

Mary Yeboah

Doctoral Candidate College of Education and Human Development University of
Minnesota 630.520.3074 yeboa016@umn.edu

Appendix C: Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Teaching Location	Subjects Taught	Interview #1	Interview #2	Gender	Education	Retired
Sylvia Lewis	Chicago Public Schools	Special Education	5/17/17	5/25/17	F	BA Elementary Education; MA Special Education	2016
Charlotte Gordon	Chicago Public Schools	HS Math; Assistant Principal of the School Budget	5/23/17	6/6/17	F	BA Math Education	2008
April Davis	Chicago Southwest Suburbs	Elementary Education	6/22/17	11/1/17	F	BA Business Administration, MA Elementary K-8 middle school social studies and LA	2015
Juanita Cross	Chicago Southwest Suburb	Elementary Education	6/27/17	10/21/17	F	BA Elementary Education	2007
Arthur Williams	Chicago Public Schools	Special Education	8/13/17	10/22/17	F	BA Elementary Ed; MA Social and Emotional Disorders and Urban Studies; PhD Counseling	2004
Cynthia Brown	Chicago Southwest Suburbs	PE; Counseling	8/24/17	10/13/17	M	BA PE Education; MA Counseling	2004
Abigail Turner	Chicago Northwest Suburbs	Elementary Education	10/25/17	11/2/17	F	BA Elementary Ed, Special Ed Minor Speech and Music, MA Educational Leadership and Supervision Type 75	1995
Carol Harding	Chicago Northwest Suburbs	Elementary Education	10/4/17	10/25/17	F	BA Elementary Ed; Educational Technology	2017
Denise Martin	Chicago Public Schools	Elementary School; Special Ed Itinerant Supervising Teachers	10/13/17	10/30/17	F	BA Gen Ed/Special Ed; MA Educational Administration and Reading/EMH; PhD Policy and Urban Ed	2007
Eric Weaver	Chicago Northwest Suburbs	Shop, Drafting, Technology; Dean of Students	9/19/17	9/28/17	M	BA Technology Education; MA Computer Ed and Administration and Supervision; PhD Curriculum and Instruction	2014