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# Black Church Advocacy in the Era of Mass Incarceration: A Phenomenological Study

## Abstract

The purpose of this research study was to examine the response of Black church pastors to Alexander's (2010) observation in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* of a "relative quiet" and "eerie silence" in the civil rights community and to explore factors that influenced Black pastors' actions to address the mass incarceration problem between 2012 and 2015 subsequent to studying *The New Jim Crow*. Utilizing the phenomenological approach, participants for this study were purposefully sampled from a national database of Black pastors in the following regions: Northeast, Midwest, and South. Data collected from conducting 11 interviews with 11 Black pastors showed that they responded to Alexander's observation by starting conversations on the new Jim Crow within local congregations and the broader community, educating policymakers on mass incarceration's impact on the Black community, and identifying barriers to collective and sustained action on the part of the Black church to end mass incarceration. Pastors recommended that the Black church address the stigma and negative perception associated with incarceration, develop a shared vision for addressing race and racism in the criminal justice system, and play a role in developing messages based on Christian teachings to frame the conversation on ending mass incarceration in the United States. And, like past civil rights issues, mass incarceration is proving to be an issue that the Black church is strategically positioned to address and, once again, the church's response is slow and uncoordinated in confronting this racial justice and human rights nightmare.

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Sr. Remigia Kushner

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## **Dedication**

First and foremost, I would like to thank God from whom all blessings flow. This dissertation journey was endurable only because of God’s grace and mercy. This achievement is dedicated to the women in my family who are now my ancestors: my grandmother, Julianna; my mother, Ann; and my aunt, Noelina. I know you are looking down on me. Thank you for your guidance, your encouragement, and your love. Whenever I questioned my decision to embark on this journey, I remembered your many sacrifices that allowed me to get to the place where I am today and to become the woman I have become. I hope I have made you proud. To my daughter, Elisa, this is all for you—your love and fierce commitment to justice and fairness inspire me to work harder and longer to leave this world a better place for you and for future generations.

To my village elders in Grenada who spoke vision into me from a tender age—this achievement is also dedicated to you. My hope is to return home one of these days to share what you have given to me with the next generation of dreamers. And to the villagers who stood with me during one of the toughest periods of my life—I am eternally grateful. I will always remember your selfless acts of service and love—your love and kindness were the fuel I needed to carry on.

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To my committee chair, Sr. Remigia Kushner, and my committee member, Dr. Ellen Bergman, thank you for your patience and your wise counsel. This dissertation would not have been completed without your ongoing support and guidance. Dr. Iva Carruthers of the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference and my research participants, thank you!

Lastly and most importantly, this achievement is dedicated to formerly incarcerated and currently incarcerated individuals—the “least of these” in our communities—and to their families.

## **Biographical Sketch**

Yolande A. Cadore attended SUNY-Empire State College and earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Urban Policy and Advocacy. From 2015 to 2017, Ms. Cadore attended Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs and obtained a Master of Public Administration degree with a focus on international political economy. In spring 2017, Ms. Cadore began her journey as a doctoral candidate by enrolling in St. John Fisher College's Executive Leadership program-New Rochelle site. She completed her doctoral studies on Black church advocacy in the era of mass incarceration under the direction and guidance of Sr. Remigia Kushner and Dr. Ellen Bergman and received the Ed.D. degree in 2019.

For more than 15 years, Ms. Cadore worked as an organizer on a range of issues, including organizing and advocating for state and federal housing policy reform, environmental justice and climate change, and criminal justice reform and ending the war on drugs. Ms. Cadore's areas of expertise are grassroots organizing and advocacy, strategic planning, organizational development, and not-for-profit management. She is currently the interim director for reinvestment at Community Change.

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this research study was to examine the response of Black church pastors to Alexander's (2010) observation in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* of a "relative quiet" and "eerie silence" in the civil rights community and to explore factors that influenced Black pastors' actions to address the mass incarceration problem between 2012 and 2015 subsequent to studying *The New Jim Crow*.

Utilizing the phenomenological approach, participants for this study were purposefully sampled from a national database of Black pastors in the following regions: Northeast, Midwest, and South. Data collected from conducting 11 interviews with 11 Black pastors showed that they responded to Alexander's observation by starting conversations on the new Jim Crow within local congregations and the broader community, educating policymakers on mass incarceration's impact on the Black community, and identifying barriers to collective and sustained action on the part of the Black church to end mass incarceration.

Pastors recommended that the Black church address the stigma and negative perception associated with incarceration, develop a shared vision for addressing race and racism in the criminal justice system, and play a role in developing messages based on Christian teachings to frame the conversation on ending mass incarceration in the United States. And, like past civil rights issues, mass incarceration is proving to be an issue that the



Black church is strategically positioned to address and, once again, the church's response is slow and uncoordinated in confronting this racial justice and human rights nightmare.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2010, Michelle Alexander wrote *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. In the book, the author called on civil rights organizations to prioritize ending mass incarceration in the United States. In a searing indictment, Alexander (2010) referenced a “relative quiet” and an “eerie silence” within the civil rights community including the Black church community (pp. 179–224). Alexander opined, “given the magnitude—the sheer scale—of the New Jim Crow, one would expect that the War on Drugs would be the top priority of every civil rights organization in the country” (p. 223). The author continued:

Conferences, strategy sessions, and debates regarding how best to build a movement to dismantle the new caste system would be occurring on a regular basis. Major grassroots organizing efforts would be under way in every state and city nationwide. Foundations would be lobbied to prioritize criminal justice reform. Media campaigns would be unleashed to overturn the punitive public consensus on race. The rhetoric associated with specific reform efforts would stress the need to end mass incarceration, not merely think with it, and efforts would be made to build multiracial coalitions based on the understanding that the racial politics that gave birth to the War on Drugs have harmed poor and working class whites as well as people of color. All of that could have happened, but it didn't. Why not? (Alexander, 2010, p. 224)

In addressing the Black church as one of the places where the conversation on ending the war on drugs and mass incarceration could have happened, Alexander stated that

Far from being a place of comfort and refuge, churches can be a place where judgement, shame, and contempt are felt most acutely. . . . Black churches, in this cultural narrative, are places where the ‘good’ black people can be found. (p. 166)

In documenting the scope of the mass incarceration crisis, the author and legal scholar highlighted that “more African American adults are under correctional control today—in prison or jail, on probation or parole—than were enslaved in 1850, a decade before the civil war began” (Alexander, 2010, p. 180). Additionally, Alexander (2010) observed that “the mass incarceration of people of color is a big reason that a black child born today is less likely to be raised by both parents than a black child born during slavery” (p. 180).

The impact of mass incarceration on Black bodies and Black lives cannot be ignored and the seeming lack of urgency among Black church leaders to address this problem cannot go unnoticed. According to Mitchell and Williams (2017), “one in three black men between the ages of 18 and 28 is in prison, jail, or on parole. Nearly one-half of the entire population in prison (over two million people in total) is black” (p. 36).

In *The New Jim Crow*, Alexander (2010) stated, “what this book is intended to do—the only thing it is intended to do—is to stimulate a much needed conversation about the role of the criminal justice system in creating and perpetuating a racial hierarchy in the United States” (p. 16). Alexander (2010) continued:



The fate of millions of people—indeed the future of the black community itself—may depend on the willingness of those who care about racial justice to re-examine their basic assumptions about the role of the criminal justice system in our society. The fact that more than half of the young black men in many large American cities are currently under the control of the criminal justice system (or saddled with criminal records) is not—as many argue—just a symptom of poverty or poor choices, but rather evidence of a new racial caste at work. (p. 16)

Alexander (2010) encouraged civil rights organizations to step out from behind the veil of denial and colorblindness and carry the torch of the civil rights movement of the 1960s forward (p. 223). Specifically, the author opined, “the awkward silence of the civil rights community, however, is more problematic. If something akin to a racial caste system truly exists, why has the civil rights community been so slow to acknowledge it?” (Alexander, 2010, p. 223). Alexander continued her questioning of civil rights organizations’ seeming lack of engagement in the fight to end mass incarceration by asking, “indeed, how could civil rights organizations, some of which are larger and better funded than at any point in American history, have allowed this human rights nightmare to occur on their watch?” (p. 223).

Founder and executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative Bryan Stevenson (2017) concurred:

The civil rights movement should have been followed by a process of truth and reparation that focused on recovery. . . . Instead, a toxic era shaped by the politics of fear and anger followed the civil rights movement and sustained racial inequalities. We retreated from racial and economic justice and opted for mass

incarceration and a misguided “war on drugs” that have left many poor and minority people marginalized, incarcerated and condemned. (p. 24)

From slavery to segregation, the Black church has played a central role advocating for and winning civil rights for African Americans in the United States. Warnock (2014) argued that “the concerns of the poor and the most marginalized members of the Black community, and nothing else, must be at the center of the much-needed conversation about the mission of the Black church” (p. 142).

This phenomenological study examined the impact of Alexander’s book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness* on Black pastors in the Northeast, Midwest, and South who responded to Alexander’s (2010) call to action to “stimulate conversations” and disrupt the “relative quiet” and “eerie silence” that currently exist on the role that race and racism play in the criminal justice system” (pp. 16, 179, 224).

According to scholar and prison abolitionist Davis (2003), “in most parts of the world, it is taken for granted that whoever is convicted of a serious crime will be sent to prison” (p. 9). In the United States, today there are 2.3 million Americans behind bars (Sawyer & Wagner, 2019). The vast majority are Black. Marc Mauer (2017) observed that “while the complicated relationship between black men and the criminal justice system has endured throughout American history, the experience of the past half century marks a shift of historic proportions” (p. 31).

Alexander (2010) chronicled the negative impacts of the United States’ war on drugs and mass incarceration on the Black community in general and specifically on

African American men. In a continuing discussion on the racial disparities in the criminal justice system, Mauer (2017) noted:

American society's racial assumption about crime made the outcome (mass incarceration) a choice. Whether these perceptions were conscious or not, they resulted in policy makers and the public creating a systemic approach that not only reinforced distorted assumptions of criminal behavior, that solidified the second-class status of so many black men in disadvantaged communities. (p. 33)

According to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU, 2019), the United States is home to 5% of the world's population and 25% of the world's incarcerated population. Furthermore, a report by The Sentencing Project (2018) revealed that in 1980 there were 19,000 individuals in state prisons compared to 197,200 in 2016; 4,700 in federal prisons in 1980 compared to 81,900 in 2016; and 17,200 in jails in 1980 compared to 171,245 in 2016. Alexander (2010) described the growth in the prison population as a form of "racialized social control" and opined:

Once again, in response to a major disruption in the prevailing racial order—this time the civil rights gains of the 1960s—a new system of racialized social control was created by exploiting the vulnerabilities and racial resentments of poor and working-class whites. More than 2.2 million people found themselves behind bars at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and millions more were related to the margins of mainstream society, banished to a political and social space not unlike Jim Crow, where discrimination in employment, housing and access to education was perfectly legal and where they could be denied the right to vote. (p. 58)

Davis (2003) drew a line between U.S. chattel slavery, lynching, and segregation in the United States and prisons. Historian Adam Jay Hirsh pointed out:

One may perceive in the penitentiary many reflections of chattel slavery as it was practiced in the South. Both institutions subordinated their subjects to the will of others. Like Southern slaves, prison inmates followed a daily routine specified by their superiors. Both institutions reduced their subjects to dependence on others for the supply of basic human services such as of food and shelter. Both isolated their subjects from the general population by confining them to a fixed habitat. And both frequently coerced their subjects to work, often for longer hours and less compensation than free laborers (as cited in Stevenson, 2003, p. 27).

Additionally, Davis observed that “particularly in the United States, race has always played a central role in constructing presumptions of criminality” (p. 28) and

With the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, slavery and involuntary servitude were putatively abolished. However, there was a significant exception. In the wording of the Amendment, slavery and involuntary servitude were abolished “except for as a punishment for crime, whereof the party shall have been duly convicted.” (Davis, 2003, p. 28)

Stevenson (2017) made a similar observation:

Formal nationwide codification of emancipation came in December 1865 with the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment which prohibited slavery throughout the United States “except as punishment for a crime.” Several states continued symbolically to resist into the twentieth century: Delaware did not ratify the

Thirteenth Amendment until 1901; Kentucky until 1976; and Mississippi until 1995. (p. 9)

Similarly, in explaining the rise in Black male incarceration rates, Mauer (2017) pointed out that “black male incarceration began its historic rise in 1973, clearly the antecedents of that moment were long in the making” (p. 33). Mauer (2017) stated further:

Centuries-long history of brutal racism beginning with slavery and progressing through Jim Crow in all its permutations throughout the nation set the stage for a modern-day version of oppression in response to developing social and economic conditions in American society. (p. 33)

Alexander (2010) observed a “relatively quiet” period (p. 179) within the civil rights community as the Black community grapples with mass incarceration and the racial, social, and economic consequences of this crisis mostly on African American men. The Black church in its role as civil rights actor has a rich tradition of speaking out, standing up, and fighting against social and racial injustice against the African American community (Douglas & Hopson, 2002; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Warnock, 2014).

Lincoln and Mamiya (1990), in assessing the role of the Black church in the lives of African Americans, found that the Black church plays a pivotal role as a social, economic, and political actor in the Black community. Furthermore, Warnock (2014) stated:

Owing to a unique political consciousness that was shaped in the brutal context of chattel slavery, racial oppression, and state-sanctioned terrorism in North America, this fundamental posture of resistance applies to black religion in general and, notwithstanding its “ambiguous politics,” black church. (p. 5)

The Black church led by Black pastors has traditionally been at the forefront of the struggle for justice and liberation in the African American community. If mass incarceration is the 21<sup>st</sup> century civil rights and human rights struggle facing the African American community, the role of the Black church and the actions of Black pastors are of paramount importance in the fight to address this crisis.

This research study examined the role of the Black church in addressing mass incarceration as a result of Black pastors studying *The New Jim Crow* between 2012 and 2015. Data compiled by Sawyer and Wagner (2019) for the Prison Policy Initiative showed that the American criminal justice system houses more than 2.3 million people in 1,719 state prisons, 102 federal prisons, 901 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,163 local jails, and 76 Indian Country jails as well as in military prisons, immigration detention facilities, civil commitment centers, and prisons in the U.S. territories.

The mass incarceration crisis is having a negative impact on Black men, Black families, and Black communities (Clear, 2014). Data from the Prison Policy Initiative showed that African Americans, currently 13% of the United States population, account for 40% of the imprisoned population. Whites are 64% of the U.S. population and 39% of the incarcerated population (Wagner & Rabuy, 2017). There has been a 500% increase in the U.S. prison population over the last 40 years.

The growth of the United States prison population and its impact on African American communities present an opportunity for the Black church to act on behalf of the community it serves. The rich history of practicing Biblical teachings in general and Jesus's ministry in particular—a ministry that calls on Christians to stand up for the “least of these among us”—is now. Tisby (2019) noted the following, “the Black church has

always been a bulwark against bigotry. Forged in the fires of racial prejudice, the Black church emerged as the ark of safety for people of African descent” (p. 19). Warnock (2014) professed that:

When I refer to the Black church, I speak of the varied ecclesial groupings of Christians of African descent, inside and outside black and white denominations, imbued with the memory of a suffering Jesus and informed by the legacy of slavery and segregation in America. (p. 9)

When referencing the Black church, Warnock’s (2014) description was utilized in this study. In addition, Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) described the Black church as the:

Churches and clergy that comprise the seven major historic Black denominations: the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E) Church; the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (A.M.E.Z.) Church; the Christian Methodist Episcopal (C.M.E.) Church; the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Incorporated (NBC); the National Baptist Convention of America, Unincorporated (NBCA); the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC); and the Church of God in Christ (COGIC). (p. 1)

In addition, Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) explained that the Black church is used as a “kind of sociological and theological shorthand reference to the pluralism of black Christian churches in the United States” (p. 1). Eighty percent of Black Christians in United States identify as belonging to one of the seven predominantly Black churches (Pinn, 2002). The history of the Black church in addressing social and economic justice issues in the Black community has been well-documented (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

For example, the role of the Black church in ending legal segregation in the Southern United States cannot be ignored (Pinn, 2002). Warnock (2014) argued that:

It was the civil rights movements centered in the Black churches and led by a son of the Black church, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Black Power movement that raised sharp questions about the meaning of Black identity and the relevance of the Christian faith for suffering Black masses that provided a historical context.

(p. 5)

The work of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other Black church leaders demonstrates that, once activated and mobilized, Black congregations led by Black pastors can bring attention to and effect social change at the local and national levels.

Under the leadership of Martin L. King, Jr., the civil rights movement drew on the “truth force” philosophy of Indian leader Gandhi and the social gospel to move away from the church’s complacency of the early twentieth century and to reconnect with a social agenda that framed the work of the first generation of independent black churches. (Pinn, 2002, p. 13)

Pinn (2002) continued that “the Black church provided the ideological and theological underpinning for the movement” (p. 13). Throughout the civil rights era, the important role played by the Black church as a mobilizing and organizing institution in Black communities cannot be denied. “Evidenced by hundreds of church burnings, cross burnings and the bombing of a Black church in Alabama, it was clear that the Black church was a pivotal force in the Black community” (Pinn, 2002, p. 37). Pinn recalled, “talking about the South in particular . . . anybody in the South knows that the strength of



the Black community is our churches. When they start to burn our churches, they're trying to take our strength" (p. 37).

The history of Black churches' involvement in social and political action in the Black community is an important consideration in understanding how to best disrupt mass incarceration in the United States. Black pastors have the moral authority as well as the pulpit to start a conversation on the impact of race in the criminal justice system. However, the lack of urgency among Black pastors to use their moral authority to fill the moral vacuum that currently exists in the conversation on race, racism, and mass incarceration cannot continue to go unnoticed.

