ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: NEW WINE CALLS FOR NEW WINESKINS: BLACK MEGACHURCH APPROACHES TO RACIAL INEQUALITY

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The changing nature of racism in the post-Civil Rights period coincides with the decline in collective racial protest, or what some scholars consider the activist or prophetic wing, of black churches. As a result of the shift from the overt racism of the Civil Rights era to the hidden and often invisible forms of contemporary racism, the ways in which blacks address and resist racism might reflect similar shifts. In other words, I argue that black churches' responses to contemporary racial inequality may be different from the actions taken by some churches before and during the pre-Civil Rights era. This study seeks to explore the explanations and solutions for contemporary racial inequality offered by

black megachurch leaders and attendees. More specifically it also takes into account how religious culture may influence these explanations of and solutions to racial inequality.

A case study approach is utilized to examine three black megachurches in Washington, D.C.—one Baptist, one Pentecostal, and one nondenominational. Data from semi-structured interviews with church leaders and congregants, content analysis of church documents, and participant observation of church worship services reveal three main findings. First, contrary to literature that states blacks tend to rely on structural rather than individual explanations of racial inequality, church leaders and congregants tend to rely on explanations that are simultaneously individual and structural. Second, the strategies used by the megachurches in this study do not reflect the direct action protesting strategies used by some black churches during the Civil Rights Movement. The strategies of the megachurches in this study to address racial inequality range from aiding in educational achievement to civic engagement to employment training to address racial inequality. Furthermore, each of the churches has developed nonprofit Community Development Corporations to provide social services such as transitional housing. Third, although the various religious cultures of megachurches in this study inform how they address racial inequality, other factors, such as declining membership and changing community demographics, also shape strategies to intervene in racial inequality.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Joan and Kenneth Barber. Achieving my goals would not have been possible without your tremendous sacrifices, support, and encouragement.

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Motivations

In the New Testament gospels, Jesus was asked why he and his disciples did not fast like the disciples of John the Baptist or the Pharisees[1]. Jesus replied, "No one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins and both the wine and the wineskins are ruined." Rather than storing wine in bottles, as is customary today, wine was stored in wineskins made from the hide or bladder of animals. After being used an old wineskin would become brittle and hardened. Because wine expands during the fermentation process, it would need to be poured into a new wineskin that would have the elasticity to expand with the wine. As a result of the fixed shape of old wineskin, pouring new wine into an old wineskin would ruin both the new wine and old wineskin. The old wineskin would burst open and the new wine would spill out. So new wine was poured into new wineskins.

The parable of wineskins is a useful metaphor to think about how the Black Church approaches racial inequality in the 21st century. When people think about the role of the Black Church in addressing racial inequality, many envision the protesting done by *some* black churches during the Civil Rights Movement[2]. This strategy of protesting can represent old wine and the Jim Crow racism black churches were

[1] See Mark 2:22, Luke 5:37, and Matthew 9:17.

[2] Not all black churches participated in protest activities. Those that did participate in protests were generally more militant. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is the most recognized minister for leading protests. Dr. King challenged the conservative nature of many black churches and expressed his disappointment with the laxity of the black church when it came to protesting against injustice. (Wilmore 1983; Dyson 2000)

fighting against can represent old wineskin. Protesting worked well during a time period of legalized racism and helped produce legislation that overturned previously discriminatory laws. It was also easier to mobilize protests around a common issue because the racial inequality was made blatant through the Jim Crow system of racial apartheid. However, the old wineskin of Jim Crow has been replaced with a new wineskin of racism in a "post-racial" or "colorblind" era. In a "post-racial" or "colorblind" era, racism is considered to be a problem of the past because legislation that enforced discrimination has been replaced with legislation that aims to provide civil rights to all races. Existing racial inequality is blamed on the group culture or individual choices of racial minorities. Furthermore, the rhetoric of the Civil Rights Movement is used to justify the perspective that society should be colorblind. This dissertation examines the new wine of strategies used by black megachurches to address this the new wineskin of racial inequality in a "colorblind" era.

Yet, references to the role of the Black Church in addressing the consequences of contemporary racial inequality are often critical of what is perceived as inaction. For example, in an article that appeared on CNN, minister Al Sharpton openly questioned the usefulness of black churches in addressing racism in the United States (Sharpton 2006). More recently, Princeton University professor Eddie Glaude ignited controversy by writing an obituary for the Black Church. In his Huffington Post article he suggested that the Black Church has been idealized, is not inherently prophetic, and is more likely to organize against same-sex marriage than address black children living in poverty (Glaude 2010).

In a time period when the U.S. is experiencing its first black presidency and the numbers of religiously affiliated individuals is declining (Funk and Smith 2012) it may seem unusual to examine black churches as a site for addressing racial inequality. While some may believe that the Obama presidency has marked the beginning of a "post-racial era" (Cohen 2008; Wise 2009), racial disparities persist in housing, employment, wealth, education, and income among other indicators of well-being. Also, while the number of religiously affiliated individuals in the U.S. is declining, blacks maintain higher rates of religiosity than whites (Shelton and Emerson 2012).

Religion, and black Protestant churches specifically, have played a unique role in buffering blacks from racial hostility (Cone 1969; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Shelton and Emerson 2012). Black churches have a history of enacting self-help programs aimed at providing black communities with resources they could not otherwise access (Du Bois [1903]2003; Mays and Nicholson [1933]1969; Tucker-Worgs 2011) and remain among the most influential institutions in black communities. Research has also shown that black religious organizations are more likely to participate in civil rights activities and activities directed at disadvantaged segments of their communities than white religious organizations (Chaves and Higgins 1992).

With their growing numbers, megachurches—defined as congregations with a weekly attendance of 2,000 or more—are becoming an increasingly important aspect of the black religious landscape. Although black megachurches have long been a part of the black religious landscape, their numbers began to grow exponentially toward the end of the 20th century. Due to their size, black megachurches are more likely to have more human, social, and economic resources than their smaller counterparts and

because of that have the potential to address the consequences of contemporary racial inequality through various forms of public engagement (i.e., protest politics, electoral activism, or community development).

Statement of the Problem

With some exceptions (Barnes 2010a,b, 2013; Tucker-Worgs 2011; Shelton and Emerson 2012) few sociologists have given sufficient attention to the role of black religion in addressing contemporary racial inequality. For example, scholars of race and ethnic relations tend to exclude any measures of religion in their examinations of black life in America (e.g., Omi and Winant 1994; Bobo 2004; Bonilla-Silva 2010). Although an increasing number of scholars of religion acknowledge the importance of religion in addressing racism in the United States, this group of scholars tends to focus on how religious traditions account for differences in blacks' political attitudes and/or behaviors (e.g., Harris 1994; Calhoun-Brown 1998; Brown and Brown 2003; Brown 2009). In short, in spite of ongoing public conversations regarding the role of religion in addressing racial inequality, the sociological discourse has been limited in its exploration of how the Black Church shapes understandings of and responses to racial inequality in the United States.

In a post-Civil Rights era the Black Church has been criticized by scholars, theologians, and laypeople for its declining significance and increasingly conservative politics (Reed 1986; Blake 2008; Butler 2010; Freedman 2010; Glaude 2010)[3]. There

[3] In response to criticisms that black churches do not have the progressive impact they once had, the Conference of National Black Churches was formed in April 2009. Composed of nine denominations,

is also a concern with declining membership at traditional denominational churches[4], such as Baptist and Methodist churches, which were more likely to have a tradition of social activism. Attendance at traditional black denominational churches is declining while nondenominational membership is growing (Sherkat 2002), and blacks are overrepresented in megachurches (Lugo et al. 2008). Due to the history of the Black Churches being one of the most stable institutions in the black community there exists an expectation that they should address the needs of the black community (Warnock 2014). Hence, if it appears that those churches that were traditionally socially active are in decline and blacks are increasingly attending megachurches, which are popularly believed to lack the activism of traditional denominational churches, then it raises the question of the role of the Black Church today in addressing contemporary racial inequality.

Moreover, some scholars have argued that in many megachurches, there is a lack of emphasis on social justice (Mamiya 2006; Harris-Lacewell 2007). Rather than organizing to change society—as was done by some churches during the Civil Rights Movement—Rivera (2002) argues that megachurch pastors are more likely to seek to transform the individual. Additionally, it has been argued that many megachurches, whether predominately black or racially mixed, often do not emphasize teachings of a collective racial identity or racial justice (Harris-Lacewell 2007). Harris (2012a:1) emphasizes:

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the CNBC aims to present a unified voice of black religious bodies in order to affect public policy on issues like healthcare, education, and the economy to improve the quality of life for blacks (CNBC 2012).

[4] I will use the terms "traditional denominational churches," "mainstream black Protestant churches" and "black Protestant churches" interchangeably. They all refer to churches that are part of the eight historically black controlled Protestant denominations.

> [T]he activist wing of the black church – which was the backbone of the civil rights movement during the 1950s and 1960s and the organizational basis of black electoral politics from the 1970s to the 1990s – is slowly fading away. That activist tradition has given way to megachurches and the self-centered theology of prosperity.

Harris (2012a) indicates that there are certain expectations of what black megachurches are supposed to be doing to address racial inequality. These expectations of activism, particularly protesting and boycotting, are based on what a minority of black churches did during the Civil Rights Movement. Harris' statement exemplifies the concern with the decline of activism and a prophetic, social justice-oriented, theology that is alleged to be occurring simultaneously with the growth of megachurches and prosperity gospel[5]. This quote is also exemplary of the tendency to place black churches in a binary of either being resistant to the status quo or accommodative to the status quo. Overall, many of the scholarly remarks about megachurches remain negative and are not based on empirical research[6].

These scholarly criticisms mirror journalistic criticisms that tend to paint all black megachurches as being alike (Rivera 2002; Harris 2012a; Williams 2014). Yet, this myth of sameness tends to be based on a small number of the largest megachurches that garner the most attention such as The Potter's House pastored by T.D. Jakes or Windsor Village United Methodist church pastored by Kirbyjon Caldwell (Thumma and Travis 2007). Although black megachurches are often criticized in popular

[5] The most recent example of this perspective is the documentary "Black Church, Inc.," which assumes that all black megachurches are concerned with material prosperity and alleges that "black megachurches have caused the black church to lose its prophetic voice."

[6] It is important to note that Harris (2012a) makes claims (without findings to support them) about megachurches and prosperity gospel that treat the two as interchangeable when they are not. There are black megachurches, such as Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, IL, which preach a theology of black liberation.

conversations for what they fail to do, black megachurches remain relatively understudied by academics (Barnes 2010b).

Academic and non-academic expectations of what black megachurches should be doing to address racial inequality both rely on an idealized framework of the protests and boycotts done by some churches during the Civil Rights Movement. This obscures what black megachurches may be doing now to address contemporary racism. The changing nature of racism in this post-Civil Rights, colorblind, time period coincides with the decline in collective racial protest, or what some scholars consider the activist or prophetic wing, of black churches. Just as the overt racism of the Civil Rights era shifted to the hidden and often invisible forms of contemporary racism, the ways in which blacks address and resist racism might demonstrate similar shifts. Examining how contemporary black megachurches address racial inequality may prove useful to both popular and academic audiences.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate how black megachurches understand and respond to contemporary forms of racial inequality. Other social scientists have studied black megachurches, however they often fail to provide a critical analysis of how black churches understand and address contemporary racial inequality and they tend to rely on the perspective of pastors. For example, Barnes (2010a) examines 16 black megachurches to analyze how cultural tools found in worship and theology impact how they instruct congregants to model success. This study ends with a number of race-related queries that I intend to address in my study such as how church programs

may change in an alleged post-racial age. Hinton (2011) conducts a case study of two black megachurches and argues that they are not in line with what she calls the "historic black church" because they reinforce an individualistic understanding of social problems. Hinton's study relies on a simplistic understanding of the black church as a contrast for her megachurch case studies. In the most extensive study of black megachurches to-date, Tucker-Worgs (2011) evaluates how theology, organization of community development initiatives, and gender-based spheres of labor and leadership affect the various ways black megachurches engage the public sphere. This study explicitly focuses on black megachurches with community development organizations (CDOs), which not all megachurches have.

While these studies provide important insights into black megachurches in the U.S., none of these studies specifically looks at how these churches understand and address contemporary racial inequality. Nor do any of these studies move beyond an investigation of the pastors to include the perspectives of congregants who comprise the population of black megachurches. Although Barnes (2010a) explicitly explores religious culture and Tucker-Worgs (2011) does so through her exploration of the influence of theology on public engagement, neither uses this theoretical framework to explore how black megachurches make sense of racial inequality. This omission is important for two reasons. First, understandings of racial inequality shape strategies individuals believe should be taken to respond to it (Bobo and Kluegel 1993). Therefore, it is important to study understandings of racial inequality in order to make sense of the ways in which black churches address it. Second, previous studies have lumped black Protestant denominations together with the expectation that their

racialized experience in the U.S. would create similar racial attitudes regardless of differences in denomination and religious culture (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Shelton and Emerson 2012). Yet, studies have noted that denominational affiliation—which is an aspect of religious culture—is an important determinant for churches' public engagement activities (Hunt and Hunt 1977; Baer 1988; Tucker-Worgs 2011). Aggregating black Protestant denominations as if they are the same leads to an assumption of monolithic racial attitudes which prohibits exploration of whether or not these monolithic attitudes are true and how differences in religious culture, such as prayer, songs, and sermons, may influence understandings of and responses to racial inequality.

The objective of this dissertation is to improve our knowledge of how black megachurches understand and address issues of contemporary racial inequality. This includes explaining how both church leaders and congregants interpret racial inequality and what role the Black Church should have in addressing it. More specifically this dissertation will also take into account how religious culture may affect both the explanations of and the types of strategies black megachurches use to address racial inequality.

Research Questions

This study asks the following research questions that seek to investigate the explanations and solutions black megachurches offer for contemporary racial inequality in the United States. The primary research question is: *What are the*

explanations of and solutions to contemporary racial inequality offered by black megachurch leaders and attendees? This study also seeks to answer the following sub-question: *What role does religious culture play in accounting for these explanations and solutions?*

This research utilizes a case study approach of three black megachurches in Washington, D.C.—one Baptist, one Pentecostal, and one nondenominational. I perform three qualitative data collection methods: (1) semi-structured interviews with church leaders and congregants; (2) content analysis of church documents; and (3) participant observation of church worship services.

Significance

This dissertation contributes to the academic study of religion in the U.S. by exploring the simultaneous and reciprocal relationship between religion and race. A long line of literature, starting with W.E.B. Du Bois, has considered the role of black churches in black communities. Much of this literature focuses on social protests, such as that during the Civil Rights Movement, as a measure of how black churches address racial inequality. By moving away from expectations rooted in the protests of the Civil Rights Movement, this study allows for a broader understanding of how churches are responding to contemporary racial inequality. Using an idealized version of the past to dictate the present, scholars could miss the ways black megachurches may be addressing racial inequality that may not take the form of traditional protesting. In this alleged post-racial period racism is far more likely to be covert and be revealed in racial

disparities that are often blamed on individuals rather than systemic inequality. As institutions that have more resources than smaller congregations, scholars who are interested in race and religion should consider if and how black megachurches respond to inequalities that plague black communities and in what ways religious culture translates into various strategies to address racial inequality or maintain the status quo.

Additionally, scholars have made claims about the conservative implications of the growth of megachurches and various forms of prosperity gospel for black political mobilization and blacks' political attitudes (Harrison 2005; Lee 2005; Mamiya 2006; Harris-Lacewell 2007; Hinton 2011). These claims remain untested. In addition to moving away from the limitations of relying on "activism" as a measure of black political mobilization and responses to racial inequality, this study will utilize interviews with congregants that will investigate their racial attitudes in order to test whether or not the claims of increasing conservatism are true.

Lastly, this research will also provide insight into the views of people who attend megachurches. Previous empirical studies of black megachurches have only focused on clergy and omit the attendees of megachurches because black clergy are considered to be particularly influential (Barnes 2010b; Tucker-Worgs 2011). While pastors in black megachurches are often influential, congregants are not passive recipients of church teachings. Furthermore, if there is a belief that black megachurches are overwhelmingly concerned with prosperity and do not care about racial inequality, then assumptions are made about the attendees of these churches that may or may not be true. The validity of these assumptions cannot be tested without interviewing the attendees of these churches.

This dissertation also holds significance for a broader, non-academic audience. First, the media exposure of a small selection of megachurches has led to a general mischaracterization of all megachurches. While this is a case study and it cannot generalize to all black megachurches, it does provide in-depth analysis of three megachurches that can improve our understandings of these relatively understudied institutions. Second, the government views religious institutions as vital components of local communities and creates partnerships with congregations to address social problems. Since the establishment of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives during the presidency of George W. Bush and its reconceptualization as the Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships under the presidency of Barack Obama, there has been a plethora of literature on church-government partnerships. Sometimes criticized as an infringement on the separation between church and state, these partnerships are nevertheless important for policymakers because the purpose of these initiatives are to strengthen the capacity of religious institutions to provide federally-funded social services. Additionally, churches are increasingly being relied on to provide services in the absence of state welfare. For example, President Obama's "My Brother's Keeper" Initiative, discussed in Chapter 3, relies on the private sector, such as businesses and religious institutions, to provide mentorship, support networks, and skills for young men of color. Due to their size and resources, black megachurches are in positions to receive federal funding for social services they may already have in place. For that reason, this dissertation may be useful to both black megachurches and policymakers who are interested in how

religious institutions can help address the consequences of contemporary racial inequality.

Organization of Dissertation

This chapter introduces my study of how black megachurches interpret and respond to contemporary racial inequality. In Chapter 2, I present two theoretical approaches—religious culture and critical race theory—to provide a framework for how black megachurches might understand and respond to contemporary racial inequality. I specifically examine how religious culture influences racial attitudes. However, the limitation of this literature is that denominational differences, which are indicators of religious culture, are not accounted for and limit our understanding of how differences in religious culture can create nuances in racial attitudes. Critical race theory addresses some of the limitations of the religious culture literature. By connecting racial attitudes back to a larger system of racial domination, critical race theory accounts for power and explains how the contemporary racial ideology is hegemonic and could result in blacks holding both individual and structural racial attitudes. While critical race theory provides an excellent analysis of contemporary racial inequality and the ideology used to justify it, it falls short in that it does not address the role of religious institutions in addressing contemporary racial inequality. Taken together, these two theoretical approaches provide a unique perspective of how black megachurches understand and address contemporary racial inequality.

In Chapter 3, I explore the social science debate on the role of the Black Church as being either accommodative to the status quo, resistant to the status quo, or both simultaneously. I argue that the accommodative/resistant binary used to categorize the Black Church is limiting for three reasons: first, it misrepresents the complex history of black churches; second, it ignores how churches may move within that binary due to social and historical circumstances; and third, binaries create a hierarchy in which one category is assigned a higher value than the other. Second, I historically situate the function of the Black Church in addressing racial inequality from the Invisible Institution of slavery to megachurches of the present. Finally, I address arguments that oppose the public engagement of black churches. While I will not argue that black churches are the best or only institutions to address racial inequality, I assert that they should remain engaged in the public sphere for two reasons: first, black churches are operating in the *absence* of state welfare rather than as an *alternative* to it and second, black churches are among the few institutions providing race-specific remedies that have been abandoned in a colorblind era.

In Chapter 4, I describe the methodology, data sources, and data analysis procedures.

In Chapter 5, I explain how the first of three black megachurches in this study understand and address racial inequality. I argue that individuals at Community Baptist simultaneously express individual and structural explanations for contemporary racial inequality. The religious culture of Community Baptist Church supports both individual and structural explanations of racial inequality, and also shapes understandings of the role of the Black Church in addressing racial inequality. While

the religious culture of Community Baptist Church also has some influence on the ways in which they address racial inequality other factors, such as a loss of human and economic resources, also impact the strategies used to address contemporary racial inequality.

In Chapter 6, I argue that, like Community Baptist Church, individuals at Mt. Sinai Pentecostal Church simultaneously express individual and structural explanations for contemporary racial inequality. Because the religious culture of Mt. Sinai emphasizes holiness, leaders and attendees tend to believe that the Black Church should address racial inequality by focusing on the message of the Bible. Although religious culture impacts how this megachurch addresses racial inequality, other factors such as gentrification also shape strategies to intervene in racial inequality.

In Chapter 7, I argue that, just as in the previous two churches, individuals at House of Joy Nondenominational Church simultaneously express individual and structural explanations for contemporary racial inequality. Because the religious culture of House of Joy emphasizes positive thought and confession, leaders and attendees tended to believe that the Black Church should address racial inequality by helping individuals improve themselves and become self-sufficient. Although religious culture impacts how this megachurch addresses racial inequality, other factors such as lack of resources also shape House of Joy's strategy to implement programs rather than provide temporary hand-outs.

In Chapter 8, I present an overview of findings, discuss the contributions and limitations of the study, and suggest questions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: Theoretical Approaches

In the previous chapter I argued that scholars of race and ethnic relations tend to exclude any measures of religion in their examinations of black life in America (e.g., Omi and Winant 1994; Bobo 2004; Bonilla-Silva 2010). Although an increasing number of scholars of religion acknowledge the importance of religion in addressing racism in the United States, they tend to focus on how religious traditions account for differences in blacks' political attitudes and/or behaviors (e.g., Harris 1994; Calhoun-Brown 1998; Brown and Brown 2003; Brown 2009). In short, the sociological discourse has been limited in its exploration of how the Black Church[7] shapes understandings of and responses to racial inequality in the United States.

In order to explore the patterns of how black megachurches respond to contemporary racial inequality I will review two main subjects of scholarship. First, I examine literature on religious culture and how religious culture impacts racial attitudes. The literature on religious culture explains how individuals use religious tools to interpret reality and how those tools help motivate action. The sociological literature on racial attitudes explains how individuals interpret racial inequality as well as how they think it should be addressed. Thus, religious culture will provide a framework for understanding how leaders and attendees of black megachurches interpret contemporary racial inequality using the religious tools and how those tools also inform their responses to contemporary racial inequality. Although this literature will provide

[7] I use "the Black Church" in the same vein as Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) to refer to the shared historical origins and culture among churches belonging to the historically black denominations. My goal is not to assume that the Black Church is a monolith, but rather to highlight the difference between a collective of institutions with a common sociohistorical identity and individual churches that have a predominately black membership, but may not share that sociohistorical identity.

a framework for understanding how black megachurches account for contemporary racial inequality, which in turn may affect the solutions offered, there are a number of limitations. First, the literature on racial attitudes uses a binary categorization of individual and structural that does not allow for the presence of both types of these racial attitudes simultaneously. The result is that blacks are categorized as having only structural racial attitudes. Second, when a religious culture approach is used to examine racial attitudes among black Protestants, denominational differences are not taken into account. The assumption is that regardless of denominational differences, blacks will have structural racial attitudes. Because denominational differences are indicators of differences in religious culture, we are limiting our understanding of how differences in religious culture can create nuances in racial attitudes. As I will argue in Chapters 5-7, leaders and attendees at each of the three churches in my study expressed *both* structural *and* individual racial attitudes, and the religious culture of each church helped shape these racial attitudes. Therefore, it is important that studies of religious culture and racial attitudes account for denominational differences among black Protestants.

The second area of scholarship is critical race theory, which contributes an understanding of contemporary racism associated with the post-Civil Rights era. This literature informs my study by demonstrating how racism has changed since the Civil Rights period and continues to produce similar outcomes as legalized Jim Crow in a covert and seemingly non-racial manner. Understanding this contemporary form of racism sheds light on what black megachurches are faced with addressing and the difficulties in doing so. Critical race theory also addresses the limitations of racial attitudes literature. By connecting racial attitudes to a larger system of racial

domination, critical race theory accounts for power and explains how contemporary racial ideology is hegemonic and could result in blacks holding both individual and structural racial attitudes. While critical race theory provides an excellent analysis of contemporary racial inequality and the ideology used to justify it, it falls short in that it does not address the role of religious institutions in addressing contemporary racial inequality, which is limiting given the historical role of religious institutions in both maintaining and challenging racial inequality. I will take each of these subjects in turn.

Religious Culture

Culture has traditionally been defined as a "shared way of life," which emphasizes group worldviews and behavior (Geertz 1973; Weber 1930, 1946). Swidler (1986:273) defines culture as "symbolic vehicles of meaning, including beliefs, ritual practices, art forms and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural practices such as language, gossip, stories and rituals of daily life." These symbolic vehicles of meaning provide a "tool kit" that individuals use in a variety of ways to interpret social reality and solve problems.

Recently, the sociology of religion has been increasingly influenced by a cultural approach. Edgell (2012) posits that this emphasis on cultural analysis is caused by dissatisfaction with market and secularization approaches to religion, particularly when they do not explain recent developments in religion[8]. Previously, the sociology

[8] An extensive discussion of market and secularization theories is outside of the scope of this project, however I will provide a brief explanation of them. Market theorists of religion argue that modernity facilitates religious privatization, pluralism, and voluntarism, and competition among religious groups increases the supply of religious products. Market theory, sometimes called rational choice theory, has

of culture and the sociology of religion have ignored each other, partly because of the ambiguity in defining culture. Nevertheless, recent developments in the sociology of culture have shifted culture from the realm of art, and areas, such as politics and organizations, are now being studied as cultural that previously have not been (Williams 1996). Sociologists of religion that take a cultural approach see religion as a "source of particular kinds of cultural objects, actions, and resources that are mobilized, interpreted and manipulated in a variety of institutional settings for a variety of purposes" (Williams 1996:3).

By paying attention to how individuals use culture and how cultural elements moderate patterns of action, Swidler's (1986) argument allows scholars of religion to identify what religio-cultural elements are most effective in interpreting reality and achieving desired results. A congregation's culture includes its history, symbols, artifacts, rituals, and worldview (Ammerman 1998). The culture of a congregation is shaped by its theological tradition, the outside culture people bring to the congregation (e.g., race, class, region), and local creativity. However, Wood's (2002) study of faith-based organizations shows that religious culture, though linked to congregations, can also exist in organizations that are independent of congregations.

Religious culture can be both implicit or abstract and explicit or concrete. Individuals can refer to explicit cultural resources, such as church architecture or forms of worship,

been criticized for an inability to explain people's religious preferences (Edgell 2005). For example, culture, gender, and class play a role in religious experiences but rational choice theory does not account for this. Secularization theory was the dominant framework for understanding religion until the late twentieth century (Edgell 2012). In contrast to market theory, secularization theory argues that with modernization the significance of religion would decline. However, secularization has a number of uses, and some scholars such as, Shiner (1967), Hadden (1987), and Stark (1999) argue that this allows secularization scholars to continue to shift definitions in order to escape contrary data.

as an explanation for past action and future behavior (Kniss 1996; Williams 2005). Alternatively, the influence of cultural resources can be more implicit, yet very influential in "defining the mental and meaning parameters within which things make sense, or as beliefs and assumptions that guide actions even if actors themselves are only dimly aware of their influence" (Williams 2005:104). The distinction between implicit and explicit religious culture has been highlighted by literature that examines the relationship between religion, politics, and power and how religious culture can be used to both challenge and maintain the status quo. For example, explicit religio-cultural tools such as baptism and songs have been used to popularize liberation theology and oppose military intervention in Central America (Nepstad 1996). Religio-cultural tools of monistic corporatism have also been used abstractly to justify the status quo and discourage democratization efforts in Latin America (Smith 1994).

Religious Culture and Black Churches

Black Church attendees have developed tools such as rituals, songs, sayings, and biblical stories to help them interpret both everyday events such as poverty and discrimination, as well as historical events such as slavery (Marx 1967; Wilmore 1971; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Barnes 2005). Several scholars claim that religious culture in the Black Church facilitates social and political activism. In her seminal ethnographic study, Patillo-McCoy (1998) analyzes how Black Church cultural tools such as prayer, call-and-response, songs, and Christian imagery facilitate activism among community groups in a black neighborhood in Chicago. Because these tools were culturally familiar to black residents, and therefore implicit, they provided a common blueprint or language for social action. To illustrate, prayers focused not on

individual salvation, but rather the needs of the family, the neighborhood, and blacks as a racial group; further, politicians used call-and-response to elicit support from residents and songs to suggest that God was supportive of their efforts. Williams (2004) draws on archival and interview data to explore how the religious culture of the Black Church not only cultivated the civil rights activism of black women in Arkansas, but also provided legitimacy for their activism. Building on Higginbotham's (1993) work about black churchwomen, Williams (2004) finds that the church work and religious beliefs of black women cultivated commitment and activist identities, which in turn were transferred to various organizing tasks and instilled a sense of responsibility to help the movement progress. Although research on black church religious culture and activism tends to be qualitative, Barnes (2005) quantitatively tests the relationship between black church cultural tools—scripture, songs, prayers, and sermons—and activism. She finds that churches that incorporate gospel music are more likely to sponsor substance abuse programs, churches that have prayer groups are more likely to sponsor food pantries, and churches with sermons that focus on social justice are more likely to sponsor voter registration programs. Her findings support previous qualitative research that highlights the importance of Black Church cultural tools for community activism. Building on the foundation of Swidler's (1986) work, these studies demonstrate how black church cultural tools such as prayer, call-and-response, songs, and sermons can help provide individuals with a framework to interpret events and develop agreed-upon strategies of action.

Most recently, a few scholars have begun to examine the culture of black megachurches. Black megachurch culture overlaps with black church cultural tools, but

is also composed of distinct elements such as greater acceptance of female ministers, less emphasis on denominational affiliation, advocating personal empowerment, dynamic worship with live music, the incorporation of technology, increasing professionalism, charismatic leadership and cafeteria-style programs (Lee 2005; Barnes 2010a; Walton 2011). Barnes (2010a) applies Swidler's (1986) cultural toolkit argument to black megachurches and in her sample of 16 black megachurches, she finds that black megachurch cultural tools such as scripture, sermons, and worship are used to socialize members for success. To demonstrate, sermons and songs remind attendees at some of the black megachurches in her study of their inherent worth and that they should expect positive results in their lives if they prioritize God and Christian living. While Tucker-Worgs (2011) does not use a religious culture approach, her work provides insights about black megachurch cultural tools and how they facilitate public engagement. She reveals that because black megachurches have a range of theological orientations, which are part of the religious culture of congregations, there will be variations in the type and intensity of public engagement of black megachurches. Tucker-Worgs (2011) develops five theological orientations and finds that black theology and prophetic theology inspire public engagement while prosperity theology and nondenominationalism depress public engagement. While these studies provide important insights, this cultural framework has yet to be utilized to explore the relationship between individuals' understandings of racial inequality and the religious culture of black megachurches. Based on this literature, I argue that these cultural tools may vary across megachurches and therefore result in different understandings of and responses to racial inequality.

Religious Culture and Racial Attitudes

Racial attitudes refer to evaluations about respondents' beliefs and explanations for racial inequality and thereby solutions to racial inequality (Schuman, Steeh, and Bobo 1985). For example, a common racial attitude question is: "On the average, blacks have worse jobs, income, and housing than white people. Do you think these differences are: (1) because most blacks have less inborn ability to learn?; (2) because most blacks just don't have the motivation or willpower to pull themselves up out of poverty?; (3) because most blacks don't have the chance for education that it takes to rise out of poverty?; (4) mainly due to discrimination?" While the first two responses are indicative of individualistic explanations, the second two are indicative of structural explanations. Racial attitudes tend to be categorized into a dichotomy of individualism on one side—where people are responsible for their own fate, and structuralism on the other side—the way our society's institutions are organized creates opportunities for some while denying them to others. Also, because the overwhelming majority of racial attitudes literature is quantitative, and relies on binary answers, it does not allow for nuances in individuals' racial attitudes (Bonilla-Silva 2003). The literature on racial attitudes overwhelmingly suggests that while whites tend to rely on individual explanations for racial inequality, blacks tend to rely on structural explanations (for examples see Kluegel 1990; Sigelman and Welch 1991; Hunt 1997; Schuman, Steeh, Bobo and Krysan 1997). Blacks also tend to be more supportive of racial policies (e.g., affirmative action) while whites tend to be more supportive of nonracial policies (e.g., social security) (Bobo 2001). Although binaries are useful heuristic tools for understanding racial attitudes, the limitation is that these binary categorizations do not

allow for the existence of both types of racial attitudes simultaneously. Racial attitudes are significant to this study because they are indicative of explanations of racism, which in turn are indicative of the solutions black megachurch leaders and attendees offer for contemporary racial inequality.

Although blacks continue to overwhelmingly rely on structural explanations, emerging research shows that there has been a shift in blacks' racial attitudes. Over time, blacks have begun to shift from structural explanations (e.g., discrimination or prejudice) to individual explanations (e.g., lack of individual motivation) (Hunt 2007; Price 2009; Nunnally and Carter 2012; Shelton and Greene 2012). In other words, blacks are becoming more likely to place blacks themselves at fault for failing to keep pace socially and economically with whites and other minorities; or, what Price (2009) refers to as "black blame." In spite of this emerging trend, the reasons behind it are not fully understood. Smith (2014), one of the few scholars who seeks to explain this shift, suggests it is due to both changing times, or period effects, and generational differences, or cohort effects. As I will explain in the following section, critical race theorists would attribute the shift to the normalizing power of our contemporary racial ideology that employs "black blame."

Numerous factors such as class, religion, gender, and socializing agents such as family and the media can potentially influence blacks' racial attitudes. However, with the exception of class (Shelton and Greene 2012) and religion (Marx 1967; Hunt 2007), scholars have generally examined other factors as control variables rather than explanatory variables. Based on the studies outlined above that have examined how religious culture has influenced political action, we should also consider how religious

culture influences racial attitudes. Studies examining religious culture and racial attitudes have generally used religious denominations to operationalize religious culture. Given the importance of religious denominations in the social and political life of blacks, sociologists have paid attention to religious denominations as a means through which religious culture shapes racial attitudes among blacks. Denominations refer to "the concrete national religious organizations to which congregations may have formal ties" (Chaves 2004:22). In general, individuals do not directly become members of denominations (Chaves 2004). Rather, they become members of congregations that are affiliated with denominations. To illustrate, an individual does not join the African Methodist Episcopal denominational convention; rather, they join a congregation affiliated with this denomination. Denominational affiliation also provides insights about aspects of a congregation's religious culture such as rituals, worldview, and history.

Studies by sociologists of religion have established significant racial differences among black and white Protestants regarding how denominational differences shape racial attitudes. Emerson and Smith (2000) argue that white evangelicals use religio-cultural tools to make sense of race relations. They tend to interpret racial inequality using accountable freewill individualism (belief in equal opportunities), relationism (attaching central importance to interpersonal relationships), and anti-structuralism (inability to perceive or accept social structural influences), which leads to minimizing racism and a rejection of structural explanations. However, white evangelicals who are less isolated from blacks modify

their cultural tools in a way that their understandings of racism tend to be more structural and they are less likely to minimize racism.

Studies have also consistently found that amongst black Protestants, denominational affiliations are not significant with respect to racial attitudes. Essentially the racialized experience of blacks in the U.S. has created a distinct religious experience and "a meaningfully different cultural form of expressing Christianity is found in most black churches, regardless of denomination, to this day" (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990:7). Exemplary of this is the "black sacred cosmos" thesis advanced by Lincoln and Mamiya (1990).

The black sacred cosmos consists of the religious worldview of blacks that has resulted from their African heritage and conversion to Christianity during and after slavery. While black and white Christians have the same belief structures, there are different degrees of emphasis on certain theological views (e.g., the focus on oppression and liberation in the Old Testament that parallels blacks' experiences of enslavement). This black sacred cosmos has cut across denominational lines creating a distinct Afro-Christian worldview. Shelton and Emerson (2012) confirm Lincoln and Mamiya's (1990) black sacred cosmos thesis. They conducted a mixed-methods study of faith-based similarities and differences between black and white Protestants and found that denominational affiliations appear more important in shaping religious identities among white Protestants than black Protestants. While denominational differences are meaningful to black Protestants, their racial identity tends to take precedence over individual denominational affiliations in shaping blacks' commitments to identity politics.

Yet, other scholarship has argued that denominational differences do matter. In their classic text, *The Negro's Church*, Mays and Nicholson ([1933]1969) argued black religion simultaneously reinforced and challenged racial inequality. Findings from their survey of black congregations revealed denominational differences explained this discrepancy since religious denominations, and the congregations affiliated with them, accounted for differences in how members understood the problems of race in the mid-twentieth century. Specifically, black denominations, their leaders, and members tended to deemphasize structural views and remedies in favor of an otherworldly theology. Contrarily, Hunt and Hunt (1977) state because black Baptist and Methodist denominations have developed mainly in response to discrimination by white churches, members of these denominations tend to have higher levels of racial solidarity and more support for militancy on racial issues.

Calhoun-Brown (1998) observes that in spite of the sociohistorical contexts out of which denominations are formed, and the fact that some denominations may be considered more otherworldly than others, few significant differences are found in black attendees' support for racial empowerment. In other words, denominational differences do not have a significant impact on racial attitudes. Similarly, Brown (2009) argues that a history of racial oppression has contributed to the development of a racial consciousness that supersedes denominational affiliation. He posits that blacks, regardless of denomination, are more likely to rely on structural explanations for racial inequality and support race-based policies. Furthermore, Brown (2009) states that denominational affiliation does not play a major role in the racial attitudes of nonblack racial minorities.

In summary, the literature on denominational differences and racial attitudes suggests that, unlike whites, the common experience of racial marginalization amongst blacks has led to the development of similar racial attitudes that do not significantly vary by denomination. However, additional evidence is needed before presuming that denominations do not influence black racial attitudes. First, proponents of the insignificance of religious denominations thesis tend to blur the lines between religious denominations. Rather than examining the differences amongst historically black Protestant denominations, they are all lumped together as if they comprise one denomination. In line with Sherkat (2002) I argue that the importance of denominational affiliation may be lost in the oversimplification of black racial attitudes and religious experiences. The literature on denominational differences and racial attitudes also does not, to my knowledge, account for blacks that are affiliated with nondenominational churches. In this changing black religious landscape of growing numbers of megachurches and declining populations in traditional denominations, the line of demarcation may no longer exist between various historically black denominations (e.g., Baptists or Methodists) but rather between historically black denominations and nondenominational black churches. Highlighting this, Tucker-Worgs (2011) establishes denominationalism vs. nondenominationalism as one of the four politico-theological continua that helps explain why some black megachurches engage in addressing challenges facing black communities while others do not. Her research shows that black megachurches affiliated with a denomination were more likely to participate in public engagement activities than nondenominational churches. Therefore, it is important to also test whether the negative relationship between

denominational affiliation and racial attitudes amongst blacks also exists amongst attendees of nondenominational black megachurches.

Second, a scarce amount of this research has been conducted in megachurches. Lee (2005) suggests that we have reached a time period in which the black religious landscape has dramatically shifted. The "old black church" which represents the traditional mainstream black Protestant churches faces competition from the emergence of the "new black church" which represents post-denominational black megachurches such as The Potter's House pastored by T.D. Jakes. This shift in the black religious landscape, which points to the rising importance of black megachurches, has also been confirmed by Tucker-Worgs (2011) who states that black megachurches are more likely to be nondenominational than black churches in general. Furthermore, many megachurches that are denominationally affiliated are what Thumma and Travis (2007) call "functionally nondenominational" meaning they have more in common nondenominational churches than churches in their denominations. Given the growing significance of black megachurches in the black religious landscape, black megachurches should become sites to test questions regarding racial attitudes and the black religious experience.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory is a vast and dynamic literature, and a review of all of this literature is beyond the scope of this chapter. However I will review some major theoretical components of the literature to explain the ideological justifications for contemporary racial inequality as well as seemingly race-blind institutional

mechanisms that perpetuate racial inequality. Critical race theory explains the position of racially marginalized groups from their perspective. Critical race theory begins with the notion that racism is a normal and deeply embedded part of U.S. society (Ladson-Billings 1998). Because racism is often implicit and may appear to be natural, the strategy of critical race theory is to unmask racism.

Critical race theory analyzes the subtle forms of racism in a post-Civil Rights era[9]. Scholars such as Bonilla-Silva (2010) mark the late 1960s as the time when the ideology of colorblindness began to gain popularity. Guinier and Torres (2002) identify three rules that govern colorblindness: (1) race is reduced to pigmentation and is removed from social status, history, and power; (2) noticing race is the same as subscribing to biological differences; and (3) racism is a personal problem that is a result of bigoted individuals rather than a system of power. The language of the Civil Rights Movement even justifies a colorblind view of society. The goal is to have a society where race is irrelevant and each individual is judged "by the content of their character." Racism is considered to be a problem of the past. Any vestiges of racism that still exist are thought to be the result of individual bigoted attitudes. The apparent remedy to this form of racism is individual education to change prejudiced attitudes and protest marches are no longer needed. This adulterated definition of racism

[9] Scholars of race use a variety of terms to refer to contemporary racism. Bobo (2004) calls contemporary racism "laissez-faire racism." Collins (2005, 2009) uses both "new racism" and "colorblind racism" to designate contemporary racial inequality. Wise (2009) calls contemporary racism "racism 2.0." However, regardless of the label employed, the point is to recognize the distinctions between the way racism operates in a pre- and post-Civil Rights era. For the purposes of this paper I will use the term "colorblind racism" in line with the scholarship of Collins (2009) and Bonilla-Silva (2010).

conceals the fact that racism is embedded in social structures and is a *system* of power and not just *personal* prejudicial acts and attitudes.

The belief that racism is an individual problem makes it difficult to mount a collective resistance against it as was done during the Civil Rights Movement. Bonilla-Silva (2010) argues that whereas Jim Crow racism relied on biological and moral arguments to explain blacks' social standing, the ideology of colorblind racism justifies the racial hierarchy by relying on blacks' cultural limitations, natural tendencies among groups, and market dynamics. Colorblind racism is a "blame the victim" ideology that relies on stereotypes of blacks as lazy or culturally degenerate. The problem is not racism, but rather lies with blacks that allegedly do not work hard enough or take personal responsibility for improving their own lives. The priority placed on the individual by colorblind racism means that eliminating racism on behalf of whites and bettering the lives of blacks will depend on autonomous individuals. Bobo (2004) uses the term "laissez-faire racism," to highlight a racist ideology that emphasizes the group culture and individual choices of blacks. Bonilla-Silva (2010) employs "abstract liberalism" to describe a similar ideology that uses ideas associated with classical liberalism, such as equal opportunity, and economic liberalism, such as choice and individualism, to ignore structural inequality and oppose affirmative action measures[10]. Importantly, Bonilla-Silva (2010) argues that this ideology is hegemonic and even racial minorities have to accommodate their views vis-à-vis this dominant ideology. He

[10] Bonilla-Silva (2010) offers four frames of colorblind racism: (1) abstract liberalism (explained above); (2) naturalization (explaining racial occurences as due to personal perferences and therefore natural); (3) cultural racism (relying on cultural explanations to explain the standing of minorities); and (4) minimization of racism (arguing that discrimination is no longer a primary factor in determining life chances for racial minorities).

finds that blacks in his study were likely to subscribe to abstract liberalism, yet, at times respondents relied on *both* abstract liberalism *and* understandings of blacks' standing to be a result of discrimination.

While the majority of racial attitudes literature highlights the more structural orientation of blacks compared to whites and categorizes racial attitudes in an individual/structural binary, based on research by critical race scholars such as Bonilla-Silva (2010), I argue that a critical race theory approach may help us understand how racial minorities would subscribe to the dominant racial ideology and simultaneously express both individual and structural racial attitudes. Critical race theory helps explain the racial ideology that shapes individual's racial attitudes. Whereas all groups have the ability to develop racial ideologies, the racial ideology of the dominant group forms everyone's positions either supporting or refuting the dominant ideology. The contemporary racial ideology supports racial inequality in a very indirect manner and relies on ideals of individualism rather than older forms of racial ideologies that relied on beliefs in biological inferiority. As Bonilla-Silva (2003:67) explains:

> [T]he new, post-civil rights racial ideology incorporated many of the ideas endorsed by racial minorities in the 'sixties (equal opportunity for all, eradication of racist statements as illegitimate in public discourse, censorship of racist views on the supposed biological-moral character of blacks, etc.) but in a *hegemonic* way, that is, by including them in a manner that does not threaten white supremacy.

Racial ideologies are flexible and contain contradictions because they can represent the interests of the dominant group while allowing for themes from subordinate groups. Because the dominant racial ideology normalizes racial inequality and portrays the

view of the dominant group as universal, we should expect that blacks will express racial attitudes that reveal a structural understanding of racism yet simultaneously rely on elements of the dominant racial ideology such as stereotypes of laziness or explaining racial occurrences in a non-racial way. However, if we continue to rely on quantitative and binary measures of racial attitudes then these nuances will be overlooked.

The ideological justifications for colorblind racism have been accompanied by seemingly colorblind institutional mechanisms that perpetuate racial inequalities while appearing to promote equal opportunities. Formal equality and the appearance of progress, such as the growth of the black middle class, have done little to disrupt the institutional reproduction of racial inequality. Collins (1998) describes the sophisticated strategies of institutional racism that operate within the boundaries of formal American citizenship as a "new politics of containment" and yields the same result of keeping blacks on the bottom of the social hierarchy. For example, black and white children are entitled to equal educations through public schools but rarely experience that as a result of residential segregation, which directly impacts the quality of education schools provide (Kozol 1991, 2005), and tracking within schools which serves as a form of internal segregation (Tyson 2011). Schools may appear to be colorblind, equal opportunity institutions that only require hard work and dedication from students, but in actuality they reproduce racial inequalities (Collins 2009). Yet, structural racism such as that perpetuated by educational institutions is believed to be defunct because it is illegal. This same institutional inequality exists with virtually all measures of well-being. Just to name a few of these measures, blacks earn lower

salaries than whites (Grodsky and Pager 2001), black families are less likely than white families to pass on their middle class status to their children (Issacs 2008), and black men are eight times more likely to be incarcerated than white men (Western and Wildeman 2009). In the face of these inequalities, the contemporary racial ideology is that with racism allegedly gone anyone can pull themselves up by their bootstraps and any racial inequalities that still exist are due to a lack of motivation on behalf of blacks. Race-conscious government programs designed to redress past inequalities, such as affirmative action, are being dismantled due to accusations of reverse-racism against whites. Indeed, while colorblind racism may not legally propagate racism, it sustains racial inequality the same way Jim Crow laws did.

Crenshaw (2011) contends that the election of Barack Obama has created a shift from colorblindness to post-racialism and that post-racialism has become the new vehicle for the colorblind agenda. She suggests that there are nuanced differences between colorblindness and post-racialism. While colorblindness came out of a context of elite institutions that used "merit" to rationalize its existence, post-racialism is identified with an electoral event where outcomes are determined by mass preferences. Under post-racialism, liberals and some civil rights advocates who may have rejected colorblindness may now celebrate particular racial outcomes (such as the election of Barack Obama) but simultaneously assert that significant progress can be made without race consciousness. Crenshaw (2011) demonstrates how Barack Obama has come to symbolize post-racialism by differentiating himself from race-conscious politicians

such as Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton[11]. Rather than a colorblind stance, Obama has strategically engaged race (e.g., his 2008 "A More Perfect Union" speech and "My Brother's Keeper Initiative") while simultaneously denying that it matters (e.g., his colorblind and universal approach to public policy and admonishment of black fathers in his 2010 Father's Day speech). Yet, the investment in the symbolic significance of the Obama presidency obscures entrenched racial inequality. "As post-racialism becomes the vehicle for a colorblind agenda, the material consequences of racial exploitation and social violence—including the persistence of educational inequity, the disproportionate racial patterns of criminalization and incarceration, and the deepening patterns of economic stratification—slide further into obscurity" (Crenshaw 2011:1327).

