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While motivations for homeschooling have gained increased scholarly attention, there continues to be a general paucity of research on the motivations of homeschooling black parents, as the common and implicit assumption seems to be that African Americans' disengagement from the school system is dictated by reasons quite similar to those cited by European Americans. It is the purpose of this article to review the religious motivations of African American homeschoolers. Christian religious factors consistently rank high among motivations to homeschool. However, African American Christian homeschoolers often stand out given the racist nature of the society in which they live. Thus, their views as Christian homeschoolers are often embedded within a narrative informed by a demand for racial justice and cultural dignity. Of particular interest to us in this article is the interplay between the denominational affiliation of African American homeschoolers and their inclusion/exclusion of information pertaining to African American history and culture in their children's studies.

KEYWORDS fundamentalism, homeschooling, racism, religion

Once perceived as a marginal and temporary trend, homeschooling has, in fact, turned into a significant and growing phenomenon. Indeed, it is estimated that over 2 million children are being homeschooled today in the United States, as opposed to 300,000 in 1990, thus indicating a dramatic increase over a relatively short period of time.[1] As a matter of fact, homeschooling,

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which grew by 74% between 1999 and 2007,[2] appears to be the fastest-growing form of education in the United States today. Although White homeschooled students still represent about 75% of all homeschooled children, there has been a noticeable surge in African American involvement in the homeschool movement as well. In 1999, it was estimated that nearly 10% of all homeschooled children were Black and those numbers appear to be consistently growing.[3] However, there continues to be a general paucity of research on the motivations of homeschooling Black parents, as the common and implicit assumption seems to be that African Americans' disengagement from the school system is dictated by reasons quite similar to those cited by European Americans.[4] Yet, the very unique experiences of African Americans in this society should be cause for caution.

It is the purpose of this article to present empirical evidence regarding African American motivations for homeschooling. Although previous studies[5] have been limited by narrow geographical scopes and small subject pools, our study sought to overcome these limitations by drawing from a much larger number of households distributed over a wide geographical area and to explore in depth one of the main reasons why African Americans increasingly choose to educate their children at home, namely their Christian faith. Although religious factors are also commonly cited by other ethnic groups, it is worth noting that African American Christian homeschoolers often stand out, as their views are articulated within the context of a racially exclusive and discriminatory society, and are often interwoven with demands for greater racial fairness and cultural relevance. Of particular interest to us is the interplay between the denominational affiliation of African American homeschoolers and their inclusion/exclusion of African American cultural and historical information in their children's studies.

AFRICAN AMERICAN MOTIVATIONS FOR HOMESCHOOLING

The latest National Center for Education Statistics (NHES) report on the topic[6] reveals that the three most important reasons cited by parents for homeschooling their children are (1) the desire to impart religious and moral instruction (36%); (2) a concern about the school environment (21%); and (3) dissatisfaction with academic instruction (17%). These reasons were fundamentally similar to those cited in the 1996, 1999, and 2003 NHES reports. While yielding important information about motivations for homeschooling, the categories used in the surveys cited above remain quite broad, and therefore allow for a multitude of interpretations. To a large extent, the same conclusion can be reached regarding the numerous attempts made by scholars eager to analyze and classify parental motivations,[7] as they all point to the fact that those motivations do not lend themselves to easy and neat classifications but rather fuzzy and overlapping ones. At best, we arrive at categories that

must be broad enough to encompass the multitude of experiences that they claim to capture. At the heart of this difficulty lies the fact that the homeschooling population's heterogeneity has considerably increased over the past decades. Thus, categories such as the "pedagogical" and "ideological" ones, which were once proposed by Van Galen,[8] and which managed to capture the two main groups of homeschoolers in the 1980s, namely the White libertarian political left and the White religious right, must be considerably enlarged and refined to include parents who homeschool because of their dissatisfaction with public and private schools, family needs, and academic concerns, for example. Furthermore, such categories should arguably also be able to reflect the motivations of racially underrepresented groups, which have been glaringly absent from most of the literature mentioned above. As a matter of fact, only a few studies have dealt more specifically with African American homeschooling families.[9] Yet, it is important to recognize, as cogently argued by McDowell et al.,[10] that "Clearly, the decision to homeschool for African American parents contains a great many critical and diverse elements that are simply not a factor for Euro-Americans." One such factor is the extensive racial discrimination and prejudice experienced by Black people since setting foot on American soil. If one considers that for 90% of its existence, the United States has experienced racial inequality as the law of the land,[11] and then one realizes without much difficulty that any meaningful discussion of the African American experience, including motivations for home schooling, must take the specific social and political dimensions of African American life into consideration. Of particular relevance here is the link between the African American struggle for racial justice and involvement in Christianity, as a brief survey of the latter shall make apparent.