### **Problem Statement**

Du Bois (1903) argued that the Black church is the social, political, and economic center of the Black community. Many years later, Pattillo-McCoy (1998), in agreement with Du Bois, added that Black churches with high symbolism and culture are facilitators of social and political action in the community. If that is true, then the church's "eerie silence" on mass incarceration results in not only the lack of voice in the conversation on reducing incarceration in the United States, but also this "eerie silence" upholds and possibly contributes to a moral vacuum incapable of disrupting or fighting the increased criminalization of Black men (Alexander, 2010, p. 179).

In *The New Jim Crow*, Alexander (2010) declared, "far from fading away, it appears that prisons are here to stay. And despite the unprecedented levels of incarceration in the African American community, the civil rights community is oddly quiet" (p. 9). The Black church plays a central role in the African American community, "as socializing agent, it [the Black church] must act and provide support for other

institutions to act on behalf of the black community in the areas of health, political economy, and the preservation of black culture (Roberts, 1975, as cited in Warnock, 2014, p. 100). Alexander (2010) in outlining the impacts of mass incarceration on African American men, highlighted the following criminal justice data:

One in three young African American men will serve time in prison if current trends continue, and in some cities more than half of all young adult black men are currently are under correctional control—in prison or jail, on probation, or parole. Yet mass incarceration tends to be categorized as a criminal justice issue as opposed to a racial justice or civil rights issue (or crisis). (p. 9)

To address this racial injustice or civil rights crisis (Alexander, 2010), the Black church must find its voice and speak boldly on the issue of mass incarceration. Prior research (Cone, 1970; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Pattillo-McCoy, 1998; Warnock, 2014) have chronicled the activist and protest roles of the Black church, a role guided by the teachings of the social gospel and the legacy of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the civil rights movement. Black pastor and author Warnock (2014) argued that “the Black church was born fighting for freedom” (p. 13). If the Black church is to live up to this notion as freedom fighter then it should be leading the movement to end mass incarceration in the United States (Warnock, 2014).

If ending mass incarceration in the United States is the 21<sup>st</sup> century racial and civil rights issue, then civil rights organizations including the Black church must become more vocal on ways to deflate this bloated criminal justice system, thus making the leadership role of Black pastors pivotal to ending today’s new Jim Crow in the United States (Alexander, 2010). Alexander (2010) observed that despite credible work and notable

developments by “organizations such as National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and other civil rights organizations around the country, there seem to be a lack of appreciation for the enormity of the crisis at hand” (p. 11).

This lack of urgency on the part of civil rights organizations to ending the new Jim Crow is evidenced by the absence of a “broad-based movement brewing to end mass incarceration and no advocacy effort that approaches in scale the fight to preserve affirmative action” (Alexander, 2010, p. 11). Alexander (2010) invited readers to “imagine if civil rights organizations and African American leaders in the 1940s had not placed Jim Crow segregation at the forefront of their racial justice agenda” (p. 11).

Alexander (2010) “argued that mass incarceration is, metaphorically, the New Jim Crow and that all those who care about social justice should fully commit themselves to dismantling this new racial caste system” (p. 11). The Black church from slavery to the old Jim Crow has not shied away from caring about social justice and alleviating racial oppression in the Black community. The challenge confronting the Black church is how to intentionally reflect on the tone and tenor of its voice to end mass incarceration given Alexander’s (2010) charge of “relative quiet” among civil rights organizations in the United States. In aligning the Black church to its civil rights past, Warnock (2014) argued that it was:

The civil rights movement centered in the Black churches and led by a son of the Black church, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Black Power movement that raised important questions about the meaning of Black identity and the relevance of

Christian faith for suffering Black masses that provided a necessary historical context. (p. 5)

Alexander (2010) declared: “No task is more urgent for racial justice advocates today than ensuring that America’s current racial caste system is its last” (p. 19). The goal of this qualitative research study was to examine the response of Black church pastors to Alexander’s (2010) observation of “relative quiet” in the civil rights movement and to explore the factors that influenced Black pastors’ actions to address the mass incarceration crisis in the United States between 2012 and 2015.

*The New Jim Crow* provided the racial context connecting mass incarceration to past systems of racial oppression—slavery and legal segregation. The book documented the current impact of this new caste system on the African American community and it challenged civil rights organizations including the Black church to become more vocal advocates for ending the new Jim Crow.

In 2010, The New Press published *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness* written by legal scholar and author Michelle Alexander. Data compiled by the Media Impact Funders in their 2014 case study *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness: A Case Study on the Role of Books in Leveraging Social Change* illustrates the book’s impact on individuals and organizations working to end mass incarceration.

The case study heralded Alexander’s book as a “break out success [that] has had an unprecedented impact in the fields of criminal and racial justice” (Media Impact Funders, 2014, p. 2). The case study highlighted the level of interests among readers for the book, for example, “the book’s initial print run was slightly over 3,000 copies, a

figure consistent with sales of previous New Press criminal justice titles” (Media Impact Funders, 2014, p. 2). However, “demand for the book quickly exceeded expectations and additional printings were needed. To date, the book has had eighteen hardcover printings and is currently in its thirteenth paperback printing with more than 400,000 copies sold” (Media Impact Funders, 2014, p. 2).

The impact of *The New Jim Crow* was marked by the growing number of prominent activists and scholars who became interested in promoting the book. In 2012, theologian Cornel West wrote a new foreword for the paperback edition (Media Impact Funders, 2014). Additionally, “the new paperback edition was made available to prisoners—an audience both impacted by the book’s argument and frequently barred from access to original hard cover versions” (Media Impact Funders, 2014, p. 2).

Furthermore:

*The New Jim Crow*—called “the bible of a new social movement” and praised by scholars and activists across the country and around the world—was increasingly adopted by a range of community, faith-based, and academic groups working to end mass incarceration around the country. (Media Impact Funders, 2014, p. 2)

*The New Jim Crow* had visible impacts on organizing and advocacy to end mass incarceration. According to the Media Impact Funders (2014), there was increased:

Activism on campuses through Students Against Mass Incarceration; standing-room-only events at churches around the country (including an 800-plus audience at Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem); marches organized by the Campaign to End the New Jim Crow; and sponsored events featuring Michelle Alexander in partnership with a range of nonprofits including the ACLU, the Drug Policy

Alliance, Demos, the NAACP and The Sentencing Project. These events provided an opportunity to reach individuals at the front lines of advocating for policy reform. (p. 2)

The Media Impact Funders (2014) case study also highlighted the legal impact of *The New Jim Crow*:

In addition to events, *The New Jim Crow* also played an instrumental role in the Center for Constitutional Rights' legal preparation in advance of the seminal case, *Floyd et al. v. City of New York et al.*—a class action lawsuit that challenged the New York Police Department's practices of racial profiling and stop-and-frisks, with Judge Shira Scheindlin citing *The New Jim Crow* twice in her decision. (p. 2)

Another contributing factor to the book's popularity and impact "is the media attention that the book received subsequent to its publication, including *The Colbert Report* (May 2012); a *New York Times* op-ed by Michelle Alexander on the right to trial (March 2012); a *Time* piece about racial profiling and Trayvon Martin (July 2013); two appearances on *Moyers & Company*, the acclaimed television program; and a front-page article in the *New York Times* Arts section (March 2012) on the book's role in galvanizing the debate around race and the war on drugs" (Media Impact Funders, 2014, p. 3).

Similarly, according to the Media Impact Funders (2014) case study analysis, several prominent community and civic leaders showed their support for *The New Jim Crow*:

Benjamin Todd Jealous, former president of the NAACP, called this book a, “call to action”; Marian Wright Edelman wrote, “Michelle Alexander has placed a critical spotlight on a reality that our nation can’t afford to deny”; and the *San Francisco Chronicle* called the book “the bible of a social movement. (Media Impact Funders, 2014, p. 4).

*The New Jim Crow*’s success as a public policy resource is illustrated by its mass appeal among advocates, policymakers, and the general public. The Media Impact Funders’ 2014 study found the following:

*The New Jim Crow* has been featured on the New York Times paperback nonfiction bestseller list for more than a hundred weeks over the past two years; its longest continuous run was forty-five weeks beginning with its debut on January 29, 2012 and running through December 2, 2012. (p. 4)

Furthermore, according to the report:

During twenty of those consecutive weeks, the book sat firmly in the top ten, often bookended by such high-profile names as Tina Fey, Malcolm Gladwell, and Sonia Sotomayor. *The New Jim Crow* has also been featured on the bestsellers lists of *The Book Reporter*, *The Boston Globe*, *National Indie*, *Publishers Weekly*, and *The Washington Post*’s Book World, among others. (Media Impact Funder, 2014, p. 4)

Moreover, the Media Impact Funders report found that *The New Jim Crow*:

Consistently ranks high in Amazon sales lists, a top seller in various categories such as Discrimination and Racism, Race Relations, and African American Studies, and it often appears as one of the top 100 bestselling books on the site.

To date, more than 400,000 copies have been sold. (Media Impact Funders, 2014, p. 4)

In addition, “*The New Jim Crow* has been adopted in more than 600 college and law school courses” (Media Impact Funders, 2014, p. 7).

How did the Black church respond to the 2010 release of *The New Jim Crow*? According to the Media Impact Funders’ 2014 case study, “the message of *The New Jim Crow* has gained much traction in the black faith community, where it runs contrary to an often-conservative stance on drug legalization issues” (p. 10). The case study pointed out that:

Stephen H. Phelps, interim senior pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn, was so inspired by the book that he delivered a Mother’s Day sermon on the topic of mass incarceration as a system of racial control. He described *The New Jim Crow* as unraveling ‘the cord that are binding our whole nation in evil. (Media Impact Funders, 2014, p. 10)

Pastor Phelps followed up his Mother’s Day sermon with a subsequent sermon on the large numbers of Black fathers who will not be with their families on Father’s Day. The sermon was also published on AlterNet.org (Media Impact Funders, 2014).

Michelle Alexander has also presented at several faith organizations and churches, including “to more than 500 African American parishioners at the Hartzell Memorial United Methodist Church in Chicago under the auspices of the Black Star Project; Riverside Church in New York; and Harlem’s Abyssinian Baptist Church” (Media Impact Funders, 2014, p. 10). Similarly:



In February 2012, Alexander spoke at the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference in Chicago, an organization that represents a cross-section of progressive African American faith leaders and their congregations. The conference has also published their own *The New Jim Crow* study guide for use in the faith community. And, the Riverside Church prison ministry of the Religious Society of Friends is currently using *The New Jim Crow* in their prison working groups. (Media Impact Funders, 2014, p. 10)

*The New Jim Crow* continues to shape conversations and influence public policy discourse on mass incarceration and the drug war in the United States. And the Black church is uniquely positioned based on its history of activism in the African American community to lead conversations on ways in which the criminal justice system functions as a system of racialized control over mostly Black men in the United States (Alexander, 2010). Explicitly, Alexander (2010) cautioned:

If we say to ourselves that the problem of mass incarceration is just too big, too daunting for us to do anything about and that we should instead direct our energies to battles that might be more easily won, history will judge us harshly. (p. 15)

For Black pastors who studied *The New Jim Crow* and who are inspired by Christian teachings, working to end mass incarceration is an opportunity to avert, as Alexander (2010) observed, “a human rights nightmare is occurring under our watch” (p. 15).

Alexander (2010) opined that a conversation on the role of systemic and structural racism and its impact on communities of color is needed if we are to end race-based criminalization in the United States. Furthermore, a paradigm shift is needed in how civil

rights organizations view and respond to the mass incarceration crisis. And from this paradigm shift a new consensus must emerge and that new consensus “must begin with dialogue, a conversation that fosters a critical consciousness” (Alexander, 2010, p. 15). The author advanced the argument by stating that this dialogue and conversation and this critical consciousness is a “prerequisite to effective social action.” Alexander (2010) professed, “this book is an attempt to ensure that the conversation does not end with nervous laughter” (p. 15).

The Black church led by Black pastors guided by the legacy of its activist past, the social gospel, and who are now informed by studying *The New Jim Crow* has the gravitas and moral authority to spark a conversation on racialized social control and the criminal justice system. In addition, Black pastors can ensure that this conversation does not end with “nervous laughter” and instead leads to a radical transformation of the criminal justice system in the United States (Alexander, 2010, p. 15).

### **Theoretical Rationale**

For this study, culture was used as the theoretical framework to examine the response of Black pastors to Alexander’s (2010) observation of “relative quiet” and “eerie silence” within the civil rights community including the Black church. According to sociologist Ann Swidler (1995), a key modern cultural theorist, “culture has always been important for the kinds of processes students of social movement study” (p. 25). Swidler posited that “culture shapes action by defining what people want and how they imagine they can get it” (p. 25). Additionally, “cultural analysis focuses on the complex systems of ideas that shape individuals’ motives for action” (Swidler, 1995, p. 25).

Weber's work on culture focused on "meaningful action and the basic unit of analysis for Weber was always the individual actor" (Swidler, 1995, p. 25). Weber's approach was to look at the "beliefs and values held by individuals and their self-interested actions and what Swidler calls culture from the 'inside out'" (Swidler, 1995, p. 25). At the crux of a Weberian analysis of cultural theory is the need to "identify how a worldview motivates action and how one committed to it would act under its sway" (Swidler, 1995, p. 26).

Emile Durkheim's work on culture focused on collective representation (Swidler, 1995). Unlike Weber, Durkheim views culture as a "vehicle" that is the process that allows group identity to develop through symbols and beliefs and not ideas (Swidler, 1995, p. 26). Durkheim theorized that the social group identity gave form to individual identity and where symbols form "collective consciousness" making groups livable for its members (Swidler, 1995). Therefore, "symbols are not a reflection of group life, symbols are a part of group life" (Swidler, 1995, p. 26).

In the Black church, the cross is an important symbol that connects the struggle and oppression experienced by people of African descent in the United States to their Christian faith. Black theologian Cone (2011) described the historical significance of the cross as a symbol in understanding the relationship between the suffering of Black people in America and Christianity. In discussing Dr. Martin Luther King's involvement in the civil rights movement and the importance of the cross, Cone stated:

Martin King's perspective on the cross was not derived from reading theological texts in graduate school. His view of the cross was shaped by his reading of the Bible through the Black religious experience, and his "personal suffering" in his

fight for justice. “My personal trials have . . . taught me the value of unmerited suffering.” (p. 86)

In highlighting the importance of addressing the prophetic concerns of Black theology to the churches and the larger community, Warnock (2014) opined, “all generally agree regarding the continuing cultural primacy of the Black church as the oldest and most indigenous institution within the African American community” (p. 108).

Alexander (2010), in writing *The New Jim Crow*, provided an opportunity for Black pastors who studied the book to examine the role that Black church culture with its high symbolism—including prayers and worship and call and response (Pattillo-McCoy, 1998), the cross as a symbol of Black suffering (Cone, 2011; Pinn, 2002), and the Exodus story representing oppression and ultimate liberation (Warnock, 2014)—plays in developing a clear and consistent voice that could disrupt the “relative quiet” and spark a long overdue conversation on criminal justice advocacy to ultimately end mass incarceration in the United States (Cone, 2011; Pattillo-McCoy; 1998; Pinn, 2002; Warnock, 2014).

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to examine the responses by Black church pastors in the Northeast, Midwest, and South who studied *The New Jim Crow* between 2012 and 2015 to Alexander’s (2010) observation of “relative quiet” in the civil rights movement and the author’s call to “stimulate” conversations on mass incarceration in the United States. In addition, the research study explored factors that influenced actions that contributed to a more vocal advocacy to end mass incarceration in the United States (Alexander, 2010, p. 16). In *The New Jim Crow*, Alexander (2010) appealed to civil

rights organizations, including the Black church, to play a more visible and vocal role in ending the new Jim Crow.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How did Black church pastors respond to Michelle Alexander's observation of "relative quiet" among civil rights organizations on the issue of mass incarceration in the United States after studying *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in Age of Colorblindness* between 2012 and 2015?
2. What factors influenced Black church pastors' actions to address the crisis of mass incarceration documented by Michelle Alexander in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* in the United States between 2012 and 2015?

### **Significance of the Study**

Mass incarceration is a 21<sup>st</sup> century civil rights struggle. Currently, there are 2.3 million Americans in jails and prisons across the United States (Sawyer & Wagner, 2019). Black churches have historically played a role as social change agents in the communities in which they are located. According to Barnes (2005), "Black churches have a legacy of involvement in electoral and protest politics as well as political conservatism, influenced in part, by whether they espoused resistance or accommodationists dictates" (p. 213).

Warnock (2014) posited "as the civil rights movement, sourced by the religio-cultural capital of the Black church gained ascendancy in American life and culture, the ground was laid for new and critical discussions within the Black community regarding

the mission of liberation and the meaning of the gospel” (p. 49). Warnock opined on the significance of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement and noted:

King’s most important theological contribution is the profound way in which he made the work of addressing the sins of racism and redeeming the soul of the social order with respect to the interconnecting evils such as militarism and poverty central to the church’s claim to be a witness to One who called it into being. For King, the work of social transformation and bearing witness against the social sin of racism is not only appropriate for the church but mandatory if it would truly be the church. (p. 48)

In addition, Mitchell and Williams (2017) observed that “in the civil rights era, while many religious leaders sat at the side-lines, other religious leaders and organizations played a central role. Many civil rights leaders and activists emerged because of motivation by their religious values of justice, compassion, empathy and the affirmation of human life” (p. 39).

The findings from this study will provide insights to Black pastors and other Black church leaders on ways to be vocal on the issue of mass incarceration. In addition, the research findings will help Black pastors start conversations rooted in the Black church tradition of social and political action in the African American community—conversations inspired by the civil rights movement of the 1960s as well as Christian teaching. These conversations will be held with key stakeholders including church members, community organizations, and policymakers with a goal of ending mass incarceration in the United States.

### **Definitions of Terms**

*Advocacy* is “the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal” (“Advocacy,” n.d.).

*Impact* is “the force of impression of one thing on another; a significant or major effect” (“Impact,” n.d.).