Critical Race Theory and Religion

Critical race theory has typically been used to examine education, health, and the legal system. Although religion has been used to both justify and challenge the racial order in the United States, it remains relatively absent from critical race theory literature. If the goal of critical race theory is to understand and solve contemporary racism then it would be informative to examine how religion and religious institutions aid in this project. While critical race theory has typically not been used to analyze the black religious experience, I argue that this framework can be used to understand how a religious worldview informs understandings of race and vice versa.

[11] During the 2008 election, Barack Obama admitted that he benefitted from the work of race-conscious politicians such as Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton, but he represented the new, and presumably less race-conscious, Joshua generation (Remnick 2008). The Joshua generation is a biblical metaphor that refers to the younger prophet that succeeded Moses after his death and led the Israelites into the Promised Land.

The potential connections between critical race theory and religion have been examined by Witherspoon and Mitchell (2009). Given the historical significance of religion in racial justice (see Chapter 3 for an explanation), Witherspoon and Mitchell (2009) suggest that there are overlaps between critical race theory's emphasis on making racism visible and womanist theology's use of moral and spiritual texts to interrogate oppression. In their study of black female principals they find these women use themes that are similar in both critical race theory and womanist theology, such as storytelling, social justice, and intersectionality, to respond to everyday instances of individual and systemic racism. The women in their study used religio-cultural tools in their narratives to make sense of and resist racism.

Rather than focusing on the similarities between tenets of critical race theory and racialized theologies, other scholars have used critical race theory to reexamine findings from *Divided by Faith*, Emerson and Smith's foundational work on religion and race in the post-Civil Rights era that was discussed above. Alumkal (2004) contends that Omi and Winant's racial formation theory provides tools for analyzing the development of racial discourses and practices in religious communities as racial projects[12]. Using racial formation theory Alumkal (2004) explains racial reconciliation theology's development in the late 1960s, its relationship to the civil rights and Black Power movements, its transformation into a conservative racial project in the 1990s, and its recent popularity among white evangelicals[13]. Additionally, Alumkal critiques

[12] Racial formation refers to "the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" and a racial project is "simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines" (Omi and Winant 1994:55-56).

[13] Racial reconciliation theology was developed by U.S. evangelicals as a solution to racial problems. "Proponents of this theology drew upon New Testament passages proclaiming that Jews and Gentiles

Emerson and Smith (2000) for their failure to use the tools of racial formation theory to explain how racial reconciliation theology was influenced by other systems of racial ideology (e.g., Emerson and Smith do not discuss how the Civil Rights and Black Power movements influenced post-civil rights racial reconciliation theology).

Tranby and Hartmann (2008) also critique Emerson and Smith's (2000) analysis in *Divided by Faith* using critical race theory. Although they agree with Emerson and Smith that an understanding of evangelical racial attitudes can reveal a lot about mainstream racial attitudes, Tranby and Hartmann (2008) believe that a critical race theory approach would provide greater insights to Emerson and Smith's findings. They argue that the individualistic ideals of the evangelical cultural toolkit and anti-black attitudes are more intertwined and mutually reinforcing than Emerson and Smith realize. It is not simply that white evangelicals believe in individualism, but following scholars like Bobo (2004) and Bonilla-Silva (2010), this individualism is really "laissez-faire" or "colorblind" racism that is justified with anti-black stereotypes. White evangelicals in Emerson and Smith's study used racial stereotypes to blame not individual blacks, but blacks as a group for their problems. Tranby and Hartmann (2008) contend that white evangelicals have hidden racialized assumptions about the structure of mainstream U.S. culture that marginalizes those who are not white and allows white evangelicals to legitimate the racial status quo. Because the norms and values that inform evangelical ideas of "American-ness" are implicitly white, non-

had become one body in Christ […] and argued that the same unity was possible for blacks and whites" (Alumkal 2004:198).

whites who demand increased recognition are considered a threat to those values and norms.

As outlined above, religious culture provides a framework for understanding how leaders and attendees of black megachurches interpret contemporary racial inequality using religio-cultural tools and how those tools also inform their responses to contemporary racial inequality. Yet, the literature on religious culture and racial attitudes generally does not account for denominational differences and limits our understanding of how differences in religious culture can create nuances in racial attitudes. Critical race theory demonstrates how racism has changed since the Civil Rights period and continues to produce similar outcomes as legalized Jim Crow in a covert and seemingly non-racial manner. Hence, critical race theory sheds light on what black megachurches are faced with addressing and the difficulties in doing so. Although critical race literature has extensively considered the nuances of racism in a post-civil rights period there is a gap in the literature with respect to how religion—specifically black churches—could address this contemporary racism. This is particularly important to consider because scholars have determined that religion influences black racial attitudes.

In the next chapter, I review the social science debate on the role of the Black Church as accommodative or resistant and explore debates about whether or not the Black Church should remain engaged in the public sphere.

CHAPTER 3: Whither Shall We Go?: The Past and Present of Black Churches and the Public Sphere

For over a century, scholars such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, Benjamin Mays, E. Franklin Frazier, C. Eric Lincoln, and others have studied the role of the Black Church[14] in the lives of African Americans. As the first institution created by and for African Americans, the Black Church has been considered "the social centre of Negro life in the United States" (DuBois [1903]2000:136) and a "refuge in a hostile world" (Frazier 1963:45). These positive characterizations notwithstanding, the role of the Black Church as understood by scholars has not been without contention. Some have considered the Black Church to be responsible for upholding the status quo of race, class, and gender oppression (Frazier 1963; Marx 1967; Reed 1986), while others have characterized the Black Church as liberatory and providing African Americans with the spiritual and social tools to challenge oppression (Cone 1968; Wilmore 1983; Morris 1984).

In this chapter I analyze the role of the Black Church in black communities—particularly as it relates to providing resources and opportunities in a racially unequal society. I argue that black churches, particularly black megachurches, are filling a gap created by the self-help ideology of a neo-liberal era where addressing the outcomes of contemporary racial inequality is left to private sector organizations, such as churches, rather than the federal government. I begin by explaining the social science debate on the role of the Black Church as being either accommodative to the status quo, resistant

[14] I use "the Black Church" in the same vein as Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) to refer to the shared historical origins and culture among churches belonging to the historically black denominations. My goal is not to assume that the Black Church is a monolith, but rather to highlight the difference between a collective of institutions with a common sociohistorical identity and individual churches that have a predominately black membership, but may not share that sociohistorical identity.

to the status quo, or both simultaneously. I argue that the accommodative/resistant binary used to categorize the Black Church is limiting for three reasons: 1) it misrepresents the complex history of black churches; 2) it ignores how churches may move within that binary due to social and historical circumstances; and 3) binaries create a hierarchy in which one category is assigned a higher value than the other. Second, I historically situate the function of the Black Church in addressing racial inequality from the Invisible Institution of slavery to megachurches of the present. Finally, I address arguments that oppose the public engagement of black churches. Here I define public engagement as activities that seek to improve social problems, including protest politics, electoral activism, and community development (Tucker-Worgs 2011). While I will not argue that black churches are the best or only institutions to address racial inequality, I will assert that they should remain engaged in the public sphere for two reasons: first, black churches are operating in the *absence* of state welfare rather than as an *alternative* to it and second, black churches are among the few institutions providing race-specific remedies that have been abandoned in a colorblind era.

Contradictory Institutions?: The Social Science Debate on the Role of Black Churches

Prior to the late 20th century, scholarship on the role of the black church fell into a dichotomy of seeing the role of black churches as being either an opiate or accommodative to the oppressive status quo, while on the other hand, liberatory and resistant to the status quo of oppression[15]. The accommodative half of the dichotomy

[15] Various scholars have used a range of terms to portray the accommodative/resistant dichotomy. For example, Marx (1967) uses the terms conservatism and radicalism, Nelsen and Nelsen (1975) use

refers to black churches that ignored or downplayed inequality and were influenced by and took part in white-dominated society (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Barnes 2013). These churches accepted the normative claims and practices of white society. For example, black churches during the Reconstruction era have been characterized as accommodative due to their acceptance of the prevailing Victorian standards of morality and calls for assimilation into white society. Numerous churches created temperance organizations to counter vices that presented stereotypical images of blacks to whites. The resistant half of the dichotomy refers to black churches that viewed Christianity as a mechanism for liberation, affirmed their black heritage, and challenged the status quo of inequality (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Barnes 2013). Historically, resistance has referred to protest, community action, and political involvement (Barnes 2013). For example, contrary to the narrative that the majority of black churches supported Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement, a minority of churches actually did so (Harvey 2011). For example, the minority of churches that broke off from the National Baptist Convention to join the newly formed Progressive National Baptist Convention illustrate the resistant side of the dichotomy. The Progressive National Baptist Convention was actively involved in the Civil Rights Movement, supported the Black Power Movement, and was one of the earliest groups to oppose the Vietnam War (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990).

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isolation and integration, Wilmore (1971) uses accommodation and opposition, Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) use accommodation and resistance, and Warnock (2014) uses the terms piety and protest. Although varied, each of these terms characterizes a dichotomy that is accepting of the status quo on one hand and challenging the status quo on the other. For the purposes of this paper, I will use the terms accommodative and resistant as they are the most recent and widely used terms.

Prior to the Civil Rights Movement, scholars tended to agree that religion did little to address racial inequality among blacks and that black churches were more accommodating than resistant. While W.E.B. Du Bois acknowledged the function of organized religion in black communities to provide a sense of community and shelter from racism in the outside world, he also observed how black churches could simultaneously uphold the status quo of race, class, and gender oppression (Zuckerman 2000). In *American Dilemma*, Myrdal (1944) stated that although some black ministers took part in protesting racism, on the whole black churches were conservative institutions and black ministers were lacking in education. E. Franklin Frazier was one of the harshest critics of the Black Church. In *The Negro Church in America*, Frazier blamed black churches for undermining intellectual thought as well as for the "so-called backwardness of American Negros" (Frazier 1963:86). It would only be through a process of secularization, whereby the Black Church lessens its otherworldly outlook and focuses more upon the social condition of blacks, that Frazier believed there would be the potential to address racial inequality.

While accommodation has a submissive tone of uncritical acceptance, it is important to question this one-dimensional characterization of accommodation. By assuming that accommodation can never be subversive, we neglect how black churches may have been more accommodative as a survival strategy. For example, black churches during the Reconstruction era have been characterized as accommodationist because of their emphasis on Victorian morality and assimilation into white society, symbolized by the language of "racial uplift" and self-help. Racial uplift involve moral, economic, social, and educational improvement, which overlapped with Victorian

morals that stressed self-discipline, low tolerance of crime, sexual restraint, and in general "respectable" (i.e., middle-class) behavior (Wheeler 1986). In many post-Civil War black churches, blacks were encouraged to abstain from alcohol and tobacco and become educated. On the one hand, this behavior upheld white, middle-class values and meant, "surrender to the concepts, principles, and ideals of the dominant society. On the other, uplift was a denial of what white society meant by accommodation, for it spoke of a possibility to move beyond the limits prescribed by the dominant society" (Wheeler 1986:xvii). By encouraging blacks to present themselves as citizens worthy of equal treatment, the seemingly accommodative behavior of some black churches actually challenged the dominant narrative that blacks were uncivilized and would never participate as equal members of the U.S. democracy. It is also important to note that in a context in which black churches faced violent consequences for challenging the status quo, such has church burnings and bombings[16], they "represented not an escapist and other-worldly orientation but the only viable bastion of a community under assault" (Higginbotham 1993:5).

Beginning with the Civil Rights Movement, scholars began to debate the accommodative role of black churches in addressing racial inequality. It is significant to note that this shift in the literature, and this particularly historical juncture, has shaped our contemporary narrative of the Black Church. Before this point—particularly before revisionist readings by present-day historians—scholars argued that the Black Church was primarily an accommodative institution. In other words, it was

[16] According to Soule and Van Dyke (1999), in the 1960s there were more than 300 church bombings in the U.S. and between 1989 and 1996 more than 200 black and multiracial churches were burned.

only about sixty years ago that scholars began to construct a narrative of the Black Church that countered accommodation. Yet, when critics of the Black Church's perceived lack of activism describe a prophetic history, there is an assumption that the Black Church has *always* been defined as a resistant institution and is now abandoning that lineage. This static account of resistance was not the case, and the result of this debate among scholars was a very contradictory assessment in which some scholars continued to argue that black churches were accommodative, while others argued they were liberatory. Marx (1967) posited that the Black church functions as an opiate that stifles public engagement. He found that an otherworldly focus tends to stifle civil rights militancy and traditionally black denominations (e.g., National Baptist Convention) were less militant than black churches in traditionally white denominations (e.g., Episcopalian). Revisiting the history of the Black Church in the U.S., theologian James Cone disputed the accommodationist thesis and suggested that liberation is central to the religious history of blacks. He declared, "Freedom and equality made up the central theme of the black church; and protest and action were the early marks of its uniqueness" (Cone 1969:94). Like Cone, Wilmore (1983) viewed black religion as inherently radical because of its preoccupation with liberation from oppression. In his analysis of the role of black churches during the Civil Rights Movement, Morris (1984:77) maintained that they provided organization and leadership to the Civil Rights Movement as well as "an ideological framework through which passive attitudes were transformed into collective consciousness supportive of collective action." Yet, the participation of some black churches in the Civil Rights Movement did not completely dismiss the accommodationist perspective. For example,

in *The Jesse Jackson Phenomenon*, Reed (1986) contested that instead of encouraging political mobilization black churches are by nature anti-political and more likely serve as a force of social control. It was not until the 1990s with the publication of Lincoln and Mamiya's *The Black Church in the African American Experience* that scholars began to recognize that the Black Church could function as *both* accommodative *and* resistant simultaneously, rather than as a dichotomy.

The accommodative/resistant binary used to describe the Black Church is quite limiting for three reasons: first, it misrepresents the complex history of black churches; second, it ignores how churches may move within that binary due to social and historical circumstances; and third, binaries create a hierarchy in which one category is assigned a higher value than the other. The Black Church is at times a contradictory institution with a complex history. Baer and Singer (2002) describe the complex nature of black churches that on the one hand exhibited an accommodative stance to racism by trying to shield blacks from a racist society and, on the other hand, a resistive stance by engaging in broader social change from the Abolition Movement to the Civil Rights Movement. For example, Booker T. Washington (1905:22) criticized the seemingly otherworldly nature of black religious life arguing that the Black Church "must be recalled from its apocalyptic vision back to the earth." Yet, in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* Scott (1990) discloses that during this time, slaves were creating subversive "hidden transcripts" that challenged their oppressed conditions. He describes a hidden transcript as any discourse or act that takes place beyond the observation of those in power that mocks, contradicts, or challenges those who hold power. The theology that enslaved blacks produced when they gathered together was a

hidden transcript that opposed their oppressed conditions. Scott (1990) also reveals that they created "public transcripts" that presented a meaning that would appear to support the status quo but actually had an entirely different and oppositional meaning. For example, spirituals such as "Steal Away to Jesus" or "Go Down Moses" may have appeared to whites as a fascination with heaven and the Bible that kept their slaves obedient, but they often had subversive meanings that slave owners did not realize. The lyrics "Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus. Steal away, steal away, steal away home. I ain't got long to stay here. My Lord He calls me" may, on the surface, appear to be a desire to be in heaven. However, these lyrics simultaneously communicate a message that encouraged slaves to flee their oppressive conditions.

A second limitation of the accommodative/resistant binary is that the historical dynamism of churches due to social and historical circumstances is missed (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). Interestingly, Booker T. Washington made this same critique over one century ago. In his article "The Religious Life of the Negro" Washington (1905:20) begins by stating:

> In everything that I have been able to read about the religious life of the Negro, it has seemed to me that writers have been too much disposed to treat of it as something fixed and unchanging. They have not sufficiently emphasized the fact that the Negro people, in respect to their religious life, have been, almost since they landed in America, in a process of change and growth.

The Black Church, as Washington noted, does not exist in a vacuum. It has always been in an interdependent relationship with the socio-political context of the time. For example, during the late 1960s the United States was experiencing the emerging Black Power Movement in the aftermath of simultaneous Civil Rights legislative victories and the assassinations of black political leaders. In this socio-political context, a very

radical orientation emerged from some black churches. While it reached its apogee with the writings of James Cone, black liberation theology was born out of a context of disillusionment with the Civil Rights Movement and continued race and class oppression. The context of this time period shaped a stance where some black pastors argued that churches could not separate religion and black liberation. While not all black churches subscribed to black liberation theology, its emergence was influenced by the socio-political context. Therefore it is misleading to say that the Black Church has *always* been accommodative or resistant because the Black Churches does not exist in a static context.

The final limitation of the accommodative/resistant binary is that it creates a hierarchy in which one category is assigned a more positive value than another and allows scholars to transmit their own perspectives. Walton (2009) uses Benjamin Elijah Mays and Joseph William Nicholson's *The Negro Church* as an example of how binary categories can create a hierarchal order.

> Hence their binary categorizations such as otherworldly versus this-worldly, compensatory versus instrumentalist, praise oriented versus protest oriented, and resistant versus accommodationist were innately tied to the implicit assumption that black Christian congregations, in their best manifestations, were socially active and politically progressive, the marks of a civilized and sophisticated faith. (Walton 2009:27)

Scholars who previously criticized the Black Church for an overly accommodative role did so with the perspective that resistant was the more favorable aspect of the binary, the only acceptable way to address racial inequality, and represented the paradigmatic Black Church. Yet, these either/or categories are not mutually exclusive. Therefore, a

binary categorization leaves no room for black churches to be both accommodative and resistant.

Binaries are expressions of power in that the more positive side of the dichotomy is identified with the socially dominant group (Collins 2000). For instance, feminist scholars have critiqued the reason/emotion dichotomy in which men are defined as rational against women who are defined as emotional (Gatens 1991; Prokhovnik 2002). This dichotomy then translates into unequal power relations. Furthermore, categories in dichotomies are dependent upon each other in order to have meaning. For example, race scholars have argued that the black/white dichotomy operates as a paradigm that shapes our understandings of race (Perea 1997; Delgado and Stefancic 2012; Vargas-Vargas 2014). This dichotomy not only provides meaning to the categories in it (i.e., white is defined as that which black is not), but it also proves limiting in our ability to include other categories (e.g., race theory has faced increasing criticism for using the black/white paradigm as representative of the experiences of all people of color (Perea 1997; Alumkal 2004)). An accommodationist understanding of the Black Church is informed by a resistant understanding of the Black Church because they are always defined in contrast to each other. If a resistant church is characterized by social and political activism and an affirmation of black racial identity, then an accommodative church is characterized as lacking that. Binaries allow for neat, mutually exclusive, categorizations even if the categories are not very neat in reality. In general, the Black Church has always defied binary categorization, simultaneously

challenging oppressive conditions while supporting them—at times even perpetuating oppression such as sexism and heterosexism within their congregations[17].

More recent studies have moved beyond the simplistic binary of the role of the Black Church in addressing racial inequality as either liberatory or accommodationist. In their seminal work, *The Black Church and the African American Experience*, Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) suggest six dialectical models that represent the simultaneous tensions that exist in black churches as agents of change or keepers of the status quo. Dialectical tensions hold two "polar opposites in tension, constantly shifting between the polarities in historical time" (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990:11). Whereas dialectical tensions are more representative of a spectrum with opposite polarities, binaries are two components that are mutually exclusive. The dialectical models put forth by Lincoln and Mamiya represent the institutionalization of the double-consciousness[18] Du Bois ([1903]2000) suggested blacks struggle with and, like double-consciousness, there is no resolution of these dialectical tensions. The six dialectical models are: (1) priestly and prophetic, where priestly represents church activities geared toward the spiritual life of attendees and prophetic represents church activities geared toward the wider community; (2) other-worldly and this-worldly, where other-worldly represents a heaven-focused orientation and this-worldly represents an

[17] See Douglass (1999) for more on heterosexism in the Black Church and Grant (1989), Tucker-Worgs and Worgs (2014) for more on same-sex marragiate and the Black Church, and Williams (1993) for more on sexism in the Black Church.

[18] In *The Souls of Black Folk*, which is arguably one of the most influential works of race theory, Du Bois developed the concept of double-consciousness. "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" (Du Bois [1903]2000:3). Double-consciousness signifies the struggle blacks faced against the zero-sum concept of American identity. Similar to Lincoln and Mamiya's (1990) dialectical tensions, the "warring" polarities of double-consciousness makes it difficult to achieve resolution.

orientation focused on the affairs of the here and now; (3) universalism and particularism, where universalism represents a colorblind Christian message and particularism represents black consciousness emerging out of a past racial history; (4) communal and privatistic, where communal represents churches being involved in all aspects of the lives of attendees and privatistic represents a narrow focus on the religious needs of attendees; (5) charismatic and bureaucratic, where charismatic represents investing more authority in the charisma and personality of preachers than in bureaucratic hierarchy; and (6) resistance and accommodation, where resistance represents affirming black heritage and accommodation represents being influenced by the norms and values of white society.

Lincoln and Mamiya's (1990) dialectical models explain how one end of the continuum or the other may become more dominant in a particular church or at a particular time in history. In addition to moving beyond a binary, the main contribution of Lincoln and Mamiya's dialectical models are that they allow for change over time rather than presenting the Black Church as a fixed entity that does not change. The Black Church has been in existence for centuries and over the course of that time it has changed based on the sociopolitical context of the time. Furthermore, Lincoln and Mamiya expanded the accommodative/resistant characterization of the Black Church to include other dialectics related to how the Black Church may approach racial inequality. Although Lincoln and Mamiya's dialectical models served as a paradigm shift from the prevailing dichotomous understanding of the Black Church, they simply stretch various dichotomies into a series of continuums. These dialectical models do

not account for the ways in which the ends of these spectrums would interact or shape each other.

Higginbotham (1993) asserts that rather than dialectical tensions the Black Church embodies a dialogical model. Whereas Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) describe the dialectical tensions as polarities that do not achieve synthesis, Higginbotham's dialogic model accounts for the presence of constant interaction and how this interaction causes the polarities to shape each other[19]. In dialectical tensions, one polarity eventually becomes more prominent than another, although this primacy can shift over time. A dialogical model focuses on how the polarities mutually produce each other. For example, in her study of women in black Baptist churches, Higginbotham reveals that while Black Church values gave meaning to the private sphere of the family, these same church values generated the largest number of voluntary organizations in the black community. Thus, the Black Church created a dialogic relationship between black women's faith and secular social activism. Higginbotham (1993:17) states, "This complexity precludes attempts to bifurcate black women's activities neatly into dichotomous categories such as religious versus secular, private versus public, or accommodation versus resistance." Higginbotham argues that the Black Church represented a realm where the sacred and secular did not operate as separate and individual tensions, but rather interacted and informed each other. It is this aspect of the dialogic relationship that recognizes interaction between the Black Church

[19] See Collins (2000) for an example of a dialogic relationship between theory and action in U.S. black feminism.

and the black public sphere that I argue continues to inform the role of black churches today in addressing racial inequality.

Although Higginbotham's (1993) dialogic argument is the most recent theory since Lincoln and Mamiya's (1990) dialectical argument, her dialogic argument lacks the popularity and widespread adoption of the dialectic theory. The contribution of Higginbotham's dialogic is that, unlike the dialectical model, it allows for an exploration of how there may be interaction between the polarities. For example, Lincoln and Mamiya's resistance and accommodation dialectic is useful for explaining that black churches can shift between these polarities over time, but it is less useful for explaining how resistance may be shaped by accommodation or vice versa. As an illustration, the racial uplift initiatives of the post-Reconstruction Black Church that included following Victorian values to accommodate blacks to white society were also shaped by a self-help tradition that resisted white narratives that blacks were not respectable citizens deserving of rights. While it is not always clear in Higginbotham's dialogical argument how each of the polarities *mutually* shape each other, what is useful—and what I will explore in the subsequent historical section—is how there is, at minimum, a one-way interaction between polarities.

By analyzing the contradictory characterization of black churches, it is evident that the Black Church will continue to embody this tension. Knowing that the Black Church is a complex and contradictory institution, what should be our expectations of its role in public engagement? Whether scholars were arguing that the Black Church was too accommodative or resisting oppression, the consensus was and is that at its best the Black Church should be a socially active and progressive institution (Walton

2009). However, as Washington (1978:ii) suggests, I will argue that the role of the Black Church "can be comprehended best by zeroing in on what *is* rather than what *ought* to be" [emphasis mine]. This approach involves evaluating the role of the Black Church over time in addressing racial inequality. The following section will focus on this in order to assess the potential role of the Black Church in public engagement. The goal of the following section is not to provide a comprehensive history of the Black Church in the United States. Rather, the goal is to summarize the function of the Black Church in addressing racial inequality with an emphasis on the presence of dialogic relationships in various time periods.

Historicizing the Public Role of the Black Church in Addressing Racial Inequality (19th to 21st centuries)

From the Invisible Institution of Slavery to Reconstruction (1700s-1877)

Rather than attending white churches that preached obedience to enslavement, numerous enslaved blacks created what Raboteau (2004) calls "invisible institutions." These were not physical institutions made of brick and mortar, but rather private meetings in the woods or slave quarters where enslaved blacks could gather to worship and preach as they wanted away from the eyes of whites. Although slaves were not physically free, these invisible institutions allowed them to be emotionally and spiritually free. In these invisible institutions enslaved blacks created an "underground theology" (Wright 2007). These invisible institutions are characteristic of a dialogic relationship. Raboteau (2004) explains that enslaved blacks shaped Christianity to their own particular experience while simultaneously the symbols and values of Christianity helped shape the slave community's image of itself. To illustrate, enslaved blacks

created religious songs that reflected their experience of enslavement such as "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?." At the same time, enslaved blacks interpreted the Biblical stories of bondage and freedom in Exodus as a counter narrative against their "God ordained" enslavement.

With the advent of freedom, emancipated slaves were able to transform their invisible churches into wood and brick structures. Some independent black churches and denominations had already been established prior to the Civil War in the free states of the North by black ministers and their congregations who refused to tolerate the racism of their white brothers and sisters in Christ[20]. However, after the Civil War black church membership soared and the Baptists and Methodists organized racially separate denominational bodies and became the two largest denominations of African American membership (Du Bois [1903]2000; Morial 1978; Lincoln 1999). During Reconstruction black churches became more than just religious institutions, they were autonomous social institutions as well. From schools to meeting halls to gentlemen's clubs to community kitchens, black churches served every role needed by the newly emancipated community. Now that physical emancipation had been achieved, black churches looked to address racial and economic oppression. They stepped in where the government lacked the means or simply failed blacks, and gathered resources to provide black families with food, clothing, shelter, land, and education. Black ministers filled multiple roles and over one hundred were elected to political office during Reconstruction (Hine, Hine, and Harrold 2006). Du Bois ([1903]2000:134) observes

[20] One notable example is Richard Allen who founded the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) church after he and others were forcibly removed from a white Methodist church while praying (Woodson 1945).

the many positions occupied by black ministers stating he is, “a leader, a politician, an orator, a ‘boss,’ an intriguer, [and] an idealist.” The political activities black churches engaged in could occasionally create problems for their congregations who would sometimes find their churches burned down by whites who felt they upset the status quo (Lincoln 1999).

Although black churches were cornerstones of the black community, they were by no means homogenous in their responses to the trials and tribulations faced by African Americans. Some black ministers continued to preach messages of liberation to their congregations, trusting that God was on their side in the battle against racism and poverty, while others—particularly ministers with middle-class black congregations—preached messages of compromise and accommodation. Whereas Du Bois ([1903]2000) and Wilmore (1983) felt these differences in approach were due to region, with Northern blacks being more militant, and Southern blacks more accommodative, Frazier ([1964]1971) believed it was due to class, with middle-class blacks desiring to assimilate to white culture and achieve social status. These middle-class blacks, despite discrimination, had begun to create somewhat successful lives for themselves and had too much at stake to challenge the social system. Other churches simply believed it was not their place to question God’s will or timing. Just as Karl Marx ([1844]1978) criticized religious institutions for distracting people from their earthly sufferings due to an otherworldly focus, some blacks accepted this “opium” and believed God would bring justice in his own time without their earthly assistance.

The Black Church and Jim Crow (1877-1940s)

Scholars have characterized churches in the post-Civil War era as being more accommodationist due to their emphasis on uplift and assimilating to white society (Frazier 1963; Wheeler 1986). Yet, the Black Church is an institution informed by the social, political, and economic contexts surrounding it. Post-Reconstruction black Baptist churchwomen felt it was their duty to indoctrinate blacks with middle-class, Victorian values—now referred to as "the politics of respectability"—in order to defy messages of the cultural and intellectual inferiority of blacks. The black Baptist women's conventions, for example, conducted motherhood classes, temperance crusades, and raised money to build schools (Higginbotham 1993). This characterization of accommodation is misleading and masks the ways in which the emphasis on racial uplift embodied not only acquiescence to the values of white society but also the potential to be equals rather than subordinates to whites (Wheeler 1986). This emphasis on racial uplift was part of the black self-help tradition that emerged in this changing sociopolitical context due to Post-Reconstruction Republicans abandoning the cause of racial justice for freed blacks (Reed 1999). As previously stated, this represented a dialogic relationship in which the accommodation to Victorian values and the politics of respectability was shaped by a desire to resist stereotypes of blacks that justified their marginalization in society.

During the Great Migration—the exodus of approximately seven million blacks out of the rural South into cities of the North, Midwest, and West from 1910 to 1970—urban churches grew. This exodus created a tremendous transformation in urban churches of the North. Northern churches were overwhelmed with poor and

undereducated migrants. Some black churches worked as “cultural brokers” to help rural backs transition to urban life, similar to the role undertaken by post-emancipation black churches (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). They established programs to address the educational, recreational, economic, and political needs of the new arrivals. However, large-scale social outreach was the exception rather than the rule and the needs exceeded the capacity of many churches to serve them. Holiness and Pentecostal churches, which prior to the Great Migration were small in number, experienced rapid growth with the arrival of Southern migrants. Numerous storefront churches, which tended to be Pentecostal, emerged to meet the spiritual needs of migrants whose forms of worship were not always welcome in the Baptist and Methodist churches. What also emerged during this period of urbanization were stark class differences among congregations. Studies by Myrdal (1944), Drake and Cayton (1962), and Frazier (1963) demonstrate the concentration of poor blacks in storefront Pentecostal churches and middle and upper class blacks in larger Baptist, Methodist, and Episcopalian churches.

The 1920s to 1930s were a period Wilmore (1983) refers to as the deradicaliztion of the Black Church. With the country in a severe economic depression, little improvement in racial injustice, and an influx of Southern migrants, alternative religious movements emerged to address the social and spiritual needs of blacks. Some of these movements reflected a more otherworldly orientation but were racially separatist groups, such as the Nation of Islam[21]. Other movements were equally otherworldly but were multiracial, such as Father Divine’s Peace Mission and Charles

[21] Contrary to contemporary understandings of the Nation of Islam as a very political group, the Nation of Islam was very otherworldly in outlook and only became politically active through the work of Malcolm X, against the wishes of Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the Nation of Islam (Marable 2011).

Manuel "Sweet Daddy" Grace's House of Prayer for All Peoples. Interestingly, in each of these examples, the black male leader was viewed as God or God's direct messenger (Fauset 1971). Although Father Divine and "Sweet Daddy" Grace were known for their flamboyant lifestyle and were accused of taking advantage of their mostly poor followers, both also provided social services for followers such as food banks, affordable housing, and daycares (Harris 2012b).

The Black Church and the Civil Rights Movement (1950s-1960s)

At a time when scholars, such as Gunnar Myrdal and E. Franklin Frazier, were predicting its demise, the Civil Rights Movement illuminated the liberatory potential of the Black Church. While only a minority of black churches participated, Morris (1984) illustrates the indispensable role those black churches played in providing resources for the growing desegregation movement. Black churches provided the leadership and membership base for organizations such as the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) and Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), financial support, meeting spaces, and communication networks (Morris 1984; Calhoun-Brown 2000).

The most prominent leader of the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. represented the dialogic relationship between faith and action. He used the social gospel[22], which shaped many black churches, to interpret democracy in the

[22] The social gospel movement is a religious movement that began in the late 19th century in response to social problems such as urban poverty, child labor, and low wages. Inspired by New Testament passages that present Christ as a challenger of the status quo, the social gospel developed in response to traditional theological ideas that stressed individual sin rather than socioeconomic justice. Key features of social gospel include: a stance informed by the life of Christ, prophetic leadership concerned about the less fortunate, knowledge of social problems; a connection between Christianity and social and political activism; and the desire to combat inequality through social reform (Barnes 2010a). The social gospel movement was highly influential to the development of sociology, which was a new intellectual field in the late 19th century (Morgan 1969). A notable example is Jane Addams, from the Chicago School of

United States (Pinn 2013). He also used democracy in the U.S. to interpret the legitimacy of the movement. This social gospel perspective, which viewed racial and economic oppression as social evils that Christians had a moral duty to resist, led King to view the church as equally instrumental to both individual and social salvation. In his famous 1963 "Letter from Birmingham Jail" King laments:

> If today's church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be diminished as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century. […] Is organized religion too inextricably bound to the status quo to save our nation and the world? (King 1971:297)

King believed that all churches, not just the Black Church, should be involved in the work of resisting the social injustices of racism, poverty, and war.

The combination of the social gospel and traditions of the Black Church even influenced the development of other organizations such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) (Harvey 2011). The religious beliefs of activists sustained the movement in the face of violence and emboldened individuals to stand up to a white supremacist system[23].

Black Power and Black Liberation Theology (1960s-1970s)

The demands made on the U.S. government by those involved in the Civil Rights Movement resulted in legislative victories such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964

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sociology, who stressed that society requires collective action and that sociology should be used to address social problems.

[23] Harvey (2011) references individuals whose Christian faith inspired them to challenge a system of racial injustice. Reverent J.J. Russell in Mississippi opened his church to movement meetings, despite threats of attacks. Local whites burned his church and when arrested he challenged authorities with his scriptural knowledge. Fannie Lou Hamer, a Mississippi sharecropper (and later vice-chair of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party) insisted that God would honor those who took a stand and registered to vote. She explained, "We can't separate Christ from freedom, and freedom from Christ."

and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. However, with the assassination of Dr. King, frustration with the methods and pace of change materialized into a movement that advocated for black power, which argued against integration as a solution for racial inequality. This new black consciousness created a paradigm shift from the Negro Church, studied by E. Franklin Frazier, to the "bold, strident, self-conscious phoenix that is the contemporary Black Church" (Lincoln 1974:105-106).

Black liberation theology emerged from pastors who were interested in articulating a more radical side of the Black Church. Black liberation theology's sole purpose is to "apply the freeing power of the gospel to black people under white oppression" (Cone 1969:31). The primary articulator of this theology was James Cone who called on churches to break with white theology and recognize that "where there is black, there is oppression" therefore, "Christ is black because he is oppressed, and oppressed because he is black" (Cone 1969:69). Cone advocated a dialogic relationship between the theory of black liberation theology and the practice of black power to aid in the self-determination and liberation of blacks to help them achieve equality with whites rather than accommodating to them.

Illustrating a break from the trend in the Black Church to maintain a positive perspective of whites, black liberation theology verbalized a much more pessimistic and aggressive stance toward whites. This more contentious perspective is characteristic of the time period. Black youth were running out of patience with the slow pace of a nonviolent approach (particularly when Third World nations were gaining independence from their colonizers), civil rights leaders were being assassinated, police brutality was rampant, urban ghettoes became holding cells for

poor blacks, and riots were breaking out across cities. Simultaneously, the meaning of black was changing. Rather than signifying something derogatory, blackness was becoming a source of pride and affirmation. More than just an essentialized racial signifier to replace Negro, black was a political state of being and a state of consciousness dedicated to ending white supremacy (Hill 2007). While black liberation theology did not always translate into social programs, it represented a type of political consciousness raising that emphasized a form of black nationalism that had not been present in the Black Church since the period immediately after Reconstruction.

Non-profit Community Development Corporations [CDCs] were utilized by black churches as a strategy to address racial inequality during the late 1960s to 1970s. CDCs are nonprofit organizations that fulfill some aspect of community development. A church CDC differs from a church ministry in that CDCs are affiliated with the church, they are separate nonprofit organizations that are focused on outreach, and they are usually professionally staffed by paid workers. Ministries, on the other hand, are volunteer-based, and financed by and run out of the church. CDCs first emerged in the 1960s and can be characterized as having three waves—the 1960s, the 1980s, and post 1980s. The first wave of CDCs in the 1960s were often affiliated with black churches and grew out of neighborhood organizing in response to redlining, urban renewal, and urban riots. The Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation in Brooklyn, New York is an example of a first-wave CDC that still exists and was developed in 1967 when Senator Robert Kennedy saw the deterioration that had occurred in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn.

Although the first wave of CDCs emerged during the same time period of black liberation theology, CDCs were not a direct result of black liberation theology. Yet, we can postulate that because black liberation theology emphasized Black Nationalism and provided theological support to challenge racial inequality, this first wave of CDCs may have been influenced by black liberation theology. The Opportunities Industrialization Center formed by the Reverend Leon Sullivan of Zion Baptist Church in Philadelphia is an example of a religiously affiliated CDC modeled after the boycotting tactics of the Civil Rights Movement (Stoutland 1999). Reverend Sullivan organized hundreds of clergy and their congregations to boycott any companies that refused to provide job opportunities to minority youth and established job training programs through his CDC.

Religious Neo-liberalism (1980s-present)

The development of religiously affiliated CDCs in the late 1970s to early 1980s occurred during a time period of an increasing public presence of religious institutions, or what Casanova (1994) refers to as the "deprivatization" of religion where religious institutions were less willing to be relegated to the private sphere. This also occurred within a political context in which conservatives began to demand that nonprofits assume a greater responsibility for social services without government support. President Ronald Reagan argued that federal spending on social services was too high and advocated a policy of less government intervention. His successor, President George H.W. Bush, championed the capacity of private sector voluntarism to solve social problems. Hence, there has been a clear trend since the 1980s of increasing the responsibility of religious institutions to provide the nation's social services (Cnaan,

Wineburg, and Boddie 1999). At the same time that religiously delivered welfare has increased, secular welfare has decreased. While those who argue for the dismantling of the welfare state (neoliberals) are not the same group of people who argue for religiously-sponsored welfare (religious conservatives), the two groups have become somewhat bonded based on overlapping conservative desires. The core idea of neoliberalism "is not that government should contract out all its social assistance functions, but rather that it should completely devolve responsibility to the nonprofit sector (with little or no government funding)" (Hackworth 2012:123). Religious conservatives, on the other hand, are motivated by "compassionate conservatism" and the desire to sort the "deserving" needy from the "undeserving" needy. Both neoliberals and religious conservatives desire fewer government-sponsored "handouts." While neither neoliberal nor religious conservative ideas are new, they became increasingly popular by the 1980s. The merger of religious conservatism and neoliberalism is referred to as "religious neoliberalism" (Hackworth 2012).

The philosophy of religious neoliberalism became a political reality with the expansion of charitable choice. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 ended Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and made welfare much more difficult to obtain and keep. Charitable choice was a provision of the 1996 welfare reform signed into law by President Bill Clinton that allowed states or counties to contract with religious-based organizations to provide services such as food, work, medical care, and maternity homes (Cnaan et al. 1999). President George W. Bush expanded this by creating the White House Office of

Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, which continued under President Barack Obama as the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

While the call for religious institutions to provide social services may have appeared to be a new trend, the Black Church had been engaged in providing social services to the black community since its inception. The Black Church fulfilled the role of a mediating structure, defined by Berger and Neuhaus (1977) as an institution that provides a linkage between large bureaucratic "megastructures" and individual citizens. This framework of mediating institutions provides the basis for the increased reliance on churches to provide social services. Members of individual congregations had always funded these social services, but with the U.S. government sanctioning the blurring of church-state boundaries black churches were now in a position to compete for government funding for their services. Research by Chaves (1999) indicates that black churches were five times more likely than other congregations to seek government funds. Nonetheless, some black churches refused to accept government funds because they feared it would decrease their autonomy and prophetic voice, as it is much more difficult to criticize the government while accepting its money (Harris 2001).

In addition to receiving federal funding through charitable choice for their services, black churches continued to establish CDCs. The second wave of CDCs in the 1980s was less connected to community organizing, offered fewer social services and mainly engaged in housing development. For example, Allen A.M.E. Church in Queens, New York built a 300 unit apartment complex for the elderly in 1980 with federal housing loans (Cnaan et al. 1999). CDCs established since the 1980s are the

third wave and they focus on commercial development and affordable housing. They are also more likely to be led by professionals rather than activists. In spite of cuts to federal funding under the Reagan and Bush administrations, CDCs continued to grow. Black-church-affiliated CDCs have increased since 1989, partly in response to the needs of black inner-city communities that have experienced the flight of black middle-class residents as well as neoconservative policies. Yet, CDCs are not without their critics who argue that they carry out the agenda of business and political leaders rather than community members (Tucker-Worgs 2011).

Where 2 or 3,000 Gather in My Name: The Rise of Black Megachurches

Megachurches are defined as Protestant congregations with a weekly attendance of 2,000 or more (Thumma and Travis 2007). Yet, megachurches are not simply defined by this quantitative characteristic. What distinguishes megachurches is their professionalism, charismatic and formerly educated leadership, neo-Pentecostal orientation[24], hi-tech worship services, and cafeteria-style programs (Thumma and Travis 2007; Barnes 2010a; Walton 2011). The number of megachurches has grown exponentially from approximately 50 in 1970 to nearly 1,600 in 2014 (Ellingson 2009; Thumma 2014). Approximately 149 of these are black megachurches (Tucker-Worgs 2011).

Before "megachurch" was a term, large black churches had been in existence since the late 19th century—Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, New York and Mt.

[24] Neo-Pentecostalism refers to an ecstatic Pentecostal worship and emphasis on deeper spirituality that emerged in middle-class black denominations such as the African Methodist Episcopal and Baptist churches (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990).

Olivet Baptist Church in Chicago are two such examples of churches that had over 1,000 members. Yet, it was not until the late 20th century that the rate of growth among megachurches became a phenomenon of the religious landscape. The majority of black megachurches are located in predominately black, suburban neighborhoods in Sunbelt cities such as Los Angeles, Houston, Dallas, and Atlanta (Tucker-Worgs 2011). The same way the Great Migration contributed to the phenomenal growth of storefront churches in cities of the North, the migration of working- and middle-class blacks to the suburbs has contributed to the extraordinary growth of black megachurches post-1980 (Tucker-Worgs 2011). While the majority of black megachurches are affiliated with a historically black denomination, black megachurches are also more likely to be nondenominational and part of the Sanctified tradition (i.e., Pentecostal, Holiness, Apostolic) than black churches in general (Tucker-Worgs 2011). While the move away from denominational affiliation is a larger trend among congregations in the U.S. regardless of race, many megachurches that are denominationally affiliated are "functionally nondenominational," meaning that they have more in common with other megachurches than with other churches in their denomination (Thumma and Travis 2007).

The size and concentration of resources in black megachurches has made them the target of criticisms to an extent that non-black megachurches have not been. Eddie Glaude (2010) has proclaimed the death of the black church and its prophetic activism, while Al Sharpton (2006) has blasted megachurches for preaching a non-inclusive form of Christianity in direct opposition to Dr. King. News articles chronicling black megachurch pastors in the U.S. and abroad whose wealth is 200 times greater than

people their local communities (Atlanta Black Star 2014) and independent films such as "Black Church, Inc." criticize the pursuit of wealth by black megachurches with no critique of sources of socioeconomic injustice.

Due to the history of black churches being one of the most—if not the most—stable institution in black communities there as long been an expectation that black churches should address the needs of the black community (Warnock 2014). The Black Church has been held to a standard of challenging the status quo and addressing issues faced by the black community. This expectation and standard is amplified in the case of black megachurches. Due to their membership and budget size, black megachurches are more likely to have more social, economic, and human resources than their smaller counterparts. Larger congregations and congregations with larger budgets[25] have more social services (Chaves and Tsitsos 2001; Chaves 2006). Therefore, as large institutions, black megachurches have the potential for more extensive public engagement. Unfortunately, anecdotal information, reality TV shows, and scandals involving megachurch ministers overshadow empirical research on black megachurches and perpetuate unsubstantiated claims that all black megachurches are prosperity driven. Prosperity theology blends "scriptural adherence, positive confession, and an emphasis on economic advancement" (Walton 2011:145). While many black churches and black megachurches incorporate aspects of prosperity teachings, such as positive confession, black churches have varied theological orientations and not all are prosperity churches. This mischaracterization seems to

[25] In 2008 the average megachurch income was $6.5 million, about 13% of megachurch budgets go toward missions and benevolence, and 51% of megachurches say they are working for social justice (Thumma and Bird 2008).

occur because a number of the most high-profile black megachurches that have television ministries are prosperity churches (e.g., Creflo Dollar's World Changers Christian Center and Eddie Long's New Birth Missionary Baptist Church). Also, even if black megachurches are not explicitly promoting a prosperity theology, the material prosperity of the buildings and pastors emanate prosperity (Tucker-Worgs 2011). Prosperity theology is undoubtedly becoming more popular, however, it is imprudent to assume that *all* black megachurches are prosperity churches and therefore have rejected efforts to improve the black community.

Contrary to presumptions that black megachurches eschew public engagement and social service provision in favor of prosperity, nationally representative research by Sandra Barnes and Tamelyn Tucker-Worgs show that black megachurches are more publicly engaged than smaller churches and all megachurches, regardless of race[26]. In her sample of sixteen megachurches, Barnes (2010b) found that most clergy explicitly espouse a social gospel message or it is embedded in a broader message informed by the model of Christ. These churches sponsor programs such as CDCs, voter registration drives, schools, credit unions, prisoner reentry initiatives, job training, health clinics, and neighborhood revitalization programs that aim for community empowerment. Barnes also discovered that the size of the megachurch did not necessarily determine the number and type of social programs offered as some "smaller" megachurches sponsored more programs than considerably larger megachurches.

[26] It is important to note that Sandra Barnes and Tamelyn Tucker-Worgs are the sole scholars who have conducted nationally representative studies on black megachurches in the United States.

As discussed above, many black churches have developed CDCs to address issues of social and economic inequality in black communities and the majority of black megachurches have CDCs. Tucker-Worgs (2011) developed a typology of black megachurch CDCs: prototypical CDCs that primarily focus on housing and/or commercial development; thematic CDCs that target a particular population or community issue and engage in community development activities that address this issue; and service-oriented CDCs that generally focus on support programs for children and families, job training, or social service provision aimed at raising the economic viability of community residents. Over 48% of black megachurch CDCs provide housing (with 31% providing low-income housing), almost 50% provide child care/tutoring programs, over 30% provide counseling and job training, 24% provide adult education and housing counseling, and 19% provide entrepreneurship training (Tucker-Worgs 2011). Housing, affordable childcare, education, and employment are all areas where blacks presently face racial disparities and generally these are areas where there is a divestment of public funds. Therefore, in some black communities, CDCs affiliated with black megachurches may be a primary source of social service provision and one of a few organizations engaged in the work of trying to address these racial disparities.