AFRICAN AMERICANS AND CHRISTIANITY

Indeed, one will remember that what has become known as the "Black Church," and which houses more than three-fourths of all Black Christians today, came into existence largely as a result of Africans, free or enslaved, in the North and the South, attempting to create a space free from racial bigotry and humiliations. Lincoln et al.[12] cogently explained, for example, how

> The initial impetus for black spiritual and ecclesiastical independence was not grounded in religious doctrine or polity, but in the offensiveness of racial segregation in the churches and the alarming inconsistencies between the teachings and the expressions of faith. It was readily apparent that the white church had become a principal instrument of the political and social policies undergirding slavery and the attendant degradation of the human spirit. Against this the black Christians quietly rebelled, and the Black Church emerged as the symbol and the substance of their rebellion.

Still unsurprisingly, the Black Church spearheaded sustained and numerous efforts to create institutions, especially educational ones, committed to the advancement of Blacks in the midst of widespread hostility.[13]

With the persistence of racism and racial hierarchies throughout the 20th century and well into the 21st century,[14] the Black Church has continued to exist to this day, while African Americans' devotion to Christianity remains unequaled in the nation. Indeed, according to a 2007 Pew Report,[15] "African-Americans stand out as the most religiously committed racial or ethnic group in the nation," with 78% of them reporting to be Protestants—which places them well above the 51% national average. Furthermore, it was also found that 79% of Blacks (vs. 56% overall) report that religion is "very important in their life." For instance, African Americans reported attending weekly religious services or praying daily at much higher rates than the general population. As indicated above, 75% of those Protestants belong to a Black denomination, be it the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, the National Baptist Convention, the Progressive National Baptist Convention, or the Church of God in Christ.

In addition to the bulk of Black Church members, a noticeable percentage (15%) of African American Christians have joined fundamentalist denominations, such as the Baptist Southern Convention or Assemblies of God. African Americans make up 6% of the membership of fundamentalist churches. Christian fundamentalism arose out of Protestantism in the late 19th century and early 20th century among evangelical Christians.[16] It was in large part a reaction against the process of secularism and pluralism under way in the American society, assorted with the rise of modernism. In contrast, fundamentalists insisted on the inerrancy of the Bible and emphasized their attachment to core Christian religious beliefs and practices. Of particular concern to fundamentalists in that respect has been the teaching of evolution in schools, as this theory, in the minds of many, contradicts biblical creationism and inevitably opens the door to chaos: "Losing one's faith in a preordained world ordered by a creator leads to the moral decay of individual and social life"[17]. Yet, fundamentalists do not form a homogeneous group, but rather stand on a continuum characterized by varying degrees of conservatism and resistance to secular culture.[18]

RESEARCH DESIGNS AND DATA

To capture the voice and agency of African American homeschoolers, we conducted 74 interviews across a wide geographical area, stretching along the Mid- and South Atlantic, and the Midwest during the spring and summer of 2010. In addition to the interviews, we also relied on surveys, focus groups, and participant observations of Black homeschooling parents to provide a

comprehensive view of the Black homeschooling experience (see Table 1). Indeed, subjects came from diverse metropolitan areas such as Chicago (29.7%), Philadelphia (25.7%), Washington, DC (17.6%), New York (10.8%), Atlanta (8.1%), as well as Columbia and Florence, South Carolina (6.7%).

