Socio-Historical and Contemporary Context of Black Home Education within the Black Belt of the American South

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ABSTRACT

This research article explores the socio-historical and contemporary context of Black home education within the Black Belt of the American South through a literature review. This literature review aims to uncover the historical evolution, socio-cultural dynamics, and contemporary challenges and opportunities associated with Black home education in this region.

Introduction

The story of Black education in the Black Belt of the American South is a complex his/herstory constructed by resilience, the importance of education, and the determination of Black communities (Anderson, 1988). This his/herstory is dynamic and includes home education. Black home education (BHE) has evolved as a powerful response to the challenges posed by racially discriminatory educational systems, and the desire for self-agency (Peters, 2019). BHE is rooted in a tradition of self-determination (Monds, 2022), and the desirability to learn and be educated (Anderson, 1988). This research article examines the socio-historical and contemporary context of BHE in the Black Belt of the American South, through a review of relevant literature to synthesize existing scholarly works on the subject.
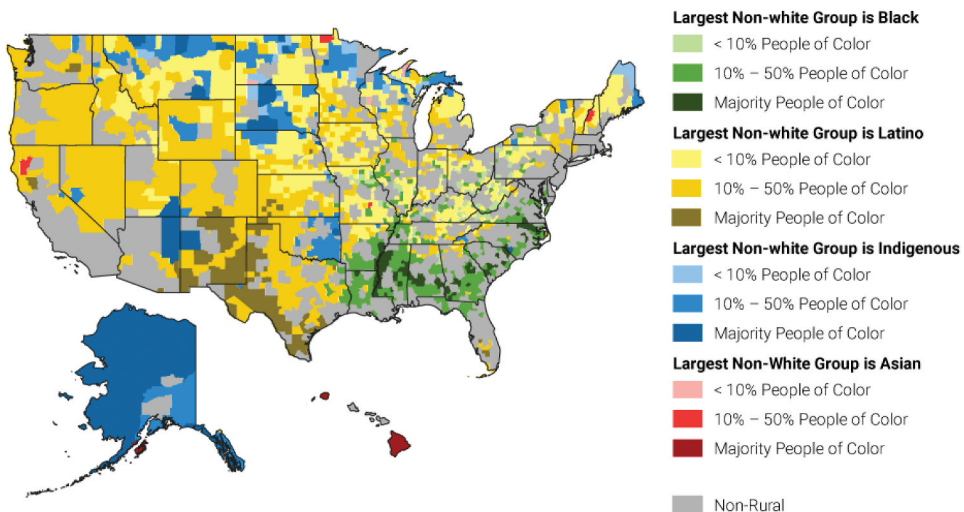
The purpose of this research article is to provide an analysis of the socio-historical and contemporary context of BHE within the Black Belt of the American South. This study aims to highlight the historical development, socio-cultural dynamics, and contemporary opportunities and challenges of BHE in this region by reviewing the literature. To do these two research questions are posed:

(1) What historical factors have influenced the development of BHE in the Black Belt?
(2) What are the socio-cultural dynamics that shape the contemporary opportunities and challenges for BHE in the Black Belt?

This choice of the Black Belt of the American South is very intentional. Currently, BHE is on the rise and even more prevalent in the Black Belt. Yet scholarship is not pacing with the increase in BHE, despite the highest concentration of Black populations being in the Black Belt of the American South (see Figure 1). The Black Belt of the American South includes 623 rural counties in: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia (Dantes, 2021). The Black Belt is home to many majority-Black towns and cities that have survived and thrived since chattel slavery and is a region known for its fertile soil and location of plantation spaces. As visualized in Figure 1, Black populations in the rural South (Rowland & Love, 2021) are not just a historical phenomenon. The Black Belt of the American South includes present-day majority Black enclaves, towns, and cities.