Whither Shall We Go? Black Churches and the Public Sphere

There are tensions between classical liberalism, which emphasizes secularism, and neoliberalism, which advocates abandoning the welfare state and reliance on the private sector to provide services. At the same time that the U.S. dictates a separation

of church and state, it is undermined by relying on the private sector—mainly religious institutions—to provide social services. As long as state sponsored welfare continues to diminish and religious institutions are expected to provide social services, the church cannot be kept outside of the public realm.

Critiques of the presence of the Black Church in the public sphere and its ability to address racial inequality are not new. In *American Dilemma*, Myrdal (1944) noted a pathological situation of too many voluntary organizations in black communities that accomplish little compared to their numbers. More recently, Pinn (2013) views the church as the polluting agent of the public sphere and asserts that black churches are best suited to serve the private, spiritual needs of members rather than being involved in the public arena. While he does not dispute the important role black churches have had in providing resources for a community oppressed by racial and economic injustice, Pinn (2013) concludes that the personal morality of the church does not make for good public policy—for example, focusing on individual pathology rather than structural issues—and the Black Church is ill-equipped to make an impact on issues facing blacks in a sustained and consistent manner—for example, providing charity rather than instituting structural change. Interestingly, Pinn does not seem to recognize that the government is also not free of moral judgments. To illustrate, in narratives regarding government welfare, President Ronald Reagan crafted an image of the "welfare queen," a lazy, pathological black woman who has babies that white taxpayers subsidize (Gilens 1999; Hancock 2004). The narrative that the government has used to dismantle the social services of the welfare state has been one of the pathology of individuals rather than structural barriers that create a need for government aid. Hence, the government

is not a neutral institution and, perhaps while not using the language of "sin," also relies on personal morality to determine public policy.

In spite of Pinn's arguments that the Black Church should remain relegated to the private rather than public sphere, as Higginbotham (1993) contends, at issue is the public dimension of the Black Church, not the religious dimension of the public realm. "This reversal shifts the emphasis from the prevalence of religious symbols and values in the organization of our social lives and in our political languages to the different ways public spaces have been 'interpolated within black religious institutions'" (Glaude 2003:341). Due to the laws denying blacks access to public space, the Black Church became a foundation of the black public sphere. Because this public sphere was established in conflict with the dominant white society, we can think of the Black Church as a "counter-public sphere" (Higginbotham 1993). The Black Church housed schools, libraries, meeting halls, restaurants, and athletic clubs that met the needs of the black community. More than a physical space, the Black Church also served as a site of public discourse. Even after laws provided blacks with access to public space, the Black Church remained a vital part of the black public sphere and continued to operate as a "mediating structure" between blacks and the racial state (Higginbotham 1993; Glaude 2003). The dialogic relationship between the Black Church and the public sphere has existed since the creation of the Black Church in the 18th century. Whereas white churches have not had the burden of being the most stable and autonomous institution in an oppressed community, black churches have and have been expected to have a public dimension (Warnock 2014). So too, the sharp dichotomy between the secular and sacred realms, while an expected goal in a secular state, has not been the

case historically with the Black Church and the black community. As long as there are blacks in need of social services and as long as the state continues to rely on the Black Church to provide these social services, the dichotomy that situates the Black Church in the private sphere will continue to be false.

What Pinn (2013) fails to account for in his critique is the trend in public divesting and increasing reliance on private institutions to do the work of the welfare state. Unlike most European countries where church social welfare programs are minimal because the provision of social services is legally mandated, in the U.S., the provision of social services is increasingly left to the private sector (Cnaan et al. 1999). The Black Church takes in billions of dollars annually and is, economically speaking, the largest institution in the black community (Lincoln and Mamiya 1993; Cnaan et al. 1999). I assert that black churches should remain publicly engaged for two reasons: first, black churches are operating in the *absence* of state welfare rather than as an *alternative* to it and second, black churches are among the few institutions providing race-specific remedies that have been abandoned in a colorblind era. I will expand on each of these reasons below.

First, black churches have had longstanding civic traditions and have been providing social services in black communities for decades—and in the case of some churches, for over a century. Critics of the involvement of churches in the public sphere, and particularly faith-based and government partnerships, fear that faith-based organizations have an agenda to replace the welfare state. On the contrary, in his study of Habitat for Humanity, faith-based homeless missions, and the government's reliance on faith-based social services in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Hackworth (2012)

reveals that these organizations predominately see themselves as an extension of the state rather than an alternative to it. In addition, many in the faith community criticized the change in welfare reform that signaled the conferral of greater responsibility for churches to reduce welfare dependency and poverty (Owens 2004). Further, Chaves (2004) notes that black churches are usually not attempting to provide an alternative to secular social services, but rather are usually working in collaboration with them. I argue that the disinvestment in black communities and decreasing state welfare has put black churches in a position where they provide services in the absence of the state. Disinvestment "involves the systematic withdrawal of capital (the lifeblood of the housing market) and the neglect of public services such as schools; building, street, and park maintenance; garbage collection; and transportation" (Gibson 2007:5). Decades of discriminatory housing and loan policies, beginning in the 1940s, undervalued housing in black neighborhoods and led to the creation of black ghettos (Massey and Denton 1993). Beginning in the 1970s the disappearance of factory jobs that had once been plentiful in urban areas led to immense unemployment (Wilson 1987). The repeal of desegregation programs in the 1980s resegregated schools (Orfield 2001). Finally, the targeting of black and Latino communities in the War on Drugs in the 1980s led to the mass incarceration of young men of color (Alexander 2010). These larger political occurrences were coupled with the cutting of community development block grants to cities from the 1980s to the 1990s (Conlan 1998). Government support for social welfare has also steadily declined since the 1980s. According to Cnaan et al. (1999:279), "What started as contracting-out has become planned cuts in services, with the expectation that others will fill the gap left by the government's decreasing

participation in social services provision." These shifts in public policy that have precipitated the disinvestment in black communities and social services have created a void that black churches are filling through their public engagement.

President Barack Obama's "My Brother's Keeper" Initiative provides a recent example of the government eschewing structural changes in favor of relying on black churches to address the problems facing black communities. Introduced in February 2014, President Obama unveiled this initiative to address the persistent opportunity gaps faced by young men of color. Although this initiative is aimed to help black, Latino, and Native American young men, the public faces of this initiative have mostly been those of young black men. In establishing the need for "My Brother's Keeper" Obama cited the lack of educational preparedness, low labor force participation rates, and likelihood to be victims of violence faced by young men of color. To improve the educational and life outcomes of young men of color, "My Brother's Keeper" relies on the private sector to provide mentorship, support networks, and skills. Faith communities, philanthropic organizations, and businesses are being called on to take up the charge of "My Brother's Keeper." Indeed, they have already responded and various companies such as AT&T, AmeriCorps, and Citi Foundation have pledged millions of dollars in mentorship and tutoring programs and summer jobs. Although "My Brother's Keeper" has been criticized for overlooking the challenges faced by young women of color (Crenshaw 2014), a letter from a coalition of Christian black women leaders enthusiastically supports Obama's initiative and pledges their commitment, as black women, to help improve the lives of young men of color (National Women Leadership 2014). Because black churches have already been

providing mentorship for young black men, these women recognize that "My Brother's Keeper," "allows for organizations, businesses, and entities, already working to improve the lives of boys and young men of color, to partner; and, allows citizens, with long-term interest and support, and those unaware of these disparaging facts, to work together to improve the statistics within their communities" (National Women Leadership 2014). The enthusiastic support expressed by these women is indicative of the support and labor black churches will likely give to this initiative. As further evidence of the potential support for "My Brother's Keeper" the Progressive National Baptist Convention has included the support of President Obama's initiative in their 2014 list of resolutions and they resolve to "support a partnership between government and the private sector intended to positively impact young African American men" (Baltimore 2014:15). While it is still somewhat early to determine what programs, if any, black churches may establish in alignment with "My Brother's Keeper," there are clear indications that black churches are supportive of this initiative.

Second, I assert that black churches are among the few institutions providing race-specific remedies that have been abandoned in a colorblind era. Whether the rationale is that black advancement will only come through universal policies, or race is thought not to matter, there is an emphasis on race-neutral, universal policies intended to help everyone—particularly in the "age of Obama" (Harris 2012). The logic behind these universal policies is that what is good for the nation is good for minorities, rather than what is good for minorities is good for the nation. Yet, numerous scholars have asserted that a rising tide does not lift all boats, particularly if certain groups of people did not have boats to begin with (for examples see Guinier and Torres 2002;

Crenshaw 2011; Harris 2012). Black churches, which tend to be located in black communities, provide social services to those communities. Therefore, intentionally or not, they are targeting these communities with race-specific services. This has been true throughout the history of the Black Church in the U.S. Where the government has explicitly refused to provide help or has provided a universal form of help, the Black Church has engaged in race-specific programming. In fact, the post-Reconstruction Black Baptist Church was overtly and explicitly nationalist in their self-help efforts and at the same time that the specific problems facing blacks were being addressed, the black National Baptist Convention worked to establish denominational hegemony free from white control (Higginbotham 1993).

To be clear, black churches providing race-specific initiatives does not mean that they deny assistance to non-blacks. But due to the segregation of religious institutions and neighborhoods, black churches primarily find themselves providing services to black constituents. For instance, Barnes (2010a) found that black megachurches are more likely to offer ministries and programs in response to social problems that disproportionately affect blacks. In her study, megachurches address problems such as incarceration, illiteracy, unemployment, poverty, healthcare, housing affordability—all of which disproportionately affect blacks—through reentry programs, literacy initiatives, employment and training, credit unions, food pantries, HIV/AIDS programs, health clinics, and low-cost housing developments.

President Obama's "My Brother's Keeper" initiative is yet another example of the reliance on black churches to enact race-specific programming. President Obama

has consistently endorsed universal, colorblind policies[27] (Harris 2012). Yet, My Brother's Keeper is a race-specific initiative, which targets young men of color and the particular challenges they face such as dropping out of school, poverty, unemployment, violence, and incarceration. This initiative departs from the universal stance of the Obama administration and is undoubtedly needed. Nevertheless, this initiative relies on donations and mentorship from the private sector rather than policy changes. It appears that the only way for the Obama administration to achieve race-specific programming is to follow the neoliberal model and rely on the private sector to enact it without the state providing any financial help. That "My Brother's Keeper" is an initiative proposed by the government, yet not financially supported by the government, reflects the limitations placed on the Obama administration to address racial inequality as well as the avoidance of race-specific government policies in a colorblind era. While the government has absolved itself of any financial support for "My Brother's Keeper," private organizations have pledged $200 million over the next five years for programs associated with this initiative. Anticipating that there would be critics of a program that appears to be race-specific, President Obama made it clear that "My Brother's Keeper" is not "some big, new government program" and that "government cannot play the only – or even the primary – role" (Obama 2014). Private organizations such as businesses and churches will assume the primary responsibility for executing "My Brother's

[27] A prime illustration of Obama's race-neutral policies is his August 2012 interview with *Black Enterprise Magazine*. When asked about his response to critics who believe his administration has not done enough to support black businesses he said, "I want all Americans to have opportunity. I'm not the president of black America. I'm the president of the United States of America" (Dingle 2012). This has been the persistent stance of Obama's administration and is evidenced in an early 2009 interview where he stated, "The most important thing I can do for the African-American community is the same thing I can do for the American community, period, and that is get the economy going again and get people hiring again" (Hyde and Wolf 2009).

Keeper." And because black churches have already been doing the work of addressing some of these issues, it stands to reason that they will be actively involved in this race-specific initiative. There is yet a second issue that is important to consider. While this initiative may help the odds of young men of color, due to the reliance on the private sector rather than changes in the policies that create the poor odds they face, it does nothing to "change the odds that [young men of color will] fall into a particular set of circumstances" (Bouie 2014). The emphasis on personal responsibility and the need to fix young men of color does not change the conditions in which they live (Crenshaw 2014). For example, providing mentorship to individual black males with the hope that they stay out of trouble is one strategy—that of "My Brother's Keeper." A completely different, and far more social justice oriented strategy, would be to change the laws and policing that support the prison industrial complex that incarcerates young black men at an alarming rate and then uses their label as "felons" to deny them basic rights to housing, employment, voting, and social services (Alexander 2010). There are however, religious organizations involved in trying to create structural change by challenging laws that contribute to the over-incarceration of young black men. For example, in April 2014, a group predominately composed of black religious leaders from various denominations issued a statement with policy suggestions aimed to eliminate the racial disparities in incarceration (Drug Policy Alliance 2014).

As outlined above in the history of black churches and public engagement, black churches have undertaken a variety of strategies to address racial inequality. Black pastors have sought elected government positions, black churches have established nonprofit community development corporations, and black ministers have

created theologies to raise consciousness and critique power structures, yet racial inequality remains. Some argue that, despite the history of the Black Church, it should not be involved in the public sphere as there should be a clear separation between church and state. Yet, as long as the country "calls upon the religious community to do more for the welfare of strangers" and continues to cut government social services, "church-state separation is merely an ideal" (Cnaan et al. 1999:301). To reiterate, I am not arguing that the Black Church is the only or best way to address racial inequality. The Black Church faces many challenges in a society that is characterized by deeply ingrained racial inequality. Yet, the continued growth and relevance of black churches suggests that scholars and popular critics rethink our expectations of the Black Church in understandings of and responses to racial inequality. It is unrealistic to think that the Black Church is capable of solving institutionalized racism or that we should assume that all black churches see this as part of their work. A more realistic perspective would examine both how black churches view the problem of racial inequality and how they see themselves addressing it, which is the aim of this dissertation project. The following two chapters will assume this task by exploring how the pastors and attendees of three black megachurches in Washington, D.C. interpret contemporary racial inequality and the ways in which their churches intervene in contemporary racial inequality.

CHAPTER 4: Research Methods

This study asks the following research questions that seek to investigate the explanations and solutions black megachurches offer for contemporary racial inequality in the United States. The primary research question is: *What are the explanations of and solutions to contemporary racial inequality offered by black megachurch leaders and attendees?* This study also seeks to answer the following sub-question: *What role does religious culture play in accounting for the explanations and solutions black megachurches provide for contemporary racial inequality?*

Research Design: Case Study

This research utilizes a case study approach. Case studies provide an in-depth description and analysis of a defined unit (Merriam 2009). While case studies are not generalizable to populations, we can draw theoretical conclusions from them (Yin 2003). The holistic analysis case studies can provide can help construct tentative hypotheses for future research and thereby advance the knowledge in a field (Merriam 2009).

This research involves multiple case studies. Comparing cases results in a more robust study. It also results in more variation across cases and helps nuance perceptions of megachurches that tend to be viewed as monolithic (Thumma and Travis 2007). However, the drawback of selecting multiple cases is that my attention was divided between multiple churches. This research explores three cases. The selection of these cases is discussed below.

Study Site

Washington, D.C. is an important case site in the study of religion and race. With a population just over 600,000 people in a relatively small geographic area, D.C. has an abundance of religious institutions and, in particular, seven megachurches. That such a small and urban geographic area has that number of megachurches is exceptional. Furthermore, 18% of the population of Washington, D.C. and Maryland are associated with the historically black Protestant tradition whereas only 7% of the national population is (Lugo et al. 2008). The nation's capital also has a legacy of religious leaders associated with the historically black Protestant tradition protesting racial injustices. The District is additionally significant because it is representative of contemporary racial inequality in a post-civil rights era—*de facto* racism that sustains racial inequality in the same ways Jim Crow laws did. According to the American Community Survey reports, between 2005 and 2009, Washington, D.C. had the third worst income inequality in the nation (Weinberg 2011). Dubbed "Chocolate City" because of its large African American population, D.C. is currently undergoing gentrification and demographic shifts. The African American population, which was about 50% in 2011 (U.S. Census 2012b), is declining as white professionals move into historically black neighborhoods. Washington, D.C. also has a history of being a city that is very segregated along lines of race and class (Iceland 2009). This segregation is still present and quite noticeable as one travels east of the Anacostia River to Wards 7 and 8 where there are much higher levels of concentrated poverty and lower levels of racial diversity. Although undergoing a changing racial landscape, Washington, D.C. remains a city segregated along lines of race and class and it is often D.C.'s poor

residents of color that experience the worst outcomes on indicators of wellbeing such as residential segregation, income, homeownership, employment, and education (Urban Institute 2012)[28]. In summary, black megachurches in the District are located in communities that are undergoing demographic changes while still serving populations that are not experiencing equitable well-being outcomes in spite of the gains of the Civil Rights Movement.

Selection of Cases

Megachurches in Washington, D.C. were selected from the megachurch database provided by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research. The Hartford Institute megachurch database was compiled in 1992 and is updated regularly. Megachurches in this database are Protestant, located in the U.S., and have a consistent weekly attendance of at least 2000 people. Attendance records are based on what the church or denomination reports regarding their attendance numbers.

According to the Hartford Institute, there are currently 1,362 megachurches in the United States and seven in Washington, D.C. In order to determine the racial makeup of these megachurches I first selected those that were affiliated with one of the eight black controlled Protestant denominations[29]. Two churches were affiliated with

[28] In the Urban Institute's report card for the nation's 100 biggest metro areas on five factors: (1) residential segregation; (2) neighborhood income; (3) school quality; (4) employment; and (5) homeownership, the Washington, D.C. metro area scored a C. Blacks in the DC metro area are more likely than whites to live in segregated neighborhoods, live in lower-income neighborhoods, attend an underperforming school, be unemployed, and are less likely than whites to own a home (Urban Institute 2012).

[29] The eight black controlled Protestant denominations are: (1) the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc.; (2) the National Baptist Convention of America; (3) the Progressive National Baptist Convention; (4) the African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.); (5) the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (A.M.E.Z.); (6) the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (C.M.E.); (7) the Cumberland Presbyterian Church of America; and (8) the Church of God in Christ (Baer 1988).

black Protestant denominations. To determine the racial makeup of the five megachurches that were not affiliated with one of the black controlled Protestant denominations, I checked the church websites to look for pictures and information about the churches.

In sum there are six black megachurches located in Washington, D.C. Two out of six are Baptist. Baptists are the largest denominational affiliation amongst black megachurches (Tucker-Worgs 2011). The Black Baptist community consists of the National Baptist Convention, formed in 1895, and the Progressive National Baptist Convention, formed in 1961. The Progressive National Baptist Convention was founded to support the more socially active mission of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. that was felt to be lacking in the National Baptist Convention (Avant 2004). Black Baptist churches are unique because local congregations and pastors have complete independence and autonomy (Morris and Lee 2005). In other words, pastors are the main instruments of power and individual congregations run their own affairs. The denominational structure of each church is be an important aspect of my study because it influences how much autonomy each church and pastor has to enact various social programs.

Two of the six churches are part of the Sanctified tradition (one Pentecostal and one Bible Way), which is the third largest denominational affiliation amongst black megachurches (Tucker-Worgs 2011). The Sanctified church developed during the post-Reconstruction South (Gilkes 1985). “The label ‘Sanctified church’ emerged within the black community to distinguish congregations of ‘the saints’ from those of other black Christians, especially the black Baptists and Methodists who assimilated and imitated

the cultural and organizational models of European-American patriarchy" (Sanders 1996:3-4). The Sanctified tradition is composed of numerous denominations. Four percent of black megachurches are affiliated with the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), and 3% of black megachurches are affiliated with the Pentecostal[30] church, making them the largest in the Sanctified tradition (Tucker-Worgs 2011). Although a denominational hierarchy exists in the Sanctified tradition, each church has a relatively high level of autonomy (McDaniel 2008).

Lastly, two of the six churches are nondenominational. Black megachurches are more likely to be nondenominational than black churches in general. Twenty-one percent of black megachurches are nondenominational (Tucker-Worgs 2011). Although nondenominational represents the second largest affiliation amongst black megachurches, and scholars have indicated the increasingly post-denominational religious landscape (Lee 2005; Walton 2009), nondenominational churches have generally been ignored in studies on the black church. Nondenominational churches are independent of any denominational affiliations and traditions so each church is completely autonomous.

From the six megachurches I selected three total, or one from each denomination, for my study—one Baptist, one nondenominational, and one Pentecostal [see Table 1]. Churches were selected to represent each of the three available

[30] Pentecostalism is generally defined as a *movement* (Paris 1982), but it can also be a *denomination*. There are Pentecostal churches that are part of other denominations (e.g., Church of God in Christ) and there are also Pentecostal denominations (e.g., Pentecostal Assemblies of the World).

denominations, the different quadrants of Washington, D.C., and my ability to gain access to the head pastor (which is not an easy task in such large institutions).

Table 1. List of Megachurches in Study[31]

Church	***Denomination***	***Pastor***	***Year Founded***	***Average Attendance***
Community Baptist Church	Progressive National Baptist Convention	Dr. Harris	1865	6000
Mt. Sinai Church	Pentecostal	Bishop Oliver	1966	5000
House of Joy	Nondenominational	Bishop Stanley	1969	4000

Data Collection

According to Berg (2009), triangulation is the use of multiple data-collection technologies, multiple theories, multiple researchers, or multiple methodologies to investigate a phenomenon. I performed three qualitative data collection methods: (1) participant observation; (2) content analysis of church documents; and (3) semi-structured interviews. Each method provides a different insight into how pastors and congregants understand contemporary racial inequality and how religious culture might affect their approaches to addressing racial inequality.

Participant Observation

In order to gain a fuller understanding of the attendees and leaders of the churches in my study I conducted participant observations at each church. Participant observation "seeks to uncover, make accessible, and reveal the meanings (realities)

[31] All names of churches and pastors have been changed to pseudonyms. Denomination and average attendance data based on information provided by the Hartford Institute megachurch database.

people use to make sense out of their daily lives" (Jorgensen 1989:15). Through firsthand observations I am able to understand the context within which people interact and see things that participants may be unaware of because of their familiarity with the context (Patton 2002).

Engaging in a participant observation of these church services provides insights that might be overlooked when solely focusing on interviews. For example, the presence or absence of Afrocentric décor in the church or announcements advertising a mobile health unit are observations that may not be mentioned in interviews but are equally important to understanding religious culture and how a church understands and addresses racial inequality. Afrocentric symbols may be indicative of a particular collective racial identity of a church that is connected to a larger community outside of the church and could be suggestive of how a church understands contemporary racial inequality as well as how a church relates to the larger black community. Similarly, announcements advertising a mobile health unit can reveal the importance of serving the surrounding community as well as an understanding that there are particular populations that are disproportionately impacted by health inequalities.

Observations, such as those mentioned above, are important because the symbols, practices, and traditions of each church, which are demonstrated in worship services, are indicators of the church's culture as well as how and why they do things (Ammerman 1998; Becker 1999). In his study of seven black congregations, McDaniel (2008) noted that the "high worship" of one church indicated a highly structured and traditional church culture, which reflected the church's focus on maintaining itself without community involvement. Hence, research has demonstrated that the elements

of Sunday worship, which I observe during participant observations, can be equally indicative of a church's community involvement as it is of the types of songs they like to sing.

Participant observation also allows me to observe the demographics of each congregation as well as the neighborhood in which each church is located. Demographics are important because they influence understandings of racial inequality and the location of the church is important it helps reveal the level of racial inequality the church is addressing. For example, a church in a predominately low-income, urban neighborhood has different challenges than one in an affluent suburb. Observing Sunday worship services at each church helps answer both my broad research question: What are the explanations of and solutions to contemporary racial inequality offered by black megachurch leaders and attendees? And my sub-research question: What role does religious culture play in accounting for the explanations and solutions black megachurches provide for contemporary racial inequality?

As a participant observer, I attended between six Sunday services—alternating between earlier and later services—at each of the three churches from April to December 2012. I also attended each church at least once for pilot observations in February 2012. During this time I observed the nondenominational church three times, the Baptist church two times, and the Pentecostal church once. I attended each church once again during Black History Month in February 2013. Because February is Black History Month this is likely the time when black churches are most likely to preach about racial inequality, whether or not this is a common topic of discussion during the rest of the year. In total, including pilot observations, I conducted 26 observations of

all three churches. A total of seven observations were conducted at the Pentecostal church, nine were conducted at the Baptist church, and ten were conducted at the nondenominational church.

It is also important to contextualize this fieldwork and note that some of it took place during an election year. Given that the president elect is African American and the racial climate proves to be equally as turbulent as it was before this presidency[32], some churches talked about contemporary racial inequality at this moment in ways that they might not have before. Therefore, in my fieldwork I remained mindful of how the identity of the president elect, this election year, and the racial climate would influence my data collection.

During my participant observations I paid particular attention to the following three categories during my visit to these churches:

1. Demographics: What is the perceived age, sex, race/ethnicity, social class[33] and family composition of attendees?
2. Physical Setting: What does the interior and exterior of the church look like? What is the neighborhood the church is located in like?
3. Service: What happens during the course of worship? What is the tone of worship? What is the content of the sermon?

[32] One notable example of this turbulent racial climate is the murder of Trayvon Martin. Martin was an unarmed black teenager fatally shot in February 2012 in Florida by George Zimmerman, a Hispanic man who served as the neighborhood watch coordinator. Many blacks felt that Martin was racially profiled by Zimmerman making the murder racially motivated because Martin's only crime was walking home with a bag of Skittles and an iced tea. Numerous churches, including one in this study, declared "Hoody Sunday" during Lent where congregants came to church wearing hoodies (the attire Martin was wearing the night he was murdered) in solidarity with Martin and countless black males like him who are considered automatically suspicious and therefore guilty. Martin's murder gained national attention and some compared his murder to that of Emmett Till, a black teen lynched in Mississippi 1955 for allegedly whistling at a white woman.

[33] Makes and models of cars driven by attendees, university, fraternity and sorority decals on cars, and the quality and type of clothing worn (e.g., fur coats, Coach or Louis Vuitton pocketbooks, and worn down and scuffed shoes) were examples of class indicators observed during church visits.

Observing the demographics of the churches provides information about who attends each church and what the population of each church is like. The demographics of a church also impacts how they perceive racial inequality and how they think it should be addressed. For example, racial attitudes literature has demonstrated that there are differences in perceptions of racial inequality based on various demographic categories such as race (Hunt 2007), class (Shelton and Greene 2012), and religion (Edgell and Tranby 2007). Demographic observations are limited in that they rely on the judgment of the observer. However, I supplemented my demographic observations with information from the head pastors and in most cases they confirmed my observations. The physical setting of the church shows the neighborhood the church is located in (and indicates whether the surrounding population may be the target of social services regarding racial inequality), as well as the financial state of a church (which is an indicator of the amount of funds available for social programs). The worship service provides a range of insights, such as whether songs and sermons are focused on inequality and/or God's provision. Finally, I included a personal reflections/personal analysis section in order to capture aspects that do not correspond to one of the categories as well as my reaction to the participant observation. [See Appendix A for church service participant observation guide.]

Services were about two hours on average. During the service I took notes when it was appropriate using the categories in my church service participant observation guide, such as during the sermon or scripture reading. After the service was over I immediately wrote down the remainder of my observations and typed them up once I had access to a computer. The benefit of conducting observations in such large

congregations is the level of anonymity. To everyone around me I appeared to be another Sunday morning attendee and because the pastors did not know what services I was observing, there was no way for me to have any impact on the services.

Content Analysis

Content analysis is a systematic examination and interpretation of a body of material to identify patterns, themes, and meanings (Berg 2009). Content analysis may be quantitative (i.e., manifest and a surface analysis), qualitative (i.e., latent and an analysis of the meaning), or a mixture of both. I conducted a mixed-methods qualitative content analysis. I am interested in both quantitatively assessing the frequency of observations regarding understandings of and responses to racial inequality, as well as qualitatively uncovering meanings and themes. The strength of conducting a content analysis on organizational documents is that, unlike participant observation or interviews, the presence of the investigator does not alter what is being studied (Merriam 2009).

I conducted a content analysis of each church's organizational written, digital, audio, and visual documents from April to December 2012. These documents include, but are not limited to church websites, informational bulletins, Sunday programs, newsletters, reports, ministry listings and sermons[34]. I paid particular attention to the following:

A. What is the purpose of this document?

[34] Sermons analyzed will include those mentioned by interviewees that they thought were examples of racial inequality being discussed in sermons. These sermons will be transcribed and analyzed in order to examine the context in which these ministers speak about racial inequality. In analyzing the sermons I will pay particular attention to the tone of the sermon, how the ministers frame their discussion of racial inequality, and what, if any, solutions they offer for it.

B. What does this document say about the identity of the church?
C. What does this document explain about this church's explanation of contemporary racial inequality?
D. What does this document explain about this church's solutions to contemporary racial inequality?

These data were used to provide descriptive and historical information about the megachurches, as well as answer the questions: What explanations of and solutions to contemporary racial inequality are offered by black megachurches? and How might religious culture account for differences in the explanations and solutions black megachurches offer for contemporary racial inequality? [See Appendix B for content analysis guide for organizational documents.]

Interviews

Thirty-five semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with church leaders and congregants. Including interviews with the head pastor at each church, I conducted ten interviews at the Baptist church, eleven interviews at the nondenominational church, and fourteen interviews at the Pentecostal church. As the leaders of their organizations, ministers have the ability to have a significant amount of influence on the actions of their congregants. Reese, Brown and Ivers (2007) found that hearing politicizing messages or a theology of black liberation serve as a radicalizing force for black churchgoers. However, Moon (2004) has shown that congregants are not passive recipients of church teachings but rather interpret these teachings for themselves using their individual social contexts. Therefore, it is also important to understand how those who occupy the pews interpret messages from the pulpit. While the pastor plays an important role in determining solutions to racial inequality, s/he alone is insufficient (McDaniel 2008).

Interviews addressed the questions: What are the explanations of and solutions to contemporary racial inequality offered by black megachurch leaders and attendees? And the sub-question: What role does religious culture play in accounting for the explanations and solutions black megachurches offer for contemporary racial inequality? Participants were asked about their perceptions of racial inequality, what they believe should be the role of the church in addressing racial inequality, and what their church does to address racial inequality. Initially I had an interview guide for the head pastors and an interview guide for the attendees. However, after my initial two interviews, I realized that I had additional or different questions for assistant pastors and ministry leaders. For example, ministry leaders had knowledge about the history and development of their ministry that ministry participants did not. Subsequently, I developed additional interview guides for assistant/associate pastors and heads of ministries. [See Appendix C for interview guides.]

To ensure I received the most information from respondents, congregants were purposefully sampled. Purposeful sampling is "aimed at insight about the phenomenon, not empirical generalization from a sample to a population" (Patton 2002:40). Purposeful sampling allows me to select the sample in each church from whom I think I will gain the most insight to help answer each of my research questions (Merriam 2009). Participants were sampled from church ministries—specifically those with an outward, community focus (e.g., public policy, prison, drug and alcohol, and food/clothing bank ministries). I interviewed the head pastor of each church and ten to twelve attendees at each church. To recruit participants I started with congregants who were head of ministries, because their contact information was available on the church

websites, and then asked them to direct me to other attendees involved in church ministries.

All interviews, with the exception of two with head pastors, were conducted in-person. The two interviews that were not conducted in person were conducted over the telephone. While telephone interviews limited my ability to observe forms of non-verbal communication and cues, they provided the benefit of being done at the convenience of the interviewee's schedule. Interviews ranged from forty minutes to two hours, however, the average interview time was one hour. Interviews were usually conducted at the participants' churches, but also occurred at their home, work, or a coffee shop. Before beginning the interview, participants were given an IRB form explaining the purpose of the project and obtaining their consent. The form also explained their ability to opt out of the study at any time as well as steps taken to ensure their privacy. When the interview was conducted over the phone, an IRB form was emailed to the participant for them to sign prior to the interview. All interviews were digitally recorded with the participants' permission. Participants were provided with a $10 gift card to a local retailer for participating in the interviews. All recorded interviews were transcribed and analyzed using NVivo qualitative data software.

Data Analysis

Developing a Codebook

As Merriam (2009:176) states, "Data analysis is a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts,

between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation." Therefore, the first step of my coding process involved a deductive analysis where I determined themes and concepts identified in the literature that were most important for understanding my research (Patton 2002). Prior to entering the field, I used these themes to create an initial codebook for the fieldnotes and interviews that consisted of the code label and its definition.

The second step of my coding process involved an inductive analysis where I identified themes and concepts that emerged from the research memos I wrote based on my fieldnotes and interviews while they were being conducted (Patton 2002). More than notes, research memos are the beginnings of data analysis during the data collection process. In addition to analysis, memos included short quotes and raw data. At this point, the initial codebook was revised to include codes that emerged from the data that have been collected. The new codes reflected recurring patterns in the data and answers to my research questions. Because data analysis is an iterative process that involves going back and forth between inductive and deductive reasoning, I alternated between the literature and data in order to refine my codebook.

Analyzing Data

All interviews were transcribed and I used NVivo qualitative software to analyze them for patterns in the data. Using the software, I went through all of the transcripts and placed a code next to the data unit where the matching concept appears. Fieldnotes from participant observations were also coded. After the data were coded then they were analyzed in relation to the research questions asked. Church documents were analyzed using the content analysis guide for descriptive and historical

information as well as indications of explanations and solutions offered to racial inequality [see Appendix B]. When sermons were analyzed as part of these documents, they were transcribed and coded inductively with particular attention paid to explanations of and solutions to contemporary racial inequality.

Cross-Case Analysis

Because this study utilizes multiple cases, first individual within-case analyses were conducted followed by cross-case analyses (Merriam 2009). In the individual case analyses I paid particular attention to how pastors and congregants of each church understand contemporary racial inequality and what they think should be the role of their church in addressing it. I also compared what the pastors of the churches said with what the congregants said, because although the pastor holds an influential position in the church, his/her perspective is not always shared by all of the congregants.

While case studies are not generalizable to populations, a cross-case analysis allows me to draw theoretical conclusions (Yin 2003). In my cross case analysis I observed similarities and differences amongst the three churches. In this analysis I considered how the religious culture of each church accounts for differences in their understandings of and approaches to racial inequality.

Conducting Research as a Religious Insider

Insider/Outsider Status in Qualitative Research

The experience of being an outsider or an insider to a group being studied has been an area of intense inquiry among qualitative researchers concerned with the

integrity of their research. An insider is defined as a researcher that shares an identity or experience with the study participants, whereas an outsider is defined as a researcher that does not share an identity or experience with study participants (Dwyer and Buckle 2009). Because insiders are seen as members of the group being studied, it is assumed that they benefit because of access to the participants and the trust and openness of participants. Yet, this insider research status can also cause the researcher to have difficulty separating their experience from that of their participants or result in an analysis that focuses on shared factors between the researcher and participants while deemphasizing discrepant factors, or vice versa (Dwyer and Buckle 2009). Outsider research status has traditionally been the standard in the quest for "objective" social science research (e.g., see Simmel 1971). Because outside researchers are not members of the group they are studying it is assumed that they benefit from a detachment and are less likely to have their research clouded by their insider identity. Yet, this outsider research status may make it difficult to gain access to the population under study or result in overlooking nuances that an insider may be aware of.

Insider/outsider researcher status has most frequently been characterized as a dichotomy. One is either considered a research insider or a research outsider. Yet, because we all have varying, intersecting identities researchers may find themselves as partial insiders. For example, Wilcox (2002) is a lesbian and non-Christian who conducted a study of LGBT Christians and used the metaphor "dancing on the fence" to describe her partial insider status. Different identities can become more pronounced during various stages of the research process and cause the researcher to experience multiple dimensions of insider/outsider status (Ganiel and Mitchell 2006; Hellawell

2006). In contrast to a dichotomy, Dwyer and Buckle (2009) take a dialectical approach and focus on "the space between." Rather than simplifying researcher status into a dichotomy of belonging or not belonging to a group, a dialectical approach recognizes the complexity of our positionalities as researchers. They explain, "The intimacy of qualitative research no longer allows us to remain true outsiders to the experience under study and, because of our role as researchers, it does not qualify us as complete insiders. We now occupy the space between, with the costs and benefits this status affords" (Dwyer and Buckle 2009:61). Thus, rather than try to resolve the insider/outsider status of researchers we should focus on the ways we are both/and rather than either/or.

My Background

My own religious background is what initially drew me to research black megachurches. I was raised in a historic black Baptist church in Brooklyn led by a pastor who was equally known for his orations and social activism. He was chairman of the New York offices of Operation Breadbasket and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, was an advisor to Al Sharpton, protested against the discriminatory hiring practices of unions, and led boycotts against A&P grocery store for discriminating against blacks. Hence, I grew up in a congregation that stressed that social justice and religion should not be separated. The church I grew up in is now considered a megachurch, and had the attendance to be considered a megachurch when I attended, but I had no conception of that when I was growing up. Because of this background I am also skeptical of scholarly and non-scholarly stereotypes of black megachurches as abandoning the "least of these" in the pursuit of prosperity, particularly when the claims are unsubstantiated by research. As a result of my religious

background, I bring to my study the experience of a religious insider shaped by over a decade of participation in a black megachurch.

Being a Religious Insider: Gaining Access and Rapport

Because megachurches are large and bureaucratic structures, gaining access to the head pastors can prove to be quite challenging. Head pastors at megachurches often have very busy schedules and lead congregations with thousands of attendees that may also desire their time. These pastors may also be wary of strangers who want to speak with them as they do receive threats to their lives[35]. I found that it was easier to gain access to the head pastors through their administrative assistants. Although the pastor's assistants serve as a gateway to the pastor they were not barriers and willingly set up appointments for me to meet with the pastor. These pastors were not unfamiliar with researchers contacting them to gain access to their congregations, and in fact, one pastor joked that he just finished an interview with a group of researchers from another university and was being "studied to death." When meeting with the head pastors I introduced myself as a Ph.D. student in Sociology at the University of Maryland. Since Washington, D.C. is only a few miles from the university all of the pastors were familiar with the institution—although one jokingly asked why I was studying at Maryland instead of Howard, a historically black institution in D.C. I also explained my religious background and that I was specifically interested in conducting a study that would address stereotypes of black megachurches as being uninvolved in their communities.

[35] Each of the three head pastors in my study always had some form of security with them (either a DC police officer or members of the congregation's security ministry) at the Sunday services I attended for my participant observations.

My religious background provided me with a point of commonality with both the pastors and attendees. A common question I was asked by both pastors and attendees was first, did I attend their church and second, since I did not, what church did I attend. As much as this likely reflects a habit to evangelize to potentially unchurched individuals I think this question also reflects a desire to know that I would understand their perspectives and perhaps I would be more empathetic in my study of their congregations. Over the course of my research I came to understand my status as a religious insider to be helpful when conducting interviews, but a difficulty when conducting participant observations, particularly in the Baptist church which closely mirrored the church of my childhood. While conducting participant observations I had to work harder to notice that which I might take for granted such as the majority female attendees or the content of prayers. Because of this, I consciously made the choice to alternate observations at church services so that by attending service at a church I was less familiar with on one week, I would be more aware of that which I may have overlooked in my observations at the church I was more familiar with the following week.

While my religious background established me as a religious insider, my status as a researcher had the potential of establishing me as an outsider. I expected that my intentions as a researcher might be viewed with suspicion and make it more difficult for me to gain access, particularly given the negative perceptions of many black megachurches by scholars and non-scholars. However, my status as a researcher was viewed positively and worked in my favor because each of the pastors were familiar with conducting interviews with scholars of religion, each of the pastors have doctorate

degrees, and because education is so highly valued in each of the congregations, participants were willing to assist in a project that would help me earn my doctorate. Yet, unexpectedly, there were times when my religious background made me feel like an outsider in the charismatic Pentecostal and nondenominational church services. Although I have attended services at charismatic churches prior to doing this research, because the church I was raised in was Baptist and not charismatic, the culture of the services was much less familiar to me. This outsider status actually helped my participant observations because the experiences were unfamiliar.

Each of the pastors was supportive of my study and provided me with permission to conduct interviews with them and members of their congregation. The pastor of the Pentecostal church was uncharacteristically accessible and supportive. He gave me his cell phone number, his book, a copy of his dissertation, which was a study of the ministries of his congregation, and a list of a few ministry leaders and their contact information. He also told me to use his name if necessary when trying to contact other pastors because he understood how difficult it could be to get in touch with them.

Congregants that I interviewed were also very supportive of my study and enthusiastic about helping me complete my Ph.D. Some called my research "a blessing" and were very interested to know about my plans once it was finished. When I encountered difficulties getting respondents at the Baptist church, two of my interviewees—both of whom had Ph.D.'s and were sympathetic about conducting research—volunteered to contact people I had trouble getting in touch with. Although some respondents joked that my interview questions were making them "think too hard," overall they were happy to talk with me about contemporary racial inequality,

what they think should be the role of black churches in addressing it, and the challenges facing their congregations' ministries.

CHAPTER 5: "Christianity should be about liberation, so you have to address race": Understanding and Addressing Racial Inequality at Community Baptist Church

In the 2014 documentary film "Black Church, Inc." black megachurches are taken to task for allegedly abandoning the socially active role of the Black Church during the Civil Rights Movement and instead focusing on a gospel of prosperity to the detriment of social programs for the black community. One commentator in the film pronounces, "Black megachurches have caused the Black Church to lose its prophetic voice." As I argued in Chapter 3, due to the history of black churches being one of the most—if not the most—stable institution in black communities there has long been an expectation that black churches should address the needs of the black community (Warnock 2014). Whether or not it is completely accurate, the Black Church has been held to a standard of challenging the status quo and addressing issues faced by the black community. As evidenced in the documentary "Black Church, Inc." this expectation and standard is amplified in the case of black megachurches. Due to their membership and budget size, black megachurches are more likely to have more social, economic, and human resources than their smaller counterparts. Yet, the assumption that all black megachurches have embraced prosperity theology and abandoned a social justice orientation is not true. While many black churches and black megachurches incorporate aspects of prosperity teachings, such as positive confession, black churches have varied theological orientations and not all are prosperity churches (Walton 2009; Barber 2011; Tucker-Worgs 2011). Furthermore, it is unrealistic to think that black megachurches are capable of solving institutionalized racism or that we should assume that all black megachurches see this as part of their work. A more realistic perspective—and the aim of this chapter—is to first examine how black megachurches view the problem of racial

inequality, and second, consider if and how this influences how black megachurches address racial inequality.

In this chapter I outline how the first of three black megachurches in my study interprets and addresses contemporary racial inequality. I analyze how religious culture accounts for understandings of and responses to contemporary racial inequality among the black megachurch leaders and attendees in my study. Religious culture includes components such as prayer, scripture, sermons, and worship. For many religious people, their religious culture provides a toolkit to help them make sense of other contexts, not just religious ones (Emerson and Smith 2000). Therefore, religious culture can help us understand how individuals use their faith-based beliefs to make sense of racial inequality as well as the strategies of action they use to address it. I also analyze how other factors, such as declining membership, impact responses to contemporary racial inequality. I find that religious culture influences how the leaders and attendees of Community Baptist[36] understand contemporary racial inequality and how they believe it should be addressed. Because the religious culture of Community Baptist emphasizes political awareness, education, and the connection between Christianity and social justice, leaders and attendees tended to believe that racial inequality is a social justice issue that the Black Church has a particular role in addressing—particularly through education. Although religious culture impacts how this megachurch addresses racial inequality, other factors such as the lack of human and financial resources also shape strategies to intervene in racial inequality.

[36] The names of churches and respondents have been replaced with pseudonyms.

This chapter is organized into four sections. The first section provides an overview of Community Baptist Church. The second section describes the ways leaders and attendees at Community Baptist explain racial inequality. Respondents at Community Baptist often began with structural explanations of racial inequality, but these explanations tended to coincide with individual explanations of culture and behavior. The third section examines how they think the Black Church should address it. The leaders and congregants of Community Baptist feel that there are two main roles for black churches in addressing racial inequality—advocating for vulnerable populations and being a resource of information. The fourth section describes the various strategies taken to address racial inequality, which includes civic engagement, education, racial reconciliation, and community development corporations. The final section analyzes how the loss of membership and a permanent place of worship effect the ability of Community Baptist to address racial inequality.

Community Baptist Church

Community Baptist Church is the oldest of the three churches in my study. Founded in 1864 in an area of D.C. known as "Hell's Bottom" by freed slaves, Community Baptist is very rooted in the African American experience. Cultural tools such as call-and-response, references to slavery and the Civil Rights Movement, and Negro spirituals are all staples of their worship services. They also hold traditional African American religious services yearly such as Watch Night Service and the Seven

Last Words service[37]. The worship services at Community Baptist are characterized by subdued praise and traditional hymns from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, such as "Old Rugged Cross" and "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing."

The head pastor, Dr. Harris, is a renowned orator who frequently incorporates social events in his sermons. Dr. Harris is also known for his gender inclusivity and the church switched denominational affiliations from the National Baptist Convention (NBC) to the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC) because he refused to stop ordaining women[38]. Under Dr. Harris' leadership, Community Baptist Church became one of Washington D.C.'s most socially and politically influential churches. Community Baptist Church addresses racial inequality by focusing their efforts on civic engagement, education, racial reconciliation, and community development corporations. Although members and leaders think addressing racial inequality is an important role of the Black Church, Community Baptist has fewer ministries that are intervening in racial inequalities than the other churches in my study. One hundred and fifty years after its founding, Community Baptist Church is suffering from a significant

[37] Watch Night Service is a New Year's Eve service traditionally held in black churches. The service usually includes songs, a sermon, and a prayer that ends in the New Year. While there are some debates over its origins, in black churches Watch Night is explained to have originated when slaves gathered on December 31, 1862, known as "Freedom's Eve," awaiting the stroke of midnight when the Emancipation Proclamation would become law and all slaves in territories rebelling against the Union would be free. The Seven Last Words service is a Good Friday service in which seven preachers present very short sermons on each of the biblical passages that present the seven last sayings of Jesus as he hung on the cross.

[38] The National Baptist Convention (NBC) is the largest of the historic black Protestant denominations and was established in the late 1880s (Morris and Lee 2005). The Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC) was established in 1961 when a group of ministers from the National Baptist Convention (NBC) opposed the term limits of the NBC president and wanted to create a more socially active denomination that would support Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement (Pinn 2006). The NBC is governed by men and this extends down to individual churches that have a history of opposing the ordination of women pastors on scriptural grounds (Morris and Lee 2005). The PNBC is also governed by men, but historically individual churches have been more open to ordaining women than the NBC (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990).

loss of membership and finances, explained below, which directly impacts their social engagement.

Explaining Racial Inequality: "Not everybody has the same opportunities"

As explained in Chapter 2, understandings of racial inequality, or racial attitudes, are significant to this study because they are indicative of explanations of racism, which in turn are indicative of the solutions black megachurch leaders and attendees may offer for contemporary racial inequality. To find out how the leaders and attendees of the megachurches explain contemporary racial inequality I asked three questions: (1) What is racism to you?; (2) On average, minorities have worse housing, jobs, and income than whites. Why do you think this is?; and (3) Some people say that minorities are worse off than whites because they lack motivation or do not have the right values to succeed. What do you think about this?

