From Integration to Resegregation: Examining the Role of Black Clergy as 21st Century Leaders in Public Education Reform

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From Integration to Resegregation: Examining the Role of Black Clergy as 21st Century Leaders in Public Education Reform

Abstract
Recognized in American history as a leading force in the 20th century, the Black clergy played a prominent role in galvanizing a national movement to dismantle more than 100 years of government-sponsored racial segregation in US public. In spite of the significant role the black clergy played reforming the institution of public education in the 20th century, there is a growing body of scholars who describe the 21st century Black clergy as ineffective in advancing education reform in US public schools. Building upon the works of Middleton and Edwards, this qualitative study used a phenomenological research method to gather perceptions from secular and non-secular groups on the role of the Black clergy in advancing education reform in a failed local public school district. This qualitative research used individual in-depth interviews of 12 participants, and two focus groups: one with three Black ministers and the other with 10 non-clergy community members, to capture their experiences. The participants were selected using stakeholder groups from previous research on public school. The findings offered insight into causes for why the Black clergy is viewed as ineffective and what this body might do to regain its reputation as a leading force for public education reform in the 21st century. Analysis yielded five emergent themes, including unique characteristics of the Black clergy, roles and expectations of Black clergy, new issues for public school reform, leadership opportunities to improve public schools, and barriers to equality. Implications include areas for Black clergy to consider when addressing public school reform. Recommendations include strategies for Black clergy to employ as leaders with influence over policy and practices related to public school reform, in addition to recommendations for future research to advance the role of Black clergy in addressing public school reform.

Document Type
Dissertation

Degree Name
Doctor of Education (EdD)

Department
Executive Leadership

Subject Categories
Education
From Integration to Resegregation:

Examining the Role of Black Clergy as 21st Century Leaders in Public Education Reform

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements of the degree

Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by

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St. John Fisher College

May 2014
Dedication

“The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education.”

–Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

I would like to first thank God, who unselfishly and undeservingy has blessed me from birth. I entered this world adversely, and I continued to triumph since that time. It is with deep and sincere gratitude that I dedicate this manuscript to the memory of my mother, Christine Fortune, who has been my greatest champion throughout life. Without her, I would have never achieved anything. In addition, I dedicate this manuscript to the memory of my Aunts Mary “Baby Sis” and Julia Coleman, who have been a constant support to me, especially after the death of my mother. This manuscript is especially dedicated to my father in the ministry, pastor and mentor, Rev. Dr. Richard H. Dixon, Jr., for accepting my call to the ministry, blazing the path for pastoral and civil rights leadership, and for being a perfect example of a pastor with a heart for the people.

This manuscript is particularly dedicated to my three children, Coleman, Chakka and Danny and ten grandchildren in hopes that they will continue to strive for a better education and achievement. I would like to thank the rest of my family for their encouragement and the Macedonia Baptist Church family for their belief in my pastoral leadership. To my Executive Mentor, Dr. Richard Sinatra, and Professional Mentor, Dr. Andre McKenzie, thank you for your support over the years and through this dissertation process. I would not have made it without your assistance. I am grateful to my former
secretary, Maureen Devine, for always being my support for 18 years. Special thanks to the participants of this study because your stories were insightful and inspiring to my leadership as a minister in the community.

I am extremely grateful for my experience at St. John Fisher College (CNR campus) and my journey with Cohort Three, especially Group 2 – Eyes on the Prize. Each of you has deposited greatly into my life, and I will never forget your contributions. This journey has been difficult and thrilling at the same time. My committee, Dr. Claudia L. Edwards and Dr. Frank Auriemma, you have been exceptional mentors and guides throughout my dissertation journey. Thank you, both, for pushing me beyond my perceived limitations. Finally, this manuscript is dedicated to all the young men and women who experience poverty as a child, may they seek achievement through education, and are inspired to reach for higher heights.
Biographical Sketch

Born and raised in Mount Vernon, NY, educated in the Mount Vernon School System, and a graduate of Mount Vernon High School, Rev. Darren M. Morton is an executive leader, specifically in Social Action, Urban Ministry, College Administration, and not-for-profit governance.

Rev. Morton is the seventh pastor and religious leader of the Historic Macedonia Baptist Church in Mount Vernon, NY. His love of God brought him to the pulpit in 1994, under the tutelage of the great Reverend Dr. Richard H. Dixon, Jr., and he was ordained in 1997. He currently serves as the Commissioner of Recreation for the City of Mount Vernon, NY, and has held several administrative positions at Hofstra University and St. John’s University. Previously, he served as the Associate Vice President for Student Affairs and was the Director of the Vincentian Institute for Social Action, (VISA) at St. John’s University in Queens, NY.

Rev. Morton is a graduate of Hofstra and St. John’s Universities, where he received his Bachelor of Business Administration and Masters of Education degrees, respectively. He is a graduate of the Tabernacle Bible Institute and Manhattan Bible Institute and has taken graduate theology courses at St. John’s University.

Rev. Morton is the proud father of three adult children: Coleman, Chakka, and Daniel, 10 grandchildren, and one great grandchild.
Abstract

Recognized in American history as a leading force in the 20th century, the Black clergy played a prominent role in galvanizing a national movement to dismantle more than 100 years of government-sponsored racial segregation in US public. In spite of the significant role the black clergy played reforming the institution of public education in the 20th century, there is a growing body of scholars who describe the 21st century Black clergy as ineffective in advancing education reform in US public schools. Building upon the works of Middleton and Edwards, this qualitative study used a phenomenological research method to gather perceptions from secular and non-secular groups on the role of the Black clergy in advancing education reform in a failed local public school district.

This qualitative research used individual in-depth interviews of 12 participants, and two focus groups: one with three Black ministers and the other with 10 non-clergy community members, to capture their experiences. The participants were selected using stakeholder groups from previous research on public school. The findings offered insight into causes for why the Black clergy is viewed as ineffective and what this body might do to regain its reputation as a leading force for public education reform in the 21st century. Analysis yielded five emergent themes, including unique characteristics of the Black clergy, roles and expectations of Black clergy, new issues for public school reform, leadership opportunities to improve public schools, and barriers to equality. Implications include areas for Black clergy to consider when addressing public school reform. Recommendations include strategies for Black clergy to employ as leaders with influence over policy and practices related to public school reform, in addition to recommendations
for future research to advance the role of Black clergy in addressing public school reform.
Table of Contents

Dedication .......................................................................................................................... iii
Biographical Sketch ............................................................................................................. v
Abstract .............................................................................................................................. vi
Table of Contents ............................................................................................................. viii
List of Tables ....................................................................................................................... x
Chapter 1: Introduction .....................................................................................................10
  Introduction .....................................................................................................................10
  Problem Statement .......................................................................................................15
  Theoretical Rationale .................................................................................................19
  Statement of Purpose .................................................................................................27
  Research Questions ....................................................................................................28
  Potential Significance of the Study .............................................................................28
  Definition of Terms ....................................................................................................29
  Chapter Summary .......................................................................................................30
Chapter 2: Review of Literature .......................................................................................33
  Introduction and Purpose ............................................................................................33
  Review of Literature ...................................................................................................38
  Chapter Summary .......................................................................................................65
Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology .......................................................................68
  Introduction .....................................................................................................................68
  Research Context .........................................................................................................72

viii
## List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.1</td>
<td>Themes and Sub-Themes</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.1</td>
<td>Description of Individual Interview Participants</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.2</td>
<td>Description of Individual Participants by Gender</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.3</td>
<td>Description of Non-Clergy Focus-Group Participants</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.4</td>
<td>Description of Non-Clergy Focus-Group Participants by Gender</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.5</td>
<td>Description of Black Clergy Focus Group Participants</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.6</td>
<td>Description of Black Clergy Participants by Gender</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.7</td>
<td>Frequencies of Themes from Interviews and Focus Groups</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.8</td>
<td>Theme #1: Unique Characteristics of the Black Church</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.9</td>
<td>Theme #2. Roles and Expectation of Black Clergy</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.10</td>
<td>Theme #3. New Issues in Public Education Reform</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.11</td>
<td>Theme #4. Leadership Opportunities</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.12</td>
<td>Theme #5: Barriers to Public Education Reform</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

The Black church in America has played a pivotal role in the African-American experience, especially in its effort to address social and economic challenges that Blacks have faced. Some scholars have characterized religion as a form of social control that aided Blacks to survive slavery and racial segregation (Harris, 2001). Although philosophies have varied regarding how faith-based organizations should address social and economic challenges, Black clergy\(^1\) have generally agreed on the need for engagement in community outreach and involvement in political affairs (Carlton-LaNey, 2006; Harris, 2001; McKenzie, 2004). Since the early 20\(^{th}\) century, religion has been central to the political and social engagement of Blacks in America.

Prior to the turn of the 20\(^{th}\) century, efforts for social change in Black communities included mutual aid for social, economic, and racial advancement. According to Carlton-LaNey (2005), the Black community fought for survival through mutual-aid organizations and civic engagement. Carlton-LaNey (2006) stated, “Enthusiastic civic engagement was a necessary response to the exclusion of African Americans from private and governmental social programs . . . both social and political civic engagement have held historical prominence in the African-American community” (Carlton-LaNey, 2006, p. 47). Black clergy demonstrated this enthusiasm during the civil

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\(^1\) For the purpose of this work, and depending on the sense of the sentence, the collective noun “Black clergy” will be considered as either singular or plural.
rights movement when they took the mantle of leadership to harness social capital in their communities (Carlton-LaNey, 2006). For example, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., a Baptist preacher, civil rights leader and congressman, who led the fight for equality employment and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther Kings, Jr., who launched his fight against injustice during the Montgomery Boycott (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

In stark contrast to the role Black clergy played in the fight for racial equality and access to equal education during the civil rights movement, today their role is uncertain, specifically in communities where “resegregation” has occurred. Resegregation is demonstrated in U.S. cities where the White population has moved out of the urban areas and the Black population is the new majority. Thus, the neighborhoods are again “segregated,” not by law but by fact. With the new resegregation, there is a reduction in the demand for housing, which lowers property values and ultimately depresses the local economy. The depressed local economy results in a lower tax base upon which to draw funds for the local schools, making education reform difficult.

This change in the political landscape where Blacks are the new majority raises important questions as to what the role is of Black clergy in the struggle for education reform in these cities. In an effort to learn public perceptions of Black clergy as leaders in the fight for urban education reform today, this research used an interpretive case study of clergy and non-clergy (educators, parents, and community leaders) in the urban community of Mount Vernon in Westchester County, NY. This research gained insight into the lived experiences of these individuals through the lens of two theoretical frameworks: critical race theory (CRT) and social capital theory (SCT).
Public education is an important component of the social and cultural structures available for the benefit of the individual in a free and democratic society. Yosso (2005) argued the importance of race and racism in social structures and exposed how race and racism influence these institutions. CRT scholars (Coffin, 2011; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) postulated that persistent racism is a result of governance created by racist hierarchical institutions. Segregation and educational equality are a profound social justice issue for the Black community in America; therefore, CRT is an appropriate lens through which to examine the effects of race and racism on public education reform.

Results from research on social capital theory by Putnam (2000), and confirmed by Norris and Inglehart (2004), proposed that Black church membership has nurtured increased organizational commitment to other social and recreational groups that help advance causes of social justice. More specifically, the Black church has functioned as a systematic form of relief for the African-American community (Carlton-LaNey, 2006) and has traditionally assumed the role of caretaker for the entire community, inclusive of non-church members. The Black church and its mission have inspired the Black community to participate in activities of civic engagement. While the Black church has provided an array of social services, such as food, clothing, shelter, and other emergency services, all of which are extremely important to the civic life of the community, there is ample evidence of Black clergy’s efforts to mobilize social and political change in Black urban communities (Henig, Hula, Orr, & Pedescleaux, 1999; Smith, 2004). The church is a social network (Putnam, 1993) and a building block for social capital. According to Putnam (2000), the Black church, in particular, is “... central to social capital and civic
engagement in the African American community” (p. 68). SCT is the lens through which this study examines the role of Black clergy in public education reform.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. initiated a national movement of civic action in order to dismantle government-sponsored segregation of public institutions, in particular, public schools (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Taylor, 1994). In the wake of the watershed Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), Dr. King’s efforts led directly to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Findings from Orfield (2001) showed how, despite legislation against segregation, segregation prevails in a majority of school districts throughout regions across America. While Gallop (1999) poll data showed that Americans, both Blacks and Whites, believe that desegregation improves education, Orfield found that public schools in southern states remain more segregated today than they were prior to the 1950s, and that northern states show patterns of segregation similar to what was seen prior to the Supreme Court’s landmark decision.

School segregation patterns persist despite the mandates of several subsequent Supreme Court rulings, such as *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, (1970) and *Keyes v. School District No. 1, Denver, Colorado* (1973). The Swann case authorized busing in the urban cities in the south, and the Keyes case extended the desegregation law beyond the southern states to all 50 United States (Frankenburg, Lee, & Orfield, 2003). In more recent years, U.S. Court rulings have resulted in resegregation into patterns that date back to those that existed before the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. For example,
In 1995, Judge Richard P. Matsch, who had presided over court supervision of Denver’s desegregation plan, declared that “the vestiges of past discrimination by the defendants have been eliminated to the extent practicable” (“Court oversight,” 1995), and, with his decree, ended mandated desegregation in the Denver Public Schools (Horn & Kurlaender, 2006).

These U.S. Court rulings, as well as changes in public policies and the high cost of housing, has resulted in resegregation of communities and public school districts. Results from Orfield and Lee (2006) revealed the return of the neighborhood school in several urban school districts with Black majority populations, including Detroit, Kansas City, St. Louis, Cincinnati, and Cleveland. The study reported that resegregation in Detroit produced neighborhood schools where more than 96% of the students are of minority or majority descent. Many of these schools are in the same districts that benefited most from desegregation laws in the 1950s and 1960s. The study also reported that recent federal laws limiting desegregation policies have supported resegregation in many of these urban districts. Orfield and Lee (2006) found that resegregation, as a result of the return of neighborhood schools, requires a more deliberate plan for desegregation to maintain a multiracial school district and to avoid “White flight,” which is the departure of Whites from places, such as urban neighborhoods or schools, which creates a predominantly minority-populated area.

This study examined the role of the Black clergy in public education reform, specifically in an urban environment, and expanded the literature on this topic. There is extensive research on the role of the Black church as an organization in political, social, and economic matters; however, limited research exists on the influential role of Black
clergy in education reform. While there is acknowledgement of Black clergy as political leaders, minimal research has been devoted to their civic influence, whether through informal or formal methods (Jelen, 2001; McKenzie, 2004), nor is there extensive research on Black clergy and their influence in the area of urban education reform. The researcher sought to understand the historical role Black clergy have played in this regard; how their role has changed since the civil rights movement era; and what their role in the struggle for public education reform may be in the future. The notion was first introduced by DuBois (1903)—that the problem of the 20th century is the color line—rings as true today as it did during the civil rights movement: the nation’s Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, has declared that disparity in education, especially in urban communities, is today’s civil rights issue (Duncan, 2011).

**Problem Statement**

Historically, Black clergy have been in the forefront of movements that have challenged inequities suffered among the African-American community. Research has shown that people believe religious organizations and their clergy have been more effective in galvanizing the community than any other social entity (Gallop, 2001; Putnam, 2000). Black clergy have used their pulpits to organize their communities around social justice issues. They have leveraged social networks to generate social interaction focused on a shared goal (Minkoff, 1997). Burton (2007) observed, “During the Civil Rights era, Black churches continued to be social and political power bases for their communities” (p. 3). Despite the Black clergy’s historic leadership to cultivate the desire for social change, Frankenburg et al. (2003) asserted that there is “no significant leadership” (p. 67) focused on creating successfully integrated schools. Findings from
Frankenburg et al. concluded, “Civil rights goals have not been accomplished” (p. 67). Black clergy has failed to harness a collective voice to demand improvement in urban education (Middleton, 2001).

Black clergy today have yet to find the balance between religious responsibility and civic responsibility. Researchers have asserted that Black clergy, similar to their role in other social and political matters, have the potential to serve as agents for education reform and to hold elected and appointed leaders accountable (Gaines, 2010; Middleton, 2001). Harvey (2012) challenged the Black clergy when he declared that public education reform in America is at the pinnacle of the moral crisis affecting some of the nation’s most racially divided inner cities. Middleton (2001), however, best described the problem when he stated, . . . the considerable power of the African-American church has not been harnessed to speak with a united voice and demand better schools for urban students” (p. 428).

In a study of 25 African American church leaders in three urban school districts on the role of the African American churches, Middleton (2001) finds that there is a great demand for resources to implement an effective urban education reform agenda and to hold school boards, superintendents, and teachers accountable for measurable improvements. R. D. Smith (2004) charged Black clergy to take up the mantle of leadership when he identified three institutions that have advanced political activism among African Americans: Black advocacy organizations, Black elected officials, and Black churches. Smith’s study on public-policy practices of African-America churches found that members expect their clergy to maintain the political momentum from the civil rights movement in the new political landscape.
Smith (2004) articulates how political opinion in the new political landscape is very fragmented, in sharp contrast to the powerful consensus that Black communities and their leaders leveraged in the wake of the civil rights movement. In the past, Black clergy gave priority to the fight against racial inequality. In Atlanta, for example, Black clergy were instrumental in “negotiating the compromise that desegregated the Atlanta public schools and provided for the hiring of substantial numbers of African-American teachers and the first Black superintendent” (Pedesclaux, 2004, p. 144). Today, however, opinions differ on how to achieve justice in areas such as public education reform (Smith, 2004). In a national survey of nearly 2,000 Black congregations, Smith revealed a lack of consensus on public education reform among members of the Black church across America, for example:

When a subsample of 324 respondents was asked about government interest in channeling education tax dollars toward vouchers for private education, 43 percent of the respondents agreed with the policy (10 percent strongly agreeing), but 54 percent disagreed (35 percent strongly disagreeing). When asked about government interest in funding churches to provide social services, 46 percent agreed with this initiative (8 percent strongly agreeing), but 52 percent disagreed (33 percent strongly disagreeing). (p. 14)

Today the crisis in education has tremendous urgency, and the changing political dynamics between Black advocacy organizations, Black elected officials, and Black churches require a careful examination of these new trends. It is essential to examine the new role Black clergy play in communities like Detroit, Kansas City, St. Louis, Cincinnati, and Cleveland, where a new majority holds the reins of power. In Black-led
cities, local citizens are reluctant to criticize Black leaders, including teachers, administrators, and elected or appointed officials. Black teachers, for example, can garner the support of the Black community simply on the basis of race and relationship with Black clergy and congregations (Pedescleaux, 2004). In the wake of the civil rights movement, Black clergy were among the greatest advocates for school improvements and education equality. Now that the political leadership has changed from White to Black, these same clergy have failed to hold other Black leaders accountable. Edwards (2008) found that the new Black majority in Mount Vernon, NY, “ . . . lack experience in being constructively critical of people they put in office and to hold them accountable while maintaining friendship or long-held relationships” (p. 251). Pedescleaux (2004) characterized Black clergy as an obstacle to public education reform. He held that “Black social capital,” that is, social networks nurtured by the Black church, works against, rather than in support of, public education reform. Black clergy are motivated to safeguard control of the education system, sometimes at the detriment of much-needed reform (Pedescleaux, 2004).

Pedescleaux (2004) proposed that Black clergy are among the greatest influencers in the Black community; and specifically, they must play a critical role in public education reform. Drawing upon work done in four Black-led cities, as part of the Civic Capacity and Urban Education Project, Pedescleaux asserted that Black clergy are critical to the mobilization of all community members, not just their Black congregants.

Notwithstanding the positive findings of the Civic Capacity and Urban Education Project that Black clergy have the ability to attract a broad range of constituencies, including both Black and White politicians, teachers, school administrators, parents, and
the community-at-large, Pedescleaux postulated that Black clergy face huge challenges to bring about urban education reform. These challenges include, but are not limited to, race and racial consciousness, the impact of reform on economic and employment opportunities, and the difficulty of building and sustaining coalitions for change.

Findings from Edwards (2008), within the same research context (Mount Vernon, NY) as this study, suggested that the new majority in Mount Vernon, NY, African Americans, struggle to establish sustainable coalitions because of "ideological differences" (p. 214) within ethnic groups. The literature is limited, however, in addressing how these and other challenges have affected the role of Black clergy in urban education reform. This study advanced the findings of the Civic Capacity and Urban Education Project, as well as the study conducted by Edwards (2008), relative to the perceived lack of leadership among Black clergy to mobilize a massive urban education reform movement similar to the civil rights movement. The researcher used an interpretive case study of the Black clergy, educators, parents, and community leaders in the urban community of Mount Vernon, Westchester County, NY. Mount Vernon is a diverse city where Blacks are the new majority. Of 67,292 residents, 63.4% are Black, 24.3% are White, and 14.3% are Hispanic or Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

**Theoretical Rationale**

In spite of the significant role played by Black clergy in education reform throughout the 20th century leading up to the civil rights movement, there is a growing perception among its congregations of the 21st century that their influence has diminished since the civil rights movement (Middleton, 2001). This research examined the role of Black clergy as leaders for social justice in the 21st century and sought to understand why
Black clergy have not played leadership roles in urban education reform. To gain insight into this phenomenon, the researcher examined the lived experiences of Black clergy through the lens of two supportive theoretical frameworks: critical race theory (CRT) and social capital theory (SCT).

This study draws on the work of Derrick Bell (1979, 1987, 1992), in particular on the components of CRT applicable to understanding educational equality. As described by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), CRT, “like its antecedent in legal scholarship [critical legal theory], is a radical critique of both the status quo and the purported reforms” (p. 62). Coffin (2011) argued that CRT whets a desire to advance educational reform more rapidly than subtly, because it offers a conceptual framework for understanding inequalities in education as a byproduct of race and racism.

The CRT framework reveals a harsh reality in the historic fight for social justice and equality in education for Blacks in America. The advance from the civil rights movement resulted in opportunities for existing and emerging leaders to inherit newly elected and appointed positions in government. In spite of these advances, however, conditions have worsened in Black communities, and members blame their Black leaders for safeguarding the status quo. Through the lens of CRT, this study gained insight into the perceived and real behaviors of Black clergy and why the Black community judges their behavior as nothing more than government-sponsored segregation.

In addition to CRT, social capital theory (SCT) served as a critical lens for this research. Within the framework of SCT, the researcher examined the potential for Black clergy to garner resources, develop social networks, and harness the collective power of the church to galvanize Black communities to civic action for education reform. The
church in any community provides social capital for its members, as defined by Bourdieu (1986), one of the original SCT theorists. More recent studies (Putnam, 2000) asserted that social capital aids future productivity of individuals and groups in society and has as its “conceptual cousin, ‘community’” (p. 21). Middleton (2001) corroborated evidence that social networks heighten opportunities for Black clergy to affect social change in the best interest of the collective. His findings, however, confirmed that Black clergy have not deployed the collective power of their churches effectively. They have failed to affect change at the varying levels of education policymaking, for instance, district superintendents, school boards, and local and state politicians.

**Critical race theory.** CRT emerged in the mid-1970s in response to inadequacies of critical legal studies (CLS) to address race and racism in the United States (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Troubled by the inability of American society to effectively reform racial discrimination, Degaldo and Stefancic (2001), Derrick Bell (1979), and Alan Freeman (1977) provided the original scholarship to introduce CRT.

In their early works, Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman voiced their doubts about the liberal philosophical view that legislation, born of the civil rights movement, is color blind (Delgado & Stefancic, 2005). They exposed ways that laws in America foster self-interest and maintain control over social and structural institutions by Whites (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Kumasi, 2011). Although CRT, as a body of legal scholarship, has its origins in 1960s’ civil rights movement, it has historical ties to scholarship on race that dates back to the social experience of Blacks as early as the 18th century, including works by W. E. B. DuBois and Carter G. Woodson (Kumasi, 2011).
Critical race theory consists of five majors tenants: (a) counter storytelling portrays and articulates the experience of the oppressed not found in Critical Legal Studies; (b) racism is endemic in American society as a means to maintain control over the prevailing social and structural institutions; (c) Whiteness, as property and a sense of value, are synonymous with individual worth; (d) social change, such as that achieved by the civil rights movement, is only achieved as a result of White “buy-in”; and (e) the concept of color blindness is limiting and does not account for the lack of opportunity, subjugation, or injustice suffered by Blacks in American society (Ladson-Billing & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997).

Tate (1997) characterized color blindness as follows: . . . legal and political scholars of color question whether the philosophical underpinnings of traditional liberal civil rights discourse—a color-blind approach—are capable of supporting continued movement toward social justice in a climate of retrenchment” (p. 203). The concept of color blindness is a liberal notion that exempts race and racism from a discussion of the civic issues addressed by civil rights legislation, such a voting rights. Tate (1997) also exposes the conservative notion that when Blacks do not share in the benefits of American society, it is the fault of the individual. As an example, she offers the point of view of a U.S. legislator: “Speaker of the House Gingrich acknowledged the reality of racial inequality; however, his color-blind approach to policymaking impeded him from moving beyond the recommendation of ‘pulling yourself up by your boot-straps’” (p. 203). CRT critiques both liberal and conservative notions to approach a truth that challenges the commonly stated goal of equal opportunity in American schools (Blake, 1973). CRT exposes the fact that racism has explicitly shaped social institutions in
America throughout the 20th century and continues in more subtle ways to impact these same institutions today (Yosso, 2005).

CRT scholarship gives voice to the oppressed. In their examination of school inequality, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) identified three relevant premises:

1. Race remains significant in America.
2. American society is profoundly dependent upon property rights.
3. Race and property are inseparable when analyzing school inequality.

When as powerful an American politician as Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education, calls urban education reform today’s civil rights issue (Duncan, 2011), CRT scholars have a unique opportunity. They have an opportunity to expose the civil rights movement for what it was: a legal exercise to confer civil rights, while denying property rights. Because property rights are the source of equal opportunity in education, not civil rights, urban education reform remains unaddressed. An examination of Black clergy’s role in public education reform begs the question why Black clergy are not as committed to equality in public education today as they were during the civil rights movement. The three aforementioned premises of CRT are attempts to provide new perspectives on the persistence of racism in American public schools (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

CRT theorists (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Yosso, 2005) recognized that much of the discussion about racism in America demands a transformational process of theorizing the concept of race. Although many scholars have attempted to analyze race in the limited context of associations with social inequality, others (Ladson-Billing & Tate, 1995; Omi & Winant, 1994; Yosso, 2005) have suggested that when analyzing race and educational inequalities there are other paradigms to explore. Omi and Winant
(1994) emphasized that the impact of race cannot be examined void of social-structure and cultural significance, and CRT scholars Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) agreed.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) introduced the notion that a government created to protect property rights cannot address human rights with equal priority. Bell (1992) examined the historical impact of slavery on African Americans and the conflict created by the government’s insistence to preserve slaves as property over advocating for their human rights. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) contended that protecting property rights in the post-civil-rights movement era protects Whiteness. CRT theorists measure self-worth in American society by the degree to which one possesses Whiteness, that is, the knowledge and benefits of social networks (i.e., social capital) (Putnam, 2000) enjoyed by the upper and middle classes in this hierarchical society. Black clergy have traditionally played a leadership role in providing social networks for Black communities in America. Social capital theory provides insight into the role of Black clergy in public education reform.

**Social capital theory.** SCT is an extension of social theory, which was essential to the development of sociology in the 19th century (Baert, 1998). Social theory has evolved into two schools of thought: (a) structuralism and (b) functionalism. Structuralism examines how social structures influence an individual’s thoughts and actions, while functionalism holds that individuals’ roles and desires determine social structures (Baert, 1998). Pierre Bourdieu was a structuralist, who advanced the concept of SCT in the late 20th century together with social theorists Glen C. Loury and James S. Coleman (Farr, 2004). More recent SCT scholars, such as Putnam (2000), however,
traced traditions of social capital theory back to the “grand theorists of economic sociology: Marx, Weber, Simmel, and Durkheim” (p. 7).

Farr (2004) concluded:

Social capital is complexly conceptualized as the network of associations, activities, or relations that bind people together as a community via certain norms and psychological capacities, notably trust, which are essential for civil society and productive of future collective action or goods, in the manner of other forms of capital. (p. 9)

Sociologists James Coleman (1968) and Pierre Bourdieu (1986) defined social capital as a form of cultural capital in education. This insight offered by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977)—that knowledge associated with the upper and middle classes is valuable capital (social capital) in a hierarchical society—explains the significantly lower educational outcomes of Blacks in comparison to their White counterparts. Yosso (2005) wrote, “If one is not born into a family whose knowledge is already deemed valuable, one could then access the knowledge of the middle and upper class and the potential for social mobility through formal schooling” (p. 70). This perspective assumes that Blacks lack social capital because of race and class background, and therefore, are “disadvantaged” or incapable of achieving social mobility (Yosso, 2005). Ironically, Blacks in America benefit from schools that are structured based upon the assumption that Blacks are “disadvantaged.” Carter G. Woodson (1933) argued that the American education system gives the advantage to White students, instilling a sense of worth and achievement, while inculcating Black students with oppressive thoughts of despair and inequality. Anzaldua (1990) challenged this disempowering notion that Blacks lack
intellectual, social, and cultural capital when he asserted that empowering theory must replace disempowering theory.

Putnam’s theory of social capital is empowering. It incorporates two major phenomena: a structural phenomenon that identifies social networks, that is, the interactions among friends, neighbors, and colleagues, and a cultural phenomenon that identifies the collaborative efforts and social norms generated through social networks (Norris & Inglehart, 2004; Putnam, 2000). Social networks, a form of social capital, continue to have an impact on social change in the Black community.

Putnam (2000) proposed that religious institutions, in particular, nurture social capital. In Black communities across America, church membership and church activities bind people together as a community, in part by building trust among members and between clergy and members. Putnam’s work served as a framework for this study to examine the importance of community leader trust, specifically as it relates to Black clergy and their involvement in public education reform.

In his study of Black clergy in Chicago, Harris (1999) found that they build social networks through church activities to coordinate social change in the Black community. This phenomenon is also evident by the historical involvement of the Black church in community outreach. Black churches have not only served as “places of worship for congregants, but also as the incubator behind schools” (Harris, 2001, p. 142). Historically, the Black church has provided support for schools, including the creation of educational programs and services to congregants, such as financial support to pay for school operations and teachers. Prior to civil rights legislation addressing desegregation in American schools, the Black church was one of the only places where people of color
could get an education. Black clergy have historically nurtured group identity and
mobilized the community (Johnson, 2007) to take civic action to reform education.
Traditionally, religious social networks of Blacks in America have helped to
communicate essential political and social information and to increase the level of Black
activism (McKenzie, 2004). Theories, such as Clarence Stone’s civic capacity theory and
his theory of neighborhood civic participation, build upon Bourdieu’s (1986) and
Putnam’s (2000) concepts by focusing on neighborhood civic engagement that generates
activism.

Today, however, Black clergy lack the leadership they have offered in the past to
generate activism among Black communities in support of education reform. Because
many of them serve in appointed and elected positions in cities where African Americans
are the new majority, their congregants may see them as part of the problem in the fight
for social justice. This perception of Black clergy by their congregants is particularly
complicated. It is one of the many complicated perceptions for which the theoretical
frameworks of critical race theory and social capital theory can provide insight.

**Statement of Purpose**

The objective of this study was to examine Black clergy in Mount Vernon, NY
and their role in public education reform in the post-civil rights movement era. The study
sought to understand the factors that affect how Black clergy perceive their leadership
role in transforming public education in Mount Vernon and how they are perceived by
their peers and other members of the community as leaders in the pursuit of addressing
issues of the inequalities in public education. The findings may prove to be invaluable
for Black clergy to find what role they should play in public education reform and,
certainly, to advance the literature on the role of Black clergy in public education reform in the 21st century.

**Research Questions**

The dissertation focused on the role of Black clergy in reforming public education in America. The research was rooted in the historic value Black clergy have contributed to the struggle for equal opportunity for Blacks before and during the civil rights movement. The study examined the question whether Black clergy will or can lead the fight for public education reform today. The research questions were as follows:

1. What are the perceptions of the Black clergy regarding the role of the Black church in fighting for education reform in urban communities where a new majority prevails?
2. What is the role of the Black clergy now that the fight for social justice in public schools may involve holding accountable leaders of the new majority?
3. What are the new issues affecting education equality in these communities?
4. What opportunities can Black clergy build upon to advance their role as leaders in education reform?
5. What are the barriers that impede the role of Black clergy to serve as a major influence in advancing educational reform?

**Potential Significance of the Study**

Despite historic involvement in a range of political and social issues in the pre-civil rights movement era, today Black clergy are not similarly involved in public education reform. This research assumed that the quality of public education in America is a civil rights issue and that Black clergy have an important responsibility to address
inequalities in education as part of a civil rights agenda. Similar to previous efforts in the struggle for civil rights, Black clergy in urban communities today must be part of a political infrastructure with strength and knowledge to establish a reform agenda that addresses the needs of urban students (Middleton, 2001). Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, has called public education reform the civil rights issue of the day (Duncan, 2011), yet there is limited research to provide an understanding of the factors that affect the role of Black clergy in addressing public education reform.