Context of the research

Recent data highlights a significant increase in homeschooling among Black families in the former Confederate states, a trend accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic but rooted in deeper concerns about educational quality and cultural relevance. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey, the percentage of Black families home educating their children in the U.S. surged from 3.3% in April 2020 to 16.1% by October 2020 (Wellborn, 2022; (https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/03/homeschooling-on-the-rise-during-covid-19-pandemic.html). This growth reflects a broader

Figure 1. Rural Americans of color in 2020. Adapted from Mapping Rural America's Diversity and Demographic Change by D. W. Rowland & Hanna Love, 2021, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/mapping-rural-americas-diversity-and-demographic-change/. Copyright 2021 by the Brookings Institution.

Table 1. Total number of "black alone, not hispanic" reported as homeschooling by year.

State	2023	2024	% Difference
Alabama	6,608	11,326	52.6%
Arkansas	–	2,173	–
Florida	104,104	5,122	−181.2%
Georgia	11,520	52,829	128.3%
Louisiana	22,215	2,593	−158.1%
Mississippi	–	10,741	–
North Carolina	8,831	10,211	14.4%
South Carolina	7,201	–	–
Tennessee	10,053	25,967	88.3%
Texas	21,799	15,439	34.1%
Virginia	–	22,493	–

Note: The figures in this table only represent those who reported as "Black alone, not Hispanic" on the Household Pulse Survey (2023, 2024). While there are not exact date overlaps between 2023 and 2024 the closest dates which are included in the table are March 29, 2023 to April 10, 2023; and March 5, 2024 to April 1, 2024. These are the closest overlapping times that can be used to demonstrate differences by total number of individuals in each Black Belt state that reported as "Black alone, not Hispanic" and "Children Homeschooled."
https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2023/demo/hhp/hhp56.html
https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2024/demo/hhp/cycle03.html

national trend where Black households have shown the largest gains in home-schooling rates among all racial groups (Dunn, 2021; EdChoice, 2021). This dramatic increase was particularly notable in the Black Belt of the American South. Table 1 details the reported total number of children homeschooled who completed the Household Pulse Survey and identified as "Black alone, not Hispanic" and reside in states within the Black Belt of the American South as defined by (Dantes, 2021).

While the table demonstrates that there are significant changes just between a single year overall note that most consistently there are increases in the number of households reporting homeschooling children. Several factors may contribute to this shift. Black parents often cite concerns about systemic racism, the lack of culturally relevant curriculum, and the need to protect their children's self-esteem as primary motivations for homeschooling (Ali-Coleman & Fields-Smith, 2022). As Peters (2019) articulates it:

> One of the major goals of Black parents who home-educate their children is to provide "racial protection." Black parents' motivations are in response to the widely held and substantiated concern that their children are uniquely vulnerable to a variety of harms emanating from racial discrimination within the school environment; harms that inter-fere with their children's right to self-actualize or to be and become themselves. (p. 31)

Additionally, the flexibility offered by home educating allows parents to provide a tailored educational experience that includes a strong emphasis on Black history and culture, which is often inadequately covered in traditional schools (Fields-Smith, 2021; Siddiqi, 2021).

Furthermore, support networks for Black home educating families have also expanded, with organizations such as the National Black Home Educators (https://www.nbhe.net/aboutus.htm) and local groups like Heritage Homeschoolers in Georgia (https://www.heritagehomeschoolers.org/) playing crucial roles in providing resources and community connections. These networks have grown significantly since the pandemic began, indicating a robust and supportive community for Black homeschoolers (Dunn, 2021; Otey, 2021).

In summary, the rise in home educating among Black families in the Black Belt of the American South reflects both the immediate impact of the pandemic and longstanding issues related to educational equity and cultural representation. As these families continue to seek alternative educational pathways, the trend toward home educating is likely to persist and evolve, supported by a growing network of resources and community support.

Methodology: literature review

The method for this study was a literature review. This method involved a structured approach to identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing existing research on Black home education or homeschooling. To conduct this study literature searches were conducted using the library databases at the author's institution.