Studies of blacks' interpretations of racial inequality find that, compared to whites, blacks are more likely to rely on structural explanations rather than individual explanations (for examples see Kluegel 1990; Sigelman and Welch 1991; Hunt 1996; Schuman, Steeh, Bobo and Krysan 1997). In other words, blacks are more likely to cite the way society is structured that creates opportunities for some while denying them to others as the primary reason for racial inequality. However, because the overwhelming majority of racial attitudes literature is quantitative, and relies on binary answers, it does not allow for nuances in individuals' racial attitudes (Bonilla-Silva 2003). I find that rather than binary explanations of racial inequality that *either* place the blame on

individuals *or* blame social structures, both of these explanations tend to coexist and are relied on simultaneously. Respondents at Community Baptist often began with structural explanations of racial inequality, but these explanations tended to coincide with individual explanations based on culture and behavior. These types of responses reflect the individualism of post-Civil Rights colorblind racism that blames individuals for their shortcomings rather than unequal social arrangements. I also find that the religious culture of Community Baptist supports both individual and structural explanations of racial inequality.

When asked to define racism, Dr. Harris, the head pastor, provided a response that highlighted the subtleties of racial inequality in a post-Civil Rights era. He explains:

> […] [R]acism is difficult to define. It is more difficult to define this day and era because […] the nature of racism has changed. I was saying yesterday down at the March on Washington, the celebration of the anniversary of the "I Have a Dream" speech, the signs on the water coolers are gone. You can eat in Woolworth's, if you can find a Woolworth's. Public accommodations are available to you any time you want them. But the nature of racism has to do with, why can't I get a loan if I have good credit. Or why can't I live in this neighborhood if I'm able to afford it? Or how is it that my son gets shot and he's walking from the grocery store and minding his own business? Those are some of the problems that you're faced with.

Dr. Harris suggests that racism is difficult to define because it is no longer as blatant as it was in a pre-Civil Rights era and it is also no longer legally enforced. The explicit signs of segregation and inequality have been replaced with laws that seemingly grant everyone equal opportunities. Although there are no longer signs in residential

neighborhoods that say "Whites Only," the outcomes of residential segregation persist. Bonilla-Silva (2010:3) labels this the "now you see it, now you don't" nature of contemporary racial inequality. Rev. Sheila, an assistant pastor, also notes the subtlety of contemporary racial inequality. She mentioned that she grew up in the segregated south where railroad tracks divided the white part of town from the black part of town. Rev. Sheila used to drink from segregated water fountains and attended segregated movie theaters where blacks had to sit in the balcony. Yet, she suggests, "They do it differently now. The [Ku Klux] Klan doesn't wear white anymore. They wear Brooks Brothers stuff. […] They don't have the signs up on the doors anymore; I just know not to go there." Rev. Sheila reiterates Dr. Harris' observations regarding racial inequality in a pre- and post-Civil Rights era. The white robes of the Ku Klux Klan have often been a symbol of explicit racism. Yet Rev. Sheila suggests that just because the robes are not as visible as they once were it does not mean racism or the Klan has disappeared. Furthermore, even though there are no discriminatory signs stating who is welcome and who is not, Rev. Sheila knows where she is not welcome. As explained in Chapter 2, despite claims of a "colorblind era," racial inequalities persist by other means. To use a metaphor from a popular children's story, the emperor has new clothes[39] and although racial inequality may not be as blatant, it maintains the same outcomes through different mechanisms (Bonilla-Silva 2010).

[39] "The Emperor's New Clothes" is a fairytale by Hans Christian Andersen. In the story, an emperor hires two weavers who promise new clothes that are invisible to anyone who is unfit for their position or stupid. No one can see the clothing but everyone pretends to in fear of being presumed incompetent. Finally, a little boy exclaims that the emperor is not wearing clothes and everyone in the crowd finds the courage to stop pretending.

Denise, a 31 year old seminary student, who was born well after the Civil Rights struggles that eliminated legalized segregation, also noted the subtleties of contemporary racial inequality. As an undergraduate student at the University of Pittsburgh[40], Denise recalls that there was a policy which required student organizations to have a metal detector for any entrance when they hosted a party. Furthermore, any attendees had to be college students and there had to be security present. Although this was a policy that was supposed to apply to all campus organizations, it was only enforced when black student organizations hosted parties. She also recalls that whenever more than five black students were present in the lobby of the main dorm, campus police would appear and stand around as if they were waiting for something bad to happen. Yet, this never happened when there was a large group of white students. Interestingly, Denise's mother Janice, 74, who grew up in Pittsburgh did not perceive it to be a city of blatant racism. She remembers that there was no legalized segregation as there was in the south, she had both black and white friends and worked at a predominately white department store. Yet, over four decades later, Janice's daughter Denise thinks of Pittsburgh as a "very racist city." Denise and Janice's observations further highlight the nuances of contemporary racial inequality and why it is difficult to define. Denise did not experience the Jim Crow segregation that her mother Janice was thankful Pittsburgh did not have. Nevertheless, she is highly aware of the differential treatment of white and black students at Pittsburgh's flagship campus and how racial inequality persists without the presence of Jim Crow laws and seemingly in the midst of social progress.

[40] Although Denise's name is a pseudonym, this is the name of the university she attended.

While not all respondents at Community Baptist remarked on the nuances of contemporary racial inequality, almost all respondents explained that contemporary racial inequality is a result of structural arrangements that are beyond an individual's control. Although individuals may appear to have equal opportunities according to the law, that does not mean individuals have equal opportunities in practice. Denise explains, "Our system is set up that supposedly you pull yourself up by your bootstraps, but not everybody has the same opportunities." The view of racial inequality as a structural issue fits the religious culture of this congregation. The sermons at this church often highlight social inequalities and the pastor has a history of activism.

A couple of respondents at Community Baptist explicitly stated that racial inequality continues to exist because our society is set up to keep the majority of blacks from advancing. In other words, racial inequality is not an unintentional result of the structural arrangements of society; rather, it is an outcome that is intentionally sought. As the head pastor, Dr. Harris, contends:

> It is the responsibility of those who are oppressors to keep the oppressed, oppressed. […] Those who have power want to retain power and the only way you can retain power is to retain the money. Why do we have the worst housing? Is it because […] we don't have a desire to work for it, we're not willing to work for it, is that what it is? Or is it even when we think we have it there'll be some scheme hatched among bankers and financers? They put us in a situation where the houses we thought we had are foreclosed. […] It's that kind of thing that begins to define the whole issue of racism to the point that it no longer is obscure, that it is something that is clearly to be seen.

Dr. Harris challenges notions that blacks are not motivated while simultaneously pointing to the obscurity of contemporary racism. Using the predatory lending that

created a housing foreclosure crisis that began in 2008, he explains that even when blacks become homeowners they may unknowingly be the victims of predatory lending and lose their status as homeowners. As Dr. Harris points out, racism seems very obscure, but when one becomes aware of the strategy of the powerful to maintain their power, then racism seems much less obscure. Rev. Sheila echoes Dr. Harris' sentiments and states, "[T]here's a concerted effort to keep it that way."

Although Rev. Sheila suggested that racial inequality is a result of intentional structural arrangements to maintain the subordination of people of color, she simultaneously felt that individual blacks are responsible for the persistence of racial inequality. Rev. Sheila says:

> […] [A]s much as it just grieves me to say it, there's still too many of us that really have just gotten too complacent on living off of everybody else. […] But I […] remember […] this was probably mid-60s, before 65. I was sitting in a meeting one day […]. I remember getting this notion in my head 20 years from now there are going to be too many people on welfare. "He's setting them up for it and they're falling for it." And I heard the words come out of my mouth and if looks could kill I wouldn't be sitting here today. [*Laughs*] That's what they wanted to happen and doggonit if we didn't fall for it. Are there some people who can't make it? Absolutely, for many reasons. But for a lot of it, I'm sorry; I think we've just gone too far with this.

Rev. Sheila expresses concern with the number of blacks that appear to be dependent on government assistance. The general perception is that black families have higher rates of welfare participation than white families. While minority families have not accounted for any more welfare caseloads than white families, they are disproportionately more likely to participate in the welfare system given that they are

a smaller population than whites (Moffitt and Gottschalk 2001). Although Rev. Sheila seems to express a perspective that it was a concerted effort to make blacks welfare dependent, she believes that the responsibility still lies with blacks who "fell for it" and perpetuate cycles of welfare dependency. Yet, it is Rev. Sheila's theology that shapes this more individualistic understanding of racial inequality. She clarifies, "And I think that's a piece of what we try to teach some people coming into the kingdom because that's not kingdom mindedness. I mean the Bible is clear. If a man does not want to work, he ought not eat." The Bible verse Rev. Sheila is referring to is 2 Thessalonians 3:10 which states, "For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: 'The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.'" This Bible verse is commonly used by conservatives who are against a welfare state that they deem provides "handouts" rather than "hand ups" (Olasky 2000; Hackworth 2012). Based on Rev. Sheila's understanding of the Bible there are particular groups of people who are deserving of assistance, but individuals who are physically able to work should not depend on government assistance. There are a number of New Testament passages[41] that refer to seeking the kingdom of God or bringing God's kingdom to earth. Influenced by these scriptures, kingdom mindedness refers to biblical principles that define behavior. This means actively living out biblical principles here on earth rather than waiting until one gets to heaven. Because Romans 14:17 describes the kingdom of God as righteousness, Rev. Sheila asserts that anyone who is kingdom minded will reflect this righteousness and live in a way that is upright and respectable. Consequently, laziness and a lack of desire to work does not reflect kingdom mindedness.

[41] For examples see Matthew 4:23; Matthew 6:33; Matthew 6:10; Mark 1:15; and Romans 14:17-18.

Among the respondents who cited unequal structural arrangements as a cause of racial inequality, many specifically referenced differences in education. Blacks may not have the same educational opportunities as whites due to historical discrimination and the perpetual effects of this discrimination on present generations. Although this is considered a structural explanation of racial inequality, a few of the responses simultaneously relied on individually oriented explanations. These responses noted that the main consequence of these disparate educational opportunities is that a lack of education creates lower expectations and behaviors that are not conducive to success. Janice illustrates:

> A lot of them, they don't have many opportunities for education. Either because their families were poor and maybe they didn't have anybody to show them how they could do better or they don't have mentors. Sometimes when you're in like a certain family style, say like some people here that are poor that live in the ghetto. […] People are just in their pattern and sometimes when people are like that, they are really hard to reach because sometimes they're not very approachable. […] I think people get stuck in a rut. And they don't have the opportunity to get themselves out of the rut and it's just like perpetuated. People have the same bad habits, they maybe have kids and then get hooked up on drugs and other things and it's just a vicious cycle.

While Janice recognizes that individuals do not have equal opportunities, it is the pattern of behaviors one develops when confined in poverty that perpetuates a cycle and keeps the individual "stuck in a rut" and creates a type of anger and aggressiveness that is off-putting to those who try to help. She admits, "You get like a rough ghetto person and if you come and try to talk to them […] they're belligerent and you don't know what to do. […] It just puts people off and it's just like how can you help people

like that." Janice notes that there are fewer educational opportunities for blacks—particularly poor blacks—and that this is a result of unequal structural arrangements beyond an individuals' control. Yet, at the same time Janice also attributes the lack of intervention in poor black communities to the off-putting attitudes and responses of individual blacks.

Similar to Janice's initial assertion that poor blacks may not have anyone to show them how to do better, Natalie and Denise believe that the cycle of negative behaviors persists because you cannot do better if you do not possess the knowledge. Natalie asserts that when "you know better, you do better":

> I have had a lot of struggles with my finances because my parents did not teach me about money because they didn't know. And they still don't know. […] I had to go on my own and learn and read books and watch Suze Orman and like all this stuff that I probably wouldn't have had to do if my parents would have taught me some basic stuff.

Because Natalie realized that she lacked the knowledge for financial success, she taught herself the tools she needed for improvement. Based on her perspective it is up to the individual to break the cycle of behavior. The explanation of "when you know better, you do better" was a pattern found across each of the churches, but it was most commonly deployed as an individual-level explanation of racial inequality in the nondenominational church. Yet, Denise regards the lack of information as a systemic rather than an individual level problem:

> [N]ot everybody has the same opportunities of exposure or to even know that you have options to live somewhere else. To even know that you have options to help you if you're trying to buy a home. A lot of people don't know that there

> are programs to help you fix your credit and prep you for homeownership. […] Sometimes I don't even think that's education as far as formal education, it's just education about how to work things within a system, that's not made, you know, mass knowledge.

Denise views this knowledge as a form of capital that is systematically kept from blacks. Although this knowledge is not economic capital, it has the capacity to translate into economic gains if one possesses it. Unlike Natalie, who suggests that one can simply fill in the knowledge gaps on their own, what Denise describes is a structural problem. Yet, Denise simultaneously finds fault with blacks who refuse to be involved in things that would be productive for them because it is associated with whiteness. She says, "Sometimes it can be our own pride and arrogance cause there are a lot of people who don't trust white people, so anything that looks remotely 'white' to them, they're not even going to push for it, or try to be involved in it." Because blacks have been systematically denied access to this capital, it is associated with whiteness and therefore rejected by some blacks who would benefit from it. Thus, what appears to be a more structural take on access to knowledge also reveals individual level explanations.

Others also acknowledged a similar form of negativity that reflects a form of internalized oppression. LaTasha states, "There is a inbred systematically induced racism when it comes to those economic advances. It seems like […] we're never going to catch up because of this institutionalized thought that we are inferior in every way, so we don't deserve these things that other people deserve." Natalie echoes this:

> [S]ome people have this like systematic—and it's both ways, it's kind of like how they feel about themselves and how white people feel about them. […] [T]hinking that they're less than or that they can't achieve or that they're stuck

> in the ghetto or whatever. And then I think that some of it is them not being able to overcome that and having like, being weak-minded and just not being able to say that I can do better than this.

LaTasha and Natalie believe these negative thought patterns contribute to racial inequality because they create a defeatist attitude. As a result, people have a lower sense of self-worth compared to whites and think they will never achieve anything more. Their responses mirror Rev. Sheila's assertions about kingdom mindedness. Although neither LaTasha nor Natalie use the term, they are both describing negative thought patterns that can arise when individuals believe they are less than, or not deserving of God's promises. Often associated with Word of Faith Churches[42], positive confession spans denominational affiliations and literally interprets Proverbs 23:7 which states, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Harrison 2005; Walton 2009). Harrison (2005) has demonstrated that positive confession has been used by blacks as a tool to respond to racial injustice. Because kingdom mindedness involves thinking of oneself in positive terms as an heir to God's promises, individuals who succumb to negative thought patterns as a result of racial inequality and "believe they can't achieve" or are "weak-minded" fail to be kingdom minded. LaTasha and Natalie's responses also highlight that racism is not simply a system of structural inequalities, but it also consists of a hegemonic ideology that influences how both dominant and subordinate groups view themselves.

[42] Word of Faith describes a loosely organized fellowship of churches belonging to the neo-Charismatic movement. Word of Faith churches have no official ties to any classic Pentecostal fellowships or any other denominations. Because Word of Faith churches believe so strongly in positive confession, they often are not socially or politically active because positive thinking and confession are seen as the only way to address racism, sexism, and classism. (Walton 2009)

Similar to assertions that "when you know better, you do better," Sierra, 41, explains that when you know better, you also expect more. She discloses that the main difference between herself and her cousins was that her parents had clear expectations that she would succeed at something.

> I grew up knowing I had four choices once I graduated from high school, and I had to graduate from high school. You go to college, you join the military, you get a job and pay us rent, work for a year and save money and then do something, or you get out. Those were the four choices, they were clear. I can't tell you when I first heard it, but that was constantly communicated. Backpacks were checked every night. The subjects we were weak in, we had to have tutors for our weak subjects, because if dad couldn't figure it out and mom couldn't figure it out, we're gonna find somebody who knows how to figure it out because there's no options for failure, that wasn't an option for us. The expectation was "you will succeed in something." […] Whereas I had cousins, expectations weren't communicated. The mom would do whatever she did. […] It really starts from birth.

Although Sierra describes her parents as poor, they had high expectations for their children because someone of a previous generation also expected that her parents could rise above their circumstances. Sierra continues:

> My mom was *po*[43], […] because her father died when she was five, she doesn't remember her father. One of her teachers said to her "your father believed in education." And so she tried to live with that expectation that she would be able to rise above her circumstances. Her mother never did. […] [W]hen she graduated from high school, […] I think she said she had 17 dollars, didn't have money for school, but got on the bus and went to college, because the people who were successful in her community said you will succeed, you will do this,

[43] Sierra uses the term "po" (pronounced poh) to differentiate between poor and very poor. "Po" denotes a deeper state of poverty.

> and she believed them, because believing them was better than what'd come from her mother.

As LaTasha states, "[O]pportunities are different because expectations are different." Yet, what we see in a number of the responses from Community Baptist is that even though there is an acknowledgement that racial inequality persists because of structural factors such as discrimination and unequal opportunities, racial inequality is also described as a byproduct of a cycle of poor behaviors. These behaviors and the lower expectations that result from not "knowing better" were described in a way reminiscent of the culture of poverty, which are a set of intergenerational behaviors that run counter to national values (Nunnally and Carter 2012). Culture of poverty arguments suggest that people with a culture of poverty develop a sense of helplessness, inferiority, and lack of aspiration (Lewis 1971; Asen 2002). As discussed in Chapter 2, colorblind racism is an ideology used to justify the status quo of racial inequality, and is a "blame the victim" ideology that relies on stereotypes of blacks as lazy or culturally degenerate. Because this ideology is hegemonic, even racial minorities have to accommodate their views vis-à-vis this dominant ideology (Bonilla-Silva 2010). Responses that indicate negative behaviors or thought patterns arising from a culture of poverty are also similar to Bonilla-Silva's (2010) cultural racism frame of colorblind racism. Cultural racism relies on cultural explanations to explain the standing of minorities. The problem of racial inequality becomes the cultural deficiencies of blacks rather than white supremacy. Because the ideology of colorblind racism is so pervasive and hegemonic, blacks will adopt aspects of it in making sense of racial inequality. This explains the simultaneity of structural and individual level explanations of racial inequality in

Community Baptist responses and suggestions that there are aspects of black culture—particularly poor black culture—that perpetuate racial inequality.

How Black Churches Should Address Racial Inequality: "Feeding people beyond spiritualness"

In addition to analyzing how leaders and attendees at Community Baptist explain racial inequality, it is also important to understand what they believe to be the role of the Black Church in addressing racial inequality. Those who criticize black churches and black megachurches for what they fail to do generally neglect to establish what these churches think should be done. Instead, there is an assumption that there is a common belief that the Black Church should have a particular role or strategy and if that is not being fulfilled then the church is disparaged for neglecting the legacy of the Black Church. Hence, it is necessary to first ascertain what a church believes should be done and then compare that to what they are actually doing. Overall, the leaders and congregants of Community Baptist feel that there are two main roles for black churches in addressing racial inequality—advocating for vulnerable populations and being a resource of information. Both of these roles reflect the historic role of many black churches in being all encompassing institutions that provided resources and opportunities in a racially unequal society.

The religious culture of Community Baptist emphasizes the connections between Christianity and social justice. Founded in 1864 by freed slaves, and a member of the Progressive National Baptist Convention because of their gender inclusivity, it

is not surprising that Community Baptist would view the mandate of social justice as an integral part of their ministry. Each Sunday a series of banners with themes and Bible verses hang on the walls of the school auditorium that has become their temporary home. The banner with the theme of "humanity" states, "Our ministry must reach our community and our world. Our commitment is to racial equality, gender equality, and social justice. We are all the children of God. Micah 6:8." Micah 6:8 reads, "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." Thus, because of the teachings of the Bible, Community Baptist views the mandate of social justice to be equally important as saving souls. Denise, 31, illustrates this message. She states, "Christ was a person of social justice and for us to ever think that we can separate faith from social justice would be ingenuous to our own faith." For respondents the church has a particular role in social justice because their view of social justice and liberation is informed by the Bible. Jesus is understood as a revolutionary figure who advocated for individuals, such as lepers and prostitutes, who were marginalized in society. Echoing this, Stacey said that if you're a Christian "liberation drives you" and because of this "you have to address race, […] economics, […] education, […] health." Because the leaders and congregants at Community Baptist have a theology that interprets Christ as an advocate of social justice, it follows that being a Christian means one should be concerned with matters of justice and inequality.

The leaders and attendees at Community Baptist believe that the historic role of the Black Church has been to provide leadership and advocate for the most vulnerable populations. This perspective is enforced yearly when Community Baptist celebrates

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and Martin Luther King, Jr. is honored as a minister who worked for racial justice. As Janice explains, "It's been the tradition that the Black Church was where people look up to for […] information and to keep them going." They also believe that the contemporary Black Church should retain its role as an advocate and moral compass for the community, and furthermore that this role is still needed. Brandy, 49, recounts the self-help tradition of the black community and suggests that even today, the black community cannot rely on the government for help. She says, "We've always as a community, we've taken care of ourselves because you can never rely on any other […] government program or outsider […] to do it for us. So the church has to do it."

In addition to advocating for the most vulnerable populations, some respondents also maintained that an important role of the Black Church in addressing racial inequality is to be a resource of information. Historically, the Black Church has been considered an all-encompassing institution (DuBois [1903]2003; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). This was a role that was undertaken by necessity due to racial segregation that denied blacks access to other social institutions. As a result, the Black Church became a resource center for information regarding politics, health, education, and finances. It is this role as a central social institution that provides information that respondents at Community Baptist want to see continued. For example, Natalie, who realized that she lacked financial literacy because her parents did not have the knowledge to share with her, recommends that the Black Church should fill in these knowledge gaps in order to address racial inequality. She says:

> I guess as far as that stepping in and teaching kids those things that parents didn't teach them. Things like discipline and respect and taking care of yourself and dreaming and having goals. […] So like in children's church and step team, youth choir, […] I think those kind of things, youth usher, those are opportunities for other adults to step in and you know, affirm these children and build them up and let them know what they can do. Because sometimes I think also […] people don't try to do stuff or achieve higher because nobody ever told them that they could.

Natalie believes that the Black Church can provide individuals with knowledge and information they would not otherwise have had access to. She thinks this is particularly the case for youth who may have never been told the range of opportunities they have available to them.

Black megachurches frequently have many middle-class attendees and these attendees often have the forms of social and cultural capital to assist non middle-class blacks (Gilkes 1998). However, LaTasha, 40, suggests that this information sharing does not happen as much as it used to:

> I think the church's responsibilities is to feed the people beyond spiritualness. […] There was somebody who knew more about accounting, there was always someone who knew the legal field, there was someone who knew how to do this and how to do that and how to make clothes or how to cook or whatever. And I think that we have those things still, but […] the information is not shared like it used to be.

Prior to the flight of middle-class blacks from inner cities, black churches served as sites for middle-class blacks to share their skills with less economically advantaged blacks (Gilkes 1998). Yet, LaTasha concludes that this is no longer the case and she speculates that it is because people in black churches want to keep knowledge about

how to “get ahead” for themselves. In other words, she suggests that there may be a sense of increasing individualism, rather than the linked-fate mentality that has been characteristic of the Black Church (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Barnes and Nwosu 2014).

Addressing Racial Inequality

Civic Engagement

Because attendees of Community Baptist Church are encouraged to become “change agents” both inside and outside of the church, one of the primary ways Community Baptist addresses racial inequality is through civic engagement. This involves ensuring that the congregation is informed about contemporary social issues and encouraging them to take an active role in their government. Although considered a basic right in a democracy, the right to participate in government has been a privilege that blacks have fought for from the end of Reconstruction to the present day. The 1965 Voting Rights Act eliminated many of the barriers that previously prevented blacks from participating in this democracy during the Jim Crow era, nevertheless some of these barriers are reinstated in a “colorblind” era in new ways through redistricting and felony disenfranchisement (Alexander 2010).

While not all black churches may be considered “political churches,” historically the Black Church has been an institution that has contributed to civic engagement by supporting pastors who became politicians, registering voters, informing congregants of political issues, and galvanizing support for or protesting

against political issues (McClerking and McDaniel 2005). Community Baptist Church carries on this legacy by focusing on civic engagement as a strategy to address racial inequality. Janice, 74, suggested that the Black Church should continue to participate in civic engagement. She says, “First of all, point out what the racial inequalities are. What do we need done and how do we need to do this.” Thus, it is the role of the Black Church to help keep the black community aware of issues of racial inequality. Dr. Harris, the pastor of Community Baptist, frequently incorporates contemporary social events into his sermons. Whether it is the government shut down, disrespect of President Obama, healthcare inequities, or racial profiling, Dr. Harris can be relied on to address current social events. As Brandy shares, “Everybody knows how vocal Pastor is” and according to Janice they “look forward to that.” Dr. Harris feels that it is his duty to speak about these issues. He declares:

> I don’t know of anything that I could preach that at some point or other did not have something to do with the social condition that the people are experiencing. I’m in a position where I feel I am under orders to speak to those issues. […] I think if I am not speaking to social reality, […] I don’t have anything to preach about. What would I preach if I didn’t preach that? And who would want to hear it? […] I suppose that was the reason why Jesus got in trouble and was crucified because he dared to speak to the issue of inequality, he dared to speak to the issue of hunger and poverty. He dared to speak to those issues, to get people to see that the kingdom of God is not reserved for a few but it is something that is an option for all.

Dr. Harris feels compelled to speak about the social conditions people are experiencing as a result of his understanding of Jesus. Because social justice is such a central part of the religious culture of Community Baptist Church, Jesus is perceived as a revolutionary figure who challenged inequalities during his time. Consequently, Dr.

Harris strongly believes that part of his job as a pastor is to preach about social inequalities.

In keeping with the religious culture of Community Baptist Church and Dr. Harris' desire to speak to social issues, Dr. Harris was the only preacher in my study that devoted a sermon to the murder of Trayvon Martin and the only preacher to devote a sermon to the verdict of the Trayvon Martin murder trial during the course of my research. Wearing a hoodie and placing a bottle of Arizona iced tea and a bag of skittles[44] on the podium, Dr. Harris declared:

> They'll put up a statue for Martin King on one day and then shoot your children the next day. It's time to stand. We cannot be bought. We cannot be bought and paid for when it comes to standing for justice and for truth. We got to stand for ourselves. Democrats won't do it, Republicans won't do it, Independents won't do it, Tea Party sure not gonna do it. You got to stand for yourself.

Through current social events Dr. Harris educates his congregation about the importance of civic engagement. He employs the Martin Luther King, Jr. memorial statue on the National Mall in D.C. as a symbolic form of racial inclusion that, for many people, may suggest that we have achieved racial equality. Dr. Harris warns his congregation not to be deceived by this symbolic inclusion. It is quite significant that he tells his congregation that social justice cannot be bought while using the example of the Martin Luther King, Jr. memorial. The Martin Luther King, Jr. memorial had a great deal of corporate sponsorship including General Motors, Tommy Hilfiger,

[44] This sermon was given on Palm Sunday, which was declared "Hoodie Sunday" by some black churches across the U.S. Congregants were encouraged to wear hoodies—the attire Trayvon Martin was wearing when he was murdered. The Arizona iced tea and the bag of skittles represent what Trayvon Martin was carrying when he was murdered by George Zimmerman and they have become symbols of his innocence as a teenager who was simply getting snacks from the store when he was presumed to be a "thug" and murdered.

Volkswagen, Pepsi, Hyundai, Pfizer, Ford, Disney, Honda, Verizon, Toyota, State Farm, Exxon Mobile, Fed Ex, Coca-Cola, and Shell among others (Mainwaring 2011). In spite of the corporate sponsorship of a statue in honor of a man who died for racial equality, the statue remains just a *symbol* of racial equality. The reality is that black youth are still being killed by individuals who view them as a threat. The words of Dr. Harris suggest that the death of Trayvon Martin disrupts the nation's colorblind narrative and shows that even with a black president in office and a statue dedicated to a slain civil rights leader, we are not post-racial.

Over a year after the shooting of Trayvon Martin, George Zimmerman was found not guilty of murdering Trayvon Martin. In a sermon entitled "Pilate's Dilemma and Ours," given the day after the verdict, Dr. Harris exclaimed:

> Today we're faced with a dilemma. Your human and civil rights are being picked off one at a time. Right to vote, right to walk down the street while black, right of women to control their bodies. America has committed a child for doing nothing but walking home. For shame! […] Race still matters in America! It is foolish to think it doesn't. A profile is a profile whether it's in Florida or Palestine. […] There is a historic and undeniable problem of race with those who claim to be the keepers of the law. I know I'm not politically correct this morning. I don't care! Our children are being killed by the hands of godless men!

Using the outcome of the Trayvon Martin trial, Dr. Harris reminds his congregation that this country is not yet post-racial. He alerts them that rather than being in a time period of increasing civil rights, it seems the opposite is occurring where the rights of both women and racial minorities are being decreased. While other pastors in this study said they felt it was best not to address the Trayvon Martin trial in the pulpit, Dr. Harris

candidly stated that he did not intend to be "politically correct" because racism and racial profiling is a problem in the U.S. that is causing the lives of black children to be taken.

Studies have noted that politicized messages from the pulpit can serve as a radicalizing force for black churchgoers (Reese, Brown and Ivers 2007; McDaniel 2008). As a result of having a politically aware pastor and congregation, Community Baptist Church is a socially and politically active congregation. To illustrate, Taylor, 49, explains that Dr. Harris encourages congregants at Community Baptist to be "change agents" both inside and outside of the church and to be aware of social issues. As Kareema, the previous chair of the Public Policy Ministry, explains:

> I went to the Congressional Black Caucus. […] I must have saw five [Community Baptist] members […] and I participated in the 50th Anniversary for the March on Washington. […] I must have seen at least five [Community Baptist] members that were marching, or more. […] [N]o matter where I have gone as it relates to social issues, public policy issues, civic engagement, I see [Community Baptist] members there and they're not always there alone, they're with other [Community Baptist] members.

As Kareema illustrates, the attendees of Community Baptist Church frequently attend events that are related to social issues. Because the religious culture of Community Baptist Church stresses civic engagement and the pastor frequently speaks about current social issues, it is not uncommon to see groups of Community Baptist Church attendees at political events.

In addition to hearing about current events in Sunday sermons, the Public Policy Ministry at Community Baptist works to make sure that members are registered to vote

and are aware of any significant political events (e.g., the 2010 Census or Question 6, which determined same-sex marriage in Maryland). Electoral activism has been a common strategy of black churches to address racial inequality in a post-civil rights period (Smith 2002). Yet, the emphasis on "one person, one vote," can lead to an individualism that makes it difficult to achieve the race-based mobilization that was so effective during the Civil Rights Movement (Calhoun-Brown 2003). In a post- Civil Rights era of colorblind racism, it has also become increasingly difficult to identify one concern around which black churches can be effectively mobilized.

During the time interviews were being conducted for this project, the Supreme Court made a decision in 2013 to strike down Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act. Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act required states with histories of significant voter discrimination to gain clearance from the Department of Justice before changing voting regulations. With this section of the Voting Rights Act being eliminated, many civil rights advocates were alarmed and feared this decision would open the door for more restrictive voter laws to be passed (Whitaker 2013). Thus, in a post-Civil Rights time period, electoral activism becomes important to maintain the legislative victories that were gained in the 1960s. Community Baptist, however, has such a politically knowledgeable congregation that the large majority of people are already registered to vote. Therefore, much of the information given by the Public Policy Ministry is like "preaching to the choir." Kareema says:

> One of the issues that I did have as an immediate past chair of the public policy ministry was that [Community Baptist] is very unique in […] the demographic of our congregation. Because people are so highly educated and well informed, often times you're preaching to the choir. So you have to find creative ways, not

> to keep them engaged, but to engage them in such a way because most people are already knowledgeable […] about most of the issues that plague black Americans today.

Because of the political awareness and engagement of the congregation, the Public Policy Ministry found other topics about which to inform the congregation such as the Affordable Care Act and the importance of the 2010 Census. Kareema explained that the information provided by the Public Policy Ministry makes direct interventions into racial inequality.

> Well, the reason why we have health disparities in this country is because there is a lack of access to it. One of the ways that this country plans to address […] reducing health disparities […] is to provide access to all Americans. 6.8 million African Americans will now obtain health coverage through the Affordable Care Act. That's a large number. […] Participation in the Census is what action will help the federal government formulate funding for transportation, public housing, parks and recreation, things that we access on a day-to-day basis. […] [I]f you don't participate and you're not counted, then those federal dollars may never matriculate down to education and so forth.

The Affordable Care Act, otherwise known as "Obamacare," is a law that requires insurance companies to cover everyone regardless of pre-existing conditions. Considered controversial because it imposes a financial penalty for individuals who do not enroll in health insurance, the goal of this legislation is to make health insurance more expansive and affordable. According to the Kaiser Commission (2013) 21% of blacks are uninsured versus only 13% of whites. Because blacks are less likely to be insured, the Affordable Care Act could directly benefit them, and that is why Kareema thinks it is important for the Public Policy Ministry to provide congregants with this information. Additionally, as Kareema explained, the U.S. Census directly impacts

political and economic decisions in communities. Blacks have been undercounted in the U.S. Census and their participation is particularly important because it also provides statistics to document racial disparities in income, housing, and other indicators of well-being (Griffin 2012; U.S. Census 2012a).

It is important to note that many of the programs and workshops put on by the Public Policy Ministry, while technically open to the public, are primarily taken advantage of by members of Community Baptist Church. When Kareema was chair of the Public Policy Ministry, her goal was to engage the community outside of the church and to do so the ministry handed out flyers and did radio interviews. She says:

> We've always invited the community in anything we've done. And put it on the radio. WHUR has publicized some of our events before; we try to keep it on the Internet, Facebook. So the primary goal is to educate the membership, the secondary goal is to involve the community as well.

Even though there are efforts made to include the outside community, it is the congregation who generally benefits from their programs. Because Community Baptist Church is a congregation that is highly aware of social issues and the primary goal is to educate the congregation, those in the surrounding community who may be in need of the information the most may not get it.

Education

In addition to educating the congregation about civic engagement and social issues, encouraging traditional forms of education is also a strategy used by Community Baptist Church to address contemporary racial inequality. Traditionally, the black community has held education in high regard because it was seen as a gateway to access

the promises of U.S. society. The hope has been that as opportunities increased, so would one's social status and overall quality of life. Promoting education has also been a role embraced by the Black Church. Anderson (1988) suggests that even before the establishment of public schools during Reconstruction, most black churches have been committed to the education of the black community. The black church has established literacy programs and colleges, Sabbath schools, which existed before public or private schools in the South, and raised money to support the education of black children (Anderson 1988; Higginbotham 1993; Johnson 1999).

Education is valued and encouraged at Community Baptist Church. Community Baptist is a highly educated congregation and both Dr. Harris and his wife have doctorate degrees. Furthermore, Community Baptist Church will not ordain any minister who does not have a master's degree in divinity, religion, or theology. Given that approximately 85% of the congregation is middle class and approximately 5% is upper class, the educational attainment of the congregants is expected. Each Sunday cars fill the parking lot with decals and license plate frames advertising various four-year colleges and universities attended as well as membership in historically black fraternities and sororities. Dr. Harris's sermons reflect the education level of the congregation and are geared toward people with at least an undergraduate education. His sermons are always prepared and he will often quote a European theologian or explain a Biblical text in Greek or Hebrew to show his theological training. Kareema, the head of the Public Policy Ministry, shares that she had a friend who could not come back to Community Baptist because "he couldn't follow the sermon because Pastor was too intellectual for him." She goes on to say, "When you have that, you can't help but

to want to better your intellect in order to understand the character of God because he has given us a glimpse of who God is and he does it in such a high intellectual way that you really have to be smart to attend this church." Thus, the culture of Community Baptist is one that encourages and promotes education. This may have the outcome of encouraging others to achieve a higher level of education or, as Kareema's story indicates, may even cause some to feel excluded.

Community Baptist Church promotes a college-going culture. Annually in June a Graduate's Sunday is held where everyone who has recently graduated from kindergarten up to postgraduate degrees come to church in their regalia. The names, institutions, and degrees, or grades the graduates are promoted to, are printed in the bulletin and graduates are each publicly acknowledged during service. At the June 2012 Graduate's Sunday there were five college graduates, twelve graduate and professional school graduates, and three PhD graduates.

Many of the respondents at Community Baptist attribute racial inequality to education disparities and because of this one of the ways they address racial inequality is by creating a college-going culture and helping youth navigate career choices through their College and Career Ministry. When Community Baptist was in better financial conditions, the College and Career Ministry used to pay for youth to attend college tours to both historically black and predominately white colleges and universities. Today Community Baptist encourages youth to attend college tours sponsored by other churches or fraternities and sororities; however, they still provide SAT preparation and assistance with the college application process. Youth are also given the opportunity to compete for various scholarships offered by the congregation,

including a scholarship given to the winner of an oratorical contest. Denise, now in her early 30s, expresses that the knowledge she gained from the College and Career Ministry.

> I get excited and nostalgic when I think about this. […] One of the things was always education. […] If you're not going to college then you need to be thinking about […] a trade or something. Like that was always the push to the youth from the door. So much so that this one year—a lot of us would volunteer at the summer camp, [Community Baptist] used to hold a summer camp every summer. We'd volunteer for summer camp every summer and they'd pay for our trip to the college tour; that was the initial exchange. This one year our pastor decided […] that we needed to learn how to go through the process of interviews, résumé writing and actually how you get a job. So they forced us to do that but for summer camp. We had to write a resume, we actually had to show up dressed for an interview with the person who was in charge of the summer camp and then every year proceeding that, we had to do it every year. It's almost nepotism. If you were there, you were an active member, you pretty much would be able to get a position there but it was no longer guaranteed. Like you had to do the interview […] and so they prepped us for that. I remember that year, we had to all show up in suits or whatever and we're all kind of like, "For summer camp?!" We were kids so we didn't understand the value of it initially but they really did do that for us.

Initially, Denise did not understand why they were being forced to learn how to interview for jobs they were previously given automatically. However, it was not until years later when she went away to college and relied on those skills she learned that she realized the value in what Community Baptist was trying to instill in their youth. It was more than just information about how to get a job and get to college; Denise was also given a skillset to help her get through college.

> They always emphasized writing and learning how to speak well. […] So there was a lot of educational preparation that I […] did not appreciate it until I went away to college and I was at other churches and I got to see […] other people my age who did not have that exposure. […] To be taught how to speak in public, how to stand up before a group of people and be able to express yourself. […] [L]ike college interviews, when I would go sit down with my advisers, like getting ready to plan courses or whatever I was trying to do. Everyone's like, "Wow! You know exactly what you're interested in. And you know what to talk about and you ask this and this." […] And it's just certain things that I didn't realize how valuable it was. […] But all of them still instilled in us you need to learn something. Whatever it is, I don't care how great or small, be the best at it. […] Not everybody will be a doctor, that's fine, but if you want to be a teacher, be the best teacher. […] That was always the push across the board, male, female, everything so I really really appreciate that now.

In addition to helping youth get to college and instilling in them that they should always aim to be the best at whatever they do in life, Community Baptist also provided a skillset that reflects middle-class values and behaviors. This skillset is equally important to success as it provides training in the "rules of the game" (Lareau 2003). Lareau (2003) argues that because the parenting styles of middle-class parents—regardless of race—reflect dominant parenting styles, they are able to pass along advantages to their children that poor and working-class parents are not. As part of middle-class parenting styles children are taught to have more comfort with authority figures, ask questions, speak up for themselves and pursue their own individual preferences. Denise recognizes that she benefitted from lessons youth in other churches did not receive. Because Community Baptist Church thought it was important to teach youth public speaking, interviewing skills, and assist them with their career path,

Denise had the tools she needed to succeed in college and people were surprised at her ability to advocate for herself.

Racial Reconciliation

In addition to education, racial reconciliation is another strategy Community Baptist has used to address racial inequality. Racial reconciliation theology emerged in the 1960s from a group of black evangelical Christians who sought to address racism in the U.S. Racial reconciliation theology views racial division and inequality as a result of sin and requires Christians to admit that there are racial problems, recognize that these problems can be solved by submitting to God, and commit to building relationships that overcome racial division (Emerson and Smith 2000). They drew on the New Testament passage of Ephesians that states Jews and Gentiles had become one body in Christ. When racial reconciliation theology initially emerged, significant civil rights legislation had been passed and some declared that racial inequality had been defeated. Yet, the initial group of black evangelicals that introduced racial reconciliation theology argued that there was still much work to be done. They felt that addressing individual racism was equally as important as changing unjust social structures (Alumkal 2004). The second wave of racial reconciliation theology in the 1990s featured fewer black evangelical leaders and with a more popularized message of racial reconciliation, the emphasis was placed on individual reconciliation rather than changing unjust social structures (Emerson and Smith 2000). As a result, white evangelicals have individualized racism as an issue of sin that can be fixed with cross-racial relationships and repentance. Alumkal (2004) argues that the two waves of racial reconciliation theology should be considered racial projects. Hence, we can view the

second wave of racial reconciliation theology as mirroring the colorblindness of the post-Civil Rights era that reduces racism to a personal problem that is a result of bigoted individuals rather than a system of power.

In 2008 Reverend Belinda, an assistant pastor at Community Baptist Church, founded an interracial and interdenominational racial reconciliation ministry. The year 2008 was a significant year in race relations in the U.S. because then Senator Barack Obama was running for the office of President of the United States. Having secured the Democratic Party nomination, he was the first African American candidate whose election was plausible. Yet, Obama's campaign was not without racist incidents. Throughout his campaign stereotypical and racist images portraying him as an ape and terrorist were circulated on the internet and his ability to lead the nation was questioned because of his race. Following controversial sermons that disrupted our country's colorblind narrative by his former pastor, Jeremiah Wright, Obama directly addressed race in a speech entitled "A More Perfect Union." It is in this context that Rev. Belinda established the racial reconciliation ministry. She explains that her aim was "to help people move beyond the barriers to transformation in spite of the racial disparities." Although the racial reconciliation ministry was founded by a pastor at Community Baptist and its events were open to members of the congregation, the ministry was independent of the church.

Rev. Belinda, the founder of the racial reconciliation ministry, believes reconciliation is important for racial progress. She states, "It is difficult to move forward without reconciling – at least at a spiritual level. Forgiveness is a way of acknowledging the pain of the past and making a decision to move forward." According

to the ministry website there are two fundamental understandings that informed their work: "(1) Race, gender and power must all be addressed in the ongoing process of moving toward racial understanding and reconciliation, (2) reconciliation is never possible without truth." Although the racial reconciliation ministry acknowledges structural inequality, according to Rev. Belinda, the primary focus was "to help people move beyond barriers to transformation in spite of the racial disparities."

The racial reconciliation ministry hosted trainings, conversations, and film screenings. In July 2010 they hosted "An Evening to talk About Race." The announcement in the church bulletin stated, "an Evening to Talk About Race (including prejudice and bias in what is increasingly labeled as the current post-racial environment)." People were invited to view a film, and discuss their "perspectives and responsibilities as Christians in a world of increasing diversity amidst lingering lines of separation, distrust and unspoken anger." In September 2011 they hosted a "Teachable Moments Session" with a discussion of the book and movie "The Help." Rev. Belinda explained that the racial reconciliation ministry was intentional in their efforts to have age, gender, and racial diversity in their seminars and conversations. Although the ministry stopped holding events in 2011, they continued to post articles on their website until 2013. For unknown reasons, the racial reconciliation ministry is currently inactive, however the head pastor of Community Baptist continues the work of educating his congregation about racial inequality from the pulpit.

Community Development Corporations: Mental Health & Economic Empowerment

In addition to developing ministries and programs that seek to make interventions into racial inequality, Community Baptist Church has established

nonprofit community development organizations to address particular social issues. Tucker-Worgs (2011) highlights community development—rather than protest or electoral politics—as the form of public engagement in which black megachurches are most likely to participate. Community Development Corporations [CDCs] are nonprofit organizations whose mission is to fulfill some aspect of community development. Tucker-Worgs (2011) characterizes CDCs as falling into three typologies: prototypical, thematic, and service delivery. Prototypical CDCs focus on physical development such as housing or commercial development. Thematic CDCs target a particular population or community issue. Service oriented CDCs focus on support programs for children and families, job training, or social service provision. Childcare/tutoring (48.5%), housing (48.5%), food distribution (33.3%), job training (30.3%), and counseling or support groups (30.3%) are the top five activities black megachurch CDCs engage in.

Community Baptist Church has two nonprofit service oriented organizations—one that focuses on mental health and another that focuses on financial literacy and employment. Dr. Harris explains that Community Baptist Church incorporated these organizations and made them separate entities from the church in order to "legally […] separate those things that are going to have a wide social impact from those things which are primarily spiritual that are left to the church to resolve." Dr. Harris cites an instrumental reason for establishing CDCs. CDCs enable churches to separate church funds from government grant funds and also provide access to resources from funders who are unable to provide funding directly to religious institutions (Tucker-Worgs 2011).

In 1996 Community Baptist Church incorporated a nonprofit organization that offers mental health services, including individual and family therapy, premarital and marital counseling, domestic violence, and drug and alcohol treatment. Their mental health nonprofit started out as a peer-counseling ministry in 1994. To protect the liability of the church, the ministry was incorporated. The head of this CDC is Rev. Sheila whose background is in psychology and theology. In addition to Rev. Sheila, two other licensed professional counselors work with the CDC and ten others have been trained as unlicensed professional counselors. Rev. Sheila describes that they view health from a holistic perspective that seeks to address the physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being of an individual. Recall that Rev. Sheila proposed the lack of "kingdom mindedness" as a reason some individuals continue to rely on welfare when they have the ability to work. The holistic perspective Rev. Sheila emphasizes through Community Baptist's mental health CDC is also characteristic of kingdom theology. Based on the Lord's Prayer in the New Testament, kingdom theology seeks to fulfill characteristics from God's kingdom on earth; therefore, spiritual, physical, emotional, and social needs are considered in a holistic manner (Barnes 2012).

As important community institutions and social service providers, black churches are often a first point of contact for blacks facing psychological distress (Neighbors, Musick, and Williams 1998). Blacks are 20% more likely than whites to report experiencing serious psychological distress, yet blacks are less likely than whites to seek treatment for their distress (Neighbors, Musick, and Williams 1998; National Center for Health Statistics 2012). Blacks are more likely than whites to cite the use of religious coping strategies, such as prayer, in response to a variety of problems

including psychological distress (Ellison and Taylor 1996; Chatters, Taylor, Jackson, and Lincoln 2008). Furthermore, barriers exist for blacks in utilizing mental health services including inability to afford mental health services or mistrust of medical institutions. Yet, Rev. Sheila maintains that "as opposed to 20 years ago when we started this, [people] are a lot more open and a lot more willing to admit, 'Okay, we need to really get some help here, so here we are.'" The Black Church has historically been an institution that helped blacks cope with their problems. By establishing a CDC that offers low cost mental health services, Community Baptist helps provide health resources that otherwise may have been difficult to access.