Drawing on professional experience as a local minister in Mount Vernon, NY, the researcher tested the assertion that Black clergy have a critical role to play in improving public education, collectively, rather than independently, through the efforts of their respective churches. Findings from Middleton (2001) concluded that public education reform in an urban setting requires a system approach, as well as the collective power of the church, if it is to be successful. The significance of this study, therefore, is its contribution to the literature as well as its practical application for clergy in urban communities. The study’s results helped to define the changing role of Black clergy in leading a nation of the new majority in educational reform.

Definition of Terms

*Black or Negro* is interchangeably used in this study to refer to any individual of African, African American, or Caribbean American descent living in America.

*Black church* used as a singular term to refer to the collective congregations within the traditional Black religious experience (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).
Black clergy is defined as religious leaders in the United States of American from African American, or Caribbean American descent, leading congregations in the prominent Black denominations (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

United Black Clergy of Westchester (UBC) is a coalition organization created over 40 years ago to discuss and collectives address issues affecting the Black community. The organization consists of approximately 30 – 40 ministers in the southern Westchester County area, primarily in Mount Vernon, NY.

Communities of color refer to deprived, poor or working class and urban communities where a large majority of the population is Black and Latino (Yosso, 2005).

Education reform refers to public education in American cities; it is also referred to as urban education reform or public education reform (Henig et al., 1999; Middleton, 2001; Pedescleaux, 2004)

Resegregation is the result of the moving away of Whites from U.S. cities, whereby the Blacks and Latinos are the new majority population. The resulting neighborhood schools are thereby de facto segregated. (Orfield, 2001; Orfield & Lee, 2006)

White flight refers to the migration of Whites from a culturally mixed school district that leads to resegregation when Whites withdraw from school districts and the urban neighborhood, leaving non-Whites as the majority populations. (Frankenburg, Lee, & Orfield, 2003)

Chapter Summary

The Black church has been an integral force in the fight for social justice throughout American history. From the slave insurrections of the 1800s up to the civil
rights movement, Black clergy have been at the forefront in the fight for racial equality. Their efforts culminated in government-mandated segregation of public schools by the U.S. Supreme Court’s landmark ruling in Brown v. Board of Education (1954). Despite such advances, the consequences of legally mandated desegregation were neither longstanding nor all positive. Today, in many areas, American public schools have become segregated again (resegregated) in patterns dating back to the pre-civil rights movement era.

While Black clergy have led the fight against racial inequality and mobilized the community around other social-justice issues in the past, they appear to be absent from the fight for public education reform today. This study used critical race theory and social capital theory to examine the role of Black clergy in public education reform. The purpose of the study was to explore the lived experiences of Black clergy in order to expand upon earlier scholarship by DuBois (1903) and Woodson (1933) who argued that the permanence of race in America is due to the phenomenon that Whiteness is the acceptable validation of self-worth in American society. The permanence of race in America has impeded social mobility among people of color since the early 19th century, and it continues to undermine public education today.

Historically, the Black church has been instrumental in mediating social and political issues for Blacks in America. Life, in many Black communities, has become more sophisticated, comprehensive, and focused over the years. The basic needs that Black churches have addressed in the past—poverty and quality education as a means to address poverty—remain unmet. The Black church and its clergy play a pivotal and central role in actualizing social change in Black communities (Carlton-LaNey, 2006).
Specifically, public education reform remains a critical issue today and has a tremendous impact on Black communities. Black clergy are faced with the challenge of mobilizing the community around what Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, has called today’s civil rights issue (Duncan, 2011). Despite a history of heroic efforts by Black clergy to address racial and social injustice before and during the civil rights movement, Black urban communities today think that their clergy are inadequate to lead the fight for change in an area of such critical need as public education. The review of the literature to follow provides historical and theoretical explanations for the role of Black clergy in public education reform. The focus in the literature review is on education reform and community action through the critical lens of both CRT and SCT.

Chapter 2 provides a review of literature on the historic role of the Black clergy in social justice, an overview of critical race theory and education, and various forms of social capital related to the role of Black clergy in public education reform. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology for this study. Chapter 4 details the results and findings, and Chapter 5 discusses of the findings, implications, and recommendations for future policy and practice.
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Introduction and Purpose

The purpose of this study was to gain perceptive on the role Black clergy play in public educational reform, specifically in an urban environment, and to offer new literature regarding their role in the future. The literature review begins with an historical context that has shaped the role of the Black clergy in urban education reform, the role that race has played education reform, and the ability of the Black clergy to mobilize the community in social change efforts. In an effort to understand how the role of the Black clergy has changed since the civil rights movement era, the literature review focuses on critical race theory, including sections on critical race theory in education and social capital theory.

An historical perspective of the Black church. Historically, the Black clergy has served as role models for their religious congregations, political leaders, and community influencers (Edwards, 2008; Smith & Harris, 2005). Research has shown that most Americans believe churches and other religious organizations have been more effective in addressing their social needs through the leadership of their clergy, and the ability of clergy to harness social capital generated within their respective communities (Dionne, 1997; Burton, 2007). For example, the Black clergy utilizes organizational partnerships, networking collaborations with other pastors and ministerial alliances, and other political action networks to influence policy (Burton, 2007). Burton concluded that Black clergy involved in pastor conferences and ministerial alliances, such as the nationally recognized Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the
Cleveland based United Pastors in Mission and Baptist Ministers Conference are prominently recognized for addressing issues affecting the community. Similarly, Edwards (2008) found that Black clergy in Mount Vernon, NY, individually, and with the United Black Clergy of Westchester (UBC), collectively, have received great reverence and distinct influence in mobilizing the community around political matters.

In general, Black clergy have held extremely important roles in social change whether through direct or indirect involvement in social and political activities (Burton, 2007; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; McBride, Sherraden, & Pritzker, 2006; Putnam, 2000; Spruill, 1993). More specifically, Black clergy have served as political leaders since the Reconstruction era, most notably, Senator Hiram Revels of Mississippi and Rev. Richard Cain. Decades later, after the above leaders, New York Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., Atlanta Mayor Andrew Young, Pennsylvania Congressman William Gray, III, and New York Congressman Floyd H. Flake also epitomized the Black clergyman-political leader model (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

Researchers have also concluded that while the role of the Black clergy has historically been to provide the moral compass for their respective communities and lead the fight for social justice (Edwards 2008; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990), recently they face irrelevancy and new challenges that have emerged in the 21st century (Alex-Assensoh, 2004). Alex-Assensoh (2004) captured the historical perspective of Black clergy and the church nicely when she stated, “... during times of severe racial oppression and exclusion of the pre-civil rights period, Black churches were often compelled to operate in subterranean and silent ways. The 1960s, however, provided the backdrop for vocal and visible involvement in political issues” (p. 82).
Black clergy in the 21st century are conspicuously quiet. Some scholars call for Black clergy to address the issues of resegregation (Edwards, 2008; Orfield, 2001; Weiler, 1998). Others suggest they address the regionalization of their congregations (Edwards, 2008), while others demand they strike an appropriate balance between personal goals and community activism (Edwards, 2008; Henig, Hula, Orr, & Pedescleaux, 1999; Smith, 2004; Smith & Harris, 2005).

The Black clergy have demonstrated their capacity to galvanize their core constituencies to influence the electoral process and expand opportunities for economic mobility. Pastor Floyd Flake, for example, has expanded his Allen AME Church in Jamaica, NY, from a budget of $250,000 for 1,400 members in 1976, to $12 million, serving 5,000 members in 1987. Flake represents only one of several Black clergy, such as Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. and Al Sharpton, who have used a combination of church, politics and personal persuasion to affect social change in a community (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

While the personal persuasion of the Black clergy extends as far back as the Reconstruction era (1865–1877), it continues today in exhibiting their ability to broker relationships with the politically astute (Smith & Harris, 2005). There are, nevertheless, some inherent obstacles. Smith & Harris (2005) argued that while personal persuasion is a beneficial trait, some Black clergy have used their influence for personal gain rather than community good. There is a potential for this ability to undermine the collective interest of the community (Smith & Harris, 2005).

Another challenge to the influence that Black clergy can potentially have over social change relates to their role in ministerial coalitions and alliances. While normally
seen as an advantage in wielding their political influence, the emergence of political
differences among them in such groups often serves to stifle the cooperation needed to
benefit their collective communities (Smith & Harris, 2005). As a result, the political
influence of the Black church is dwindling. Between the 18th and 20th centuries, Black
clergy were responsible for providing a moral compass for the community, in addition to
leading the fight for justice. However, today these same clergy are confronted, although
not by the entire community, with tarnished reputations as the result of their involvement
in politics, failure to develop coalition in the best interest of the community, including
their perceived role in public education (Edwards, 2008; Henig et al., 1999).

As the leadership of the Black clergy continues to assume the role as champions
for educational equality, the continuance of a failing local educational system and the
effects of congregants moving to other areas, yet continuing to worship at the local
church (Edwards, 2008) challenge them. Edwards referred to the relocation of
congregants who maintain active at the local church as “regionalization of
congregations.” Despite these challenges, findings from a 2001 national survey
composed of 1,003 Black Americans revealed that the respondents believed that churches
are better equipped to solve the most important community problems (Gallup, 2001).

Similarly, during the civil rights movement, under the leadership of the Black
clergy, there was no other black institution in America with the potential to mobilize, or
the constituency to influence social change except the Black church (Lincoln & Mamiya,
1990). In more recent studies (Edwards, 2008; Middleton, 2001), findings have
determined that today the Black clergy faces criticism regarding their role in providing
the leadership needed to address issues affecting public education. This criticism is in the
face of their successful leadership during the civil rights movement, their ability to influence social change, and to foster the Black church’s ability to serve as social and political power bases for their communities (Spruill, 1993).

Generally, most politically astute Black clergy lead their congregations toward low-cost political activism, such as when they issue invitations for political candidates to speak during worship service. Brown & Brown (2003) found that this approach to political activism is the result of limited organizational resources. Black clergy face challenges in raising the consciousness of civic engagement beyond an informal approach (Brown & Brown, 2003; Harris, 2001). Black clergy are more likely to engage in low-cost political engagement; however, these challenges may be obstacles but not inhibitors to Black clergy involvement in urban educational reform.

Historically, as part of their spiritual mission, progressive African-American clergy were known to embrace their responsibility to improve the African-American condition (Lee, 2003; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Myrdal, 1944; Sawyer, 2001). As both religious and civic leaders, despite the challenges of limited resources, Black clergy are known to exert influence in their respective communities. Brown and Brown (2003) suggested it is important to understand the influence that religious resources have on activism in the Black community, especially since Black clergy are often leaders of the only non-governmental institution in that community. Black clergy are increasingly likely to serve as important political leaders (Jelen, 2001), and further study of their potential as influencers of political attitudes and behaviors within the congregation is crucial (Cavendish, 2001).
Previous research demonstrates that political relationships between clergy and politicians stem from practices of mutual support, which can take a variety of forms (Brown & Brown, 2003; Harris, 2001). For example, the incentives for clergy range from more immediate needs, such as donations and revenue earned by hosting governmental-sponsored programs in churches, to more altruistic initiatives like providing resources for outreach programs. Likewise, a study by Harris (2001) determined that politicians benefit from a political relationship with clergy through the harnessing of electoral support for election. The study further concluded that Black clergy influence congregant voting by allowing candidates to speak before their congregations or by simply referencing a candidate during worship. Whereas these political and electoral efforts continue to be equally important today as in the past, there is a need for much more effort in urban communities. Beyond the electoral involvement of governmental politicians and past involvement in the fight for equal educational facilities during the civil rights movement, this study aims at answering the question as to what role Black clergy will play in influencing policy for the improvement of urban school systems.

**Review of Literature**

This study will use specific components of critical race theory (CRT) and social capital theory (SCT) to understand the role of Black clergy in securing an equal opportunity to education for Blacks in American. The literature review begins with a discussion of critical race theory follows with a brief overview of the theory and an examination of its use in understanding education reform. A discussion of various forms
of social capital theory then exposes the potential that Black clergy have to mobilize Black communities in the struggle for equality in public education.

**Overview of the related studies on the role of Black clergy.** Middleton (2001) conducted a quantitative study on the role of the African American church in urban school reform. This study was conducted by surveying 25 African American church leaders in three urban school districts. The overall outcomes of the study find five major issues. There were five overarching findings. Church leaders agreed urban education had inadequacies, urban education problems had been addressed within the congregation rather than collectively outside the congregation, and clergy worked together during crisis but retreated to individual efforts afterwards. The church leaders in the study also expressed identifying qualified teachers willing to work in urban cities and developing culturally enriching curriculum will be a challenging in the future; and finally, the African American church had tremendous political power.

The 2007 Burton study was an interpretive qualitative case study using two focus groups with 16 African Americans to examining the role of the Black church in two critical events: shooting of 15-year-old and mayoral control of Cleveland Public Schools, and focused on the interactions that shaped policy. She found that clergy influenced policy in the mayoral control issues in three ways: a) clergy influence, b) organizational partnerships and c) civic empowerment. Burton suggests the personality and charisma of the clergy, personal relationships with the politicians, and use of the pulpit to disseminate information created clergy influence over policy. Organizational partnerships such as ministerial alliances and coalitions allowed clergy to wield influence over policy changes in Cleveland, OH. Burton also asserted civic empowerment through the organizing of
education summits, forums and town hall meetings mobilized the community around the issue of mayoral governance.

Edwards (2008) conducted a qualitative study in Mount Vernon, NY with 78 in-depth interviews, 5 focus groups, and a review of historical data. Her study focused on building civic capacity to determine ownership of public schools. As part of her findings, Edward discovered a lack of trust in the Black clergy relative to their role in education matters affecting the public schools. While the clergy had shown leadership previously, their role had changed drastically. She concluded because of the distrust and disconnected relationship the Black clergy leadership faced challenges in public education reform.

**Overview of critical race theory.** Critical race theory emerged from criticism of critical legal studies (CLS) and its inadequacies with regard to race and racism as they affect social issues in the United States (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Degaldo & Stefancic, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). CRT was created through the work of Derrick Bell (1979) and Alan Freeman (1977). Bell and Freeman posited that CLS, an offspring of critical theory, was insufficient in its critique of law because of the absence of a discussion about race and racism (Yosso, 2005).

Not all scholars expert in using CRT agree. Anzaldua (1990) characterized CRT as a response to disempowering theory, and an extension of the work of DuBois (1903) relative to understanding race in America (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Despite the fact that equal opportunity education is a commonly stated goal U.S. public policy, racism has explicitly shaped American social institutions, in particular public schools (Delgado, 1995). Though progress has been made, the presence of inequalities continue to exist
today in more subtle ways (Blake, 1973; Yosso, 2005). Tate (1997) in his critical analysis of his own experience with inequality in education asserted, “[The] CRT movement has argued that civil rights discourse in CLS does not adequately address the experiences of people of color. Ultimately, this argument serves as a point of departure between the two theoretically driven movements” (p. 198). Scholars developed critical race theory as an alternative to critical legal studies, because CLS failed to give voice to the oppressed.

**Toward a critical race theory of education.** Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) asserted that race is untheorized in scholarship, and offered three premises to support their hypothesis that CRT is as powerful a critique of education as it was a critique of CLS:

1. Race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States.
2. U.S. society is based on property rights.
3. The intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can understand social (and, consequently, school) inequality. (p. 48.)

Prior to this groundbreaking study, Tate (1994) was the first sociologist to expand CRT to include education with his seminal work entitled “From Inner City to Ivory Tower: Does My Voice Matter in the Academy” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Tate’s early analysis drew upon the principles of CRT to examine his elementary education experience in an urban catholic school. He discussed the importance of a compilation of theories that help to explain his educational development from inner-city environment to
the Ivy League. Tate concluded with a discussion about the tensions developed by his “voice” within traditional academic scholarship.

Subsequent studies (Coffin 2011; Tate, 1997) used Ladson-Billings’ and Tate’s three premises above to advance CRT’s growing application in American education. Coffin (2011), in particular, states that these three premises offer a framework to advance educational reform more rapidly than subtly, as he sought to understand the inequalities in American public education as a byproduct of race and racism.

**CRT and the significance of race in America.** Ladson-Billings’ and Tate’s first premise, that race is significant in America, highlights the disparity in the statistical and demographic data provided by the Children’s Defense Fund related to educational and life opportunities, such as the disproportionate number of Black students with “high school dropout rates, suspension rates, and incarceration rates” (p.48). Omi and Winant (1993) used the premise to support their argument that race creates an ideological and objective issue that impacts society. They contend that if race is viewed as ideological, then it denies the existence of racism and how it affects the racially oppressed. On the other hand, Omi and Winant (1993) contended that if race is viewed as objective, then it becomes difficult to determine the race of individuals. Notwithstanding either of these perspectives on race, Bell (1992) argued that there are particular rules that govern how we deal with race, and these rules aid in our understanding of policies, laws, and protocols of societal structures.

Notwithstanding the relevance of race in America, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) acknowledge that race has not been fully theorized in scholarship related to education. Their findings identified, instead, the advancement of theory related to gender
and class in education; for example, Marxist and Neo-Marxist research about class and social inequalities has received significant recognition. Scholarship related to feminist theories in education continues to advance. For Ladson-Billings & Tate, however, race is inextricably connected to gender and class. The fact that race has not received the same level of attention in education scholarship as gender and class led Tate (1997) to insist that the discussion of race cannot continue to contain gaps in theoretical perspectives and must extend beyond the traditional methodologies in order to give voice to those oppressed.

Omi and Winant (1993) were convinced that gender and class are significant to a discussion of race and articulated the importance of gender and class for a more comprehensive analysis of race and racism in America. By offering the notion that race is untheorized, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) did not suggest that race has not been examined in relation to social inequalities. On the contrary, they highlighted findings from Omi and Winant (1993) who argued that race has been intertwined with ethnicity, class, and nationality to the extent that a sociological explanation of race in America has been a major topic of discussion in social science. They found, however, that race has not been systematically applied in the analysis of educational inequality (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Researchers other than Ladson-Billings and Tate suggested that class and gender alone could not account for obvious inadequacies, such as high dropout rates, rampant suspensions, and a general failure to perform among African American and Latino males (Hacker, 1992; Majors & Billson, 1992).

In summary, Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) suggested that if racism did not have significance in America, its effects would be localized or isolated; that is, there would be
a more prevalent trend of educational excellence and equity. Findings from Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) asserted that because race and racism has permanency in America, the tendency is for African American students to excel outside public schools rather than inside them because of the “institutional and structural racism” (p. 55) prevalent in the public school system. Ladson-Billings and Tate acknowledged that poor children do poorly in school regardless of their race. They conclude, however, that poverty is only one aspect of below-average educational outcomes. Of equal impact is the institutional structure of students’ environmental conditions, such as school and schooling, which is profoundly affected by race and racism because funding for local schools comes from local property taxes.

**CRT and property rights in America.** Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) used CRT as a conceptual framework to demonstrate that property rights protect the self-interest of Whites. Ladson-Billings (2009) further confirmed that there is a historical connection between property rights, ownership to citizenship, and an adverse impact on minority education. Ladson-Billings’ analysis found that many discussions of democracy in America assume that without capitalism, democracy is unattainable. She rejects this notion and asserts that civil rights for Blacks have not advanced in America, because civil rights laws were built upon human rights not upon property rights.

An example of tension between human rights and property rights is demonstrated in Bell’s work. Bell (1992) examined the historical impact of slavery on African Americans and the conflict created by the U.S. government’s insistence to preserve slaves as property over advocating for their human rights. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) emphasized that the purpose of the government was to protect the *status quo*. For
example, Bell further stated, “the concept of individual rights, unconnected to property rights, was totally foreign to these men of property; and thus, despite two decades of civil rights gains, most Blacks remain disadvantaged and deprived because of their race” (p. 239). American history is filled with countless examples of individuals and racial groups struggling over property and oppressive treatment because of property. As further evidence, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) contended that American history begins with the struggle between Native Americans and early settlers over property.

Public education in America also relates to property rights because school districts are primarily funded by property taxes. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) applied CRT to reveal that educational quality correlates to property tax values. For example, the average per pupil expenditure in New York City in 1987 was $5,550 versus more than $11,000 in suburban Long Island. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) also examined intellectual property and its impact on public education. For these researchers, intellectual property is an opportunity for students, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, to acquire knowledge, and intellectual property requires “real property” (p. 54), such as textbooks, technology, and other co-curricular necessities, including well-prepared teachers. In support of Ladson-Billings’ and Tate’s proposition about property rights, Kozol (1991) concluded that in spite of educational mandates, school districts serving poorer students will encounter difficulty accessing the appropriate resources.

In summary, the second proposition in the Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) study asserted that American society is based on property rights, and achievements from the civil rights movement era have failed because they were established based on human rights instead of property rights. Furthermore, education equality is explicitly and
implicitly connected to the value of property, including intellectual property. It is the right to property, then, that secures the opportunity to acquire a quality education, and because Whiteness is property through the lens of CRT, race and property in America are inextricably connected.

**CRT and intersection of race and property in America.** Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) declared that Whiteness is the ultimate property in America, and comes with some inherent privileges. Before discussing these privileges, it is imperative to understand Cheryl Harris’ definition of “possession” in her article, “Whiteness as Property” (1993).

“Possession” is the act necessary to lay the basis for rights in property – was defined to include only the cultural practices of Whites. This definition laid the foundation for the idea that Whiteness – that which Whites alone possess – is valuable and is property. (p. 1721)

Expanding on Harris’ study, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) outlined the privileges of Whiteness as follows: “(1) rights of disposition; (2) rights to use and enjoyment; (3) reputation and status property; and (4) the absolute right to exclude” (p. 59). The right of disposition offers inalienable rights to individuals who conform to the norms and expectations of being White. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) explained that inalienable rights are granted only to those with entitlement and alignment to the sanctioned cultural norms, that is, “White norms.” For example, when teachers praise students for embracing the White cultural norms of speech, language, and dress, students receive inalienable property rights.
Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) further explained that white privilege comes with the right to use and enjoy the social, cultural, and economic privilege afforded them by their Whiteness at any time. For example, Whiteness affords the use of school property for extensive usage in the school setting. In his book, *Savage Inequalities*, Kozol (1991) showed the difference between those with the right to use and those without that right. Kozol illustrated with an example. A predominantly White elementary school served 825 children in a facility designed for 1,000 students, while a predominantly Black elementary school of the same size served 1,550 children. The White students, therefore, experienced greater entitlement to property and use of that property, both the physical plant and the available resources, than the Black students who learned in an overcrowded facility.

Ladson-Billings’ and Tate’s (1995) remaining functions associated with Whiteness—reputation and status property and the absolute right to exclude—suggested how pernicious racism is in American schools. For example, classifying a program as Black or non-White reduces the reputation and importance of that program and calling a White person Black has defamatory effects. The absolute right to exclude is particularly disempowering for Blacks. Bell (1992) asserted that when considering race, if an individual is known to have one “ounce” of blackness, he or she is considered Black; however, having any part of Whiteness does not make an individual White. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) also drew from Oakes (1985) who showed that resegregation is a form of the absolute right to exclude. Additionally, studies by Ladson-Billings (2009) and Coffin (2011) found that property ownership and Whiteness are requirements for property rights.
American public education is a powerful example of Ladson-Billings’ and Tate’s (1995) concept of “Whiteness as property.” The denial of a quality education to Blacks, the segregation of schools, White flight, growing vouchers, public funding for private school, and “school choice” are all examples of the absolute right to exclude. All of these examples support resegregation, the development of neighborhood schools, and the opportunity for those with greater means to withdraw from the public school system. Ladson-Billings and Tate concluded that the standard for educational achievement is measured by the degree to which one possesses Whiteness. This key tenant of CRT—that Whiteness is property and American society is based on property—provides a powerful framework in which to examine the role of Black clergy in addressing educational inequality in America.

**Critical race theory and the education debt.** Coffin (2011) uses CRT to introduce the concept of education debt:

Education debt is the foregone schooling resources that we could have (should have) been investing in (primarily) low-income kids, which deficit leads to a variety of social problems (e.g., crime, low productivity, low wages, low labor force participation) that require on-going public investment. (p. 3)

This work by Coffin analyzes several theorists who used CRT to understand the inequalities in American public education, and to “make a parallel between the critical race legal theory (a precursor of critical race theory) and traditional civil rights laws with that of critical race theory in education” (p. 1). Coffin (2011) contended that CRT is a unique “method of analysis in educational research” (p. 1), and that researchers must view issues of race and racism through this critical lens. Coffin examined the work of
Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, Richard Delgado, and Ladson-Billings and Tate, and emphasizes that critical race legal scholars had doubts about the success of civil rights laws.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) concluded that hindsight provides better vision and an opportunity to reexamine the strategy of Thurgood Marshall and his defense team in the groundbreaking *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision. The two scholars acknowledged and appreciated the work of Marshall and his team, but they identified some severe shortcomings. Marshall and his team did not consider Whiteness as property, that is, the permanency of race in America. They assumed property rights in their decision, and that assumption eventually undermined equal opportunity in education for Blacks in desegregated schools, when White flight reduced property values and the number of Black teachers and administrators in American schools decreased (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Coffin (2011) concluded that school reform fails because it does not recognize that property, defined as Whiteness, powerfully determines academic advantage. Furthermore, Coffin agreed with Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) that human rights are the basis for civil rights laws in America, rather than property rights, and that the benefits of these laws inure to Whites and exclude people of color. Pedescleaux (2004) supported Coffin when he argued that even though Black clergy were instrumental in desegregating public schools in Baltimore, Detroit, Atlanta, and Washington D.C. in the wake of the civil rights movement, they are still fighting prejudiced white educators in Detroit and challenging biased educational practices in Washington, D.C. in the 21st century. Coffin,
therefore, suggested that scholars must approach the fight for equality in education with more radical means than civil rights laws.

Education reform can be best addressed by focusing on educational debt, that is, what Coffin terms the “equity gap,” rather than the “achievement gap” (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Coffin, 2011). Coffin (2011) contended that America’s long-standing education debt increases at the expense of disadvantage students and in particular those of racial and ethnic minorities: “. . . the educational equity gap is a function of the unequal distribution of educational resources among our schools that disenfranchises low income urban school districts especially those with concentrations of minorities” (para. 26). He further argued that any efforts to improve the educational system would be short lived without addressing its inherent racially biased structure and shifting the focus to address the equity gap by providing the appropriate resources regardless of race and ethnicity or social economic status.

In summary, Coffin used CRT as a framework for addressing educational inequalities, inclusive of the permanency of race, the right to property, and the intersection of race and property as it affects school funding. He highlighted the need for mobilization to more comprehensively address the educational inequalities by shifting the focus from under-achieving among minority populations to the lack of schooling resources in communities with high minority populations.

Yosso (2005) offered CRT as a challenge to traditional interpretations of cultural capital that view communities of color from a deficit perspective. Yosso’s study suggested that scholars, when analyzing these communities, must shift to a more advantageous viewpoint where cultural poverty is not central, but rather where cultural
assets are recognized among communities of color. Yosso found that “CRT is a framework that can be used to theorize, examine, and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact on social structures, practices, and discourses” (p. 70).

Research on the experience of people of color, including Blacks, “in critical historical context reveals accumulated assets and resources in the histories and lives of communities of color” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). Yosso declared that community cultural wealth comprises a collection of knowledge, skills, and abilities available to communities of color, and it is used to withstand, fight, and overcome oppression. Yosso (2005) further explained that CRT recognizes the value of communities of color and their ability to foster cultural wealth in the form of social capital. Social capital can be defined as “networks of people and community resources . . . [that] attain education, legal justice, employment and health care” (p. 79).

**Social capital theory.** The theory of social capital originated from concepts presented by Pierre Bourdie (1986) and James Coleman (1988). Bourdieu developed his theory from a European perspective based on a neo-Marxist view of social class, particularly in French culture. His theory hinged on the belief that one’s place in society is dependent on the amount of social capital one possesses or acquires (Baker & Miles-Watson, 2010). According to Bourdieu’s theory, the more social capital one has, the more power and influence one wields, and so, the more access one will have to other types of capital such as cultural capital and economic capital. He contended that social capital is the property and advantage of the elite. This is in stark contrast to Coleman (1988), who asserted that social capital
. . . is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors—whether persons or corporate actors—within the structure. (p. S98)

James Coleman (1988) offered a counterpoint to Bourdieu’s notion that social capital belongs to the elite classes only. He proposed, instead, that all forms of capital, including social capital and cultural capital, are accessible to the poorer classes as well. Coleman classified “social capital” as norms that are of value for children and create an honorable set of cyclical beliefs and actions where parents have a “norm” of expectation for success, which they pass on to their children as they grow up. Coleman argued that human capital, a form of social capital, is present in marginalized communities where parents expect their children to succeed in life. Like Bourdieu, Coleman was interested in the relationship between education and how marginalized children succeed. He believed that social capital is developed inside the family, as well as outside the family, and the combination of the two sources creates a value for acquiring social and cultural capital (Baker & Miles-Watson, 2010).

In contrast to Bourdieu, Coleman identified a variety of social structures that nurture social capital, including family, school, and church. The church, in particular, Coleman alleged, is an entity that uniquely delivers more closure to the intergenerational gap and a benefit to a closed network system (Baker & Miles-Watson, 2010). The Black church has the ability to develop bonds around social issues that foster change in the community. These bonds foster social networks across generations because of the diversity of age groups in the church; therefore, education reform is an important social
issue in the Black church. Robert Putnam’s definition of social capital is similar to that of James Coleman’s, in that Putnam, too, emphasized norms, networks, and relationships (Baker & Miles-Watson, 2010).

**Putnam’s theory of social capital.** Struck by the lack of civic engagement in America since the 1960s, Robert Putnam, a Harvard Public Policy professor, saw such behavior as the beginning of a disastrous trend for the nation (Putnam, 2000). Putnam’s theory of social capital referred to the connectivity between individuals, the creation of “social networks, norms of reciprocity, and the outcome of trustworthiness” (Putnam, 2000, p. 19). Putnam incorporated two major phenomena in his theory: (a) a structural phenomenon, inclusive of friends, neighbors, and colleagues, and (b) a cultural phenomenon, such as social norms generated through collaborative efforts and interactions of friends, neighbors, and colleagues (Norris & Inglehart, 2004; Putnam, 2000).

Putnam (1993, 1995) introduced scholarship that focused on the various forms, issues, and behaviors associated with the social, economic, and political inhibitors to civic engagement. Putnam’s first work in the area of social capital was *Making Democracy Work* (1993). This study examined the correlation between economic modernity and institutional performance in Italy. Putnam’s groundbreaking study, *Bowling Alone* (2000) focused on the decline of civic engagement in the United States. The study concluded,

In America, at least, there is reason to suspect that this democratic disarray may be linked to a broad and continuing erosion of civic engagement that began a quarter-century ago . . . High on America’s agenda should be the question of how
to reverse these adverse trends in social connectedness, thus restoring civic engagement and civic trust. (p. 77)

One of the ways in which Putnam suggested restoring civic engagement and civic trust is through “[f]aith communities in which people worship together are arguably the single most important repository of social capital in America” (Putnam, 2000, p. 66). Religious organizations directly impact civic engagements by providing social support and services to their members, and indirectly by fostering moral development, civic responsibility, and altruism in their members (Norris & Inglehart, 2004).

McBride et al. (2006) maintained that religious organizations support participation in civic engagement by developing their members’ skills to address political and social issues. This is particularly evident around common goals and collective action, such as civic responsibility, social action, and other civic duties. Religious organizations also help to cultivate social norms. Researchers suggested that churches have traditionally been vital to American civic life, because they are a critical source of social capital (Brown & Brown, 2003; Burton, 2007; Norris & Inglehart, 2004; Putnam, 2000). Furthermore, the literature supported the claim that faith-based organizations, in particular Black protestant churches, are vital to mobilizing their members, galvanizing diverse populations of Americans within local communities, and encouraging interaction among members, collective action by members, social networks, and organizational efforts (Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006; Carlton-LaNey, 2006; Harris, 2001; McKenzie, 2004; Norris & Inglehart, 2004; Swain, 2010).

Church leaders, therefore, have the potential to be powerful nurturers of social capital. They emphasize civic engagement through sermons, announcements, teaching,
and other intellectual learning methods. Cavendish (2001) suggested that clergy encourage participation, nurture feelings of confidence, and raise consciousness among their members, which in turn increases civic involvement. Informally, congregants generate personal and long-lasting relationships, as well as social and emotional networks, that provide social incentives (Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006). These social incentives generated through church attendance motivate membership in community organizations. Norris and Inglehart (2004) maintained that there is a direct relationship between the frequency of church attendance and membership in a religious organization. Putnam’s theory of social capital suggested that there is also a relationship between membership in religious organizations and civic engagement or democratic participation. Beyerlein & Hipp (2006) conducted a study on the correlation between church attendance in protestant churches and active involvement in the civic organizations. The study included used data from the 1990 American Citizen Participation Study (CPS) survey – a clustered and stratified probability sample of adults 18 and older in the United States. The sample size included 2,429 respondents. Findings from this study supported the notion that participation in religious congregations provided social incentives for congregants to get involved in civic organizations. Norris and Inglehart (2004), however, have found that the more frequently one attends church, the less likely one is to get involved in civic activity. No matter what the relationship between church attendance and civic engagement, social capital theory provides a critical lens through which to examine the potential for civic engagement incentivized by religious organizations.