*Jim Crow laws* were state and local laws passed from the end of Reconstruction in 1877 through the mid-1950s by which White southerners reasserted their dominance by denying African Americans basic social, economic, and civil rights, such as the right to vote. Poll taxes and literacy tests, which even literate Blacks were not allowed to pass, were common means of disenfranchising Black voters. Jim Crow laws also extended to the private sphere, where discrimination in workplaces, public transportation, housing, and other venues led to extreme racial segregation in all aspects of life. The Supreme Court case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 declared the federal government had no right to stop local segregation laws, a position not reversed for another 50 years.

*Mass incarceration:*

Whether called mass incarceration, mass imprisonment, the prison boom, the carceral state, or hyperincarceration ... refers to the current American experiment in incarceration, which is defined by comparatively and historically extreme rates of imprisonment and by the concentration of imprisonment among young, African American men living in neighborhoods of concentrated disadvantage. (“Mass incarceration,” 2018)

*The Black church* is defined as the:

Churches and clergy that comprise the seven major historic Black denominations: the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E) Church; the African Methodist

Episcopal Zion (A.M.E.Z.) Church; the Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church; the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Incorporated (NBC); the National Baptist Convention of America, Unincorporated (NBCA); the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC); and the Church of God in Christ (COGIC). (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990, p. 1)

The Black church is described as the “varied ecclesial groupings of Christians of African descent, inside and outside Black and White denominations, imbued with the memory of a suffering Jesus and informed by the legacy of slavery and segregation in America” (Warnock, 2014, p. 9).

*The new Jim Crow* is defined as:

The rebirth of a caste-like system in the United States, one that has resulted in millions of African Americans locked behind bars and then relegated to a permanent second-class status—denied the very rights supposedly won in the Civil Rights Movement. (Alexander, 2010 p.16)

## **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 1 was a summary of the mass incarceration problem facing Black America. Currently, in the United States there are more than two million Americans behind bars (Sawyer & Wagner, 2019). In describing mass incarceration as the new Jim Crow, Alexander (2010) called on civil rights organizations, including the Black church, to take seriously the issue of mass incarceration by playing a prominent role in ending this human rights and civil rights crisis mostly plaguing Black communities.

*The New Jim Crow* provided data that if used correctly can position Black pastors to lead conversations in congregations and communities on the issue—conversations



shaped by Black faith tradition and culture. Using culture as the theoretical rationale, the research study is guided by the symbolism embedded in Black church culture, specifically the cross as a symbol of struggle and oppression and the Exodus story, which represents bondage and ultimate liberation from oppression for the African American community (Cone, 2011; Warnock, 2014).

Chapter 2 summarizes a review of literature related to the research topic. This empirical review of related literature focuses on the scope of the mass incarceration crisis and explores the historical and contemporary role of the Black church as an agent of social transformation in the African American community. Chapter 3 is a description of the research methodology. Chapter 4 is a report of the data analysis process and research findings. Chapter 5 is an overview of the research study; the study's limitations; implications for future research; and recommendations for Black pastors, as well as criminal justice advocates.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

### **Introduction and Purpose**

Chapter 2 provides a review of literature on mass incarceration as the new Jim Crow in the United States and the role of the Black church as a leader of social transformation in the African American community. This study examined Black church pastors' responses to Michelle Alexander's observation of "relative quiet" on the part of civil rights organizations in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness* and explored factors that influenced Black pastors' actions to address the issue of mass incarceration in the United States between 2012 and 2015 after studying the book.

Douglas-Brown and Hopson (2001) stated the following regarding the role of the Black church, "the Black church is a unique social institution... and one of the few institutions to survive slavery and remain virtually free from white control" (p. 95). Because of the position the Black church occupies in the Black community—the position of a social justice advocate—sparking meaningful conversations on ways to disrupt the flow of Black bodies into the criminal justice system is a task that the church is strategically positioned to undertake based on its history as a social institutional player in Black communities.

### **Review of Literature**

Criminalization, whether jail, prison, probation, or parole, is having a negative social and economic impact on Black men and Black communities (Alexander, 2010).

The Black church in America has traditionally played a role in lifting African Americans up from the pit of social and economic oppression (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

Theologian Joseph Washington, in his presentation titled, “How Black is Black Religion?” (Washington, 1971, as cited in Warnock, 2014), and in what Warnock (2014) described as “a rather interesting and poetic spin on the Johannine text” (p. 71) announced:

In the beginning was the black church, and the black church was with the black community and the black church was the black community. The black church was in the beginning with the black people; all things were made through the black church, and without the black church was not anything made that was made.

In the black church was life, and the life was the light of the black people. The black church still shines in the darkness. And the darkness has not overcome it.

(As cited in Warnock, 2014, p. 71)

The social justice role of the Black church in Black life cannot be ignored. It is this role as advocate and mobilizer that warrants the Black church’s leadership in filling the moral vacuum that currently exist on the issue of overincarceration in the United States. A review of literature revealed that prior studies have documented this important role, as well as questioned the church’s commitment and consistency in fighting racial oppression and spearheading social transformation in the African American community. In addition, Alexander (2010) encapsulated in *The New Jim Crow* the scope of the problem of mass incarceration and connected mass incarceration and the war on drugs to systems of racial oppression of the past, including slavery and the old Jim Crow.

### **The Black Church: A Help or Hindrance to Black Freedom**

According to Swain (2008), “the Black Church evolved in a culture that oppressed, subjugated, and discriminated against Blacks and as far as possible South to relegate them to the most extreme margins of American society” (p. 408). This history of supporting the marginalized and the oppressed is supported by Black theologian Cone (2011), who argued:

Penniless, landless, jobless and with no political and social power in the society, what could Black people do except to fight with cultural and religious power and pray that God would support them in their struggle for freedom? Black people “stretched out their hands to God,” because they had nowhere else to turn. (p. 23)

In addition, Calhoun-Brown’s (1996) research study analyzed whether Black churches are mobilizers or simply a medium for the movement, and, more broadly, whether it is fulfilling the role institutions play in facilitating the kinds of motivations that are needed for group mobilization. Calhoun-Brown found that attending a Black church is positively related to electoral action and other forms of political participation. In addition, Black church attendance is positively related to the psychological components of motivation, as well as influencing internal and external efficacy and group consciousness. The data also revealed that efficacy and group consciousness are positively related to political participation.

Harris (1994), in looking at religion as a social mobilizer, used the 1987 General Social Survey (GSS) to investigate whether religion among African Americans serves as both an organizational and psychological resource for individual and collective political action. Harris hypothesized that organizational involvement in church activities, church attendance, and internal religious behavior will have different effects on individual and

collective political action, as well as intermediary resources for participation that directly promotes participation (p. 52). For the research study, Harris used an oversample of 353 Black respondents of a cross-sectional survey on political and social attitudes—a venture of the National Opinion Research Center (NORC). Harris (1994) looked at several indicators of religious activities including: frequency of church attendance; membership in a church-affiliated group; active membership in a church group that solves community problems; being among one's organizations, most active in a church group; frequency of prayer; feelings of closeness to God; and strength of religious affiliation. Harris used factor analysis to identify clusters around constructs including reflections on church activism, internal religiosity, and church attendance. And, path analysis was used to estimate the direct and indirect effects of religiously based resources for participation on frequency of voting and communal collective action behavior among African Americans.

The research findings show that for both Whites and Blacks religion functions as a resource for political action but in different ways. Both psychologically and organizationally, religious beliefs and practices promote political involvement. Additionally, there was a direct effect of church attendance on voting among Blacks and Whites. Those who attend church services regularly are more likely to be faithful voters. However, the research also found that church activism was a stronger predictor of voting among Blacks than Whites. Overall, based on the research findings, there was a propensity among Black church attendants to vote and to become engaged in church activism and Black church attendants were more likely to hear political messages from their pastors than White voters, which may influence their voting decisions. However,

the research also revealed mixed results on the issue of church attendance: Church attendance encouraged voting, but it did not encourage collective communal activism.

Brown and Brown (2003) investigated the relationship between church-based resources and political activism among African Americans. Data for the study analyses were drawn from the 1993–94 National Black Politics Study (NBPS), a multiple-frame telephone survey of 1,206 African Americans 18 years of age or older, conducted between December 4, 1993 and February 14, 1994. Brown and Brown used the GENESYS system to locate a national random digit dial (RDD) sample using an equal-probability-of-selection methodology. The second frame selected a random sample of households located in census blocks with 50% or more African American households. The overall response rate was 65%. A dichotomous dependent variable, logit regression was used to test the effect of church resources on respondent voting behavior. The researchers argued that church attendance alone is not likely to lead to increased political participation. Rather it is church-based political communication and church involvement that have positive and direct effects on political activism. The result findings suggest that exposure to political messages in one's place of worship provided African Americans a substantive boost in their propensity to participate in voting and nonvoting political activities.

The Black church plays an integral role in Black life (Douglas & Hopson 2001). However, Harris's (1994) research studies suggested that the presence of the Black church and Black church attendance are insufficient mobilization and motivation factors when it comes to political activism and community engagement but political messaging from the pulpit and church activism are important criteria in measuring whether or not a

church attendant will be politically engaged. Additionally, Brown and Brown's (2003) research findings suggested that church-based social capital also impacts levels of political activism. Conversely, Warnock (2014) explained, "the Black church has been both radical and un-radical, the most prominent instrument of liberation within the African American community and the foremost conservative custodian of an uncritical evangelical piety that undermines the aims of liberation" (p. 29).

### **The New Jim Crow and Black Church Protest**

The new Jim Crow is responsible for the social and economic marginalization of millions of Black Americans, mostly Black men. Alexander (2010) outlined in *The New Jim Crow* that "more African American adults are under correctional control today—in prison or jail, on probation or parole—than were enslaved in 1850, a decade before the civil war began" (p. 180). Alexander opined "more Black men are imprisoned today than at any other moment in our nation's history" (p. 180). Similarly, Alexander (2010) observed that this "extraordinary circumstance—unheard of in the rest of the world—is treated here in America as a basic fact of life, as normal as separate water fountains were just a half century ago" (p. 181).

The disproportionate impact of mass incarceration on Black men in the United States is calling the Black church to action. The history of the Black church—a church with a distinct origin, a church that emerged out of the suffering and oppression of an enslaved and racially marginalized people—is now being summoned to civil, political, and social action. However, despite this rich legacy of protest, the Black church's response has been unpredictable when it is called to stand up and speak up on behalf of marginalized and oppressed Black people in the United States, including the incarcerated

and the criminalized. According to Warnock (2014) “the oppositional witness of the Black church against racism and on behalf of justice has not always been consistent, nor has the nature of its response been the same” (p. 29).

Moreover, “Black church history began during the antebellum period in America and was born during the Black suffering of capture, middle passage, and enslavement. It took shape as the enslaved Africans rejected their enslavers version of Christianity which asserted that God sanctioned slavery” (Douglas, 2001, p. 96). The confinement of over one million Black bodies in cages in America today should awaken the Black church to social and political action—the first being, a conversation on racism’s impact on the criminal justice system (Mitchell & Williams, 2017).

Alexander (2010) stated that mass incarceration is a form of racialized social control over African Americans and has created a new racial caste system akin to the old Jim Crow. Similarly, sociologist Wacquant (2000) theorized that mass incarceration is directly linked to the other “three peculiar institutions that have been used to define, confine, and control African Americans in American history” (p. 378). According to Wacquant, the first institution is chattel slavery, the second institution is Jim Crow, and the third institution is the ghetto (p. 378).

Additionally, Wacquant (2000) suggested that the historical comparison between the ghetto and the prison should not be ignored, since the prison and the ghetto both serve as institutions of “forced confinement”: the ghetto is a manner of social prison while the prison functions as a judicial ghetto. Both the prison and the ghetto function as places where individuals who are stigmatized and rejected by society are enclosed. It is this connection between slavery, Jim Crow, and mass incarceration as forms of social control



that calls into questions the muted response from the Black church on ways to disrupt the flow of Black bodies into what Wacquant (2000) called “judicial ghettos” (p. 378).

Data published by the Prison Policy Initiative (Wagner & Sawyer, 2019) revealed that the American criminal justice system currently holds approximately two million people in 1,719 state prisons, 102 federal prisons, 1,852 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,163 local jails, and 80 Indian Country jails, as well as military prisons, immigration detention facilities, civil commitment centers, state psychiatric hospitals, and prisons in the U.S. territories. The report highlighted further that 626,000 individuals are released from prison annually, however, 10.6 million individuals enter prison every year in the United States (Sawyer & Wagner, 2019).

The United States is 5% of the world’s population but incarcerates 25% of the world’s prison population (ACLU, 2019). A 2015 report by the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime showed that the United States incarcerates 693 for every 100,000 residents. Researchers at the Prison Policy Initiative looked at the rate of incarceration among internally secure and stable industrialized nations with populations of 500,000 or more (Wagner & Sawyer, 2018). Comparing the incarceration rates of individual U.S. states and territories with other countries showed that 32 states incarcerate more people than Turkmenistan, which has the highest incarceration rate in the world after the United States. For example, data showed that the District of Columbia incarcerated more than twice as many people as Turkmenistan (Rabuy & Kopf, 2016).

To further highlight the scope of incarceration in the United States, the state of New Hampshire, a relatively liberal state with a low incarceration rate, imprisons more of its residents than the Russian Federation (Prison Policy Initiative, 2016). Data showed

that if the two U.S. states with the lowest rates of incarceration become independent nations, they would rank 11th and 12th globally in terms of rates of incarceration.

The United States' dependence on incarceration as a tool for maintaining law and order has not impacted Americans equally. According to a report by The Sentencing Project (2014), "nearly 60% of middle-aged African American men without a high school degree have served time in prison" (p. 5). Despite the fact that Blacks and Latinos make up 30% of the U.S. population, they account for 58% of prisoners (The Sentencing Project, 2014). Criminologists argued that crime rates alone cannot explain this meteoric rise in incarceration and criminalization in the United States. The Sentencing Project's (2014) report stated the following:

Criminal justice policies and practices, and not just crime rates, are the key drivers of these trends: correctional populations have grown during declining crime rates and people of color are disproportionately punished even for crimes that they do not commit at higher rates than whites. (p. 5)

Additionally, researchers Western and Wildeman (2009) posited that the: Mass imprisonment boom of the late 1990s can be traced to two basic shifts in politics and economics. The growth of harsh sentencing policies and a punitive approach to drug control began with a rightward shift in American politics in the mid-1960s. (p. 223)

Moore, Adedoyin, Robinson, and Boarmah (2015) suggested that the "onset of drug-related mass incarceration has been traced to the declaration of the war on drug that the Nixon administration launched in 1971 as part of the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act of 1970" (p. 315). Nixon's declaration of drug use as public

enemy number one brought about a new day in criminal justice policymaking, incarceration, and drug policy in the United States. Data show that “the impact of the drug war is shocking. In less than 30 years, the U.S penal population exploded from around 300,000 to more than 2 million with drug convictions accounted for the majority of the increase” (Moore et al., 2015, p. 315).

The need to find solutions to the mass incarceration crisis have come from scholars, advocates, organizers, and policymakers alike. And, the increase in the number of Black men and women who are caught up in the criminal justice system have pointed advocates and organizers seeking solution in the direction of the Black church. The Black church has historically played a role as the “social center” (Du Bois, 1903) of the Black community. The seeming lack of outspokenness from within the civil rights community in general and the Black church specifically (Alexander, 2010) can be an indication of Warnock’s (2014) claim that “this is why many in the Black church have celebrated the liberationist vocation and political effectiveness of Martin Luther King, Jr., but do not necessarily see liberation as, did King, as the church’s primary vocation, indeed its very *raison d’être*” (p. 119).

The church as an “entity conceptualizes its affairs to include the total world of the community. The total world encompasses various aspects of life in Black communities including social, economic, political, and cultural elements” (Moore et al., 2015, p. 317). Understanding and appreciating this all-encompassing role of the Black church begs the question: Why has the Black church not been more vocal in highlighting the negative impacts of mass incarceration on the Black community? Swain (2008) asked a more general question: “has the Black church abdicated its prophetic voice of the Civil Rights

Era?” (p. 401). Warnock (2014) asked a similar question: “If the Black church is to strengthen and maintain its prophetic voice, it must ask itself, ‘what does that basic liberationist trajectory mean today for both the American churches and the American nation?’” (p. 143).

Warnock (2014) shed light on Alexander’s (2010) observation of the complacency among civil rights organizations including the Black church to prioritize mass incarceration by stating:

It is quite ironic that in recent years, the black church’s public voice has not been heard on the government’s treatment of the poor or the devastating impact of America’s growing prison-industrial complex on its own community, but it was heard loud and clear in opposition to gay marriage, as if it had been a threat to black people’s survival. (p. 151)

And despite, the compelling arguments laid out by Alexander (2010) in *The New Jim Crow* and the clear call to start conversations—as a way to disrupt the “eerie silence” of mass incarceration’s impact on Black men and on Black communities—the issue of race-based criminalization remains a concern for the Black community (p. 224).

Douglas and Hopson (2001) observed that “in regard to certain social justice issues, the Black church appears ambivalent at best and oppressively unprogressive at worst” (p. 96). This is despite the fact the Black church has been growing. Data show that there were close to 150,000 African American churches in the United States and approximately 87% of Black Americans identify with a religious group (Moore et al., 2015).

Additionally, the number of Black churches in the United States has increased significantly in last few years and the number of individuals flocking to Black churches has also increased—giving rise to megachurches, which are characterized as churches where the congregational membership is more than 2,000 (Moore et al., 2015). Moore et al. (2015) stated:

Because of the strategic positioning of the Black church in general and megachurches in particular, and “because of the magnitude of the number of people who attend them and their vast economic resources, African American megachurches are in a strategic position to utilize their means to help alleviate a whole host of problems faced by the African American community. (p. 317)

Ending mass criminalization and incarceration is an American problem. Data show that crime cannot explain, however, why disadvantaged young men were so much more likely to go to prison by the end of the 1990s than two decades earlier (Western & Wildeman, 2009). Similarly, Alexander (2010) noted that the American criminal justice system has created a new racial caste system—the new Jim Crow. And Warnock (2014) opined “too many preachers and their churches have embraced distorted theology of personal prosperity that is disengaged from the needs of the poor who are often surrounding the church and is disconnected from any theological vision of communal liberation” (p. 152).