A snowball sampling procedure and active recruitment from local and national homeschooling associations accounted for a majority of respondents. The interviews consisted of two parts: a survey which sought demographic and background data for each homeschooling family, followed by a semistructured, open-ended interview with the participating parent, where issues touched upon in the survey were further explored and elaborated upon by parents. Over 80% of the interviews were conducted with one parent—usually the mother ($n = 60$)—representing the homeschooling family. The interviews ranged from roughly 1 and a half hours to 2 hours in length, and were analyzed using an open coding method, whereby the interviews' content (i.e., data) was divided into meaningful segments and then scrutinized to allow common categories or themes to emerge. Connections were then made amongst the categories and subcategories in a process referred to as *axial coding*. In other words, we sought connections amongst the various emergent categories. This, in turn, led us to the final stage of analysis known as selective coding whereby a storyline or main theme emerged.[19] As a follow-up, three focus group sessions were conducted in the fall of 2011 to further investigate the homeschooling experiences of Black families. The focus groups consisted of five to six mothers in a large metropolitan area in the Northeast of the United States. Finally, on many occasions observations were made at forums specifically geared for homeschoolers (e.g., science museums or sporting events). The data gathered in the focus groups and participant observations were used to complement and triangulate the data gathered in the individual interviews and surveys. The information presented in this study, however, is largely culled from the surveys and interviews. Table 2 considers the demographic characteristics of the subjects interviewed. As can be seen there is little variation in the ethnicity of Black respondents interviewed. The majority of our respondents self-identified as native-born African Americans, with only a few self-identifying as foreign born or racially

TABLE 1 Place of Interviews ($N = 74$).

Interview site	%
Chicago Metropolitan area	29.7
Philadelphia Metropolitan area	25.7
Washington, D.C. Metropolitan area	17.6
New York City Metropolitan area	10.8
Atlanta	8.1
Columbia and Florence, South Carolina	6.7
Bridgeport, Delaware	1.3

TABLE 2 Place Indicators of Respondents' Demographic Background (*N* = 71).

Demographic	%
Ethnic/racial	
Black/African American	92.7
Caribbean	2.9
African	1.4
Mixed race	1.4
Hispanic/Latino	1.4
Immigrant origin	
U.S. born	95.6
Born abroad	4.3
Average number in household	3.2
Younger than 18	59.8
Aged 18 or older	21.9
H.S. graduate	12.9
Aged 25 or older	2.2
College graduate	3.1

mixed. In terms of family description, the average family consists of 3.2 children and most were brought up in a two-parent household (91%).

In terms of education, over 80% of the mothers and over 60% of the fathers have an undergraduate college degree or more. These figures are significantly higher than the national trend of only 19.4% of Blacks with a Bachelor's college degree or more in 2010.[20] These figures aside, a substantial number of homeschooling households have parents with no college degree. For example, almost 20% of mothers and close to 40% of fathers do not possess a college degree.

FINDINGS

When asked in the open-ended interviews to delve into their motivations for homeschooling, most parents offered a series of motives rather than a single one (Table 3). Among the many reasons given, a concern with the quality of

TABLE 3 Place Reasons for Homeschooling (*N* = 71).

Homeschooling reasons	%
Quality of education	25.0
Racism	23.9
Family bonds	14.8
Religious	9.5
Safety concerns	7.6
Financial constraints	4.2
Moral (secular)	4.2
Special needs	3.4
Other	7.6

education provided in brick-and-mortar schools was most often mentioned (25%). This finding is consistent with previous research, and indeed consistent with the history of homeschooling in America. But unlike other research on homeschooling, and unique to the African American experience, the second most mentioned motivating factor for homeschooling was a concern with racism (24%). Indeed, it is fair to say that a preoccupation with racism and discrimination undergirds most of the responses regarding motivation for homeschooling. Furthermore, homeschooling parents also seem to care deeply about family dynamics and closeness because consideration for family bonds was the third most cited factor. But also among these motivational forces was also religion. Nearly one in 10 families interviewed (9.5%) mentioned religion as the main reason for homeschooling their children, making it the fourth most-cited cause of African American homeschooling. Most of these parents expressed overt devotion to religious scripture and were fearful of the deleterious effects of brick and mortar schooling. Indeed, for many of these parents, to homeschool their children was a serious ecclesiastic matter, not be contaminated by a secular educational system where God is removed from the center of life. This concern was particularly striking among Christian Fundamentalists. Furthermore, our data revealed over all 102 references to the Christian church and its role in the homeschooling process. Not only do the teachings of the church play a major socialization role in the lives of many of our subjects' children's lives, but church-related activities also provide them with significant social outlets, in the form of choirs, dance, theater, reading, or athletic clubs. Interestingly enough, more than a third (36.3%) of those references to the significance of the church in their children's social lives was made by parents who were not led to homeschooling by their Christian religious faith. This is consistent with the overall religious nature of the African American community where the church tends to play a central role in folk life, including homeschooling.