Data collection

Using the library databases, keywords were used to find text for inclusion in the literature review these were *black homeschooling* and *black home education*. Once documents were collected using this approach abstracts and the body of the articles were filtered for the inclusion of the words south or their context in the Black Belt of the American South, in some cases this also included looking for states that are included within the Black Belt.

The sub-analysis for states was only included if the abstract review yielded that the article was relevant to the overall purposes of the study. This approach and specificity to a particular region of the country greatly limited the number of studies included in the analysis. Yet it yielded important findings related to the process of learning about BHE within the Black Belt of the American South.

Data analysis

The data analysis process included reading the texts that met the criteria for the study and identifying the historical context, the cultural significance and/

or the opportunities and challenges that are faced by Black families who home educate. A concentration of text was included in a single edited book by Ali-Coleman and Fields-Smith (2022) which made for a concentrated examination. Only chapters that included content from scholars whose study was located within or about the Black Belt were included in the analysis.

Findings

Historical factors (RQ 1)

The origins of BHE can be traced back to the era of U.S. chattel slavery, when enslaved Africans were prohibited from learning to read and write, as a result they taught one another (Span, 2005). Despite the severe punishments, many enslaved individuals sought education clandestinely (Cornelius, 1983). These efforts were often spearheaded by community leaders and religious figures who risked their lives to impart knowledge. Literacy among the enslaved was not just a personal achievement but a communal one, seen as an act of resistance against the oppressive system that sought to keep them ignorant and submissive (Givens, 2024).

One of the most prolific and renowned scholars of Black education in the Black Belt of the American South is James Anderson. His book "The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935" sets up the historical context for the present-day analysis of BHE (Anderson, 1988). Anderson's book does not explicitly discuss home education as a core aspect, yet it is instructive in the overall landscape and scope of the educational experiences of Black families, in the Black Belt of the American South.

Following the Civil War, during the Reconstruction era, Black communities continued to prioritize education, establishing schools with the limited resources available to them. These schools were often funded and operated by Black churches and community organizations (Anderson, 1988). The establishment of institutions like the Tuskegee Institute by Booker T. Washington is a testament to the Black community's commitment to education. Despite facing immense challenges, these institutions provided quality education and vocational training to Black students, laying the foundation for future educational advancements (Anderson, 1988).

However, the progress made during Reconstruction was met with fierce resistance during the Jim Crow era. Segregation laws and policies were implemented to disenfranchise Black Americans and ensure that public schools for Black children were grossly underfunded and inadequately resourced (Anderson, 1988). This period saw the entrenchment of educational disparities that would persist for decades. Black families, in response, sought alternative means to ensure their children received an education (Fields-Smith, 2020,

2022). These efforts included the establishment of private schools and, increasingly, home education (Fields-Smith, 2005, 2022).

Contributing to the pursuit of home education are the inadequacies of public education for Black children which became increasingly apparent, leading to a resurgence of community-led educational initiatives (Anderson, 1988). These initiatives were not just about imparting basic literacy and numeracy skills but also about instilling a sense of pride in Black heritage and culture (Anderson, 1988). Community leaders understood that education was a crucial tool for social and economic mobility and a means to challenge and dismantle the systemic racism that permeated every aspect of American society (Banks, 2015). These inadequacies lead to several motivations for BHE, among these motivations are educational inequities (Fields-Smith, 2020; Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009; Howard & Baker, 2024), cultural affirmation (Fields-Smith, 2020; Fields-Smith & Baker, 2023; Mazama & Lundy, 2015), and safety and emotional wellbeing (Ali-Coleman & Fields-Smith, 2022; Monds, 2022).