The aim of this study was to examine the response of Black church pastors to Alexander’s observation of a “relative quiet” on the issue of mass incarceration in the civil rights community and the factors that influenced conversations within the church and with stakeholders as a result of studying *The New Jim Crow* between 2012 and 2015.

Data from previous research studies support assertions that the contemporary Black church, although guided by the legacy of the civil rights movement and the Black church tradition of social transformation in the Black community, lacks a clear and compelling vision for social action today.

This assertion of inconsistent social action and indecisive responses from the Black church to matters of racial and social injustice issues affecting the Black community may explain the moral vacuum and muted response on the mass incarceration issue. Despite Alexander's (2010) clear, concise, and compelling account of the mass incarceration crisis in the United States, evidenced by this new racial caste system, the "relative quiet" continues and the new Jim Crow rages on (p. 179).

### **The Black Church and Social Transformation**

Pattillo-McCoy's (1998) seminal research study looked at Black church culture as a strategy for community action using cultural theory and social movement theory as frameworks for understanding if the role of culture was frustrating or facilitating collective organizing. Data from this ethnographic research study conducted in Groveland, an African American neighborhood in Chicago, show that the Black church provided the cultural blueprint for civic life in the neighborhood.

Data from Pattillo-McCoy's study showed that prayer, call-and-response interaction, and Christian imagery are important parts of the cultural toolkit of Groveland's Black residents, and these cultural practices invigorated activism. Pattillo-McCoy's research findings highlighted a common motif within the Black church—piety. As Warnock (2014) questioned, "what is the relationship between personal piety and social protest?" (p. 4). As Black theologian Roberts (1975) observed:

Black churches are often burning up with piety and emotionalism while those who are concerned with social change operate outside the church, believing it is not in the nature of the black church to be where the action is, and that the black church should have become a revolutionary power for liberation, with few exceptions it has become a dispenser of spiritual aspirin. (As cited in Warnock, 2014, p. 99)

Black church culture is useful for “embodying” and “enlivening” the content and goals of such activities (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997, p. 50). The research findings suggested that the Black church is a more encompassing institution than are White religious bodies because of Black people’s inability to participate fully in the economic, social, and political life of the majority society, and because it has been the only institution controlled completely by Blacks (Morris & Robinson, 1996).

Black church culture is important in shaping the Black church experience. The role of the Black church in advocating for an end to mass incarceration is guided by Black church history—rooted in and supported by a Black church culture of fighting for racial and social justice in the African American community. Swain’s (2008) research study supported prior claims that the Black church was the most important institution in the African-American community before the civil rights movement. The research examined whether the Black church had lost its prophetic voice. Research done by Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) found that the Black church was important to the Black community because it provided the backdrop for many social and community activities.

Despite previous studies on the Black church showing the church’s importance in stimulating and nurturing Black activism, Swaine (2008) drew attention to the body of research disputing the claim that the Black church was a “facilitator of social and

community activism” (p. 403). Swain’s research viewed the Black church as an “opiate, discouraging social and political activism among adherents” (p. 403) Woodson’s (1945) research supported that claim and stated that the historical role of the Black church was to acquiesce to the White racist institutions as a survival measure. Frazier (1963) as cited by Harris (1994) stated that the Black church was good at nurturing the Black churchgoer spiritually but was doing very little to spur social and community engagement. The creation of an otherworldly experience was one reason for the lack of social engagement among Black church attendants. Additionally, Harris’s (1994) research findings supported the notion that certain Black church engagement decreased political activism.

### **Mass Incarceration’s Impact on the Black Community**

Clear (2014) theorized that mass incarceration was making communities poorer. The author interviewed 100 residents of Frenchtown and South City (cities in Tallahassee, Florida) about their opinions on how incarceration affected their neighborhoods. Of the initial 100 residents, 26 residents were selected to participate in group interviews that were recorded by the researcher. The research participants represented a sample of neighborhoods impacted by incarceration. Data from the research findings suggested that individuals are concerned about the prevalence of incarceration in neighborhoods, the disruptive effect of incarceration, stigma, the economic costs, and ways in which incarceration may negatively affect relationships. The impacts of incarceration on families and communities are multilayered and multigenerational. The social and economic costs of imprisonment require a comprehensive approach that reaches far beyond the criminal justice system. The author



suggested reforming the criminal justice system to address long prison sentences and a consideration of the impact of incarceration on families and communities.

In a 2014 study on the rise of mass incarceration, researchers Travis, Western, and Redburn noted that the increase in incarceration rates in the United States in the past 40 years is unlike that of any other country in the world. From 1973 to 2009, the state and federal prison population rose from 200,000 to 1.5 million. The research findings suggested that the increase in incarceration at a period of rising crime rates and social upheaval resulted in long prison sentences and imprisonment for minor offenses and for drug crimes. And, the harshest penal policies have generally impacted Blacks and Hispanics and specifically the poorest (Travis et al., 2014). The researchers suggested a complete overhaul of the criminal justice system especially aimed at sentencing reform and further suggested that the impact of incarceration on the poor and people of color cannot be examined outside of an economic, social, and racial context.

Despite Clear's (2014) observation that incarceration is concentrated in impoverished communities and mostly impacts Black males, Travis et al.'s (2014) research findings suggested that amending the harshness of the sentences will not alleviate on its own; the many social and economic problems, such as economic marginalization and lack of access to good education and healthcare, that plague the poorest communities and the communities that are linked to high rates of incarceration. Clear's (2014) and Travis et al.'s (2014) studies supported legal scholar Alexander's (2010) claim that a person released from prison today has far less rights and garners less respect than a Black person residing in Mississippi during the period of old Jim Crow.

To successfully disrupt the flow of Black men and women from communities to jails and prisons require an acute awareness of the American tradition of using force and violence against the Black body (Mitchell & William, 2017). Summoning the Black church to action will require a commitment to a theology that recognizes and affirms the freedom of Black people and is focused on renewing the physical Black body (Pinn, 2010). Cone (1970) called on Black people living in America to be free to be Black and Christian and to know that Christianity is fundamentally about the oppressed and the marginalized in American society. Historically, the least visible and most vulnerable in American society happen to be people of African descent (Cone, 1970).

Mitchell and Williams (2017) in the article on “Black Lives Matter and the Theological Response to Racism’s Impact on the Black Body” examined the responses of the church to the extrajudicial killing of Black men in the United States. The article analyzed the historical use of violence against Black bodies from slavery and Jim Crow to the criminal justice system. The conclusion was that the role of the Black church was to create a framework to analyze and interpret the presence of the Black body as more than a metaphorical abstract and recognized that the Black body is a vessel that contains the being-ness of lived experiences (Pinn, 2010). This recognition and reconciliation of Black spirit and Black body are important factors in the process of disrupting the prevailing quiet on the issue of mass incarceration within the civil rights community, specifically the Black church. Black church leaders must see more than souls to be saved behind bars and must acknowledge the personhood and humanity of the individuals—individuals with families and livelihoods who are important members of both the physical and spiritual community.

Cone's (1970) work on Black liberation theology examined the complex relationship between Black people in America and Christianity. The Black theologian looked at the emergence of the history of the Black church—a history that is rooted in fighting various forms of social control and racial oppression—and highlighted the inherent hypocrisy in the Christian religion when it comes to Black suffering. It is this interpretation of Christianity that focused on good and evil and moral and immoral that may serve as obstacles to disrupting the silence on mass incarceration. The evolution of Christianity is based on the premise of Black being bad. However, Cone suggested that despite this association of Black being associated with evil it is important that the Gospel of Jesus is aligned with the painful experience of being Black in America.

Pinn (2010) posited a theology that supported Cone's (1970) work by focusing on the Black body. Pinn (2010) looked at the many ways in which theology has removed the body as the focal point and refers to this as a theology about no-body. Pinn suggested that Black theologians create lens through which they can center the Black body and admonished the religious community to address the violence inflicted on the Black body in the United States.

Federal data on corrections in the United States showed that one in 10 Black men are in prison (United States Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2012). Similarly, the rate of women in prison has been growing at a rate 50% faster than men. In 1980, there were approximately 13,206 women in prison compared to 111,000 in 2016. Research data from the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics showed that one in nine children in the United States is living in a home where one or more parent is incarcerated (2012). Mass

criminalization is having a negative impact on Black communities, specifically on Black families including Black children.

According to The Sentencing Project (2016), the likelihood of imprisonment for U.S. residents born in 2001 is the following: A Black boy born in 2001, has a one in three chance that he would end up in prison compared to a one in nine chance for all men and a one in 17 chance for White men. Similarly, all women have a one in 56 chance of imprisonment; Black women has a one in 18 chance of imprisonment and White women has a one in 111 chance of imprisonment. The increased likelihood that a Black man or woman will be imprisoned and the impact of imprisonment on the Black family and the Black community poses an importance challenge for Black institutions such as the Black church. Data from The U. S. Bureau of Justice Statistics and reported by The Sentencing Project (2017) showed the following:

One in every 115 adults in America was in prison or jail in 2015. 4.6 million people were on probation or parole in 2015 for a total of 6.7 million people in America under some form of criminal justice supervision. The 2015 U.S. incarceration rate of 670 people per 100,000 is the highest in the world. (p. 1)

In addition to the 1.6 million people in federal and state prisons in the United States, there are 646,000 people locked up in 3,000 local jails (Wagner & Walsh, 2016). Seventy percent of the people sitting in local jails are there pretrial. Pretrial means the individual has not been convicted with any crime and are presumed innocent (Wagner & Walsh, 2016). Pretrial detention is associated with money bail. An arrested individual promises the court that she or he will return to the court for trial (Wagner & Walsh, 2016)

Institute). This is typically guaranteed through a bail bond or through the individual's own recognizance.

However, in the United States, who is in jail is largely determined not by the crime they had committed but whether they were rich or poor. Money is the deciding factor in determining who remains in jail and who is granted bail (Wagner & Walsh, 2016). Data from the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics show that individuals that are in jail are the ones least able to afford money bail. In 2015, the median income for an individual in jail was \$15,109, before they were incarcerated. This number according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, is 48% less than peers who are not in prison or jail on any given day (Wagner & Walsh, 2016).

### **The New Jim Crow**

Sawyer and Wagner in a Prison Policy Initiative (2019) report used data compiled by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics at the state level and the Bureau of Prisons at the federal level and analyzed the state of mass incarceration in the United States. The research findings showed that the United States is leading the world in the number of people it incarcerated and that African Americans were immensely impacted by incarceration and criminal justice involvement. African Americans are 13% of the United States population but account for 40% of the individuals behind bars (Sawyer & Wagner, 2019).

The Sentencing Project's (2015) report to the United Nations on the racial disparities in the United States criminal justice system highlighted the role racial bias played in determining which Americans were stopped, questioned, arrested, and sentenced and the severity of the punishment associated with an offence. Using data

from the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics and the Bureau of Prisons, the report findings suggested that approximately 60% of African Americans males without a high school degree had spent time in the prison system.

This overrepresentation of Black men in the criminal justice system is having a negative impact on Black families and communities. Researchers recommended a new approach to addressing crime in America and noted further that crime statistics alone cannot explain the meteoric rise in incarceration rates, since crime rates were falling while prison rates were increasing in the United States. Western and Wildeman (2009) research study used Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1965 report as the foundation on which they built the argument that the social problems raised in Moynihan's report that were affecting poor Black families have worsened and that the call for social investment in poor urban communities went unheeded. Conversely, public policy approaches to social problems became more punitive and more reliant on the criminal justice system.

This shift from rehabilitation to retribution and punishment as the crux of criminal justice involvement led to the rise of the prison boom of the 1980s and 1990s. A time series of incarceration rates revealed how the extent of penal confinement has shifted historically; and, using the life course analysis, the researchers studied how the risk of incarceration accumulates over an individual's life. The life course analysis looked at the likelihood an individual will go to prison by age 25, 30, or 35. Additionally, the researchers looked at the percentage of men aged 22 to 30 in prison and jail by race and education between 1980 and 2000 to understand social integration of the urban poor. The research findings showed that involvement in the prison system, especially among uneducated, young Black men was disrupting the passage to adulthood, which is

described as “achieving adult status involves moving from school to work, then to marriage, to establishing a home and becoming a parent. Imprisonment disrupts this process and subsequently “influences success in fulfilling adult roles and responsibilities” (Western & Wildeman, 2009, p. 229). The research findings further explained the disparate impact of mass incarceration on Black life and posited that if the phenomenon is not disrupted the family as a social institution will in turn negatively affect the children in the family who will also end up in the prison system.

Moore et al. (2015) in the research study on the Black church and its response to mass incarceration revealed that in less than 30 years the U.S. penal population exploded from around 300,000 to more than 2 million with drug convictions accounting for the majority of the increase. Researchers used social work theory of empowerment and Black church theology as lens through which they assessed the problem of mass incarceration. Specifically, they used social work empowerment theory as a framework for social change as evidence-based, suggesting that effective social movements and interventions require empowerment-related processes across multiple levels of the social system to positively impact the mass incarceration problem. The researchers concluded that Black church leaders have unchecked authority to use the pulpit as a vehicle for education, transformation, and social reform.

In the last three decades, the number of Black Americans in prisons skyrocketed (Moore et al., 2015). Data from The Sentencing Project (2013) showed that 60% of African American males without a high school degree has spent time in prison. Subsequently, mass incarceration has had a negative impact on Black family life (Western & Wildeman, 2009).

## Chapter Summary

The review of literature highlighted the integral role Black churches have played in effecting racial and social justice from slavery to Jim Crow (Calhoun-Brown, 2001; Cone, 1970; Douglas, 2001; Harris, 1994; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Swain, 2008; Tisby, 2019; Warnock, 2014). In addition, the literature review showed the importance of the topic in current public discourse and the scholarly and research efforts made to investigate the role of the Black church in effecting social transformation in the African American community and the scope and impact of mass incarceration on Black life—particularly Black men in the United States.

Despite the Black church's history of social and political engagement, research findings suggested that the Black church may have lost its prophetic voice (Swain, 2008) and reverted to “orthodox Marxist views of religion as an institution of political domination” (K. Mark [1884] 1963, as cited in Harris, 1994, p. 43). Furthermore, according to Harris (1994), other researchers viewed the Black religion as the agent of the oppressor, rather than a potentially liberating ideological force (Harris, 1994, p. 43). Similarly, Douglas and Hopson (2001) questioned whether the Black church is really an antagonistic agent for liberating change or is simply a pacifying sanctuary for Black life (p. 96).

Additionally, research data showed that simply being Black and attending a Black church is not enough to effect social and political change in Black communities (Calhoun-Brown, 2001; Harris, 1994; Swain 2008). Research findings revealed that to obtain the information, skills, and training needed to engage in political and social activism, African Americans must attend a political Black church where politicization



happens by hearing political announcements and messages from the pulpit and where the pastor of the church is the political messenger (Harris, 1994). Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) noted that:

The Black church, Black clergy and churches participate collectively in ways that go behind the realm of electoral and protest politics—their involvement also entails the community organizing and community building that are part of many Black clergy and churches. (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990, p. 243)

This study documents and analyzes data on the lived experiences of Black church pastors who took actions that sparked conversations on mass incarceration in the Northeast, Midwest, and South after studying *The New Jim Crow* and aims to shed light on the opportunities and challenges encountered, values that guided advocacy efforts, and the vision for the Black church as a collective to break the silence on mass incarceration in the United States. Chapter 3 discusses the research methodology used to conduct this phenomenological study. Chapter 3 also details the structure of the research study including: research context, a description of the research participants and selection criteria, and the data collection process and analysis.

## Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

### Introduction

In 2010, legal scholar Michelle Alexander wrote *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. According to Alexander (2010), “few Americans today recognize mass incarceration for what it is: a new caste system thinly veiled by the cloak of colorblindness” (p. 223). Throughout the book, Alexander chronicled the impacts mass incarceration and the war on drugs have on poor and African American communities. Alexander highlighted the following:

More than 2 million people found themselves behind bars at the turn of the twenty-first century and millions more were relegated to the margins of mainstream society, banished to a political and social space not unlike Jim Crow, where discrimination in employment, housing, and access to education were perfectly legal, and where they could be denied the right to vote. (p. 58)

Mass incarceration disproportionately impacts Black communities and specifically Black men in America. According to activist and prison abolitionist Davis (2003):

In 1990, the Washington-based The Sentencing Project published a study of U.S. populations in prison and jail, and on parole and probation, which concluded that one in four Black men between the ages of twenty and twenty-nine were among these numbers. Five years later, a second study revealed that this percentage had soared to almost one in three, 32.2 percent. (p. 19)

The purpose for conducting the current study was to examine the response of Black church pastors who studied *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness* between 2012 and 2015 and explore factors influencing Black pastors' actions based on Alexander's (2010) call to "stimulate a much-needed conversation" within the civil rights community to end mass incarceration in the United States (p. 16).

### **Research Context**

According to Lincoln and Mamiya (1990), the Black church is made up of the seven major denominations that account for 80% of Black Christians in the United States. Author and legal scholar Alexander (2010) explicitly called on civil rights organizations to play a more vocal leadership role in the movement to end mass incarceration.

Specifically, in the concluding chapter of the book, Alexander recalled Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s message to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)—a message that highlighted the need to switch from a civil rights approach to a broader human rights approach to fully address the challenges of racial injustice (p. 259).