American citizens dedicate a significant amount of time to their religious congregations, more so than to any other civic organization, thus developing
relationships, a sense of belonging, and social support (Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006; Putnam 2000). Congregants have the potential to mobilize services, cultivate connections to community members outside the congregation, and generate discussion about the capacity of congregations to foster and sustain robust and progressive communities. Beyerlein and Hipp (2006), therefore, characterized congregations as social capital groups with strong internal connections, but with fewer external ties that benefit members. In fact, the literature has developed two terms for social capital, “bonding” and “bridging,” in order to accommodate the notion that social capital can have harmful effects on the larger community.

For Putnam (2000), bonding is when strong ties are developed among individuals within a single group, while bridging is when interactions and connections are created among various groups. In relation to Black clergy, bonding entails a single congregation addressing a community issue, such as education reform, because the pastor considers the issue important; while bridging is a more collaborative approach, where several pastors and/or congregations mobilize around a community issue, such as education reform.

Beyerlin & Hipp (2006) characterized religious congregations as social capital groups with the potential to mobilize services and to cultivate connections to community members outside the congregation. They concluded, “Our observations suggest that, with the exception of occasional sermons or announcements about civic engagement, the mechanisms through which congregations mobilize civic engagement are most often associated with congregation activities outside religious service attendance” (pp. 99–100). Black clergy have influence culturally on their congregants, and church
participation impacts political activity, especially among African Americans (Frasure, 2003).

It was McBride et al. (2006) who revealed that incentives for producing civic action correlate to the ability to influence resources or assets in the community, “... interest, information, efficacy, and partisan intensity provide the desire, knowledge, and self-assurance that impel people to be engaged by politics” (p. 35). McBride et al. drew on previous studies (Sherraden, 1991; McBride, 2003) and concluded that connections between entities, such as parent teacher associations and small businesses, provide resources for action. Black clergy influence both resources and assets in their communities.

In American cities where the new Black majority holds the reins of power, some Black clergy are part of a political infrastructure. They have strength and knowledge to establish an effective reform agenda, to hold school boards, superintendents, and teachers accountable for measurable improvements that address the needs of Black urban students (Middleton, 2001). This study examines the higher levels of civic engagement necessary for public education reform through the lens of several theories of civic engagement.

**Theory of civic capacity.** Stone, Henig, Jones, and Pierannunzi (2001) broadened Putnam’s perspective on social capital with a study of 11 cities across America undergoing urban education reform. Stone et al. (2001) argued that civic capacity, a non-conventional form of social capital, is focused on mobilizing various components of the community to solve critical problems beyond traditional civic engagement.
Stone and his colleagues began with two assumptions when conducting their study: (a) public education reform requires a collective, rather than isolated, approach, and (b) communities must recognize the seriousness of public education reform. These assumptions required a different conceptual approach to social capital from Putnam’s approach. Findings from Stone’s research encourage strong diverse coalitions to effect reform of public schools in American cities. The study concludes,

El Paso, Pittsburgh, Boston, and even Los Angeles are examples of something much more potent than fragile coalitions around particular initiatives. As examples of strong civic capacity . . . represent an ability to bring diverse elements and resources together in a sustained effort to meet a major community challenge. The highest levels of civic capacity rest on an ability to engage not just an array of strategic elites but also a broad base of ordinary participants. To withstand the corrosive power of public contention, civic capacity needs strong pillars of support. (p. 614)

According to Stone et al. (2001), building blocks for successful school reform include civic mobilization, issue definition, civic capacity, and systemic reform effort.

Civic mobilization refers to the level of engagement from various sectors in the community around the issue, that is, inclusion of the invested stakeholders, parents, businesses, and education.

Issue definition requires acknowledgment that the issue is a community issue, and that it is difficult to solve. A school board, for example, typically does not have the breadth to define and solve the problem because they focus on the immediacy of governing the district. A well-defined approach that recognizes the politics involved
must be employed (Stone et al.). Stone et al. offer Hannah Arendt’s (1968) theory on politics as an example of how to approach defining the problem, where people refrain from “political jockeying” but, rather, recognize common ground.

Stone (2001) contended that, in contrast to Putnam’s theory of social capital, civic capacity is more conscious and contentious in its design and operation to effect social change. Social capital, as described by Putnam and others, is largely the unconscious by-product of everyday interactions, whereas civic capacity is the conscious creation of actors seeking to establish a context in which extraordinary problem solving can occur (Stone, 2001).

Stone’s third building block for successful school reform, civic capacity, is defined by the ability of stakeholders to come together and assemble the necessary resources to motivate a community to respond and solve a community issue (Stone, 2001). Building civic capacity is often predicated, or at least reinforced, by the individual’s ability to develop a local desire to engage in activism for social causes.

Findings by Stone (2001) confirmed that only when a community acknowledges that there is a community issue that requires attention and they proceed to galvanize around the issue can civic capacity exist. Putnam (1993) argued that social capital is generated as people learn to work with one another, practice reciprocity, and develop a sense of interpersonal trust. Stone (2001), however, viewed civic capacity as a more expansive mobilization of the various components in a community to engage in dialogue and problem solving. He wrote, “Unlike the conventional social capital described by Putnam (1993), civic capacity may not be self-replenishing” (p. 614). This type of expansive mobilization has the potential to be exhaustive and not allow individuals to
self-replenish; for instance, it can create several levels of controversy within the community whereby the leaders may be scrutinized (Stone, 2001). In this situation, there is a high potential for relationships to break down, resulting in elements of misunderstanding and mistrust.

In a study about building civic capacity to address public education issues in Mount Vernon, NY (the city in which this study takes place), Edwards (2008) conducted 78 in-depth interviews, five focus groups, and a review of historical data. Her findings concluded that distrust and relationships in disrepair exist in many of the city’s school districts. Black clergy in Mount Vernon mobilized the community to win elected positions on the local school board, but later withdrew their support because of controversy. Members of the community developed a mistrust of their clergy’s motives; and civic capacity was not self-replenished.

Trust is vital to developing civic capacity and building a collective plan of action (Stone, 2001). Stone’s findings suggested that major community issues can create contention, and, therefore, they demand high levels of trust and engagement. This level of engagement, interaction, and trust is on a macro-level and is quite different from the concepts of reciprocity and relationship building that Putnam (2000) articulated. The study found, for example, that the more people interact with one another, the more trust they build among them, and there is increased reciprocity, which Putnam asserts in his theory (Stone, 2001). Conversely, inappropriate and subpar interaction, especially with influential leaders, may be detrimental to the cause. Stone (2001) found that mere involvement from governmental leaders is not sufficient, and distrusting behavior by these leaders can be more damaging.
Truelar (n.d.) draws an interesting comparison to characterize low levels of trust he found among members of African-American communities:

One must recognize that loyalty is a strong value in communities where trust is low. African Americans score the lowest of any ethnic group in the area of “trust,” ergo, they score high in loyalty . . . Moving beyond loyalty requires a cultural shift of monumental proportions, and plausibility structures that support that shift. (Review from http://www.claudialedwards.com/home/publications/, para. 2)

Members of the Black community, for example, are loyal to their clergy in that they are reluctant to confront them publically because congregants believe that such behavior is sacrilegious (Edwards, 2008). Effective civic capacity requires the development of trust.

Stone’s (2001) fourth building block for successful school reform, and the dependent variable in his study, is systemic reform effort. Notwithstanding a universal definition for a systemic reform effort, Stone encouraged a more comprehensive and strategic approach:

More substantive elements include introduction of less centralized and bureaucratic means of assuring accountability; attention to the ongoing interplay between schools and other important societal institutions such as family, work, and community; the importance of combining clearly defined goals, a long-term orientation, and ways of measuring progress along the way. (p. 28)

Greenberg (2001), author of the Elements and Test of a Theory of Neighborhood Civic Participation, offered a social capital theory that builds on Putnam and is akin to Stone’s theory of civic capacity. Greenberg (2001) posited that activism leads to
neighborhood civic participation, which is nurtured by early life and environmental experiences.

**Theory of neighborhood civic participation.** Greenberg (2001) used a telephone sampling of 2,517 residents in the Philadelphia metropolitan area to test his theory of neighborhood civic participation. Findings from his study showed that there are two forms of neighborhood activism: (a) volunteering with governmental and the political process, and (b) volunteering with non-governmental entities, that is, schools, hospitals, and so forth. For the purpose of this research, and reinforced by social capital theory (Putnam, 2000), churches are non-governmental social entities that provide the vehicle for developing activism and civic engagement. Civic engagement encompasses a wide range of activities from voting, serving on juries, and volunteerism, to political activism and participation in political campaigns. As sources of neighborhood influence, religious congregations and their leaders have played an extremely important role in civic engagement, whether through direct or indirect involvement in social and political activities (Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006; McBride et al., 2006; Putnam, 2000). Neighborhood civic theory illustrates the importance of neighborhood activism as a crucial element of effective civic engagement. For many Black neighborhoods in American cities, civic engagement is essential to their survival. Engagement in community coalitions that foster civic engagement is the pinnacle of political power in Detroit where “candidates for mayor, city council, school board, and other offices submit eagerly to the Council of Baptist Pastors and the Shrine of the Black Madonna’s Black Slate as they seek endorsements” (Henig, Hula, Orr, & Pedesclaux, 1999, p.145).
Greenberg (2001) believed that “values are the cornerstone” (p. 40) for theories such as the theory of neighborhood civic participation. The desire to participate in civic affairs is often dependent on the need to protect one’s physical and social environment, and religious-based values would lead members of a community to protect their neighborhood. Churches and clergy, both Black and White, foster religious-based values. Pedescleaux (2004) charged Black clergy to protect their neighborhood schools: “In the current wave of reform, the mobilization of families and communities by African American ministers is crucial in determining that success or failure of school reform” (p. 145).

According to Greenberg (2001), some religions are more supportive of civic participation than others are. Although there is some overlap, the type and level of civic engagement depends on the community concerns of the individual or group. Additionally, family history plays a crucial part in shaping civic participation (Greenberg, 2001), not to mention societal factors of the neighborhood, such as the poverty rate, employment rate, level of investment in local government, and level of church activity. In addition to these concerns, the more community members trust their elected and non-elected leaders, the more community members are engaged in civic activity.

Greenberg (2001) further postulates that those who are not engaged in civic activities have had experiences that are the polar opposite of those who actively engage. Clergy members continue to serve as trusted authorities within the neighborhood or communities they serve. Yet recently, a growing number of Americans mistrust their community leaders, including clergy (Putnam, 1998; Greenberg, 2001). Black clergy, nevertheless, have been and are expected to provide leadership on a number of political
and social issues beyond their primary spiritual responsibilities, and to improve the civic engagement of their congregants.

In a study drawn from the 1993–94 Black Politics Survey, where 1,206 African-America adults participated in a telephone survey, Brown and Brown (2003) argued that a social capital model explains the reason that some African-American churchgoers are more inclined than non-churchgoers to participate in political and social activities. Their study identified gaps and recommended further investigation into the extent to which Black clergy can foster their flock’s concern and involvement in public policy issues affecting Blacks on many levels. Putnam’s theory of social capital supports the importance of family history, life experience, reciprocity, and trust on the individual level, while Stone’s theory of civic capacity broadens the approach to collective coordination of efforts to solve community concerns. Greenberg’s neighborhood civic participation theory further expands Stone’s concepts by emphasizing the importance of social capital in neighborhood civic participation. Other theories of both social capital and political capital abound.

**Other theories of social and political capital.** Sociologists recognize involvement in social-change movements, such as the civil rights movement in America, as an important aspect of citizens’ full participation in democratic societies. Not surprisingly, a number of theoretical frameworks have emerged to define and explain it. Typically, this type of engagement occurs in two frames: social and political (McBride et al., 2006). For McBride et al. (2006) social engagement encompasses acts of membership, volunteerism, care, and donations to individual and organizational causes. In general, this type of social engagement is a commitment to independent acts of
compassion for one’s neighbor. Political engagement, on the other hand, denotes actions that influence more structured community efforts such as “legislative, electoral, or judicial processes and public decision making” (McBride et al., 2006, p. 153), including volunteerism, activism, participation in political causes, and voting.

McBride et al. (2006) conducted a study of 84 low-income families to examine their civic engagement and identified four theories of social and political capital. They are institutional theory, life course theory, resource-based or stakeholder theory, and cultural theory. For the purpose of this study, cultural theories are most applicable. Cultural theories give attention to the impact of socialization inclusive of major events, activities, and programs designed to inculcate civic values. The clergy, especially in the Black church, has cultural influence on their congregants. Church participation affects political activity especially among African Americans (Frasure, 2003), and the church is an effective vehicle for individuals to acquire socialization and social capital.

**Chapter Summary**

The literature provides an overview of various schools of thought on public engagement through the theoretical lens of critical race theory and social capital theories. Black clergy have traditionally been an influence in maximizing the social capital accessible in their communities. Rev. Dr. King Luther King, Jr.’s leadership in support of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 mobilized local Black clergy and their respective communities into a national movement (Taylor, 1994) culminating in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 may have dismantled government-sponsored segregation in schools, but scholars of critical race theory deemed such civil rights laws
insufficient; because the very foundation of American society is built on property rights rather than human rights; and the intersection of race and property is the bedrock of inequality in public education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Clearly, the literature on CRT frames education reform in American cities as a community issue that has rich potential for civic capacity as defined by Stone et al. (2001). Cultural theories of civic engagement identify the church as the wellspring of social capital necessary to engage in civic activity; and CRT scholars acknowledged the importance of cultural wealth in communities of color (Yosso, 2005). In particular, they noted that social capital is an integral form of cultural wealth in Black religious communities.

The literature acknowledged urban education reform as a potential civil rights issue and identified the critical need for adequate leadership to address the problem. Despite this acknowledgement by Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, and others, there is limited research to provide an understanding of factors that affect the role of Black clergy in building collaborative civic efforts to advance equality in urban education, and to hold leaders in education accountable.

Advancements of the literature would do well to examine social capital is a means by which Black clergy can garner the resources to reform public education in American cities. Contrary to Bourdieu’s (1986) view that social capital is inherited, Coleman (1968) argues that social capital can be acquired through education. Later, Putnam (2000) called community leaders to task when he defined social capital as the creation of social networks and a source of trust. Putnam’s study (2000) highlighted the importance of religious organizations to harness social capital and affect social change. His books
generated great debate and his fellow researchers identified several other forms of social
capital, Clarence Stone’s civic capacity, and Michael Greenberg’s theory of
neighborhood civic participation among them. These theories of social capital broaden
the macro-level perspective that Putnam introduced and provide a context for this
examination of the role of Black clergy in public education reform in America.
Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

In an effort to learn public perceptions of Black clergy as leaders in the fight for urban education reform, this study examined the Black clergy in Mount Vernon, NY and their role in public education reform in the post-civil rights movement era. Findings from Edwards (2008), a study on Mount Vernon public schools, showed that the public has not positively perceived the involvement of the United Black Clergy of Westchester (UBC) in educational matters. Building upon the work of Edwards (2008), this qualitative study used interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to collect perspectives from ministers and community influencers, such as the district superintendent, school administrators, and parent-teacher association leaders. The study examined the lived experiences of these individuals relative to the role Black clergy currently play in urban education reform of Mount Vernon schools.

The research questions under investigation included:

1. What are the perceptions of the Black clergy regarding the role of the Black church in fighting for education reform in urban communities where a new majority prevails?

2. What is the role of the Black clergy now that the fight for social justice in public schools may involve holding accountable leaders of the new majority?

3. What are the new issues affecting education equality in these communities?

4. What opportunities can Black clergy build upon to advance their role as leaders in education reform?
5. What are the barriers that impede the role of Black clergy to serve as a major influence in advancing educational reform?

Morse (1991) characterized a qualitative research problem in one of four main categories: (a) the concept is without adequate theory or previous research; (b) there are inaccurate, biased, or inappropriate theories associated with the research problem; (c) there are phenomena to explore, describe, or a new theory is needed; or (d) the phenomenon is not appropriate for quantitative analysis. While there is research on the Black church and the role its clergy played in addressing inequalities in government-sponsored segregated education (Gaines, 2010; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990), there is a gap in the literature. There is need for new research that explores the role of Black clergy in urban education reform, in the aftermath of the civil rights movement, where Blacks and Latinos are no longer in the minority. Exploring this phenomenon through a reflective lens lends itself to qualitative analysis. It allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the complex role Black clergy must play in the fight for equality in public education, specifically in communities that have been resegregated.

Phenomenological research “describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). The study described the commonalities of experience among Black clergy in an effort to reduce the individual lived experience and gain insight into a more universal experience. The consciousness of life experiences are essential but are often overlooked or taken for granted as a result of an inability to step away from everyday experiences, referred to as our natural attitude (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This study was a phenomenological inquiry into the consciousness of the individual, setting apart the
experiences of the Black clergy, known as bracketing, to better understand their achievements, challenges, and evolving role as leaders in public education reform. Additionally, this study observed a series of reductions, which is to say, “a different lens or prism, a different way of thinking and reasoning about the phenomenon at hand” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 14). The goal of this study was to allow for free imagination variation, where participants described a phenomenon as they see it without imposition. Therefore, it was important to focus on the experience, itself, and the participant’s ability to freely describe the features of that experience. Accordingly, an interpretive phenomenological analysis was essential to answer the research questions, and to understand the life experiences of the participants.

**Positionality.** It is important to discuss positionality in relation to this study, given the various connections and potential influence of the researcher (Chavez, 2008). The researcher is intimately aware of the clergy population in the city of Mount Vernon and the New York metropolitan area. Most notably, the researcher is the pastor of an historical church with over 100 years of service to the community. The researcher is also chairperson of the education committee of the United Black Clergy (UBC), which is a coalition of clergy in Westchester, NY, primarily located in Mount Vernon, NY. Furthermore, the researcher was born and raised in Mount Vernon and educated in the Mount Vernon School System. Through each of these affiliations, the researcher is recognized as an “insider.” Professionally, the researcher has served as a higher education administrator for over 23 years, adjunct professor for 10 years, and currently serves the Commissioner of Recreation for the city of Mount Vernon.
There is much debate over the advantages and disadvantages of positionality and what difference the position as an insider versus an outsider has on research outcomes (Chavez, 2008). As an insider among Black clergy, the researcher had greater access to potential participants, and a greater opportunity to obtain authentic information. However, there was a risk for bias when examining the research problem. As an outsider among educators and parents, the researcher had the potential to impose his beliefs and values on the participants who are unfamiliar with the researcher’s expertise. Chavez (2008) warned that the relationship between the researcher and participant is essential, and there is no guaranty that “observations, interpretations, and representations” (p. 475) are not affected by personality. Given the various roles the researcher plays in the community under investigation, as both insider and outsider, the researcher developed ways to minimize personal bias or coercion of the participants.

Banks (1998) would classify the researcher as an indigenous insider. This type of insider is one who has multiple connections in the community, is completely socialized, and is perceived to have authority. While such authority has no power or control over the participants, their decision to participate might have been affected, either positively or negatively, by the researcher’s positionality.

Chavez (2008), however, offered a new perspective on indigenous insiders, based on the degree to which the researcher could maintain, simultaneously, both insider and outsider roles. To this end, the researcher made every effort to balance both insider and outsider roles. These efforts included providing the participants with clarity of purpose and collecting data through various instruments, such as interviews, focus groups, and
field notes. These various instruments of data collection facilitated triangulation to test the trustworthiness of the data collected.

This chapter begins with an overview of the research context, research participants, the process for data collection and analysis, and concludes with a summary of the chapter.

Research Context

Mount Vernon School District. The Mount Vernon School District in Mount Vernon, NY, an incorporated city in southern Westchester County since 1892, borders on the northeast side of Bronx, NY. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), Mount Vernon spans 4.39 square miles, where 67,292 residents live in the most densely populated city in the County of Westchester (Westchester County Department of Planning, 2005). School-aged children comprise 22% of the population. This diverse city is 63.4% Black, 24.3% White, and 14.3% Hispanic or Latino.

There are approximately 10,985 children between the ages of 5 and 17 residing in Mount Vernon (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Of these children, 1,880 live in poverty. The New York State District Report Card for the Mount Vernon School District reported in 2011–12 (New York State Department of Education, 2012) that there were 8,363 children enrolled in K-12 grades with 68% eligible for free or reduced-cost lunches (national indicators of poverty). The student population consist of 77% Black or African-American, 15% Hispanic or Latino, 6% White, 1% Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, and 1% other. Furthermore, 8% of the population is students with limited English proficiency. According to the New York State District Accountability Report (New York State Department of Education, 2012), the district failed to make
adequate yearly progress (AYP) in English Language Arts, Mathematics and Science for all student groups on both the elementary school and secondary school levels. The district is classified as a high need/resource urban/suburban school district.

**An Historical Perspective of Black Clergy in Mount Vernon**

**Black clergy in Mount Vernon before the civil rights movement era.** The Black clergy in Mount Vernon, similar to those on the national scene, such as Rev. Gardner C. Taylor and Rev. Sandy Ray in Brooklyn, were leading efforts for racial, economic, and political equality during the civil rights movement era. Several of the Black churches in Mount Vernon became influential social institutions through their bold efforts to combat social and economic inequality. Taylor (1994) stated, “the church is more than its ministers” (p. 102). However, the minister is crucial to the church’s involvement and impact in social and economic issues affecting the Black community. Through the leadership of the clergy, the Black church fostered social change in the Black community. “The Black church was a refuge and institution of hope. It is the key to understanding 19th century African American life. The church provided early leadership, human services, moral direction, social activities, political organization, education, and community cohesion” (Spruill, 1993, p. 19).

The Black church in Mount Vernon had its origins during the late 19th century with the organizing of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, now known as Greater Centennial African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. A study by Spruill (1993) found that, although not the pioneers of Black religious life in Mount Vernon, as once believed, Grace Baptist Church, “was the most effective at institutionalizing Black participation in mainstream religion, politics, and social services” (p. 29). Since that
time, Black clergy in Mount Vernon have served as leaders in social change. The churches provided the community with political and intellectual leadership. For example, in the 1930s and 1940s, Benjamin Levister, of Grace Baptist Church, was a forerunner in leading efforts to address obstacles to integration (Edwards, 2011). Subsequently, ministers such as Rev. Shelton Doles and Rev. Samuel Austin, also of Grace Baptist Church, Rev. Clinton Wilcox of Greater Centennial African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, and Rev. Richard H. Dixon, Jr. of Macedonia Baptist Church, were among the continuation of clergy engaged in providing leadership around political, social and economic equality (Edwards, 2011; Spruill, 2009).

During the early 20th century, de facto segregation was an indisputable reality in most aspects of the living experience for Blacks in Mount Vernon. The involvement of the Black clergy in the social and economic affairs of the Black community had a direct impact on the prominence of the Black church on the south side of Mount Vernon (Edwards, 2011), where the emerging Black middle class resided (Spruill, 1993). On September 12, 1901, there was a mass meeting of the Black Republicans, which began a relationship between local political parties and Black clergy (Spruill, 1993). A byproduct of the Black clergy’s involvement and influence led to a few Black clergy members running for, and receiving, appointments to political office both before and during the civil rights movement era, in hopes of making advances in the fight for equality. Some of the pastors included Rev. Samuel Austin, who was the first Black clergyman to enter the race, although unsuccessful, for Mayor of the City (Edwards, 2011), and both Rev. Rinico Nelson and Rev. Richard H. Dixon, Jr. who were appointed police chaplain and 2nd Deputy Commissioner of the city’s Police Department, respectively.
The Black clergy’s roles of leadership inside and outside of the church helped to maintain a consciousness of the civil rights movement and the importance of their involvement in the political environment. Leadership of the Black clergy during the civil rights movement era was developing a pathway for future leadership to continue and expand the roles of Black clergy (Edwards, 2008).

Early in the 20th century, improving the education and opportunities in the Black community became of great interest to Black clergy, and they led the Black church to engage in various efforts to address educational inequality. Despite the fact that many of these efforts were programmatic, like the Community Settlement House, established by Grace Baptist Church in 1939 to provide leisure activities for children and young adults, evening classes for adults to improve their education, and other social activities (Spruill, 1993), they demonstrated the commitment of Black clergy to improve opportunities for Blacks. These types of programs enhanced the labor skills among Blacks to better serve their employers. However, with the growing number of qualified Black voters in the city during this time, Black leaders began focusing on the need for greater representation in school policymaking positions and electing Blacks to the Board of Education (Spruill, 1993).

The Black clergy were also pioneers in running for the school board in Mount Vernon. In 1931, Rev. Joshua M. Levister, pastor of Grace Baptist Church, was the first Black candidate to run for the school board, making him the first Black person to run for elective office in the city (Spruill, 1993). With the support of the NAACP, three Black candidates, Rev, Joshua M. Levister, Rev. James White, and Dr. Mark DeLeon, unsuccessfully ran for the school board between 1931 and 1936. Despite the defeats,
these runs gave birth to the history of Black clergy’s leadership in the fight for educational equality and inclusion in school policy and school board elections. The 1936 school board election was highly controversial. Spruill (1993) writes, “The election was one of the most hotly contested in the city’s history. The victor was Mrs. Burrage. She defeated Dr. DeLeon and the incumbent, Miss Marlatt. This was a controversial victory” (p. 77). Spruill further concluded that the supporters of Mrs. Burrage and the other two successful incumbents celebrated this victory at the Italian Civic Association (ICA), marking the beginning of a 50-year struggle between Italians and Blacks for control of education in Mount Vernon.

**Black clergy in Mount Vernon after the civil rights movement era.** Since 1936, Black clergy and their communities have been fighting for equality and social change, especially in the area of educational policy in Mount Vernon. The 1984 election of three Black trustees to the school board was evidence that the work started by the Black clergy in the 1930s had been passed on to future Black clergy leadership. Black clergy in the 1980s took up the mantle and continued the fight for equality. Edwards (2008) states that between 1984 and 1999, the control of the school board had shifted to the Black community and the UBC had become the new political power, a position once held by the Italian Civic Association (ICA). Along with the political shift in the city’s leadership, by the election of the first Black mayor, Hon. Ronald Blackwood in 1985, the political paradigm had shifted to the Black community. Findings from Edwards (2008) found:

Since the changeover in leadership, Blacks have filled local governmental posts, including important commissionerships and judgeships; gained control of the city
council; and used their power at the voting box to elect government officials at the county and state levels. In addition, Blacks have maintained their majority representation on the Mount Vernon Board of Education (p. 133-134).

Many of these victories were the result of the involvement of Black clergy leadership in political, social, and economic affair in the Mount Vernon community. More specifically, Black clergy have played an instrumental role in the political arena related to the election of the School Board Trustees (Edwards, 2008), and thus an impact on educational policy.

In spite of the success and significant role that Black clergy have played in the fight for high-quality, high-performing integrated public schools, Black clergy in Mount Vernon, specifically the UBC, find itself under scrutiny by the community. The United Black Clergy consist of a small percentage of clergy in Mount Vernon. Most of the clergy are not active members of the UBC. However, the UBC is the vehicle and voice of the clergy in Mount Vernon. In 2008, Edwards found that Black clergy, specifically the UBC, were major players in educational politics, yet there is a belief within the community that their involvement was self-serving. Black clergy were instrumental in the election of members of their respective congregations. Not only did they support individuals from their respective congregation, but they also helped to elect several of their clerical colleagues to the School Board.

The Mount Vernon Black clergy, who made a conscious decision to involve themselves in educational matters in the 1930s (Spruill, 1993), reinforced their position in 1993 with the creation of the Coalition for the Empowerment of People of African Ancestry (CEPAA) (Edwards, 2008). Edwards (2008) asserts that Black clergy made a
similar conscious decision to become less active in the electoral process of School Board Trustees. A finding by Edwards (2008) and confirmed by Mizzel (2012) was the decision of the Black clergy to withdraw involvement in the School Board election, in part, as response to criticism from the community that questioned the motivation for their involvement in matters of education.

There is a new landscape in Mount Vernon. The city had less than 1,600 people, out of an eligible 30,000, vote in the 2012 and 2013 school board elections. Additionally, there have been an increasing number of regionalized churches (Edwards, 2008), where more church members are residing outside the community. In addition, Smith & Harris (2005) found that Black clergy are experiencing more leadership challenges with the balance between individual religious duties and secular responsibilities (Smith & Harris, 2005). In the last 40 years, more pastors have become bi-vocational or heavily involved in the politics of the community. For instance, Rev. Keith Williams, who served as a higher education administrator; Rev. James Gardner, who served as an educator in Mount Vernon public schools; Rev. Troy DeCohen, who served as an executive for a non-profit organization, and the role of the researcher, as a pastor and commissioner of recreation for the city of Mount Vernon.

Public opinion has adversely affected the reputation of the Black clergy. During the 2012 school board election, controversy erupted when the UBC received chastisement by members of the community for their lack of involvement in the school system. In contrast, other community members considered Black clergy involvement as beneficial. Some community members questioned the motivation for the involvement of the clergy in school matters, claiming that clergy involvement was personally motivated. However,
the Black clergy did not share this opinion. For example, at a special school board meeting, Rev. William Mizzel, Associate Pastor of Grace Baptist Church, Mount Vernon, NY, and chairman of the Social Action Committee for the UBC, rebutted disparaging comments by community members that criticized the Black clergy’s involvement in public school matters. Mizzel (2012) informed over 200 community members that the Black clergy never lost interest in educational reform, but dismantled the CEPAA and chose to refrain from organized efforts in school matters or endorsing candidates for the school board because of community criticism.

Likewise, Black clergy in Mount Vernon have received criticism for other social and political decisions. In 2013, a minister of a prominent church, who was also a leader of the UBC, was the target of controversy and in a political debate with a county elected official regarding the establishment of an emergency homeless shelter at a prominent church (Dyer, 2013). The Black clergy was faced with competing priorities. For example, the establishment of the shelter served to support the mission of the church, yet the minister faced challenges from members of community who questioned the motives for contracting with the county to receive $120,000 for housing for the homeless shelter (Rauch, 2013). The county elected official stated,

I am not concerned about threats of political repercussions . . . for taking a stance to protect children, my constituents, and the homeless and vulnerable population in this county. I have taken this stance because it is absolutely the moral and correct thing to do. My position is not influenced by money or any personal financial benefit. (Williams, 2013)
These are examples of the complex role Black clergy play in the urban community. The Black clergy struggle to address the needs of the community, while balancing priorities that effectively address the social, political, economic, and spiritual needs of their constituents (Edwards, 2008; Smith & Harris, 2005). Rauch (2013), for example, identified a minister faced with justifying an emergency homeless shelter located in the same building with a school and near two neighboring schools. Because of this struggle, there is a need to examine the new role of Black clergy in the midst of the new landscape.

**Research Participants**

There are a reported 400 religious organizations, religious houses of worship of varying sizes, denominations, and faiths within the city of Mount Vernon. Additionally, there are interdenominational and interfaith associations. One in particular, the UBC, brings Black clergy together for mutual benefit and collaboration on social issues. The UBC has an average of 30 members, annually, and it includes pastors and other ministers from primarily Christian churches, and there is one Muslim leader within the city limits and the local vicinity.

The sampling for this study consisted of subsets of the population, such as clergy, educators, parents, and community leaders. In order for results to be meaningful, the study required participants who have a perspective on the research problem through their lived experiences in Mount Vernon. In their studies on urban education, Stone (2001) incorporated three categories of respondents (general influentials, community advocates, and program specialists), and Edwards (2008) identified four categories (educational specialists, members of community-based organizations, members of the community at
large, and influentials). This study conducted 12 semi-structured interviews and two focus groups with similar categories of respondents.

This was a purposeful sampling for the study. The sampling included four local Black clergy, both members and non-members of the UBC, and one non-clergy community-based organization leader (community advocates/community-based organizations), one school district leader, one former teacher/current school board trustee, and one teacher (program specialists/educational specialists), two parent/community members, and two elected officials (general influentials/community-at-large/congregation members). Smith, Flowers, & Larkins (2009) stated that phenomenological studies could have sample sizes that range from small to large. A small sample size was better suited to this analysis because it was practical. Otherwise, attendance at in-depth, one-on-one interviews and focus groups may have been a scheduling issue for the participants. The two focus groups included 10 non-clergy and three Black clergy participants. The non-clergy focus group consisted of two school board trustees, one charter school administrator, two community-based organization leaders, five parents, and community-at-large participants. The clergy focus group included one member of the UBC and two non-members of the UBC.

The study’s purposeful sampling included participants who had been best aligned and familiar with the research problem, such as clergy who had been both members and non-members of the UBC, as well as educational and community-based leaders. Ease of data gathering was also a concern: participants had to be readily accessible to participate in the study. While homogenous in the sense that the participants were all familiar with the research problem, their perspectives varied. The purposeful sampling allowed for an
analysis of a variety of lived experiences, and therefore, it had the potential of offering meaningful findings.