Educational inequities

The motivations behind BHE are multifaceted, encompassing both the desire to escape educational inequities and the need to affirm cultural identity. Cheryl Fields-Smith (2005, 2015, 2020, 2021) research elucidates how contemporary Black families continue to face systemic inequities in public education, including racial discrimination, low expectations from teachers, and a lack of culturally relevant curricula. These factors drive many Black parents to seek alternatives that better serve their children's educational and emotional needs (Fields-Smith, 2020; Fields-Smith & Kisura, 2013). Through the studies reviewed below, evidence is provided to demonstrate the educational inequities that permeate all schools. Yet the previous review of education in the South provides a contextualization for the focus on how these inequities are historically grounded in the American South and apply to Black families who seek to home educate in the Black Belt of the American South. While many of the issues reviewed in this section could be applied outside of the Black Belt region, a review of educational inequities would not be complete without this analysis and how these factors contribute to BHE in the Black Belt.

Fields-Smith and Kisura (2013), explore the increasing trend of Black homeschooling in the United States, particularly in Metro-Atlanta and Metro-DC. Emphasizing the historical and contemporary motivations behind Black families' decisions to homeschool, they focus on negative experiences in traditional schools, such as low expectations and safety concerns, and positive opportunities in home education, including imparting Black cultural values and seeking a global perspective. The authors argue that Black homeschooling

represents a radical act of self-determination and resistance to institutiona-lized racism, providing a safe, culturally affirming educational environment.

Furthermore, studies have shown that Black students are disproportionately subjected to disciplinary actions in public schools (Baker & Williams, 2019), which contributes to perspectives on home education. "According to the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (2014), Black students are suspended and expelled at three times the rate of white students" (Baker & Williams, 2018, p. 7). This punitive approach not only disrupts the educational experience of Black children but also contributes to the school-to-prison pipeline, where minor infractions in school lead to involvement in the criminal justice system (Baker & Williams, 2018). By home educating, Black parents can shield their children from these harsh disciplinary practices and create a more supportive and nurturing learning environment. This is further elucidated and discussed later (see, Hinnant-, 2022; Howard & Howard, 2022).

Cultural affirmation

Moreover, the lack of representation in the curriculum is another significant concern. Mazama and Lundy (2013, 2014, 2015) research highlights the importance of culturally relevant education in fostering a positive self-identity and sense of belonging among Black students (Mazama & Lundy, 2015). Mazama and Lundy's study includes families who reside in the Black Belt, while Black Belt families are not exclusive in the study their input is valuable in how we construct an understanding of the value of cultural affirmations. Home education allows parents to incorporate a curriculum that celebrates Black history and culture, providing their children with a more balanced and inclusive education. It also provides an opportunity for community.

Black home educating families often participate in community events, cultural celebrations, and social justice initiatives, which help to foster a sense of community and belonging. By engaging in these activities, children can develop strong social networks and build relationships with peers who share their cultural background and values. This sense of community is crucial for their social and emotional development and helps to counteract the isolation that can sometimes be associated with homeschooling (Mazama & Lundy, 2015). Community networks and co-ops play a vital role in Black home education and cultural affirmation, providing support, resources, and socialization opportunities. These networks enable families to share educational materials, organize group activities, and build a sense of community. These networks harken back to the historical context of Black churches and communities coming together to educate their own. Fields-Smith's research highlights the importance of these support systems in sustaining and enriching the

home educating experience (Fields-Smith, 2005; Fields-Smith & Baker, 2023; Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009).

Connecting the past to the present community organizations and churches still play a crucial role in supporting Black home educating families. These institutions provide access to resources such as books, technology, and extra-curricular activities, as well as offer spaces for group learning and social events (Fields-Smith & Baker, 2023). However, when these community networks were difficult to find there was expressed concern or disappointment. Fields-Smith and Baker's (2023) study examining the experience of Black mothers in rural places who home educate found an example "The challenge in finding like-minded homeschool families existed within majority Black and predomi-nantly white rural communities because even in the majority Black commu-nities, rural homeschool mothers frequently reported being the only Black family that homeschooled in their community" (p. 412). Community when home educating is both historically and present-day indispensable. By lever-aging community resources and connections, Black home educating families can create a rich and diverse educational experience for their children (Fields-Smith & Williams, 2009).