In addition to the mental health CDC, in 2000 Community Baptist Church developed a CDC to help with the social and economic growth of the community. Once a month, this CDC has a table that provides employment information. The CDC also conduct workshops on successful job interviews and résumés. According to Dr. Harris:

> [P]art of our responsibility is not only to take an offering, but the responsibility to assist people in strategically working toward a solid financial platform and a secure employment history so that the benefits of the kingdom come not as a consequence of something that is a hand out, but it comes as a consequence of working systematically together in order to secure economic freedom and security for all.

One of the criticisms of black megachurches is that they are solely concerned with profit. Those who argue that black megachurches are prosperity churches suggest that black megachurches encourage congregants to treat God as an ATM without regard to teaching financial literacy (Harris 2012). In other words, congregants are told that if they put in an offering, they will receive a financial blessing. Yet, Dr. Harris points out

the significance of encouraging the biblical mandate of providing tithes to the church as well as ensuring that congregants have secure employment and income. Again, this reflects the holistic aspect of kingdom theology emphasized above by Rev. Sheila. Because Washington, D.C. ranks among the highest in income inequality in the U.S. (Weinberg 2011) and much of that inequality falls along lines of race (Sawyer and Tatian 2003), Community Baptist is intervening in an issue of racial inequality in the District by providing employment assistance and financial literacy.

Current Challenges: A Church without a Home

Although Community Baptist has several ministries and programs to address aspects of racial inequality, their strategies are somewhat limited by their declining membership and lack of a permanent place of worship. One hundred and fifty years after its founding, Community Baptist Church is experiencing a period of transition. Washington, D.C. has undergone many demographic changes since Community Baptist Church was founded in "Hell's Bottom." Specifically, D.C., which was once described as "chocolate city" due to the large African American population is experiencing an influx of white residents due to gentrification. Between 2000 and 2010 the white population in D.C. increased from 30.8% to 38.5% while the black population decreased from 60% to 50.7% (U.S. Census 2010). Similarly, the neighborhood surrounding Community Baptist Church's location, prior to moving into the charter school, began to experience a decline in its African American population and a growth of the white population. In 2000 the black population was 31.8% and the white population was 49.4% and by 2010 the black population declined to 21.4% while the

white population grew to 62.8% (U.S. Census 2010). Houses that were once dilapidated were renovated and sold at much higher prices.

After many conflicts with their gentrifying neighbors over parking and the congregation outgrowing their historic location, Dr. Harris allowed the church to decide whether they should move. In 1999 the congregation voted to build a new church in Maryland. In 2000 they bought 34 acres of land in Maryland on which to build a $30 million edifice. Some members were so upset with this decision to leave a century long history in D.C. that they left the church. The church began building on land in the suburbs of Maryland in 2004, sold their church in D.C. in 2006, and in 2008 moved into a charter school in D.C. temporarily. However, the church leadership did not expect an economic downturn and ran out of money. The property on which they were building in Maryland was put on the market in 2013 and is currently at risk of foreclosure. Community Baptist no longer owns their previous church in the District and have been in the temporary location of a charter school for six years. They are essentially a church without a home. The church, which once had an average weekend attendance of 6,000 people, has experienced a 70% decline in membership. Because there has been such a loss in membership, the church is unable to function at the capacity it once did in providing community resources.

When I began collecting data at Community Baptist in February 2012, they had already sold their former church in Washington, D.C., but the building of the new church was stalled. I did not anticipate how much this sense of "homelessness" would impact how people view their church and its ability to address racial inequality. Kareema captures this sense of homelessness:

> I can't say it enough. We have got to get out of this school. We have got to get somewhere where we can call home. Until we do that, all of the other stuff [*waves hand*]…I'm a realist. We've been in this school for 4 years. Now let it be known, I'm going down with the ship. I've already made up my mind. I'm sinking with the ship. But, before we sink, I'm just praying that we can find somewhere in D.C., not Maryland, *D.C.* where we can get to and rebuild and continue doing God's work because the church is going down.

The consistent response to the question "What are future goals you would like to see your church accomplish?" was to find a permanent home. Because there has been such a loss in membership, the church is unable to function at the capacity it once did in providing community resources. Denise reveals, "We just can't do the larger scale things that we used to do. Which I think to some degree is a little bit of a blow somewhat to your ego to that whole, you know, this was the legacy we did have. People looked forward to those things that we can't do." The current state of Community Baptist has been a particular blow for people who were members during the church's hey-day in the 1990s when they hosted presidents and dignitaries such as Presidents Nelson Mandela and Bill Clinton, held Easter services on the National Mall, and paid for college tours for members of the youth ministry.

Conclusion

Historically, black churches have had a self-help tradition because they were often one of the few institutions in black communities that had to provide resources and opportunities that were denied to blacks (Frazier 1963; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). Community Baptist continues to fill this role. Even though racial segregation is illegal,

black churches still serve as a central institution and resource in black communities. The strategies used by Community Baptist to address racial inequality may not reflect the direct action protesting strategies used by some black churches during the Civil Rights Movement. As stated poignantly by some of the respondents, contemporary racial inequality is much less obvious and much more nuanced than before and during the Civil Rights era. Previously, it was much easier to label and organize around racial inequality because of its "in your face" nature. On the other hand, contemporary racial inequality appears to be both everywhere and nowhere. Furthermore, the hegemony of colorblind racism results in attributing the problem to both unequal societal arrangements and cultural deficiencies and behaviors. Subsequently, Community Baptist Church focuses on strategies, such as civic engagement and education, which will improve individuals but also have the potential to have large-scale effects if the strategies are targeted to those in the surrounding community.

The understandings of the causes of racial inequality at Community Baptist also reflect the strategies that seek both micro and macro level outcomes. Individuals at Community Baptist simultaneously expressed individual and structural explanations for contemporary racial inequality. While almost all respondents began by describing racial inequality as a structural issue that is a result of societal arrangements beyond an individual's control, many also suggested that the poor behaviors and mindset of individual blacks causes racial inequality. The religious culture of Community Baptist Church supports both individual and structural explanations of racial inequality. The perception of Jesus as a revolutionary figure that addressed inequality, and references to Christianity as a tool for social justice—particularly during slavery and the Civil

Rights Movement—helped inform beliefs that racial inequality is a structural issue of social justice. At the same time, biblical interpretations could also inform beliefs that racial inequality can also be an individual-level issue that is a result of not being "kingdom minded."

The suggestions given for the role of the Black Church in addressing contemporary racial inequality reflected some of the causes of racial inequality that were cited such as educational disparities and lack of opportunities and information. The leaders and attendees of Community Baptist Church felt that the Black Church should address racial inequality by advocating for vulnerable populations and being a resource of information. The religious culture of Community Baptist shapes perspectives of what the current role of the Black Church should be in addressing racial inequality. The religious culture of Community Baptist includes references to the historical role of the Black Church as a resource for the black community during times when blacks were denied access to other institutions. The history of Community Baptist also reflects this as it was a church created and financed by former slaves who created ministries to serve the congregation and community. The religious culture of Community Baptist Church also emphasizes the connections between Christianity and social justice. Because congregants are taught that the Bible is about liberation they believe it is indisputable that Christians should be concerned with issues of social justice, including racial inequality.

While the ministries and programs discussed in this chapter are noteworthy, they are not exhaustive for Community Baptist Church. Rather, they represent those most commonly mentioned in interviews as addressing issues that are particularly

important to the congregation. Community Baptist Church addresses racial inequality through civic engagement, education, racial reconciliation, and Community Development Corporations that focus on mental health and economic development. The development of CDCs at Community Baptist is in line with what Tucker-Worgs (2011) found to be characteristic of black megachurches as a form of public engagement. However, unlike the CDCs at the Pentecostal and nondenominational churches—discussed in the subsequent two chapters—it does not appear that the D.C. government relies on Community Baptist's CDCs as an addition to or replacement for government social services.

There were significant connections between the perceived causes of racial inequality and the programs most mentioned by leaders and attendees. The primary causes of racial inequality according to leaders and attendees at Community Baptist were unequal opportunities, lack of access to information, and negative behaviors and mindsets. As a result, the strategies of action taken to intervene in racial inequality seek to provide education and job opportunities and address lower expectations and poor behaviors. The religious culture of Community Baptist Church also has some influence on the ways in which they address racial inequality. Because the culture of Community Baptist Church emphasizes education, social justice, and being socially and politically aware "change agents," it is not surprising that these were the areas leaders and attendees of Community Baptist Church cited as strategies to address racial inequality. However, the declining human and economic resources of Community Baptist Church also impact their strategies to address racial inequality. Many of the interventions I have discussed in this chapter appear to be insular and help the congregation rather than

the community outside of the church. This may be a result of the transition period that the church is in and because it is no longer operating at the capacity it once did when it was one of the most prominent churches in Washington, D.C. Therefore, both the religious culture of Community Baptist and other factors, such as human and financial resources, shape strategies to address contemporary racial inequality. In the next chapter, I will examine how the second of three black megachurches in my study interprets and addresses contemporary racial inequality.

CHAPTER 6: "The Word has to be the number one priority": Understanding and Addressing Racial Inequality at Mt. Sinai Pentecostal Church

In the previous chapter I argued that individuals at Community Baptist simultaneously expressed individual and structural explanations for contemporary racial inequality. The religious culture of Community Baptist Church supports both individual and structural explanations of racial inequality, and also shapes understandings of the role of the Black Church in addressing racial inequality. While the religious culture of Community Baptist Church also has some influence on the ways in which they address racial inequality other factors, such as a loss of human and economic resources, also impact the strategies used to address contemporary racial inequality.

In this chapter I outline how the second of three black megachurches in my study interprets and addresses contemporary racial inequality. As in the previous chapter, I analyze how religious culture accounts for understandings of and responses to contemporary racial inequality among the black megachurch leaders and attendees in my study. I also analyze how other factors, such as gentrification, impact responses to contemporary racial inequality. I find that religious culture influences how the leaders and attendees of Mt. Sinai Pentecostal Church[45] understand contemporary racial inequality and how they believe it should be addressed. Because the religious culture of Mt. Sinai emphasizes holiness, leaders and attendees tended to believe that the Black Church should address racial inequality by focusing on the message of the Bible. Although religious culture impacts how this megachurch addresses racial

[45] The names of churches and respondents have been replaced with pseudonyms.

inequality, other factors such as gentrification also shape strategies to intervene in racial inequality.

This chapter is organized into four sections. The first section provides an overview of Mt. Sinai Pentecostal Church. The second section describes the ways leaders and attendees at Mt. Sinai explain racial inequality. Respondents at Mt. Sinai often began with structural explanations of racial inequality, but these explanations tended to coincide with individual explanations of behavior and racial differences in culture. The third section examines how they think the Black Church should address racial inequality. The leaders and congregants of Mt. Sinai feel that the main roles for black churches in addressing racial inequality are to prioritize the message of the Bible and become less segregated. The fourth section describes the various strategies taken to address racial inequality, which includes addressing alcohol and drug abuse, incarceration, food and clothing insecurity, and employment readiness. The final section analyzes how current challenges effect the ability of Mt. Sinai to address racial inequality.

Mt. Sinai Pentecostal Church

Mt. Sinai Pentecostal Church was founded in 1966 by its current pastor, Bishop Oliver and has grown to become one of the largest churches in Washington, D.C. Mt. Sinai has the largest number of ministries of the churches in my study and is the most engaged in its surrounding community. With over 70 ministries, and 21 of which have some type of external community focus, Mt. Sinai Church could be a single case study. The head pastor, Bishop Oliver, is described as a very generous man and Marie, the

founder of the Community Development Corporation illustrates, “My bishop is a really nice person. […] I’ve been to churches where pastors […] separate themselves from their members. But Bishop love being surrounded by people, he loved people and it shows, you feel welcomed.” When conducting research on this church I was surprised by Bishop Oliver’s generosity in giving me his phone number, a copy of his dissertation about Mt. Sinai, and a copy of his book. To be a pastor of such a large church, he is surprisingly accessible and when I met with him he said that he wished he could get to know members of his congregation more.

Bishop Oliver also strongly believes that churches must provide ministry beyond their four walls. The waiting area of Bishop Oliver’s office is filled with plaques and certificates recognizing the work the church has done in the community. He cites the poverty he experienced as a child as the motivating factor for the social services he provides to the community. In his biography Bishop Oliver states:

> Even living in the house with rats and roaches also taught me to be more compassionate to the needs of people. That is why at [Mt. Sinai] we have a lot of benevolence activities. I have others in charge of that because for awhile I was giving away everything.

Bishop Oliver’s experiences with poverty have made him more compassionate toward others who are experiencing hardship and his generous nature makes it difficult for him to limit the assistance he gives to people. Bishop Oliver is also the current leader of their denominational body, and the community programs Mt. Sinai has established have served as a model for other churches in their denomination. Mt. Sinai Church addresses racial inequality by focusing on alcohol and drug abuse, incarceration, food and clothing insecurity, and a CDC that provides employment training.

Explaining Racial Inequality: "We don't prepare as a race"

Some individuals at Mt. Sinai Church had similar observations to those in Community Baptist Church regarding the differences between the overt racism before and during the Civil Rights era and the hidden and often invisible forms of contemporary racism. Timothy, a deacon, and David, the head of the food bank, both remarked that younger generations are more integrated, but that has not necessarily reached older generations in positions of power. David suggests, "I think that as the generations evolve, you are seeing definitely more interracial marriages. You see more interracial children. You are seeing even more white kids hang out with black kids or Asian kids. […] But the lawmakers haven't changed." Increasing rates of interracial marriages and the public acceptance of them has been documented in research (Wang 2012). Most individuals also have at least one friend of another race (Pew Research Center 2010). These growing trends of interracial marriages and friendships will shape the way younger generations understand racial inequality. Yet, the increase in interracial marriages and friendships does not mean that the structure of racial inequality has changed. Timothy shared that he wanted his son to marry a black woman. However, growing up in a generation of increased interracial relationships, Timothy explained that his son felt it was racist for his father to want him to marry a black woman. Timothy responded:

> I think racism […] has to have some power. […] I don't think I'm a racist. I could be a little prejudiced but I think everyone has some prejudice in them […]. […] I understand that the generation that comes after me don't see things

> the way I do. They're not jaded like I was jaded coming up. And I think more younger people don't see color the way I see color and the way people above me, older than I, see color. They see urban, they see flavor. You see a lot of white kids who act just the same way as black kids and Hispanic. There's a shift in that and hopefully that kind of interaction will wipe out […] the racism that exists. It hasn't happened yet. We see that in our government. We see that with our president. It hurts me to my heart.

As David and Timothy note, younger generations are less segregated and it is not unusual to see white youth appropriating black or Hispanic culture. While young people interacting with and acting like each other may promote the appearance of a society that is blind to color, legislation and indicators of well-being such as health, income, wealth, and education, paint a different picture.

One of the characteristics of contemporary, colorblind racism, is that race is reduced to culture and is removed from social status, history, and power (Gallagher 2003; Guinier and Torres 2003). Younger generations who are removed from the far more overt racism before and during the Civil Rights era may have a different understanding of racial inequality than older generations. Rather than viewing race as a system of power that shapes life chances, younger generations may simply view race as an aspect of culture[46]. As Timothy stated above, "Younger people don't see color the way I see color […] they see urban, they see flavor." Although Timothy views this as a positive change and hopes it will eliminate racism, Bishop Oliver's wife, Co-Pastor Oliver is concerned about the post-racial narrative. As someone who came of age during the era of Stokely Carmichael, Eldridge Cleaver, Nikki Giovanni, and the Black

[46] See Greg Tate's (2003) argument in *Everything But the Burden* for an example of how whites embrace, and even appropriate, black culture without absorbing the burden of being black.

Panthers, Co-Pastor Oliver notes that younger generations may be duped into believing the narrative that we are post-racial and everyone has access to the American Dream. She states:

> I do think there are some differences in this generation, but I think it has cloaked itself. I think it's very much alive. […] So when we see skinheads and other organizations of that magnitude, we say that they're racist. But I think that there is some other underlining of it that has cloaked itself and has become as sophisticated as the times in which this generation lives and if you're not careful, you'll be […] suckered into thinking that it no longer exists and each of us are given full opportunity for the American way and that is not true.

Co-Pastor Oliver's response mirrors respondents at Community Baptist Church who noted the subtleties of contemporary racial inequality. It is somewhat easier to spot racial inequality when it comes in the form of individuals who wear the white robes of the Ku Klux Klan, but it becomes more difficult when it becomes "sophisticated" and takes the form of the over-incarceration of blacks (Alexander 2010) or higher mortality rates of blacks due to lack of health insurance (Kaiser Family Foundation 2014). Collins (1998) labels these sophisticated strategies of institutional racism a "new politics of containment" because they have the same result of keeping blacks on the bottom of the social hierarchy.

Using the biblical story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness after escaping slavery in Egypt, Co-Pastor Oliver provides an interesting perspective on how the post-Civil Rights generation can be fooled by the sophisticated nature of racial inequality and succumb to a sense of entitlement. She explains:

> The Bible gives somewhat of a paradigm to that, as we look at the children of Israel. So the first generation, they grew up under bondage. They grew up under racism. The Egyptians didn't like the Hebrews. They worked hard. They tortured them. They broke their self-will. They broke their self-esteem. But underneath when they met together, they kept saying, "We have a God. His name is Jehovah. He's promised to deliver us." So they whispered that among their own community and they believed that but […] they were still tortured and beaten, and broken and brainwashed, as if they were nothing. But they finally got out and they went into the wilderness and they brought their kids. Well, their kids grew up 40 years in the wilderness. They weren't tortured. They weren't building any pyramids for Pharaoh. They were eating bread, meats, […] the birds flew out, *pow*, they shot them with the arrow and they had meat. The wafers they picked up every morning. They had bread and wafers. So, they grew up almost with the spirit of entitlement. So don't be telling them about what happened. They don't want to hear about that. They don't have no idea about that. All they said was that there'll be houses that they didn't build and vineyards -- go across that river, let's get them.

Parallels between the Exodus story of Moses leading the Israelites out of slavery and the enslavement of African Americans have long been part of the black Christian experience[47] (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Glaude 2003). Co-Pastor Oliver uses this narrative to illustrate her point. She utilizes the Israelites who were in bondage under the Egyptians as a metaphor for the pre-Civil Rights Movement generation of blacks. Like the Israelites, they suffered enslavement and were treated as second-class citizens. In the Exodus story, Moses was the savior of the Israelites and, with God's help, he led them out of slavery. Moses gave the Israelites the laws they were to follow. However,

[47] In fact, Harriet Tubman is often referred to as the "Moses" of her people for her role in leading more than 300 slaves to freedom (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). Also, a common Negro Spiritual was "Go Down Moses/When Israel was in Egypt's Land" (Wright 2007).

because the people did not obey the laws and complained, they were forced to wander in the wilderness for 40 years until everyone 20 years and older died. Although Moses led them out of slavery, he would not be able to lead the Israelites into the land God promised them. His assistant Joshua would have to lead the Israelites to the Promised Land after their 40 year wilderness experience. Even though the younger generation had to wander in the wilderness until the older generation died, they were no longer enslaved and had plenty of food to eat. Co-Pastor Oliver views the generation who grew up in the wilderness as a metaphor for the post-Civil Rights Movement generation of blacks[48]. Like the generation of Israelites who grew up in the wilderness, the post-Civil Rights Movement generation of blacks were no longer under the physical bondage of the generations before them. In fact, they never knew enslavement. They benefitted from their freedom and even though they were not in their ideal location, they were in a much better situation than the generations before them. As a result of not having to endure the types of oppression of the generations before them, Co-Pastor Oliver believes that the post-Civil Rights Movement generation of blacks, just as the generation of Israelites who grew up in the wilderness, have a sense of privilege. She goes on to explain this sense of entitlement:

> And so I think it's the same type of thing that sometimes our children are growing up with a spirit of entitlement only because they did not go through some of the things that their parents and the other generation went through […] in an effort to give them a better life. And not all cases, but in some cases, we

[48] The generation of Civil Rights leaders is often called the "Moses Generation" and the contemporary leaders are often called the "Joshua Generation." In a speech given in 2007 at Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church in Selma, Alabama, shortly after he announced his candidacy for president, Obama thanked the Moses generation who marched and died in the Civil Rights Movement. He also inserted himself in this historical lineage as a member of the Joshua generation (Remnick 2008).

> left them with a spirit of entitlement that you supposed to have this. […] And so I think that this generation has to somehow revamp its thinking and look back into the past and see some of the prices that were paid, the injustices that were suffered so that you can do what you do and have what you have and be who you are, and take full advantage of that. And don't let us see you selling drugs on the corner, don't let us see you becoming an alcoholic. Don't let us see you in any type of gang that takes the life of somebody else. Don't let us see you with guns because now you're reflecting what people gave their life for you not to be. […] I think it's hard to understand what you have in the present and move to some future betterment if you don't know where you've come from. And we can't just do it during February Black History Month. I think there ought to be ongoing lessons taught in school houses and churches, community centers, Boys and Girls Clubs of how we got where we are and not with bitterness, but with the taste betterment in there and I think some of the vices and the activities that we see in our community will be diminished. […] I think this generation is both blessed and cursed. I think they are.

Just as the generation of Israelites who wandered in the wilderness began to expect the bread and meat, because it had always been there, Co-Pastor Oliver believes the post-Civil Rights Movement generation of blacks feels that they are entitled to the privileges they have. She also suggests that the more covert nature of contemporary racial inequality leads younger generations to feel they have the freedom to behave however they want, perhaps because they do not bear the burden of representing their race, or feel a sense of responsibility to older generations. Co-Pastor Oliver believes that older generations of blacks did not fight and die for younger generations to take their struggles for granted and engage in activities that are not considered holy. Co-Pastor Oliver's interpretation of the Exodus story of the Israelites as a parallel to blacks in the U.S. reflects the religious culture of Mt. Sinai Church which emphasizes holiness. As

Greg, the head of the Prison Ministry, explains, "[…] [T]he thing about being a Pentecostal is […] it's clearly defined. Holiness, live holy, live right, live moral—period." The religious emphasis placed on living "moral" and "right" is part of the reason why Co-Pastor Oliver does not want to see any of the younger generation engaged in "vices." She also believes that if the younger generations had a better understanding of the hardships that older generations of blacks endured and fought to change, then they would not engage in vices. The purpose of gaining a better understanding of past struggles is not to encourage "bitterness" but a sense of "betterment." This also reflects the religious culture of Mt. Sinai. The leadership at Mt. Sinai feel that in spite of any hardships or injustices, they should focus on love and praising God. For example, when asked why he decided not to say anything about the Trayvon Martin verdict from the pulpit, Bishop Oliver said:

> […] I don't want anybody to get angry and leave here angry. Because I preach and promote love and although I felt there's a great injustice, I don't. […] In fact, one of our ministers opened up in prayer and he said, "Although injustice was done this weekend, we still praise you God." That was enough said, if that should have been said.

Bishop Oliver specifically does not want to do anything to encourage bitterness or anger. This theme of focusing on love will also be discussed below as a strategy respondents at Mt. Sinai believe the Black Church should use to address racial inequality. As another example, when I visited Mt. Sinai one Sunday in July 2012, there was a strong storm that knocked down trees and power lines the night before. Co-Pastor Oliver's response was that God still deserved to be praised because the storm could have been worse. In the end, Co-Pastor Oliver views the ability to benefit from the

struggles of the previous generations, yet still having to navigate a more obscure form of racial inequality, to be simultaneously a blessing and a curse.

Just as in Community Baptist Church, respondents at Mt. Sinai Church simultaneously viewed racial inequality as a structural problem and a result of behaviors and negative cultural traits. Explanations of racial inequality as structural issue stressed the lingering effects of historical discrimination, which make it impossible for blacks to reach social and economic parity. Shanell uses the metaphor of a race to explain how previous discrimination can create present-day inequalities:

> I think if you start a race off […] and everyone's at the starting gate and they started the same time with the same advantages then fine. Where people end up depends on ability or what they do with it or whatever. […] But […] for the longest we weren't able to purchase houses or to be employed unless we were employed because somebody employed us, it wasn't because we were starting our own business and things like that. We had a later start in this sort of American dream, so it's always been a catch up.

Timothy, who had a particularly strong racial ideology and was very passionate about racial inequality, expressed his frustrations regarding explicit acts to deter the progress of blacks, such as the burning of Tulsa, Oklahoma[49] to abolish black wealth and the curtailing of affirmative action policies. Regarding the contradictions of whites institutionalizing inequalities and then not remedying them Timothy exclaims:

[49] In 1921 the prosperous black community of Greenwood, Oklahoma—also known as "Black Wall Street"—was destroyed in the Tulsa race riot. The race riot began because of an alleged sexual assault of a white woman by a black man. White mobs attacked Greenwood and as a result over one hundred blacks were murdered by deputized whites, over 4,000 blacks were arrested by the National Guard, black businesses were destroyed, and over 1,000 blacks were left homeless (Brophy 2002). No one was convicted for murder, arson, or larceny during the riot and subsequent reparations lawsuits filed by blacks were rejected.

> But we started out taking over land that didn't belong to you and bringing in folks for free labor for how many years? 200 years? And then never giving those people the opportunity to excel. […] We had to deal with your foolishness, your Jim Crow and your lynchings and all of that for all of these years. […] See affirmative action was fine as long as they were still getting the jobs, as long as they were still getting acceptance in the school. Affirmative action is fine because we get bits and pieces you know, just a few of you. When you have a whole bottle of salt, a little pepper shaken into that salt ain't gonna make that much difference. But now you get a whole bottle of salt and a half a bottle of pepper, uh oh! Something wrong with this! I'm starting to taste the pepper now.

Like Shanell, Timothy recognizes the legacy of historical inequalities that have contributed to contemporary racial inequalities. He also explicitly advocates policies to remedy these inequalities and recognizes that once the policies appeared to be working they became problematic and were dismantled out of fear of too much black progress.

Both Timothy and Shanell recognized that racial inequality is simultaneously a result of structural dynamics beyond an individual's control and individual dynamics. Timothy, who above gave a very passionate answer citing the history of white oppression of people of color in the U.S., also declares that a lack of personal responsibility is part of the reason why racial inequality exists. He maintains:

> [W]e don't make it easy on ourselves because we don't do the things that we should do as a people to get out of that hole. […] I was the PTSA president for two years and prior to that, I worked in a school. It was like pulling teeth to get parents to come out to do *anything* that had anything to do with educating your kids or understanding what the system is doing. But now, if I said that next year, there will be no cornrows or plaits for the boys and girls, oh the place will be filled, the place would be crowded. […] So we're concentrating on the things that don't get us anywhere. […] We're majoring in the minor. […] I don't blame

> all of this on white folk or the "establishment." At some point, we have to take responsibility for ourselves and say enough is enough.

Although in the above quote Timothy gave an answer that placed the blame for racial inequality on unequal social structures created and maintained by whites, at the same time he also advocates personal responsibility and individualism by stating that blacks do not have the appropriate priorities. Similarly, Shanell, who above used the metaphor of a race to explain the structural disadvantages blacks have faced, simultaneously views racial inequality as an individual level problem of sin. She suggests:

> It's a hate. Just like anything else that if you deal with the soul of the person, the heart of the person, you change the behavior of the person. And when the behavior of the person changes, then you see neighborhoods and relationships change.

The perspective that racial inequality as a result of sin stems from the religious culture of Mt. Sinai Church. As mentioned previously, there is a lot of emphasis placed on holiness and living right. This is characteristic of Pentecostal churches in general and Mt. Sinai in particular. Humans are viewed as flawed beings who, without the presence of God, will behave in sinful ways. When people treat others differently because of their race then it is because of hate, which is a sin. Mt. Sinai focuses on addressing and correcting sin. Essentially, this perspective reinforces the belief that as more people become Christians, the less racial inequality there will be (Emerson and Smith 2000). The explanation of racial inequality as a sin will be explored again when respondents at Mt. Sinai discuss the role of the Black Church in addressing racial inequality.

Another example of the simultaneity of individual and structural level explanations is Andrea, 53, who initially explains that racial inequality exists because of unequal educational opportunities that stem from unequal housing opportunities:

> [T]he school, depending on your zip code will depend on the quality of education that you're going to get. So if we are not educated equally, it is a little difficult to have equal footing. And yes, there are always those who will rise above, we can say that. But if we do not have […] equal opportunities for education, then we tend not to have equal opportunities when it comes to employment because now you're unqualified.

But Andrea goes on to explain that because middle-class individuals moved out of black neighborhoods the only role models black youth tend to have are celebrities they see on television. When black youth model the behavior of rappers like Jay Z and Young Jeezy then the black community has to take responsibility for perpetuating stereotypes of themselves.

> Because if all you see is Jay-Z and […] you think that is wealth […] you don't have anything else to aspire to. In my generation we grew up with the teacher, the preacher, all those people lived in my neighborhood. Now we get five dollars and fifty cents and we gonna move, to prove that we've got five dollars and fifty cents. […] So the government bears responsibility, the church bears responsibility, and the community bears responsibility. […] [W]e have to take some ownership and part of the stereotypes that we have created because you could not have a Bill O'Reilly being on TV, spouting ignorance if we did not give him something on which to talk.

Andrea's response is reminiscent of respectability politics and suggests that it is the absence of middle-class role models that creates this poor culture. Prior to the passage and implementation of fair housing laws, racial segregation forced all blacks to live in

the same community regardless of class differences. With the flight of middle-class families from black, inner city communities Andrea asserts that the role models for youth are more likely to come from glorified entertainers rather than their own community. Because these entertainers do not model middle-class norms and values, this behavior is passed on to impressionable youth. As a result, everyone bears the responsibility for the stereotypes black youth fulfill.

Jason, the 25 year old Youth Minister, also provides a response that highlights both structural and individual-level explanations of racial inequality. He explains:

> I do believe God has given us, not to be super deep, but I think that all of us who have life have opportunity to become anything that we can imagine, anything that we can desire. But I don't think that everybody has the same resources or the access to the same things. But at the end of the day, motivation is subjective because again, everybody grows up in different areas. […] But I think at the end of the day the motivation depends on the person because you have to be able to find hope in something.

While Jason acknowledges that there are structural barriers and unequal opportunities, he also believes that God gives people the ability to rise above their circumstances. Similar to the adage, "God helps those who help themselves," Jason believes that structural barriers are not an excuse because we all have the ability to "find hope in something." Jason's response is similar to white evangelicals in Emerson and Smith's (2000) study who strongly believe in freewill individualism, or the individual's ability to control their own destiny. In their study, respondents interpret racial inequality as a result of the lack of individual initiative or sinful and prejudiced individuals. Although Jason is not a white evangelical, he possesses similar religio-cultural tools that he uses

to interpret racial inequality. The tension present in Jason's response between recognizing inequality but also believing that God gives people the tools to overcome those barriers shows that racial inequality can become a religious question, even if it does not initially seem so. The presence of racial inequality can challenge people's beliefs in a just God. As a result, people may rely on explanations that equally emphasize individual actions.

When asked about the causes of contemporary racial inequality, a number of respondents from Mt. Sinai Church indicated that cultural differences between blacks and whites were the explanation. These respondents felt that black parents and white parents provide their children with a different set of skills and it is the skillset that white parents instill that seems to produce a higher success rate. Jacob states:

> I don't believe that it's all […] racism. I think […] some of it has to do with educational background. […] [T]here's a different familial stance in the generations if you will. There is something that Caucasians have done that instilled education, teaching, and just a drive for prosperity and success within their children that has stemmed from generation to generation for years that maybe we as a people did not do.

Similar to Jacob, Melissa feels that black parents do not instill the necessary knowledge in their children. When asked why she thought racial minorities tend to lag behind whites in employment, housing, and education she replied:

> I think that we don't prepare as a race. […] [P]erhaps it's the educational level, perhaps it's the exposure. Whereas at 10, 12 Jim is teaching little Jimmy how to save his money, how to invest his money whereas you know, John is telling Johnboy, […] "Let's go to the store. What you want buy?" […] Like the materialistic piece and not teaching the value of money and the responsibility

> of investing it so that later down the road, you can have this and you can have those kinds of things.

Melissa notes that black parents and white parents teach their children different lessons because they possess different knowledge. The type of knowledge that white parents possess is a form of capital that can translate into economic gains. Jason, the youth minister, also believes that a lack of financial knowledge has a lot to do with contemporary racial inequality. He says:

> We are unaware and miss out on things because we are unaware. So I do believe that what you don't know can in fact hurt you because you're unaware. […] We've always had that "You got to work to get your money, you got to work. […] You work your job and you retire." And that's it. But without the knowledge and education of how to not just work to make money but to work to make money in such a way where your money makes money. That type of idea and creativity is not as widespread in our community.

Like Melissa, Jason also acknowledges the importance of teaching financial literacy and how to achieve wealth in addition to an income. However, what respondents such as Jacob, Melissa, and Jason described as cultural differences are in reality resources and knowledge that white parents are more likely to acquire based on their access to economic capital. In the same way that some in Community Baptist saw this lack of knowledge as an individual problem while others viewed it as a structural problem, some in Mt. Sinai Church also view this lack of information as a result of it being systematically withheld from blacks. Wendy, the head of the church's Community Development Corporation, suggests, "We as a people sometimes aren't exposed to a lot of resources that other people have a right to and are exposed to. We're kept from it on purpose. We're kept from getting information that would allow us to be

homeowners." Wendy's response highlights a theme that is consistent across each of the churches. "When you know better, you do better." Yet, as some have noted, blacks have been systematically denied the knowledge that would allow them to "do better."

How Black Churches Should Address Racial Inequality: "Just preach the love of Christ"

While all of the respondents at Mt. Sinai Church believed the Black Church had a role in addressing racial inequality, what that role is varied. Some would like to see the Black Church have a more prominent leadership role in organizing people such as during the Civil Rights Movement, some feel the Black Church should focus on preaching love and the Bible, while others question whether the Black Church should remain racially homogenous if the goal is to achieve racial equality.

A couple of respondents from Mt. Sinai Church felt that the number one priority of the Black Church should be maintaining biblical principles and serving as a source of moral instruction. Co-Pastor Oliver advocates maintaining biblical principles in any cause they support. She explains:

> [I]f we need to support a rally that's going to bring more healthcare into our communities then we'll do that even though we may disagree on this point. But be certain if this point comes up, then we're not going to change. So if we're going to get along then we're going to allow you the freedom to believe what you believe, but we're also going to stand on what we believe. […] As long as you don't crisscross our lines, we'll try not to crisscross yours. But if you give us a choice then we have to stay on the side of biblical principles because that's

> how we believe and that's what we're established to do and we're not going to compromise those principles at any cost.

Although the leadership at Mt. Sinai does want everyone to have healthcare, food, and education, if anything comes up that goes against their biblical principles, such as homosexuality, then they will make it clear that they do not support those aspects. This emphasis on biblical principles coincides with the religious culture of Mt. Sinai which stresses holiness and strict adherence to biblical principles. Bishop Oliver's sermons stress holiness and tend to challenge people's behaviors. While not completely "fire and brimstone," they aim to push the audience beyond their comfort zone. For example, in a sermon by Bishop Oliver entitled "Help Thou My Unbelief," homosexuality, fornication, drug addiction, and alcoholism were cited as spirits that are hard to get rid of. In another sermon by the assistant Bishop Bryant, entitled "Be Not Weary in Well Doing," lasciviousness was described as "behavior without regard […] doing what you want with whoever you want, be it a man, woman, animal, inanimate object—you're just nasty!" Congregants of Mt. Sinai Church are encouraged to stand firm on biblical principles. Greg, the head of the Prison Ministry, reveals the cost of preaching against homosexuality in a church that stresses holiness:

> And then you know you have these situations where particularly with a Pentecostal church or a holy church like ours, when you start preaching holiness and living right, it rubs some people wrong because you're telling them to do things that they don't necessarily want to hear. And then you're stepping on their toes. And our pastors is not afraid to say what they mean. There was a couple of times where co-pastor and Bishop had declared statements that were true and real by biblical standards. And people had threatened them.

According to other interviewees, Bishop Oliver preached against homosexuality and was criticized for it. During this time other pastors abandoned him and some members left the church. However, Bishop and Co-Pastor Oliver maintain that their church must follow biblical principles regardless of the cost.

Following the religious culture of Mt. Sinai, Timothy thinks that in anything it does the Black Church should focus on holiness and a Christian lifestyle. However, he also suggests the church should have a holistic approach. Timothy specifies:

> [T]he word has to be the number one priority of any church. Aside from that I think the health of its people and its community are just as important. And certainly the wealth of your people. I don't mean wealth as in getting money because a lot of people got money and they don't know what to do with it. […] But understanding of finances. How to live with what you have and how to leave something for those who are coming behind you. […] Certainly the young people need to know how to conduct themselves as they grow older through the word, how to stay healthy, not taking chances and drinking and drugging, […] using wisdom in their activities.

Timothy believes that as a church, their first priority should be the spiritual well-being of the congregation. Characteristic of Pentecostalism, Timothy feels that morality and holiness should be stressed. Additionally, his response also reflects others' concerns with the lack of knowledge regarding financial literacy as a cause of racial inequality.

Because racism is considered a sin at Mt. Sinai, some respondents feel that by focusing on holiness and the spiritual well-being of the congregation, racism will be addressed by default. Nadine, the head of the Alcohol and Drug Ministry, believes that the Black Church should focus on teaching people the Bible because then they would learn to love themselves, and by extension, learn to love others.

> Now what can the church do? Just preach the love of Christ. And maybe do the different programs and things that if people get to love themselves then they could love one another. And I think that if they can get that together then that would change a lot of how people feel. Racism? We're racist against ourselves. That's something […] to think about.

Emerson and Smith (2000) refer to Nadine's perspective as the "miracle motif." As more people become Christians and, by extension, follow biblical guidelines, then social and personal problems (i.e., sin) will disappear. The focus is on love because that is part of the religious culture of Mt. Sinai Church. They stress following biblical principles and in the New Testament, Jesus sums up the greatest commandment in Matthew 22: 36-40 saying, "You shall love the Lord God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." And "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Nadine also maintains that the black community experiences internal racism because of an absence of self-love and love of others.

Like Nadine, Jacob, 41, also believes racism is a sin and the church has a responsibility to talk about sin. Yet, despite this similar thought pattern, Nadine believes pastors should not talk about racial inequality from the pulpit while Jacob believes they should. Jacob explains:

> From a biblical standpoint, yes. I think you have to…because in racial inequality we have seen murders, we have seen theft, we have seen crimes committed. And so those things from a "spiritual," a biblical aspect, are called sins and it is a pastor's responsibility to talk about sin.

Again we see that the religious culture of Mt. Sinai Church stresses holiness and views racial inequality as a sin. While Nadine feels that teaching biblical principles is sufficient to address racial inequality by default, Jacob feels that because racial

inequality is a sin that can lead to other sins the church has a responsibility to talk about it directly.

When asked about the role of the Black Church in addressing racial inequality other respondents drew comparisons between the Black Church during the Civil Rights Movement and the contemporary Black Church. Shanell, 32, would like to see the Black Church become the center of organization for civil rights the way it was in the 1950s and 1960s. Yet some noted that we cannot maintain the same expectations of the Black Church over time. Melissa, 51, realizes that times have changed and we cannot rely on the nostalgia of the Black Church during the Civil Rights Movement. She declares, "We can't just keep hope alive based on the days of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement, but we need to reignite it for the generations that are coming behind us to prepare them." As discussed previously, contemporary expectations of the Black Church are often shaped by the belief that the Black Church writ large was active in the Civil Rights Movement. Shanell's comment is an example of this sentiment. However, in referring to this sense of nostalgia of the Black Church, Melissa—like Co-Pastor Oliver—also speaks to the tendency to think that issues of racial inequality are less pertinent for younger generations who are the beneficiaries of the Civil Rights Movement. She believes that it is the responsibility of black churches today to inform younger generations of contemporary racial justice issues. Andrea, 53, also realizes that the Black Church has changed. She acknowledges:

> [W]e must also understand that the church of today is not the church of the '60s where it was the end all be all. There's so many other opportunities to get information where now you have social media so people don't look to the church to be its everything. The church of today could not have organized the

> Civil Rights Movement like the church of that time, because that's all you had. […] [T]he church of now will have to refocus itself and almost reinvent itself in ways that it deals with people and disseminates information.

The realization that the contemporary Black Church is different because times have changed is an important part of creating realistic expectations of the Black Church. During the Civil Rights Movement, E. Franklin Frazier (1963) predicted that the desegregation of society would lead to the Black Church losing its status as the primary agency of social control. Not only has the *de jure* desegregation of society created a "colorblind age" that has made organizing around issues of racial inequality much more difficult, but the "internet age" also means that people have access to information from places outside of the church. Taken together the role of the Black Church in addressing racial inequality will not be the same as it once was.

Some of the most interesting perspectives regarding the role of the Black Church in addressing racial inequality came from a group of respondents who questioned the continued racial homogeneity of the Black Church. Although Mt. Sinai is about 95% black, and about 1.5% white, they have a growing Hispanic population (currently about 3.5%). Furthermore, while the majority of blacks at Mt. Sinai Church are native to the United States, a number are from the Caribbean and West Africa. These demographics may be part of the reason why the religious culture of Mt. Sinai is not as strongly rooted in the African American experience as Community Baptist Church. Mt. Sinai is the youngest church in my study and was founded by the current pastor in 1966. Therefore it does not have the same history as Community Baptist Church of being founded by ex-slaves in post-Civil War D.C. Mt. Sinai rarely sings Negro spirituals, or reference slavery or the Civil Rights Movement and, based on

responses outlined below, respondents seem to desire a diverse ministry that reflects what they believe heaven will look like. A telling example of the difference between Community Baptist Church and Mt. Sinai Church was a comparison of each choir singing "Lift Every Voice and Sing" during Black History Month. Because "Lift Every Voice and Sing" is considered the "Black National Anthem," it is often sung at predominately black churches during Black History Month. However, there was a difference in familiarity with the lyrics. Whereas the choir at Mt. Sinai Church used lyrics for the entire song, including the most commonly sung first verse, the choir at Community Baptist Church did not. Because the religious culture of Mt. Sinai is not as strongly rooted in the African American experience as Community Baptist Church, it is not entirely surprising that some respondents would question the racial homogeneity of the Black Church. Jason, the youth minister, Jacob, a worship leader, and Wendy, the head of the church's CDC all emphasize multiculturalism. Wendy, 62, explains, "[…] [T]he word says that God wants us all to have those things. He didn't come for a particular race of people, he came for all men that we might see him and glorify him." The religious culture at Mt. Sinai Church stresses biblical infallibility. On the church's website they state, "We believe that the Bible is the inspired, infallible, authoritative Word of God." Because the religious culture of Mt. Sinai stresses that the Bible is infallible that means it is viewed as being true and without error. As a result, it is the Bible that informs Wendy, and later Jason and Jacob's, view that God is colorblind and that the Gospel is for everyone. There are several Bible verses that inform Wendy's understanding that God "came for all men." John 3:16 states, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not

perish but have everlasting life." John 12:32 reads, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." Finally, Galatians 3:28 declares, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Each of these Bible verses convey an absence of divisions—particularly racial divisions—under Christ. Jason, 25, also seems to be influenced by these Bible verses. He states:

> […] [W]e don't get to pick Jesus in the racial draft[50]. Jesus was not black. Jesus was in fact Middle Eastern. At the end of the day, […] when it comes to churches, it shouldn't be about race. It should be about the blood that lies inside of us […]. […] Race is not something that we can ignore because there is still racism in the world. But I don't think it's something that we should constantly harp on. I think that *especially* in the Black Church, I think there should be a variety of races. […] I believe that [Christ's] intent was that multicultural churches should be the norm. […] But unfortunately we kind of segmented based upon beliefs or certain styles of worship or different things. So unfortunately that has been a downfall in my opinion of the church. So I think if we can break those barriers that we can come together for a true point, which is Christ.

Jason suggests that one of the reasons churches have remained racially segregated is because of differences in religious culture and he perceives this as a weakness of churches. However, if churches were able to focus less on race and more on Christ, then segregation in congregations might decrease. Although racism still exists, and therefore cannot be ignored, it is not something that the Black Church should "harp on." In other words, it should not be a consistent theme and the focus should be Christ.

[50] By using the phrase "racial draft," Jason is referring to a satirical sketch done by comedian Dave Chappelle in 2004. In the sketch, representatives from various races take turns selecting individuals to join their racial group, much like professional sports teams draft players.

Similar to Jason, Jacob, 41, stressed that because God has no color we should not use race as a divisive force. He says:

> God has no color […] and heaven is going to be a makeup of all people. […] [W]e have to learn to worship together because that's what's going to be happening in heaven. […] Christ was a man of love, he was a man of care, he was a man of acceptance, and he was a man for all people. And that is what the church should be; a haven for all people.

According to Jacob, the church should be a reflection of what heaven will be, which is multicultural. Anna, the head of the Hispanic Ministry at Mt. Sinai, also believes that to address racial inequality the Black Church should be multicultural. In her role as head of the Hispanic Ministry in a predominately black church, Anna has firsthand experience with what can happen when people are not intentionally educated about diversity. One such example she related to me was when an usher at Mt. Sinai greeted Hispanic attendees with "¡Feliz Navidad!" which is Spanish for "Merry Christmas!" Anna informed the usher that wishing Spanish speakers "Merry Christmas" when it was not Christmas (it was October) was inappropriate. Instead, Anna taught the usher how to say "God bless you" in Spanish. After experiencing culturally insensitive situations such as this, Anna wants all churches to be intentional about teaching inclusiveness and diversity because simply focusing on Christ will not prevent uncomfortable situations. Anna declares:

> I think it should be the same way as the government to have mandatory diversity and inclusive training. I think we should do it in the church. […] And also through the training, you know how sometimes people say a joke and you just be like [*she smiles uncomfortably*] but you know inside it's not good. And it's a race joke. So it teaches you to be like "ouch!" Okay, let's stop it there and

> change the conversation. […] [W]hen you don't stop it then they say the second one and then the third joke and you're even feeling worse like "oh my goodness!" […] And it's not a joke because somebody could be listening to that; that hurts their feelings.

One may assume that because blacks are a racially marginalized group that they might be more culturally sensitive; however, Anna's experience exposes the potential pitfalls that can occur in multicultural churches, even if they are predominately black. Without intentional training in interacting with racial and ethnic diversity, these types of situations will continue to occur if black churches become more multicultural as a number of Mt. Sinai respondents would prefer. Jacob, who above expressed his desire for the church to reflect the diversity of heaven, also acknowledges that intentional efforts must be made in order to achieve a multicultural and inclusive congregation. After explaining the open relationship he has developed with Asian, Jewish, and Hispanic co-workers, Jacob explains that is what is missing at Mt. Sinai Church. He states:

> […] I believe what [Mt. Sinai] needs is more education about other cultures because this has been a church that has been predominately African American. And just because it has been and not because other cultures had not been welcome, but […] there's a huge learning curve that needs to take place so that intervention can be more impactful and can reach a bit deeper. And although we have seen visits from other cultures, we have visitors that were Caucasian, we have a thriving Hispanic ministry, and we've seen Asians visit. They don't always stay and I think that could be because there is not enough education about where they've been, what they like, what they don't like, all those kinds of things. And so to make the ministry a bit more ecumenical […] so that it is palatable to all men. We may be on the road there, but we're not quite there. […] I think education is the missing component. […] The heart is there, the

> willingness is there, the drive is there, the workers are there, but I think it's the educational aspect that's what's missing.