In addition to those, a significant portion of parents mentioned moral issues as a force behind their decision to homeschool (4.2%). The perceived lack of morality displayed by children attending brick-and-mortar schools, the fear of peer influence, and the inability of schools to monitor and control what many parents considered to be lascivious behavior on the part of children, all contribute to a sense of alarm on the part of these parents. These concerns, although not directly couched in religious terms, were similar in character and tone as those expressed by parents who cited religion as their reason for homeschooling their children.

Table 4 provides the religious affiliation of our homeschooling families, who tend to display a great diversity of religious faiths. African American homeschoolers are Baptists, Methodists, Muslims, as well as practitioners of African religion, Agnostics, or Atheists. Among this diversity, however, it is safe to say that the majority of families in our study are Christians and overwhelmingly Protestants. Indeed, African American homeschoolers who are

TABLE 4 Place Religious Affiliation of African American Homeschoolers (*N* = 71).

Religious affiliation	%
Protestant	
Baptist	26.1
Pentecostal	8.7
Methodist	2.9
JehovahWitness	1.4
Charismatic	1.4
Unitarian	1.4
Anabaptist	4.3
Nondenominational	8.7
Combination	7.2
African religion	11.6
Muslim	5.7
Catholic	2.9
Buddhist	1.4
No religious background	7.2
Agnostic	4.3
Atheist	1.4
Declined to answer	2.9

Protestants constitute 65% of our subjects, with Baptists being the largest denomination (26.1%). A distant second are African American homeschoolers who claim an African religion (11.6%), such as Akan or Yoruba. These homeschoolers are often Black Nationalists and their experiences and concerns were addressed in a previous article.[21]

African American Christian Homeschooling as Protectionism

We have chosen to label "Christian Protectionists" those Black parents who have opted to educate their offspring at home, at least in part, as an attempt to shield their children and families from what they felt were the harmful effect of secular schooling. Those parents typically displayed an acute awareness of schools as major sites of morally questionable behaviors and inappropriate linguistic expressions. They were particularly worried about how this state of affairs was encroaching upon children's sense of purpose and morality.

However, Christian protectionists do not form a monolithic group. Instead, our analysis revealed that Black Christian homeschoolers stand on a continuum. At one end of this continuum stand parents who are evangelical and fundamentalist, and whose main if not sole concern is imparting Christian values to their children. At the other end stand parents who, although ranking Christianity as their number one reason for homeschooling, nonetheless display an even greater concern for other aspects of their children's educational experiences, such as the cultural and historical content of the curriculum and the social and racial climate of schools.

Christian Fundamentalists

African American fundamentalists do not present any noticeable specificity when compared to European fundamentalists, whose ideology they have adopted, even if they have at times felt uncomfortable in the world of White fundamentalism.[22] They too adhere to the view that it is parents' sacred obligation to teach their children, as well as they object to the exclusion of Christianity from the schools.

Parental Involvement and Homeschooling as Moral Obligations

African American fundamentalists, like many other Christian fundamentalists[23], share the belief that it is God's strong wish for parents to be responsible for the education of their children. For Cindy and Joe, a couple with four children in Columbia, South Carolina, there is no doubt that "...parents have a God-given responsibility to be active participants in raising their children, not just academically but spiritually as well." This sentiment is echoed by Tanisha, in Philadelphia: "I don't think that it's necessary for a school to train my child for eight hours a day when that's the commission that I've been given by the Lord. And, I take that seriously." Many, in fact, testified that it was God itself which had requested that they homeschool their children. In other words, homeschooling is perceived as a godly duty, which must be carried out faithfully and courageously. It may very well be this understanding of homeschooling as a sacred mission that explains why, in general, religious homeschoolers are less prone to quit homeschooling than non-Christian homeschoolers.[24] When faced with doubts about the feasibility of homeschooling, "praying to God to get an answer" and "getting an answer from God" were often reported:

> I prayed and prayed over several months, and I got an answer. I really believe that was what God wanted me to do, I knew he would provide.
> It was a decision that my husband and I and God made.
> I just think it was the Lord who showed us. He put us in a place where we found people who homeschool and then showed us how to do it, what we were going to do.

Objecting to the Exclusion of Christianity and the Secularism and Modernism of School

Unsurprisingly, African American Christian fundamentalists take issue with the exclusion of Christianity from the classroom and textbooks. Gwenn, of Columbia, South Carolina, explained how:

> We wanted our children to have a Christian education, and I guess with the way that things are in the schools where you can't even mention God,

you can't even mention the Bible, things like that, that was a concern for us. We wanted our children to know that God is a part of everything, and we wanted them to be able to see God in history and in language arts.