Safety and emotional wellbeing

Rich educational experiences include safety and emotional well-being. By not having to confront the same historic and present racism or systemically racist interactions provides for greater well-being (Howard & Howard, 2022). By home educating, parents can create a positive and supportive learning envir-onment where their children feel safe and valued (Ali-Coleman & Fields-Smith, 2022; Fields-Smith, 2020). This approach not only helps to protect Black children from the harmful effects of racism but also allows them to thrive academically and emotionally (Peters, 2019). Home educating parents can tailor their teaching methods to meet the unique needs of their children, providing individualized attention and support that is often lacking in tradi-tional schools.

Research has shown that Black students often face racial harassment and discrimination in public schools (Baker & Williams, 2019), which can have a detrimental impact on their mental health and academic performance. Bullying, racial microaggressions, and disproportionate disciplinary actions (Carey, 2024) contribute to a hostile school environment for many Black students. Home educating offers a safer and more nurturing alternative where parents can protect their children from these negative experiences (Fields-Smith, 2020). Moreover, Black home educating parents often empha-size the importance of academic excellence and high expectations. By creating a supportive and encouraging learning environment, parents can help their children develop a strong work ethic and a love for learning. This focus on

academic achievement can lead to better educational outcomes and greater opportunities for higher education and career success (Mazama & Lundy, 2015).

In brief, basic education has been an important and even life-risking endeavor for Black folks in the Black Belt of the American South, this resilience to educate families and communities harkens back to the time when it was illegal to learn. In response BHE has been operating as a means to challenge and dismantle systemic racism. BHE also provides opportunities for social and economic mobility. These are achieved through addressing educational inequities, cultural affirmation, and ensuring the safety and emotional well-being of Black children. This historical and present-day articulation of BHE is instructive to recognizing the value and importance of the socio-historical context by which BHE is operating, and the dynamics that shape its success.

Dynamics that shape black home education (RQ2)

When reviewing the literature about and constructing the socio-historical context of BHE there are several dynamics that are consistently a part of the choice and implementation of BHE. Faith (Mazama & Lundy, 2014), cultural relevance/self-determination (Monds, 2022), and challenges to the dominant narrative (Fields-Smith & Baker, 2023; Mazama, 2016) are all a part of the dynamic nature of BHE and are relevant to the contemporary challenges and opportunities. Considering the works of Mazama and Lundy (2014, 2015), Monds (2022), and Fields-Smith and Baker (2023) the dynamics that shape BHE are more evident. These dynamics have shaped the context by which BHE is occurring within the Black Belt of the American South.

Mazama and Lundy's (2014, 2015) explores the cultural motivations behind BHE. For many Black families, home educating provides an opportunity to offer a curriculum that affirms Black culture and history, counteracting the Eurocentric narratives prevalent in traditional schools. This cultural affirmation is crucial for fostering a positive self-identity and instilling a sense of pride in Black heritage (Mazama & Lundy, 2015). The studies of Mazama and Lundy included families who were located in the Black Belt of the American South at the time of the study. Not all families included met this criterion, yet they denote the geographic diversity of their participant sample which includes families living in the Black Belt, as a result, their work is included in this examination of the socio-historical context of BHE in the Black Belt of the American South.

One major dynamic of BHE is a sense of safety, Mazama and Lundy (2014) address this when they state "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" (p. 269). Therefore, their study was intentional about seeking a wide geographical and increasingly specific sub-demographic to better understand the dynamic of home education operating within Black families. Those who chose to home educate due to their Christian faith. Mazama and Lundy (2014) noted:

> 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. (p. 257)

Doing an examination of these families' experiences was instructive as a common trope in homeschooling is that families choose to homeschool for religious reasons and to keep their faith and values explicitly separate from the ways that traditional public schools may negatively talk about or address their faith traditions. Note that their study discusses the interwoven choice to home educate for Christian reasons and how racial fairness and cultural relevance could be better achieved at home. Furthermore, Mazama and Lundy's (2015) study contributes to a more holistic understanding of Black families who are home educating in the Black Belt.