The researcher contacted the participants through the membership in the UBC and the Mount Vernon school district, as well as through referrals by individual clergy in the vicinity and participation in the parent-teacher associations and community-based organizations. As a local cleric and resident of the community, the researcher was aware of the several venues with access to clergy in the vicinity, and access to the superintendent of schools, the school board trustees, elected officials, and members of community organizations.

The researcher invited potential participants with an initial email and followed up with an introductory letter sent via U.S. Postal Service, FAX, or electronic mail (email). The researcher furnished each participant with an overview of the study to explain the role of the participant and of the researcher. The introductory letter officially requesting participation is attached as Appendix A. An informed consent form (Appendix B), when signed by each participant, acknowledged that the participant had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. This executed acknowledgement served to confirm each participant’s commitment to participate in the study.

In an effort to protect the participants from any undue influence, and to protect their privacy throughout the study and afterwards, the researcher used a pseudonym for each participant and provided a variety of venues for participation in the research. Participant chose the location for their interviews. All participants received contact information for the officials at St. John Fisher College in the event that they had questions or concerns regarding the study. Finally, to ensure reliability and validity of
data, the researcher gave each participant the opportunity to review the transcript of his or her responses for accuracy.

**Data Collection Instruments**

The primary sources of data collection were in-depth, one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and the researcher’s observations. These three separate and distinct methods for data collection facilitated triangulation and included perspectives of both clergy and non-clergy members of the community. In order to manage positionality and ensure validity and reliability of the data, the researcher enlisted a research assistant to help analyze and triangulate data.

A clarity of purpose explicitly expressed in the informed consent form (Appendix B) lent assurance to the participants that the study was authentic, and the triangulation of the data by interviewing various members of the community, including non-clergy, ensured the accuracy of data obtained and reported, all of which helped to yield true perspectives. Findings by Chavez (2008) described a process for obtaining validity and reliability as the ability to maintain good observation skills. An outsider is readily able to disconnect from the participant, while an insider must manage the connection. To this end, the researcher attempted to manage positionality by continuously evaluating the researcher’s insider and outsider positions and monitoring the comfort level of participants in every setting. In cases where the researcher may have felt that a participant was concerned about undue influence, the researcher was prepared to arrange for the research assistant to administer the individual’s interview.

**Interviews.** Researchers have described an interview as a purposeful conversation guided by the research questions, where the participants describe their
experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Once all of the participants were confirmed, the research assistant scheduled a one-on-one interview for each participant. A list of interview questions is attached (Appendix C). These interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions related to the topic, the research questions, and each participant’s lived experiences. The interviews were standardized, yet allowed some flexibility for the participant to express perceptions without restraint. In some cases, the participants offered perspectives that were not relevant to this study. However, the flexibility allowed the researcher to capture rich and in depth perceptions from the participants.

**Focus groups.** Focus groups are particularly relevant for interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA); because focus groups: (a) provide an efficient method for collecting multiple perceptions in a single setting, (b) gather multiple perspectives (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), and (c) provide an alternative dataset for triangulation. The researcher conducted two focus groups. Given the sensitive nature of open-and-honest discussion among participants, the researcher conducted separate focus groups for clergy and non-clergy. Separating the groups allowed non-clergy participants to express themselves without concern or imposition related to the presence of clergy, other than the researcher. Each focus group session began with a recitation of the research questions and employed the same open-ended questions as those employed for the interviews. In order to ensure meaningful triangulation of data, all focus group participants were interviewed (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

**Observations.** The researcher recorded observations and field notes during the one-on-one interviews and the focus group sessions. These notations supported the data
that the researcher gathered from the interviews and the focus groups to ensure triangulation. The researcher noted the date, time, and location of the data collection event as well as both verbal and non-verbal responses of the participants. To protect participants’ privacy, the researcher used pseudonyms when recording his observations and field notes.

**Reliability and validity of the instrument paramount.** Without a reliable instrument, there is the potential for collected data to be untrustworthy (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). According to Kvale and Brinkman (2009), validity is the strength by which a researcher can measure the accuracy of statements in the investigation of the research problem. To ensure both reliability and validity of the instrument, this investigator convened a panel of experts to review the list of interview questions for clarity, meaning, and significance. The panel included two clergy, one educator, and one community leader who had a deep familiarity with the research problem and IPA methods.

IPA requires verbatim recording of each interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). The researcher recorded each interview and focus group session using a digital recording device that was compatible for recording and retrieving on the iPad Mini. The researcher also took handwritten field notes during the interviews and focus group sessions to keep track of observations. The data collected through these means allowed the researcher to record interactions that were not captured by the verbal recordings. The researcher kept a journal to document his growth and development during the study. Both methods helped with keeping track of reactions and bias while collecting and analyzing data. Once the one-on-one interviews and focus
group sessions were completed, Speedy Transcription Services, a professional company that guarantees confidentiality of voice recordings, transcribed all recordings and guaranteed the accuracy of all transcripts produced. The transcript included all verbal responses as well as coding for non-verbal utterances, such as laughter, significant pauses, and hesitations. The researcher listened to all the digital recordings and read all the transcripts returned to him by the transcription company to further ensure the reliability and validity of the data.

The researcher developed a coding system to maintain the anonymity of the participants throughout the data collection and transcription process. Only the researcher is able to connect the participant to the research documents. Participants’ personal information obtained from the informed consent forms was stored separately from the transcripts. All of the other documents related to this research, that is, digital recordings and the researcher’s observations and field notes, are retained on a password-protected computer. The digital recordings are accessible to authorized and contracted personnel only, such as the researcher, research assistant, and transcription company personnel, each of whom have signed a confidentiality agreement. All digital recordings will be destroyed by May 31, 2016; and the identity of the participants will never be published, directly or indirectly, in relation to this research.

**Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis**

The data an interpretive phenomenological analysis is iterative and inductive, so there is no one correct way to conduct it (Smith, 2007; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). There are, however, general principles to guide the investigator in transcribing interviews, reading and re-reading transcripts, initial note taking, developing emergent
themes, searching for connections across emergent themes, identifying patterns across interviews, and reporting results (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009); therefore, the analysis process was flexible, reflective, thought provoking, and required continuous revision and expansion.

The researcher listened to the audio recording of each interview while reading each transcript for the first time. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) suggested that this method allows the researcher to imagine the voice of the participant during subsequent readings of the transcripts. In a closer analysis of the transcripts, the researcher paid special attention to interpreting what each participant thinks and understands about the research problem. The researcher developed an initial code to record these interpretations. Guarding against bias was essential at this critical juncture. Freedom from bias is a form of objectivity in qualitative research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), and it can be achieved only by reporting data that has been “systematically cross-checked and verified” (p. 243). To that end, the researcher enlisted the help of a qualified research assistant to analyze the transcripts.

Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) identified this critical phase of IPA when they wrote, “One basic element of exploratory commenting is analyzing the transcript to describe content” (p. 84). The researcher analyzed each sentence for textual data and added descriptive comments that highlighted items of importance to the participant, inclusive of perspectives, events, and experiences. The next level of note taking examined the data for a contextual or structural experience and compared ideas. The final step of the note taking was more interpretative and brought out emerging themes
from all participants’ responses, as opposed to having to decipher the individual meanings of each participant’s responses (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

The development of emerging themes requires a system of coding, “mapping the inter-relationships, connections, and patterns between the exploratory notes” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 91). The goal was to identify those themes related to the research that were most important and common to all sampling subsets, for example, both clergy and non-clergy. Here, the researcher used Microsoft Excel to dissect each interview to reveal themes reflective of the participant’s original statements and thoughts, which were coupled with the researcher’s interpretation. The development of emergent themes led to the identification of connections across emergent themes.

The goal of an IPA is to combine the important themes that capture the most relevant and interesting aspects of the participants’ responses. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) proposed that making connections across emergent themes comprises several processes: abstraction, subsumption, polarization, contextualization, numeration, and function.

Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) defined “abstraction” as the identification of patterns between emergent themes and clustering them together with a new name, referred to as a “sub-ordinate theme.” Conversely, subsumption takes a single emergent theme and makes it a sub-ordinate theme with other emergent themes classified under it. The process of polarization looks for opposing relationships between emergent themes, while conceptualization focuses on the more historical, cultural, and narrative themes that increase local understanding of lived experiences. The researcher looked for the frequency of themes, that is, he counted the data, known as numeration; and finally, the
researcher examined the emergent themes for positive and negative perceptions, known as function, to further establish the meaning of the responses.

After developing a list of codes and emergent themes, the researcher reexamined the themes and conducted additional analysis of the data. The reevaluation of the codes further eliminated one of the initial sub-themes and developed another sub-theme more accurately representing the perceptions of the participants. This process of multi-layered analysis ensured accuracy and minimized bias by the researcher. All of these steps taken together in the coding process provided for a rich and in-depth data analysis of each interview that contributed to a collective cross analysis.

The cross analysis challenged the researcher to search for patterns across all the interview and focus group transcripts, and to chart this information in a table or graphic format. Table 3.1 appropriately illustrates the major and minor categories of the themes. The researcher coded the data according to a key based on the participants’ responses. To ensure reliability of the results, the research assistant verified the codes by using the same coding system as the researcher used to categorize the participants’ responses. The researcher resolved all coding discrepancies.
Table 3.1

**Themes and Sub-Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Themes</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-Theme</th>
</tr>
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| Theme # 1        | Unique characteristics of the Black Church | 1. Spiritual and moral development  
|                  |                                    | 2. Advocacy and community engagement  
|                  |                                    | 3. Influence and political involvement  |
| Theme # 2        | Roles and expectations of the Black clergy | 4. Advocacy and community engagement  
|                  |                                    | 5. Awareness of community issues  
|                  |                                    | 6. Influential and accountable leadership  
|                  |                                    | 7. Collaboration and mobilization  |
| Theme #3         | New issues for public school reform | 8. Inadequate funding resources  
|                  |                                    | 9. Lack of parent involvement and community apathy  
|                  |                                    | 10. Diminishing and Inconsistent Black clergy leadership  
|                  |                                    | 11. Lack of qualified staff and leadership  
|                  |                                    | 12. Challenging school environment  
|                  |                                    | 13. Political control groups  |
| Theme #4         | Leadership opportunities to improve public school | 14. Access and Improved School  
|                  |                                    | 15. Expertise and awareness  
|                  |                                    | 16. Influence and mobilization  |
| Theme #5         | Barriers to Equality: race, poverty and accountability | 17. Race, white flight and resegregation  
|                  |                                    | 18. Poverty, wealth, and policy  
|                  |                                    | 19. Accountability and ownership  
|                  |                                    | 20. Competition and internal conflicts  |

**Summary**

This study was an interpretative phenomenological analysis. The context for this study was Mount Vernon, NY, a diverse urban community of 68,000 people. The participants included a purposeful sampling of Black clergy, educators, parents, and
members of the community at large. As an insider familiar with the population, the researcher identified the participants through direct access to community organizations, such as the UBC, parent-teacher associations, and community organizations as well as professional relationships with non-UBC clergy.

The data collection process began with an initial invitation to participants, followed by an introductory letter (Appendix A), and an informed consent form (Appendix B), to explain the study and the right of each participant to withdraw at any time. The data collection process used open-ended questions developed by the researcher and verified for validity and reliability by a panel of experts in the field. The researcher employed these questions to conduct semi-structured interviews and focus groups, digitally recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed as outlined in this chapter.

The researcher submitted the proposed study to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at St. John’s Fisher College in October 2013 for approval. After receiving IRB approval, the researcher began to identify potential participants and commenced formal interviews in late November 2013. Recordings were sent to a professional transcriber. The researcher reviewed each transcript to ensure accuracy; he completed coding and analysis of data in February and March 2014.
Chapter 4: Results

Research Questions

This chapter outlines the findings of a phenomenological study that utilized qualitative research methods to examine the Black clergy in Mount Vernon, NY, and their role in public education reform in the post-civil-rights-movement era. The participants in this study involved Black clergy and non-clergy stakeholders in Mount Vernon, NY. This study was inspired by the notion that public education reform benefits from the collective power of church involvement (Middleton, 2001) and the perceived absence of the Black clergy from the fight for educational equality today (Edwards, 2008). The chapter includes responses to the specific research questions that guided this study, a descriptive and cross analyses of the data, and a summary of results.

This study obtained perceptions through 12 individual interviews and two focus groups. The individual interviews consisted of one community-based organization leader, two parent/community members, two elected officials, three educational specialists, and four Black clergy (two members of the United Black Clergy of Westchester and two non-members of the UBC). The focus groups included one Black clergy group, consisting of one member of the UBC of Westchester and two non-members; and one non-clergy group, consisting of two community-based organization leaders, four parents/community members, and four educational specialists.

This chapter is an overview of the perceptions and lived experiences of the participants in the study. Each person was a member of a Black congregation, participated in a school-related organization, or had experience with Black clergy and the
education system through community involvement. The participants’ membership in the Black church or involvement with Black clergy ranged from 10 to 70 years. The unique experience of each individual and the findings offered insight to the role the Black church and Black clergy have played in public school educational reform. The research questions were developed based on the theoretical framework of critical race theory and social capital theory. The following is a summary of the findings.

**What are the perceptions regarding the role of the Black church in fighting for education reform in urban communities where a new majority prevails?** The participants recognized public education as a means to moral and ethical development and that the Black church has a biblical mandate to give voice to the discontent, identify injustice, and galvanize the community around the issue of education inequality. Respondents felt the church has a biblical responsibility to advocate for education through information gathering and dissemination to congregants, mobilization of community, and creation of supportive services to the educational system. Participants felt that ministers were responsible for understanding the complexities of education reform and for holding elected and appointed officials accountable. Finally, participants expressed the role of the Black church as providing leadership and collaborative coordination to support education reform.

**What is the role of the Black clergy now that the fight for social justice in public schools may involve holding accountable leaders of the new majority?** The respondents agreed that the role of Black clergy in the fight for social justice and public schools today remains the same as it did pre/during the civil rights era. They did not see any major differences in the role of Black clergy as it pertained to holding appointed and
elected officials accountable regardless of the shift in leadership. The expectation that Black clergy were to hold the new majority even more accountable for safeguarding public schools was a key response. The respondents expressed concern about political and personal agendas hindering the ability of Black clergy to hold the new majority leadership accountable but challenged them to assume the moral and ethical responsibility to do so. They outlined the need for Black clergy to be advocates for educational reform, to be knowledgeable of educational issues, to exert their influence, and to collaborate with other community stakeholders to ensure accountability of elected and appointed officials. The participants expressed concern about nepotism.

What are the new issues affecting education equality in these communities?

When the participants were asked to identify new issues affecting education equality, they responded with: inadequate resources; lack of qualified staff and leaders; lack of parental involvement and community apathy; political control groups, and challenging school environment. While these are important to education today, several of these concerns had prevailed before the civil rights movement, and they did not directly correlate to the focus of this study.

During the interviews with the participants, there were a few new issues related to the role of the Black clergy in public education reform that did arise through the voices of the participants. They believed that, in the new landscape, issues with the lack of parent involvement, community apathy, and challenging school environment had increased significantly. In addition, many of the respondents, including some of the Black clergy, voiced concern about a diminishing and inconsistent Black clergy in public school reform over the past few years and the changing faces of political control groups in the new
landscape. When asked to explain, participants described the former Italian Civic Association (ICA), the Coalition for the Empowerment of People of African Ancestry (CEPAA), the Northside Concerned Property Owners United Tenants Association, and the United Black Clergy as examples of political-control groups that were a coalition of individuals in the city who used their influence to exercise power over the direction of public school reform. The voices of the participants suggested these issues were new because they significantly influence the community trust of Black clergy, and these issues had become problematic since the new majority took control of the public school system.

Several participants expressed that the Black clergy were losing or had lost trust in the community. The respondents stated that these issues were different than the old issues because, previously, the community trusted the clergy to maintain the moral and ethical leadership, mobilization of parents, and to hold elected and appointed leaders accountable; and now they voiced that they did not see the clergy acting in that role.

Recognizing the advantages that Black clergy hold as leaders of their congregations and the influence they wield among their congregants, they expressed the expectation that Black clergy provide leadership to address current issues in the public school system.

**What opportunities can Black clergy build upon to advance their role as leaders in education reform?** The participants identified Black clergy, in their role as the moral and ethical leadership in the community, as having the greatest potential to address issues in the public school system because of the general influence they hold in the community. They articulated that Black clergy have a unique ability to influence change, especially in addressing issues such as “Black-on-Black” crime. They
recognized the ability of Black clergy to have access to resources, galvanize members of
their congregation, and, in times of crisis or community, the need to collaborate across
religious entities. This opportunity for Black clergy to influence their respective
congregations and to use their pulpits to provide awareness around issues related to
public education is an advantage not typically utilized by other religious denominations.

They also expressed an equally great opportunity for them to use the issue as a
vehicle to collaborate with other Black clergy throughout the community. The
participants identified collaborative efforts between Black clergy and other community
organizations as potentially having a critical impact on public education reform. The
respondents further expressed that the Black clergy have the opportunity to build on their
previous experience in public education reform efforts. They recognized Black clergy as
having the opportunity to provide awareness of education issues, encourage community
involvement, foster collaborative leadership, and use their relationships with elected and
appointed leaders to hold those leaders accountable in advancing public education
reform.

What are the barriers that impede the role of Black clergy to serve as a
major influence in advancing educational reform? When asked about the various
barriers that impede the role of Black clergy to influence public school reform, the
participants discussed several items that are tied to the new issues in education reform,
that is, the inconsistent role Black clergy have played in recent years and the effect
political groups had on the leadership image of clergy. They voiced concern over the
inconsistency of the UBC of Westchester and the perceived lack of seriousness regarding
education reform matters. Some individuals from the study recognized the role of Black
clergy in gaining control of the school board during the 1990s, but chastised them for becoming politically converse and failing to remain involved. They believed inconsistency and intermittent involvement from Black clergy is a barrier. They also expressed concern about the inability of clergy to work together collaboratively to address education policy.

Many of the interviewees took the stance that due to the complexities involved in educational reform, there needed to be more constant and consistent leadership from the Black clergy. Some respondents felt that Black clergy only become involved in matters of education during school board election periods. On the other hand, some participants articulated concern that the clergy have been too involved and create chaos by their formation of political control groups. Political control groups were special groups within the community engaged in advancing a specific agenda in support or against a particular community issue. To that end, participants agreed that perceived competition and internal conflicts between Black clergy members remain as barriers to their becoming effective leaders and advancing public school reform. They believed the growing lack of trust affected how accountable the community viewed the Black clergy as leaders versus obstacles to public school reform. On the other hand, the clergy voiced the belief that they have championed the cause for the community and, when criticized for being too involved, they consciously withdrew.

The participants expressed racial and ethnic divisions and the inability of Black clergy to unify the community across racial and ethnic groups, and they acknowledged that the Mount Vernon public schools’ challenge with resegregation in the aftermath of White and bright flight. They argued that because of resegregation, Mount Vernon is
primarily Black and is more ethnically divided than before the White flight. The respondents voiced concern that the Whites (6% of the population of Mount Vernon), who primarily reside on the north side of the city, were fighting to control the schools and reduce property taxes. While, with the school population being 75% Black and Blacks fighting to keep control of the system, along with the growth of the 15% Latino population, who basically disengaged from the fight for public school reform, the Black clergy have been unable to unify the fight across racial and ethnic barriers. They stated the need for Black clergy to collaborate with community and education leaders to create equitable schools regardless of racial demographics, or location in the city. Yet, according to the participants, the focus of the Black clergy leadership has been based on race, as it was in the case with the ICA previously. Despite these barriers, many of the respondents viewed Black clergy as having the potential to advance public school reform with a more collective and consistent approach if they extended their advocacy beyond their own racial group.

Data Analysis and Findings

Five themes emerged as a result of these interviews and focus groups: (a) unique characteristics of the Black church, (b) expectations of Black clergy, (c) new issues for public school reform, (d) leadership opportunities to improve public schools, and (e) barriers to equality, which are race, poverty, and accountability. There were 20 sub-themes to support the main themes (Table 3.1). Prior to the analysis of the findings, it is important to provide a description and analysis of the study participants to understand their experiences with the phenomenon presented in the study. The following descriptive analysis provides demographic and biographical information of the individuals to provide
a context for the lived experiences shared by the participants. Following the descriptive analysis is a cross analysis of the data to show the results of triangulation of data.

**Descriptive analysis.** This section provides a general description of the respondents who participated in the one-on-one interviews.

Participants in the individual interviews reflect a range of diverse religious, educational, and community experiences. They were clergy, community leaders, educators, elected officials, and parents from diverse religious backgrounds, representing a broad range of educational and community involvement experiences. The individuals (Table 4.1) included three UBC clergy, one Non-UBC clergy, one community-based organization leader, three educators, two elected officials, and two parents. Their religious affiliation included the following: seven Baptists, two Catholics, one Muslim, one Nondenominational, and one Presbyterian. All respondents have an affiliation with Mount Vernon through residency, employment with the school system, or a community organization. Ten of the 12 were residents, while two were non-residents. The two non-residents were affiliated with Mount Vernon through employment and community involvement for at least 20 years. All others had at least 20 years involvement with the community. The age range of the participants was 30–75 years old. Despite their diversity of experiences, they provided common perspectives concerning the role of Black clergy in public education reform.
Table 4.1

Description of Individual Interview Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Community Group</th>
<th>Stakeholder Category</th>
<th>Religious Affiliation</th>
<th>Residency/Work Years</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>UBC Clergy</td>
<td>Community Advocate</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>35 years*</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Organization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Educator</td>
<td>Program Specialist/</td>
<td>Catholic/Baptist</td>
<td>2 years*</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>educational specialist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>UBC Clergy</td>
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<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>20 years</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Organization</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Parent/Community Member</td>
<td>Community-at-Large/</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Congregation Member</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Parent/Community Member</td>
<td>Community-at-Large/</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>40 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Congregation Member</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Community-Based Organization Leader</td>
<td>Community a/Advocate</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>40 years</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Community-Based</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Organization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Educator – Teacher</td>
<td>Program Specialist/</td>
<td>Protestant/Baptist</td>
<td>40 years</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Educational Specialist</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Educator</td>
<td>Program Specialist/</td>
<td>Protestant/Baptist</td>
<td>50 years</td>
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<td></td>
<td>School District Leader</td>
<td>Educational Specialist</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Non-UBC Elected Official</td>
<td>Community Advocate</td>
<td>Non-denominational</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Inactive UBC Clergy</td>
<td>Community Advocate</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>Elected Official</td>
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<td>Baptist</td>
<td>50 years</td>
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The gender demographics of the participants of the individual interviews (Table 4.2) included six males and six females. All 12 participants were African/Caribbean American.

Table 4.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>African/Caribbean American</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Male</td>
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<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participant 1. The first participant was a pastor of a Black church in Mount Vernon. Having had three churches under his direction, his pastoral experience has spanned almost 50 years. He is a highly trained minister with several degrees in religion, including a doctoral degree in ministry. His civic duties included leadership on several community organization boards, community advocacy organizations, and national religious and denominational organizations. He had been in Mount Vernon for over 35 years and was actively involved in social-justice matters since arriving in the city. This minister was actively involved in the 1990 paradigm shift of the school board’s control.

Participant 2. Actively involved in education policy, with over 40 years of experience in public school education, Participant 2 was a highly educated, well-established educator having held several school district leadership positions in the local area. She was instrumental over the past 25 years with several community-based efforts concerning public education reform. Her religious experience was both with the Catholic
and Baptist churches, and she had worked closely with Black clergy and the community at-large on educational matters.

*Participant 3.* This Presbyterian minister was an interim pastor outside of Mount Vernon. She had been in the church for over 28 years, and she was a licensed minister for 17 years at the time of this study. Initially licensed in the Baptist church, she transitioned her ordination to the Presbyterian Church after nine years. Her early childhood did not include the church and her transition to the Presbyterian Church was an affirmation in seeking greater opportunities for women in the ministry. She was a longtime resident of Mount Vernon for over 20 years and she serves on the staff of a local New York seminary. Although her involvement had been limited at the time of the interview, she previously has been actively involved in community efforts on educational matters, and serving on the scholarship and programming committees of the UBC.

*Participant 4.* Participant 4 was a community member with 20 years’ residency in Mount Vernon. She worked for a not-for-profit, community-based organization that focuses on advocacy for families and provides services to parents and children. Involved in partnership to increase community involvement in the city’s education system, Participant 4 had experience working with other community leaders in Mount Vernon. In addition, she had been an advocate for parental involvement in public school education, and she coordinated several efforts to increase parents’ involvement in the schools. Although she did not regularly attend church, her religious affiliation was Baptist, where she was a member of a Black church in Mount Vernon. Her knowledge of the Black church stemmed from her experiences dating back when her children were in school, and recent experiences through visitations at various Black church services.
Participant 5. This participant was a longtime resident of Mount Vernon for over 50 years, a current tenant association leader, and former leader for a parent-teacher association in Mount Vernon. She is an active community member who has been an advocate for children, and she frequently attends the Mount Vernon school board meetings to voice concerns about the public school system. She has served on several school-based committees. She is an active member of a small Baptist church. For her, the Black clergy demonstrated a collective involvement in education reform in the past, but more recently, their efforts appear to be on a more individual level.

Participant 6. A longtime resident of Mount Vernon for over 40 years, participant 6 was an adult when she and her husband moved to Mount Vernon and raised their children, who are now adults. Her religious affiliation was Catholic, yet because of her personal relationships with Black clergy, she nurtured her knowledge of the Black church and its involvement in public education reform. She attended Catholic school growing up, and her children attended public school until she transferred them to Catholic schools for their secondary school years to receive a better education. She was a leader of a community-based organization specifically created to aid the Mount Vernon public school system and provided advocacy and financial support. For over 20 years, she was involved in a coalition for civil rights in Westchester to address issues of economic and educational disparities. At the time of this study, she was a member of a not-for-profit organization focused on empowerment of the community on issues affecting public education in Mount Vernon.

Participant 7. Participant 7 was born in North Carolina, where he spent his early childhood. He had been an educator for over 30 years and has lived in Mount Vernon for
the past 50 years or more. He worked as a teacher for an accredited alternative education program affiliated with the Mount Vernon school system. His religious affiliation was Protestant, and he attended two Baptist churches in the metropolitan New York area. The son of a minister, his religious experience began as a child around 8 years old; as a young adult, he considered studying religion in college. He attended the Mount Vernon school system after desegregation and before the new majority took over control of the school board in 1980.

Participant 8. Born, raised, and educated in Virginia, Participant 8 was an experienced social worker, educator, and school district leader, who moved to Mount Vernon over 50 years ago. In Virginia, she was a high school educator, and was disqualified from teaching in New York after moving to Mount Vernon. As a result, she became a social worker and attended college for her master’s degree in counseling. She later became a guidance counselor and was involved in the 1960s integration of Mount Vernon’s schools. All of her children were graduates of schools within the Mount Vernon school district. She has worked in the Mount Vernon school district as an administrator and has been an advocate for public education for over 20 years. Her religious affiliation had been Baptist, since her early years in Virginia, and she continued to be an active member of the Baptist church where she served as a church leader.

Participant 9. This participant was a 25-year plus resident of Mount Vernon and a licensed minister with affiliations in the Unitarian, Baptist, and most recently, Congregational churches. Licensed for two years in the Congregational church, she also served the community as an elected official and worked closely with Black clergy on a number of social justice issues affecting the community. Her experience with those
issues was that they provided leadership where necessary, especially in areas, such as public education, where she believes there is a void in the fight for educational equity.

**Participant 10.** Participant 10 was a minister in the Nation of Islam, under the leadership of Minister Louis Farrakhan, and an inactive member of the United Black Clergy. Raised in Mount Vernon as a child, he had been a Mount Vernon resident for over 40 years. His religious affiliation with the Black church began as a child before his conversion to Islam as an adult. He worked in the Mount Vernon public school system and was a youth advocate. He has been directly involved in many efforts affecting youth and education for the past 10 years, especially regarding school violence issues.

**Participant 11.** This participant was an elected official with over 70 years’ residency in Mount Vernon. For most of her life, she has been affiliated with the Baptist church, where her father was a deacon for 40 years, and her mother was a minister. The experience with the Black church began as a young child in Sunday school, then in the Baptist training unit, and in junior missionaries. She has attended a wide range of churches and gained a broad knowledge of the Black church. She was educated in the Mount Vernon school district and attended before the desegregation of public schools. She actively participated in public school programs, and she supports the literacy program at a local elementary school.

**Participant 12.** An elected official born and raised in the south before desegregation, this participant’s religious foundation began with his grandmother and grandfather, who was a deacon in the church as well as a Freemason. As a Southerner, his experience with the Black church had been that it established and supported educational institutions. He was a graduate of a historically Black college supported by
He moved to Mount Vernon in the 1960s and raised his children in the Mount Vernon school system. He had collaborated with Black clergy on a number of social issues, including public education. He believed that Black clergy have the best opportunity to address social issues in Mount Vernon. For him, the Black church was responsible for the moral and spiritual development of the community.

Descriptive analysis and demographic information of focus group participants. The participants in the focus groups had extremely diverse religious backgrounds, along with a broad range of educational and community involvement experiences. The participants in the non-clergy focus group (Table 4.3) included two community-based organization leaders, four parents, one former school district employee, one charter school administrator, and two school-board trustees. Additionally, the demographic included one participant from each of the following religious affiliations: Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Seventh-Day Adventist, Baptist, Catholic converted Baptist, Jewish, and Apostolic. Three had no religious affiliation.

The gender demographics of the participants in the non-clergy focus group (Table 4.4) included three males and seven females. Nine participants were African/Caribbean American; one participant was White and married to an African-American.
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<th>Community Group</th>
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<th>Religious Affiliation</th>
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<td>Community Advocates/Community-Based Organizations</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Community-at-Large/Community-Based Organizations</td>
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<td>Community-at-Large/Community-Based Organizations</td>
<td>Seventh-Day Adventist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Community-at-Large/Community-Based Organizations</td>
<td>Non-Affiliated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Program Specialists/Educational Specialists</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter School Administrator</td>
<td>Program Specialists/Educational Specialists</td>
<td>Catholic/Baptist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator - Trustee</td>
<td>Program Specialists/Educational Specialists</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator - Trustee</td>
<td>Program Specialists/Educational Specialists</td>
<td>Apostolic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 4.4

Description of Non-Clergy Focus-Group Participants by Gender

<table>
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<th>Gender</th>
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<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Biographical sketches of non-clergy focus group participants. The following is biographical information on the participants in the non-clergy focus group.

Participant 13. Participant 13 was a charter school administrator. She previously lived in Mount Vernon with her husband and children. She had a master’s degree in social work. She had been actively involved in the Mount Vernon community for over 10 years, and she attended a Baptist church. Previously, her religious affiliation was with the Catholic Church where she received her conversion and confirmation. Her community involvement included membership in a parent-teacher association, development of a charter school, and participation in a coalition initiative to inform the community on the importance of involvement in the public school system.

Participant 14. This participant was a member of the school board. He had been a resident of Mount Vernon for over 20 years. He held a law degree and a degree in social work. His religious affiliation was Jewish, and he attended various Black churches in his role as school board trustee. He was the founder of a non-profit organization focused on empowering and educating the community on educational matters. Throughout the past 10 years, he had been actively advocating for an improved and inclusive education system.
Participant 15. This participant coordinated programs for youth in Mount Vernon and collaborated with the recreation department and the school system; she also provided an after-school program at an elementary school. Participant 15 founded a mentoring program that used sports to develop sportsmanship and improve academic and social skills. She had been a resident of Mount Vernon for the past 10 years and had been a leader since her early 30s—although inactive in the church—her religious affiliation was Pentecostal.

Participant 16. This participant was a 60-year-old resident of Mount Vernon and had lived in the city for over 40 years. She had raised her children in the Mount Vernon school system and currently has foster children in the system. She was an active member of the parent-teacher association, and she attended school board meetings regularly. Her religious affiliation was Presbyterian; she previously attended a Baptist church where she served as a deaconess. She had served on several committees at the school and district level.

Participant 17. A community-based organization leader who coordinated a literacy program for children at no cost, this 70-year-old man had no religious affiliation. Participant 17 had been extremely active in public education initiatives and attended school board meetings on a regular basis to advocate for cultural awareness in the curriculum. His residency in Mount Vernon spanned over 20 years. Despite his lack of an affiliation with the church, he worked with Black clergy on a number of community-related projects.

Participant 18. This school board member has been a parent and child advocate for over 10 years, and her children had graduated from, or were currently in, the Mount
Vernon school system at the time of this study. She served actively on parent-teacher associations. Her other community involvements included serving as a member of various school committees, and participation in several collaborations with other community organizations to inform and mobilize residents around education initiatives. Her religious affiliation was Apostolic, where she had been active for most of her life.

**Participant 19.** This participant was a long-time resident of Westchester County. She was not a resident of Mount Vernon, but had been active in community activities in the city. Participant 19 was a longstanding Seventh-Day Adventist who has worked closely with other community leaders on social-justice issues. Her experience with the Black clergy spans 50 years. She attended segregated schools and experienced desegregation.