Jacob suggests that what has prevented the Mt. Sinai congregation from retaining non-black visitors is a lack of education and diversity training. If Mt. Sinai wants to become a reflection of heaven, then they will need to be prepared when non-black visitors attend their services. Later in this chapter I will discuss how the changing demographics of the community around Mt. Sinai has initiated a conversation regarding if and how they should change their worship services.

Addressing Racial Inequality

Alcohol and Drug Abuse

The first outreach ministry started by Bishop Oliver was the Drug and Alcohol Ministry established in 1983. Bishop Oliver started the ministry because of his own experience with an alcoholic father who became abusive when drunk. His experience with his father who seemed to become another person when drunk led Bishop Oliver to realize that alcoholism is a disease and those who suffer from it need help. Although the Drug and Alcohol Ministry is now lauded, when it was initially established, Bishop Oliver was criticized for initiating a program related to drug addiction. As one of the first black churches in Washington, D.C. to have a drug and alcohol ministry, in the 1980s, people would assume that the congregation must be made up of drug addicts and alcoholics.

Washington, D.C. has had, and continues to have, significant drug and alcohol problems. Washington, D.C. gained notoriety in the 1980s as the "murder capital," which was fueled by the overwhelming presence of crack cocaine. The Drug and Alcohol Ministry was founded during this crack epidemic. In 1990, former D.C. Mayor Marion Barry was arrested for crack cocaine possession, which shows that drug abuse was not confined to alleys or crack houses, but reached into the halls of D.C. political power. Furthermore, the District has an average annual number of deaths attributable to alcohol that is 6.8% higher than the national average (Stahre, Roeber, Kanny, Brewer, Zhang 2014). In 2013, the rate of heavy alcohol abuse[51] was 4.5% among blacks and 7.3% among whites (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration 2014). Those who have rates of heavy alcohol use are also more likely to report illicit drug use. In 2013, among those 12 or older, blacks had an illicit drug use rate of 10.5% while whites had an illicit drug use rate of 9.5% (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration 2014).

The Drug and Alcohol Ministry provides free and confidential counseling with the goal of helping individuals who have become incarcerated, homeless, or unemployed because of their addiction. They have a six month structured program that individuals can attend which includes group and individual counseling, Narcotics Anonymous/Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, domestic violence classes, and life skills. This ministry has served over 10,000 clients since its founding, and D.C. courts and homeless shelters frequently refer clients to Mt. Sinai's Drug and Alcohol Ministry.

[51] Heavy alcohol use is defined as five or more drinks on the same occasion on each of 5 or more days in the past 30 days (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration 2014).

In his biography, Bishop Oliver recognizes that the pressures his father faced of being the first black cashier at Safeway, living in a racist society, and not having the same level of achievements as his family likely contributed to his alcoholism. The pressures of a bad economy as well as the stress of racism can also provide insight into the levels of drug and alcohol abuse among blacks. By providing services for individuals suffering from these problems Mt. Sinai's Drug and Alcohol ministry seeks to help those like Bishop Oliver's father, who lacked the resources needed to overcome his addiction.

Incarceration

An issue that can be the outcome of drug and alcohol abuse is incarceration. The Prison Ministry at Mt. Sinai Church was started in 1987 with the purpose of teaching Bible Study in local prisons and humanizing those who are incarcerated. About a decade later, the Prison Ministry waned and was no longer actively going into prisons to visit inmates. Greg, the present director of the Prison Ministry, revived it by addressing what he felt was a need. Greg's previous experience with imprisonment and the positive experience he had with the men's ministry at Mt. Sinai led Greg to start visiting incarcerated individuals. He reveals:

> […] I was a person who didn't think anything was out of my control. So I got out of control. […] I realized that I needed help with my own lifestyle and behavior […]. And I've always wanted to help African American men because growing up, I was one of them guys who got mad at the world because I did not see anybody that looked like me in a positive role, and every positive role model that I saw either got disgraced or got killed. So it began to wear on me. So instead of complaining that we're not this and we're not that, for my own self-

> benefit, I started getting involved and going to jails because incarceration was part of my own background.

Greg feels that part of the reason he was incarcerated was because of a lack of black male role models. Although he had his reservations about church, he was able to find other men to help him grow and develop and, most importantly, model how a responsible adult man should behave. Greg began holding Bible Study and communion in jails. In 2012 Greg transitioned from being a volunteer, without an official title, to the director of the Prison Ministry. Today, the Prison Ministry uses weekly Bible Study to stress holiness and morality, which is a prominent feature of the Pentecostal faith. The ministry also partners with D.C.'s Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA) to assist formerly incarcerated adults with reentry.

The rate of incarceration in the U.S. has increased dramatically since the declaration of the War on Drugs in the 1980s and the U.S. has the highest rate of incarceration in the world (Alexander 2010). People of color have been disproportionately impacted by this race to incarcerate. Scholars have used the term "prison industrial complex" to capture the connections between the growth of the incarcerated population and larger political and economic structures, and ideologies (Davis and Shaylor 2001). Rather than reflecting efforts to curb crime, the prison industrial complex reflects the reliance on prisons and prisoner labor as a source of profit. Because racial minorities constitute such a large percentage of the incarcerated population, the prison industrial complex has become a new form of racial control (Davis and Shaylor 2001; Alexander 2010). In a "post-racial" time period of alleged colorblindness, the U.S. incarcerates more black people than South Africa did at the

height of an explicitly racist, apartheid regime (Alexander 2010). These trends are mirrored in Washington, D.C., which has the highest incarceration rate in the country and 90% of people in D.C.'s Department of Corrections are black, even though blacks are only 54% of the population (Justice Policy Institute 2010). Greg explains that incarceration without rehabilitation has not been an effective strategy, but the Prison Ministry's focus on behavioral change and holiness has been more effective.

> So the […] prison ministry itself, the message had been holiness and living right. And the thing about being a Pentecostal is […] it's clearly defined—holiness, live holy, live right, live moral—period. And that message coupled with life skills and cognitive behavior scenarios causes people to really take a look at themselves without pointing fingers. […] I guess the last 20 or 25 years of lock them up and throw away the key and worry about them later didn't prove to be fruitful. All it did was fill up the jails. And […] the recidivism, it doubled and tripled and they're noticing that these guys that started going to jail at 18 are still going to jail at 50. So they've been looking at this being more effective because research has shown it has been more effective. Less people are going back now. […] So our ministry has gone back to its roots where we offer spirituality, life skills, and a mirror for them to take a look at themselves on the inside. With the idea that when you come out, if you do these things, knowing that it's going to be hard but your faith in God will help you get through these rough patches. […] And it has been successful.

Those who are more interested in challenging the prison industrial complex may question Mt. Sinai's focus on addressing the individual behavior of inmates. However, this focus on addressing individual behavior is because of the religious culture of the church that places emphasis on holiness and behavior. Nadine, who is in charge of the Alcohol and Drug Ministry used to work with the Prison Ministry. She simultaneously

critiques the Prison Ministry for failing to address core issues related to incarceration and individuals for the choices they make that lead to incarceration. She states:

> I don't think that they address a lot of the social issues that need to be addressed with the […] ex-offender. I think they keep putting the patches on it than really getting to the core of everything, but then […] once you get to a certain age, you make choices. But I think a lot of times that some of us blacks do things out of ignorance because […] there's certain basics that aren't taught.

Even though Nadine criticizes what she perceives as a lack of addressing core issues, she still goes back to focusing on individual behavior and choices. In other words, people make decisions to engage in vices and sin because they do not follow biblical principles or because they were never taught any better. And, as was discussed in the previous chapter, "when you know better, you do better." Yet, that the Prison Ministry at Mt. Sinai Church even exists highlights their recognition of the need to address the social problem of the mass incarceration of D.C.'s black population. Beyond stressing holiness and conducting Bible study, the Prison Ministry provides resources to aid with reentry. Family members of the incarcerated and newly released inmates are referred to the church's Food Bank and Clothing Boutique, the Employment Ministry, Drug and Alcohol Ministry, and HIV/AIDS Ministry. Annually, Children with incarcerated parents are given Christmas gifts through Mt. Sinai's Angel Tree Program and the church has employed several ex-offenders. The following section examines how Mt. Sinai Church addresses food and clothing insecurity, which can also be a result of incarceration.

Food and Clothing Insecurity

Established in 1991, the Food Bank provides free groceries (including fruits, vegetables, meat, dairy products, cereal, and baked goods) and hygiene products to thousands of individuals each month who are senior citizens, unemployed, low-income, disabled, or who have simply fallen on hard times. People come to the Food Bank from D.C., Maryland, and Virginia. The D.C. Department of Human Resources, Child Protective Services, and Veteran Affairs often refer individuals to Mt. Sinai's Food Bank, as well as congregations whose food banks are not as large. The Clothing Boutique was established in 1995. Similar to an actual boutique store, clothes are arranged on racks and hangers. Although the clothing is provided to anyone in need, free of charge, in order to receive clothing individuals have to first be fitted. Mt. Sinai's Clothing Boutique believes that when you look good, you feel good and in order to do that the clothes they provide should fit properly. Those that benefit the most from the Clothing Boutique are the homeless, unemployed, and those with emergency needs.

David, 46, is currently in charge of the Food Bank and Clothing Boutique. He notes that with the economic downturn they are now seeing people come in that they did not normally see before. He says, "With […] the way the economy is, we've recently been seeing a lot of fathers, with lay-offs, and/or they're fired, and downsizing or whatever. We're seeing people who I guess what we call the underemployed." David's wife Andrea often helps him at the food bank and remembers a woman who once had a six-figure job and came to the food bank. Andrea remembers, "She was embarrassed that she was driving a big fancy Escalade, but that's the only car you got. […] She was really very embarrassed about it but if you have kids to feed, you can't

think about that." Although their primary purpose is to provide material items to individuals, David says they also serve as counselors and prayer warriors. As a minister, David is equipped to address both the material and spiritual needs of individuals who seek assistance.

As David noted, the economic recession has made it harder for more families to afford food. From 2008 to 2012, Washington, D.C. ranked as the second worst place for food hardship for households with children (Burke, Martin, and Weill 2013). Although fewer people report experiencing food insecurity, there is still a racial disparity. In 2014, 17.2% of people reported experiencing food insecurity, which is the lowest since 2008. Yet, of the 17.2% of people who experienced food insecurity, 29% are black versus 13.3% who are white (Riffkin 2014). As David's wife Andrea explains:

> Most of the people you see who are hungry look like me. That doesn't mean that that's all, but in this area, most of them. Because most of the opportunities for employment and for housing and for better healthcare, if you don't have a job, you don't have the insurance. If you don't have the insurance, you can't get healthcare, which means you keep sliding down rather than going forward.

Racial disparities in income and unemployment help explain why blacks are more likely to struggle to afford food. As Andrea explains, this can also create a ripple effect that sheds light on the interconnected nature of inequalities. Through the Food Bank and Clothing Boutique, Mt. Sinai Church is able to address racial disparities in food and clothing insecurity. As discussed above, one of the issues that may bring people to the food bank or clothing boutique is unemployment or underemployment. To address

this, Mt. Sinai has created a Community Development Corporation to provide employment training.

Community Development Corporation: Employment Training

Mt. Sinai's Community Development Corporation (CDC) for employment training was created because Marie, the founder, was working with another church ministry to help mothers dealing with drug abuse. While working with one of the mothers Marie asked her what she wanted to do when the program was over and the woman vaguely responded "find a job and buy a house." Marie realized that this woman, and likely others, had no idea how to set goals and prepare for employment. Bishop Oliver gave Marie permission to start a job-training program and also asked her to run the church's job bank. The CDC now offers GED preparatory classes, English as a second language, business writing and grammar, basic computer training in Microsoft Office, computer repair, web design, and personal development. By providing employment training, the CDC has the potential to help address the unemployment rate for blacks in D.C., which is more than three times the rate of unemployment for whites in D.C. (Comey et al. 2010).

Marie stressed the holistic approach the CDC takes to work with individuals. Rather than just providing individuals with job training, the CDC also addresses the spiritual needs of individuals. Marie explains, "Some […] people are afraid. They've been told that they're dumb and they […] won't accomplish anything so you have to replace all that negative with something positive. You are wonderful and God created you to accomplish anything you set your mind to." As discussed in the previous chapter, a holistic perspective is an aspect of kingdom theology, which seeks to fulfill

characteristics from God's kingdom on earth; therefore, spiritual, physical, emotional, and social needs are considered in a holistic manner (Barnes 2013). Because kingdom mindedness involves thinking of oneself in positive terms as an heir to God's promises, individuals who succumb to negative thought patterns fail to be kingdom minded. Rather, Marie suggests that by believing the inerrancy of the Bible that states individuals are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14), then people can accomplish anything. A holistic approach to helping individuals is not only a strategy used by the CDC but is characteristic of the religious culture of the church. As Wendy describes:

> Everything that we do is based on the wealth of the individual, their one-to-one relationship with the Lord, the individual […] relationship to the family, and the individual's role they play in the community. Everything that [Bishop] does and our leaders do is to make [Mt. Sinai] members individually well rounded. […] We try to be a church that meets all their needs: spiritual, physical, mental. […] When Jesus was upon the world, he addressed all the needs. […] He fed the people before he was able to speak to them cause if you're hungry, you aren't going to hear anything I say about what God is doing.

Using Jesus as the model for church outreach, ministry leaders at Mt. Sinai feel that it is insufficient to focus only on the spiritual needs of a person because when they leave the church, they will face the outside world with the same social concerns they entered church with. Timothy, a deacon, echoes this saying:

> I think this church […] addresses numerous things that involve the whole man. Which I think you can't just go to the church and preach Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, and the people go home, and they don't have no food, they still don't know how to budget their money, they don't have no job, they don't know how to get a job.

Timothy, like others, states that it is insufficient to only focus on the spiritual aspect of an individual because there are social issues facing an individual that also need to be addressed. These responses highlighting a holistic approach emphasize the historical importance of the Black Church having a responsibility to take a holistic approach and provide people with resources they did not have access to elsewhere. The following section explores how gentrification impacts the strategies used by Mt. Sinai Church to address racial inequality.

Current Challenges: Being Pushed Out of the Community You Helped Revitalize

The community surrounding Mt. Sinai Church has changed significantly since the church moved to that location in 1991. Between 2000 and 2010 the black population decreased from 78% to 62% while the white population increased from 18.2% to 31.8% (U.S. Census 2010). As in many parts of the District, there is a revitalization of property and an influx of white residents. Bishop Oliver has received offers worth millions of dollars from people who would like to buy the church and five other properties the church owns but he refuses to sell any of it because he sees himself as "called to urban ministry." There is a common theme of frustration among members who are offended by new residents that want them to leave; yet it was the church's community efforts that made the community safe enough for them to move into the neighborhood in the first place. David comments, "It was because of the church that we cleaned up some of the area by having different programs available for them. Now that we've done all of this and helped to get the area where it is, now they want to come in and say, 'What are you going to do with the church?' So we're not going anywhere." Co-Pastor Oliver

related the story of how crime ridden the area was when Mt. Sinai moved into their current location in 1991 and how they began to clean up the community. She reveals that the community had a problem with gangs, alcoholism, and drug dealers:

> It was kind of like most urban, inner city, African American communities where there was a small gang population, […] but there were alcohol and drug dealers and those kinds of things. We made our presence known here. This used to be a church with a Caucasian pastor and although he had African American members, they didn't seem to make as great of an impact or I can just say maybe it wasn't as great of a need to make the impact when they first moved here. […] And I'm not sure that they would have been able to handle it quite as successfully as we did because we did those things that were prevalent with the African American culture and that is you hit it face on.

The community around Mt. Sinai Church was—like much of D.C.—experiencing the aftermath of the crack epidemic and, as a result, was plagued with crime and drugs. As newcomers, Mt. Sinai confronted the community's social ills head on. Co-Pastor Oliver explained that the church used a combination of "get tough" tactics in addition to providing community services to help push the crime out of the vicinity of the church.

> We set up security. We […] put up flyers. They challenged us and so we challenged them back. They threw out rocks and busted up car windows and they jimmied car locks and stole cars and they stood right by the corner and did their deals and we had to be sure that even the ladies were just going from half a block to the bus stop, we had to make sure that the guys were there with them. And so, we started to say, "[…] You have to take it down the street. […] [W]e're going to get involved with the police in the area […] and this is going to stop. So, now you can make up your mind whether you go to jail or whether you go down the street and sell that. But in this radius right here, this is going to stop." […] They threw the rocks out and the security went and got them and drug them

> back down that hill and threatened them. "[…] Throw another boulder, throw another stone, break another car window, we're gonna break your fingers. And you better not tell it because […] we work this street so, wherever you go, we're going to meet you there." And so […] and we ain't had no more trouble. You know, you just shut down a couple of them and then the word gets out, "They're not playing down there. They will hurt you." And these were African American men and some of them with single mom's homes so they didn't know how to deal with strong men. So they got an earful and they got a body full.

Using tactics that might seem unusual for a church, the congregation of Mt. Sinai essentially claimed their territory and gave the local drug dealers and vandals a taste of their own medicine. Any men who worked in law enforcement were recruited to serve on the Security Ministry with the purpose of protecting the welfare and property of Mt. Sinai congregants. Co-Pastor Oliver explained that after they "threatened them and scared them to death" they also offered alternative activities such as classes on parenting, domestic violence, and social services like the food bank and clothing boutique. The result was that people who were previously troublemakers began to see the church as a positive part of the community and would not conduct their activities within the vicinity of the church. Co-Pastor Oliver states:

> And then, we got involved in their situations. So we set up […] parenting classes and single-mom classes then we […] took a survey and we got involved with the [Advisory Neighborhood Commissions] council, we saw some of their needs. So then we opened up the food bank […]. We don't have designer clothes but we got clean clothes and […] we got stuff to help them and we did the back to school things. […] We got in their hearts and once you get in the hearts of people then they start protecting what's theirs. And so […] they begin to own the church as theirs and so once they owned the church as theirs, they wouldn't let nobody – "You're not going down there. […] I go to that church."

> So, education, activity, and then give them alternatives. So, it was really a collaboration of all those things that gave us success so there isn't one thing.

By confronting the activities of troublemakers in the community and also consistently providing them with positive activities that addressed some of their needs, Mt. Sinai was able to create positive change in the community over time. Mt. Sinai also did a lot of outreach and would canvas the community, knocking on doors and even going into local clubs. Some individuals began to attend the church and make positive changes in their lives. Research has shown that church attendance reduces drug use and drug dealing among urban black males (Johnson, Larson, De Li, Jang 2000). The work Mt. Sinai did helped to reduce crime and visibly clean up the neighborhood. Approximately 15 to 20 years after Mt. Sinai moved to that community and began making positive changes, gentrification also started. Greg, the head of the Prison Ministry, explains the transition that began to happen in the community:

> So this was just predominately low-income […] people who the city hadn't turned their back on, but hadn't put much emphasis in. The church came in and immediately had impact. […] Through the years, […] when the housing boom took place Northeast became—the city of Washington—basically became a hotbed so they started removing rundown, low income apartments and buildings. They turned them into renovated subsidized housing. […] [I]nvestment started to take place in the city. And when that started to happen the demographics started to change, mainly income-oriented people started moving in. And then as they moved in, the church congregation changed from underserved, low-income congregants […]. […] We experienced a growth of people from the Latino community. We are experiencing now a growth or surge of people coming to the Northeast corridor based on the development of this area. […] But the population has changed racially from the predominately

> black, low income, underserved population to a middle class […] upwardly mobile population.

Once known as "Chocolate City" because of its predominately black population, Washington, D.C. has transformed into what Timothy terms a "Neapolitan City" because of increasing populations of whites, Hispanics, and Asians. While not all areas of the District have experienced the same levels of gentrification, the community around Mt. Sinai has been particularly impacted. Dilapidated housing and empty lots have been replaced with condominiums. In the time span that I conducted this research a new condominium with retail stores was completed across the street from Mt. Sinai. With new housing and retail come higher rents and some people who previously lived in the community have been priced out or have had their homes foreclosed. Crime has also decreased, but has not been eliminated. Respondents note that they see new white residents out walking alone late at night or jogging with dogs—activities they could never have imagined 20 years ago.

As a result of the gentrification of the church's neighborhood, Mt. Sinai is currently enduring parking disputes. Previously on Sundays attendees were able to park on both sides of the street that the church is located on, including underneath an overpass. Recently, attendees have received $50 to $100 tickets that cite a D.C. law that prohibits parking underneath a structure. Timothy, a deacon, conveys:

> We used to be able to park on both sides of [the street] without a problem. When you see the houses start to change, and the people start to change, […] now all of a sudden, we're getting bombarded with tickets. We're getting bombarded with not being able to park or only being able to park on Sundays. This is a

> seven-day a week church. […] There's a lot of stuff going on but you can't park. So, when you can't park, you're not inclined to come to church.

The parking issues present a problem for Mt. Sinai because it is not a church that operates only on Sunday's. The church has events throughout the week and when the majority of the congregation drives in from Maryland, it becomes difficult for them to come to church if there is no place for them to park. David and his wife Andrea explained that they went around D.C. and took pictures of cars parked underneath structures in Georgetown and on K Street that were not ticketed. Andrea expresses her frustration of going to an Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) meeting to find that it was white residents creating the new issue of parking for the church:

> [W]e know what it is. We went to an ANC meeting and quite a few of them were beige. […] So it's that kind of being subtle. […] Oh, "all of a sudden now you can't park," so now it's tickets. Now it's, "oh, we need to ticket you because you're parked here" and, "oh, now you can't park up in the parking lot anymore," so the things that never were an issue for 20 years have become an issue. For 19 years they were not an issue. The last one year they have become an issue.

Essentially, members of Mt. Sinai Church see these parking disputes as a trend in the city that causes churches to move to the suburbs because they are frustrated—which is what it appears that incoming residents want. This is what happened with the Baptist church in my study. The result is that after so much ticketing, the churches decide to leave, thus handing over their land and property to developers to build new stores and condominiums for incoming residents who tend to be white and upper class.

However, the push to get Mt. Sinai to give up their property and move to the suburbs did not start with the parking tickets. Andrea, who has been a member of Mt.

Sinai Church for 20 years, explained that there was a plan to pressure Mt. Sinai to move out of the community in the same way that Community Baptist felt pressured to move out of their community after so many disputes with new residents.

> Someone asked [the former councilman] when they first moved here, "What are you going to do about that church down there?" He said, "what do you mean what am I gonna do about it?" And so the thing that was going to happen to [Community Baptist Church], they were attempting to happen here. And he said, "Nothing, they were here before you got here."

Now that Mt. Sinai owns what has become valuable property and continues to be a major presence in the neighborhood, individuals—it is unclear whether they are developers or new residents—want the church to leave. Andrea is aware of what happened at Community Baptist Church and how years of parking disputes eventually caused the congregation to vote to build a new church in the suburbs of Maryland. She indicated that the same set of circumstances could have happened with Mt. Sinai, but the congregation is committed to staying in their community. Attendees of Mt. Sinai find it astounding that after all of the positive work they have done in revitalizing the community, they are expected to leave. Andrea's husband, David, who has also been a member of Mt. Sinai Church for 20 years, reveals:

> It was because of the church that we cleaned up some of the area by having different programs available for them. Now that we've done all of this and helped to get the area where it is, now they want to come in and say, what are you going to do with the church. So we're not going anywhere.

When Mt. Sinai first moved into this community they claimed their territory and refused to allow drugs, gangs, or violence to occur. Respondents from Mt. Sinai believe that it was because they made the effort and provided programs the community needed

that it became a viable location for redevelopment and incoming residents. Similar to their stance over 20 years ago, now that they are facing a different type of threat Mt. Sinai is once again claiming their territory and they refuse to leave.

Mt. Sinai is not the only congregation that has experienced pressure to relocate or stop their ministry work due to gentrification. Anna, the leader of the Hispanic Ministry, explained that new residents also try to stop other churches from providing the community services they have been providing for decades. She says:

> I have a friend who owns a church on New Jersey Avenue […]. And they're dealing with issues where they have always helped the community. […] Just because certain individuals move in doesn't mean everybody else is wiped out. No, there are still people there and she's still giving clothes away and food. And the people in her neighborhood that have moved in will send letters saying, "Can you stop that. It's bringing the value of our property down." And she's like "I've been here for a decade. You just got here. This is the way it is because we have been here cleaning up, evangelizing. […] I think a lot of people moving into the city are ignorant. They don't know what the city was known for, the crime level, the drugs, the prostitutions, all those things. So […] it would be good for them to know the history.

Like Mt. Sinai, other churches believe that their work in the community has created positive change that has made the community safer for newcomers. Yet, these newcomers, who are the beneficiaries of community work by churches, want these churches to stop what they are doing because it involves having people who may be homeless or jobless come into their community. Hence, the presumption made by newcomers is that they should be the sole dictators of what activities happen in the

community. Anna believes that this attitude is a result of ignorance that the community has undergone drastic change as a result of ministry work by churches.

Although Mt. Sinai is adamant that they will not be moved, the changing demographics in their community has prompted some congregants to think about if and how to spread the Gospel and conduct community outreach to a changing community. For some respondents, the gentrification occurring in the neighborhood surrounding Mt. Sinai church highlights the lack of outreach the church is making to new white residents. At the same time I was conducting research for this study, a group of scholars was conducting research about the impact of gentrification on black churches in Washington, D.C. Both Timothy and Melissa mentioned this other research in my interviews with them and wondered if and how their church should adjust to these changes in the community. Timothy noted:

> The lady […] says "Did ya'll do any outreach […] where the white folks, where the affluent blacks, where they live? Have you done any outreach up there?" […] It would take the effort of walking through there, knocking on doors. […] It's not something where you can use conventional methods to invite them. […] We've had Harvest Festival where we had a stage set up on the hill […]. We had some preaching and singing and praying […]. We had a backpack giveaway and all that. […] These people up here, they don't need that backpack. […] [T]hat's not what they are into, so the challenge is how to […] take God to those individuals that are not necessarily like we are and make it viable for their life. […] [I]t has held true forever that the most segregated place in America is church on Sundays. […] We are much more diverse than what we used to be. And we are trying to be more diverse through invitations of asking others to come, but people want to go where they feel comfortable. If you are in the pulpit and you happen to say something that may could be true but may be off-putting

> to someone in the congregation, they ain't coming back. […] Even though what you say may be true. I am not saying don't speak the truth but […] you're trying to deliver words that is going to help every man. […] [C]an we do better? I'm sure every church can do better. It's a work in progress.

Because churches are voluntary organizations, and residential areas continue to be racially segregated, churches continue to be racially segregated (Emerson and Smith 2000). People also often attend congregations where they feel socially comfortable with each other (Emerson and Kim 2003). Although congregants at Mt. Sinai Church are working toward a more multiracial congregation[52], and have more non-black attendees than the other two churches in my study, Timothy recognizes that the conventional methods of outreach used by Mt. Sinai target those who are less economically privileged. While a back-to-school backpack giveaway may attract former community residents, it may not attract new middle- and upper-class residents. Bishop Oliver has stated that he feels called to urban ministry and has a desire to help those who are less socially and economically privileged. With a large part of Mt. Sinai's identity being providing opportunities and aid for "the least of these," what happens when "the least of these" are replaced by "the most of these" due to gentrification? Another challenge regarding incorporating new white residents into their congregation that was discussed by Timothy is the result of speaking "truth." Timothy suggests that things said in the pulpit may make people uncomfortable even if it is true. He goes on to explain that while black comedians such as Kevin Hart or Paul Mooney can make true statements about race relations and white people will laugh, pastors do not have that same freedom

[52] A multiracial congregation is any congregation in which 20% of the congregation is racially different from the largest racial group (i.e., 80% of the congregation has the same racial background) (Emerson and Kim 2003).

in the pulpit. If Bishop Oliver were to say something that made whites feel uncomfortable, they probably would not come back. Thus, even though Mt. Sinai tries "not be a political motivated church" according to Bishop Oliver, there is the reality that incorporating white residents into a predominately black congregation might create restrictions in what is said from the pulpit.

Melissa observed that although the demographics changes were evident to the Mt. Sinai congregation, there was not a consensus about whether or not they should change their church to attract new community residents who are often white. Melissa explains:

> Now the community is changing. […] But how we are adjusting to the population shift and those kinds of things because indeed the neighborhood is changing and I can't say that we are 100% prepared for the change that is occurring. We began to see it but we're kind of slow moving forward with making some changes and adjusting some things to […] go with the neighborhood. […] [W]e found out when we go into their neighborhood, they don't necessarily change their service, they don't change what they're doing. […] So people were like, why do we have to change what we would do? Why can't they just come in and embrace what we go going on here? I don't know.

What Melissa describes is the burden of integration and being welcoming falls on blacks. As she explains, when blacks go into white churches, their services do not change. Research by Edwards (2008a, 2008b), that focuses on black/white interracial churches, echoes Melissa's observation and has shown that multiracial churches often have to appease white attendees and affirm their preferences. As a result, Edwards (2008a, 2008b) finds that the congregational life of multiracial churches is more likely to mirror that of predominately white churches than predominately black churches. Co-

Pastor Oliver explains that there are some changes that Mt. Sinai has already made in light of the demographic changes in the community and there are other changes they are considering making:

> We've always been community driven. […] So regentrification, it's coming. It's taking up some momentum. And so we have to look at that and so we have white children in our school. Okay, so we can't have every mural in the school black. You have to put another color in here; you have to put an Asian or Chinese because that's not fair. […] Right now our community is still basically black, but there is a lot of infiltration of Caucasians, not too many Asians and we have some Hispanics, but not as much as we do the Caucasian community. […] We're always going to be a black church. […] We're going to clap our hands. We're going to move and you don't have to do that. But you have to embrace that and we have to embrace that perhaps you came from a Presbyterian Church or an Episcopalian Church and your whole mass was 45 minutes long. So […] we may have to shorten our services to […] no more than an hour and a half and so we're looking at that.

Co-Pastor Oliver believes that they will need to make adjustments to reflect the demographic changes that are occurring. These changes would need to occur not only at Mt. Sinai Church, but also the ministries and programs associated with the church like their school. Yet, Co-Pastor Oliver makes it clear that even though they are willing to make changes, Mt. Sinai will always be a black church.

Another impact that gentrification has had on Mt. Sinai is to stimulate the congregation to become a more political church. David, the head of the Food Bank, explains, "Because we have not been a political type of church but now a lot of things that are going on politically affects a church so it's now the time for us to get into this fight, per se." As explained above, there are people who are approaching ANC

members and trying to get them to pressure Mt. Sinai to move out of the community. As a result, Mt. Sinai is becoming more engaged in local politics and establishing themselves as permanent presence in the community. For example, congregants organized to have the section of the street in front of the church named after the church. There were also local politicians present at the unveiling. David explains that they did this in order to "give them leverage," but it also recognizes the work Mt. Sinai has done to revitalize the community. This act, which honors Mt. Sinai, also makes it much more difficult for newcomers to try to push the congregation out of the community.

Conclusion

Strategies to address racial inequality at Mt. Sinai Church do not reflect the direct action protesting done by some black churches during the Civil Rights Movement. The strategies used by Mt. Sinai Church focus on helping individuals improve themselves and make better choices. This is a reflection of the religious culture of Mt. Sinai Church which stresses holiness, one's relationship with God, and that humans are fallen and prone to sin without Godly intervention. Therefore, the emphasis is on teaching people the message of the Bible, which is love of neighbor and self. If everyone could be evangelized, in essence, the sin of hate and racial inequality would not exist because the Bible is colorblind. Also, people would make better choices if they were taught the Biblical principle of holiness.

Similar to Community Baptist Church, respondents at Mt. Sinai Church simultaneously expressed individual and structural explanations for contemporary

racial inequality. Again, this highlights the hegemony of colorblind racism and that and racial minorities accommodate their views vis-à-vis this dominant ideology. Respondents who began by describing racial inequality as a structural issue that is a result of societal arrangements beyond an individual's control also suggested that the poor behaviors of blacks causes racial inequality. Many of the responses that placed the blame on poor behaviors were reminiscent of respectability politics. This fits the religious culture of Mt. Sinai because morality and individualism are emphasized. Therefore, it is expected that people will make the right choices and take responsibility for their actions. People are more likely to engage in the appropriate behavior and make the right decisions if they have a relationship with God.

The responses given for the role of the Black Church in addressing racial inequality were significant because respondents questioned the racial homogeneity of the Black Church. In the past, this racial homogeneity has been considered a source of strength and a refuge (Frazier 1963; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). However, because the religious culture of Mt. Sinai stresses biblical inerrancy, they interpret the Bible in a colorblind fashion and believe the Black Church should be a multiracial replica of heaven.

The strategies utilized by Mt. Sinai Church to address racial inequality focus on improving individual behaviors and providing opportunities. Bishop Oliver explains:

> […] [W]e have not had the opportunities to succeed like the majority of the population has. So when opportunities are not given to you and second chances are not given to you, you start off as disadvantaged.

Mt. Sinai addresses racial inequality through alcohol and drug abuse, incarceration, food and clothing insecurity, and employment training. These ministries and programs are not an exhaustive list; rather, they are the most commonly cited by respondents. Mt. Sinai particularly provides opportunities to those suffering from addiction to drugs and alcohol or who have been incarcerated; in other words, individuals who are even less likely to be provided a second chance. The religious culture of Mt. Sinai Church also has some influence on the ways in which they address racial inequality. Because the culture of Mt. Sinai Church emphasizes holiness and a holistic approach that addresses the spiritual, physical, and mental needs of individuals, their approach in addressing incarceration, alcohol and drug abuse, and employment training is to stress moral behavior and believing what God says in the Bible. What is also noteworthy is that Mt. Sinai's Drug and Alcohol Ministry and Food Bank are both relied upon by D.C. government agencies to help provide social services. As explained in Chapter 3, black megachurches are filling a gap created by a dismantling of the welfare state where addressing the outcomes of contemporary racial inequality is left to private sector organizations, such as churches, rather than the federal government.

Many of the strategies used to address racial inequality discussed in this chapter are geared toward helping the outside community. Most of these ministries and programs have been in existence since the church moved into its current community over two decades ago, at a time when there was much more crime. However, as a result of gentrification the neighborhood is rapidly changing. Although there are still people who are in need of these ministries and programs, the demographic shifts have created pressure for Mt. Sinai to give up their now valuable property and to consider their role

as a predominately black church in an increasingly white neighborhood. In the following chapter I will examine how the last of the three churches in this study explain and address contemporary racial inequality.

CHAPTER 7: "When you preach the Bible, you preach equality among the races": Understanding and Addressing Racial Inequality at House of Joy Nondenominational Church

In the previous chapter I argued that, like Community Baptist Church, individuals at Mt. Sinai Pentecostal Church simultaneously expressed individual and structural explanations for contemporary racial inequality. Because the religious culture of Mt. Sinai emphasizes holiness, leaders and attendees tended to believe that the Black Church should address racial inequality by focusing on the message of the Bible. Although religious culture impacts how this megachurch addresses racial inequality, other factors such as gentrification also shape strategies to intervene in racial inequality.

In this chapter I outline how the third of three black megachurches in my study interprets and addresses contemporary racial inequality. As in the previous chapter, I analyze how religious culture accounts for understandings of and responses to contemporary racial inequality among the black megachurch leaders and attendees in my study. I also analyze how other factors, such as location and resources, impact responses to contemporary racial inequality. I find that religious culture influences how the leaders and attendees of House of Joy Nondenominational Church[53] understand contemporary racial inequality and how they believe it should be addressed. Because the religious culture of House of Joy emphasizes positive thought and confession leaders and attendees tended to believe that the Black Church should address racial inequality by helping individuals improve themselves and become self-sufficient. Although religious culture impacts how this megachurch addresses racial inequality,

[53] The names of churches and respondents have been replaced with pseudonyms.

other factors such as resources also shape House of Joy's strategy to implement programs rather than provide temporary hand-outs.

This chapter is organized into four sections. The first section provides an overview of House of Joy Nondenominational Church. The second section describes the ways leaders and attendees at House of Joy explain racial inequality. Although respondents may begin with a structural-level explanation of racial inequality, they would often lean toward individual-level explanations. The third section examines how they think the Black Church should address racial inequality. The leaders and congregants of House of Joy feel that the main roles for black churches in addressing racial inequality are to focus on teaching the Bible and provide individuals with the knowledge needed to improve themselves. The fourth section describes the various strategies taken to address racial inequality, which includes addressing education, employment training, and homelessness. The final section analyzes how current challenges effect the ability of House of Joy to address racial inequality.

House of Joy Nondenominational Church

The second oldest church in this study, House of Joy Nondenominational Church was founded in Washington, D.C. in 1916 as a Baptist church. In the late 1990s, the church became nondenominational because, according to the head pastor Bishop Stanley, "the Bible does not teach denomination." Since moving to their current location in 2004, House of Joy has experienced significant growth and has an average weekend attendance of 4,000 people, most of whom are younger than 50 years old. As reported by Bishop Stanley, the church is currently about 93% black with the remaining

7% being a mixture of whites, Asians, and Hispanics. House of Joy also has the largest percentage of low-income congregants out of the three churches in this study. Bishop Stanley describes the congregation as approximately 40% low income, 50% middle income, and 10% high income[54]. The impact of having such a large percentage of low-income congregants will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

Sunday worship services at House of Joy are lively and place a lot of emphasis on worshiping God. Although a nondenominational church, services at House of Joy resemble Pentecostal worship services. It is not unusual to see people dancing in the pews, running up and down the aisles, to hear worshippers speaking in tongues, or to see ushers attending to individuals who have been "slain in the spirit."[55]

House of Joy has the least amount of ministries listed on their church website, and it was not until speaking with congregants that it becomes evident how involved House of Joy has been, and continues to be, in their surrounding community. Unlike Community Baptist Church or Mt. Sinai Pentecostal Church, House of Joy is not located in a neighborhood in D.C. that is experiencing rapidly changing demographics due to gentrification. The area of the District that they are located in continues to be predominately black and low income and their community programs reflect this. The primary ways House of Joy addresses racial inequality is through education, employment, and a Community Development Corporation (CDC) that provides transitional homes for homeless women and children as well as veterans.

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[54] Bishop Stanley described high income congregants as those making above $70,000 annually.
[55] This refers to a reaction by someone who feels they have been touched by God's spirit and are overcome with emotion.

Explaining Racial Inequality: *"If you know better, you do better"*

Like the respondents at Community Baptist Church and Mt. Sinai Pentecostal Church, respondents at House of Joy also acknowledged differences between the overt racism before and during the Civil Rights era and the more covert forms of contemporary racism. Darius, 29, stated, "[…] [R]acism didn't go anywhere. We just put on suits and we went from wearing corduroys and walking barefoot to driving nice cars and living in decent areas, but it's still here. We're still seeing it on a regular basis." This perspective that racism is essentially the same monster in new clothing and, furthermore, continues to simultaneously exist with black socioeconomic progress is one that was expressed by respondents at all three churches.

The subtleties of contemporary racial inequality were noted by Terri, 40. She explains, "I haven't experienced it like maybe my mother or my grandmother. Like, right in your face with it. I have not. I have experienced it in subtle ways." Terri related one experience at a restaurant where a white hostess seated a white couple before her even though she had been waiting to be seated with her friend. When Terri complained about her treatment she was told that the hostess would never do that. She expressed her frustration with trying to prove the ill intent of such subtle actions.

> The way they do it these days is you can't prove it. It's your word against theirs. "Well, that wasn't my intent." Who can judge the intent of someone's heart because no one knows anyone's heart? I only know your actions. Sometimes your actions do not line up according to your mind or even your heart. That could be a battle all within itself. You know when somebody is doing something to you maliciously and you know when somebody is not. I knew that was a

> malicious act. Hands down. But I couldn't prove it so you have to just let it go. I have little examples like that but nothing further than that. No one ever called me nigger, or caused me bodily harm, or some things that our ancestors have experienced.

What Terri is communicating is the paradox of intentions. Often, conversations about contemporary racial inequality tend to stall because the conversations become about individual intentions rather than about systems of power. Since the late 1950s surveys on racial attitudes have found that whites are far less likely to subscribe to views associated with Jim Crow segregation (Bonilla-Silva 2010). As a result, optimists would argue that over time whites have become less racist. In the face of such data, one may ask how blacks can continue to assert that racial inequality is the result of ill-intentioned, racist whites. Or, as Terri suggests, how can you prove the intentions of another person? Yet, critical race theorists have demonstrated that racial inequality is a problem of power (Guinier and Torres 2003; Collins 2009; Bonilla-Silva 2010;), and the intentions of individuals are inconsequential when the outcome perpetuates a system of racial inequality (Bonilla-Silva 2010). In Chapter 2 I explained how colorblind institutional mechanisms can perpetuate racial inequalities while appearing to promote equal opportunities. For example, all children are entitled to equal educations through public schools, but that is more of the exception rather than the rule as a result of residential segregation and tracking within schools. Whether or not individual teachers within schools or elected officials on school boards are ill-intentioned or overtly racist does not change the outcome that schools reproduce racial inequalities. The quandary of contemporary racial inequality is that it can occur even without ill intent.

Consistent with respondents from Mt. Sinai Pentecostal Church, some individuals at House of Joy also noted that younger generations are less segregated and, as a result, may be less racist. Zakiya, 48, states:

> I think that it's important that we do have multi-racial and multi-generational churches because […] this country has become a serious melting pot. It's nothing for black kids to be with white kids and Asian kids and Latino kids. I mean, there's far more integration with that now than there's ever been.

As discussed in the previous chapter, interracial marriages and friendships are on the rise (Pew Research Center 2010; Wang 2012). The increase in interracial relationships may shape the way younger generations understand racial inequality. As a result of increased racial integration, Bishop Stanley believes "younger generations […] would be less racist as time goes on." Yet, research has shown that declining rates of overtly racist public opinions does not mean that the structure of racial inequality has changed (Schuman, Steeh, Bobo, and Krysan 1997; Bonilla-Silva 2010).

Wanda, 58, warns that younger generations of blacks should not be misled into thinking that racism no longer exists because it is not as overt as it may have been under Jim Crow.

> […] [W]hen I hear the younger people talk who don't really know the struggles that we've gone through, they weren't around when Martin Luther King was marching or Jim Crow times and although I came in at the end of it, […] I still experienced it. […] I hope we as a race don't lose that and fall in the cracks and have false hope. Even with the Zimmerman trial, that's a very good example of racism here in the United States. Don't get caught up because we have a black president. You […] see his struggles because he is black. […] We can't sleep. And that's my concern with the generation that's coming up, I hope they don't

> fall asleep and get caught up. The next thing you know, they're gonna wake up and be in chains again, whether they realize it or not, because we still are in mental chains.

Wanda fears that younger generations, who may be less aware of previous struggles for racial equality, will take having an African American president for granted. Although Wanda is skeptical about the potential for younger generations of blacks to be deceived, research by Cohen (2011) has shown that black youth are particularly suspicious of the idea of a post-racial society and believe discrimination is a major factor in racial inequality. Yet, these same youth are somewhat optimistic and believe that racism will be eliminated in their lifetime.

Samantha, 51, also expresses concern about the tendency to take racism for granted because of an African American president.

> […] [P]eople take for granted the fact that there is an African American president in that space. That's what we fought for and he's doing a phenomenal job, and there's ups and downs and of course that doesn't mean racism *does not* exist. But the significance of that is tremendous. […] You know again, but for the Martin Luther Kings and the Voting Rights Act, but for all of that groundwork that was done, that would have never happened. And he has made some changes that have affected us in a positive way but he cannot change the world in four years. […] So it saddens me, it really grieves me that sometimes we as a people don't really get that great significance because what if it would have been Mitt Romney, what if it had gone the other way? Where would we be? Some of the programs that we see, some of the benefits that we see, we would not have experienced it. Even just the impact of him being there on our kids […] the desire to achieve and the recognition that I can really make it here is phenomenal. So we're making strides. We have a ways to go.

Like Wanda, Samantha is also concerned that people with an ahistorical perspective will take Barack Obama's presidency for granted and will fail to recognize the various milestones that have made his election possible. Although an African American man is President of the U.S. and that provides a powerful social representation for black children, racial inequality did not end when Obama took the oath of office, nor will he singlehandedly end it with his presidency. Samantha also expressed concern about her own children being less aware of racial inequality because they live in a predominately black county in Maryland where they regularly encounter middle and upper class black professionals. Overall, Zakiya, Wanda, and Samantha are apprehensive that because of the appearance of progress, younger generations may be deceived by the permanence of racial inequality.

Similar to Community Baptist Church and Mt. Sinai Pentecostal Church, there were some respondents who simultaneously relied on structural and individual-level explanations of racial inequality. Although respondents may begin with a structural-level explanation of racial inequality, they would often lean toward individual-level explanations. Attendees at House of Joy broadly felt that racial inequality is a result of educational and cultural differences, which can sometimes lead to a limiting and negative mindset. The religious culture of House of Joy, which focuses on hope, positive thinking, and believing God's promises seem to influence the partiality to individual-level explanations.

Both Bishop Stanley, the head pastor, and Charles, the head of the employment ministry, suggested that there have been systematic efforts to prevent blacks from succeeding. Bishop Stanley asserts, "[Y]ou can't stop us unless you put forth a

determined and a deliberate effort to do so. […] And I may be stretching this thing too far. […] But it's almost like all of the evidence points to something like that." Although Bishop Stanley hints at a conspiracy to hinder blacks from reaching parity with whites, he hesitates to state it directly. Yet, he continues to point to the evidence of a conspiracy when describing his disappointment at having the church's proposal for a math and science charter school rejected[56]. When I asked if the plans were rejected because they were a religious institution Bishop Stanley replied:

> It's not that we're a church. I think it's because of where we are. Certain areas, there are certain people. Crime is big business, […] poverty is billions of dollars of a business. Keeping people poor, having the social government services and employees, […] the welfare department, the food stamps, all that kind of stuff is billions of dollars to keep poor people poor. […] It's nothing that can't be solved.

Washington, D.C. no longer has a reputation as the "murder capital." Yet, neighborhoods that are predominately black and poor, such as the community House of Joy is located in, continue to experience violence as a result of drugs and guns. Communities such as this have poorer schools and higher rates of incarceration, unemployment and poverty, which create a cycle of crime and poverty. Bishop Stanley feels that the only explanation for rejecting a plan that would have had a positive impact on the community is because there are deliberate efforts to keep the community poor and crime-ridden.

[56] House of Joy's rejected plans for a charter school will be discussed in more detail in the Education section.

Similar to Bishop Stanley, Charles believes efforts have been made to intentionally harm black communities.