Additionally, Alexander, leaning on lessons from the civil rights movement, noted:

Civil rights advocacy has not always looked the way it does today. Throughout most of our nation's history—from the days of the abolitionist movement through the Civil Rights Movement—racial justice advocacy has generally revolved around grassroots organizing and the strategic mobilization of public opinion. (p. 225)

Furthermore, Alexander (2010) charged:

Even in communities devastated by incarceration, many people struggling to cope with the stigma of imprisonment have no idea that their neighbors are struggling

with the same grief, shame, and isolation. . . . To the extent that the imprisonment of one's son or relative (or one's own imprisonment) is experienced as a personal failure—a failure of personal responsibility—church can be a source of fresh pain rather than comfort. . . . As one woman responded when asked if she could turn to church members for support, “Church? I wouldn't dare tell anyone at church. (pp. 166–167)

Research participants were drawn from nine states (Alabama, Indiana, Florida, Louisiana, Maryland, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee) in three regions of the United States (the Northeast, Midwest, and South) and were identified through stratified purposeful sampling. These regions have the highest rates of incarceration in the United States. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), “purposeful sampling means the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposely inform an understanding of the research problem and the central phenomenon” (p. 158).

Data from The Sentencing Project (2013) revealed the following: in the southern United States, in the state of Louisiana, there were 66,596 individuals in jail and prison, 32,056 in jail and prison in Mississippi, 32,056 in jail and prison in Alabama and in Virginia, there were 66,503 in jail and prison. Similarly, in the Midwest, Ohio's jail and prison population is 70,365, Kentucky's jail and prison population is 42,218, and Wisconsin's jail and prison population is 34,294. Additionally, in the Northeast, Pennsylvania's prison and jail population is 85,720 and New York's jail and prison population is 77,570 (The Sentencing Project, 2013).

### **Research Participants**

Research participants were purposefully sampled from the Samuel Dewitt Proctor Conference (SDPC) database. SDPC is a national conference of Black church leaders. The Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference was founded in 2003 with a mission to represent a cross section of African American faith leaders and their congregations in the United States to continue the rich legacy of the faith community's engagement in issues of social justice. Participants met the following criteria: self-identified as Black or African American, have studied *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, and have pastored a church in the Northeast, Midwest, or South region of the United States between 2012 and 2015 subsequent to studying *The New Jim Crow*.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions guided the research study:

1. How did Black church pastors respond to Michelle Alexander's observation of a "relative quiet" among civil rights organizations on the issue of mass incarceration in the United States after studying *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in Age of Colorblindness* between 2012 and 2015?
2. What factors influenced Black church pastors' actions to address the crisis of mass incarceration documented by Michelle Alexander in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* in the United States between 2012 and 2015?

### **Overall Study Design**

A prequestionnaire survey (Appendix A) was developed to identify participants that met the research criteria. The prequestionnaire survey was distributed to a list of 50 pastors via Qualtrics. From the 50 participants who received the survey, 18 pastors gave

their consent to participate in the study and subsequently self-identified as Black or African American; indicated they had pastored a church in the Northeast, Midwest, or South; and shared that they had studied *The New Jim Crow* between 2012 and 2015.

Subsequent to consenting to participate in the study, participants completed a demographic and congregational profile. Of the 18 Black or African American pastors that were administered the prequestionnaire survey, only 15 pastors answered the required questions. Of the 15 pastors who consented to participate in the research study and completed the prequestionnaire, due to time constraints, the first 11 pastors were selected to be interviewed. Of the 11 pastors selected to be interviewed, three pastors were in leadership roles in churches in the Midwest, four were in leadership roles in churches in the South, and four pastors held leadership roles in churches in Northeast.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was (a) to examine the impact of Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* on Black pastors in the Northeast, Midwest, and South who responded to Alexander's (2010) call to action to stimulate conversations to disrupt the "relative quiet" and "eerie silence" that currently exist on the role and racism play in the criminal justice system and (b) to explore factors that influenced Black pastors' advocacy actions to address the mass incarceration issue between 2012 and 2015 (pp. 179, 224).

A key characteristic of qualitative research is to strive to achieve rigor of the data being analyzed. To achieve rigor, Creswell's (2014, p. 197) seven steps in analyzing data when conducting phenomenological research was used for this study. Figure 1 illustrates Creswell's data analysis in qualitative research. Creswell (2014) stated:

Phenomenological researchers use the analysis of significant statements derived from research participants in their natural setting, followed by inductive and deductive data analysis and build their patterns categories and themes from the bottom up by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract unit of information and the generation of meaning units. (pp. 185–186)

The process culminates with what Moustakas (1994) called an essence description: (a) analysis of significant statements, (b) generation of meaning units, and (c) essence development. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence (p. 75). Van Manen (1990) described phenomenology as “a grasp of the very nature of the thing” (p. 177). The study of the lived experiences of persons, the view that these experiences are conscious ones (van Manen, 1990), and the development of descriptions of the essences of these experiences are not explanations of analysis (Moustakas, 1994). Furthermore, Saldaña (2016) posited that the “phenomenological process consists of extracting verbatim, significant statements from the data, ‘formulating meanings’ about them through the researcher’s interpretations, clustering these meanings into a series of organized themes, then elaborating on the themes through rich written description” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 200).

Using an interpretivist lens, the goal was to interpret and seek understanding of the world in which Black pastors in the Northeast, Midwest, and South experienced studying *The New Jim Crow* between 2012 and 2015 and to develop subjective meaning of their experiences to advocate to end mass incarceration (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Interpretivists focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants. Furthermore, Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that the researcher's "intent, then, is to make sense of (or interpret) the meanings others have about the world (p. 24). A prequestionnaire survey and in-depth semi-structured interviews were used as data collection instruments to capture participants experiences for this study.

Creswell and Poth (2018) pointed out that in defining qualitative research, the process of research is described as flowing from philosophical assumptions, to interpretive lens, and on to the procedures involved in studying social and human problems. Researchers conduct qualitative research "because a problem or issue needs to be explored" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 45).

### **Phenomenological Design**

According to Vogt and Johnson (2016), the phenomenological method "was established by German psychologist E. Husserl in the early 20th century and has had considerable influence in the social sciences, particularly sociology. Husserl stressed the rigorously descriptive, but introspectively, study of how people perceive and understand the world" (p. 324). Phenomenology is aimed at documenting the lived experiences of individuals and striving to achieve the essence of the experiences (Creswell, 2014). The epistemological perspective was used to understand and make meaning of the lived experiences of Black church pastors who studied *The New Jim Crow*.

The qualitative phenomenological methodology facilitated the collection of survey and interview data. This research method provided the instruments needed to collect demographic and congregational data and for organizing the data collected into



categories and themes. In addition, the phenomenology design created the opportunity to be fully immersed in the data corpus. In addition, the phenomenology design facilitated an analysis of the rich, thick descriptions provided by research participants (Creswell, 2014).

There were several reasons for selecting phenomenology as the research design, including the ability to conduct research in the field (a natural setting) with Black church pastors, collect data using a prequestionnaire survey, and conduct in-depth and semi-structured interviews. The prequestionnaire identified gaps in the review of literature and developed new insights that informed the in-depth, semi-structured interview questions.

### **Instruments Used in Data Collection**

**Pquestionnaire survey.** At the beginning of this research study, a prequestionnaire survey was emailed to the Samuel Dewitt Proctor Conference and subsequently to pastors in the Northeast, Midwest, and South who studied *The New Jim Crow*. The prequestionnaire survey collected demographic and congregational data from research participants (Appendix A). Once data from the survey were collected and analyzed and due to time constraints, the first 11 pastors who met the research criteria were emailed information about the research study including the consent form for the research study (Appendix B). The initial email included a detailed description of the purpose of the study, the study design, the research and interview questions, the timeline, and ethical considerations. Follow-up emails were sent 1 week after the initial e-mail to non-responders. A maximum of three e-mails were sent over a 1-month period to non-responders. Interviews were scheduled with research participants who consented to participate in the research study.

**Interviews.** Interviews are important tools in the researcher’s toolbox when conducting qualitative research in general and specifically, phenomenological research. In conducting interviews for this research study, the researcher was guided by Brinkman and Kvale’s (2015) seven stages of interview investigation (p. 123). The seven stages of a “qualitative interview investigation” are: (a) thematizing, (b) designing, (c) interviewing, (d) transcribing, (e) analyzing, (f) verifying, and (g) reporting (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015, p. 124).

Brinkman and Kvale (2015) noted that the “first choice to be made in a research project is to consider whether qualitative interviews will be the most adequate way of answering one’s research’s question” (p. 124). To gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of Black church pastors who took action to address mass incarceration—data were coded and meanings and themes were developed from the thick, rich, and descriptive texts (Creswell, 2014). Interviews were used to collect and analyze the data needed for a phenomenological study. Upon completion of the prequestionnaire survey, an email was sent to research participants who met the research study criteria. In the email, the researcher requested dates and time options for a 60- to 90-minute telephone interview and shared the research study goals with participants.

From the 18 pastors that consented to participate in the research study by completing the prequestionnaire survey and who met the research study criteria, 11 were chosen to participate in an individual in-depth, semi-structured interview. The 11 research participants represented each of the three regions (Northeast, Midwest, and South): four pastors were from the South, three pastors were from the Midwest, and four pastors were from the Northeast. According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), “the

research interview is based on the conversations of daily life and is a professional conversation; it is an inter-view, where knowledge is constructed between the inter-action between the interviewer and the interviewee” (p. 4). The 11 Black pastors were interviewed over the phone and audiotaped and audio recorded using Zoom conferencing. During the interviewing stage of the investigative process, research protocol for this study was reviewed, and each interview question was read to each pastor. The interviews averaged 40 minutes. Handwritten notes were taken during the interviews. The interviews were digitally recorded using a high-quality audio recording device and transcribed using a transcription service, rev.com, to approximately 80 pages. The interview data were analyzed using the coding process. In vivo and values codes were used as part of the initial or open coding process. Subsequently, the data were categorized and themed allowing for interpretation and for the extraction of the essence of the lived experiences of Black pastors who studied *The New Jim Crow*.

To verify the interview data, this researcher engaged in member checking after the interviews were completed. The purpose of member checking was to clarify and confirm information shared during the interview process. Finally, the data were reported in the research findings chapter of a dissertation (Creswell, 2014). Similarly, Creswell (2014) described the researcher as the instrument conducting the research study. In line with Creswell’s description, this researcher conducted all 11 interviews via telephone calls. Pastors were in their natural setting when the interviews were conducted.

### **Procedures for Data Analysis**

**Coding.** After the research interviews were completed, the rich, thick descriptions provided by the 11 Black pastors were coded, categorized, and themed

(Creswell, 2014). Subsequently, Tesch's eight steps in the coding process (Creswell, 2014, p. 198) was used to code the data generated from the 11 transcribed interviews. Following Tesch's coding process (Creswell, 2014), the interview transcripts were read several times and notes were made of the most salient points. In addition, the longest interview was selected and carefully read using as a guiding question "What is this about?" Following this careful reading, a list was made of emerging topics from the data provided by research participants.

As part of the coding process, a list of words or codes that best described the experiences of pastors who read *The New Jim Crow* and took advocacy actions to end mass incarceration was generated. Codes were then developed into categories. This process was followed up by an initial analysis of the data. Throughout the process, codes and categories were consistently aligned with the research questions.

According to Creswell (2014), Tesch's eight steps in the coding process is a credible way to begin the data coding process. The first level used to analyze the interview data was open coding or initial coding. As the first level of coding, in vivo codes were generated for the interview data.

After thoughtfully and thoroughly combing through the data line-by-line, words and phrases used to describe the lived experiences of Black church pastors who experienced the phenomenon of studying *The New Jim Crow* and their subsequent advocacy actions were coded. Subsequent to engaging in the in vivo coding process, categories were generated based on the frequency in which research participants described their experiences of studying *The New Jim Crow*. These categories were then used to develop themes, which were subsequently used to interpret the meaning of the

lived experiences of Black pastors (Saldaña, 2016). Values coding was used as part of the data analysis process. Values coding is a way of reflecting “values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspective or worldview” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 131).

Saldaña (2016) posited that “a value is the importance we attribute to ourselves, another person, thing or idea. Values are then the moral codes and norms by which people live by” (p. 131).

From the data corpus, the values, attitudes, and beliefs that guided Black pastors’ lived experiences were identified and aligned to responses and actions taken to stimulate conversations on ending mass incarceration. According to Saldaña (2016), “a belief is part of a system that includes our values and attitudes, plus our personal knowledge, experiences, opinions, prejudices, moral, and other interpretive perceptions of the social world” (p. 298). Furthermore, Wolcott (1999) stated that “beliefs are embedded in the values attached to them” and can be viewed as “the rules for action” (as cited in Stern & Porr, 2011, p. 28). This coding process was grounded in the understanding that “values, attitudes, and beliefs are formed, perpetuated and changed through social interactions and institutions, and our cultural and religious (if any) memberships” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 132). The coding process used a V (value), A (attitude), and B (belief) to describe the experiences of Black pastors who read *The New Jim Crow*.

Following the in vivo coding process, codes were categorized and subsequently the process of theming the data commenced (Saldaña, 2015, p. 198). According to Saldaña (2015), “a theme is an outcome of coding, categorization, and analytic reflection, not something that is, in itself, coded” (p. 198). Summarily, “a theme captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole” (Saldaña, 2015, p.

199). Concurrently, values, attitudes, and beliefs that described Black pastors' experiences of studying *The New Jim Crow* between 2012 and 2015 were identified and noted as part of the value coding process.

After theming the data, the next stage in the data analysis process was the generation of meaning units. The data was then categorized into textual (what) and structural (how) meanings. From the textual and structural meanings generated from the data (surveys and interviews), a description of the shared or common experiences of Black pastors who studied *The New Jim Crow* between 2012 and 2015 was developed. This process is known as describing the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

As a result of categorizing and theming the data, a summary of the rich, thick, descriptive iconic statements that described Black pastors' values, attitudes, and beliefs was developed. This summary of descriptive statements can be interpreted as the "rules for action" to guide advocacy efforts to end mass incarceration in the United States into themes (Stern & Porr, 2011, p. 28). The goal for this process, as van Manen (1990) recommended, is to winnow down themes to what is considered "essential" rather than "incidental" since essential themes make the phenomenon "what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is" (p. 107).

To ensure trustworthiness, the following recommended process was followed: (a) initially coding as you transcribe interview data; (b) maintain a reflexive journal on the research project with copious analytic memos; and (c) check your interpretations developed thus far with the participants themselves (Ezzy, 2002, pp. 67–74). This process was completed in alignment with the research questions:

1. How did Black church pastors respond to Michelle Alexander's observation of a "relative silence" among civil rights organizations on the issue of mass incarceration in the United States after studying *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in Age of Colorblindness* between 2012 and 2015?
2. What factors influenced Black church pastors' actions to address the crisis of mass incarceration documented by Michelle Alexander in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* in the United States between 2012 and 2015?

### **Positionality**

For more than 5 years, the researcher worked with faith leaders on criminal justice reform. Having pre-knowledge of the topic (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015) made conducting the interviews possible. Additionally, this researcher listened to the research participants throughout the interview and took copious notes throughout the interview process.

### **Chapter Summary**

The purpose of the research study was to examine ways Black church pastors responded to Michelle Alexander's observation of a "relative quiet" in the civil rights and Black church community. The research questions were aimed at capturing Black pastors' responses and actions to studying the book. Additionally, the research study explored the factors that influenced decisions by Black pastors to speak out on the issue of mass incarceration after studying *The New Jim Crow*.

This phenomenological design was applicable to this research because it allowed participants to speak directly about their related experiences. By conducting in-depth interviews to collect data for the research study, it was possible to capture the lived

experiences of Black pastors who studied *The New Jim Crow* (Creswell, 2014), examine how they responded to Alexander's observation of "relative quiet," and explore the factors that influenced the actions they took to stimulate conversations as a result of studying *The New Jim Crow*.

Chapter 3 provided an overview of the research methodology selected for this research study and also outlined the structure that was followed to conduct the study. This chapter included a discussion on the following: overall research design, context, participants' selection, instrument used to collect data, data collection procedure, and data analysis methods.



## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

In 2010, The New Press published *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness*. *The New Jim Crow* was written by legal scholar and author Michelle Alexander. Data compiled by the Media Impact Funders and reported in their 2014 case study documented the book's impact on individuals, scholars, and advocacy organizations working to end mass incarceration. The report noted that as of 2014, 400,000 copies of *The New Jim Crow* were published by the book's publisher, The New Press. According to the Media Impact Funders' (2014) report, Alexander presented the book at several Black churches. A review of literature focused on the assertion that mass incarceration is a major social justice and civil rights issue impacting the African American community and Black pastors have the moral authority and social and political agency to address the issue of mass incarceration plaguing the African American community.

This chapter provides an analysis of qualitative data compiled from in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with 11 Black church pastors who studied *The New Jim Crow* between 2012 and 2015 and served in a leadership pastoral role in a church situated in the Northeast, Midwest, or Southern regions of the United States. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the responses of Black pastors to Michelle Alexander's observation of a "relative quiet" in the civil rights community on

the issue of mass incarceration and to explore the factors that influenced actions to address the mass incarceration issue between 2012 and 2015.

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

**Questionnaire survey findings.** According to Fowler (2014), “the purpose of a survey is to provide statistical estimates of the characteristics of a targeted population, some set of people” (p. 8). Fowler stated further that “the other defining characteristic of a survey is that respondents answer questions; and the answers to the questions are used to describe the experiences, opinions, and other characteristics of those answering the questions” (p. 8). To collect data for this research study, a prequestionnaire survey was disseminated via Qualtrics to members of the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference (Appendix A). The prequestionnaire survey comprised of 21 questions. The survey collected demographic and congregational data from research participants. A total of 50 pastors were emailed for this research study.

Of the 50 pastors that received the prequestionnaire survey, 18 pastors consented to participate in the study and 15 pastors fully completed the survey questions. Due to time constraints, the first 11 pastors who consented to participate in the research study and met the research criteria were chosen for an in-depth, semi-structured phone interview and were sent an introduction interview letter (Appendix C). From the prequestionnaire survey: 100% of the respondents identified as Black or African American and 100% of the respondents had studied *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* between 2012 and 2015. Table 4.1 illustrates the region, gender, and age of the 11 research participants that were interviewed for the research study.