**Participant 20.** A retired/former school district employee with over 40 years of experience in the Black church, this participant worked closely with school board members and school district leaders on initiatives that involved the community in public school affairs. She originally came from the south and moved north in her young adult years. She does not live in Mount Vernon, but has close ties to the community. Her religious affiliation was Baptist, where she received additional educational support.

**Participant 21.** While this participant had no children, she served as a surrogate to children involved in her community program. While she was not affiliated with a church, she had roots in the Black church. Her community involvement included participation in a literacy program for children. Despite her limited involvement in education initiatives, her personal experience had given her a broad perspective on public school issues.
Participant 22. As a community activist, this participant had extensive involvement in public school initiatives. He had participated in the planning of an education summit to empower community members around public school reform issues; he served as a mentor and tutored children in several mentoring programs, and became an advocate for curriculum reform and increasing funding for literacy programs. He is not affiliated religiously, yet he works with clergy on issues of social justice. He had been a resident in Mount Vernon for over 10 years.

The participants in the second focus group were all Black clergy. One participant was a pastor and member of the United Black Clergy, while the other two were assistant ministers and non-members of the UBC. The assistant ministers were female and the pastor was male. The pastor was from a congregational church and the assistant ministers were Baptist (Table 4.4).

Table 4.5

*Description of Black Clergy Focus Group Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Group</th>
<th>Stakeholder Category</th>
<th>Religious Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clergy – UBC</td>
<td>Community Advocate/Community-Based Organizations</td>
<td>Congregational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clergy – Non-UBC</td>
<td>Community Advocate/Community-Based Organizations</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clergy – Non-UBC</td>
<td>Community Advocate/Community-Based Organizations</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The gender demographics of the participants in the Black clergy focus group (Table 4.6) included one male and two females. All three participants were African/Caribbean American.
Table 4.6

*Description of Black Clergy Participants by Gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>African/Caribbean American</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Biographical sketches of clergy focus-group participants.** The following is biographical information on the participants in the clergy focus group.

**Participant 23.** This participant was a pastor with over 27 years of experience. He held several degrees, including three master’s degrees. He was a member of the UBC and had been a bi-vocational pastor working for a non-profit organization. He had extensive experience with community organizations and social justice ministries. At the time of this study, he had recently founded his own health services organization and was active in outreach ministry working with gang violence initiatives, job training programs, and childcare programs. He had been a resident of Mount Vernon for 15 years.

**Participant 24.** Participant 24 was an assistant pastor at a medium-sized Baptist church. She has been in the ministry for 15 years. She was 70 years old and a retired administrative assistant for a hospital. She was born in North Carolina and attended college in the South. After graduation, she moved to New York where she raised her son in Mount Vernon. Her son graduated from the Mount Vernon school system where she was an active parent. She worked closely with her pastor on community initiatives, including the establishment of a free after-school program. Her public school education experience was accomplished before desegregation.
Participant 25. Participant 25 was an assistant minister at a small Baptist church and she was not a member of the UBC. Her residency in Mount Vernon and ministry spanned over 20 years. She had been a member of her church for over 25 years. Her children attended the Mount Vernon school system, and she was an active member of the parent-teacher association. A transplant from the state of Alabama, she came to New York as an adult. She was raised in the 50s and had first-hand experience with racism in the South. She attended segregated schools and witnessed the integration of schools just prior to leaving the region.

Cross analysis of the individual interviews and focus groups. Following the 12 individual interviews and the two focus groups, the data analysis resulted in 189 individual codes. These individual codes represented the unique perspectives of the lived experiences of the participants. Five emerging themes and 20 sub-themes developed after further analysis. These themes and sub-themes best describe the converging perspectives and lived experiences of the participants in an attempt to answer the research questions of this study.

The major themes correlate to the five research questions in this study supported by the frequency of sub-themes shown below (Table 4.7). According to the cross analysis, 68% of the participants viewed influence and political involvement as a unique characteristic of the Black church, and 60% of the respondents identified advocacy and community engagement as an important role of Black clergy. Twenty-eight percent of the participants expressed inadequate funding resources, followed by 56% of the respondents identifying a lack of parent involvement and community apathy as the two major issues facing public school reform today. Seventy-two percent of the respondents
were concerned with the diminishing and inconsistent clergy leadership in public school reform efforts. When discussing leadership opportunities to improve public schools, 76% of the respondents discussed influence and mobilization as the greatest potential for advancing public school reform. On the other hand, 76% of the participants envisioned issues of race, white flight, and resegregation as major barriers to achieving public school reform. This was followed by 72% of the respondents citing an absence of accountability and ownership. The following is a description of the sub-themes with direct quotations from participants to substantiate each sub-theme.

**Theme 1: Unique characteristics of the Black church.** The participants were asked to provide their experience with the Black church and its role in the community. They agreed that the biblical mandate to provide spiritual and moral development was the main responsibility of the Black church. It was viewed as a center for the community to address social-justice issues and as a place for advocacy and community engagement. Lastly, the participants identified the Black church as influential and involved in the political arena.
Table 4.7

*Frequencies of Themes from Interviews and Focus Groups*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Themes</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-Theme</th>
<th>% of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme #1</td>
<td>Unique characteristics of the Black Church</td>
<td>1. Spiritual and moral development</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Advocacy and community engagement</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Influence and political involvement</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #2</td>
<td>Roles and expectations of the Black clergy</td>
<td>4. Advocacy and community engagement</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Awareness of community issues</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6. Influential and accountable leadership</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7. Collaboration and mobilization</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #3</td>
<td>New issues for public school reform</td>
<td>8. Inadequate funding resources</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9. Lack of parental involvement and community apathy</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10. Diminishing and inconsistent clergy leadership</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11. Lack of qualified staff and leadership</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12. Challenging school environment</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13. Political control groups</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #4</td>
<td>Leadership opportunities to improve public school</td>
<td>14. Access and improved schools</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15. Expertise and awareness</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16. Influence and mobilization</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme #5</td>
<td>Barriers to equality: race, poverty, and accountability</td>
<td>17. Race, white flight and resegregation</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18. Poverty, wealth, and policy</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19. Accountability and ownership</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20. Competition and internal conflicts</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.8

*Theme #1: Unique Characteristics of the Black Church*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Themes</th>
<th>Community-Based Organization Leader N = 3</th>
<th>Educational Specialist N = 7</th>
<th>Elected Official N = 2</th>
<th>Non-United Black Clergy N = 3</th>
<th>Parent &amp; Community Member N = 6</th>
<th>United Black Clergy N = 4</th>
<th>Total N = 25</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual and moral development</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy and community engagement</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influential and political involvement</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sub-theme: Spiritual and moral development.* Spiritual and moral development were the first characteristics outlined for the Black church. Participants considered the Black church to be the entity in the Black community responsible for ensuring its spiritual and moral compass. In fact, some of the participants viewed the Black church as having a mandate to provide spiritual, moral, and ethical development. For example, one participant stated,

> The Black church is responsible to administer to their souls. The church needs to be the healer, which is the pastoral thing. I think the church needs to be an advocate for us that’s prophetic. The church is the keeper of the traditions, so [it has] the priestly responsibility. So the church in the community is there, ought to be there, in my opinion, to be concerned about the lives of people and to care for people and to help people reach their full and best selves.
When comparing the Black church to non-Black churches, participants characterized it as being more emotive and expressive in its religious beliefs. One non-clergy participant said,

I see the Black church, in particular, as the soul of Christianity because of their, I’m going to say “unique,” but the fervent way they worship, the sincere way that they worship. You know, when you go to events, you always see the Black church open up in prayer, they always blessed their food. I see Black people, in general, being more religious and obviously more spiritual than the church at large. They demonstrate it in a very unique way.

Sub-theme: Advocacy and community engagement. Participants reflected on the historic and current role of the Black church and the advocacy role it has continuously assumed over the years. They viewed the Black church as being the catalyst to spur community involvement and action, most notably during the civil rights era. These participants characterized the Black church as holding responsibility-addressing injustice and to rebel against all forms of oppression. According to one participant, in contrast with other churches, the Black church has historically been the only religious institution concerned with the plight and problems of Black people. One participant from the non-clergy focus group stated,

The Black church, at the time, had a significant impact in the strides that African-American people made in America . . . I think because of the leadership, it was realized that if we don’t do anything for ourselves, nobody is going to do it for us. The Black church experience was a forum, so the church became a form of
worship, but we also realized that, in the worship center, we also had a meeting of
the minds about our situation.

The participant identified advocacy as unique to the Black church, and it was
rarely seen in non-Black churches. The participants with religious experiences outside of
the traditional Black church found stark differences. One Catholic participant compared
the Black church experience with the Catholic religion, and stated that, in spite of its
advocacy role in the past, the Black church today has not demonstrated the same
commitment.

Well, being that I am Catholic, I don’t identify the Catholic religion specifically
with the problems of the Black people. I identify the Black church as our leaders
in that area. I think that the Black church is a single entity that has the ability to
galvanize a lot of people and to address the issues that are unique to us, and I just
don’t think that it’s being done on the level that it needs to be done . . . I just think
that there’s a big void, and like I said, I think that the Black church has the
potential, but I don’t think that they’re doing it.

Specific to this study, the participants believed the Black church has been
instrumental in providing and supporting education within its community. One of the
participants stated,

My first scholarship money I got from the usher board, it wasn’t but $50, but it
came and I don’t care what I got after that; [the] $50 was like a surprise, and you
know, they were all very proud and happy to push young people. It wasn’t “Do
you go to college?”; it’s “Which college do you go to?” And the church would do
what they could to help you go.
The participants viewed the Black church as historically engaged and having the potential to foster engagement today. However, some of the participants felt the Black church today requires more visibility in community affairs. When reflecting on the role of the church in public school reform, a non-clergy participant characterized the Black church as follows:

Certainly having a congregation that can be educated is really important. How about educating the congregation? How about offering community service programs to educate parents, work alongside of, or coming to the assistance of, the administrators when we ask for help. This district can’t solve by itself all the ills of this city, no way. This is so severe that every social agency and every religious agency needs to be playing a role.

*Sub-theme: Influence and political involvement.* Influence is powerful, especially in the Black community. The participants viewed the Black church as a powerful resource that could be accessed to make major changes in the community. The participants highlighted their experiences. They defined the Black church, collectively, as a source of future leadership. In their experience, the Black church possessed powerful resources to orchestrate change and improve social conditions. According to a non-clergy participant,

Well, when I look at the history of the Black church and the influence during the civil rights movement, and Dr. King, I know that there is a strong influence. There is a very strong power that the church could have, and [it] could be a lightning force to make change . . . The Black church could change, once again, the souls of our people and really impact the community.
The participants unanimously agreed that the Black church has the ability to influence all aspects of the community. They recognized that the potential for the Black church to influence rests with the individual church and pastor. A clergy participant explained,

The Black church has the ability to hit all levels of our community, but I’m not too sure that all pastors have the information that they need to be able to rally that force, and to cultivate that force, and to nurture that force, and to really know what they need to do. The real role should be spirituality. I think some of them have gotten away from what spirituality is. I believe they are also too much involved in politics. They are mixing the two when it’s supposed to be the body of Christ.

A participant from the non-clergy focus group offered the following,

The church is very, very, very much involved in the political arena. In fact, a lot of the political outcomes are dependent upon, or a lot of the political candidates know, that they must have a strong affiliation with a church in order to win an election. There is the church . . . it’s now political.

**Theme 2: Roles and expectations of the Black clergy.** The participants were asked to share their perception of the role Black clergy play in public school reform. In the experience of the participants, the role and expectations of Black clergy can be explained in four distinct areas. The participants articulated the need for Black clergy to be involved in advocacy and community engagement around the issue of public school reform. They perceived the value in Black clergy advocating for public school reform and actively engaging in community efforts regarding the public school system.
Awareness of community issues, such as public school reform, is essential to the role of Black clergy.

Participants articulated that Black clergy must be aware of community issues and have a responsibility to educate themselves about the concerns of the community. Equally, the participants identified Black clergy as influential and accountable leaders with the responsibility for holding other leaders accountable. The expectations of the participants were that Black clergy should foster collaboration and mobilize around issues regarding public school reform.

Table 4.9

*Theme #2. Roles and Expectation of Black Clergy*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Themes</th>
<th>Community Based Organization Leader N = 3</th>
<th>Educational Specialist N = 7</th>
<th>Elected Official N = 2</th>
<th>Non-United Black Clergy N = 3</th>
<th>Parent &amp; Community Member N = 6</th>
<th>United Black Clergy N = 4</th>
<th>Total N = 25</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy and community engagement</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of community issues</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influential and accountable leadership</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration and Mobilization</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sub-theme: Advocacy and community engagement. The achievements of public school reform are the result of the involvement of Black clergy in these efforts. This involvement included Black clergy’s leadership in providing schools for Black children before desegregation, fighting for equality in education during the civil rights era, and advocating for improved educational systems during the post-civil rights era. One Black clergy member, recalled when Black clergy were successful in education reform, and stated,

I think we came through a period in transforming the schools, bringing them [the school board] to reflect the interests of the population—the children population. The church is led [by Black clergy], and advocates for our people to get involved in the Board of Education, voting, and changing the composition of the school board for the purpose of getting our children to have people who cared about their education, who look like them, for motivation.

Though the participants reflected on the success Black clergy have had in public school reform efforts, they also believed that they have been inconsistent in these efforts. They explained the need for them to be more persistent. They further expressed the need for Black clergy to serve as “free agents” with expertise in advocating the needs of the community and fighting for education reform. One parent participant spoke of the desire for Black clergy to serve as community liaison between the community and elected officials,

They [Black clergy] could potentially bring and offer collectively as a group of clergy. Their power would be even more; the power would be awesome because you all are working towards the same goal to make sure they have the correct
people sitting there to do the job that’s best for this community and the children of this community. Because if we’re not careful, the generation after you, cause you’re younger than me, we’re going to be in trouble.

They imagined Black clergy to be present, visible, and involved in community affairs, including public education reform. They expressed concern over the perceived level of disengagement of Black clergy in community affairs. Another participant stated,

We’re not going to have no leaders, and if we don’t do something now, and I think the Black clergy plays a big part of what the future of this community is going to be, but they have to be involved, they have to not sit up in their church . . . Every time, now, we start something, we stop. We have one big event and what happens? We stop. We can’t, and I think the Black clergy is really an important part because if you think about the Black clergy, who else? The Black clergy controls this city, really, with their people. I’m not talking about, we don’t have that many ministers sitting in politics or nothing, but just for your church and your congregation alone, if you think about it, the Black clergy can control this city no matter what.

Sub-theme: Awareness of community issues. The participants believed Black clergy are responsible to be well informed about community issues. They viewed one role in particular as being that of informant. Categorized as having the pulse on the needs of the community and the responsibility for the dissemination of information, Black clergy must first understand, and have the ability to articulate the issues that affect the community. They viewed the church are more informative in the past than today, and
encourage the church to become more informative. A participant from the clergy focus group stated,

The church was a source of education and update. There were no e-mails, there were no faxes, there weren’t flyers circulating to letting people know. So the way you got information was, you know, 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday evening what might have been an off worship night where anyone from the community, Black or White for that matter, could come in and get informed and get their marching instructions. So I think that the church was successful in conveying information.

The participants reflected on the importance of knowledgeable Black clergy and their involvement in the community. Some of the participants believed they lack a level of sophistication about educational issues and encouraged them to become more aware. While some clergy has knowledge, not all are as aware of education issues. The participants articulated the need for Black clergy to set the agenda for church involvement in public school reform. One participant stated,

I think that the clergy are not as engaged in education reform because they don’t know enough. They don’t have the knowledge of what input is needed. They also don’t know how bad things are, and then there is this on-going change situation where clergy do not have an, all clergy, I’d say the majority of clergy in Mount Vernon don’t care about education. They don’t care about that. I mean they care that their kids are going to get an education or go to school, but they don’t see education reform as one of their top agenda items. There are some churches who will, but by and large, even with the struggles we had before, it wasn’t all the churches involved.
Sub-theme: Influential and accountable leadership. The participants all agreed Black clergy are influential leaders in the community. They further explained this influence as unique to the specific clergy. Some expressed concern about the Black clergy’s ability to influence beyond their individual congregations. They voiced the advantage to Black clergy expanding their influence beyond the reach of their individual church and becoming more impactful in the community at large. A parent participant highlighted that individual churches engage in educational services to support public school improvement, and then stated,

Individually, individual churches have adopted schools, some churches have participated in particular after-school programs with local schools, and the schools in their direct community offered after school, I think to that extent they’ve helped. Collectively, I don’t think they’ve done anything...

Participants viewed public school reform efforts as an opportunity for Black clergy to influence community change by supporting families, educating parents, and assisting students with formal programs and scholarship opportunities. One participant reflected on the collective influence of the United Black Clergy.

The United Black Clergy of Westchester is viewed as an open organization available to listen to stakeholders in the community. I’m enlightened and encouraged by the work that [the UBC] organization has done . . . in that organization, which membership is predominantly all ministers, they come together to look at what’s going on in the community and listen to all of the trials and struggles of not only its membership, but the struggles of the hospital, the struggles of education. So, [they are] not just concerned about our own interests
in terms of the pew, but concerned about the impact or the struggles that the pews may be having as a result of a challenge going on with the leadership outside of the church and the Black clergy. The United Black Clergy is willing to hear from both parties not just the members, but also the community, also government.

In contrast, the participants articulated the need for Black clergy to be accountable and hold other leaders equally accountable. They reflected on instances where appointed and elected officials were not held to a standard of accountability. They identified favoritism, nepotism, and silence as counterproductive in order to “hold one’s feet to the fire.” One of the clergy participants summarized the thoughts of several participants when he stated,

I think the [Black clergy] role is the same whether they’re Black, White, or whatever the majority is . . . You have to be committed to addressing those issues and you have to have a plan or some idea of how those issues should be addressed. If you have the big picture, you’ll be able to talk to people, and you’ll be able to see whether, in fact, these people will be able to carry out the job that you want them to do. I no longer feel, I don’t know whether I do or not, let me just, I have to think about that, I no longer feel that it has to be just Black anymore. I’m almost disappointed that Mount Vernon’s school board had gotten to that point or even the Mount Vernon administration. So I don’t think anymore that a Black superintendent is a requirement, a good superintendent is a requirement. I no longer feel that a Black board is a requirement, nor a Black mayor; okay, cause we’ve already lived through the Black mayors here and the White mayors, and right now, I want somebody that’s of quality, and I don’t think
that we’re getting what we need to get. So I know I am really almost at the point where I’m color blind.

Sub-theme: Collaboration and mobilization. The participants reflected on the role of the Black clergy today in contrast to that during the civil rights era. They recognized the role of Black clergy as having the same ability to mobilize and give voice against instances of oppression and inequality. The respondents believed that Black clergy continue to have a role in mobilizing the community to address issues affecting our public schools. They did not see much difference and expected the Black clergy to continue. In the non-clergy focus group, one of the participants stated,

The Black clergies were very instrumental because, I believe, during that timeframe everyone was working together because they knew that there needed to be a change because we were tired of being the oppressed. We wanted our children educated as well as anybody else, and it should not be in a segregated manner. We’re all of Christ, we’re all alike, and they fought very hard, and they were instrumental voices of helping to pull people together, and they stood up for what was right because Black people had been denied an education. They were killed, they were slaves . . . folks did not want us to be educated and they helped that case to be won. A lot of people suffered from that.

Another participant agreed to the importance of collaboration and motivation, yet described a difference today,

Some of the clergymen have been very instrumental in promoting education. Some have been, and some still are, very instrumental in supporting our youth because that area is where we really need help. I believe they have fought for
some improvement of safety issues within the community, but I don’t see that much.

**Theme 3: New issues for public school reform.** Several of the new issues articulated by the participants were issues affecting education reform. They directly named inadequate funding resources, lack of parental involvement and community engagement, lack of qualified staffing and leadership, challenging school environment, and political control groups. Another new issue emerged through the voices of the participants. They expressed concern about the diminishing and inconsistent role of the Black clergy in public school reform. The participants viewed Black clergy as influential leaders in community relationships with teachers, administrators, and school board trustees. To that end, they believed the Black clergy needed to collaborate with those individuals and other community organizations to safeguard the quality of education in Mount Vernon.

They found parent involvement to be extremely low and community apathy equally high. In response, the participants believed the role of the Black clergy included the development of strategies to educate, motivate, and engage parents and the community. However, they identified the school environment as challenging, and the diminishing and inconsistent role of Black clergy in recent years as problematic. In addition, the effects of political control groups were another concern the Black clergy needed to address. The participants desired to produce quality schools by challenging Black clergy to becoming mentors and help address these new issues. An educational specialist voiced,
My ideal public school in Mount Vernon would be a combination of ethnicity, qualified teachers, meaning they are certified by the state, their education is current, that’s the personal development, on-going education. To make sure that classrooms are clean, they have the material that they need to teach, and that it is in a safe environment. I believe they should have an education that brings children together where it’s culturally competent, culturally appropriate, culturally fitting. What do I mean by that? Whether you’re talking about the Jewish people, their culture, the African American culture, whether it’s the Hispanic culture, that everyone comes together, that people stop seeing color but just see an individual and focus on if you want to be an engineer, provide those classes, that training. You want to be a doctor, prepare them with the science and the math. Engineer, that’s my way of that ideal school and a superintendent that really holds the staff accountable and provides the assistance that the teachers, the principals, and the assistant principals need to help children be successful. To make sure that we also have early childhood education to build the foundation from the beginning and then follow the kids through and make sure they have mentors.
Table 4.10

Theme #3. New Issues in Public Education Reform

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-Theme</th>
<th>Community-Based Organization Leader N = 3</th>
<th>Educational Specialist N = 7</th>
<th>Elected Official N = 2</th>
<th>Non-United Black Clergy N = 3</th>
<th>Parent &amp; Community Member N = 6</th>
<th>United Black Clergy N = 4</th>
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<tr>
<td>Inadequate funding resources</td>
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<td>28%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>43%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>67%</td>
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<td>33%</td>
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</table>

Sub-theme: Inadequate funding resources. The participants perceived the lack of funding as a unique issue for Mount Vernon because the district is classified as poor. They discussed the financial structure of the public school system and expressed a need for the school board leadership to reevaluate the budget and clergy to demand community involvement in budgetary matters. They reflected on a general lack of funding, but more specifically, they focused on the disproportionate number of students receiving special
education services in the district that strained the budget. Another education specialist explained how funding challenges have an adverse effect on the school system:

[The] Journal News produced the article that said high-wealth schools are 80% more likely to spend more on their children than low-wealth schools are . . . they think we spend a lot of money on children of Mount Vernon, but we don’t. The reason why it looks like a lot of money is that Mount Vernon’s children are more likely to live in trauma-ridden homes than kids in other places are. Living in a home dominated by trauma makes it difficult for you to be school ready, which means you’re likely to act out, which means you’re likely to be labeled Special Ed, which means you’ll likely cost the school district more to educate even though the education isn’t comparable. So Mount Vernon spends $50,000, $60,000, $100,000 for a Special Ed kid, $11,000 per General Ed kid, but when you average that out it looks like they’re spending $22,000 per kid. They’re not.

The Black clergy must hold school administrators and funding policymakers accountable for appropriate funding allocations. They believed there was a lack of leadership or focus by the Black clergy and the community that breeds underachievement. An elected official voiced,

I think the greatest shame of the Mount Vernon school system is not the system, not the school system, but the system by which schools are funded. I think it’s a shame that Mount Vernon schools are underfunded and they have bigger problems than schools that are overfunded. So, for me, the ideal school begins with getting adequate funding. I think that you got to revisit the formula by which we create funding of education. I think you got to take [it] away from real estate,
I think you got to find a more universal way to provide educational funding. So, for me, the Mount Vernon school system is paying the teachers and making the resources whether it’s music in the schools, whether it’s art, whether it’s a science program available to our kids. So, for me, a system, a good system is a system that has all the bells and whistles of a good education in place because children from Mount Vernon who are making $10,000 appropriation per student will have to compete for the same jobs in the global market as the kids who get $30,000 for their education.

Sub-theme: Lack of parental involvement and community apathy. The participants described the Mount Vernon school system as lacking parental involvement and suffering from community apathy. The parents are viewed as uninformed and intimidated by the system, lacking the requisite skills to deal with the system because of a lack of education themselves. One respondent explained that oppressed people are less inclined to improve their value to society without focusing on educational learning and acquisition of skills. They perceived a difference in parental involvement between White residents and Black residents. A parent participant said,

Yes, it has, here in Mount Vernon, I think it’s definitely changed. Again, because I think when people leave the community that had real influence, again, if you had White people within a community, a school district where there are more resources, they’re more involved. I think it’s a lack of parents being involved, coming out and finding out what’s going on, and holding people accountable not to settle, and I’m not blaming any particular nationality, no. We lack a lot on being involved African Americans, definitely, the parents.
The participants also discussed apathy among the community in general, inclusive of political officials, parents, voters, and educators. They explained that community apathy has increased and the Black clergy must emphasize the value of education as being the root of action from the community. They perceived Black clergy as being key to addressing this trend by encouraging more parental involvement. A community organization leader stated,

Use the pulpit to encourage people, help get mentors for children, get into these homes or work with these families to find out what is the root cause of your child not going to school. Helping them understand the importance of getting that education, and maybe even providing some of the services that the family says they need in order to keep that child in school. Being a mentor, being supportive are the most important things that exist today . . . encouragement that will keep someone going to school. Making sure the schools are safe, leading their congregation to get involved in the community, and not be frustrated being real.

Sub-theme: Lack of qualified staff and leadership. Despite the indirect correlation to the role of Black clergy in public school reform, the participants identified the need for qualified staff and leadership in the public school system. They expected the clergy to identify any shortcomings and hold the school board trustees accountable for informing the public of staffing qualifications. An education specialist participant, stated that the clergy should,

Call them [school board members] in, let me tell you [clergy] what we’re going through right now. Yeah, you need to call them in, you can’t have over four at a time, but you can, three is a good number and say . . . For example, you’ve got
nine members, don’t get three from the same corner. Maybe get one and then two, or either way, or two and two, so that you will know the whole story of a Board. [The] fight on the Board now is that the power is being run by buildings and grounds, it’s all about jobs and contracts, we’re sliding back away from academic achievement. You [Black clergy] need to educate the community too, to be vigilant about who they put on the board and what they stand for.

They particularly articulated a concern for more qualified and caring teachers, and more qualified, diverse, and accountable leaders within the school system. They described the public school system as challenged by retaining incompetent and under-qualified teachers within the schools. The respondents recognized that the school system had qualified teachers and administrators; however, they believed the public school system was threatened by retaining unqualified teachers, and school conditions that cause qualified teachers to leave the district. They explained that the Black clergy needed to become more engaged in asking for improvements, and assisting with recruiting qualified teachers. One participant, explained the power of the clergy to demand answers from the educational leadership more than once a year during the election and budget process.

I think that the Black clergy in this town is not committed to education. I think everyone knows the importance and will speak a word towards education but, as a unit, we are concretized around the concept of creating a better educational environment. The advantages that we [Black clergy] have is that though we are not committed, we still have an opportunity to be a major force because we can count [on] at least once a year that the educational community will come down and will ask [if] can they address us as a unit, sometimes speak at our forums, at
our churches. So the fact that there’s not a total disconnect, you know, in other words when the superintendent’s secretary says Pastor so-and-so is on the phone, she’ll pick up that phone call.

Similarly, the participants described the need for the school system to have well-qualified leadership in the school buildings, district office, and on the school board. They also expressed concern about the lack of diversity on the school board, recognizing that other ethnic groups attend the school system. An elected official stated,

You need a school board that’s diverse and that [there] are people on there, first dealing with leadership. The school board will have to be diverse. I’m not into, forget the color stuff, let’s get the diverse group of leaders that understand. For me the ideal would be people that understand what education is about. I think that’s what we fail to do is put people on the school board that have no concept of what education is about.

*Sub-theme: Diminishing and inconsistent role of Black clergy.* Several of the participants across the sub-groups expressed concern that Black clergy had become less involved in the fight for public education reform, while others characterized the clergy involvement as inconsistent. Clergy leadership in public education reform was a role the participants expected from Black clergy as moral and ethical leadership in the community. Noted as a role and expectation, the participants viewed the diminishing and inconsistent roles as a new issue because, previously, the Black clergy were in the forefront and responsible for the school board takeover in the 1990s, but at the time of this study, they were no longer as active. A non-clergy participant explained,
The first thing, of course, the CEPAA was one of the clergy movements and it was an awesome movement. I think the weakness in it . . . we failed to stay united once we elected people to the School Boards and articulated what we thought were some of the issues for whatever reason, and I know they’re multiplicity of reasons. There are various reasons why the clergy had to pull away, but in their pulling away, they failed to hold people accountable on that school board, and they failed to be able to invoke the kind of power that they used [which was] to put people there to remove [other] people because of their failure to do what was in the best interest of children.

They also believed that some of the reason Black clergy were inconsistent or absence from the public education reform was, in part, because of the threat of losing their tax-exempt status. This threat presents a new challenge that created hindrance to the clergy developing strategies to advocate for public school reform without the issue of being threatened with tax-exemption issues based on a separation of church and state. One participant described it this way,

I think when you recognize . . . the whole church and state thing was created in the first place so that clergy could not have too much influence over government and government could not have too much influence over the church, creating this faith base, however, has been a double-edged sword.

Another respondent, said,

Well, I think one of the major impediments to clergy acting in Mount Vernon is that they’ve been under threat and that every time they’ve made an effort to act on behalf of reforming education, they’ve been threatened with government action,
and if clergy acts individually more than collectively, they need to know what the rules are so that we can protect each other from that threat. Because you [the clergy] are very powerful as individuals acting together, but if you act as churches, you’re going to lose your churches, and we need to understand that, as a community, those threats were probable and real and it has something to do with why the church stepped back.

The new issue for Black clergy is defining their role. A clergy participant said,

I think what we have to do as a clergy, again, is reassess and redefine our role and come up with a strategy, because I don’t believe that educational advancement is on the top of our agenda more than peace in the streets, you know?

Sub-theme: Challenging school environment. The participants reflected upon the obstacles to creating conducive learning environments. They described school buildings as unclean, unsafe, and overcrowded. The respondents described the schools with more social issues, such as purported gang activities, lack of student discipline and low literacy. They believed that the clergy and community must become more involved in providing safer schools; the presence of more clergy was expected. Participants shared their concerns regarding supportive services and a more comprehensive approach to improvements in the school system. Supportive services were seen as crucial to improving Mount Vernon’s schools. Some of the respondents described the need to provide such support to families, inclusive of prenatal care services, after-school activities, parental workshops, and general academic support services for students. They reflected upon the role of Black clergy in advocating for, and providing these services.
When asked about the major problem clergy face in addressing school reform, a community-at-large participant described it this way.

Two, appropriate, consistent, and deliberate discipline[s] would be my number-one [problem]. [That’s of the students or the staff?] The entirety, so the teachers, students, there’s not a discipline action that is acceptable. I would say community involvement or community support, especially from the ministers.

In addition, they defined lack of modern technology as another school environment concern. They believed that new technology was necessary to improve the academic environment, describing it as challenging and in need of improvement. The need for improvements in the school system’s infrastructure is essential for effective learning environments. An educational specialist explained,

. . . impacting the ability of their children in terms of having computers, I mean you know, cause that’s an issue. Technology is what’s driving a lot of our scholarships, so if our kids don’t have computers . . . I think we just need to address where the shortfalls are, find out what they are and then have the impact.

**Sub-theme: Political control groups.** Although not a new issue, the participants found political control groups to be more detrimental to public school reform in Mount Vernon where the new majority controls. They recognized that identifying and electing qualified leadership or hiring qualified educators is complicated by the interference of political groups, including the clergy. They gave examples where the Black clergy used their influence to affect hiring and to safeguard employment for their congregation members. One of the educational specialists, who described the negative effects of political control groups on voter participation and community involvement stated,
Yeah, there’s control groups, we’ve got that still, that’s our biggest problem. You’ve got that right now, you have a group here who can push a button a [and] get 20, no get 2,000, votes and that’s year after year after year. So guess what? Our folks have given up and they stay home, or else their kids are out of school and they stay home. [Johnson School] on the south side disgrace is a, three voting districts over there and those people are bright people, there’s no reason. Someone, who is the preacher over there, [Rev. X], he needs to know this problem and he needs to get that community activated. Who else is over there?

They recognized, with the shift to the new majority, political control groups and nepotism had become more of an issue. Another respondent described political control as the polarization of education reform.

We got people that, just because they’re politically connected,—and they have a name for themselves in the community—we put them [on the board], we vote them in . . . they have no background in education, they don’t know anything about contracts, they don’t know anything about what the needs of the children are, they have no concept of that.