In their 2015 study, Mazama and Lundy found that Black home educating parents often prioritize teaching about African civilizations, Black inventors and leaders, and the civil rights movement. For instance, parents can use books, films, and other resources that reflect the experiences and perspectives of Black people. This approach helps to create a more engaging and relatable learning experience for Black children, fostering a love for learning and a deeper connection to their cultural roots. This approach not only provides a more comprehensive understanding of history but also empowers Black children by highlighting the achievements and contributions of their ancestors. By learning about their heritage, Black children can develop a stronger sense of identity and purpose, which is essential for their overall development, success, and sense of safety.

Afrocentric education goes beyond simply adding Black history to the curriculum; it re-centers the educational experience around African and African American perspectives. This was true for Monds (2022) who stated "Freedom from a compulsory system of education that seldom infused the type of literature, values, and experiences that were integral to life-long learning were top-of-mind" (p. 109). As a home educator, in Alabama, Monds articulates a major dynamic of home education: self-determination, freedom to choose, agency to determine learning by and with community. Monds goes on to discuss how her family home educated because "we wanted to create a learning environment that saw challenges and failures as an opportunity to learn and grow, and not as an opportunity to discourage" (p.115). This

disposition about the learning environment is integral to the dynamics that contribute to home educating, being able to take this approach challenges the dominant narratives that have historically marginalized Black voices and contributions. Choosing to center Afrocentric education, and self-determination provides for learning and outcomes that are more aligned with freedom and possibility. By doing so, home education, helps to empower Black students and foster a greater sense of pride and identity (Fields-Smith & Kisura, 2013).

Likewise, Fields-Smith and Baker's (2023) study which included Black mothers in rural places who home educate, found that the importance of teaching one's own history was critical. This dynamic around history and choice of curricular and learning opportunities was integral to what we know and understand about home educating in the Black Belt of the American South. Some study participants represented Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, and Texas. Furthermore, mothers in this study expressed an important notion for the development of home education and that is the "significance of the land" (p. 408).

Rural Black home educators reported strong connections between the land (owned by them and surrounding them) to their curriculum, home education practice, and transmission of values and life lessons to their children. Interestingly, both rural natives and transplants expressed experiencing these connections (p. 408-409). Like Mazama and Lundy (2015) recentering educational experience around African and African American perspectives included the land in the Fields-Smith and Baker study. The connection between the land and educational experience is valuable when considering the dynamics that shape BHE ensuring that the story of Black people in the South and the land are not just stories of dispossession and enslavement, yet of resilience, ownership, family, love, loss, and home (Howard & Baker, 2024). This framing of the land and its worth is not commonly present in standard educational curricula, this aspect is often not included in dominant narratives about BHE.

Including narratives of BHE means including the work of mothers. Several studies reviewed below are concentrated in the book "Homeschooling Black Children in the US: Theory, Practice, and Popular Culture" by Ali-Coleman and Fields-Smith (2022), this collection of auto-ethnographic studies of Black families provided some clear opportunities and challenges. Howard and Howard (2022), explore the experience of a mixed-race Black family, in North Carolina, who chose to homeschool in response to a racially toxic school environment. Utilizing a photovoice project from January to July 2020, the chapter documents their homeschooling journey, emphasizing themes of friendship, change, and creativity. The authors reflect on the freedom to learn as an act of marronage, drawing parallels to historical maroon communities that sought liberation from oppression. The study highlights the flexibility and cultural relevance of home educating, allowing for

a personalized and liberating educational experience. The chapter underscores the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy and the role of home educating in fostering a supportive and emotionally safe learning environment. Through their narrative, the Howards advocate for a reimagining of educational spaces that prioritize the well-being and holistic development of Black children.