> At one point 20 years ago, we were expanding much faster than the white population. Then part of that was, let's slow that down, let's birth control. That's when AIDS showed up, and just all kinds of things. It just happened to show up right in the heart of the black community. What can you say? I'm not a conspiracy theorist, but I would say I know one thing for sure. Guns, drugs, all of that stuff is put into the black community for a purpose and it's not just to make money. It's put in for a purpose that's not good for us as a population.

Analogous to Bishop Stanley's assertions that crime and poverty at the expense of poor black communities is a big business, Charles also suggests that guns and drugs and intentionally pushed into black communities. Although not new, the assertions made by Bishop Stanley and Charles maintain that premeditated efforts have been made to perpetuate racial inequalities. Essentially, both are arguing that structural limitations beyond the control of individual blacks are the cause of racial inequality. Yet, at the same time that both Bishop Stanley and Charles point to factors outside of the control of individual blacks as the cause for racial inequality, they also simultaneously advocate personal responsibility. Charles states:

> And I do believe the system, I'm not saying that America is killing us, black men, black population. But they are. But you can't […] stop at that. At some point you got to have some responsibility. You have to say that even though the system is beating us hard, trying to get rid of us, it's up to us as a people to survive this.

Although Charles believes that AIDS, guns, and drugs may have been strategically placed in black communities, he also feels that is not a reason to give up or give in.

Charles believes that people still need to take personal responsibility in the face of systemic injustice. In the end, Charles asserts that a choice has to be made by the individual to survive the systematic efforts to impede black success. Bishop Stanley also suggested that there is a deliberate effort to hinder blacks, but he simultaneously questions the need of blacks to identify by race.

> We're African Americans right? […] We never really hear anybody say I'm French American or I'm German American. Because they have no need to prefix their nationality. There's no need to identify them as a certain type of Americans. They are Americans. […] We are the ones that there has to be some type of special identity associated with us, so the other folk will know who they're dealing with. There's no need to put down your race on an application. Why in the world would you do that if the country is trying to get past race? […] I think we start off wrong. I think we really haven't had the leadership or the follow-ship. […] [B]lack folks have problems following other black folks. Usually, you only get black folks to do something when you get somebody white to tell them what to do.

At the same time that Bishop Stanley asserts that there are systematic efforts to hold black people back, he also criticizes the need to focus on race. He highlights the "symbolic ethnicity" of European Americans, which is individualistic and without social cost (Waters 1996). However, for people of color in the U.S., symbolic ethnicity is not an option. Although Bishop Stanley criticizes people of color for identifying themselves as a particular type of American, he overlooks how "American" is often conflated with "white" and that for racial minorities, their lives are strongly influenced by their race regardless of how much they identify with an ethnicity. The result is that Bishop Stanley simultaneously places the blame on both unequal social structures and individual blacks that are not quite past race.

In the same vein as Bishop Stanley, Ahmad, 26, suggests that it is time to move on from using racism as a crutch. He declares:

> I think sometimes we utilize racism as a crutch to stay where we are, as opposed to using it to build against and go against it. Make them call you who you are. If you're successful, make them call you successful. Not by saying he's saying he's successful, but by the works that you have shown them. Because we do have to work a little harder than our white counterparts, but that's not to say that they're better than us. […] I think a lot of races are laughing at us like, "They're just not going to get it." We have to get to a point where we just move on.

Much like Bishop Stanley and Charles, Ahmad simultaneously acknowledges that racial inequality is a result of structural factors outside of one's control and individual actions. Ahmad acknowledges that blacks have to work harder, which implies they face unequal opportunities. Yet, at the same time he also feels that individual blacks are responsible for making whites respect them rather than using race as a crutch and not moving past it.

Similar to respondents at Mt. Sinai, there were some at House of Joy who felt that cultural differences between blacks and whites help explain contemporary racial inequality. Ahmad, who left his mother's house at 18, feels that in black families it has become normal for young people to leave at an age that white children would still be at home, which results in less nurturing and a forced sense of survival. He explains:

> I think that's one of the things that Caucasian people have over African Americans, and even other races. They don't force their children out as quick as we do. […] We're forced to be survivors so early. I'm twenty-two years old.

> All I know how to do is survive on my own. […] That really is one of the plagues that effects African Americans.

Ahmad believes that whereas white families allow their children to stay home longer, black families force their children to be independent at a younger age. It is possible that Ahmad's perspective is informed by class differences as much as it is by racial differences. Ahmad suggests that being forced to learn how to survive and become independent before they are ready can create negative outcomes for black young adults. Charles, the head of the Employment Ministry, highlights some of the negative outcomes that Ahmad implies. He states:

> Traditionally we don't get that nurturing in the early years, especially in the hardcore ghetto. I mean the parents […] are not educated. […] [Y]ou got the babies making babies syndrome. How can a child, 13, raise a baby when they're still baby characteristics themselves? Never having a chance to be grown up and now they're forced to be in an adult role.

Charles notes that there is a lack of nurturing, particularly in black families from the ghetto. The trend of youth taking on adult responsibilities, such as having children before they are ready, contributes to people not having the skills needed to be successful in life. This perspective is another example of individual explanations of racial inequality.

In addition to cultural differences, negative and limiting thought patterns were a commonly cited reason for contemporary racial inequality. Terri, 40, suggests:

> Unfortunately, our culture, the African American culture, in some instances are not past the past. We're still in that crab mentality. We're still at everybody's against us. We're still at there's no way out. We see all the proof around us. We have an African American president. It's some people that still have no hope.

> The Bible tells us there will always be the poor among us. That's what Jesus said. He wasn't talking about just poor financially. He's talking about in spirit, and in mind, and in thought. You can have a poor way of thinking about life and about yourself.

Terri, like Ahmad and Bishop Stanley, also suggest that people need to move beyond using race as a crutch or a way to linger in past discrimination. Terri believes that by dwelling in the past influences one's present thought patterns and can result in an almost conspiratorial mindset. She also indicates that the Bible anticipates people who will have a negative mindset and lack of hope. In Terri's response we can begin to see how the religious culture of House of Joy influences her perspective that becoming immersed in negative thinking about race is a "poor way of thinking."

Terri's perspective that people have negative though patterns, as well as the belief she shares with Bishop Stanley and Ahmad that people should not use race as a way of maintaining a victim mentality are influenced by the religious culture of House of Joy, which emphasizes positive thinking and speaking things into existence. Samantha, 51, asserts, "[…] [W]e have a lot of hope. We believe that God can do everything, anything." This positive thinking principle of "naming it and claiming it" is not simply restricted to the leadership, but is found at all levels of House of Joy and is emphasized through sermons, scriptures, and songs. In an untitled sermon, Bishop Stanley told the congregation, "You have to act like it's already done." In other words, individuals should act as if what they have asked God for has already happened and praise God for it as if it has already happened. On another occasion, Bishop Stanley's son, Pastor Stanley, requested everyone hold hands during offering and said, "I need you to take your neighbor's hand and believe that they will receive everything God has

for them. Believe they will be prosperous, that their child will be saved. Now squeeze life into your neighbor's hand." Another Sunday, a congregant stood before House of Joy to make the announcement for tithes and offerings. He explained that when he first married his wife he wrote a check for $1 million. He knew he did not have the money then, but he explained, "Bishop Stanley teaches us to do things like that, to go into neighborhoods we want to live in." After the tithes and offerings were collected, the choir sang a song titled "Speak." The lyrics state, "I shall have what I decree. Yes, I believe it belongs to me. So I'm going to speak into the atmosphere." The songs, sermons, and even impromptu messages throughout the service all communicate the importance of positive thinking, hope, and believing that God will provide what they ask for. Through positive confession, people are encouraged to speak about themselves what God has spoken of them in the Bible. Positive confession or "name it and claim it" is a central practice of the Word of Faith movement. The Word of Faith Movement consists of nondenominational churches, ministries, Bible colleges, and mass media broadcast networks (Harrison 2005). Although the religious culture of House of Joy parallels beliefs central to the Word of Faith movement, I do not characterize House of Joy as a Word of Faith congregation. Word of Faith congregations are generally not concerned with social activism or community programs and believe that overcoming racism, sexism, and classism is simply a matter of overcoming negative mindsets (Walton 2009). On the contrary, although respondents at House of Joy place a lot of emphasis on negative mindsets, they also cite structural reasons for the existence of inequality and, as will be discussed later in this chapter, they create social programs to address these conditions.

Wanda, 58, believes that Bishop Stanley preaches prosperity to counter negative thought patterns:

> [Bishop Stanley] preaches prosperity and […] it's not so much that he preaches prosperity, he preaches the Word. When you know the Word, have an understanding of the Word, there is constant growth. There is prosperity in the Word. God talks about it all the time. […] [T]he way I grew up, in a Baptist Church, it was almost like if you were poor and struggling, that's how you were going to get to heaven. But I strive for more. Sometimes I would go to church and […] I would be church-depressed, because I got the feeling that I'm only going to get my glory in heaven and there is no glory on earth. […] [B]efore I joined [House of Joy], I joined another church, which was nondenominational, and that was my first encounter with a nondenominational church. She was a female bishop […], she preached the word and she also preached prosperity, in the sense that you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. […] [I]t's nowhere in the Bible where God said "you'll lack." […] I guess that's just to let you know that you are all-powerful and believe in it.

Prosperity theology teaches that Jesus was prosperous and God desires people to prosper (Walton 2009). Furthermore, God desires people to be a blessing to others (Harrison 2005). According to prosperity gospel, anyone with enough faith has the capacity to be healthy and wealthy. Church attendees are encouraged to "sow" financial seeds in order to receive God's blessings. Megachurch pastors such as Creflo Dollar and T.D. Jakes are considered to be prosperity preachers. There has been much condemnation of prosperity theology[57] and it has come to be seen as a justification for material excess. Yet, the basic idea that God desires people to prosper and that people

[57] For example, Black liberation theologian, James Cone, argues that prosperity theology contradicts the gospel of Jesus (Lee 2005) and Min. Michael Eric Dyson asserts that prosperity gospel is a way to justify the upward mobility of the black middle class without guilt (Walton 2009).

can “do all things through Christ” are core teachings found in most black churches. Even though these aspects of what make up prosperity gospel are found in many black churches that does not mean those are prosperity churches. Wanda explains that, unlike the Baptist church she used to attend, Bishop Stanley teaches his congregation that as children of God they should strive for success because the Bible does not say that God wants his children to be poor or struggle. However, by doing so, Bishop Stanley reinforces an individual-level explanation of racial inequality and that, with faith, people have the power to change their circumstances.

The belief that God wants people to prosper is also part of the religious culture of House of Joy. Each Sunday at House of Joy, prosperity scriptures are read at the start of service. Prosperity scriptures can come from both the Old and New Testament and generally present what the Bible says about success, wealth, abundance, and blessings. At House of Joy the prosperity scriptures are projected on the screens at the front of the sanctuary and everyone reads them aloud. For example, the following were prosperity scriptures read during a Sunday service at House of Joy: “The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace” (Psalm 29:11). “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people he chose for his inheritance” (Psalm 33:12). “The Lord will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to. The Lord your God will bless you in the land he is giving you” (Deuteronomy 28:8). In addition to reading scriptures about prosperity, congregants are told that God wants them to prosper. One Sunday Bishop Stanley said:

> I honestly believe from the bottom of my heart God does not want us to be a people of poverty. You are somebody special. You are the head and not the tail.

> You got to pull yourself up by your bootstraps and say I'm gonna go to school. I'm gonna change my community.

Congregants at House of Joy are constantly reminded that, in the end, they are responsible for their own lives. Although they may face adversity because of their race or class, God wants them to succeed and they must make the decision as individuals to have faith in God's promises and work to achieve a better life. As Wanda explained above, Bishop Stanley's preaching of prosperity is not a version that treats God as an ATM, but encourages people to believe that they are children of God, who are capable of, and deserve success. Although respondents at House of Joy acknowledge structural-level explanations of racial inequality, the religious culture of House of Joy supports individual-level explanations.

Additionally, lack of knowledge, or "not knowing better," was cited as a cause for racial inequality. Respondents felt that when people are not exposed to something different, they will continue to do things the same way they have always been done. Furthermore, they felt that when people have not been exposed to positive social representations then they will not expect that they can do anything different. Darius, 29, related a humorous story about generations of women in a family who cut part of a ham off before cooking it without knowing the reason why. Each woman would ask the woman before her why she would cut part of the ham off and they would say "Go ask your grandmother" or "Because that's the way my mom did it." When the matriarch was asked why she cut part of the ham off she explained that it was so she could fit it into the pan. The message behind Darius' story was that when people have a limited perception and are raised only knowing one type of life, they follow that without

understanding why they are doing that or that they could do something different. As he explains, “To me, it’s a way of thinking that has just transcended through the years to where people […] of our culture a lot of times without seeing it, don’t push. Don’t really get out there to see the world in a different light.” Ahmad suggests, “If everybody around you has failed, well I guess I’m going to fail. If you expand your horizons and go beyond your inner circle, I think the sky’s the limit. But you have to be exposed to it.” Stacey, 42, further illustrates the implications of Darius and Ahmad’s statements. She clarifies, “We become a product of our environment. What’s the phrase that everybody is using now? […] ‘If you know better, you do better.’ It’s that you didn’t know.” Charles reiterates Stacey’s statements and says, “If you don’t know no better, then hopefully somebody will teach you […] better. But it’s our responsibility as minorities that know better or that know what it takes to try […].” Charles goes on to relate an example that makes explicit that the lack of knowledge he is referring to is what scholars would call cultural capital. Cultural capital refers to shared forms of high status knowledge that can be consciously or unconsciously used in social and cultural exclusion and translated into different forms of value (Lamont and Lareau 1988; Lareau 2003). Charles explained that if his uncle was a lawyer and was able to take him to Europe for a summer that provides him with an experience that cannot be quantified, but as I discussed in Chapter 6, can translate into economic gains. Much like respondents at Community Baptist Church and Mt. Sinai Pentecostal Church, respondents at House of Joy cited cultural differences between blacks and whites that are, in reality, differences in access to resources and forms of knowledge. Respondents in both Community Baptist and Mt. Sinai viewed this lack of knowledge as both an

individual problem and a structural problem. Contrarily, respondents at House of Joy did not state that they felt this information was systematically withheld from blacks. Instead, they felt that it was a result of individual blacks not pushing to know better and would relate examples of how they or others they knew found a way to gain the knowledge they lacked.

One such example of someone who felt that lacking knowledge does not have to be a hindrance to success if Zakiya, 48. She explains that her mother did not have the knowledge needed to help her get into college or to support her once she got in. So Zakiya made it to college on her own and worked full time to pay for it. She maintains:

> Systemically, the access of opportunities are there, but they are not there. It's invisible. If you don't have a network of support that can sponsor you into opportunities, more than likely you are not going to get there. If you don't have parents that come from a certain network that have influence you to get you there, or just really parents that are pushing you. Most of these kids don't have that. I didn't have it. My mother never asked the question "what do you want to be when you grow up?" […] Never visited my campus. […] I didn't hold it against her. She did what she could with what she knew to do.

Zakiya feels that not knowing better does not necessarily mean you cannot do better. Although Zakiya recognizes that there is a systemic lack of opportunities for black youth, she stresses the importance of self-motivation. Zakiya's mother did not possess the knowledge to help her go to college, Zakiya worked full time while in school and bought her own car. After college Zakiya built a network of mentors and supporters by volunteering for people such as Dr. Dorothy Height and Dr. C. Delores Tucker[58].

[58] Dorothy Height was a civil rights and women's rights activist who was president of the National Council of Negro Women from 1957 to 1998. She also helped found the National Women's Political

Stacey explains how the religious culture of House of Joy, which stresses positive thinking and believing the promises of the Bible, can help people to "do better."

> […] [House of Joy] gave people a reason to believe that they have the ability. That they can do more, that there's a God that loves them enough that He wouldn't leave them where they were. And that […] "I really can become a homeowner, I really can be." And then you have people around you that are doing things that you thought could never be done and they look just like you.

Encouraging people to see beyond their present circumstances and aim for a life that is different than what they may have known is part of the religious culture of House of Joy. Inherent in the concepts, discussed above, of positive confession and speaking things into existence is the idea that people can and should believe they will achieve more. Terri reveals, "But that's the great thing about being here. [Bishop Stanley] doesn't stop it just because we're in the inner city […]. That doesn't mean you have to not believe in yourself. It doesn't matter where you come from." House of Joy also emphasizes role modeling and teaching individuals who may not know better, how to do better. Camille, 44, provides an example of this:

> […] [A]ll the ministers in our church and the Bishop, the deacons, the deaconess, […] age doesn't matter, they're all back in school. […] So it's like a role model. And they don't make you feel less than. […] So that's the beauty of it. They're gonna tell you how to get it and what you can do to get it.

Caucus and African American Women for Reproductive Freedom. C. Delores Tucker was also a civil rights and women's rights activist. She was the first black female secretary of state in Pennsylvania. With Height and 14 other women she helped form African American Women for Reproductive Freedom. Tucker was also ridiculed for the strong stance she took against gangsta rap music.

Perhaps because there is a narrower range of social representations in the community in which House of Joy is located, the church leadership feels it is important to not only tell people they can achieve more, but also show them how they can do it. Because Bishop Stanley is such a strong proponent of education, other ministers and the diaconate decided to pursue additional education regardless of their age. A number of respondents told me that had it not been for the teaching of Bishop Stanley that they could achieve more they, and/or their relatives, would not have gone back to earn a high school diploma, bachelor's or doctorate. Again the religious culture of House of Joy, which emphasizes the belief that God wants them to be successful, influences individual-level explanations of racial inequality.

How Black Churches Should Address Racial Inequality: "We're not picketers or marchers"

Overall, respondents at House of Joy tended to believe that black churches should address racial inequality by helping individuals improve themselves and become self-sufficient. In line with views that racial inequality is a result of not "knowing better," some respondents at House of Joy felt that the responsibility of black churches in addressing racial inequality should be to provide people with the knowledge they need to "do better." Because the religious culture of House of Joy stresses positive thinking and that individuals can rise above their circumstances, it is not surprising that respondents often felt that black churches should address racial inequality in this way. Also, like some respondents at Mt. Sinai Pentecostal Church,

some respondents at House of Joy also questioned the future racial homogeneity of the Black Church if it is to address racial inequality.

One of the strategies some respondents suggested the Black Church should use is to focus on God and the Bible. By focusing on spiritual aspects, respondents believed there would be a ripple effect. Stacey, 42, explains:

> I think the church's responsibility is […] if you change the individual, the individual changes the home, the family, they change the entire ecosystem. The church does not change. It is all about the Kingdom of God, it's all about saving souls. […] So if the pastors are doing their job and they're teaching it then there's less of those vices. It never goes away, it's just less of it because you're changing the individual. […] If we teach you the right way and we get the Zimmermans and whoever else in the church, we'll get them saved, we'll get them understanding that there's a different kind of way then you don't have [racism]. So we're not in a reactive mode, we're proactive, we're changing it by changing the individual then changing the family, then changing the ecosystem.

Stacey envisions social change as a ripple effect that will start with the individual and spread throughout society. If the church reaches individuals then those individuals will change their household, then that household will change their family, and that family will change their community. Stacey later said that "the church's job with racial injustice is not to use the pulpit as a platform to preach against racial injustice." Stacey's response is similar to those at Mt. Sinai Pentecostal Church who felt that black churches should focus on the love of Christ and by default the sin of racism would be addressed. This perspective relies on an understanding of racism as an individual issue of sin that can be remedied with spiritual teachings. Because Stacey views racism as a vice or a

sin then if individuals could commit their lives to Christ, then racism would eventually disappear.

Bishop Stanley reiterates Stacey's sentiment that focusing on the Bible also addresses other aspects of life:

> I believe and I know that all people can rise above their circumstances if they're not being held back by political machines. […] They can go to any school and learn […] and become not only productive citizens but citizens of excellency, changing the fabric of our community. […] And I think that the church's job is not only just to preach the Bible but when you really teach and preach the Bible, you teach and you preach […] people being successful and you preach equality among the races. All of that is right there in the scriptures if we teach it properly. So each story, each illustration of Christ doing different things, you can look at it and it's easy to comparatively analyze the scripture with day to day situations that would be easy for us to apply and live by and be successful with it.

Bishop Stanley interprets the Bible as an all-encompassing and holistic book whose messages apply to every area of modern life, including racial inequality. Therefore, one way black churches can address racial inequality is to focus on teaching the Bible. Yet, Bishop Stanley does not perceive racism solely as a sin. As was explained in the previous section, he simultaneously understands racial inequality to be a result of structural factors outside of an individual's control as well as individual behaviors.

One reason why some respondents at House of Joy may suggest that black churches should focus on the Bible to address racial inequality is because there are some white members at House of Joy. Charles suggests that Bishop Stanley has to be "gentler" when talking about racial inequality because the church is not 100% black. This also seemed to be the case at Mt. Sinai Pentecostal Church. Like some of the

respondents at Mt. Sinai, a few respondents at House of Joy also concluded that black churches would have to become more multicultural in order to address racial inequality. Darius, who is head of the media ministry, advocates having leadership that is open to diversity and does not treat non-black individuals differently. He said, "Make it mandatory for your leadership to be well-rounded. To address when an Asian person comes to church and not to look at them as in 'oh my God, you're Asian.'" Darius then laughed about another media person who likes to find the rare non-black person on camera and consider that his quota for the day. Yet, in relating this story Darius also noted the racial diversity of the kingdom of God. Zakiya, 48, also acknowledged the segregation of churches. Recall that in the above section she noted that the increasing integration of younger generations will present a challenge to church segregation.

> You know Sunday is the most segregated day of the week. We go to our own respective places. We have no regard for the people that look different from us, for those two hours. […] I think that it's important that we do have multi-racial and multi-generational churches because […] this country has become a serious melting pot. It's nothing for black kids to be with white kids and Asian kids and Latino kids. I mean there's far more integration with that now than there's ever been.

Both the idea that heaven will be multiracial and the changing demographics of the country inform Darius and Zakiya's views. Interestingly, none of the respondents at House of Joy or Mt. Sinai who called for black churches to become less segregated suggested the same for white churches. For the most part, they all placed the onus of integration on black churches.

Several respondents at House of Joy concluded that racial inequality is a result of not knowing better because "when you know better, you do better." For that reason, some felt that part of the responsibility of the Black Church is to teach people how to "do better." Charles asserts:

> […] [T]he church as an institution […] needs those classes. Classes for young mothers, classes for young adults and I mean it's hard. The average young adult is not going to be interested in that, but that's the challenge. To cloak this education in some framework that gives them something to keep their interest, but at the same time you are providing them with some very valuable information that might have an effect on their lives.

Samantha, the head of the CDC, proposes that people need to be reeducated "on how to live and how to maintain" without relying on the government for assistance. Wanda, the program director for the homeless women and children's transitional home, has a similar belief that black churches should teach people to be self-sufficient. She says:

> […] I think that the black churches should focus on teaching their members how to be self-sufficient, not dependent on the system or anybody else. […] Because the system, just like everybody else, can change their mind. That's what we tell the women here, because most of them are on TANF, and […] they have to be re-evaluated. Money gets less and less, so it's our view you've got to get a job. You've got to get something that's going to sustain you, because eventually they're going to get rid of […] the welfare system, I believe.

Charles, Samantha, and Wanda all believe that the Black Church has a responsibility to teach congregants how to be self-sufficient so that they will not be held to the whims of government aid. Each of their perspectives in influenced by the demographics of their congregation and surrounding community. Because they often interact with low-income individuals through their ministries who come from generational cycles of

government dependency, they view self-sufficiency as one of the primary ways the Black Church should address racial inequality.

Because education is held in such high regard at House of Joy, it was not surprising to hear Bishop Stanley say that is how he believes black churches should address racial inequality. He asserts:

> [T]he only way to develop any type of equality is to participate in education. If you want to change the laws and change stuff you need people who are *in* law. […] I think that if our country is serious—[…] if every black church could send somebody to law school, you know if you get maybe 100,000 black lawyers in law school over the next 10 years, I think it will make a major difference in how people do law. […] You know I think that's going to be powerful. You're not going to get people to like you, you can't legislate people's feelings. They're going to be that way, there's always going to be a section of this country and some people who are not of our race who would dislike us. And there's nothing you can do about it, they're just going to be that way. You can sing and you can march all you want to. […] It's not going to change them. We've got to get involved in the laws so the laws are favorable to us in regard to equality. […] Instead of standing on the outside of the justice court building […] we need to have people on the inside. Some justices, some lawyers, people of that nature who qualify to sit in those seats that can provide opinions that are favorable to equality. And I think for us as a people that's our new march. It ought to be towards colleges. Our new march ought to be towards stronger economy.

Bishop Stanley specifically speaks to the idea that black churches should be involved in mass protesting, such as that done by some churches during the Civil Rights Movement. However, Bishop Stanley recognizes that in order to create equality there must be equitable laws and people to enforce justice. Hence, rather than marching and

protesting, Bishop Stanley believes black churches should financially sponsor law students in order to change the laws that determine equality.

The belief that marching and protesting is not effective in this contemporary time period was echoed by Samantha, the head of House of Joy's CDC. She says:

> Well one thing that we always say here […] is we're not picketers or marchers. Those were the old days and you can scream and yell from a bullhorn all you want but once you go home what's changing? […] You have to have a strategy, you have to have goals, and you have to have focus and you have to follow through on those goals. As we're doing the programs that we run he'll begin to instill those values and it demonstrates actions speak louder than words. So it demonstrates to the community at large and then to society at large that we're […] a group of people that really aspire to be everything that God has called us to be and have the capability and the ability to do it. As long as we have the same opportunity to do it. And so as a ministry we have to push the ability for our people to have the same opportunities as their white counterparts so that we can operate on the same level as they do because we are able, but without the opportunities we won't. So it's pushing the programs, making sure that the education is there, and not […] speak out about it, but then offer a solution. […] And so […] sometimes it means creating your own opportunities on smaller scale for it to then be replicated on a larger scale for racism to be exposed in certain areas based upon the solution that you're providing. Sometimes it's not always best to just scream "racism, racism, racism!" because sometimes it's better to demonstrate it by creating a solution to it and then […] speaking to how your solution exposed the issue.

Samantha explains that House of Joy is not rooted in the strategy of protest politics. She finds that strategy is not very useful and that rather than stating that something is evidence of racism, it is much more productive to create an intervention. In doing so, the intervention highlights the existence of racial inequalities and, if successful,

provides a model that can be replicated on a larger scale. Samantha's statement is very significant for critics of black megachurches who expect to see protesting in order to address racial inequality. Rather than assuming that black churches should engage in a particular type of strategy, we should investigate what strategies they deem appropriate in this time period and whether their understanding of racial inequality would result in protesting as a strategy (Barber 2011). As Samantha suggests, screaming "racism" the loudest does not always translate to the most action.

Addressing Racial Inequality

Education

Education is greatly emphasized at House of Joy. Unlike Community Baptist Church, which stressed education because most of the congregation is middle class and educated, Bishop Stanley stressed education because a large percentage of the congregation has not had the opportunity to earn a college degree or, in some cases, a high school diploma. According to Bishop Stanley, approximately 40% of members at House of Joy are poor or working class, approximately 50% are middle class, and approximately 10% are upper class. Because Bishop Stanley wants people to transform their lives and become financially independent, one of the ways he suggests congregants do that is through education.

Bishop Stanley and Marion Barry, the former Mayor of Washington, D.C. and Ward 8 councilmember who was also a member of House of Joy, collaborated to implement a program that would allow residents of Ward 8 to attend the University of

the District of Columbia (UDC) for free in return for volunteering at local high school after school programs. As a former educator and the pastor of a congregation that has a significant population of adults that are low-income and are not college educated, Bishop Stanley recognized the importance of providing educational opportunities to his congregation.

One of the projects House of Joy wanted to develop to further education in the community was building a charter high school with a curriculum focused on math and science. House of Joy wanted to take their old church building, which is a few blocks away from the new church, and transform it into a charter school. Bishop Stanley explained that they had a board comprised of 24 Ph.D.'s, including a principal who had a Ph.D. in Physics. Surprisingly, the local community rejected this proposal and I was told the money was given to a woman who had a school in her house. Ahmad, an assistant to Bishop Stanley, was present at the Advisory Neighborhood Commission meeting when it was presented to the community and the residents refused the project because they did not want traffic and felt that the street would be populated by rowdy teenagers after school. Ahmad also believes that people have a stereotype of pastors having dishonest intentions. He explains:

> When African Americans hear that a church wants to do something, they always think that all the money's going to the pastor, because they drive nice cars. That is not the case for us. […] The people in this neighborhood did not want it, because they thought he would become this big person that took all the money from their neighborhood. That's not even his personality. Bishop, to me, is one of the most humble guys I've ever met in my life. […] It blew me away, because I was like, wow, they don't really want the change that they get in front of the

> news camera and say we want. Because when it's implemented, they don't want it.

Ahmad reveals that many people have stereotypes that the pastors of black churches are pocketing the money for community programs due to their material possessions. At the beginning of Chapter 5, I introduced "Black Church, Inc.," a documentary about the alleged focus on material gain in black megachurches. Documentaries such as this both reflect and confirm people's stereotypes that black megachurches such as House of Joy might have ulterior motives. At the same time that black megachurches are taken to task for not addressing social problems faced by blacks, sometimes their attempts are rejected. Several members that I spoke with at House of Joy mentioned the failed attempt at building a charter school in the neighborhood and each was disappointed that their efforts to bring about positive change were rejected.

The push for education at House of Joy is not limited to earning a high school diploma or college degree. Congregants are also encouraged to pursue job training and financial literacy. Congregants who are residents of D.C. are also encouraged to attend UDC's Workforce Development Program, which provides job skills training and GED preparation. Teaching individuals the skills to become homeowners is another way House of Joy advocates education. Once successfully a homeowner, people would place signs on their lawns stating that they were a "House of Joy Homeowner." According to respondents, these signs were becoming plentiful before the economic downturn. Ahmad, an assistant to Bishop Stanley, praises the work Bishop Stanley has done to foster homeownership:

> [U]nder Bishop's leadership, I would say that probably about 35 to 45% of our members are now homeowners. In this area where all you see is low-income housing and people are on Section 8 for all of their lives—grandma was on it, mom was on it, so they feel as though they have to be on it—we teach that you don't have to be that. If you look at what the federal government is trying to do, they're trying to get rid of it, so if they get rid of it, then what? Then you'll be stuck and out on the street again. Then homelessness will increase. I appreciate him for making that one of his main focuses of our ministry, because it helps people to understand that there is more to life than getting a voucher from the federal government.

Respondents at House of Joy commonly cited lacking the knowledge to do better as a cause of racial inequality. Encouraging these skills among congregants helps them "do better." Because many of the low-income congregants come from generations of poverty and government assistance, Ahmad explains the importance of providing people with the tools to become the first financially stable homeowners in their family. Homeownership is a primary form of wealth for middle-class families in the U.S. Due to past and present forms of discrimination in bank loans and real estate a racial disparity in homeownership exists. By helping people become homeowners, House of Joy helps to both build the wealth of families in the community and reduce the racial disparities in rates of homeownership.

Employment

Charles is the head of the Employment Ministry and he has been involved with it for 10 years. In 2004 Bishop Stanley selected a group of people from the church to help people find jobs and Charles was one of the members selected. Over time, Charles was the only volunteer left out of the original group of people Bishop Stanley asked to

create the ministry. Every Wednesday before Bible study, Charles and other volunteers meet with people to help them with their résumés and prepare for job interviews. Sometimes those seeking help are congregants and other times they have been sent to House of Joy for help. For example, Charles said that at times a homeless shelter may recommend House of Joy's employment ministry and 30 young men will arrive at once on a Wednesday evening seeking help with their résumés.

The Employment Ministry also organizes job fairs twice a year that are open to the entire community. When they started organizing the job fairs in about 2006 they partnered with a local Baptist Church in order to gain access to vendors. Now the church conducts their job fairs independently and because they have grown so large, they rent gymnasium space from a local Catholic church. Initially, the Employment Ministry was criticized by Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) leaders who felt that they were not doing enough to include the outside community. In response to that the Employment Ministry makes special efforts to advertise the job fair in advance and notify the local ANC about the job fair so they can also advertise it. Interestingly, the ANC leaders who were critical of the Employment Ministry's job fairs have not provided any resources to help with its operation. As a ministry of the church, the Employment Ministry conducts its job fairs solely using volunteer labor and the resources provided to them by the congregation. With this they are able to hold a job fair twice a year, rent the gymnasium space from the church, provide breakfast and lunch for attendees, and job interview clothing for those who need it. They solicit clothing donations from the congregation and Target and at times receive food from food banks. Over the years they have had vendors from the Social Security

Administration to Mary Kay, but they also encounter vendors who do not want to come because of their perceptions of the neighborhood. He suggests, "There's an enigma that goes with [this area of] Washington, D.C. […] And I've been told, 'It's not worth it. It's a waste of our time to come.'" The perceptions by some vendors that coming to the job fair is a waste of time because there will be no qualified candidates reflects the challenges Charles regularly faces when trying to prepare individuals for employment.

Many of the clients that Charles assists through the employment ministry are young black males. One of the challenges that Charles faces is the difficulty of helping a population that already has a higher than average unemployment rate find employment when many of them have previously been incarcerated. Charles explains:

> [I]t's still rough for basically males because coming out of their incarceration, that's the biggest strike when you have no education, and when I say no education that's less than a high school diploma, now it's nothing. When you have no education and you have the strikes against you and that usually is compiled by no or very little sketchy work history as well. So now you got three strikes working against you and that's the hardest to break because even the good ones come out and they try. […] And I had some very frustrated young men coming here from various sentences and they basically have taken out their anger perhaps on anyone that will listen. […] So I empathize with people like that because I've seen a lot of it and I do realize you try not to go back to jail, but it's very, very difficult.

The difficulty that Charles encounters when helping young black men find employment is a prime example of how *de facto* racial inequality creates similar outcomes as legalized, *de jure* racial inequality. The economic recession that began in 2007 caused many to lose their jobs. In Washington, D.C., which was not one of the hardest hit

cities, the unemployment rate rose from 6.4% in 2008 to 10% in 2010 (Comey, Narducci, and Tatian 2010). Washington, D.C. also has a history of being a city that is very segregated along lines of race and class (Iceland 2009). This segregation is still present and quite noticeable as one travels east of the Anacostia River to Wards 7 and 8 where there are much higher levels of concentrated poverty and lower levels of racial diversity. In these predominately black and low-income wards, average incomes are less than $20,000 (Justice Policy Institute 2010). As the adage goes, "when white America catches a cold, black America catches pneumonia." Although everyone suffers in an economic recession, it is particularly those who were already suffering who fare worse. Because of this segregation, blacks in D.C. have been particularly hard hit by unemployment and in 2009 their unemployment rate was 15.6% compared to 4.7% for whites (Comey et al. 2010). The area of D.C. that House of Joy is located in had the highest unemployment rate of the city at 28.7% in 2009, reflecting the race and class segregation of the city. Furthermore, the schools in the area where House of Joy is located are among the worst in the District regarding reading and math proficiency (Comey et al. 2010). Hence, the outcome is undereducated and unemployed young black men who turn to illegal activities to earn a living. In D.C., nearly three out of four young black men can expect to serve time in prison (Braman 2004). Washington, D.C. has systematically disinvested funding from public schools, parks, housing, and mental health while increasing funding for policing (Justice Policy Institute 2010). As Michelle Alexander outlines in *The New Jim Crow*, once released from prison, the formerly incarcerated are often denied housing, the right to vote, public benefits, and employment (Alexander 2010). Young black men, like those Charles tries to assist

through House of Joy's employment ministry have been pushed to the margins of society and experience second-class citizenship that parallels the segregated Jim Crow era.

Helping people find employment in the face of structural level racial inequalities such as inferior educational opportunities, the absence of jobs in poor black neighborhoods, and labor market discrimination against the formerly incarcerated is an immense challenge. However, Charles remains hopeful and feels that many people working together can make things better. He acknowledges:

> I look at it like a mountain and each one of these people or organizations they're trying to chip it a little bit, a little bit of rocks fall off of it every now and then. They somehow brought successful programs, x amount of people get a job, whatever, whatever. That's good. But still you have a mountain that's there and all we're doing is basically chipping little pieces off of it. But if we don't do that, then of course we're going sliding back and that's totally unacceptable because then people who have enough education and are charged to, with responsibilities then that means they are letting down the very people that they came from, their very brothers and sisters. No matter how hopeless their particular situation may be we still are charged to try to do our best to help as many as we can.

Charles' metaphor of chipping away at a mountain is an effective way to describe the challenges House of Joy faces in addressing racial inequalities. Many of the issues they try to address—unemployment, education, housing, homelessness—are the result of unequal social structures that systematically disadvantage blacks. Their interventions, however noteworthy, are not enough to solve these problems. Yet, Charles feels that it is their calling to do all the good they can with what they have available.

Community Development Corporation: Homelessness

The mission of the CDC at House of Joy is to combat community deterioration, promote education, prevent homelessness, and help those who are addicted to drugs. Samantha, the head of the CDC, explained that the rationale behind developing a CDC is to provide social services for the community while protecting the church from being sued. Developing a CDC that is a separate nonprofit also allows the church to pursue government funding that is available to faith-based organizations with a social service goal but is not available to organizations that have religion as the primary goal.

One of the first projects of the CDC was a transitional home for homeless women and children established in 2007. The CDC receives funding for this transitional home from the Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness, the DC Child and Family Services Agency, and the DC Family Treatment Court. Homeless women are referred to the CDC from those government agencies and they say at the transitional home for 12 to 18 months. Most transitional home programs are not that long, and there are not many programs in Washington, D.C. that accept women and their children. During the time the women are living in the transitional home they receive childcare, are given opportunities to complete or further their education, and receive employment assistance until they are independent and able to find a permanent place of residence. Camille, 44, lived in the transitional home for homeless women and children for two years. After graduating from the program she volunteered for six months, then became a monitor and now she is a case manager at the transitional home. I met Camille at the transitional home to interview her. The transitional home is located in a residential area not far from the church. In the basement, where we conducted the

interview, there were staff offices, a laundry room with multiple washers and dryers, and a common area with a television. Camille recounted how she was interviewed for the program at the transitional home while she was living in a shelter:

> And although I told them all my faults of my substance abuse, being on probation, I had got locked up—didn't do a lot of time, but I was on probation, […] they told me it was okay. […] And I was selected and I felt so much love because with all my faults I'm thinking ain't nobody want me. […] [S]o I got selected and I came here in December 21st of 2007 when the building first opened. […] And so from there I just never looked back.

It was that experience of acceptance and non-judgment described by Camille that attracted other respondents to House of Joy. Bishop Stanley, the pastor of House of Joy, is described as being very transparent. Because he is open with his congregation regarding his own past struggles—including drug addiction—congregants know that they are not alone and that he understands their perspective. According to Camille, Bishop Stanley has said, "[I]f anybody comes in here I don't care if they're drunk or falling down, let them in. I don't care if they stink and flies following them, let them in because they need more help than the one that's sitting with the suit on." This acceptance of others without judgment, which is characteristic of the church, also extends to how those who seek help through their CDC are approached. Camille goes on to describe how the program helped her finish her education and find permanent housing and employment.

> When I came here they provided daycare for me to go back to school. I went to school at night so they had a daycare here. And they still do for the women that want to go back to school in the evening or they want to work during the day, they have a staff here that has a degree in childcare. […] And when I was getting

> my high school diploma through UDC I […] took up two classes. I took up medical office assistant and my GED at the same time. And I've earned both of them. And later on after that I felt like this is not what I want to do. […] I want to help somebody like somebody helped me. […] I went back to school and in six or nine months I got my certification in substance abuse. And that's what I do now. I was able to get a three-bedroom apartment, permanent housing on my own that go according to my income for me and my two children. So this program really works. It brings tears to my eyes to even talk about it.

Camille's life was so positively impacted by the help she received from House of Joy that she changed her career plans so that she could help others the way she had been helped. The counselors at the transitional home also try to encourage the women to aspire to a career rather than a job so that they can give their children a life that is different from the one they had. Some of the women living in the transitional home grew up in transitional homes with their mothers so the program tries to give the women the tools they need to break that cycle and create different outcomes for themselves and their children.

The second transitional home started by the CDC was for formerly incarcerated women. Samantha, the head of the CDC, expressed that this was a more difficult model to run because it is more expensive given the mental health and substance abuse issues formerly incarcerated women reentering society have. Due to the challenges of running this transitional home, including a lack of funding, it was closed. The third transitional home started by the CDC is a co-ed independent living program for veterans. Women who graduate from the transitional home for homeless women and children are also given the opportunity to live in the co-ed transitional home for another year for a low cost if they are unable to find permanent housing.

Wanda, the program director of the transitional home for homeless women and children, explained that transitional home programs for women must be treated differently than transitional home programs for men. She reveals:

> It's so much that women need. Not only physical needs, but psychological as well. Because when they come from prison they bring everything with them. In other words, they bring all the problems, all the concerns that they had in prison home with them, whereas the men leave them there. Men have the propensity to shake it off, but women don't. They bring everything with them and we have to treat them as a whole. It's a holistic approach when we treat women, because the traditional counseling didn't work for them because they had baggage. That's another reason to have a home with children, because when a woman is in treatment her mind is on her children. Or her mind is on trying to get a job, her mind waders. That's why to keep it from less wandering they bring their children with them.

Wanda explained that many of the women who lived in the transitional home for ex-offenders, and even some who live in the transitional home for homeless women and children, would spend a lot of time trying to reclaim their children. This is a problem specific to women who have been incarcerated, as they are often the primary caretakers and risk having their children put into the foster care system when they are incarcerated. Therefore, the CDC makes sure that they address the specific circumstances women are facing as part of their rehabilitation.

Current Challenges: Mega Population Doesn't Always Equal Mega Money

A common misconception that people have of megachurches is that because they have large congregations they must have a lot of economic capital. However, it is

important to consider where the megachurch is located and the economic status of the members of the congregation. While there may be many people in the congregation, not everyone contributes to the finances of the church. When a church is located in an economically depressed neighborhood, people may presume that the church is in a position to offer them financial assistance. Ahmad describes this dilemma:

> People say, "Oh, if the church is filled, they're bringing them in." […] I know I've heard people say that. "Your services are always packed. Why can't you help me with my rent?" If two thousand people are sitting here and only a hundred of them give more than a dollar, that's not a lot of money. When we're paying tens of thousands of dollars a month for mortgage, ten thousand dollars a month for light bill and water and all that, and we have salaries here. […] They automatically assume that every time that they come and ask for a thousand dollars to pay their rent, that we are supposed to have it, because it appears as though—every time you come here, the lights are on. Every time they come here, the water's on. We have air in the summer time and heat in the winter, so they think that everything is the way that it's supposed to be. A lot of times that's not the case, because of the area that we are in, we don't have the budget of other ministries just down the street from us, just because of the neighborhood that we are surrounded by. That's a major hindrance—the perception that because we have a big edifice, that people say, "They got it," and that's not the case for us.

While there are a number of far wealthier churches in the suburbs of Washington, D.C., House of Joy sometimes encounters financial trouble because they are in an economically depressed area of the city and approximately 40% of the congregation is poor or working class. Darius, 29, estimates that "financially the 20% is trying to carry the 80%." As Ahmad explains, "People hold onto every dime, because that might be all that they have. Finances is a very big hindrance for us just based off of the people

that attend and the neighborhood that we're in." These financial troubles are compounded when, in addition to not receiving money that reflects the number of congregants, there are people who look to the church for financial assistance. Ahmad explained that at times, staff members at House of Joy (including himself) have gone without pay in order to provide rent money to someone who sought financial assistance at the church.

Bishop Stanley's generosity may also contribute to the dilemma of having a megachurch but not having the finances to match the population. Wanda explains that unlike other churches, that will not provide aid if someone is not a member, Bishop Stanley will do whatever he can:

> I think that's what attracted me to the church, because our Bishop's spirit, it's not inhibited, in a sense. […] I'll never forget one time […] we were doing outreach […] and I met this gentleman and he said, "Yea, I know Bishop, he buried my son. I'm not a member, but I've been there. But he buried my son. I'll never forget that." So you run into people who have been affiliated with him in that way. Or the church has done this for me, or the church has done that for me, which is good. And they're not members. I stress that, because […] the church where I was before, if you weren't a member, you didn't get much help. So he does it. If you're in need, you're in need. It doesn't matter whether you're a member or not. The need comes first.

Wanda describes Bishop Stanley as a very generous man who will help an individual regardless of whether or not they are a member of his church. Similarly, Bishop Oliver, the head pastor of Mt. Sinai Pentecostal church had to have his staff take over benevolence activities because he "was giving away everything." Pastors often want to help people, but when a church has a budget that is millions of dollars, is carrying debt, and lacks a congregation that is financially capable of clearing the budget, generosity

can be detrimental. As Ahmad explained above, staff members have at times gone without pay to help people with financial needs. While the generosity of Bishop Stanley is a commendable character trait, it likely makes it more difficult to share limited resources or to provide the amount of help he would like to give individuals.

Although having a large ministry has not translated into having an affluent ministry, Bishop Stanley explains how the size of his congregation can prove to be an asset when applying for government grants:

> I think size is very important when you deal with the city and the grants some things of that nature because the size of the church basically mandates attention in the city. […] So when we apply for certain things they have to look at us because politicians look at votes. […] When it's time for them to get back into office it's ridiculous, they show up in droves. So when you submit something, they pay attention to us so that's helpful. […] When it comes to the grant and transition homes and the things of that nature, it is a situation where the size of your church really matters in the city. And the people who get the awards for different types of things, they may not give this to you but they'll give you something. So I think that that has do with no matter how well you write the grant. There's a board of people who look at it and decides on whether or not you're going to receive or whether or not you're going to get it. So it's that type of situation, so it does help.

The courting of black churches by politicians is not new. Black megachurches are particularly attractive to politicians because of the larger number of potential voters. On any given Sunday, House of Joy can seat over 2,000 attendees in their sanctuary at *one* service. Bishop Stanley explains that having such a large congregation is actually an asset because politicians know they have the potential to reach thousands of voters. As a result, elected officials may also be more willing to approve proposals or provide

resources to House of Joy. Echoing Bishop Stanley, Stacey explains the political power of having such a large congregation:

> Size helps because at the end of the day, it influences power. We have a lot of influence in the city, politically, even on the court side, because of sheer numbers. We literally, although Bishop doesn't ascribe to telling people who to vote for, but because of the sheer numbers we can influence politicians. Politicians stop by, we have all types of celebrities stop by because they recognize the capital and the power in the numbers. […] Being a megachurch has only helped us.

Again, Stacey suggests that the number of potential voters in House of Joy is very attractive to politicians. While pastors are not supposed to use the pulpit to endorse elected officials, many find ways to communicate their preferences to the congregation. As a result, politicians running for anything ranging from Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) to President of the U.S. will make it a priority to visit black churches—particularly black megachurches. Although House of Joy may not have much economic power, the size of the congregation provides a source of human capital that can be translated into political power.