**Theme 4: leadership opportunities to improve public schools.** The participants reflected upon leadership opportunities for the Black clergy in public school reform. They described access and improved schools, expertise and awareness, and influence and mobilization as opportunities for the Black clergy to demonstrate leadership in public school reform. They viewed desegregation as creating an opportunity for Black clergy to build on their leadership from the civil rights era. Likewise, they also reflected on the opportunity for Black clergy to become experts in public school reform and provide
awareness to the community. Lastly, participants considered influence and mobilization as another opportunity for Black clergy to demonstrate leadership by galvanizing the masses around the issue.

Table 4.11

Theme #4. Leadership Opportunities

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<th>Sub-Themes</th>
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<th>Educational Specialist N = 7</th>
<th>Elected Official N = 2</th>
<th>Non-United Black Clergy N = 3</th>
<th>Parent &amp; Community Member N = 6</th>
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<td>67%</td>
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Sub-theme: Access and improved schools. The respondents explained that desegregation provided access to institutions previously closed to the Black community. They viewed desegregation as providing an entry, giving the Black clergy an opportunity to gain additional knowledge and use it to display leadership. Lastly, this access would provide the opportunity for people of color to lead public school reform. Unanimously, the respondents agreed that desegregation provided a wide range of possibilities and the ability to share experiences through integrated schools. Some of the participants who attended school before desegregated schools lamented on the sacrifice made by losing these schools to integration.
Some believed that all-Black schools provided a better education for Black children. Despite the dismantling of all-Black schools because of desegregation, the participants viewed *Brown v Board of Education* and integration as an opportunity for Black leadership, including the Black clergy, and other appointed and elected officials to gain control in a city like Mount Vernon. They reflected upon the ability of the Black clergy to organize efforts in the 1990s to take control of the public school system in Mount Vernon. They observed it as a direct benefit of desegregation; without it, the leadership opportunities would not have been available.

Many respondents viewed the Black clergy as having more access to improve the public school system under the control of the new majority. Because the Black community gives high regard to Black clergy, and many there are closely tied to their churches, they respected religious leaders and viewed them as both spiritual and community leaders.

In Mount Vernon, I feel like when the Black clergy was involved with the education system here in Mount Vernon, it started out as a good thing. We saw it to be a good thing. We were trying to get control of the Board of Education —we accomplished that. It seems like after we got control of it, the Black clergy just walked away from it, and just left us there . . . if they had stayed and really, really did what needed to be done to straighten out the Board of Education, I think we would be in a better place right now.

*Sub-theme: Expertise and awareness.* The participants identified the Black clergy as having the potential to learn more about issues associated with public school reform. They believed the community needed to be educated on the intricacies of public
school reform, and that Black clergy were the best leaders to facilitate such a discussion. However, they also acknowledged the need for Black clergy to educate themselves before accepting a leadership role in education reform. The first phase of leadership in education reform is self-education. Therefore, the participants expected the Black clergy to demonstrate an interest in public school reform as a precursor to becoming experts on educational issues.

Similarly, they emphasized the opportunity for the Black clergy to increase awareness was through outreach to the education experts and direct involvement in education reform initiatives. Education reform must be part of the clergy members’ list of priorities. They must consider education reform as essential to their role as a minister. One clergy participant stated,

So just because there’s a church that’s got a label on it, [it] doesn’t mean it’s a conscious church, [it] doesn’t mean that it’s a church that’s prophetic, doesn’t mean it’s a church that cares about the social issues. It doesn’t mean that they have a theology of empowerment; they may have a theology of tolerance, you know. So, when you talk about church, it’s not a modern-day term, it’s such a diverse term. You’re talking about a whole bunch of different stuff when you talk about churches. You’re not talking about any single thing.

In addition, they described becoming well informed as another leadership opportunity for Black clergy. Black clergy have the opportunity to expand their knowledge through the process of engagement. As talented, trained, and organized leaders, the Black clergy have not realized their full potential, but engagement in the
public school reform efforts will increase and expose Black clergy to a variety of leadership opportunities in the community. A participant described,

At the end of the day, it would be helpful if the clergy could have the capacity to receive training or information to understand educational reform. I think that, and to be interpreted in a way that they understand it, as being their responsibility. I don’t think that exists. I think when you call on clergy to be a part of education reform, the first step is to see if you can convene them to give it light, and then the next step to be active. So, I don’t think that’s going on or where it comes [from]. If you want to bring the clergy along, I think they probably can go along, but it’s going to require some preparation, some training, some sensitizing.

Sub-theme: Influence and mobilization. The participants reflected on the role of the Black clergy relative to influence and mobilization as a leadership skill in the community. They viewed Black clergy as having the opportunity to influence both their congregation and the community at large. More specifically, the respondents described specific opportunities for leadership in education reform that involved fostering influence with their colleagues and developing coalitions across congregations, denominations, and throughout the secular community. The participants described Black clergy as having the opportunity to set a national agenda for public school reform. They realized the potential for Black clergy to mobilize a cross-section of leaders outside of the religious sector and persuade change for public school reform. Observed as articulate, the clergy were observed as capable of communicating the importance of improving education and advocating for the necessary means to affect change in education. Viewing Black clergy as having numerous opportunities to cultivate congregational ownership and nurture
community engagement through their multiple influential roles within the community, the participants shared that Black clergy are an asset to mobilization. They highlighted the ability of Black clergy to develop relationships and unite multiracial communities around public school reform. A non-clergy focus group participant explained,

The strength of the Black clergy is their access to the constituent body, where the issues of equality or injustice are impacted. By first-hand contact with those individuals in the community, who were enduring the injustice or the inequality, they can hear first-hand [about] those challenges. What those issues are and galvanizing the people, which are the very same people that’s in the school system and come to the elected and the appointed and the hired individuals that possess the power to make the change. You [the clergy] need to go to the board, they’re the people who possess the power to make the change, the administration, the elected officials in Albany, and the state or abroad, the county . . . those are the people who possess the power to make the change. The elected people move off of numbers and the Black clergy seem to be a powerful group who can gather numbers, because when it comes time for [the] election [of] some of our elected officials, we don’t think about our community until it’s election time, but where do they go directly to (?), the Black churches.

**Theme 5: Barriers to equality: Race, poverty, accountability.** The participants were asked to share their perspective on the barriers to equality in public schools. They identified poverty and policy as contributing issues that impact public school reform. According to the participants, race continues to be a factor, and as a result, the community suffers from white flight and resegregation, which in turn affects the public
school system. The study participants also identified lack of influence and collaboration, and competition and internal conflicts as two other areas that create barriers to equality.

Table 4.12

**Theme #5: Barriers to Public Education Reform**

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<th>Sub-Themes</th>
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<th>Elected Official N = 2</th>
<th>Non-United Black Clergy N = 3</th>
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Sub-theme: Race, white flight, and resegregation. The respondents had the opportunity to share if race played a role in public education reform and education equality. They viewed race as an historic barrier to equality in education, and they believed that today, there was an intersecting of race, poverty, wealth, and policy. More specifically, ethnic divide was an issue in Mount Vernon, where 75% of the school population was Black and 15% Latino. However, Blacks were subdivided into African American and Caribbean America. These were independent and collective barriers to achieving quality in the Mount Vernon public schools. Some viewed the actions of the United Black Clergy as divisive, in its exclusion of Whites and Latinos. They described
desegregation as having marginal achievement—providing access for Blacks to
integrated public schools—yet race continuing to be a challenge to public school
education. They explained that while racism is somewhat less overt, it has taken on a
covet nature; it is more difficult to identify, and it is more prevalent in the policies.
Considering the changing face of race, the participants described the Mount Vernon
public school system as one previously affected by White flight and currently in a
resegregated state because of the diminished number of White students in the system.
They explained racism is persistent and makes fighting resegregation challenging.
According to the participants, in addition to White flight, there was bright flight,
including other Black residents who searched for other educational options at the earliest
opportunity, typically at the close of the elementary school experience.

They recalled Mount Vernon’s public school as more integrated when busing
children to schools throughout the city existed. Likewise, the participants believed the
school system had become increasingly Black, in both the student body and leadership.
One participant stated,

People have chosen to segregate themselves, where we call it bright flight/white
flight, moving out of neighborhoods, creating a situation where, although
segregation has been abolished, if you go into many public schools, it is very
much in play. It is segregated, and some are victims [of bright/white flight]
because it’s segregated . . . people actually left. Some have determined that it will
be segregated because they left. So it depends on what side of the fence you’re
sitting on. I don’t know, in the long term, if desegregation has worked the way it
was intended, which was to provide a quality education for everybody equally with everybody participating but that is not what we have.

*Sub-theme: Poverty, wealth, and policy.* The respondents viewed the Mount Vernon public school system as affected by many challenges as a result of racial, ethnic, and class separation. The participants’ identified poverty, wealth, and policy as the equity issue, replacing overt racism from the civil rights era. In addition to White families leaving the school district, the participants voiced concern that resegregation of public schools had occurred based on the socioeconomic status of the families within the school district.

They explained the difference in the north and south side schools. According to the respondents, families from higher socioeconomic statuses occupy the north side schools where the school conditions are better than the south side. Families with a lower socioeconomic status occupy the south side schools, where according to the participants schools are having more challenges.

They described the public school system as receiving funding based on property value and applying spending according to socioeconomic class, which creates a different type of segregation. This is a new issue for the Mount Vernon school district, and is connected to their belief that Mount Vernon had become a community affected by inadequate funding, creating a poor school system. They also viewed the Black clergy as only focusing on education matters that were relevant to race and maintained control, when there are issues related to funding and economics that affect the entire district. Another participant explained,
What we’ve created are schools that are segregated by wealth and by color, and I say that because, if you’re poor, you’re more likely to be Black. So, therefore, the segregation is as much by color as it is by wealth. But the reality is that school systems are segregated based on the funding formula, their ability to pay to educate their kids, and we either believe in this country that everyone has a right to a quality education or we don’t. But if we believe it, we don’t pay for it. So the more money you have to pay for education, the better educated your child will be and those are usually wealthy White kids, but it also includes wealthy kids of color, but they’re a smaller percentage of the whole, but in no way would I say that we’ve desegregated our schools.

Another participant viewed Black clergy as having an impact only regarding racial change.

The Black clergy, their issue is being broader and only dealing with part of the issue, which is color. Because it’s not just [about] color anymore . . . it’s color and finance. The emphasis had to change; you can’t compare 1954 to 1968 with . . . now because they’re not comparable. The non-White student living in Mount Vernon is an example, or in a community like Mount Vernon, is not in the public school if they have . . . The same goes for the White person who does not have [the] finances, they’re in that school whether they want to be or not. The clergy’s impact has been strictly on color, it has not been in the financials . . . the decisions that are made on a political basis are made from the haves and the have-nots, as opposed to the Black versus the non-Blacks or the Whites versus the non-Whites.
On the contrary, one of the clergy members believed the fight for public school reform had become more about accountability than race.

We [Black clergy] have a total responsibility to do that [hold leaders accountable]. We are past the time when we can afford to have Black tokenism, we can’t tolerate Black tokenism . . . What we have to prove now is that we can get quality, committed, intelligent people making decisions about our city, about our schools, [and] about our life. So, I’m past fighting for Black people to have position alone, I’m past that. That was an important period, but you can’t stay in one place you know. When I came here 40 years ago, that was an important place, to fight for Blacks to get included in the system. Today Blacks are included, so I ain’t fighting that fight no more . . . what I’m fighting now is [to] find me somebody who is going to help us make the schools better, who’s going to take on the responsibility, and if that happens to be a White person, then we’re going to embrace that because we have done the Black thing . . .

Sub-theme: Accountability and ownership. Accountability and ownership were other barriers that the participants considered as relevant. They recognized the advantages to a new majority leadership; however, described issues of accountability and ownership that surfaced once the new majority took control. According to the participants, identifying problems in education reform during the civil rights era was easy. Today, identifying these problems and creating solutions is more difficult because of poor accountability and a lack of ownership. They reflected on the paradigm shift in leadership and explained the difficulty with holding leaders accountable and encouraging community ownership.
Holding the new majority accountable, when race is no longer an issue, appeared to be more difficult for the participants. They recognized the need to hold these leaders to the same standard as those previously in control; however, there appeared to be a loss as to why it did not occur. They pointed to the Black clergy as the moral compass for the community and having the responsibility to hold these leaders accountable. The barriers identified were a combination of a lack of follow-through, oversight and responsibility.

In the non-clergy focus group, one participant stated,

The clergy was behind the failure, because the clergy was the one dictating who was going to be on the board. The clergy was the ones who they handpicked, not by qualification, but [by] who could better serve the pastor of a certain church or certain flock or membership, had the power to say we will have this person serve on the Board of Education whether that person was qualified or not. In that there’s not a Black church, I do believe, in Mount Vernon that is not politically responsible for some of the people that run around and say who gets elected.

Sub-theme: Competition and internal conflicts. Another major barrier was competition and internal conflicts. According to the participants, it hinders the reform progress and redirects the focus from improving student achievement. They described competition and internal conflicts as being prevalent in the community, and even more since the new majority has taken control of the public school system. They viewed public school as infected by corruption, nepotism, personal agendas, and favoritism.

According to the participants, appointed and elected officials were disengaged, incapacitated, or compromised. This led the participants to discuss additional barriers for
Black clergy related to community trust and jeopardy of not-for-profit statuses because of laws governing separation of church and state.

They perceived the Black clergy as having to safeguard their standing as ministers and the operation of the church. Many of the clergy operated non-profit entities that received funding from the federal government. The participants viewed the involvement of the Black clergy in school politics as a potential danger. The respondents shared the additional concern that the community has lost trust in the Black clergy and their image in the community was tarnished. They believed individuals have developed a lack of trust for clergy because of perceived political and personal alliances. They believed Black clergy must be careful not to cross the line by extending themselves beyond the traditional role as a minister. For some of the participants, the Black clergy’s involvement in education reform is a conflict of interest and a violation of the federal law governing their non-for-profit status. They described Black clergy’s focus as spiritual and involvement in education reform would only be successful if they balanced their role as community leaders and ministers and minimized the threat of becoming involved in community affairs. A participant stated,

The only barriers that they have are to make sure that they do not become partisan in their participation. Their participation must be focused on education and motivation, and organization. They [Black clergy] have those skills, they have that capacity, and they could organize members within their church to be involved and create, depending upon what issues, and create modules within the church to help to deal with that. It’s a ministry; there needs to be an education ministry. I thought that there needed to be someone in city government who was a liaison to
the Board of Education, reporting to the Mayor and reporting to the City Council members. What’s happening? Maybe we need to be doing that similar kind of thing with the clergy.

**Triangulation of Data**

Interviews, focus groups, field notes, and observations provided the data collected in this study. The perspectives received from the participants offered diverse perceptions on the role of Black clergy in public education reform. The analysis of the data yielded convergence in a few areas. Across the subset groups, the participants characterized the Black church as an influential social entity with historic involvement in the political affairs of the community. These same subgroups also considered the church as less involved over the last two decades.

Another areas of convergence with high frequency percentages (76% or higher) was that Black clergy should exhibit leadership roles in advocacy and community engagement. However, the participants also believed the Black clergy had diminishing and inconsistent roles in public education reform over the last two decades. They believed the clergy in Mount Vernon demonstrated great leadership during the 1990s, during the efforts to gain control of the school board, but they believed that, afterwards, they failed to continue the same commitment to public education matters. In contrast, there was convergence related to Black clergy demonstrating leadership through influence and mobilization of the community around public education reform issues. They believed, despite the clergy’s failure to maintain consistency in public education matters, clergy possessed the greatest leadership potential.
Finally, the analysis showed convergence related to two barriers Black clergy faced in their role as public education reform leaders. The participants considered race, poverty, and policy as significant barriers in communities with a new majority that is Black. Despite the high percentage of Blacks in the school system and in leadership, the participants voiced concern about how the Black clergy addressed these barriers in a resegregated community. They identified leadership deficiencies in developing collaborations across racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups to achieve education equality.

In summary, the convergence of data identified the positive role of the Black clergy as providing advocacy, influence, and mobilization. The concerns were the diminishing and inconsistent role that clergy have played over the last two decades and how they address the issue of race, poverty, and policy. A final and significant area of convergence pointed to the issue of accountability and ownership. The subgroups believed the Black clergy had the same responsibility in the 21st century to hold elected and appointed officials accountable as they did during the civil rights movement. The respondents equally agreed the community had a responsibility to claim ownership of the public schools and efforts addressing public education reform. In both case, they were not satisfied with the clergy or the community response.

**Comparison with previous key research and this study.** Inspired by three previous studies related to Black clergy leadership in public school reform (Middleton, 2001, Burton, 2007; Edwards, 2008), it is essential to discussion the correlations between those studies and this study. Through the analysis of data, this researcher was able to identify a few correlations related to the role of Black clergy in public school reform.
Comparison with Middleton study. Middleton (2001) discovered clergy addressed public school issues independently and from within their individual congregations rather than through collaboration. The respondents in the Middleton study considered the clergy’s inability to work together, except in crisis, as a barrier to public education reform. Middleton found this approach to be problematic and inefficient. In this study, the respondents viewed the Black clergy as limited in their approach to education reform. The participants of this study described the clergy as having the ability to leverage their pulpits to inform the congregation about education matters, yet failing to develop sustainable collaborative efforts throughout the community in addressing education issues. Middleton asserted that clergy must constantly advocate for educational needs in the community. This notion was similar to the response received in this study, where the participants considered the Black clergy as advocates of public education reform, and expressed the need for them to provide consistent leadership in addressing education needs.

The Middleton (2001) study also acknowledged services provided by the clergy to assist children with education needs, known as supplementary educational services. These services included mentoring, tutorial and after-school programs. In this study, the participants outlined the importance of Black clergy continuing and expanding these services in more collaborative methods to address the issues causing a challenging school environment. In addition, the two studies both identify similar issues affecting the school environment, such as attracting qualified teachers committed to working in urban settings; providing culturally sensitive curriculum; providing social skills programming, and increasing the quality of instruction. Finally, this study and the Middleton study
identified an increase in political partisanship as a barrier to improving education in urban environments where the new majority is Black and Latino.

*Comparison with Burton study.* The Burton (2007) study identified three major ways Black clergy effectively influenced policy changes in public education reform, specifically related to mayoral control. Clergy influence, organizational partnerships and civic empowerment were successful approaches to affect change in the Burton study. In comparison, the results of this study outlined influence and accountable leadership, and collaboration and mobilization as two important roles Black clergy must exhibit in public school reform. The Burton study revealed that personal influence, charisma and personality of the minister had tremendous impact on the elected and appointed officials. In this study, the respondents described how the Black clergy had incredible advances to influence change because of their relationships with elected and appointed officials. In both studies, Black clergy had great potential to influence because of personal and political influence granted through preexisting relationships between themselves and politicians (Burton, 2007). However, depending on the integrity of the clergy member these relationships could have a negative or positive impact on the reform of public education in a community.

In this study and the Burton (2007) study, organization partnerships and collaborations were key elements to addressing educational challenges in an urban community. Burton identified two ministerial alliances with prominent partnerships affecting the community, and this study recognized the contributions of the United Black Clergy (UBC) as leaders in community affairs. Both studies detected the advantages to individual clergy when they collaborate with other clergy and become spokespersons for
the group. These studies agree there is great disadvantage to independently advocating for policy issues than doing so with the support of several ministers. In this study, respondents were concerned about the absence of a unified and concerted voice regarding public school reform. Burton postulates that collaboration of pastors is more solid and fosters advocacy that can shape policy in support of public school reform.

Civic empowerment was the third strategy Burton (2007) revealed in her study. The ability of clergy to galvanize, inform and mobilize the community in support of mayoral control demonstrated the importance of Black clergy to civic empowerment. The respondents in this study articulated the critical need for Black clergy to assert influence and be aware of education issues. The more conscious clergy are about public education reform issues, the greater the impact potential and civic empowerment. The empowerment of the community generates the mobilization, which is vital to education reform.

*Comparison with Edwards study.* The Edwards (2008) study discovered a perceived void of adequate leadership and mistrust of clergy within the community. Her study concluded that the community appreciated the previous leadership exhibited by the Black clergy in attaining control over the school board. However, there were great concerns about the political positioning of the clergy regarding education policy and governance. In this study, the researcher identified similar concerns from the respondents regarding Black clergy’s leadership and diminishing involvement in public school reform efforts. In concurrence with Edwards, the participants in this study recognized the change in the educational landscape and questioned the actions of Black clergy. They believed Black clergy influenced decisions regarding the school system, advocated for
self-serving motives and then abandoned the community and retreated from the fight against education inequities.

Edwards categorized the United Black Clergy (UBC) as the new majority’s version of the Italian Civic Association (ICA), who previously had control of the Mount Vernon Public Schools. In this study, the respondents described the Black clergy as a political control group that only became involved in education matters during the election process for school board members. Some of the participants viewed clergy as attempting to control the elected officials for self-serving motives, such as employment opportunities for their congregation members. The inconsistent involvement and disunities among the ministers were leadership flaws described by the participants of this study. The Edwards study highlighted challenges for the clergy that included a change in the education landscape, level of trust in the clergy, and the perceived entanglement in political adversity by clergy. Similarly, findings from this study were consistent with Edwards’ detected similar issues. The respondents expressed disappointment in the diminishing and inconsistent role of Black clergy, as well as concern with the increased political control group challenges and the lack of leadership accountability. Similar to Edwards (2008), holding elected and appointed officials accountable was perceived as critical for Black clergy becoming leaders in public education reform.

Summary of Results

The five research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the perceptions regarding the role of the Black church in fighting for education reform in urban communities where a new majority prevails?
2. What is the role of the Black clergy now that the fight for social justice in public schools may involve holding accountable leaders of the new majority?

3. What are the new issues affecting education equality in these communities?

4. What opportunities can Black clergy build upon to advance their role as leaders in education reform?

5. What are the barriers that impede the role of Black clergy to serve as a major influence in advancing educational reform?

The study concluded with the identification of five findings from the data obtained. These findings delivered practical insight to Black clergy, public school leadership, education, community leaders, and parents in urban communities. The findings offered awareness on the opportunities Black clergy have in becoming leaders in public school reform.

The Black church has the potential to influence public school reform through advocacy and community engagement. The participants of this study shared how they viewed the Black church as a unique social entity in the Black community. They understood the Black church to have the spiritual and moral responsibility to oppose and rebel against all forms of oppression. They reflected on the historic role of the Black church in the fight for education equality and the need for it to continue that role. The respondents voiced concern that the Black church appeared less engaged in social justice issues in comparison to the civil rights era. They expressed that the Black church, collectively, can be the source of future leaders in the fight for public school reform. The participants credited the Black church as being a “think tank” or forum for generating
social change, effectively identifying issues, and addressing injustice in the Mount Vernon public schools.

The respondents discussed the consciousness of the individual congregations within the Black church and the affiliated clergy as the best indicators and determining factors of the role that Black clergy can play in public school reform. Several of the respondents understood the ability and willingness of the congregation to take on the role of advocates would best determine the collective Black church’s involvement and effectiveness. For many, strong engagement with the community is a crucial element to the role of the Black church in public school reform. Several respondents voiced concern that the Black church has diminished her involvement in the community. They recognized that Black church involvement in advocacy and community engagement have the best potential for influencing positive public school reform, yet this involvement depends on the impact of the local congregation.

Black clergy with awareness of education issues and actively involved in the community have the best opportunity for affecting education inequality and holding leaders accountable. The participants believed that Black clergy, like the Black church, possessed the opportunity for impacting public education reform. They viewed the Black clergy as having the core leadership skills to impact public school reform. To that end, the participants characterized the Black clergy as advocates, informants, agitators, and collaborators. They depicted each of these attributes as key to public school reform. In contrast, the respondents acknowledged that Black clergy have disengaged more recently and demonstrated a period of inconsistency. Yet, the Black clergy continue to be critical leaders who are responsible for issues affecting the community. They also portrayed the
Black clergy as being well respected in the community with the responsibility of maintaining the moral compass. The fight for education equality is a moral fight and the responsibility of accountable leaders, including Black clergy.

Many participants reflected on their experience with Black clergy as advocates, and expressed the need for them to gain broader knowledge of community concerns, including education issues affecting the public school system. Although some respondents believed the Black clergy to be unaware and less interested in education issues, the majority viewed them as willing to gain knowledge about the education issues affecting the Mount Vernon community and having the desire to gain awareness. They viewed educating Black clergy on education matters as an opportunity for them to advance public education reform. According to the respondents, they believed Black clergy had tremendous influence over the members of their congregation and the community at large to mobilize the community around the issue of public school reform. Through dissemination of information to the congregation and empowerment of the community, the Black clergy can orchestrate community involvement and ownership of public school reform.

**Black clergy must build coalitions and partnerships to effectively address the new issues for public school reform.** Public school reform is a complicated matter affecting urban communities, and it requires a comprehensive approach. The participants viewed Black clergy as limited in their ability to address some of the issues affecting public school reform, but they acknowledged their potential to develop coalitions and partnerships. The Black clergy were portrayed as possessing relational leadership abilities to connect multiple facets of the community. The participants did not see Black
clergy as having to directly orchestrate change in the system. They described their role as indirect and supportive to educators, school system administrators, and parents. Coalitions and partnerships to develop and enhanced support services would be essential to public school reform.

Many of the respondents expressed concern about the social problems affecting the quality of education and parental involvement. They acknowledged a lack of parental involvement, lack of resources, and challenging educational environments as crucial issues. The participants in this study recognized Black clergy as capable of developing coalitions and partnerships to collaborate with the school system, community leaders, elected officials, and parents in addressing these issues. As leaders directly connected to the parents, the participants described the role of the Black clergy as facilitators and liaisons to coordinate supplementary educational services through the development of coalitions and partnerships throughout the community.

The respondents expressed that Black clergy have the capacity to advocate and facilitate discussion with public school leaders and community members in establishing the expectations for quality teachers, administrators, and school board members. They described the ability of Black clergy to utilize similar strategies from the civil rights era, to demand policy and administrative changes in public schools. The study participants believed identification of social issues affecting our public school begins outside of the school. They recognized Black clergy as confidantes to parents and children. According to the participants, Black clergy should have a greater presence in the schools to help address social issues affecting public school education. For many in the study, the indirect leadership the Black clergy can provided begins with the identification of social
and cultural needs of the community. They conveyed the ability of Black clergy to stimulate individuals, articulate concerns, and foster relationships around the issues affecting public school reform.

Many participants in the study reflected on the direct leadership Black clergy have provided, that is, after-school programs, family support, scholarships, and a physical presence in the school buildings, remain as crucial elements to public school reform. They viewed the Black clergy as having the capacity to build coalitions and partnerships to provide these services. Recognizing the correlation between healthy life conditions and educational success, many of the respondents identified that Black clergy possess the requisite relationships within the community to foster coalitions to connect it to these services.

**Issues of race, poverty and inequitable funding policies continue to erode public school reform efforts and there is a clearly defined role for the clergy to address these issues.** The respondents of the study provided a reflective description of racial and economic barriers to public school reform. They described desegregation as having limited positive impact on the integration of public schools in Mount Vernon. According to the participants, the integration of the Mount Vernon school system was short lived, and the long-term effects had been minimal. All participants agreed that desegregation has provided limited access to equality, and race continues to be a factor in public school reform. They acknowledged that Blacks and other minorities had gained access to integrated schools and eventually took control. However, they failed to hold the leadership accountable. One clergy participant stated,
The whole CEPAA [initiative], getting the Black people involved in the school board from pooling candidates to voting them in, those are two successes, victories, but I can also [see] it as failures, you know. We did not, for obvious reasons, after we helped to pool the candidates elected, we didn’t hold the candidate’s feet to the fire and give them a list of expectations. We didn’t give them mid-year grades, we kind of almost did [it] like the civil rights movement. We spoke a similar language, we had a similar focus, and we got the apparent victory, [but] we went on to our own silos. So, I think that’s a failure, when you look at it from the long term . . .

Conversely, some of the older participants described segregated schools as providing better quality to Black children. For many, desegregation is a work in progress and has only provided limited access, forced overt racism to become covert—hidden in the funding policies—and changed the face of inequality to include race and poverty.

Classifying the combination of race and poverty as a barrier to public school reform in Mount Vernon, the participants discussed how vital addressing Black clergy’s leadership was to fighting for equality. They viewed the Black clergy as having the greatest potential for building relationships across cultural and ethnic groups, but they said they are failing to do so.

Furthermore, they discussed that, despite Black control of the public schools, the politics of race and poverty continue to plague the school system. They highlighted that in spite of a 90% Black and Latino school system, there are factions within the race, and ethnic and class divisions. In fact, according to the participants, the racial fight is no longer White versus Black; it is within the race and it crosses ethnic groups within the
race. They described the withdrawal of White children from the school system as a major contributor to creating a resegregated and homogenous school district. The resegregation of the Mount Vernon school system is a result of White parents’ refusal to send their children to poor school districts. They explained how members of the community struggle with internal conflicts, school zoning, and distribution of resources based on socioeconomic status.

Several individuals from the study discussed school funding formulas as inherently based on poverty and tax property values. They viewed the Mount Vernon school district as a poor school district that received inadequate state and federal funding. According to the participants, much of the inadequate funding is the cause for the deplorable conditions of the school buildings and inadequate resources to educate children of color. They described a direct correlation between the value of property in Mount Vernon and the value of education rendered to poor Black children.

According to the participants, while race does continue to be a factor in the city’s school district, it does not have the same level of negative impact upon the provision of services as does issues of wealth and property values.

**Black clergy, who are seen as non-partisan and who foster community ownership and accountability have a better chance of becoming leaders in public school reform.** The participants observed the lack of community ownership for public schools, and low levels of accountability as serious barriers to public school reform. They discussed the politicization of education and the need for Black clergy to fight for public school reform without succumbing to political control groups, nepotism, and favoritism. They described Black clergy as more effective and trustworthy when their
efforts focus on school improvement versus political standing within the community. Some of the individuals from the study perceived Black clergy as part of a “political machine” that is inconsistent and racially motivated. They argued that the roles of Black clergy can improve public schools by facilitating awareness and stimulating engagement in school reform. According to the participants, Black clergy become less effective and less trustworthy when they are aligned to political agendas.

The respondents reflected on the reverence the Black clergy held in the community and among elected and appointed officials. They characterized them as being in possession of a strong ability to access and influence appointed and elected officials. Some participants believed that Black clergy must possess a non-partisan commitment to improving education and the ability to foster collaboration and galvanize by acknowledging the effects of education inequality and by refraining from political agendas. On the contrary, Black clergy viewed their role as focused on achieving education reform and developing alliances as crucial. The Black clergy recognized these alliances should be non-partisan, but also acknowledged the challenge of a one-party city. They viewed their role as ensuring education reform is achieved and that individuals are held accountable.

Many of the non-clergy participants also agreed that accountability of leadership is essential to effective public school reform, some of them, however, labeled the involvement of Black clergy in public school reform as misplaced and self-serving. They acknowledged the need for accountability and ownership, yet some believed the ownership and accountability belongs to the school board, district administrators, teachers and parents. According to the participants, Black clergy will be challenged to
effectively convince the community that public school reform belongs to the entire community, to build trust in the community, and to hold appointed and elected officials accountable. One respondent summarized the Black clergy’s role as extremely influential and responsible for holding appointed and elected officials accountable.

They [Black clergy] need to make them [the elected and appointed officials] accountable to them [the Black clergy] because most politicians don’t want the Black clergy to be out there badmouthing them. Because they know they’re not going to get re-elected again because you have a lot of the Black clergy who have members who go to church and nine times out of 10, you may not think so, but if your minister is preaching to you about who you should vote for, and you should do this, that’s who you’re going to support. So, the Black clergy, to me, need to make the politicians more accountable for what’s going on in the community.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The objective of this qualitative study was to examine Black clergy in Mount Vernon, NY and their role in public education reform in the post-civil rights movement era. In the study, we sought to understand the factors that affect how Black clergy perceive their leadership role in transforming public education in Mount Vernon and how their peers and other members of the community perceived them as leaders in the pursuit of achieving equalities in public education. This study used two supportive theoretical frameworks: critical race theory (Bell, 1979; Degaldo & Stefancic, 2001; Freeman; 1977) and social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000) to analyze the data.

Twelve in-depth interviews and two focus groups of individuals in Mount Vernon, NY provided their perspectives on the role of Black clergy in public education reform. All of the participants played active roles as clergy, educational specialists, or community leaders with lived experiences related to public education in Mount Vernon. The participants were asked to provide perspectives on the role of the Black church, the role of the Black clergy, new issues facing public education reform and opportunities for Black clergy leadership. The findings provided valuable insight and practical knowledge to Black clergy as they define their new role as leaders in a community where resegregation has occurred and a new majority of Blacks and Latinos has taken control in the community and in the public school district. The object of the study was achieved and consistent with the literature offered in Chapter 2.
There was limited literature (Middleton 2001) available on the role of the Black clergy in public school reform. Findings also expand the dearth of literature on the role of Black clergy in public education reform in the 21st century. This chapter is a discussion of the study’s findings and provides insight to Black clergy and other leaders in communities where resegregation has occurred and a new majority of Blacks and Latinos exist. The chapter includes details on implications of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, and it is followed by a conclusion.