Alicia, the mother of four children, in Columbia, South Carolina, was equally concerned: "I didn't want my children to be in a godless school system. I didn't want them to be taught things we disagree with. I didn't want them to be taught that their faith was foolishness."

A significant concern of many parents and consistent with the research on Christian homeschoolers[25] is the teaching of evolutionism, which contradicts the Christian creation account, thus undermining the literalism of the Bible. Furthermore, the libertine atmosphere often prevalent in school is also problematic for many. A particularly touchy issue was sex education. Lisa, from Columbia, South Carolina, cites her objection to sex education as the deciding factor for homeschooling her 5-year-old daughter:

The more I thought about that, the more I thought, "What on God's green earth does a five year old need to know about sex?" It bothered me so much, I did not want somebody telling my daughter about oral sex when she's five. I just thought it was inappropriate, not their place.

Tameka, mother of three in Philadelphia, also expressed her outrage and opposition:

I just don't agree with what they're teaching in our schools. I don't need the schools to teach my children about sex education. I want to be the person to do that. I just heard of a girl in the school where my husband works, they gave her a banana and made her put a condom on the banana. This is middle school. She cried afterward and said: "Why do I have to do this?"

A Curriculum Based on a Biblical Worldview and Identity

Finally, a consistent characteristic of Black fundamentalist homeschoolers is the building of their children's identity around Jesus and Christianity, rather than around race, culture, or history, for example. Jesus, as some put, is the "Great Equalizer," who has rendered racial and other artificial barriers irrelevant. Kim, mother of three males, in Chicago, explained it thus: "We're Christians, we believe that Jesus Christ has broken down the barriers, the racial barriers and that he has made us all one." Based on this assessment of the effect of Jesus' actions, any emphasis on racial considerations is deemed misplaced. Vanessa, of Philadelphia, reports this about her son: "We teach him that his purpose and identity come from God. He identifies first and foremost as a Christian, and that's where his confidence and his source of being come from. God and the Bible come first, race comes second."

In other words, African American fundamentalist homeschooling parents seem highly unlikely to engage in the racial socialization of their children, as the transmission of Christian values and beliefs is their utmost priority. Thus, as a result of their "Christian worldview," the curriculum espoused by many African American fundamentalists includes minimal references to African American history or culture. Eric and Pam's statement aptly summarizes the view of many when they state that, "Heritage is not a priority with us. Our heritage is in Christ." They thus continue: "What is important to us is that they learn about Christ. Our worldview is biblical."

African American Christians (Non-Fundamentalists)

The place accorded to African American culture and history and the position taken on the significance of race in American society is the main distinction between the general Black Christian population and their fundamentalist counterparts. Indeed, although the latter tend to downplay the significance of race, culture, and history, this is not so with the former. Again, given the history of the Black Church, to which most African American Christians belong, this sensitivity is to be expected. Sheila, mother of two in Washington, puts it that way: "We are of African American descent, and we find that to be extremely important. That's how God created us. Let's learn about who we are first, and take pride in who we are." Thus, although Black Christian homeschoolers generally share with fundamentalists the belief that it is their responsibility to educate their children and instill Christian values into them, as well as they display a concern over the immorality prevalent in school, a more poignant and pressing motivation, it often seems, was (1) the exclusion or misrepresentation of African American history and culture from the classroom and (2) the racial abuses suffered by Black children.

The Exclusion/Misrepresentation of African American History and Culture

African American homeschoolers objected to the absence of significant and positive information about Black people in the school. The common construction of African Americans as "descendants of slaves," and slavery as the defining moment of their existence was deemed particularly distasteful if not hurtful for the self-esteem of Black children. However, even the treatment of slavery might be quite unsatisfactory and disturbing. David, of Lansing, Illinois, shared with us how he and his wife, Dorothy, decided to withdraw their four children from a Christian cyber school because of the latter's disrespectful approach to the enslavement of Africans:

> This one particular Christian school had a worldview way different from ours. It became apparent, particularly when talking about the African American slavery experience. They didn't think it was "that bad." We

were done with them. Nuh-uh. They tried to soft-peddle it, like it was almost a benevolent field trip to America, and Robert E. Lee was a great Christian man, I mean, I thought, and what planet are you from?