Furthermore, Williams- Johnson (2022) in the same Ali-Coleman and Fields Smith edited book discusses her experiences in Georgia, the chapter begins with her initial hesitations and struggles with self-doubt when transitioning from a public-school teacher to a home educating parent during the COVID-19 pandemic. She outlines key influences on self-efficacy, such as mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and emotional states. Williams-Johnson shares personal anecdotes about overcoming challenges and building confidence through community support and reflection. She highlights the significance of creating a culturally relevant and academically rigorous homeschooling environment that fosters a positive racial identity and activism in her children. The chapter concludes with insights on the evolving nature of education, stressing the importance of patience, persistence, and collaborative efforts in achieving educational goals and building self-efficacy in both parents and children.

These stories, herstories of Black families who home education within the Black Belt of the American South is so necessary to understand the contemporary context of BHE. It also lends itself to better discuss how not being included in dominant narratives is a part of the contemporary challenge of Black home education. While there are concerns that legislation, lack of agency and autonomy (Peters, 2019), and faux comparisons to public schooling are challenges to BHE there are opportunities as well to provide the type of education that contributes to a democratic citizenry.

Contemporary opportunities and challenges

BHE in the Black Belt of the American South is a clear opportunity for families to provide a type of education for their children that aligns with greater protection for institutional and systemic racism, at least for a time, and with cultural norms and values (Williams-Johnson & Fields-Smith, 2022). More explicitly, "...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" (Mazama & Lundy, 2014, p. 270). This point by Mazama & Lundy is both an opportunity and a challenge.

For example, Hinnant- (2022) explores a mother's decision to homeschool during the COVID-19 pandemic, in North Carolina, and the broader implications of this choice for Black families. Using a critical autoethnographic

approach, the author documents the first-year homeschooling experience, highlighting the creation and implementation of a mission and vision for the home school. Her journey underscores the dual role of the mother as both an educator and a scholar, navigating the challenges of homeschooling while working full-time. The author also discusses the significance of creating a supportive and safe learning environment that fosters academic excellence and emotional well-being, particularly in the context of racial and educational inequities faced by Black children in traditional schools. By providing an adequate education for Black children many are going against the pervasive narrative that Black children and families are unconcerned with education.

Furthermore, what contributes to incomplete perceptions of home educating Black parents is that "…the literature remains incomplete without the lived experiences and perspectives of homeschooling according to African American students" (Williams, 2016, p. 111). The incomplete nature of literature is one of the challenges to and a challenge of BHE.

Williams's (2016) study, which included participants in Georgia, also highlights the opportunity that home education can be. In their findings, they indicate participants experienced the homeschooling environment as emotionally nurturing in marked contrast to their experiences in traditional schools. Furthermore, the research suggested homeschooling was experienced as a journey of self-discovery and that journey, coupled with the infusion of Afrocentricity, contributed to their self-confidence as academically prepared first-year college students (p. 116).

All of these positive benefits of BHE are evident in each of the studies that have been produced about BHE.

By home educating, parents can create a positive and supportive learning environment where their children feel safe and valued. This approach not only helps to protect Black children from the harmful effects of racism but also allows them to thrive academically and emotionally. Peters (2019) states this most profoundly:

> For Black home educators, this means that the preservation of Black childhood requires a higher level of parenting vigilance that necessarily includes some form of racial protectionism or protection against the subsequent treatment and consequences of living with racial stigma. (p. 44)

Home educating parents can tailor their vigilance, teaching methods, and organization of their day to meet the unique needs of their children. Being able to take a more tailored approach can be a challenge yet it is also a dynamic opportunity to provide individualized attention and support that is often lacking in traditional schools. Ultimately, BHE can ensure a child and family are able to learn and grow in a protected environment that honors their presence and abilities without demeaning or demanding that the child change to meet the school's expectation.