An analysis of the prequestionnaire survey data revealed that 10 pastors self-identified as male and one pastor identified as female. One pastor indicated an age range of 36 to 45, five indicated an age range of 46 to 55, three indicated an age range of 56 to 65, and two indicated an age range of 66 and 75. The fact that the majority of pastors were middle-aged Black men is somewhat indicative of the gendered assumption that only men belong on the pulpit (Williams, 2018).

Table 4.1

*Participant Demographics: Region, Gender, Age*

Participant Pastor	Region	Gender	Age
1	Midwest	Male	56–65
2	Northeast	Male	46–55
3	South	Male	46–55
4	South	Male	46–55
5	Midwest	Male	35–46
6	Midwest	Female	56–65
7	South	Male	46–55
8	Northeast	Male	46–55
9	South	Male	66–75
10	Northeast	Male	56–65
11	Northeast	Male	66–75

One hundred percent of the research participants indicated that they had pastored a predominantly African American or Black church (a congregation where more than 50% of the church members identified as Black or African American) and reported that the churches were located in the Northeast, Midwest, or South. All 15 participants indicated having studied Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* between 2012 and 2015 and 14 participants indicated that

they had churches located in ZIP Codes in following nine states: New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Alabama, Tennessee, Louisiana, Ohio, Indiana, and Florida. Table 4.2 illustrates the ZIP Codes of survey respondents who responded to the question (Appendix D). In addition, a deeper analysis of the survey data show that five respondents reported that they had pastored a church for zero to 5 years; two had pastored a church for six to 10 years and eight had pastored a church for 11 to 15 years. Of the 15 respondents, nine reported that they studied *The New Jim Crow* in 2012, three respondents had studied *The New Jim Crow* in 2014, and three respondents had studied *The New Jim Crow* in 2015 (Appendix D).

In response to the survey question on the size of their respective congregations, one respondent reported having a congregation size of less than 50, five respondents reported have a congregation size of between 51 and 100, four respondents reported having a congregation of between 101 and 150, three respondents reported having a congregation size between 151 and 200, and two respondents reported having a congregation size between 251 and 300. None of the respondents reported their church being considered a megachurch, which is defined by the Hartford Institute for Religious Research as any protestant church with an average weekly attendance of 2,000 or more (Hartford Institute for Religious Research, 2000).

Of the 15 pastors who responded to the question on the region of the United States in which their churches were located, five reported that their churches were located in the southern United States, five reported that their churches were located in the Midwest, and five reported that their churches were located in the Northeast (Appendix D). Deeper analysis of the data revealed that seven of the 15 survey respondents used a

study guide to accompany studying *The New Jim Crow* and eight respondents reported not using a study guide to accompany studying *The New Jim Crow* (Appendix D). Of the 15 respondents who answered the question on whether they had recommended *The New Jim Crow* or study guide to others, 14 respondents reported that they had recommended the book to others; one respondent indicated that they did not recommend *The New Jim Crow* to anyone.

Additionally, respondents reported being affiliated with the following denominations: Interdenominational, Disciples of Christ, Baptist, Pentecostal, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church, and nondenominational (Appendix D). Of the 15 respondents that completed the prequestionnaire survey, 10 pastors responded that they were not involved in any denominational-wide activities related to *The New Jim Crow*, and five respondents were involved in denominational-wide activities related to *the New Jim Crow*. In addition, 13 respondents reported being a member of a faith-based organization such as Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference and PICO.

The 11 pastors who completed the prequestionnaire survey and who participated in the research study reported the following statements as key takeaways after studying *The New Jim Crow*:

One pastor stated, “having practiced law as a criminal defense attorney for better than 20 years before the book came out, my advocacy work predated the book. Once the book was published it made organizing around the issues raised in the book more feasible because it elevated the voices of those who had been championing the rights of prisoners and advocating for criminal justice reform much for prominently as a result of its meteoric rise. It was an affirmation of what I have already experienced as a Black man

who has been incarcerated and a formal indictment of a system of oppression that I am called to oppose.” Another pastor shared the following as a key takeaway after studying *The New Jim Crow*: “how caste systems continue to be changed or restructure once the system injustices have been identified”. One pastor stated that, “mass incarceration is a continuance of the dehumanization of Black people.”

Another pastor opined that there is a “need for overall community organizing and education.” One pastor stated, “The biggest takeaway was that slavery still exists. The new plantations are prisons.” Another pastor shared that, “in part, it was a real timely history lesson of what happens to African Americans in the United States in the late 1800s. It was also a great struggle between perceived Christianity and the true love of God”.

Another pastor stated, “for me, the real importance of Alexander’s work is her definition of mass incarceration. She (Alexander, 2010) identifies it as being more than just the number of bodies in our prisons and jails. Rather mass incarceration is a systemic issue that infiltrates traditions, policies, laws, and institutions. It is perpetuated by the attitude of mind and mood of the human spirit. For this reason, as she said at the 2012 convening of the Proctor Conferees “The core challenge to ending mass incarceration is dispelling the myth that some of us are not worthy of genuine care, concern, and compassion.” One pastor declared, “of course, the laws are disproportionately set up to incarcerate young African American men at a greater rate for petty drug charges than Whites, which also effects the education of African American young men. This also leads to socio-economic disparities.” Another pastor opined, “that America has an original sin of racism and structural inequality.”

One pastor posited the following: “The issue for people of color is urgent and that we must become more aware of the policies and behaviors of policymakers concerning justice reform in local communities. The urgency of now!”

Pastors that completed the prequestionnaire survey and participated in the research study shared that specific Biblical verses guided the development of sermons they preached on the topic of *The New Jim Crow* including the following:

One pastor referenced, “Amos 5:24, Luke 4:18, Mathew 25:31-46, Isaiah 40, 28–31, Galatians 3:28: II, Corinthians 5: 17–20 as important Biblical texts.” Another pastor indicated that the following Biblical texts were used during sermons, “1 Samuel 30 and Philippians 5.” One pastor utilized, “Mathew 25: 33–46.” In addition, another pastor stated that they “used many from the prophets (major and minor) as well as scriptures from the gospels which emphasized Jesus’s calls for Justice.” Pastors also shared that the following Biblical text were used: Psalm 146: 7; Mark 5: 1–18; the books of Amos and Micah and Exodus.

The researcher utilized the prequestionnaire survey as a tool to collect demographic and congregational data from research participants. Table 4.2 illustrates the major themes and topics preached by Black church pastors on *The New Jim Crow*. Moreover, respondents who completed the survey shared the following information on the overall actions they believed leaders of Black churches could take to address the issue of mass incarceration in the United States today. Below is a description of respondents’ suggested actions. The research data revealed that respondents were interested in having the Black church play a role informing church members and the broader community on

Table 4.2

*Themes/Topics Preached by Black Pastor After Studying The New Jim Crow*

Themes and Topics	Themes and Topics
Criminal justice, the disparity of Black folks who are incarcerated, solitary confinement, policy change	Rethinking the prison industrial complex
Reentry and family connectivity	Deliverance from oppression
Justice, fairness, equality, and addiction	Who is our neighbor, the church what do you see? Coming home
Justice in African American communities John 9:1 “As Jesus Passed, He Saw a Man.” Subject: It’s good to be seen	Injustice in the justice system is real but that faith, combined with knowledge, is the way to combat it
Conditions that caused fear	Deliverance from oppression
The revolution will not be televised	How to overcome opposing voices
John 9:1 “As Jesus Passed, He Saw a Man.” Subject: It’s good to be seen	Injustice and God’s justice
Justice in African American communities	

the impact of incarceration, a more politically active role in the civil rights community, and a role as a bridge between the Black church and other social justice actors and criminal justice reformers.

**Survey responses on the role of the Black church in ending mass**

**incarceration.** Pastors identified the various roles they believe the Black church can play in ending mass incarceration in the United States. One pastor stated that the Black church can “organize to elect more conscious judges and DAs. The truth of the matter is that communities have the power to stop a good bit of the trend toward mass incarceration if they would target those elections, organize, and inform the public about them, and move that as a single-issue agenda in local elections.”

Another pastor articulated that “they can assist their congregations in becoming affirming and welcoming spaces for returning citizens; we can help form public sentiment in our respective congregations and we can institute worship services,



conferences, and such around these issues.” While one pastor admonished the Black church to “continue to inform our congregations of the injustices of the criminal justice system.” Another pastor challenged the Black church to “hold services in the parking lot of every correctional facility in the United States.” While another pastor identified “criminal justice reform.” One pastor identified, “Voting rights.” While another pastor encouraged the Black church to “gather more testimonies form individuals and families whose lives are being destroyed by mass incarceration.”

Other pastors identified roles such as “voter registration, Souls to the Polls and paying off fines for Amendment 4 voters”. Another role identified by a pastor is that of “partnering with community organizations and nonprofits to assist families and persons returning to the community from incarceration and engaging members in policy information and how to work with or against politicians to change them.”

**Research Question 1.** The first of two questions that guided the research study was:

1. How did Black church pastors respond to Michelle Alexander’s observation of a “relative quiet” among civil rights organizations on the issue of mass incarceration in the United States after studying *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in Age of Colorblindness* between 2012 and 2015?

**Black pastors’ responses to studying *The New Jim Crow*.** The aim for the research questions that guided this study was to examine the lived experiences of Black pastors who studied *The New Jim Crow* between 2012 and 2015 and responded to Alexander’s (2010) observation of a “relative quiet” in the civil rights community and to explore factors that influenced Black pastors’ actions to address the new Jim Crow. To

accurately capture the essence of the phenomenon (studying *The New Jim Crow* and taking action to address the “relative quiet”), 11 in-depth, semi-structured phone interviews were conducted with self-identified Black or African American pastors who held leadership roles in churches in the Northeast, Midwest, or South and who studied *The New Jim Crow* between 2012 and 2015.

In analyzing the data, the following categories were developed: impact, awareness, motivation, advocacy goals and actions, barriers, vision, and values. This categorization of the data provided a framework in which the research findings were organized and interpreted to reflect the lived experiences of Black pastors who studied Alexander’s (2010) *The New Jim Crow* and took action to address mass incarceration. Table 4.3 illustrates the alignment between the 11 interview questions and the research question.

**Black pastors’ responses to the impact of *The New Jim Crow* on understanding mass incarceration.** In general, pastors in this study reported that *The New Jim Crow* had a significant and profound impact on their understanding of mass incarceration in the United States. One pastor described the experience after the reading the book as an “eye-opener.” Another pastor described the experience as “transformative” and that the book provided “language.” The nine themes that emerged from the interview question on the impact of *The New Jim Crow* are presented in Table 4.3. The pastors discussed the ways in which *The New Jim Crow* “facilitated” conversations with congregants on the issue of mass incarceration and that the book was a “blueprint” for the advocacy work they were doing in the community.

Table 4.3

*Summary of Interview Question and the Relationship to the Research Questions*

Interview Question	Research Questions
1. How did studying <i>The New Jim Crow</i> impact your understanding of mass incarceration in the United States and shape your role as an advocate for reducing the number of Black men and women in prison?	1. How did Black church pastors respond to Michelle Alexander’s observation of a “relative silence” among civil rights organizations on the issue of mass incarceration in the United States after studying <i>The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in Age of Colorblindness</i> between 2012 and 2015?  2. What factors influenced Black church pastors’ actions to address the crisis of mass incarceration documented by Michelle Alexander in <i>The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness</i> in the United States between 2012 and 2015?

Moreover, pastors described the experience of this phenomenon as impactful and that for the first time they were able “to see in writing” what they had known all along (anecdotally) about the issue of mass incarceration. Pastors described the impact of the book as serving to connect the dots between forms of oppression and mass incarceration in the United States. In response to the interview question on the impact of *The New Jim Crow* on Black pastors’ understanding of mass incarceration in the United States, one pastor responded to the question in the following way, “It shaped my understanding. It honed it” (Pastor 3).

In another interview, one pastor described the impact of *The New Jim Crow* by stating: “It was great to see somebody put it together in a way that was understandable for Mister and Misses Front Porch. Put in a way that everybody could see it” (Pastor 10). And, stated further, “the widespread acceptance that it got helped made it easier to do the work. (Pastor 10). Responding to the same question on ways the book impacted

understanding of mass incarceration in the United States, one pastor described the impact as:

The book had a profound impact on my understanding of mass incarceration because Michelle Alexander defines mass incarceration not as the number of people who are in prison or in jail. She talks about it being a systemic thing. So, she says that mass incarceration operates as a collection of laws, policies, traditions, and institutions interconnected to keep a group of people that are criminals under caste status, defined largely by race. So that's a little different than just the number of people who are in prison. That's talking about our schools, our education system. That's talking about our economic system. That's talking about jobs. That's talking about how we do or do not allow certain people to live in certain places. So, it's a whole range of things. More than just the number of people in prison.

So that had a major impact on my understanding of mass incarceration. Particularly since I've personally experienced the collateral consequences, as they say. Having a felon label. It was really, I would say, eye opening because I experienced it. But it was great to see it put down on paper and presented academically. And the argument just laid out, the way she did. (Pastor 3)

Summarily, the 11 Black pastors asserted that *The New Jim Crow* had an impact on their understanding of mass incarceration after studying the book and described the experience as "eye-opening" despite being previously aware of the problem in local communities and across the United States. Additionally, pastors described the book as being facilitative, transformative, and codifying, as well as a blueprint, resource, and tool.

Moreover, describing the impact of the book as an eye-opener, one pastor noted, “it helped me, first of all have a deeper empathy for Black men in particular who grew up in this system of mass incarceration” (Pastor 1). Another pastor noted, that the book was helpful in framing the conversation for church members and stated, “it was helpful to have something in writing, and something that’s sort of unapologetic in its debunking, if you will, of the quote unquote things that people in my community have been accused of having sort of missed” (Pastor 2). Table 4.4 summarizes the themes, quotes and values of the impact of *The New Jim Crow* on Black pastors’ actions to end mass incarceration.

**Black pastors’ responses to *The New Jim Crow* as a resource to support actions to end mass incarceration.** One of the pastors shared that one of the impacts of *The New Jim Crow* was that it served as a resource and declared, “at first it was a great history lesson of African Americans in the United States in the 1800s. Besides it being a great history lesson, I immediately began to reach out to organizations within the church community which is in my local city. We show up at the courthouse” (Pastor 4).

Table 4.4

*Summary of the Themes, Quotes, and Values of the Impact of The New Jim Crow on Black Pastors’ Actions to End Mass Incarceration*

Category	Themes	Quotes	Values
Impact of <i>The New Jim Crow</i> on pastors’ understanding of mass incarceration	<i>The New Jim Crow</i> was an eye-opener	“The biggest impact was the revelation of just what a major problem it is. I think, you know, as a Black person, I knew that a bunch of us went to jail, I knew that. But tying mass incarceration to slavery and just the sheer number of people in prison.”	Educational
	<i>The New Jim Crow</i> served as a resource for my advocacy	“So, reading the book gave me more resources and references on how systemic this mass incarceration is.”	Utility
	Facilitated my advocacy engagement on the issue	“More than anything, what the book represented was the natural evolution of things that already you thought you and understood to be the case. It was good to read a book that was developed in as such a scholarly manner that it allowed me to be able to easily share given the things I like to teach and in terms of an understanding in a concise way.”	Agency

	The book confirmed what I knew all along	“I would say that Michelle Alexander’s book essentially documented and confirmed and gave concrete expression in terms of the way she, you know, the academic documentation, so to speak, you know what I presumed all along and worked presuming all along.”	Informative
	<i>The New Jim Crow</i> codified the information I already knew about the problem	“I was working in a project in that area 20 years before the book came out, so it was not introductory. But it was what I would call codifying. And it pointed out mass incarceration as a continuance of Black dehumanization.”	Compassion
	The book gave me language	“It gave me language. It gave me a theological point of view to start from which is that we are all created in the image of God, every man, woman and child who is incarcerated is created in the image of God and are they being treated as though they were created in the image of God? Whether by society as a whole, or by the criminal justice system, or by their own church, communities, families.”	Faith
	The book helped me connect the dots	“It enabled me to have more tools, and the ability to connect the dots for people in my congregations and in my context, along with the fact that I am not only a pastor, but I am a former police officer in Chicago. And, it helped me to see how my role as a police officer contributed to, unintentionally on my end but it showed the structural nature of it and that we are contributing to mass incarceration.”	Reflective
	It got middle-class people to care about the issue	“Michelle Alexander was able to get middle-class people to care about the issue.”	Care
	It validated what we’ve been saying about the problem	“It legitimized some of the things that we’ve been saying from the pulpit on incarceration and its impact on people of color. It also gave me a tool that I could now share with my members around that.”	Helpful
Awareness of the state of mass incarceration in the United States	Confirmation: <i>The New Jim Crow</i> legitimized what was being said already	“It legitimized some of the things we’ve been saying from the pulpit on mass incarceration and its impact on people of color.”	Legitimacy
	Awareness: The ways in which returning citizens are received in the worshiping communities	“I think in one section of the book, and forgive me because I have not read the book now for a couple of years but Alexander talked about the way in which returning citizens are often not received in worshiping communities and how hostile churches are, particularly African American churches.”	Redemption
	Systemic	“And then as I read and began to understand how once you’re out of it, if you get out of prison, you’re still in prison, because there are so many things that work again you, so that you can’t have a decent and normal and dignified life.”	Dignity
Motivation to prioritize mass incarceration as an advocacy issue	Personal experience	“Working in Sing Sing Prison in the 1990s is what struck it. I’ve all the bright Black men in my classes whose lives were being wasted by the system.”	Humanity
	What is the church doing?	“And the question always comes to me, what is the church doing about it?”	Responsibility
	Impact on Black communities	“But when you see that this has been a systemic issue that created a lot of these problems, you know, over-arresting Black people, you know, in proportion to White folks for drugs, all of those things kind of made it all, just made sense.”	Justice