The Abuses Suffered by Black Children

Many of the Christian parents we interviewed regularly commented on schools and their agents as playing a critical role in the reproduction of a racist social set-up. Indeed, racism was talked about as an inevitable fact of American life, and schools as a place where Black children were bound to experience dire racial oppression and hostility, in the form of the suppression of African American cultural identity and imposition of Whiteness as the ideal norm; the inculcation of anti-Black attitudes and beliefs, assorted with the acceptance of White superiority; unjust and quick criminalization; low expectations; unnecessary referrals to special education tracks; and outright meanness and impatience. The curriculum and the teachers were identified as the two main sources of this racial oppression and hostility. As a result, parents felt that schools, public or private, would not nurture their children's positive sense of self but would dangerously undermine it, leading to low self-esteem and self-hatred. Diamond, a chaplain for the army, mother of two daughters in Washington, DC, was particularly concerned about the impact of anti-Black imagery on her daughters: "In our area, when you talk about a white school you're talking $26,000. That's $26,000 for our baby to grow up not feeling good about herself because her skin is not white and her hair is not blonde."

HOMESCHOOLING AS A CORRECTIVE

Building Christian Character

According to Kunzman,[26] homeschooling, given the philosophical control and pedagogical flexibility that it allows, was bound to be quite appealing to Christians, especially those with a strong evangelical orientation, in their attempt to protect their children from modern notions and practices while instilling Christian values into them. This analysis is certainly corroborated by our findings. Indeed, to the Christian Protectionists we interviewed, homeschooling appeared as the only real alternative to avoid altogether the profound shortcomings of schooling. Homeschooling was claimed to be the ideal corrective to a morally and philosophically deficient curriculum. Most specifically, parents reported that homeschooling made it possible for them to follow a schedule that included daily exposure to Christian ideas, thus allowing their children to develop Christian character. For example, many start their day with one hour-long devotion, which consists of praying, reading, and discussing passages from the Bible, often with Christian music in the background. For others, the Bible was the text of choice for their

children's reading assignments. Janet, of Chicago, proudly shared the following with us regarding her daughter: "The first thing we did was start her reading the Bible and she just finished it in September of this school year. So it took her five years to do so." Julia, in Washington, D., further comments that, "Homeschooling gives us more opportunity and time to teach, and throughout the day, when things come up, just in studying we can relate it to God." Homeschooling also provides parents many opportunities to "steer the children the right way" and instill "character" in them. This, many Christian Fundamentalists in particular felt, is the true and ultimate purpose of education. In that context, Pam and Eric of Columbia, South Carolina, see teaching as a form of "discipling," which in the end, will enable their children to have a "personal relationship with Christ:" "But this is what we are doing, we are discipling our children, they are with us all the time, and we are teaching them. So that is basically what it comes down to, discipling." Furthermore, it is apparent that many of the fundamentalist parents we interviewed homeschool their children to counter what some have termed "the deep crisis of the models of transmission of religious beliefs" as a result of the displacement or at least undermining of the Christian paradigm by other paradigms, in particular modernism. Indeed, when asked why their children would not attend schools that purport to teach Christian values and content to their students, many of the parents expressed the view that Christian schools, as Cindy and Joe put it, were "filled with people who are not acting like Christians." In other words, Christian schools may not be Christian enough, and thus may not be able to socialize children correctly into Christianity.

Teaching Historically and Culturally Relevant Information

Furthermore, for those so inclined—the majority—homeschooling granted the opportunity to teach their children about African and African American history and culture. As mentioned above, this matter was a particularly sensitive one as many parents considered the exclusion of the African American experience from school curricula a significant defect. Consistent efforts were reported to infuse the curriculum with empowering and meaningful information about African Americans to ensure that their children learn about themselves and develop a positive sense of self. Diana, a Christian mother of five males in Philadelphia, reports how: "We started talking about Africa in the Bible—way before slavery. I did not want them to start with slavery. I wanted them to know the riches of our race from, you know, the beginning."

In other cases, it was not just a matter of infusion, but of centering the whole curriculum around the African American experience, as Jonathan, the father of two, in Richmond, Virginia, explains:

> I didn't want my children having to do extra stuff in order to get their history. So the sense of identity we wanted to give them was one, a sense of

who we were as a family but also a sense of our historical perspective being primary, not being "extra." That was very important to us and one of the reasons we do it. And our purpose for being here–we're very deeply rooted in our Christian faith, and again, we don't want them learning about themselves to be a secondary activity. It's integrated in all we do. We talk about history, and we don't call it "history," necessarily. We just talk about the figures in history, either from Africa or African-American communities, and that's how they learn different things.