Discussion

Providing a socio-historical perspective on Black home education within the Black Belt of the American South, means writing about the struggles, triumphs, and opportunities given to Black families by Black families. It means writing about self- agency, and protection of children, to provide the right to privacy or right to be let alone (Peters, 2019). Black home educators are historically and present day a necessary and effective educational option. Black home educators are preparing citizens and doing so using methods that are culturally responsive and that promote self-agency, and freedom to learn. By reviewing literature and writing about this very important topic scholars are better able to understand that BHE is not a new phenomenon, the increase after COVID-19 is but one iteration of a history of resilience and self/community reliance.

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the socio-historical context of BHE within the Black Belt of the American South by addressing two primary research questions:

(1) What historical factors have influenced the development of BHE in the Black Belt?
(2) What are the socio-cultural dynamics that shape the contemporary opportunities and

challenges for BHE in the Black Belt?

The historical trajectory of BHE in the Black Belt is deeply rooted in resilience and a commitment to self-determination. Education for enslaved African Americans was prohibited, leading to clandestine efforts to learn and teach literacy as acts of resistance (Anderson, 1988). This foundational period set the stage for a tradition of valuing education. During Reconstruction, Black communities established schools with limited resources, often supported by Black churches and community organizations (Anderson, 1988). Despite progress, the Jim Crow era introduced significant setbacks, with segregation laws ensuring that public schools for Black children were underfunded and inadequately resourced (Fields-Smith, 2020).

The motivations for BHE historically were driven by the need to escape educational inequities, affirm cultural identity, and protect children from systemic racism (Fields-Smith, 2021). Contemporary studies continue to reflect these motivations, demonstrating that Black families seek alternatives to traditional schooling to provide a more supportive and culturally relevant educational experience (Hinnant-, 2022; Howard & Howard, 2022; Mazama & Lundy, 2015).

The contemporary dynamics of BHE are shaped by cultural relevance, community support, and the pursuit of educational equity. Culturally relevant

curricula that affirm Black history and identity counteract the Eurocentric narratives prevalent in traditional schools, fostering a positive self-identity and instilling pride in Black heritage (Mazama & Lundy, 2014, 2015; Musumunu & Mazama, 2014). Community support networks, such as those highlighted by Fields-Smith and Baker (2023), play a crucial role in sustaining BHE by providing resources, socialization opportunities, and a sense of belonging, which are essential for the success of home-educated children. The studies reviewed indicate that Black home educating families often participate in community events, cultural celebrations, and social justice initiatives, reinforcing the communal and collective aspects of education.

Moreover, the flexibility of homeschooling allows parents to tailor educational experiences to their children's needs, ensuring their safety and emotional well-being. Peters (2019) and Fields-Smith (2020) articulate how homeschooling serves as a protective measure against systemic racism and harsh disciplinary practices in public schools. This protective environment fosters academic and emotional growth, contributing to better educational outcomes.

Conclusion

The surge in homeschooling among Black families in the Black Belt is a response to both immediate concerns raised by the pandemic and long-standing issues related to racism and educational quality. This trend highlights the importance of understanding and addressing the unique educational needs and preferences of Black families, particularly in regions with a history of socio-economic and educational disparities.

The socio-historical context of BHE within the Black Belt of the American South is characterized by resilience, self-determination, and a deep commitment to education. From clandestine learning efforts during slavery to community-supported schools during Reconstruction and beyond, Black families have consistently sought to provide quality education despite systemic barriers.

Contemporary BHE continues to address historical inequities by emphasizing culturally relevant curricula, leveraging community support, and ensuring the safety and emotional well-being of children. As the trend toward homeschooling persists, it is vital to recognize and support the unique educational pathways chosen by Black families, honoring their rich cultural heritage and addressing ongoing challenges.

In summary, BHE in the Black Belt of the American South is not merely a reaction to immediate circumstances but a continuation of a historical legacy of educational self-determination and resistance. This enduring commitment

to education underscores the profound importance of supporting diverse educational practices that empower Black families and contribute to the broader goal of educational equity.

Disclosure statement

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