	Impact on Black and Brown men and women	“My motivation for that was our county jail was filled with Black and Brown men and women who could not afford a small money bail and often they were in prison, or in jail, for several months only to be freed by the judge when they appeared for a hearing.”	Fairness
Goals and actions for ending mass incarceration after reading the book ( <i>The New Jim Crow</i> )	Conversations	“I think the one single event that stands out is a series of conversations that were hosted in our community, in the city where our congregation was located.”	Information sharing
	Local community actions	“Oftentimes because we are downtown, we are able to attract a lot of city officials. So, like the killing of Alton Sterling, the rally was at our church where the mayor, city council people, et cetera, showed up at our church for the rally.	Engagement
	Changing laws	“I personally speak on behalf of a group here that have put in place brought to light rather a lot of irregularities as it relates to mass incarceration.”	Activism
Impact of <i>The New Jim Crow</i> on pastors’ understanding of mass incarceration	<i>The New Jim Crow</i> was an eye-opener	“The biggest impact was the revelation of just what a major problem it is. I think, you know, as a Black person, I knew that a bunch of us went to jail, I knew that. But tying mass incarceration to slavery and just the sheer number of people in prison.”	Educational
	<i>The New Jim Crow</i> served as a resource for my advocacy	“So, reading the book gave me more resources and references on how systemic this mass incarceration is.”	Utility
	Facilitated my advocacy engagement on the issue	“More than anything, what the book represented was the natural evolution of things that already you thought you and understood to be the case. It was good to read a book that was developed in as such a scholarly manner that it allowed me to be able to easily share given the things I like to teach and in terms of an understanding in a concise way.”	Agency
	The book confirmed what I knew all along	“I would say that Michelle Alexander’s book essentially documented and confirmed and gave concrete expression in terms of the way she, you know, the academic documentation, so to speak, you know what I presumed all along and worked presuming all along.”	Informative
	<i>The New Jim Crow</i> codified the information I already knew about the problem	“I was working in a project in that area 20 years before the book came out, so it was not introductory. But it was what I would call codifying. And it pointed out mass incarceration as a continuance of Black dehumanization.”	Compassion
	The book gave me language	“It gave me language. It gave me a theological point of view to start from which is that we are all created in the image of God, every man, woman and child who is incarcerated is created in the image of God and are they being treated as though they were created in the image of God? Whether by society as a whole, or by the criminal justice system, or by their own church, communities, families.”	Faith
	The book helped me connect the dots	“It enabled me to have more tools, and the ability to connect the dots for people in my congregations and in my context, along with the fact that I am not only a pastor, but I am a former police officer in Chicago. And, it helped me to see how my role as a police officer contributed to, unintentionally on my end but it showed the structural nature of it and that we are contributing to	Reflective

	mass incarceration.”	
It got middle-class people to care about the issue	“Michelle Alexander was able to get middle-class people to care about the issue.”	Care
It validated what we’ve been saying about the problem	“It legitimized some of the things that we’ve been saying from the pulpit on incarceration and its impact on people of color. It also gave me a tool that I could now share with my members around that.	Helpful
The book gave me language	“It gave me language. It gave me a theological point of view to start from which is that we are all created in the image of God, every man, woman and child who is incarcerated is created in the image of God and are they being treated as though they were created in the image of God? Whether by society as a whole, or by the criminal justice system, or by their own church, communities, families.”	Faith

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Another pastor added:

I think we hold our head in the sand, many of us, in this country, Black and White because slavery officially ended but it really hasn’t ended. And what hit me, is that the desire of White people to stay in control and to keep Black people in their place has never gotten any less. And so, I read those numbers, as she quoted in her book, I’ve got it right here, you know, this is worse than, you know, actual slavery on the plantation (Pastor 6).

In describing the impact of *The New Jim Crow* as a resource, another pastor shared the following:

It gave me a better grasp of the problem, and the scope of the problem of mass incarceration. It’s one of those things, I almost liken it to hunger, it’s an invisible problem, sometimes. You know it’s there but you don’t really see it and you don’t know how to address it until somebody like Michelle Alexander writes a book that kind of outlines it for you and puts it where you can get it. And then you see it. And you go back and that is how we are going to change things. It



really—first—heightened my sensitivity to the issue and broaden my grasp of the scope of the issue (Pastor 8).

**Black pastors’ responses to *The New Jim Crow* as a resource for increasing awareness of mass incarceration.** In response to the interview question on what was revelatory about *The New Jim Crow*, pastors described what was most revealing about the state of mass incarceration in the United States. In general, pastors noted the correlation between the new Jim Crow and the old Jim Crow, segregation and slavery, and the large numbers of Black people that are in prison or jail in the United States. In addition, pastors noted the lack of awareness of the powerful position that prosecutors and judges held in the criminal justice system. Table 4.5 summarizes the category, themes, and values generated from the data. There were three themes: confirmation, awareness, and systemic.

In response to the question on what was most revealing about the state of mass incarceration in the United States after studying *The New Jim Crow*, one pastor stated the following:

The thing that was most revealing is, I worked as a police officer in the housing developments and in reading her book, my eyes were opened to how housing developments were given so much money, not only to start police departments, but also to contribute the mass incarceration of Black men and how formerly incarcerated Black men were hindered and hampered from trying to rebuild their lives, so they couldn’t go back, they couldn’t live in housing anymore. And how the housing development was able to profit and then secondly, how police departments were able to profit by weaponizing themselves with military

equipment as such to be an occupying force. . . . I have never understood the money trail of how these things were connected. . . . That the money that helped pay my salary was also money that was targeted to the mass incarceration problem. (Pastor 1)

Another pastor added:

The word would be sort of urgency. That we were not moving or addressing it from a policy or advocacy position as forcefully as we could have. We have allowed other issues to sort of take precedent. And I walked away from it, I was like, you know, we have to stop this now. We got to do something. There was a sense of urgency after reading her book. (Pastor 2)

In addition, one pastor stated:

The biggest takeaway I got from that personally, when I did study with the book was the power of the prosecutor. How much power the prosecutor has in the criminal justice system. And, consequently that gives me hope to see people like Larry Krasner in Philadelphia and the young lady that just won the primary in Queens. Other district attorney candidates that are running on the platform that is much more progressive and looking to be able to use their power in more just way. (Pastor 3)

Table 4.5

*Summary of Significant Statements on the Impact of The New Jim Crow on Black*

*Pastors' Understanding of the Problem of Mass Incarceration in the United States*

Significant Statement (In Vivo Codes)	Category	Theme
“I had never understood the money trail of how those things were connected. That the money that helped pay my salary was also money that was targeted to the mass incarceration problem.” (Pastor 1)	Connecting the dots	Better understanding of the history and magnitude of the mass incarceration problem in the United States
“Oh, the one that stands out, I use it all the time. And that is there are more African Americans, this was 2010, right? There are more African American males that were on probation or awaiting hearing as she phrased it than there were in chattel slavery in 1850. I’ll never forget reading that.” (Pastor 2)	History	
“The book had a profound impact on my understanding of mass incarceration because Michelle Alexander actually defines mass incarceration not as the number of people who are in prison, in jail. She talks about it as a whole systemic thing.” (Pastor 3)	Systemic	
“Mass incarceration just seems as a continuation of slavery no separating line there, just a continuation. That was probably the thing that stuck out the most.” (Pastor 4)	Continuation of slavery	
“I think it was the correlation between mass incarceration and Jim Crow. And kind of helping me to see, how mass incarceration is just a continuation of the oppression of people of color in this country. It is just another iteration.” (Pastor 5)	Continuation of forms of oppression in the United States	
“It was really an eye-opening experience for me. I did not know that the number of incarcerated people were so high. And I did not know that this country incarcerates more people than any other modern nation in the world and that just blows my mind.” (Pastor 6)	Impact on communities	
“This was a problem all over the country not just in the South. Prisons as plantations. It was happening everywhere.” (Pastor 7)	National impact of the problem	
“Oh, the connection to the history of Jim Crow slavery, Jim Crow, and segregation.” (Pastor 8)	Injustice	
“It [ <i>The New Jim Crow</i> ] outlines very effectively the escalation of mass incarceration over the time period just looking at where we are in the early 80s and again in the 70s, early 80s when the language of the war on drugs began and what it escalated into at the time period this book was written.” (Pastor 9)	Escalation of the problem	
“I was able to look at the numbers, so I kind of had an idea of what they were, but to see somebody who took national numbers. Just to see the numbers that I have been looking at kind of laid out in that way was revealing for me.” (Pastor 10)	Large numbers of people in prison and jails	
“But listen, I just think what Michelle Alexander did for me was basically put down in a very informative book what I knew all along.” (Pastor 11)	Educational	

Another pastor noted the following, “it is just a continuation. Mass incarceration just seems as a continuation of slavery. It really is. No separating line there, just a continuation. That was the thing that stuck out the most” (Pastor 4). Another pastor shared the following:

I think the correlation between mass incarceration and Jim Crow. And kind of helping me to see how mass incarceration a continuation of the oppression of people of color in this country is just. It’s just another iteration. A guy named Haney wrote a book. I was trying to think of the title of the book. Anyway in the book, he talks about how these kinds of systems basically just reinvent themselves. They never go away. Culture changes. Times change. And so, the system just reinvents itself. In ways that is oftentimes indestructible. And so, you think, oh well you know, slavery is over, sharecropping is over, so yeah, but the system still needs to feed itself, so it just reinvented itself. (Pastor 5)

Similarly, one of the pastors added,” Oh, the connection to the history of Jim Crow, slavery, Jim Crow, and segregation” (Pastor 6). Another pastor explained:

I guess, I was just really able to look at the numbers, so I kind of had an idea of what they were, but to see somebody who took national numbers, it kind of made it that, you know, Black people are 13% of the population, just to see the numbers that I have been looking at, kind of laid out in, in that way was revealing for me. It was revealing of what we already knew but that was the most impressive thing it taught me. Also, being able to trace it all the way back, to you know, the response to civil rights movement. (Pastor 10)

And one pastor expressed the following sentiment:

I would say the pattern, the clear and documentable pattern. It's been a while now since I read that, but it was the pattern. In other words, a kid starting out in a certain way almost has no option but to wind up in a certain place. I would say, and really putting the academic research behind that, which was good for me to read. In my time with certain colleagues with whom I've worked with over the years, you're sort of operating on anecdotal perceptions, and every now and then a scholar will come along and produce something that confirms what you presumed with the data. That would be, I would say, her contribution from my point of view. (Pastor 11)

**Research Question 2.** The second question that guided this study was: What factors influenced Black church pastors' actions to address the crisis of mass incarceration documented by Michelle Alexander in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* in the United States between 2012 and 2015?

**Black church pastors' responses on the factors that influenced action to address mass incarceration.** Based on responses from pastors on what motivated them to prioritize mass incarceration as an advocacy issue, four themes emerged from the data: community impact, disparity, personal experience, and social justice. In describing the experience, one pastor stated:

Just the sheer numbers of families that have been affected in every major city including the city I grew up in Chicago, and the city I'm now pastor, Gary, Indiana. Just to see the numbers, the sheer numbers of Black men who have been incarcerated, despite the fact that Blacks and Whites use drugs or what they call illegal drugs at the same rate, if not Whites use it more because of sheer numbers.

But the horrible fact that Black men are overrepresented in prison because of mass incarceration and the 1994, in particular, Crime Bill, that you know escalated the incarceration of Black men and boys. (Pastor 1)

Another pastor commented, “it was something that we were already sort of concerned with. But we had turned our attention to cash bail here in Baltimore. So, it was sort of on our radar” (Pastor 2). Another pastor added:

That’s easy. One, it’s my own experience with the criminal justice system and then, two, in my undergrad work, I was in a variation of the Inside-Out Program. Where we go inside and we do classes on the inside, with insiders. When I came out of undergrad and went to seminary, I had that. That was a kind of passion of mine given those two experiences. My own experience with the criminal justice system. Then my experience with folks who were on the inside. Doing that inside out program. (Pastor 3)

Another pastor added:

Social justice as being part of the gospel, Jesus is concerned for “the lost and the left out.” And so, a part of that scene today is returning citizens. And, if they’re part of that group, then a part of preaching of the gospel, a part of living out the gospel in society and in culture means advocating for them as well. (Pastor 4)

One pastor added, “my own personal experience.” (Pastor 11)

Table 4.5 illustrates the categories, themes, and quotes on ways in which studying *The New Jim Crow* motivated Black church pastors to engage in advocacy to end mass incarceration in the United States between 2012 and 2015.

Overall, pastors were motivated to prioritize mass incarceration as an advocacy issue for several reasons, including the personal experience of being incarcerated or having to work in the criminal justice system. Four of the pastors interviewed self-identified as having spent time in prison or jail. One pastor stated: “I spent, you know, nearly a decade in a New York State prison” (Pastor 10). And, another pastor stated, “I spent 14 years in a Florida prison” (Pastor 7). Another pastor added:

I am certain that somewhere out there are 40-somethings who read Michelle Alexander’s book, have been specifically inspired by what she has written, to do what they do, but when I went inside the prison the only pastors I met in the prisons were people trying to evangelize the prisoners. They weren’t in there to find out their welfare or to advocate better prison conditions or to minister to their families. I just never experienced this. On Rikers Island, where I went very often, that’s really what I saw, the reverend who goes to tell the inmate he needs to come to the Lord. I didn’t see the other type. (Pastor 11)

**Black pastors’ responses to *The New Jim Crow* by developing advocacy goals and taking actions.** Overall, all 11 Black pastors described developing goals and taking actions to address mass incarceration. Pastors stated that the major focus of advocacy efforts were on education and the work that needs to be done to affect “heart and head” and local policy efforts. Local efforts ranged from “showing up in the courts” to working on reforming the money bail system in local cities. Additionally, two pastors described the experiences of opening local churches to “returning citizens” and explained ways in which advocacy focused on families of incarcerated individuals were conducted in the community. In analyzing the data, three themes emerged: education, changing laws, and

local community actions. One pastor stated that, “after reading the book—using it as an advocacy tool to enlists others in the advocacy struggle, I was already in” (Pastor 8).

Another pastor added:

My one primary goal was education, because most people have not been able to do the real deep-dive research that Michelle Alexander was able to do. They knew it viscerally because everyone is touched. A family member goes to jail. And then secondly, the myth and the notion that Black people are more violent, sexually crazed, lazy, et cetera, that helps feed into the waves of police actions in communities to create occupied communities, rather than the money flowing to create jobs. The myth that Black people were more violent, et cetera, educating our Black people that that is a myth. And the difference is that what happens in the Black community is publicized more than the same thing, or even more of them are happening in white communities all over the nation. They’re just not publicized. So, deconstructing that myth that was my primary goal, and education. (Pastor 1)

Another pastor added, “I think the goals were more in alignment with just overall justice reform in the state of Maryland. And so, we started forming coalitions around it, and so a lot of our work centered on cash bail” (Pastor 2).

In describing the advocacy goals, one pastor described the following:

Well, that’s easy. Michelle kind of articulates this in the book. But she said it so well at the 2012 Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference. When she said the core challenge to ending mass incarceration is dispelling the myth that some of us are not worthy of genuine care, concern and compassion.



For me, that summed that up right there. I mean, when I heard that, that stuck with me. That stuck with me because that really is at the core of it. It is really a heart and head matter. There are certainly, policies that can be changed and things that can be reduced. Things we can do to reduce the number of people in prison. There are things that we can do to, can be done to change laws and policies. I think where the real challenge comes is in affecting the head and heart things that need to happen to really get to the cultural things that maintain mass incarceration as defined by Michelle Alexander. (Pastor 3)

One pastor added:

Well I don't know if I have a goal for ending it. What we've tried to do, and I am speaking in a Louisiana context, not necessarily the context of the nation, of changing local laws, is very helpful in a way that we reduced our state's incarceration rates. So, the book really helped pointed me to what I can do as a local pastor. The answer, coming back, small steps are good. So just small steps. I don't know if it can be remedied in a few years, so just small steps of changing our laws on the books. (Pastor 4)

Another added:

We have a prison ministry that's probably one of our strongest ministries. We visit with males and women. This past year, maybe the last 6 months, our policy work in the prison ministry for men, fell off. But our women continue to be very strong. And, I participate in both of them. I go in for the women, and for the men, But I am very, appreciative of those persons in the church who serve on those ministries. (Pastor 2)

In describing advocacy goals, one pastor added:

Man, I wanted to help introduce legislation. At the end of the day there is a goal in mass incarceration. The goal is not for truth. The goal is not justice. The goal is to keep Black people under control and bondage. And so, if I had a goal, it is to continue to try to tell the story in bits and pieces about what is going on, and to encourage people to read Michelle Alexander's book, and then do something on their own. (Pastor 6)

Another pastor stated the following:

Working with an organization in my state and another national network and getting my church involved in advocacy work and getting more involved with healing communities by helping to train other churches in being welcoming places to those who were formerly incarcerated men and women. Thanks to the national network, I chaired a meeting in the White House in 2015. Didn't get to meet President Obama but met a couple of his folks. I chaired a meeting on criminal justice and stuff. (Pastor 8)

One pastor described the following advocacy activities:

Well, primarily the advocacy goal was to use the book as an avenue to engage communities that had been unable to fully understand the magnitude of the problem and the issue of mass incarceration. And, in that instance, in that sense, it also turned out to be an advocacy tool that transcended the rigid divides between those that are Black churches and those that are White European evangelists. (Pastor 10)

**Factors that served as barriers and hindrances to Black pastors taking actions to address mass incarceration.** Overall, all 11 pastors described barriers to responding and taking actions to address mass incarceration after studying *The New Jim Crow*. The four themes that emerged from the data were: (a) structural, (b) perception, (c) narrative, and (d) stigma about people who are in the criminal justice system from within the Black community. Pastor 6 stated, “My impression is that we are more interested in our own salvation than we are in the salvation of the community. That’s when we get in trouble.” Pastor 1 added:

Well, the barriers, it starts with going back to what I was saying about the notion that Black people are more violent, that Black people are less industrious that you know that even among Black people, the media, propaganda, and the narrative affect even Black people. And that barrier is still strong. Because people, see their community, and they don’t connect the dots, that gentrification and resource deprivation are the major contributors to frustration and anger in the Black communities.