Creating a Safe Space for Black Children

Furthermore, homeschooling was also presented as the perfect remedy to the hostility often experienced by Black children in school. It is indeed one of the strategies adopted by a growing number of African Americans to deal with school-related racism.[27] In other words, many parents choose to physically remove their children from an environment perceived to be abusive and destructive. To the extent that homeschooling takes the threat of racial harassment and discrimination out of the picture, it is felt that it provides African American parents the space and time to educate and socialize their children for optimal personal development. For instance, parent teachers usually care deeply about their children's optimal development, and display attentiveness and patience toward them. Unlike most school teachers and administrators, the parents who shared their story with us often reported going out of their way to create a nurturing and safe space for their children.

DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

The overall aim of this study was to gain insight into the experiences, views, and actions of African American Christian parents who choose to educate their children at home to protect them from the deleterious effects of the education offered by most secular or religious public and private schools. Our research led us to the conclusion that Black Christians differ markedly regarding the importance they attach to race, culture, and history. We thus suggested that African American Christian homeschoolers' views fall along a continuum. At one end stand Christian Fundamentalists who tend to downplay the significance of social and cultural factors to almost solely focus on religious doctrinal considerations. At the other end of the continuum fall Christians from diverse denominations whose concern for religious indoctrination is at times superseded by preoccupations with the hostile racial climate in school as well as with the absence of any meaningful and sustained engagement of the African American cultural and historical experience. At stake is Black children's ability to feel safe and obtain self-knowledge, defined as cultural and historical knowledge, which would in turn allow them to develop a strong sense of self and purpose in a still racially unequal society.

In that regard, the African American Christian homeschoolers we interviewed seem to differ from the general homeschooling Christian population. Indeed, as mentioned at the beginning of this article, religious motivations have been consistently the most often cited factors by homeschoolers in general since the first survey in 1997.[28] However, relatively few of the African Americans to whom we spoke, despite being overall a religious group (only 7.2% reported being atheist or agnostic), cited religion as their primary reason for homeschooling. Instead, they seem more preoccupied by the poor quality of education available in most schools, as well as the racial and cultural disenfranchisement of their children in schools—and this is also true among those who cite religion as their number one reason for homeschooling.[29]

Most importantly, however, regardless of the primary motivation for homeschooling, one must keep in mind that the decision by an increasingly large number of Black parents to take back their children's education in their hands is part and parcel of the long and rich history of African American parental involvement in the access to, and shape of the academic training and socialization of Black children. Too often, previous research on African American homeschooling has presented it as simply an epiphenomenon of the failure of the American educational system.[30] Although such a view may not be incorrect, it nonetheless fails to appreciate homeschooling as the latest phase of the African American struggle for adequate education. For the most religious-oriented parents, an adequate education necessarily entails a curriculum infused with Biblical teachings. For other parents, a satisfactory education implies teaching information that is historically empowering and culturally relevant to their children as African Americans. After all, there exists a long history of African American deep interest in educational matters. Whether it was during slavery, when enslaved Africans were prohibited to learn to read and write, and risked their lives for doing so, or after emancipation, when newly freed Africans resisted attempts to limit their educational options to vocational training or instruction in segregated schools, African Americans kept insisting on their right to be educated as they saw fit.[31] For instance, African Americans were the first and most ardent promoters of free public education in the South,[32] and despite the incredible odds that they faced, were able to reduce their illiteracy rate from 95% in 1860 to 30% by 1910 (Anderson, 1988, p. 31), and down to 20% by 1940.[33] More recently, in the face of what they perceive to be a morally and academically deficient educational system, African Americans have turned to homeschooling to ensure the adequate education and emotional well-being of their children.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

It is suggested that future research undertake a longitudinal study of African American homeschoolers to examine the potential benefits of

homeschooling to make adequate comparisons to the nonhomeschooling population. This method would also allow researchers to assess the social and psychological development of homeschooled children, as well as the lifespan consequences of homeschooling, as these children enter college. Future research would also do well to investigate the microlevel dynamics of parent–child relationships in the African American homeschooling context. How do parents—if at all—communicate messages of identity, motivation, and overall success? Also significant would be the assessment of the correlation between parental educational level, income level, residential segregation, and other indicators of wealth and status and the decision to homeschool.

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