Implications of the Findings

Implication 1: Findings expand upon the limited research on the role of the Black clergy in addressing education inequality. This study advanced discussions provided by previous studies of the topic (Edward, 2008, Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990, Middleton, 2001; Smith, 2004, Stone, 2001, Henig et al., 1999; Edwards, 2008) with findings related to Black clergy and education reform. At the time of this study, there was a dearth of literature on the role of Black clergy in education reform. Only Middleton directly focused on the Black clergy and education reform. Other studies focused on topics related to American public school and education reform and included sections on the role of the Black clergy. This study generates a more extensive discussion by scholars relative to theoretical and practical approaches to the education reform and the role Black clergy play. Because of this study, scholars will seek more empirical data that offers greater solutions to education reform and the leadership role Black clergy must play. Recommendations for future research using quantitative and qualitative methods appear later in the section on Recommendations.
Implication 2: The Black church should reexamine its effectiveness as an agent for social justice and advocacy in the community. While 68% identified the Black church as influential and politically involved in the community, 25% of participants believed this involvement had decreased since the civil rights era. Despite this decrease, 56% of the participants viewed the Black church as having the ability to advocate for public school improvements. The second implication suggests that one new issue in public school reform is the decreased engagement of the Black church in social justice issues within the community. The church has failed to embrace ownership of public schools (Edwards, 2008). Edwards argued that the community must take ownership of public schools in an effort to effect change. Without increased engagement and the involvement of the church, the community will continue to struggle with the ownership of public schools.

The ability of the Black church to gain understanding of community concerns is a critical element to this implication. Examining the seriousness of education inequality and its impact on other social factors in the community is paramount, and the Black church must reexamine the impact of low engagement in education reform. If the Black church fails to recognize the impact of education inequality and the importance of community engagement, the Black church fails to access its influence within a community. The unique and historic role of the Black church necessitated that it develop methods for outreach to the community and congregation members regarding education reform.

The Black church must develop strategies to re-brand its image from a less-engaged church to a more accessible, inclusive, and engaged social entity within the
Black community. The participants reported the Black church is the center for spiritual and moral development with a responsibility to extend beyond the individual congregation membership and address social concerns. This process begins with the Black church revisiting its mission, and then applying biblical mandates with practical application to fight inequality in education. However, the careful execution of the fight for justice in education must have a framework that does not portray the church as a political organization. A more consistent and deliberate approach to engagement in matters of education would be practical and effective. For example, availing the church facility to host regularly scheduled meetings, workshops, and forums to enlighten congregants and the community at large on educational matter, would establish a more defined role for the Black church.

**Implication 3: Black clergy should examine their relationship with the community and find ways to rebuild their capacity to forge meaningful relationships for improving public education in their local community.** The community cannot efficiently address education reform when it is void of adequate leadership and the development of coalitions and partnerships. Despite that fact that Black clergy have historically provided this type leadership, this study confirmed findings in Smith (2004) and Edwards (2008). Smith concluded that the close relationships Black clergy have with black teachers and other school system leaders negatively influence their ability to effectively build coalitions and partnerships to hold them accountable. Edwards discovered the impact Black clergy have in public school reform was adversely affected by a negative perception of the role Black clergy have played in public school reform.
Although the participants in this study considered Black clergy as influential, they viewed them as lacking knowledge of public education reform issues and relying on their relations with individuals associated with the school system for understanding. The implication suggests that Black clergy must gain understanding of the issues independent of relationships that may bias their efforts. Sixty-four percent identified as influential and accountable leadership, and 52% reported collaboration and mobilization as additional roles the Black clergy should play in education reform. On the contrary, only 24% of participants viewed Black clergy as having awareness of community issues, including education reform. These implications suggest that Black clergy have the potential to influence, yet they lack the awareness of the issues and are reluctant to be responsible. This implication warrants the Black clergy to investigate their individual aptitude for education reform and the education issues specifically affecting Mount Vernon.

Education reform requires a multifaceted and comprehensive approach (Henig et al., 1999; Middleton, 2001, Edwards, 2008). Black clergy should become a “think tank” on education reform utilizing their reverent influence to bring stakeholders together to dissect the problems, strategize, implement action, access progress, and hold stakeholders accountable. One of the highest percentages of participants (76%) considered Black clergy as responsible for advocacy and community engagement directed toward education reform. The self- and collective assessment will increase opportunities to become more knowledgeable of new issues and provide effective leadership.

The participants viewed the involvement of Black clergy in public education reform as unreliable and criticized the trustworthiness of their participation. All stakeholder groups, except the Black clergy, viewed Black clergy involvement in
education reform as inconsistent and often politically motivated. The clergy must rebuild
distrust within the community to build effective coalitions and partnerships in an effort to
address education inequality. Trust is a key element to galvanizing social capital
(Putnam, 2000; Stone et al., 2001), yet in the study by Edwards (2008) on building civic
capacity, the community viewed concern regarding the trust of clergy. This study
confirms that the community has issues with the level of commitment demonstrated by
Black clergy and the inconsistency of their engagement in public school reform.

Additionally, the participants of this study viewed the clergy as indirect
contributors to education reform. Educational leaders, administrators, and teachers were
seen as more directly capable, responsible, and consistent in education reform efforts.
The ability of Black clergy in Mount Vernon to influence, with greater potential for
building coalitions and mobilization of the community as in the 1990s, can be realized
through the power of their congregation. They must examine the opportunities available
to engage the community in public school reform through their pulpits—without
jeopardizing their not-for-profit status with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). At the
time of this study, clergy are faced with potential scrutiny from the federal government
regarding their political involvement. Many of the clergy created and relied on their tax-
exemption status for the church or a church-affiliated 501c3 community-development
organization for survival. The implication is that the clergy have not utilized the power
of the pulpit effectively to advance public school reform, and as a result, their limited
involvement has faced scrutiny. Despite the reluctance of Black clergy in recent years,
the potential for them to mobilize and influence (Henig et al., 1999; Putnam, 2000; Smith
& Harris, 2005) and to potentially regain leadership and effectiveness in reforming the Mount Vernon schools has gone untapped.

The clergy possess *reverent influence*, which is granted based on the nature of their positions. The participants perceived clergy as ministers caring for the community, and thus, the community innately trusts clergy unless given a reason otherwise. As such, clergy must assess this great opportunity to advance public school reform by taking on the responsibility for identifying, advocating, agitating, and mobilizing the community to address the education inequities in the community and demonstrate consistent and issue-based leadership.

**Implication #4: There is the need to examine the role of Black clergy as a direct service provider to education reform.** The participants in the study acknowledged the indirect contribution Black clergy make as leaders in public school reform through building coalitions and partnerships; yet historically, Black clergy have developed programs and services to supplement the public school system (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). The respondents shared experiences where children and families, in addition to academic challenges, are struggling to achieve a myriad of social concerns, that is, hunger, health, housing, and mental health issues. Minimizing these adverse factors is important to improving student performance and transforming public schools.

Although academic and support services are not new issues, the participants of this study believe there are issues that have increased and require the attention of the Black clergy. Forty-eighty percent of participants identified challenging school environment issues that require additional support from the church and other community organizations. Whereas, many of these issues, such as lack of student discipline, safe
school buildings, need for additional academic enrichment, and need for mentorship, has been challenges in public schools for decades, the participants expressed concern that these issues have heightened in recent years.

The Black clergy should reexamine the effectiveness of existing services offered through their community-development organizations and provide additional direct services that are needed in Mount Vernon to address deficiencies through collaboration and partnerships with the school system and other community organizations. The Black clergy has played an historic role in providing these types of services (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Smith, 2004) and should continue to develop strategies to supplement and expand them to students in the school system. Therefore, an implication of this study is that Black clergy should examine their capacity to expand services directly to families, advocate for additional services provided by the school system, and build community partnerships to address these needs.

Implication #5: Cleric and non-cleric community members might begin to examine the Black clergy and their ability to hold themselves, as well as their appointed and elected official accountable. Effective education reform in urban cities like Mount Vernon must refute control groups and individual desires and passions—these efforts must be collective in their philosophy and practical approach. Communities are challenged to hold elected and appointed officials accountable because of alliances and relationships (Henig et al., 1999, Smith, 2004) where the new majority is Black and Latino. Many of the participants shared their disappointment that Black clergy successfully rallied to elect city officials and school board trustees, but failed to hold these same officials accountable once they assumed office.
Regardless of racial, personal, or political relationship with appointed and elected officials, Black clergy should demand accountability. Sustainable coalitions and partnerships should require accountability and the development of consensus or majority agreement of the community stakeholders; otherwise, coalitions and partnerships will fail. In examining leadership accountability and consensus building, clergy should relate all actions to objectives that focus on achieving public school reform. The Black clergy, in their role as advocate for the community, should address any *groupthink* that allows elected and appointed officials to exhibit meritocracy or ineffectiveness.

The findings suggest that approaches to education reform without the appropriate leadership, and clear goals and objectives to maintain a focused plan of action will be short lived. Plagued by political complexity in education reform (Henig et al., 1999; Smith, 2004) requires Black clergy to examine their leadership role and responsibility in holding elected and appointed officials accountable. The achievement of public education reform requires them to safeguard the integrity of the objective and advocate for accountability or removal of elected and appointed officials. Likewise, they must exhibit accountability and refrain from wavering leadership dictated by the nepotism, political control groups, or minority vote of the stakeholders.

**Implication #6: Black clergy must examine their role in influencing the political terrains versus promoting public ownership and responsibility for public education reform.** The participants in this study expressed the need for greater focus on developing a quality education for children in Mount Vernon and diminishing the negative politics in public education reform. They believed the Black clergy must develop strategies in fostering ownership and avoiding political terrains as leaders in
education reform. Edwards (2008) demonstrated a void in ownership of the Mount Vernon public schools. Similarly, the participants in this study convey a lack of awareness and ownership with regard to education reform. They are unsure whose responsibility it is to lead and sustain these efforts. Depending on the timing, particular control groups, nepotism, or favoritism has taken the education reform efforts hostage. They describe the Black clergy, along with other elected and appointed leaders, as untrustworthy and unreliable at times.

Some explained the apathy as rooted in a distrust of Black clergy and elected and appointed leaders. They also viewed the school system as stagnant until the new majority no longer controls the school board, or at the least, a more diverse leadership is in place. Additionally, 56% of participants shared the opinion that there is a high level of parent and community apathy about public schools in Mount Vernon. While low parent involvement was not a new issue, participants describe recent trends as dangerously absent. There is a feeling that parents are disinterested in the school system, intimidated, and ill equipped to address any concerns, or they are preoccupied with other life issues. The increased lack of parental involvement and community engagement, coupled with the failure to hold leadership accountable suggests failed ownership of the public schools (Edwards, 2008).

In addition, the participants believed there were political terrains between the various types of congregations in Mount Vernon. They expressed that the United Black Clergy consisted of a small percentage of the estimated over 100 churches and reported 400 religious organizations in Mount Vernon. The lack of involvement from smaller congregations and the over involvement of larger congregations presents the appearance
that the Black clergy were not united. The participants voiced concern that the majority of members in the larger churches did not resided in Mount Vernon and had less interest in education issues affecting Mount Vernon. Yet, the smaller congregations comprised more residents of Mount Vernon and were not seen as leaders in the public school efforts coordinated by the United Black Clergy.

The implications of these findings is that Black clergy should maneuver ways to hold elected and appointed leaders accountable, improve parent awareness and involvement, bridge collaborations with various size congregations, and build trust throughout the community to provide a more shared leadership model. They should develop strategies to increase trust as leaders in education reform that will bond their congregations, and bridge other congregations (Putnam, 2000), in a unified approach to achieving public school reform.

Implication #7: Cleric and non-cleric leaders might begin to recognize that in spite of people of color having greater access and control over public institutions, issues of racism, classism, and inequality continue to persist and impede education reform. In this study, 76% of participants identify race as an issue that continues to challenge education reform in Mount Vernon, while 28% identified poverty, wealth, and inequitable policies as obstacles to public school reform. They viewed desegregation as having theoretical long-term success by providing access to integrated schools, and some practical short-term achievements that consequently created White flight and resegregation of neighborhoods (Orfield, 2001; Orfield & Lee, 2006) like Mount Vernon. Race has permanency in America (Bell 1979; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and continues to affect the education system (Tate, 1994). Additionally, economics plays an
obstructionist role in public school reform. Through issues based on socioeconomic class
differences within urban communities, poverty- and wealth-based challenges surfaced in
Mount Vernon.

The participants explained how Mount Vernon schools improved shortly after the
integration of its school system. However, after the new majority took control of the
school board, White flight and resegregation began to plague the Mount Vernon school
district. Each year since, the population of the Mount Vernon school system has become
increasingly more Black, and Whites continue to leave the district. The fight for control
remains focused on race rather than providing a quality education for all children, despite
race, ethnicity, or economic class.

Issues related to poverty versus wealth create obstacles to public school reform
and contribute to the resegregation of schools in Mount Vernon beyond racial boundaries.
The participants believed socioeconomics created a system of the have and the have-
nots—where children from upper-middle class families attend schools with other children
from similar economic classes, and children from lower socioeconomic classes attend
separate schools. It was clear the participants believed schools on the north side of
Mount Vernon received better advantages and resources than those on the south side, and
control of the school board was a crucial factor. They acknowledged the most recent
school board election as a battle spawned by racial and socioeconomic differences. They
believed a control group from the north side rallied three candidates: two Black and one
White, for the school board, in a fight based on high property taxes. The north side
schools have families with higher socioeconomic status and wish to control the school
board to determine spending levels.
Additionally, some of the participants believe inadequate funding formulas to be a new challenge for the school district. They believe the quality of education during the 1980s, when the ICA controlled the school board, was better and received more adequate funding. They voiced concern that with the new majority in control, funding is inadequate, and poor communities, like Mount Vernon, have less available resources to service children with more intense academic and social needs that requires diverse participation.

The implication of this study is that Black clergy must examine strategies to shift the paradigm and level the playing field for all children in Mount Vernon. Participants of this study valued diversity as a laboratory for enhanced learning and the broadening of perspectives. Providing the appropriate resources to address the academic and social needs of children with special needs is a step in the direction of education reform, and it requires cross-cultural coalitions and partnerships. Black clergy must examine ways to build coalitions across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups where all children can receive a quality education.

**Discussion related on results related to critical race theory and social capital theory.** Critical race theory (CRT) and social capital theory (SCT) were the theoretical frameworks of this study. An examination into the role of Black clergy in public education requires an analysis of race. Race has adversely influenced America’s social and structural institution since its founding (Bell, 1979; Delagado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billing & Tate 1995; Tate 1997). The respondents believe race continues to be a factor in education and affects public education reform. Bell (1979) argued that laws created during the civil rights movement were insufficient and failed to adequately
address race or racism and the inequality in America’s social structures. Ladson-Billings & Tate, (1995) argued that racism in America is a means to maintain control over social and structural institutions. CRT contends that the voice of the oppressed must be considered to fully understand the effects of race and racism. In addition, CRT scholars (Bell, 1979; Delagado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate 1995; Tate 1997) consider whiteness as a property, and property as a sense of self-worth and right of entitlement.

In this study, the respondents clearly view race as a continuous factor in education and public school reform. Despite the 90% populace of Blacks in the Mount Vernon school system, the participants argued that although the new majority is Black, the inequitable education policies and funding formulas hinder public education reform. Several of the participants pointed to low parent involvement and high community advocacy as directly associated with inequitable policies that generate a belief that Blacks are not worthy of the same education as that obtained in other non-Black controlled, or affluent communities. CRT scholars argued that U.S. society is based on property rights, and by analyzing the intersection of race and property, there is great understanding of school inequality (Coffin, 2011; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In Mount Vernon, the property tax rate and high number of lower-class families has created White and bright flight, resulting in resegregation. This resegregated community is embattled with multiple racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic issues that Black clergy must consider and address when leading efforts in public education reform. Black clergy are viewed as holding the responsibility to lead the community in public education form, educate the community on the importance of education, and galvanize it to lobby for policy changes
that adversely affect the Mount Vernon school system. The Black clergy must strategize to enable the CRT concepts of convergence, whereby the non-oppressed groups “buy in” to efforts for social change to be successful.

When considering the results of this study and SCT, Black clergy must utilize their influence to identify social networks and harness the social capital needed to effect positive public education reform. Putnam (2000) characterized the church as an influential social organization with strong social networks to make change in a community. The respondents viewed the role of the clergy with the capacity to develop bonds around education quality and create bridges of action to impact public education reform. Bonding is a concept that allows homogeneous groups to encamp around a particular societal issue, while bridging is the ability to bring together heterogeneous groups, mobilize, and address community issues (Putnam, 2000).

The findings in this study concluded that Black clergy must deploy both bonding and bridging efforts. The clergy are to utilize their skills and ability to influence their individual congregations in the interest of quality education, and then to collaborate with other clergy and community stakeholders to develop civic capacity (Stone et al., 2001) in mobilizing the entire community to address public education reform. Bonding around education reform enables Black clergy to utilize their pulpit and to provide awareness of education issues to their congregation, provide supplementary educational services, and foster interest in public education reform. Bridging offers an effective way to utilize social capital in a more collaborative approach through galvanizing the community around the issue of education reform, facilitating partnerships, and mobilizing for a more comprehensive plan.
Limitations

There were few limitations in this study and they include a) the inability for generalizability and b) the possibility bias because of the insider positionality of the researcher. However, neither limitation presents any issues of validity and reliability for this study.

Inability for generalizability. In qualitative research, the small sample size is suitable to gain perspective on a phenomenon (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The findings of this study are distinct to Mount Vernon, and generalization to other cities would be inappropriate. However, the study provides insight and general guidance to Black clergy and other non-clergy leaders in cities challenged by public education reform. While the sample size provides some rich insight, it should be acknowledged that Mount Vernon has a reported 400 religious institutions, including registered church and non-profit religious organizations. Thus, given the limitation of the sample size, the results of the study are available to generate and form discussions in other cities with similar phenomena, or they can be used as a springboard for a national study.

Insider positionality of the researcher. The positionality of the researcher could have affected the results. As a native son of Mount Vernon, educated in the Mount Vernon school district, holding various positions of the leadership as the pastor of an historic church, and as an appointed official, participants might not have fully disclosed their thoughts. In addition, they might have been less forthright in their criticisms of Black clergy. In spite of the limitation, the process of triangulation of data was applied and findings showed congruence of data among multiple types of data. In addition, findings were consistent with research conducted by other scholars in the field.
Recommendations

Conduct more research on the role of the Black clergy in leading education reform in communities where the new majority is people-of-color. Given the void of literature on this topic and the importance of education reform, additional research to assist Black clergy in addressing education reform should focus on practical approaches. Middleton (2001) completed a quantitative study on the role of Black clergy in urban education reform, and this study broadened the literature with a qualitative study. The literature would benefit from further studies that use a mixed-methods approach to further expand the research and provide specific quantitative and qualitative practical approaches to addressing public school reform. Additionally, researchers should consider extracting portions of the findings from this study to further their investigation. For example, how Black clergy can address racial issues in public school reform; strategies to develop suitable collaboration and mobilization; effectively addressing low parental involvement, and tactics to increase community ownership of public school reform. Two important studies would be a) the effects of government faith-based funding initiatives on Black clergy leadership in holding elected and appointed officials accountable and addressing public school reform, and b) an examination of the benefits and challenges of Black clergy organizations as leaders in public school reform in communities where the new majority is Black and Latino. These are only a few suggested topics. Finally, a replication of this study in the form of a comparative analysis, similar to the multiple city study by (Henig et al., 1999), using one urban and one suburban city would tremendously advance the literature.
Black clergy should begin to rebuild the reputation of the Black Church as social justice and education reform leaders. Sixty-eight percent of participants viewed the Black church as being influential and having an important role in community affairs and politics within Mount Vernon. The findings conclude that the Black church continues to play an important role in the community. However, there is an underlying belief that, at times, the Black church becomes involved in negative politics. There is significant belief among the participants in this study that the Black church achieves more for the community when individual congregations collaborate and is collectively engaged in community affairs. According to the findings of this study, redeveloping the image of the Black church would be beneficial to advancing public school reform. The participants see the Black church as more successful when collectively advocating for the needs of the community. Public school reform requires a collective approach, and the Black church is crucial to galvanizing the community at large. The Black clergy should seek partnerships with established community organizing entities, such as the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), where the Black Church can received strategies to improve community participation. A complete infusion of the Black church in the community has the potential to transform the education system in Mount Vernon. The Black church is categorized as a center for holistic development of the community. As such, Black clergy must utilize portions of the worship hour and leverage their captive audiences to create a center for engagement and advocacy.

Historically, the church has been a meeting place for not only spiritual development but also engagement in social justice. The Black church must once again become this type of social center with a focus on community engagement in social justice.
matters. If the Black church is to be a gathering place where people come together for common religious beliefs and social concerns, the participants of the study believe that it must improve its engagement and active involvement in social issues such as public school reform. The participants of this study criticized the Black church for less engagement in the fight for education reform and other community affairs. Therefore, it should employ additional efforts to outreach and commit to addressing community needs beyond individual congregations.

The United Black Clergy should develop training opportunities for its members and other clergy to receive independent, objective, and best practice training to improve public education. During the discussion regarding Black clergy awareness of education issues in Mount Vernon, the majority of participants agreed that Black clergy are primarily responsible for the spiritual development of their congregations. Secondarily, they are responsible for engagement in efforts to uplift and address social issues. Recognizing the enormous responsibility of the Black clergy, participants understood the low engagement and awareness Black clergy have regarding education reform matters in Mount Vernon. Leadership in public education reform requires that they must more intensely understand the issues affecting education inequality.

They must develop the means to obtain independent information and understanding of education matters, and they should not depend only on education specialists for information. While the information from such specialists is helpful, clergy should seek more neutral and objective information on the state of public education so that they are equipped to make judgments with regard to district policies and practices.
Neutral information allows clergy to hold education, elected, and appointed leaders accountable without bias. Void of having a clear understanding of the conditions that contribute to any inequality or the new issues affecting education reform, Black clergy will be unsuccessful as leaders in public school reform. Therefore, a concerted effort exhibited by the United Black Clergy of Westchester (UBC), as a coalition of clergy, requires individual clergy to increase their knowledge and understanding of educational issues in Mount Vernon.

The aptitude for public education reform and the level of involvement from the Black clergy varies. Many of the churches under the leadership of Black clergy have adopted neighborhood schools, created and managed after-school programs, and offered other supplementary educational services (SES) to support the educational achievement of children. These efforts are beneficial to improving the performance of all children in Mount Vernon. However, education reform requires a greater understanding of education practice and policy issues. Understanding these practice and policy issues will enhance the ability of Black clergy to serve as change agents in education reform, while others choose to attend school board meetings and strategize on improvements related to school board governance.

The UBC of Westchester—an organization created to bring clergy together to discuss and address issues affecting the Black community—has various committees to carry out its goals and objectives. The education committee is responsible for identifying education matters, informing the members of the UBC, and facilitating clergy involvement to address these issues. The UBC, through its education committee, must
develop strategies that are more deliberate, expand Black clergy’s knowledge of the issues affecting public education reform, and foster engagement in public school reform.

Individually, some Black clergy have been actively involved and visible in the school system. Conversely, there are those who have not exhibited any interest in the school system or public school reform. Therefore, a more cohesive and collective approach must be developed by the UBC as an entity with the responsibility for bridging the interest and activities of Black clergy and the community. The UBC is the best opportunity for Black clergy to collectively discuss public school reform and strategize on appropriate techniques for addressing the issue of education inequality. However, any effort to address education inequality must begin with an understanding of the problem. Before deploying strategies for education reform, it is imperative that Black clergy become extensively informed of the facts and capable of addressing the issues relative to educational equality. The development of an ongoing training initiative by the UBC and made available to other clergy, community members, and elected and appointed officials would have a more deliberate approach toward establishing a foundation for awareness and engagement.

**Black clergy must build formidable coalitions and partnerships with education leaders, community organizations and government agencies to provide direct service without compromising their ability to address effectively the new issues in public school reform.** The non-clergy participants recognized the value of Black clergy as leaders in public school reform, yet they disagreed with Black clergy running for school board leadership positions. They believed Black clergy could best serve public school reform as advocates, motivators, organizers, and liaisons. The
participants largely believed that Black clergy should be free agents who exert an organizing influence over the community and serve as a liaison between the community and elected and appointed officials. As the moral leaders of the community, Black clergy were commissioned to hold appointed and elected officials accountable. Serving on the school board, in the eyes of the participants, jeopardizes the ability of the Black clergy to be free agents. Although they recognized the potential of Black clergy and the leadership skills they offer to school board governance, the respondents considered the non-partisan leadership of Black clergy as more beneficial for regulating justice in public schools.

In contrast, during the discussion, Black clergy highlighted the benefits of their holding elected and appointed positions. In fact, they described several clergy who were among the initial groups to hold positions on the Mount Vernon school board, and they provided solid leadership. According to some of them, the election of Black clergy, such as Rev. David Henry, Bishop W. Darin Moore, and Rev. Rose Niles-McCray, were good examples where a Black clergy member held the position on the school board and served well. Positively, these individuals provided good stewardship and governance over the Mount Vernon school system, but they were not without challenges. They often found themselves in the minority trying to lead the school district in a direction the majority of school board members and community members may not have agreed. In some instances, these members of the Black clergy faced fighting against the new majority in Mount Vernon and were challenged by political control groups.

The participants of this study believed Black clergy were challenged to hold elected officials accountable because the church has become dependent on faith-based initiatives and government funding to provide direct services. In an effort to avoid
compromising the moral and ethical role Black clergy play in the community, the Black church must become less dependent on external support function provide services or advocacy in the community. Accountability is important, and a necessity for leaders in public school reform requires that Black clergy hold themselves accountable, as well as hold the other elected and appointed leaders accountable. Whether elected or appointed officials or free agents, Black clergy are responsible to safeguard the Mount Vernon public schools with integrity of leadership.

**Black clergy must exercise strong leadership integrity in becoming leaders in public school reform and avoid affiliation with political groups.** Trust from the community is paramount to influence and mobilization. The influence of the church directly correlates to the integrity of Black clergy. Individual congregations within the Black church largely establish their reputation in the community due to the involvement and influence of their respective clergy. In this study, 60% of participants viewed Black clergy as influential and responsible for the accountability of leaders. Black clergy received the benefit of *reverent influence*; simply based on holding the position as a minister, the community renders respect to that person. The community initially views the Black clergy position as honorable. Trust is normally given to these individuals until some incident between the clergy and a member causes mistrust. The influence of Black clergy begins to wane when the community perceives him or her as a political agent in public school reform rather than an advocate for community needs.

A perceived failure of Black clergy is a lack of seriousness and an active role in education reform. In the eyes of the community, Black clergy members should focus on transforming the schools in the best interest of the community. The community
perceived the efforts of Black clergy in the 1990s, when they successfully organized a
takeover of the school board, as an example of transforming the school system and
fighting in the best interest of the community. They recalled the momentous success of
Black clergy in the organizing efforts of the Coalition for the Empowerment of People of
African Ancestry (CEPAA) that led to the inclusion of Blacks and the eventual takeover
of the school board. The disappointment resulting from these efforts was the ultimate
failure to sustain involvement in public school reform. Some non-clergy participants
viewed Black clergy as abandoning the fight for education equality. On the contrary,
Black clergy viewed their withdrawal from involvement in education matters as a
response to community criticism and characterizations that they were becoming political
agents rather than community advocates for public school reform. In hindsight, Black
clergy acknowledged their failure in consciously deciding to withdraw their involvement
in education matters, and they committed to reengage themselves with sustained
participation.

It is incumbent upon Black clergy to reexamine their role and establish integrity
of leadership that fosters trust within the community and avoids affiliation with political
groups adverse to public education reform. Despite the challenges Black clergy have
faced in their efforts related to education reform, the participants viewed the clergy as
influential leaders responsible for advocating the needs of the community. The clergy
must maintain the moral integrity by avoiding political corruption and alliances
counterproductive to education reform. The expectations of Black clergy are that they
develop a consistent engagement in the fight for educational quality, and demonstrate a
level of persistence that inspires a general community engagement in education-reform
efforts. The participants viewed Black clergy during the civil rights era as having one voice. Those who could remember, recalled Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as the image and the voice of Black clergy in the fight for social justice, and the remaining clergy as the support behind that one voice. Today, the Black community expects Black clergy to exhibit, publicly, one voice and, privately, work out any differences in the best interests of the community.

Black clergy must become leaders in non-partisan, cross-cultural, and intergroup development to address new issues in public school reform and foster community ownership. Public-school reform requires a multifaceted approach (Henig et al., 1999). Black clergy should serve as facilitators and organizers of the involvement of the entire community in demanding public school reform. They must address any racial, cultural or economic issues affecting public school improvements. Cross-cultural coalition building and partnership development are key elements to improvement within the school system. Developing strong coalitions and partnerships requires outreach and collaboration beyond individual clergy.

The participants of the study agreed Black clergy are most effective when they extend beyond their individual congregations and collaborate. Despite many non-clergy expressing challenges with clergy collaborating, and the belief that most clergy are more focused on individual congregation activity than the collective approach to the education issues in Mount Vernon, they recognize the importance of coalition building and partnership development. As outlined in Chapter 2, literature review, Putnam (2000) outlines two types of social capital: (a) bridging and (b) bonding. The clergy in Mount Vernon exhibit these types of social capital.
Black clergy are bonding around public school reform issues when they approach
public-school reform through the efforts such as discussing education matters during
worship service to their individual congregations, developing relationships with
neighboring schools—that is, adopt-a-school school programs, and/or creating church-
based supplementary education services in the manner of after-school programs. These
are efforts that involve, for the most part, individual clergy and their congregations
coordinating efforts to address public school issues. In these cases, Black clergy operate
independently and without the collaboration of other clergy in the community. For
example, in Mount Vernon, several Black churches have after-school programs or the
churches have “adopted” individual neighboring schools. These beneficial and effective
initiatives are not collaborations through the UBC or any other coalition. They are
independent approaches to an educational issue within the community. Bonding
(Putnam, 2000) initiatives are successful, and they address an immediate need or
neighborhood issue. Generally, they do not address broader policy and systemic issues
affecting public school reform.

On the other hand, bridging (Putnam, 2000) requires Black clergy to reach beyond
their individual congregation. These types of approaches include several churches
collaborating to mobilize the community for a rally against inadequate resources such as
funding or facility inefficiencies. Black clergy exhibiting its collective influence by
attending school board meetings and requesting meetings with the superintendent on a
regular basis to hold elected and appointed officials accountable is another example of
bridging. Additionally, the 1990s CEPAA effort was a bridging approach to addressing
inequality in Mount Vernon’s public schools. Black clergy coordinated and galvanized
the Black community to elect representatives from within its ranks and eventually the
Black community became the new majority. Unfortunately, as previously discussed, the
CEPAA disbanded and the momentum wavered. Many of the gains from that effort are
lost today.

Black clergy should revisit those efforts and build coalitions and partnerships to
address new issues for public school reform with a plan for long-term sustainability.
These new efforts must include leaders from other populations to address the education
issues in Mount Vernon. The creation of stakeholders’ organization that strategically
builds coalitions and partnerships across racial and ethnic groups would be an excellent
approach to addressing the new issues affecting public-school reform in Mount Vernon.

According to the study by Drew (2005), education reform is a multifaceted
problem, and the approach must be comprehensive and inclusive. Developing
sustainable partnerships requires participants with knowledge of the breadth and depth of
the problem, and those participants need to have the commitment to withstand numerous
challenges. Well-respected individuals with the ability to develop genuine and
trustworthy leadership relationships are required for these types of coalitions. Black
clergy have the capacity to reinforce relationships within the community, retool the fight
for equality, and galvanize the community to achieve public education reform through a
cross-cultural, cross-interest, and community-based coalition.

Conclusion

The Black church has been an important social entity in the fight for social justice
throughout American history. From the 19th century, with the slave insurrections,
through the civil rights movement, Black clergy have been at the forefront in the fight for
racial equality. The U.S. Supreme Court case Brown v. Board of Education (1954) was a pivotal achievement in the life of America and in the role that Black clergy played in public education reform. Notwithstanding these advances, there are consequences to desegregation and the achievements have been short-lived. American public schools today are experiencing resegregation in patterns dating back to the pre-civil rights movement era.

Despite a history of involvement by Black clergy to address racial and social injustices before and during the civil rights movement, Black urban communities today criticize their leadership as inadequately leading the fight for change in an area of public education reform and other critical-needs areas. The purpose of the study is to explore the lived experiences of Black clergy, their colleagues, and other community stakeholders in order to expand upon earlier scholarship by Bell (1979), DuBois (1903), and Woodson (1933), who argued that the permanence of race in America validates self-worth in American society. The permanence of race in America has obstructed the ability among people of color to obtain social mobility since the early 19th century, and it continues to adversely affect their public education today. The challenge is of mobilizing the community around what Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, called today’s civil rights issue (Duncan, 2011). This study aims to understand the role of Black clergy as leaders in public education reform and expand scholarship completed by Middleton (2001), Burton (2007), and Edwards (2008).