House of Joy is a megachurch that has a large congregation, but because of the neighborhood in which the church is located, a large percentage of the congregation is poor or working class. Rather than being able to contribute to the finances of the church, many in the congregation are in need of financial assistance themselves. Having a congregation with limited resources shapes House of Joy's commitment to programmatic efforts rather than "hand-outs." Charles, the head of the employment ministry explains:

> This church can only be what its membership is. […] A lot of unemployed and a lot of people on [welfare] checks, if they're fortunate. Some of them don't have anything. […] [S]o if the church is going to spend some money and the church is going to spend some time and effort, it's best placed into programs rather than trying to give individuals handouts because if you start that, then you get a vicious cycle. […] And when you're talking about return on the dollar, you'd be much better off teaching them how to fish no matter how long it took to teach them.

House of Joy has limited resources and is in a community where people are constantly in need of help. Because of this, to address racial inequality, it is a better investment of their limited resources to implement programs to help people get jobs, housing, complete their education, and start businesses. While the efforts of black megachurches may be critiqued for providing hand-outs rather than sustained assistance, House of Joy recognizes the limitations of hand-outs and makes an attempt to move beyond that strategy. Having a megachurch, but not having the finances to match the size directly impacts House of Joy's strategy to implement programs that can teach people skills rather than relying on short-term remedies to problems.

Conclusion

Like Community Baptist Church and Mt. Sinai Pentecostal Church, the strategies to address racial inequality at House of Joy Nondenominational Church do not reflect the direct action protesting done by some black churches during the Civil Rights Movement. The strategies used by House of Joy focus on programs to help

people improve themselves. This is a reflection of the religious culture of House of Joy, which stresses positive thinking and confession, believing that, with God, individuals can rise above their circumstances to improve themselves.

Similar to the other two churches in my study, respondents at House of Joy simultaneously expressed individual and structural explanations for contemporary racial inequality. As stated previously, this highlights the hegemony of colorblind racism and that and racial minorities accommodate their views vis-à-vis this dominant ideology. Respondents who begin with a structural-level explanation of racial inequality, would often lean toward individual-level explanations. Attendees at House of Joy broadly felt that racial inequality is a result of educational and cultural differences, which can sometimes lead to a limiting and negative mindset. The religious culture of House of Joy, which focuses on hope, positive thinking, and believing God's promises influence the partiality to individual-level explanations.

The leaders and congregants of House of Joy feel that the main roles for the Black Church in addressing racial inequality are to focus on teaching the Bible and provide individuals with the knowledge needed to improve themselves and become self-sufficient. This is influenced by the religious culture of House of Joy, which emphasizes positive thought and confession. House of Joy was also the only church in the study where respondents explicitly stated that they do not think traditional protesting is a viable strategy for the Black Church to address contemporary racial inequality. Instead, those respondents suggested that creating programs and helping people to move into positions where they can influence the law would be more successful.

House of Joy addresses racial inequality through education, employment training, and homelessness. These ministries and programs are not an exhaustive list; rather, they are the most commonly cited by respondents. The decision to establish programs is a direct reflection of how respondents felt the Black Church should address racial inequality. Because the religious culture of House of Joy emphasizes positive thought and confession leaders and attendees tended to believe that the Black Church should address racial inequality by helping individuals improve themselves and become self-sufficient. House of Joy particularly provides programs to address issues common to the community they are located in such as low rates of college completion and high rates of unemployment. Also, being a megachurch with a large percentage of low-income attendees influences House of Joy's decision to create programs to meet the needs of individuals rather than give them temporary hand-outs.

CHAPTER 8: Conclusion

The assumption that black megachurches have eschewed the work of social justice in lieu of the pursuit of material prosperity because they rarely engage in protesting or boycotts has limited our understanding of other ways black megachurches address racial inequality. I began this project with the perspective that rather than presuming black megachurches should engage in a particular type of strategy to address racial inequality, scholars should investigate which strategies they deem appropriate in this time period. As part of this inquiry, this dissertation examined how the religious culture of each megachurch congregation shaped their understandings of and responses to contemporary racial inequality.

Throughout this study there was a consistent theme that the nature of racial inequality, or what I metaphorically titled "new wineskin," has changed. It was both implied and explicitly stated that traditional strategies such as protesting are not appropriate for this time period. Megachurch leaders and congregants suggest that new strategies, or the metaphor of "new wine," are needed. These new strategies might take the form of church-state partnerships, Community Development Corporations, or more holistic approaches to service provision. Yet, for the respondents in this study described themselves as attempting to address racial inequality differently than the Black Church of the past or other secular organizations. Older or traditional strategies can be applied to a contemporary system of racial inequality. Or, metaphorically speaking, old wine can be applied to new wineskin. However, because old wine has already gone through the fermentation process it will have no impact on new wineskin. Hence, old strategies will have no impact on a contemporary system of racial inequality.

Three main findings emerge from this study. First, contrary to literature that states blacks primarily rely on structural rather than individual explanations of racial inequality, church leaders and congregants tend to rely on explanations that are simultaneously individual and structural. Second, the strategies used by the megachurches in this study do not reflect the direct action protesting strategies used by some black churches during the Civil Rights Movement. The megachurches in this study utilize strategies that focus on individual development, such as aiding in educational achievement, civic engagement, and employment training, to address racial inequality. Furthermore, each of the churches has developed nonprofit Community Development Corporations to provide social services. Third, religious culture impacts how the megachurches in this study understand and address racial inequality. In each of the three megachurches, religious culture influences which types of individual explanations people relied on. Religious culture also influenced which strategies some of the megachurches used to address racial inequality. However, other factors, such as declining membership and changing community demographics, also influence strategies to intervene in racial inequality. This concluding chapter reviews key findings, limitations, and areas for future research.

Understandings of Racial Inequality

Understandings of racial inequality were critical to this study because they are indicative of the solutions black megachurch leaders and attendees offer for contemporary racial inequality. Although scholarship on racial attitudes states that blacks tend to rely on structural explanations of racial inequality, I found that

respondents at each of the three megachurches simultaneously understood racial inequality to be a result of *both* individual *and* structural reasons. When asked why racial inequalities exist, respondents often began with structural explanations, such as the legacy of past discrimination, or intentional societal arrangements designed to keep blacks from succeeding, such as segregated public schools. As explained in Chapter 2, racial attitudes scholarship states that, compared to whites, blacks primarily rely on structural rather than individual explanations for racial inequality (for examples see Kluegel 1990; Sigelman and Welch 1991; Hunt 1996; and Schuman, Steeh, Bobo and Krysan 1997). Yet, recent research shows that, although they maintain more structural explanations than whites, blacks have begun to shift from structural to individual explanations (Hunt 2007; Price 2009; Nunnally and Carter 2012; Shelton and Greene 2012). Based on the trend in racial attitudes scholarship, it was not entirely surprising that the responses across each of the three megachurches were structural explanations of racial inequality. However, Community Baptist Church, the oldest church in the study, was the only congregation whose religious culture supported structural explanations of racial inequality. It was also the only congregation whose sermons regularly highlighted social inequalities. The congregation's history of being founded by ex-slaves helped create a linked fate mentality and collective memory that supported understandings of structural challenges facing the black community and the role of the Black Church in addressing those challenges (Barnes 2014).

What was somewhat surprising, and proved to be a departure from the majority of racial attitudes literature, was that respondents who gave structural explanations would also give individual explanations of racial inequality. In other words, rather than

the binary that often appears in racial attitudes literature of either relying solely on individual explanations or solely on structural explanations, respondents provided both. This occurred in each of the three megachurches. Individual explanations from respondents cited welfare dependency, negative thought patterns, low expectations, lack of personal responsibility and knowledge, and poor behaviors that do not generate success. These findings reflect the emerging literature that points to a shift in racial attitudes from structural to individual explanations and that blacks are relying on "black blame[59]" (Price 2009). However, rather than relying on *either* structural *or* individual explanations, respondents relied on *both* simultaneously. It is plausible that the pattern of simultaneous individual and structural explanations in each of the three megachurches reflects the argument of Shelton and Greene (2012) that higher status blacks are less structural in their justification for inequalities facing black people. Although the majority of respondents, excluding head pastors, were not higher status based on income, almost all (with the exception of four) had at least a college degree. Therefore, this elevated social position might impact beliefs about racial inequality resulting in a commitment to individualism in addition to structuralism. As more blacks achieve a higher social status, they may be more likely to blame other blacks for not "working hard enough" (Shelton and Emerson 2012). Yet, even those respondents who had less than a college degree and were not higher status based on income still relied on individual and structural explanations so it appears that class does not solely account for this pattern. Furthermore, Price (2009) found that blacks across the economic spectrum adopted individual explanations and Nunnally and Carter (2012) found that

[59] "Black blame" faults blacks for the failure of blacks to keep pace socially and economically with whites and another minorities (Price 2009).

class does not account for individual explanations. Rather, I assert that the religious culture of each congregation and critical race theory's explanation of the hegemony of the contemporary racial ideology help explain the simultaneous reliance on structural and individual explanations of racial inequality.

The religious culture of each congregation is shaped by its theological tradition and the outside culture people bring to the congregation (e.g., race and class) (Ammerman 1998). For many people of faith, their religious culture helps them make sense of non-religious contexts (Emerson and Smith 2000). The religious culture of Community Baptist Church emphasized kingdom mindedness[60], which in turn shaped individual explanations of welfare dependency, negative thought patterns, and low expectations. The religious culture of Mt. Sinai Pentecostal Church emphasized holiness and strict adherence to biblical principles, which shaped individual explanations of racial inequality as a personal sin and lack of personal responsibility. The religious culture of House of Joy Nondenominational Church emphasized hope and positive thinking, which shaped individual explanations of racial inequality as a result of negative thought patterns. Thus, the various religious cultures of the congregations in this study help influence the *types* of individual explanations respondents used to account for contemporary racial inequality.

What these results show is that the traditional binary explanations of racial inequality that place blame on *either* individuals *or* social structures do not accurately

[60] Kingdom mindedness refers to actively living out biblical principles on Earth rather than waiting for heaven. People should behave in a way that is upright and reflects the righteousness of the kingdom of God. For example, if the Bible warns against sloth and states that men who do not work should not eat then laziness is viewed as not reflecting kingdom mindedness.

represent racial attitudes. Both critical race theory and Emerson and Smith's (2000) religio-cultural toolkit theory help explain what accounts for individuals in each of the three megachurches simultaneously relying on individual and structural explanations. In Chapter 2, I explained how critical race theory's analysis of the hegemony of colorblind racism can help scholars uncover the nuances in racial attitudes. Bonilla-Silva (2010) argues that whereas Jim Crow racism relied on biological and moral arguments to explain blacks' social standing, the ideology of colorblind racism justifies the racial hierarchy by relying on blacks' cultural limitations, natural tendencies among groups, and market dynamics. Because colorblind racism is hegemonic, even racial minorities have to accommodate their views vis-à-vis this dominant ideology (Bonilla-Silva 2010). As a result, blacks adopt aspects of colorblind racism in making sense of racial inequality and continue to rely on individual explanations *in addition to* structural explanations. For that reason, respondents at each of the three megachurches were able to acknowledge structural limitations while also relying on what they perceived to be the cultural limitations of blacks.

Emerson and Smith (2000) examine how white evangelical[61] racial attitudes can provide insights into mainstream racial attitudes. White evangelicals use religio-cultural tools to make sense of race relations and some of these cultural tools were present among the black respondents in my study. Emerson and Smith argue that white evangelicals tend to interpret racial inequality using 3 religio-cultural tools: 1) accountable freewill individualism (belief in equal opportunities and the ability to

[61] Evangelicals are a diverse group of Christians united by a belief that the Bible is the ultimate authority, one must be "born again" through accepting Christ and have a changed life, evangelizing, and engaging the larger society with evangelical beliefs (Emerson and Smith 2000).

control one's destiny); 2) relationism (attaching central importance to interpersonal relationships); and 3) anti-structuralism (inability to perceive or accept social structural influences), which leads to minimizing racism and a rejection of structural explanations. While none of the respondents in my study expressed anti-structural sentiments, respondents in each of the three megachurches relied on freewill individualism and relationism to explain racial inequality. It would be expected that freewill individualism would be found in each of the megachurches because black megachurch culture emphasizes personal empowerment, which would lead people to believe that they, as individuals, have power over what happens in their lives (Lee 2005; Barnes 2010a). Relationism was a particularly prominent explanatory tool in Mt. Sinai Pentecostal and House of Joy Nondenominational churches because their religious cultures both stress adherence to biblical principles and that racial inequality is a result of sin. Because human sin is the rationale for why racial divisions and inequalities exist in these churches, then the emphasis is placed on mending individual relationships between races to overcome divisions. I assert that because the religious culture of each congregation provides the justification for individual explanations of racial inequality then it seems *particularly* valid to use those justifications in combination with acknowledging that structural barriers exist. Furthermore, it allows for individual and structural explanations to be used simultaneously without being viewed as conflicting or contradictory. For example, the sermons of Community Baptist Church may help an individual to recognize how a history of discrimination has created unequal schools. Yet, at the same time, the sermons of Community Baptist Church may also help an individual to believe that those who are not "kingdom

minded" could be blamed for not being socially and economically on par with whites. Both individual and structural explanations are supported by the religious culture of the church, and biblical explanations are provided for both the successes and failures of blacks. Therefore, it is not contradictory to simultaneously understand blacks as both victims and victors.

Contrary to Shelton and Emerson (2012) who argue that racial identity takes precedence over denominational affiliations and that black Protestants all have similar racial attitudes, my results show that denominational affiliations (which provide insights about religious culture) are important in shaping racial attitudes. As Shelton and Emerson (2012) argue, a common experience of racial marginalization may account for a pattern of structural understandings of racial inequality regardless of denominational differences. However, because I did not assume that all black megachurches have a monolithic religious culture, I was able to find nuances that Shelton and Emerson overlooked. The finding that denominational affiliation influences religious culture, which in turn influences understandings of and responses to racial inequality, is significant because studies have shown that denominational affiliation is an important determinant for churches' public engagement activities (Hunt and Hunt 1977; Baer 1988; Tucker-Worgs 2011). Yet, these studies generally do not account for nondenominational churches (with the exception of Tucker-Worgs 2011). Due to the rise of nondenominational churches and that nondenominational black megachurches are the second largest group of black megachurches, I hypothesized that the line of demarcation may no longer exist between various historically black denominations (e.g., Baptists or Methodists) but rather between historically black

denominations and nondenominational black churches. I did find that there were many similarities between Mt. Sinai Pentecostal and House of Joy Nondenominational churches, and that those churches were quite different from Community Baptist Church. It appears that there is a line of demarcation between Community Baptist Church, which is part of a historically black denomination, and Mt. Sinai Pentecostal and House of Joy Nondenominational churches, which are not part of historically black denominations and are both "functionally nondenominational" (Thumma and Travis 2007)[62]. Very little research exists on nondenominational churches. However, there is a neo-Pentecostal[63] movement that tends to span black megachurches regardless of their denomination (Tucker-Worgs 2011). This shared neo-Pentecostalism might help explain the similarities between Mt. Sinai Pentecostal and House of Joy Nondenominational churches—particularly their shared traditions and worship styles of the Sanctified church.

Solutions to Racial Inequality

To understand the interventions black megachurches make in racial inequality, I first began by researching what role respondents thought black churches in general should have in addressing racial inequality. As explained in Chapters 1 and 3, there is a sense of nostalgia about the role of the Black Church during the Civil Rights

[62] "Functionally nondenominational" refers to megachurches that have more in common with other megachurches than with other churches in their own denomination (Thumma and Travis 2007).
[63] Neo-Pentecostals blur the line that for Pentecostals traditionally separated the sacred and secular. E.g., they are willing to participate in secular industries with the aim of converting the culture to Christ. Neo-Pentecostalism also puts less emphasis on the baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues and more emphasis on other gifts of the spirit (healing, vibrant worship, prophetic utterances, prosperity). (Lee 2005; Walton 2009)

Movement. Even though it is not accurate that all black churches were active in Civil Rights protesting, this ideal serves as a standard to which contemporary black megachurches are compared. While scholarship on black megachurches continues to compare its role to the idealized prophetic Black Church of the Civil Rights Movement[64], none has examined how black megachurches themselves think they should address racial inequality. The findings of this study fill this gap in black megachurch scholarship and show how the religious culture of a congregation shapes how black megachurches envision the role of the Black Church in addressing racial inequality.

Respondents at each of the three megachurches in my study felt that the Black Church should have a role in addressing racial inequality, but their views of what that role should be varied. Community Baptist Church felt that there are two main roles for black churches in addressing racial inequality—advocating for vulnerable populations and being a resource of information. Mt. Sinai Pentecostal Church felt that black churches should prioritize the message of the Bible and become less racially segregated. House of Joy Nondenominational Church felt that the main roles for black churches in addressing racial inequality are to focus on teaching the Bible and provide individuals with the knowledge needed to improve themselves. Both Mt. Sinai Pentecostal and House of Joy Nondenominational were similar in wanting the church to focus on the message of the Bible. Respondents at both of those churches also had a desire to see the Black Church become less segregated, which is discussed below.

[64] For example, in *The Black Megachurch*, Tamelyn Tucker-Worgs asks whether or not black megachurches answer the "knock at midnight," which was a question posed by Dr. King to assess the public engagement of the Black Church.

At times the religious culture of each of the three churches directly influenced their ideas about how the Black Church should address racial inequality. Community Baptist Church, with a religious culture strongly influenced by their history of being founded by ex-slaves and a strong sense of social justice felt that the Black Church should continue its self-help tradition and should be at the center of social justice work. Mt. Sinai Pentecostal Church, whose religious culture emphasized holiness and strict adherence to biblical principles, felt that the top priority of the Black Church should be to teach morality and biblical principles. A number of Mt. Sinai respondents also questioned the continued racial homogeneity of the Black Church since they felt it should be a multiracial reflection of heaven. House of Joy Nondenominational Church, whose religious culture stressed positive thought and confession, felt that the Black Church should focus on biblical principles and teach people how to become self-sufficient. Like respondents at Mt. Sinai, respondents at House of Joy also suggested that the Black Church needs to become more multiracial. Both Mt. Sinai Pentecostal and House of Joy Nondenominational churches have more non-black attendees than Community Baptist Church, which helps explain their desire for more multiracial churches. The insistence by respondents in those churches that the Black Church should become more integrated to address racial inequality was a surprising finding. The Black Church has historically been segregated due to exclusion, yet, like white churches, it is a voluntary organization and often remains segregated by choice. The segregation of the Black Church has been considered a source of strength since it has remained one of the most influential institutions in the black community (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990), so for its monoracial identity to be challenged was unanticipated.

While it is unrealistic to think that black megachurches will solve racial inequality on their own, it is important to study the interventions they are attempting—particularly in light of the stereotype that black megachurches are more concerned with prosperity than racial justice. In line with Barnes' (2010a) findings, through various programs and ministries, each of the three megachurches in my study addressed issues that blacks in Washington, D.C. tend to be disproportionately impacted by in a negative ways such as unemployment, incarceration, college-readiness, and homelessness. Community Baptist Church focuses their efforts on civic engagement, education, racial reconciliation, and community development corporations. Because the religious culture of Community Baptist Church emphasizes education, social justice, and being socially and politically aware "change agents," it is not surprising that these were the areas leaders and attendees of Community Baptist Church cited as strategies to address racial inequality. However, the declining human and economic resources of Community Baptist Church also impact their strategies to address racial inequality. Many of their interventions appear to be insular and help the congregation rather than the community outside of the church. Mt. Sinai Pentecostal Church addresses alcohol and drug abuse, incarceration, food and clothing insecurity, and employment readiness. The strategies used by Mt. Sinai Church focus on helping individuals improve themselves and make better choices. This is a reflection of the religious culture of Mt. Sinai Church, which stresses holiness, one's relationship with God, and that humans are fallen and prone to sin without Godly intervention. House of Joy Nondenominational Church focuses their efforts on education, employment training, and homelessness. Like Mt. Sinai Pentecostal Church, the strategies used by House of Joy focus on programs to help

people improve themselves. This is a reflection of the religious culture of House of Joy, which stresses positive thinking and confession, believing that, with God, individuals can rise above their circumstances to improve themselves.

An unanticipated finding was that Mt. Sinai Pentecostal Church had more programs to address racial inequality than Community Baptist Church. I expected Community Baptist Church to have the greatest number of ministries and programs that attempt to address racial inequality based on the religious culture of the church, which emphasized a strong sense of social justice and civic engagement. Furthermore, Community Baptist Church is what we may consider to be a paradigmatic black church. It is part of one of the historic black Protestant denominations, and, according to the scholarship on black churches, should have a high level of political engagement (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Harris 1999; Reese, Brown and Ivers 2007). Yet, it was Mt. Sinai Pentecostal Church that had the most extensive list of active ministries and programs that attempt to address racial inequality. While black Pentecostal churches have rarely been characterized as having a high level of public engagement (Mark 1971; Paris 1982; Baer and Singer 1992), more recent research has shown that characterization is not always accurate (McRoberts 1999; Daniels 2003). This finding can certainly be attributed to the extensive loss of financial and human resources Community Baptist Church is facing, however, it is also representative of the changes in the black religious landscape where traditional denominational churches, such as Community Baptist, are declining (Sherkat 2002). Lee (2005) suggests that we have reached a time period in which the black religious landscape has dramatically shifted. The “old black church,” which represents the traditional mainstream black Protestant

churches, is facing competition from the emergence of the "new black church," which represents post-denominational black megachurches, such as The Potter's House pastored by T.D. Jakes. While Mt. Sinai Pentecostal is not a nondenominational church, it has a lot in common with House of Joy Nondenominational Church and is "functionally nondenominational" (Thumma and Travis 2007). Scholars such as Glaude (2010), Hinton (2011), and Harris (2012) express concern about what will happen when traditional black churches, some of whom had a history of Civil Rights activism, are replaced by the "new black church." Perhaps this concern is based on stereotypes of black megachurches being uninvolved in addressing contemporary racial inequality because there is an expectation of a particular type of response that was effective during the Civil Rights Movement. While this research does not allow me to generalize my findings to all black megachurches in the U.S., I would argue that the assumption that only traditional denominational churches are involved addressing racial inequality and the subsequent concern about their decline may be unfounded. This concern relies on a simplistic understanding of the traditional Black Church and this research, in addition to that conducted by Barnes (2010a,b; 2013) and Tucker-Worgs (2011) illuminates the ways in which black megachurches representing the "new black church" are publically engaged and have programs and ministries that work to address contemporary racial inequality.

As part of their interventions into racial inequality, each megachurch has also developed a nonprofit service-oriented Community Development Corporation (CDC). Unlike protest or electoral politics, CDCs involve directly producing goods and services and the development of assets (Tucker-Worgs 2011). The megachurches in

my study developed CDCs to provide services to the community while protecting the church from any liability issues that may arise. I expected that the main reason to develop a CDC would be to increase the possibility to apply for federal funding from which religious organizations may be included. Yet, surprisingly the primary motivation for CDC development was to protect the church from litigation with the ability to apply for federal grants described as a convenient outcome. Tucker-Worgs' (2011) research shows that black megachurches founded before 1960, black megachurches with pastors holding an advanced degree, located in an inner-city area, located in the South, and with fewer than 3,000 attendees per week are the most likely to have CDCs. With the exception of church attendance, each of the megachurches in this study match the characteristics of black megachurches that are most likely to develop CDCs.

The services offered by some of the megachurches are so extensive that the D.C. government regularly refers people to them. For example, the alcohol and drug abuse ministry at Mt. Sinai Pentecostal Church and the employment ministry at House of Joy Nondenominational Church regularly receive referrals from D.C. government services. While some of the megachurches may apply for grant funding, the D.C. government does not solely finance any of the church ministries or programs it relies on. In Chapter 3, I outlined how the private sector is increasingly relied on to do the work of the welfare state. Unlike most European countries where church social welfare programs are minimal because the provision of social services is legally mandated, in the U.S., the provision of social services is increasingly left to the private sector (Cnaan et al. 1999). Critics of the involvement of churches in the public sphere, and particularly

faith-based and government partnerships, fear that faith-based organizations have an agenda to replace the welfare state. On the contrary, these findings show that the reliance on the services provided by black megachurches in Washington, D.C. to supplement government social services means that black megachurches are not attempting to replace the welfare state, but rather are filling a void left by a neoliberal government. Additionally, because the services the megachurches in my study provide are addressing inequities that negatively impact blacks, they are engaging in race-specific programming. To be clear, this does not mean that the megachurches in my study deny assistance to non-blacks; nor does it mean they specifically advertise their services as being for blacks. But, due to the segregation of religious institutions and neighborhoods in Washington, D.C., the black megachurches in my study primarily find themselves providing services to black constituents.

Although the black megachurches in my study may have more human and/or economic resources than smaller black churches in D.C., and the government may rely on some of their social services that does not mean they have the resources to completely fill the void left by the government's disinvestment in social services. As Calhoun-Brown (2003:52) explains:

> Social service delivery, at least on the surface, does not represent a significant departure from that which churches have always done. However, there is a significant difference between delivering food baskets to needy families during the holidays and actually feeding the hungry. Rarely have churches offered ministries in the consistent, systematic, and sustained manner that would be required for them to actually be the primary deliverer of such services in the black community.

Many black churches have been willing to address racial inequality. Yet, the ministries and programs churches develop generally lack the resources to be large scale and sustained over a significant amount of time. While the development of CDCs allows black churches to engage in an expanded public role, in some ways, they cannot fulfill the role of *primary* social service provider. Rather than being relied on as the primary source of social services, which appears to be expectation of a neoliberal government, black churches should "serve as example and catalyst for the work which must be done by government and private agencies in collaboration with churches" (Billingsley 1999:188).

One clear pattern in how the churches in this study address racial inequality is that none of them engage in protest politics. As I explained in Chapter 1, there is an expectation that if black megachurches are not protesting then they are not prophetic and they are not challenging racial inequality. However, the absence of protesting does not mean black megachurches are not engaged in addressing racial inequality in other ways. Each of the megachurches in this study acknowledged that contemporary racial inequality is more covert and subtle than what was faced during the Civil Rights Movement. In the absence of overtly racist policies and laws, it is difficult to organize around or even litigate against particular issues. The laws promising equality already exist, but that does not mean there are equal opportunities. In the face of contemporary racial inequality, which can be amorphous and difficult to collectively organize around, the most common strategy used by the megachurches in this study is to try to create equal opportunities through their various ministries and programs. For example, each of the megachurches have ministries or programs dedicated to education or job training.

In the black community, particularly post-Emancipation, education has been viewed as a primary mechanism of upward mobility (Higginbotham 1994; Nunnally and Carter 2012). There is a popular Chinese proverb that states, if you give a man a fish you feed him for a day, but if you teach him how to fish you feed him for a lifetime. By providing training programs these megachurches also feel that they are teaching those they help how to fish rather than simply giving them the fish so that they can be self-sustaining.

In addition to attempting to create equal opportunities, many of the ministries and programs the megachurches in this study have developed focus on individual morality and character building. This is reminiscent of the strategy of racial uplift and the politics of respectability exercised by black Baptist women's conventions post-Reconstruction (Higginbotham 1993). As discussed in Chapter 3, racial uplift emphasized positive representations of blackness and black Baptist churchwomen felt it was their duty to indoctrinate blacks with middle-class, Victorian values in order to defy messages of the cultural and intellectual inferiority of blacks. These strategies placed emphasis on personal betterment rather than protesting. Although viewed as a way to help blacks resist inequities, this strategy has the potential to make issues about race rather than racism. In other words, the strategy addresses what may be viewed as negative characteristics associated with blackness rather than the system of racial injustice of which blacks are victims. Various scholars have debated whether or not the behaviors of blacks contribute to their own disparities (e.g., Wilson 1996; Anderson 1999; Ogbu 2004). This more contemporary strategy of racial uplift used by the black megachurches in this study is part of this lineage of scholarship that has been an ongoing debate about how to make sense of and solve the persistent disparities faced

by blacks for over a century. While respondents recognize structural issues, their responses to racial inequality tend to rely on individual-level understandings. Some respondents, particularly in House of Joy Nondenominational Church, candidly stated that blacks should stop dwelling on the past and stop using racism as a crutch. Overall, racism is acknowledged, and the megachurches in this study create programs and ministries to create opportunities blacks might be denied. Yet, the emphasis is largely on personal responsibility, which does not address the unequal conditions blacks face. As I argued in Chapter 3, throughout its history the Black Church has exhibited a variety of strategies to address racial inequality. Although racial uplift has traditionally been characterized as accommodationist, this seemingly accommodative strategy also challenged the dominant narrative that blacks lacked the morality and character to participate as full members in the U.S. democracy. Similarly, the present-day focus on individual morality and character building may also be a way to resist a contemporary racial ideology that continues to rely on the cultural limitations of blacks.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is part of a long line of literature, starting with W.E.B. Du Bois, which considers the role of black churches in black communities. By moving away from expectations rooted in the protests of the Civil Rights Movement, this study allows for a broader understanding of how churches are responding to contemporary racial inequality. Previous studies of black megachurches have only focused on clergy and omit the attendees of megachurches because black clergy are considered to be

particularly influential (Barnes 2010b; Tucker-Worgs 2011). This study provides insights to a previously unstudied population within black megachurches.

This dissertation also holds significance for a public policy audience. The government views religious institutions as vital components of local communities and creates partnerships with congregations to address social problems. Furthermore, the government relies on religious institutions to provide social services. This is particularly relevant given the recent introduction of President Obama's "My Brother's Keeper" Initiative, discussed in Chapter 3. "My Brother's Keeper" relies on the private sector, such as businesses and religious institutions, to provide mentorship, support networks, and skills for young men of color. This initiative also seeks to identify those private sector programs already in existence that are effectively addressing the disparities faced by young men of color. By studying the types of programs black megachurches have in place to address racial inequality, both black megachurches and policymakers can identify the areas of most need in communities and additional research can identify which programs are most effective.

There were two main limitations of this study that have the potential to impact my findings. First, this study utilizes a case study approach, which does not allow me to generalize my findings to all black megachurches. Second, the limited sample size of my study did not allow me to adequately test my hypothesis that the line of demarcation may no longer exist between various historically black denominations (e.g., Baptists or Methodists) but rather between historically black denominations and nondenominational black churches. Future, nationally representative research can address both of these limitations.

Future research could examine how geography might impact the understandings of and responses to racial inequality by black megachurches. Washington, D.C. represents a tension between being the seat of power for an African American president, enduring racial inequalities, and a sizeable population of middle and upper class blacks. Although black megachurches are most likely to be located in areas with a large population of middle class blacks, there are some black megachurches located in cities with a larger population of whites than Washington, D.C. (Tucker-Worgs 2011). In what ways, if any, might understandings of racial inequality differ in a city that has a much larger white population? In what ways, if any, would responses to racial inequality differ? In addition to identifying how black megachurches are addressing racial inequality, future research could also evaluate how well their interventions work. How do the programs and ministries established by black megachurches make a difference in black communities?

Due to the history of black churches being one of the most—if not the most—stable institution in black communities there has long been an expectation that black churches should address the needs of the black community (Warnock 2014). This expectation and standard is amplified in the case of black megachurches. Yet, black churches, including black megachurches, suffer from the same inequalities they attempt to resist. As a voluntary organization composed of a racial group that has less income, wealth, education, and political power compared to whites, it is difficult for the Black Church to have the political and social capacity needed to address the social structures that cause racial inequality. However, the continued growth and relevance of black

churches suggests that scholars and popular critics rethink our expectations of the Black Church's understandings of and responses to racial inequality.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Church Service Participant Observation Guide

Church: _____

Date of Visit: _____

Time of Service: _____

I. Demographics

- Age, sex, race/ethnicity, gender, perceived social class and family composition of attendees?
- Does most of the congregation appear to be from the DC, MD, or VA (according to license plates)?

II. Physical Setting

- What does the surrounding neighborhood of the church look like?
  - (Suburb, city, residential, businesses, etc.)
- What does the exterior of the building look like?
  - (Traditional church structure, new, old, parking lot, etc.)
- What does the interior of the building (particularly the sanctuary) look like?
  - (Décor, seating layout, size, etc.)

III. Service

- What happens during the course of the worship?
  - (Format, length, activities and who's involved, etc.)
- What is the music like?
  - (Solemn, upbeat, contemporary, live instruments, etc.)
- What is the content of the sermon and who preached it?

APPENDIX B: Content Analysis Guide for Organizational Documents

Written Documents

Type of Document: _____

Date: _____

Author/Creator: _____

Document Audience: _____

I. Document Information
   A. What is the purpose of this document?
   B. What does this document say about the identity of the church?
   C. What does this document explain about this church's explanation of contemporary racial inequality?
      - What form of racial inequality does this document address?
   D. What does this document explain about this church's solutions to contemporary racial inequality?

Audio/Visual Documents

Type of Document: _____

Date: _____

Author/Creator: _____

Document Audience: _____

I. Document Information
   A. What is the purpose of this document?
   B. What does this document say about the identity of the church?
   C. What does this document explain about this church's explanation of contemporary racial inequality?
      - What form of racial inequality does this document address?
   D. What does this document explain about this church's solutions to contemporary racial inequality?

APPENDIX C: Interview Guide

HEAD PASTORS

Background Questions

1. Could you tell me about where you received your training to become a minister?
   a. [*If not stated already*] When did you receive your training?

2. When did you become pastor of [CHURCH NAME]?

3. A megachurch is considered to be a church that has at least 2,000 weekly attendees.
   a. Did [CHURCH NAME] grow to be a megachurch during your time here as pastor?
   b. [*If no*] Was [CHURCH NAME] already a megachurch when you became pastor?

Community Questions

4. What was the community like at the time you became pastor?
   a. What were some of the most pressing needs you felt needed to be addressed?
   b. What do you think accounted for the presence of these needs?

5. Has the community remained the same?
   a. [*If the same*] Have any of the most pressing needs of the community changed? [*If yes, skip to D & E.*]
   b. [*If changed*] How has it changed?
   c. [*If changed*] Why do you think it has changed?
   d. [*If changed*] What are some of the most pressing needs that you feel need to be addressed now?
   e. [*If changed*] What do you think accounts for the presence for these needs?

Congregation/Church Questions

6. Now I'd like to talk about your congregation.
   a. Where does most of your congregation reside?
   b. How would you describe your congregation in terms of race or ethnicity?
   c. How would you describe your congregation in terms of age?
   d. How would you describe your congregation in terms of gender?
   e. How would you describe the class composition of your congregation?

7. What are the top 3 issues that your church tries to address?
   a. Why these issues?
   b. How does your church try to address these issues? [*Probe for ministries*]

c. How successful would you say your church has been in addressing these issues?
d. [*If denominationally affiliated*] Does your denomination have any say in how you address these issues?
e. [*Follow up to C*] Do they provide you with any resources? (E.g., financial or training)
f. How does the size of your congregation help or hinder your church's ability to address these issues?

Racial Inequality Questions

8. What is racism to you?
   a. Can you give me an example of racism?

9. On average, minorities have worse housing, jobs, and income than whites. Why do you think this is?

10. Some people say that minorities are worse off than whites because they lack motivation or do not have the right values to succeed. What do you think about this?

11. What, if any, do you think should be the responsibilities of churches in addressing racial inequality?

12. Do you think pastors have an obligation to speak about racial inequality from the pulpit? Why or why not?
    a. [*If yes*] How often would you say that you preach about racial inequality?
    b. [*Follow up to A*] What were the sermons about?
    c. [*If never preached about it*] Why do you think you have never talked about racial inequality in a sermon?

13. [*If racial inequality is not mentioned in #7*] Of the top issues you listed your church as addressing, are any of them related to racial inequality?
    a. If so, which ones and how?
    b. If not, do you think that should be something your church should be addressing? Why or why not?

14. [*If denominationally affiliated*] What, if any, do you think are the responsibilities of your denomination in addressing racial inequality?

15. What, if any, do you think the role of the government should be in addressing racial inequality?

16. Do you find that different generations in your congregation have different understandings of racial inequality and how it should be addressed?

a. If so, how do the views differ?
b. What do you think accounts for this difference?
c. How do you manage this difference?

17. What are future goals you would like to accomplish with your church?

18. Is there anything else you would like to share?
    a. Is there anything I didn't ask about that you thought I should have?

ASSISTANT/ASSOCIATE MINISTERS

Background Questions

1. Could you tell me about where you received your training to become a minister?
    a. [*If not stated already*] When did you receive your training?

2. When did you become an associate/assistant minister at [CHURCH NAME]?
    a. [If not stated already] Were you a minister at another church prior to [CHURCH NAME]?

3. In addition to being a pastor, are there any additional church ministries that you are involved in?
    a. [*If yes*] What are those ministries and what do they do?

Church Questions

4. What are the top 3 issues that you think your church tries to address?
    a. Why these issues?
    b. How does your church try to address these issues? [*Probe for ministries*]
    c. How successful would you say your church has been in addressing these issues?
    d. Have these issues changed over time?
    e. [*If denominationally affiliated*] Do you know if your denomination has any say in how you address these issues?
    f. [*Follow up to E*] Do they provide you with any resources? (E.g., financial or training)

5. How does the size of this congregation help or hinder its ability to address these issues?

Identity Questions

6. How would you describe yourself? (E.g., race, faith, job, marital status, etc.)

7. Please look through this stack of cards and pull out all that apply[65]. If there is something that is not on the cards, there are blank cards you can fill out to add to the list.

8. [*After they pull out cards*] From top to bottom, please order the cards from the one you identify with the most to the one you identify with the least.
   a. What does it mean to you to be [*card ranked highest*]?
   b. What do you think your religion teaches you about being [*card ranked highest*]?

Racial Inequality Questions

9. What is racism to you?
   a. Can you give me an example of racism?

10. On average, minorities have worse housing, jobs, and income than whites. Why do you think this is?

11. Some people say that minorities are worse off than whites because they lack motivation or do not have the right values to succeed. What do you think about this?

12. What, if any, do you think should be the responsibilities of churches in addressing racial inequality?

13. Do you think pastors have an obligation to speak about racial inequality from the pulpit? Why or why not?
   a. How often would you say that you have preached a sermon about racial inequality?
   b. [*If never preached about it*] Why do you think you have never talked about racial inequality in a sermon?
   c. [*If preached about it*] What were the sermons about?
   d. How often would you say that you have heard your pastor preach a sermon about racial inequality?
   e. [*If preached about*] What did you think about those sermons?

14. [*If racial inequality is not mentioned in #6*] Of the top issues you listed your church as addressing, are any of them related to racial inequality?
   a. If so, which ones and how?

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[65] Cards include: Male, Female, Christian, Middle-Class, Working Class, Lower Class/Poor, Upper Class, Democrat, Republican, Independent, African American, Black, White, Native American, Asian, Latino, Young Adult, Middle-Aged, Senior Citizen, Immigrant, Employed, Unemployed, Married, Single Adult, Widow/er, Baptist, Pentecostal, Nondenominational. (I will leave 3 or 4 blank cards for them to put in what they want if necessary.)

b. If not, do you think that should be something your church should be addressing? Why or why not?

15. [*If denominationally affiliated*] What, if any, do you think are the responsibilities of your denomination in addressing racial inequality?

16. What, if any, do you think should be the role of the government in addressing racial inequality?

17. What are future goals you would like to see your church accomplish?

18. Is there anything else you would like to share?
    a. Is there anything I didn't ask about that you thought I should have?

HEADS OF MINISTRIES

Religious Background Questions

1. How long have you been attending [CHURCH NAME]?
    a. How long have you been a member?
    b. Did you attend another church prior to attending this one?

2. How frequently do you attend services at [CHURCH NAME]?
    a. Do you attend services at other churches?
    b. [*If yes*] How often would you say that you attend services at other churches?
    c. [*Follow up to B*] Are these churches/is this church in the same denomination?

Church & Ministry Questions

3. What are the top 3 issues that you think your church tries to address?
    a. Why these issues?
    b. How does your church try to address these issues? [*Probe for ministries*]
    c. How successful would you say your church has been in addressing these issues?
    d. [*If member for 10 years or more*] Have these issues changed over time?
    e. [*If denominationally affiliated*] Do you know if your denomination has any say in how you address these issues?
    f. [*Follow up to E*] Do they provide you with any resources? (E.g., financial or training)

4. How does the size of this congregation help or hinder its ability to address these issues?

5. If you were the leader of this congregation, what would be the top 3 issues you would want the church to address?

a. Why these issues?

6. Now I would like to ask you about the ministry/ministries that you're involved in. Could you tell me about that ministry and what it does?
   a. What is your role/position in the ministry?
   b. [*If the ministry founder*] What led you to start this ministry?
   c. [*If not the ministry founder*] Do you know anything about the history of this ministry? How long has it existed?
   d. Has the work of this ministry changed over time?

Education Questions

7. I am interested in knowing more about community life in your church. Do you think people from church see each other regularly outside of Sunday service or talk to each other during the week?
   a. If so, where and when?

8. Do you have children who attend the church with you?
   a. [*If so*] Do you know most of your child's friends? Do you think people in this church tend to know their children's friends?
   b. [*If not*] Do you think people in this church tend to know their children's friends?

9. What do most of the young people in this church do after finishing high school?

10. Do you think most of the young people in this church expect to go to college?
    a. Why or why not?

11. Do you think your church community is somewhere that young people learn about colleges? Why or why not?
    a. [*If so*] How do they learn about colleges?
    b. [*Follow up to A]* What types of colleges do people learn about? [Probe for regional, community, Ivy League, HBCU, PWIs, etc.]
    c. [*If not*] Where do they learn about colleges?

Identity Questions

12. How would you describe yourself? (E.g., race, faith, job, marital status, etc.)

13. Please look through this stack of cards and pull out all that apply. If there is something that is not on the cards, there are blank cards you can fill out to add to the list.

14. [*After they pull out cards*] From top to bottom, please order the cards from the one you identify with the most to the one you identify with the least.

a. What does it mean to you to be [*card ranked highest*]?
b. What do you think your religion teaches you about being [*card ranked highest*]?

Racial Inequality Questions

15. What is racism to you?
    a. Can you give me an example of racism?

16. On average, minorities have worse housing, jobs, and income than whites. Why do you think this is?

17. Some people say that minorities are worse off than whites because they lack motivation or do not have the right values to succeed. What do you think about this?

18. What, if any, do you think should be the responsibilities of churches in addressing racial inequality?

19. Do you think pastors have an obligation to speak about racial inequality from the pulpit? Why or why not?
    a. How often would you say that you have heard your pastor preach a sermon about racial inequality?
    b. [*If preached about*] What did you think about those sermons?

20. [*If racial inequality is not mentioned in #7*] Of the top issues you listed your church as addressing, are any of them related to racial inequality?
    a. If so, which ones and how?
    b. [*Follow up to A*] Does your ministry, or any of the church's ministries address racial inequality? If so, how?
    c. If not, do you think that should be something your church should be addressing? Why or why not?

21. [*If denominationally affiliated*] What, if any, do you think are the responsibilities of your denomination in addressing racial inequality?

22. What, if any, do you think should be the role of the government in addressing racial inequality?

23. What are future goals you would like to see your church accomplish?

24. Is there anything else you would like to share?
    a. Is there anything I didn't ask about that you thought I should have?

ATTENDEES

Religious Background Questions

1. How long have you been attending [CHURCH NAME]?

2. How frequently do you attend services?
   a. Do you attend services at other churches?
   b. [*If yes*] How often would you say that you attend services at other churches?
   c. [*Follow up to B*] Are these churches/is this church in the same denomination?

3. [*If not already answered in #1*] Are you a member?
   a. If so, how long have you been a member?
   b. Are you involved in any ministries? Which ones?

Identity Questions

4. How would you describe yourself? (E.g., race, faith, job, marital status, etc.)

5. Please look through this stack of cards and pull out all that apply. If there is something that is not on the cards, there are blank cards you can fill out to add to the list.

6. [*After they pull out cards*] From top to bottom, please order the cards from the one you identify with the most to the one you identify with the least.
   a. What does it mean to you to be [*card ranked highest*]?
   b. What do you think your religion teaches you about being [*card ranked highest*]?

Church Questions

7. What are the top 3 issues that you think your church tries to address?
   a. Why these issues?
   b. How does your church try to address these issues?
   c. How successful would you say your church has been in addressing these issues?
   d. [*If member for 10 years or more*] Have these issues changed over time?
   e. [*If denominationally affiliated*] Do you know if your denomination has any say in how you address these issues?
   f. [*Follow up to E*] Do they provide you with any resources? (E.g., financial or training)

8. How does the size of this congregation help or hinder its ability to address these issues?

9. If you were the leader of this congregation, what would be the top 3 issues you would want the church to address?
   a. Why these issues?

Education Questions

10. I am interested in knowing more about community life in your church. Do you think people form church see each other regularly outside of Sunday service or talk to each other during the week?
    a. If so, where and when?

11. If you are a parent, do you know most of your child's friends? Do you think people in this church tend to know their children's friends?
    a. If not a parent, do you think people in this church tend to know their children's friends?

12. What do most of the young people in this church do after finishing middle/high school?

13. Do you think most of the young people in this church expect to go to college?
    a. Why or why not?

14. Do you think your church community is somewhere that young people learn about colleges? Why or why not?
    a. If so, how do they learn about colleges?
    b. [*Follow up to A]* What types of colleges do people learn about? [Probe for regional, community, Ivy League, HBCU, PWIs, etc.]
    c. If not, If not, where do they learn about colleges?

Racial Inequality Questions

15. What is racism to you?
    a. Can you give me an example of racism?

16. On average, minorities have worse housing, jobs, and income than whites. Why do you think this is?

17. Some people say that minorities are worse off than whites because they lack motivation or do not have the right values to succeed. What do you think about this?

18. What, if any, do you think should be the responsibilities of churches in addressing racial inequality?

19. Do you think pastors have an obligation to speak about racial inequality from the pulpit? Why or why not?
    a. How often would you say that you have heard your pastor preach a sermon about racial inequality?
    b. [*If preached about*] What did you think about those sermons?

20. [*If racial inequality is not mentioned in #7*] Of the top issues you listed your church as addressing, are any of them related to racial inequality?
    a. If so, which ones and how?
    b. If not, do you think that should be something your church should be addressing? Why or why not?

21. [*If denominationally affiliated*] What, if any, do you think are the responsibilities of your denomination in addressing racial inequality?

22. What, if any, do you think should be the role of the government in addressing racial inequality?

23. What are future goals you would like to see your church accomplish?

24. Is there anything else you would like to share?
    a. Is there anything I didn't ask about that you thought I should have?

Demographic Information

Age? _____

Do you live in Maryland, D.C., or Virginia? _____

What is your highest level of education received? _____

Marital Status? [Select one]

Single	Separated
Engaged	Divorced
Married	Widowed

What is your income before taxes and other deductions? [Select one]

Less than $10,000	$60,000-69,000
$10,000-19,999	$70,000-79,000
$20,000-29,000	$80,000-89,000
$30,000-39,000	$90,000-99,000
$40,000-49,000	$100,000-149,000
$50,000-59,000	More than $150,000

What is your total household income before taxes and other deductions? [Select one]

Less than $10,000	$60,000-69,000
$10,000-19,999	$70,000-79,000
$20,000-29,000	$80,000-89,000
$30,000-39,000	$90,000-99,000
$40,000-49,000	$100,000-149,000
$50,000-59,000	More than $150,000

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