To gain insight into this phenomenon, the researcher examined the lived experiences of Black clergy through the lens of two supportive theoretical frameworks: critical race theory, drawn from Derrick Bell (1979; 1987; 1992), and social capital
theory, drawn from Putnam (2000). Black clergy demonstrated the ability to influence the community through galvanizing social capital in their communities. During the civil rights era, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. mobilized the country through a coordinated effort of local Black clergy in support of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Taylor, 1994). The Civil Rights Act of 1964 officially provided equality rights to all citizens. However, these laws were insufficient, and scholars of critical race theory challenged their effectiveness because the very foundation of American society is built on property rights rather than human rights; and the intersection of race and property most appropriately addresses the inequality in public education today (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

The literature on CRT frames education reform in American cities as a community issue that has rich potential for civic capacity as defined by Stone et al. (2001). The literature acknowledges urban education reform as a potential civil rights issue and identifies the critical need for adequate leadership to address the problem. Middleton (2001) argued that Black clergy failed to adequately provide leadership in public school reform. There is limited research to provide an understanding of the factors that affect the role of Black clergy in building collaborative civic efforts to advance equality in urban education and to hold leaders in education accountable. The literature will benefit from this study on the role of the Black clergy, as leaders in public education reform, through the lens of social capital theory. While Bourdieu’s (1986) view that social capital is inherited, and Coleman (1968) believed social capital could be obtained through education, Putnam (2000) introduced social networks and trust as effective social capital. Putnam’s study (2000) concluded that religious organizations are important to harnessing social capital and affecting social change. Subsequent to Putnam, several
other forms of social capital, such as Clarence Stone’s Civic Capacity and Michael Greenberg’s theory of neighborhood civic participation expand the literature. These theories of social capital broaden the macro-level perspective that Putnam introduced, and provide a context for the examination of the role of Black clergy in public education reform in America.

The context for this study was Mount Vernon, NY, a diverse urban community of 68,000 people. The participants included a purposeful sampling of Black clergy, educators, parents, and members of the community at large. The data collection process began with an initial invitation to participants, followed by an introductory letter that included an informed consent form, to explain the study and the right of each participant to withdraw at any time during the study. This data collection process used open-ended questions developed by the researcher, and they were verified for validity and reliability by a panel of experts in the field. The researcher used 13 questions during two focus group sessions and 12 in-depth interviews. The digitally recorded interviews were sent to a professional transcriber, and the transcripts were coded during three cycles, and they were subsequently analyzed. The data results include five themes, 20 sub-themes, and 189 codes.

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the perceptions regarding the role of the Black church in fighting for education reform in urban communities where a new majority prevails?

2. What is the role of the Black clergy now that the fight for social justice in public schools may involve holding accountable leaders of the new majority?

3. What are the new issues affecting education equality in these communities?
4. What opportunities can Black clergy build upon to advance their role as leaders in education reform?

5. What are the barriers that impede the role of Black clergy to serve as major influences in advancing educational reform?

The results of the study identified five findings from the obtained data. These findings delivered practical insight into Black clergy, public school leadership, education, community leaders, and parents in urban communities. The findings offered awareness about the opportunities Black clergy have in becoming leaders in public school reform.

a) The Black church has the potential to influence public school reform through advocacy and community engagement. The Black church is recognized as a means to moral and ethical development with a biblical mandate to give voice to the discontent, to identify injustice, and to galvanize the community around the issue of education inequality. Based on biblical mandates, the church’s responsibility is to advocate for education through information gathering and dissemination of information to congregants by the mobilization of the community and by the creation of supportive services to the educational system. Finally, the role of the Black church is as an incubator for talented leadership and collaborative coordination in support of education reform.

b) Black clergy, with awareness of education issues and actively involved in the community, have the best opportunity for affecting education inequality and holding leaders accountable. Black clergy have the same responsibilities today as they did before and during the civil right era. Regardless of any change in leadership, they must advocate for the safeguard of public schools and hold appointed and elected officials accountable for achieving education equality. They must maintain moral and ethical
leadership and not allow any political or personal agendas to hinder their ability to hold new majority leadership accountable.

c) **Black clergy must build coalitions and partnerships to effectively address the new issues for public school reform.** Several of the new issues identified by the participant have existed for a few decades, such as the lack of parental involvement, lack of funding resources, lack of cultural inclusion, lack of qualified teachers and school leadership, and challenging school environments. New issues identified include parent and community apathy, a diminishing and inconsistent role of Black clergy, political control groups, and resegregation. The Black clergy must develop sustaining partnership to address all of these issues despite the community apathy and complex divisions within the community where the new majority is Blacks and Latinos.

d) **Issues of race, poverty, and inequitable funding policies continue to erode public school reform efforts and there is a clearly defined role for the clergy to address these issues.** Despite over 90% of the residents being Black and Latino, the participants considered race and poverty to be contributing factors to inequality in the Mount Vernon school system. Several individuals from the study discussed school funding formulas as inherently based on poverty and tax property values. They viewed the Black clergy as leaders with unrealized potential to develop cross-cultural and intergroup coalitions focused on addressing racial, ethnicity, and socioeconomic disparities, especially advocating for improved funding policies.

e) **Black clergy, who are seen as non-partisan and who foster community ownership and accountability, have a better chance of becoming leaders in public school reform.** Black clergy have a recognized ability to build persuasive relationships because
of their positions in the community, and they have the opportunity to provide awareness
of education issues, encourage community involvement, hold elected and appointed
leaders accountable, and foster collaborative leadership to advance public education
reform. They must maintain strong ethical leadership in order to advance the public
school reform with a more collective and consistent approach.

There were seven implications in the study that related to the role Black clergy
play in public education reform. First, the findings of this study expanded the literature
on the role of Black clergy in education reform. Scholars should seek more empirical
data that offers greater solutions to the role they must play in public school reform.
Second, the Black church should reexamine its effectiveness as an agent for social justice
and advocacy in the community. Without increased engagement and the involvement of
the church, public school ownership by the community will be a struggle. Third, Black
clergy should examine their relationship with the community and find ways to rebuild
their capacity to forge meaningful relationships for improving public education in their
local community. Fourth, there is the need to examine the role of Black clergy as a direct
service provider to education reform, and fifth, cleric and non-cleric community members
might begin to examine the Black clergy and their ability to hold themselves, as well as
their appointed and elected officials, accountable.

The sixth implication is that Black clergy must examine their role in influencing
the political terrain versus promoting public ownership and responsibility for public
education reform. Finally, seventh, cleric and non-cleric leaders might begin to
recognize that, in spite of people of color having greater access and control over public
institutions, issues of racism, classism, and inequality continue to persist and impede education reform.

The two limitations in this study were the inability for generalizability and the insider positionality of the researcher. Because of the small sample size, these findings are unique to Mount Vernon, NY and should be used to form discussions, to guide future research, and to provide general insight into the phenomena. Secondly, the positionality of the researcher might have affected the results. The research is a long-time resident, pastor of a prominent church in the city, and an appointed official in city government. The participants might have been less forthright in their criticism of Black clergy because of the researcher’s insider positionality.

While the respondents did not address new emerging issues in public education reform, such as the common-core challenges and tax-cap effects on delivery of services, this study provides insight to the Black clergy as they examine their role as leaders in addressing public education reform. The perceptions obtained from clergy, their colleagues, and other community stakeholders provide findings that generated the following major recommendations:

- Black clergy should examine their role in education reform by implementing strategies to increase community engagement and advocacy.
- Black clergy should develop cross-cultural and community-wide coalitions responsible for addressing public education reform.
- The Black church should continue to provide services to the community that improve academic performance and minimize the effects of social challenges.
- Black clergy must provide leadership in addressing issues of race and poverty.
Paulo Freire, in his 1970 book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, refers to education as an instrument for integration of the young into the current system or as a practice for freedom, creatively and critical thinking to transform the world. This study serves to generate discussion about the need for greater leadership in the transformation of education. The Black clergy are crucial to this transformation in urban communities, and they must take on the mantle of moral and ethical leadership to fight against education inequality.
References


Duncan, A. (2011, September). *Education and the economy*. Speech presented at University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.


Appendix A

Introductory Letter for Individual Interviews

Date

Dear ________________,

I am a doctoral student at St. John’s Fisher College, enrolled in the Doctor of Education in Executive Leadership program. This letter is an invitation to participate in a research study I am conducting.

My research study will focus on capturing the perceptions of Black clergy, educators, parents, and other community members. The topic is Black clergy leadership in urban education reform. I seek your participation in an individual interview, which is approximately one hour.

If you agree to participate, the interview will be recorded using a digital recording device. Your confidentiality will be maintained throughout the entire research process, and under no circumstance will your identity appear in any report associated with this research.

Since this research aims to gain insight on the perceptions of the participants, there is no need to be concerned about “right and wrong” answers. The goal is to obtain your opinions and perceptions regarding this topic, which are most important.

If you agree to participate, please contact me at (914) 522-1720 at any time to schedule the interview based on your availability. I look forward to hearing from you and thank you in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Darren M. Morton
Doctoral Degree Candidate in Executive Leadership
Appendix B

Introductory Letter for Focus Groups

Date

Dear ________________,

I am a doctoral student at St. John’s Fisher College, enrolled in the Doctor of Education in Executive Leadership program. This letter is an invitation to participate in a research study I am conducting.

My research study will focus on capturing the perceptions of Black clergy, educators, parents, and other community members. The topic is Black clergy leadership in urban education reform. I seek your participation in a focus group, which is approximately one hour.

If you agree to participate, the focus group will be recorded using a digital recording device. Your confidentiality will be maintained throughout the entire research process, and under no circumstance will your identity appear in any report associated with this research.

Since this research aims to gain insight on the perceptions of the participants, there is no need to be concerned about “right and wrong” answers. The goal is to obtain your opinions and perceptions regarding this topic, which are most important.

If you agree to participate, please contact me at (914) 522-1720, so I may schedule the focus group around on your availability. I look forward to hearing from you and thank you in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Darren M. Morton
Doctoral Degree Candidate in Executive Leadership
Appendix C

St. John Fisher College
Institutional Review Board
Informed Consent Form
The Role of Black Clergy in Urban Education Reform:

Name(s) of researcher(s): Darren M. Morton

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Claudia L. Edwards
Phone for further information: 914-654-5253

Purpose of study: The objective of this study is to examine the lived experiences of Black clergy in Mt. Vernon, NY and their role in urban education reform after the Civil Rights Movement. The study seeks to understand the factors that affect how Black clergy perceive their leadership role in transforming urban education. Furthermore, this study will explore the perceptions of non-clergy regarding the role and any inadequate leadership from the Black clergy in addressing this issue. In addition, this study seeks to explore the perceptions on Black clergy and their ability to mobilize community members around issues that address the improvement of urban education.

Study Procedures: The researcher will conduct individual interviews or focus group sessions for approximately one hour each. Each participant will be asked a series of 13 questions, and responses will be audio recorded. The confidentiality of participants will be maintained throughout the entire research process, and under no circumstance will your identity appear in any report associated with this research.

Approval of study: This study has been reviewed and approved by the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Place of study: Mount Vernon, NY
Length of participation:

Risks and benefits: Your participation is voluntary and there are no expected risks or benefits associated with the study.

Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy:
Your rights:
As a research participant, you have the right to:
1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
4. Be informed of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, that might be advantageous to you.

5. Be informed of the results of the study.

I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in the above-named study.

Print name (Participant) Signature       Date

Print name (Investigator) Signature       Date
Appendix D

Clergy Interview Questions

*General Experience: Understanding religious institutions, public school reform and the role of the Black clergy during the civil rights movement.*

1. Describe your religious affiliation including denomination, if applicable/
   a. What is your role and how long have you been in the ministry?
   b. How has your experience as clergy influenced your leadership role?
   c. Can you provide two specific examples of how the Black church or Black clergy has most influenced you?

2. When you think about a “religious institution” or church in general, what would you describe as the ideal role it would play in the community?

3. When you think about the term “the Black church” or the Black clergy, what comes to mind?
   a. How does that description differ from non-Black church or clergy?
   b. Describe the role of the Black church or Black clergy during the civil rights movement (1954-1968).
   c. Is the role of the Black church the same or different today, and why?
   d. What do you know about Martin Luther King and the role he and other Black clergy played in the civil rights movement?

4. What do you know about the Black Clergy of Westchester?
   a. Are you a member? If not, why? (asked only if Black clergy)
   b. Can you provide two specific examples of how the UBC has been successful in the community?
   c. Can you provide two specific examples of how the UBC has failed the community?

5. What do you know about the landmark Supreme Court case, Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, KS?
   a. What do you think the Black clergy did to make civil rights movements successful in dismantling de facto (government sponsored) segregation in Mount Vernon public schools?
   b. Can you provide two specific examples of how desegregation of public schools has succeeded in education reform?
   c. Can you provide two specific examples of how desegregation of public schools has failed in education reform?
Research Questions #1: What are the perceptions of the Black clergy regarding the role of the Black church in fighting for education reform in urban communities where a new majority prevails?

6. During the civil rights era (1954-1968) the Black clergy led the fight for education equality against a White majority in many communities and today these same communities have a “new majority” (Black or Latino). Describe two major differences regarding the role of the Black church or Black clergy in education reform today where a new majority exist.

7. Similar to many urban communities, Black and Latinos have become the “new Majority” and they hold prominent positions in government and public sector. What is the role of the Black Clergy in holding appointed and elected officials accountable for safeguarding the public’s public schools?

Research Questions #2: What is the role of the Black clergy now that the fight for social justice in public schools may involve holding accountable leaders of the new majority?

8. What has been the role of the Black clergy in this fight for social justice in public schools?

Research Question #3: What are the new issues affecting education equality in these communities?

9. Can you describe your ideal public school for Mount Vernon?

10. What are the two major problems facing the Mount Vernon school district?

11. How would you describe the new issues affecting education equality in the urban community today now that Blacks and Latino represent the new majority in Mount Vernon?

   a. What role, if any, has race or racism played in achieving equality in the Mount Vernon school system? (only asked if race is not mentioned)
   b. How has it changed since the civil rights era? (only asked if race is not mentioned)

Research Question #4: What opportunities can Black clergy build upon to advance their role as leaders in education reform?

12. How would you describe the role of the Black clergy currently play in addressing these problems in the City of Mount Vernon?

   a. What are two strengths of the Black clergy in address issues of urban education reform
   b. Can you describe how the Black clergy individually or collaboratively address issues affecting urban education reform?
c. Can you provide two specific examples of what the black clergy is doing to effect education reform in the Mount Vernon Public School district?

Research Questions #5: What are the barriers that impede the role of Black clergy to serve as a major influence in advancing educational reform?

13. What are some barriers that impede the ability of the Black clergy to sustain their reputation as a leading force in education reform in Mount Vernon?
   a. Can you provide two specific examples of what they are not doing or could do better to effect education reform in Mount Vernon school district?
   b. What are the barriers, if any, to Black clergy individually addressing issues affecting urban education reform in Mount Vernon?
   c. What are the barriers, if any, to Black clergy bringing together the entire community to collectively address issues affecting urban education reform in Mount Vernon?
Appendix E

Non-Clergy Interview Questions

General Experience: Understanding religious institutions, public school reform and the role of the Black clergy during the civil rights movement.

1. How have you been influenced by the Black church
   a. Describe your religious affiliation and what, if any, influence it had on you as a child?
   b. How has your experience, if any, differed as an adult?

2. When you think about a “religious institution” or church in general, what would you describe as the ideal role it would play in the community?

3. When you think about the term “the Black church” or the Black clergy, what comes to mind?
   a. How does that description differ from non-Black church or clergy?
   b. Describe the role of the Black church or Black clergy during the civil rights movement (1954-1968).
   c. Is the role of the Black church the same or different today, and why?
   d. What do you know about Martin Luther King and the role he and other Black clergy played in the civil rights movement?

4. What do you know about the Black Clergy of Westchester?
   a. Can you provide two specific examples of how the UBC has been successful in the community?
   b. Can you provide two specific examples of how the UBC has failed the community?

5. What do you know about the landmark Supreme Court case, Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, KS?
   a. What do you think the Black clergy did to make civil rights movements successful in dismantling de facto (government sponsored) segregation in Mount Vernon public schools?
   b. Can you provide two specific examples of how desegregation of public schools has succeeded in education reform?
   c. Can you provide two specific examples of how desegregation of public schools has failed in education reform?

Research Questions #1: What are the perceptions of the Black clergy regarding the role of the Black church in fighting for education reform in urban communities where a new majority prevails?
6. During the civil rights era (1954-1968) the Black clergy led the fight for education equality against a White majority in many communities and today these same communities have a “new majority (Black or Latino). Describe two major differences regarding the role of the Black church or Black clergy in education reform today where a new majority exist.

7. Similar to many urban communities, Black and Latinos have become the “new Majority” and they hold prominent positions in government and public sector. What is the role of the Black Clergy in holding appointed and elected officials accountable for safeguarding the public’s public schools?

Research Questions #2: What is the role of the Black clergy now that the fight for social justice in public schools may involve holding accountable leaders of the new majority?

8. What has been the role of the Black clergy in this fight for social justice in public schools?

Research Question #3: What are the new issues affecting education equality in these communities?

9. Can you describe your ideal public school for Mount Vernon?

10. What are the two major problems facing the Mount Vernon school district?

11. How would you describe the new issues affecting education equality in the urban community today now that Blacks and Latino represent the new majority in Mount Vernon?
   a. What role, if any, has race or racism played in achieving equality in the Mount Vernon school system? (only asked if race is not mentioned)
   b. How has it changed since the civil rights era? (only asked if race is not mentioned)

Research Question #4: What opportunities can Black clergy build upon to advance their role as leaders in education reform?

12. How would you describe the role of the Black clergy currently play in addressing these problems in the City of Mount Vernon?
   a. What are two strengths of the Black clergy in address issues of urban education reform
   b. Can you describe how the Black clergy individually or collaboratively address issues affecting urban education reform?
   c. Can you provide two specific examples of what the black clergy is doing to effect education reform in the Mount Vernon Public School district?
Research Questions #5: What are the barriers that impede the role of Black clergy to serve as a major influence in advancing educational reform?

13. What are some barriers that impede the ability of the Black clergy to sustain their reputation as a leading force in education reform in Mount Vernon?
   a. Can you provide two specific examples of what they are not doing or could do better to effect education reform in Mount Vernon school district?
   b. What are the barriers, if any, to Black clergy individually addressing issues affecting urban education reform in Mount Vernon?
   c. What are the barriers, if any, to Black clergy bringing together the entire community to collectively address issues affecting urban education reform in Mount Vernon?
Appendix F

Initial Coding

1. Leadership driven by Biblical mandate for advocacy, justice, and caring for people in terms of rituals as well as in a pastoral sense
2. Model leadership after MLK Jr.
3. Church's influence is limited because it does not do much in the community.
4. (Pre / During CRE) The Black Church valued education very highly.
5. As was apparent from seeing the African American Leadership Forum work, the Black Church has had and can still have a powerful influence on the community as well as the nation
6. Church's role determined by individual church & affiliated clergy
7. Church should seek to fulfill Biblical mandate: A spiritual, moral and ethical role in the whole community, wherein people "administer to their souls," serve one another and develop good character
8. Church should be infused and involved in the local community
9. Churches are too politically involved now, which detracts from their spiritual impact on the community.
10. The Black Church is all about money, therefore cannot be trusted to follow through and be a caring presence in the community.
11. The Black Church in Mt. Vernon is a powerful resource that can be tapped to make big changes in the city.
12. The Church should oppose and rebel against all forms of oppression.
13. The Black Church collectively can be the source of future leaders
14. In contrast with other churches, the Black Church views its congregation as a flock to be nurtured; focuses on engaging people to become stalwarts and soldiers of the church. The allegiance asked of congregates who attend the Black church is deeper than what’s expected in other churches.
15. In contrast with other churches and outside the Black Church in general, there is a greater freedom of expression and a more fervent religiosity among congregants
16. In contrast with other churches, the Black Church is the only religious institution associated with the problems of Black people.
17. The Black Church has changed since childhood--it became (or is now) very politically involved.
18. The culture of the Black Church has changed in regard to how older and younger people relate with one another. Then: Older people showed concern and got involved in raising all children of the church; Now: Older people are hesitant to share their wisdom and the sense of concern has been somewhat lost and replaced with a harsher response to the errors of youth.
19. Church continually transforms to stay relevant to the times, but stays true to Biblical mandate.
21. Black clergy played a role in education reform and Brown v. BOE by giving a voice to and organizing the masses.
22. Black Church provided schools for Black children; during desegregation process, was involved in making sure children were being educated in Mt. Vernon
23. Conveying information
24. Clergy in the south did not get involved in education reform.
25. Many leaders rose from these ranks who became the voices for the masses; Black Church served as a support and initiative for CR movement (including MLK Jr.)
26. MLK Jr. interpreted scripture as a basis for CR movement, giving legitimacy to it via religious action
27. Clergy served at that time as the moral leadership for the country as well as for African Americans; Clergy served an appropriate political role, taking political stances, initiating support for or rejection of legislation.
28. The promotion of non-violence
29. Leaders didn't necessarily depend on the institutions or culture for survival - implies a disconnect from the people
30. Transformed the schools and brought them to reflect the interests of the child population by advocating for people to get involved in the BOE and voting; UBC took "control" of schools by forming a united front
31. The UBC organization is open to entities outside itself. It listens to stakeholders in the community to avail itself of the current state of affairs in the community, and assess need.
32. Although inconsistent across Black Clergy, some of them have fought for education reform.
33. Clergy have worked together to deal with "Black on Black" crime.
34. Individual churches attended to individual students' needs to help them succeed in school / college / elsewhere; Some Mt. Vernon churches have acted individually to help schools (e.g., adopting schools, after-school programs, tutoring, computer access)
35. When exposed for bad choices or wrongdoing, clergy took corrective action
36. SOS was successful at first, just didn't come to fruition
37. CEPA
38. Black clergy have not taken / maintained a serious and active role in education reform.
39. Black clergy need to be educated and better organized around education reform
40. Low level of student proficiency / grad rate / high number of suspensions are clear and disappointing symptoms of failure (in Mt. Vernon)
41. Competition / internal conflict among Black clergy has divided the community, which has a negative impact on attempts at education reform by losing direction
42. Muddled or conflicting public messages
43. Inclusion, rights, opportunities that are given in theory are not actualized for the masses
44. The clergy’s greatest potential to do good is in a crisis; strike while the iron is hot.
45. Clergy need to be informed, trained, organized and/or sensitized to engage in education reform
46. Pastors can mobilize the masses simply by telling their congregations to act.
47. Clergy are known in the community and serve multiple community roles, which gives them a voice and the power to influence community action.
48. Clergy can serve as a voice for those who do not have one.
49. The collective of clergy and Black Church congregations in Mt. Vernon is a great resource for fiscal, and talent support as well as intellectual and educated leaders to act, united.
50. Clergy can create a collective effort by starting at the individual level, leading by example; in other words, ultimately the collective is made up of individuals acting in concert
51. Clergy have shown they are interested in and concerned about education reform
52. Clergy collectively have captive, weekly audiences to whom they can disseminate a clear message and through whose power in numbers they can effect positive change in the community
53. Clergy possess tremendous power to set a national agenda for education reform.
54. Can team up with non-religious organizations that have proven track records on the issue of education reform
55. Bad habits of parents passed down from earlier generations
56. Lack of a sense of entitlement to equality among Black people
57. Clergy not well educated, united, or informed
58. Education reform is complicated
59. Clergy have broad missions that touch many sociological issues and may focus on other than education.
60. The collective will always be in the minority
61. Clergy do not have direct influence over education reform; the professionals and politicians are the ones that do.
62. Clergy is a part time organization, it has no staff.
63. The Black clergy were threatened that if they continue their political stance their tax exempt status would be challenged in the courts
64. Clergy who do not live locally are not invested on a personal level in the community's success.
65. People do not trust the clergy
66. Competition / internal conflict among Black clergy has divided the community, which has a negative impact on attempts at education reform by losing direction and impeding collectivism and cooperation
67. Clergy not involved in community, outside church (outreach)
68. Lack of education
69. Corruption / conflicts of interest / nepotism / favoritism
70. Perception that separation of church and state extends to individual students
71. Apathy (of clergy themselves)
72. Finding and agreeing on a solution is a problem
73. Clergy need legal protections to avoid serious consequences of D4i
74. Money is power
75. Lack of foresight to preempt the problems of power-hungry politicians, unchecked spending of public funds, nepotism, unchecked bias, etc.
76. Lack of follow-through in organized reform efforts.
77. Covert racism harder to identify / fight
78. Church generally does what it's supposed to do in / for the community.
79. Galvanized the community around the issue of murders
80. Affordable housing
81. Black clergy are not vocal enough, do not advocate enough, do not educate parents, and generally do not have a strong presence or influence in the community
82. There is no cohesive Black clergy presence on a national level to serve as a model or unifying reference for local churches
83. Individual churches attend to needs of people in the community
84. Then: Presidents, particularly Lyndon Johnson wouldn’t make a real move unless at least inviting the Black clergy into the room, Lyndon Johnson and John F. Kennedy made sure that if you see those photos that in the White House that whenever they were going to make a major statement or support some legislation that related to Civil Rights and social justice they brought the Black ministers into the room. So the role was considered significant at a national level; Now: Those pictures aren't being taken anymore, Black ministers aren't being brought into the room at all.
85. Then: Church pastors had great influence in the community; Now: Unsure why this mechanism no longer works or why it's just not utilized anymore.
86. Then: It was common for Black Clergy to preside over smaller congregations and to be more personally involved in community issues / family-oriented with them; Now: It is rare.
87. Parents and grandparents were older during CRE than today--clergy need to adjust to this change
88. Then: Black Church and clergy were more united, organized and active in community and political issues; Now: A few are, but there is no larger network or organized approach
89. Then: Black Churches were more traditional and structured in their approach to serving the community; Now: Non-denominational churches are drawing the younger crowd and are responsible for a less traditional and therefore less focused approach to the community
90. Then: Many more people felt connected to the church (78% of US citizens in 1960); Now: 33% in 2004--in other words, the opportunity for influencing the masses is less than it used to be
91. Hold all appointed and elected officials equally accountable to ethical standards (e.g., no Black favoritism, expect they put need of community--esp. children--first)
92. Serve as free agents who exert an organizing influence for the community and as a liaison between community and elected / appointed officials
93. Be persistent--don't start and stop--and inspire continued efforts for reform in the public
94. Organize (act collectively), identify the issues, educate and mobilize the masses
95. Use the collective to ensure people running for / getting into political positions are qualified
96. Support families, educate parents, and assist students with formal programs and scholarship opportunities
97. Be present, visible, involved in community affairs
98. Support efforts to fight resegregation
99. Serve as a "life coach"
100. Get to know the clergy in town, their character, qualities, etc.
101. Educate students and community about Black history
102. Must fight to hold corporate America, courts, etc. accountable to ensure justice in the future
103. Must be familiar with and understand the actual state of affairs for people in the community and work from that starting point
104. Parents and grandparents were older during CRE than today--clergy need to adjust to this change
105. Desegregation succeeded in that schools were indeed desegregated; True access to equal education was achieved in Mt. Vernon.
106. Desegregation produced many well-educated Black people by providing better opportunities and access.
107. Desegregation created job opportunities in government for upwardly mobile black adults. Success was longterm for many of these people.
108. Integration in schools was good in Mt. Vernon, even before and during the CRE. Segregation existed, but it was not extreme as in some other parts of the country.
109. True access to equal education was achieved in Mt. Vernon.
110. Desegregation opened up a whole new world previously off-limits to Black people, which was empowering for them.
111. Removed Black institutions
112. Dismantled a sense of community among Black students / residents
113. Hurt Black businesses
114. Losses may be seen as sacrifices for long-term goal of equality
115. Benefits did not last, perhaps because families changed
116. Missed a chance to expand the CRE to be about the oppression of people of different nations (e.g., fight for pan-Africanism
117. Racism was less visible in New York than in the south, but it still existed, most obviously in segregation and lack of equal opportunities (such as school bussing)
118. Lack of funding for desegregation initiative in public education
119. Early post CRE (1962-1970), Mt. Vernon schools were high quality.
120. Historically black colleges have filled a need that has been left unfilled by primary and secondary education systems
121. Although pure desegregation occurred only in schools at first, over time, integration in all areas increased as fear and ignorance diminished on both sides
122. White flight
123. Resegregation
124. School funding is inadequate in school districts like Mt. Vernon because the formula is flawed by being tied to real estate, in that it leads to unequal education opportunities ("keeps poor schools poor and rich schools rich, separate but not equal.")
125. In Mt. Vernon, Brown v. BOE translated to increasing access for poor Black students, but not white students, in essence defying the language of the ruling itself (i.e., "Open enrollment")
126. Due to a dearth of Black teachers in Black communities and general lack of diversity among educators, many white teachers in predominately Black schools
increases probability that there will be low cultural competency and cultural disconnect in terms of curriculum

127. Black history is not treated well in school curriculum.

128. The curriculum espousing white dominance never changed; Education was not implemented to follow-up on desegregation with a deeper strategy to change the psychology of racism.

129. As Black minority began to infiltrate positions of power, Black "race-based nepotism" took precedence over installing quality leaders in these positions.

130. Then: Overt racism was easy to identify and target; Now: Covert racism is harder to identify (see D3b)

131. Then: Fight for inclusion, rights, opportunities; Now: opportunities that are given in theory by not actualized for the masses

132. Then: Problem identification in education reform was much easier; Now: Problems and solutions are hard for people to see. Therefore, now as opposed to then, it is more difficult to rally public support and unity.

133. Then: Fought whites for civil rights; Now: Fighting one another.

134. Then: The Black Church presented a clear message in the media that was perceived without confusion in MLK Jr.; Now: Media confuse the message and people are left unsure as to what it is.

135. Poor parental support in the schools occurs because parents are uninformed, intimidated by the system, lacking in skills to deal with the system, and/or had a bad education themselves

136. Although the minority race became the majority in Mt. Vernon, race remains as an issue of oppression, because the same people are still lacking equal opportunities, perhaps because leaders are still infused with oppressors' rules, language, methods, ideologies, etc.

137. A more insidious type of racism still negatively influenced the educational experiences of Black students

138. Persisting racism makes fighting resegregation difficult

139. Race is related to inequities related to the underfunding of particular school districts or schools like Mt. Vernon

140. Then: there was a higher regard for education in poor Black communities; Now: New social ills have overwhelmed old values (e.g., drug abuse, 70s recession, Vietnam vets returned to no opportunities)

141. Then: more white residents in the community translated into more parental involvement in the schools; Now: having a majority of Black residents, parents are not as involved.

142. Then: Race was an issue in education reform; Now: Race is not an issue because the demographics of the community have changed

143. Race is involved in education reform, but not sure how; racial demographics have changed, but not sure how or what its impact of the change is.

144. Then: there was a higher regard for education in poor Black communities; Now: Education is no longer valued so highly in some families

145. Disparity in education was never very much about race. Mt. Vernon is proof of this, because when which race was in control changed, the policies still remained the same
Then: Race was the factor that divided the privileged and the oppressed; Now: the factor is wealth / poverty

Black and Latino community members may see one another as outsiders or even enemies, which divides the community

Drugs

Black and Latino community members can / should unite for their common cause of education reform

Oppressed people should improve their value to society by focusing on education, learning, skill acquisition, etc.

Public / parents need to be informed so that action can be organized and thereby make an impact on local government

Politicization of education reform may impede success of reform efforts.

Students with special needs represent a large portion of per-student expenditures in Mt. Vernon, because of cost Special Education classifications.

Apathy among public officials, public, parents, voters, educators

Lack of funding

Incompetent / underqualified leadership in education

Incompetent or underqualified teachers in schools.

Political corruption / greed

"Political control groups" (voting blocks)

Lack of disciplinary resources for educators

An educational system that breeds underachievement

Lack of focus on early childhood education

Teachers who are not from Mt. Vernon do not understand its history may do a disservice to students in this school district

Education is too demanding for many students, due in large part to the regular changing of educational methods or systems of learning

Black students of today are not well versed in Black history.

Gentrification will necessarily change a municipality

Focus more on students’ developmental and academic needs instead of age and grade

Encourage parent involvement (e.g., have a parent resource center in every single school and parental outreach, including utilizing media sources to provide parental education)

Provide prenatal care services

Provide after school activities (ideally in every single building)

Small class size

Quality teachers

Focus on literacy and literature.

Infuse more in-depth Black history into curriculum

Identify and address the sources of anger among students and parents

Make technology available for those students without access.

Provide support and guidance to students to ensure graduation and post-grad success; Create a mentor program

Clean and safe classrooms

Culturally competent school environment
180. Provide early childhood education
181. Properly and adequately equipped classrooms.
182. School atmosphere should be caring and emotionally healing.
183. Emphasis on STEM subjects
184. Qualified and caring leadership
185. Teachers who live locally
186. Don't lose the basics in the effort to keep classrooms modern. Technology is good, but should be integrated with the basics.
187. Diverse school board
188. The value of education must be at the root of the actions of the school community and the community at large to yield success
189. Violence occurs due to releasing school and not having bussing to break up the large crowds.