They just see that a community is barren, and it gets blamed on laziness, et cetera, et cetera. So that initial barrier is still prevalent. It is a false narrative that’s hard to get rid of when you see abandoned buildings and boarded-up houses. And when you see that type of decay, it is depressing, and it starts to psychologically affect people in a way that they look at one another. (Pastor 1)

Pastor 2 stated the following:

The hindrance is the bad interpretation, that far too many people in the church have, where the scriptures and traditions are seen as only as a going to heaven,

salvation, theology. That it is all about getting souls to heaven and not about dealing with the bodies on the earth. That is a big hindrance. And it's probably either almost that that nullifies the other one, because people are thinking viscerally about soul salvation and scare of the notion of hell.

Pastor 2 also added, "The same ones, which are typical stereotypes that not only folks who are not African American have, but particularly those who are in our own communities have. And that is how folks who are incarcerated deserve to be incarcerated." In addition, Pastor 3 observed:

The faith tradition that I am connected with now, is such a big tent. We got people on both sides of the extreme. But we have a Book of Discipline. The Book of Discipline is those principles that say that we as a church shouldn't be the charge, for example, in drug abuse and drug addiction but not from a criminal standpoint but from a standpoint of treatment. But we have church members who will do everything they can, you know to make sure that drugs stay illegal and that it stays a crime. So, it's a really big tent. So, there is support and opposition from our faith position.

Pastor 4 explained:

Well in my state, the denomination—Black congregants—represent maybe 12% of the entire congregations in the state. I believe there are 500 churches in my state and 12% of the church are Black. So, as a whole, we like to say, our denomination is doing a lot about social justice, I would say no. Because a lot of our White churches don't see mass incarceration as a problem. And so, as a

denomination, we may be the leading force to help change the laws. Only those of us that are serious. (Pastor 4)

In addition, this Pastor 5 opined:

Respectability politics is always a barrier. You know, helping people to see themselves in returning citizens helping people to see that those who are returning citizens as our neighbors and as Christians, our neighbors, our neighbors are basically, anybody who has a need that we can meet, that's our neighbors. And Christ expects us to help them in whatever way we can. And if that means lending our influence, lending our resources, lending our voice to the cause then that's what it means. And we should, and we're expected by Christ to do it.

Pastor 8 articulated the following: “the growing individualism and prosperity movement was a real hindrance. You know, the Black church tradition has lost the social justice advocacy and emphasis. And now it's focusing a lot on individual prosperity, individual overcoming, and obstacles.”

Pastor 10 added:

Well you know, obviously those that are duped into believing that there is only Black on Black crime, those who are misguided enough to believe that Black people do commit most of the crimes in this country. It is difficult selling this to people who have been victim of crimes and have been terrified of crimes for all of their lives to them that it's difficult to put a face on it.

For me, what I was able to because of being a pastor, and because of some of the spaces that I've been allowed to be in—to be able to say to people, “I am the result. I am the potential result of the work I am asking you to do.” But that's

been the most difficult part is putting a face, a sympathetic yet realistic face on the issue that people can understand and see and feel for. (Pastor 10)

Pastor 11 posited the following:

I pray and actually I suspect, maybe for wrong reasons, but at least she [Michelle Alexander] would get invitations to these churches to talk because one of the problems with the church and academia, a lot of Black scholars are doing research and writing that would resource a church that wanted to have a social impact.

Okay. But the scholars don't know how to access the churches and the churches don't know how to access the scholars. (Pastor 11)

**Values as a factor influencing Black pastors' responses to addressing mass incarceration.** Overall, all 11 pastors described ways in which the response to and the factors influencing advocacy actions on *The New Jim Crow* were guided by the Black church tradition of civic engagement in Black communities. An analysis of the data showed that the civil rights movement, the social justice history of the Black church, and the gospel of Jesus, as well as the Old Testament emerged as themes from the data.

Pastor 1 explained:

So, for me personally, my faith tradition energized me, based on the scriptures in Exodus, I associate with mass incarceration. The bondage of a people. And those people being used to profit, the people in power. The different texts that dealt with illegal and immoral bondage for the Babylonian period up to the destruction of Black born babies in the New Testament. And then Jesus's teachings, where he's quoting Isaiah text, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, to preach good news to the poor." Those things were extremely valuable to me. (Pastor 1)

Pastor 2 observed the following:

I don't know if I can say they (the Black church) were engaged. I think a lot of it had to do, on this issue, with the leadership and the advocacy that came from outside the church. I don't necessarily think it had that church type of flow, you know, the traditional advocacy piece that we do. It just didn't have that most of our partners were from outside of the church.

In addition, Pastor 3 noted:

In my denomination, one of our baptismal oaths, one of our tenets of the baptismal oath is to fight injustice and oppression in whatever form it takes. So, with that it becomes a tool to be able to move folks. In the Book of Discipline are these social principles that say we have responsibilities socially, we have responsibility for creation, we have responsibility for humanity. And so, it is those social principles that we have that says we are against a punitive system of, or form of criminal justice and look for and want to work for a restorative form of criminal justice.

Another pastor posited the following, "according to James, the writings of James, faith that is unworked is dead. I think we talk about it and we have written it out, so we have a theology of it, but I don't know if that theology is carried out" (Pastor 4). And one pastor shared this, "I pastor a church that is focused on social justice issues in our community and so this kind of stuff is built into the Church's DNA" (Pastor 5).

Additionally, another of the pastors shared the following, "I don't think that people believe, we don't believe, despite believing in Jesus, we don't believe that we have as much power as we do have. So, part of what that did for me is to teach people

that because of Jesus, we have a lot power, if we would just claim it” (Pastor 6). In addition, one of the pastors stated, “so the civil rights movement was a really important element of the Black church tradition to draw on, for our work on mass incarceration reduction” (Pastor 8).

In describing the ways Black church tradition impacted actions on *The New Jim Crow*, one pastor shared the following, “Jesus fought for those who were the disenfranchised, disinherited and discounted and what’s mass incarceration a clear reflection of the ways in which those folks who fit into those categories are victimized” (Pastor 9). In addition, Pastor 10 observed:

Because my initial conversion experience was inside it was at Rikers Island. My faith has always been informed by that. My faith has always been wrapped and tangled in that. I’ve always gravitated towards those scriptures– Amos 5:24, “let justice role down like water,” there is no Jew nor Greek, nor bound nor free, nor male nor female but all are one in Christ Jesus. (Pastor 10)

Another pastor shared the following, “I always thought that, the best way to actualize your faith, was to do something for somebody else” (Pastor 11).

**Vision described by Black pastors that should guide Black church action to end mass incarceration as a result of studying *The New Jim Crow*.** Overall, all 11 pastors described ways they wanted to see the Black church as a collective become more vocal on the issue of mass incarceration. An analysis of the data revealed that leadership, education, compassion, organizing, and collective action were important themes for Black pastors. Pastor 1 stated the following:



I would like to see the Black church be central. I would like to see the Black church be the epicenter. I would like to see the Black church be the driving force to help eradicate and end mass incarceration and other structural inequalities that Black people face. I would like to see the Black church as central to that in helping to organize and helping to educate. Helping to equip and tool persons in the community. And to be a presence to the structures of the society. Be a source of pushback and challenge to the structure. I would like to see the Black church be central.

I would hope to see them play a role that dealt more with compassion because that sort of seems like a natural fit for us the church to sort of lead from where there's a more compassionate discussion about the impact on not just those who are incarcerated, but all of those who are incarcerated when others that we love are incarcerated. We know that children, you know, wives, spouses, mothers, fathers should play a role in leading that discussion. (Pastor 1)

Pastor 2 posited:

Because there is no one in your congregation that's not touched by it. When you consider this whole Christian story it's an excellent story, just modern day. I think we; the church needs to be a leader in sort of raising this issue for a congregation that's sort of, what impact it is having, particularly from a policy perspective. And there are things we can do.

Whether it's elected persons who are more conscious of laws that impact disproportionately people of color. All those things, the church can sort of take on but that's easier said than done because that is not what gets people in the

pews. And the reality is the dirty secret is the people we want to help, we sure as hell don't want them to come worship with us when they get out. (Pastor 2)

And, Pastor 3 declared:

Because I roll with Michelle Alexander's definition of mass incarceration when I am thinking of mass incarceration, I am not thinking again of the numbers of people who are in prison but the laws, policies and traditions, and institutions that contribute to that. So, I don't know exactly what a collective movement would look like. The Black church can continue to really address and look at talking about changing how people really think about folks who are connected to the criminal justice system to look at how that happened.

Look at, and to kind of change, really change attitude. In a lot of churches, we need a real culture shift. A cultural change in the church. That when a church becomes less judgmental, less condemnatory. More open. More of a safe space. Now, that's not really necessary in a collective movement but it could be a collective movement. It could be something that could be done. It would be nice if the church could collectively look at the things that lead people to prison. Like education and childhood trauma. Which a lot of times goes to our policies around child abuse and neglect. Our policies around parenting. Policies around drug addiction and drug use.

So, having a real understanding that it is not really just the number of people in prison. But how are they getting there? The stuff that's contributing to putting them there. (Pastor 3)

Pastor 3 shared:

I think the Muslims did a good job, with the Million Man March and were able to come together and talk about issues. I think it's the Black church. It's not really denomination or any of that. I think it is the Black church coming together to say, "Hey we're tired of it, and we need this to change." It really would take something that massive to change laws on the book such as Three Strikes and you're out, that type of thing. So, in order to change that, I don't think that you could just say "Hey churches come together." You would have to come together with a plan, we would have to come together with a plan and it would take collectively throughout probably all the states in the United States to get on board with it to push our issue or the issue of mass incarceration. (Pastor 3)

In addition, Pastor 5 shared:

I would like to see our denomination, our historically African American, Black, denominational body kind of come together and leverage our numbers, our resources, and our influence to deal with that. I mean, the Black church is still a powerful source. But it is a powerful source, that quite frankly I think is asleep on a lot of issues we need to address together. Let's come together, where our conventions meet and literally bring millions of dollars of resources. We can leverage that.

Let's say, like in St. Louis. If you're having a denominational meeting in St. Louis, and as leaders of that denomination should call in the police force, and should call the mayor and the elected officials and say, hey we're coming to your city and we have concerns about x, y, and z and we want to talk to you about them. I think that we squander sometimes our economic influence by not calling

people into accountability and say hey, if this what you're doing, we are not bringing our organizations here. (Pastor 5)

Pastor 6 observed:

We don't have to wait to die, you know. We don't have to wait to die. But we have these other people that if you really believe in Jesus, then we have everything we need to fight injustice. Will we get rid of it all? No, but we can get rid of a lot of it, just because of the person who we follow. (Pastor 6)

In addition, Pastor 8 opined:

I'd like every church to start with the families in their own congregation that have somebody that's in the system. That if we saw the prisoner as part of us You know, I was locked up, there were seven guys from my church on my block. Yet, the church's engagement of the prisoner tends to be seen as outreach. If every church in America, Black church in America, gave an altar call for families of the incarcerated on a Sunday morning, and then followed up with, "where is your family member? What prison, what jail are they in? How can we help?" And get involved in the lives of actual prisoners, and families that they know, it would be a game changer. Because now mass incarceration affects my church. That woman that comes to church every Sunday with this terrible secret that her son is locked up. She's been telling everybody he's away in school, or he is in service or he moved. If every Black church would identify the families of the incarcerated in their congregation, it would change the game.

Pastor 9 declared, “obviously the first is to make sure that people do understand the far-reaching implications in terms of multigenerational consequences as a result of this particular expression of oppression.” Pastor 10 stated:

Well, I think the Black church and I am not even talking about not just the mainline denominational church but the Black Pentecostal church has to move out of the shadow, and even the scourge of White evangelicalism, because we’ve seen now White evangelical church is by and large supportive and celebratory of the Trump Administration, and unfortunately, a lot of us and by us, I mean Black and Brown folks, who are entrenched in the culture of the White evangelical movement. I’d like to see the Black church speak out against that in those spaces. And I’d like to see the Black evangelicals, call their White and Black colleagues to task on their sentiments or lack of sentiment toward this issue.

Pastor 11 envisioned the following:

I would like for leaders and lay people together, to educate themselves on this issue. To understand the root issues related to mass incarceration. And that requires a lot of careful study, reading, discussion every now and then, a resource person here and there. But a massive campaign to be knowledgeable. And then, to begin to think strategically about things that churches can do, to begin to chip away at this. Because, Michelle Alexander, has told us what the problem is. How you tackle this problem requires strategies, many of which are tailored to local situations. And I am a firm believer that it takes two to tango.

Summarily, Black church pastors envisioned a leadership role for the Black church, a role rooted in compassion and inspired by the teachings of Jesus and the New

and Old Testament to educate churchgoers and the broader community on the impacts of mass incarceration. Table 4.5 illustrates significant statements from Black pastors on the impact of *The New Jim Crow* on their advocacy to end mass incarceration. Table 4.6 is a summary of significant statements by Black pastors on advocacy to end mass incarceration in the United States. Two themes emerged from the data: *The New Jim Crow* allowed Black pastors to (a) share information and (b) take local policy action to end mass incarceration. Table 4.7 provides an overview of significant statements by Black pastors on ways the Black church tradition guided actions to end *The New Jim Crow*. One theme emerged from the data: Jesus’s teachings in advocating for social justice.

Table 4.6

*Summary of Significant Statements on Actions Taken by Black Pastors to Address the Problem of Mass Incarceration in the United States*

Significant Statements (In Vivo Codes)	Category	Theme
“We’ve had Bible classes where we used the book. And so, I had members of the congregations as part of some of the activities. We used the study guide –we’ve had formerly incarcerated persons come to inform and educate our congregation and form relationships so people could be less fearful and more compassionate. We have done some letter writing to politicians in our area.” (Pastor 1)	Engaging church members	Sharing information on the issue of mass incarceration. Taking action at the local level
“So, there was justice reform, lobbying efforts in the state capital, we did a lot more discussions around it, going on particularly in Baltimore than in other areas. We participated in those, and when I say we, I am being very general. In most cases, we <i>were</i> me. The major thing we did about this topic that Michelle was sort of a forerunner to this. I mean after her book comes out, Bryan Stevenson’s <i>Just Mercy</i> , The Thirteenth Amendment, the documentary by Ava DuVernay, a lot of issues began, so it was easy to discuss some of these issues.” (Pastor 2)	Educating policy makers	
“One of the important things that folks did to follow up was really to become more educated on the issues and the various things that were going on that they can become more involved in.” (Pastor 3)	Increased knowledge on the issue	
“I personally speak on behalf of an organization which has brought to light rather, a lot of irregularities as it relates to	Personal efficacy	

mass incarceration.” (Pastor 4)

“You know helping people begin to understand it as a problem because they don’t see it as a problem until you understand it as a problem. Then we cannot begin the process of learning, what Christ would have us do if that makes sense. If I don’t see it as a problem, then I am not praying about what I need to be doing about it.” (Pastor 5)

Sharing knowledge

“I wanted there to be some kind of way to oppose the disparity in my community. And then I said yeah, let’s hype this thing up, let’s really do it.” (Pastor 6)

Speaking out

“I worked on voting rights lawsuit in Georgia, Florida, Alabama, and Tennessee and worked to have an advocacy impact in the Southern region.” (Pastor 7)

Taking action

“The development of a regional certification program for seminarians in the area on Mass Incarceration and the church. Joining with other leaders in the area to call for what must be done, began to see just about 2015, a reformation of our jail system, which has actually closed one of our jails and our jail population since this mayor took over in 2015, has been cut in half.” (Pastor 8)

Local policy reform

“A series of conversations that were hosted in our community, in the city where our congregation was located.” (Pastor 9)

Community conversations

“I created something called “Stifle the System” it hasn’t been anything formalized, but is kind of a mindset so kind of understanding the entire process of mass incarceration that a lot of the sentiments, and things that affect mass incarceration will affect a young Black child almost from the cradle. Stifling the system kind of mean for us means if you stifle the system on the front end, which means you stop feeding our young people, stop feeding it people who if they were another race or lived in another community that they wouldn’t be arrested or wouldn’t be given the same amount of time. Then if you stifle the system on that end the belly of the beast, which is the prison system, and there’s nothing to be crapped out on the back end which is reentry.” (Pastor 10)

Institutionalizing the advocacy

“I began to work with a local organization which has recently been closed, by the way, and we hosted a really interesting dialogue on the war on drugs. We produced a very strong community presentation there on the disruptive nature of the war on drugs knew the disruption, I knew how people were being imprisoned, I knew how families were being separated.” (Pastor 11)

Community dialogue

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Table 4.7

*Summary of Significant Statements on the Impact of The New Jim Crow as a Resource in Activating Black Church Tradition and Values in Advocating to End Mass Incarceration*

Significant Statements (In Vivo) Codes	Category	Theme
“And then Jesus’s teachings, where he’s quoting the Isaiah text, ‘The spirit of the Lord is upon me to preach good news to the poor.’ Those things were extremely valuable for me.” (Pastor 1)	Helping the poor	Jesus’s teachings in advocating for social justice.
“The Gospel of John, Chapter 9. And I literally only preached the first seven or eight words, when it said, ‘As Jesus was passing by, he saw a man.’ And the subject or theme of it was that it is good to be seen.” (Pastor 2)	Seeing others	
“We actually had a group of pastors who did a monthly revival service on <i>The New Jim Crow</i> or mass incarceration for like 6 months. I use Mark 8... the guy who they used to lock up him up. They put him in handcuffs and chain even though biblical record is that he didn’t harm anybody except himself. So, they locked him up and sent him away from the city.” (Pastor 3)	Imprisoning the harmless	
“The theology is there on paper, but you know, you may have all the faith in the world, but if you don’t work it, it’s dead.” (Pastor 4)	Faith	
“Social justice as being part of the gospel Jesus is concerned for what used to be the ‘lost and the left out.’” (Pastor 5)	Concern for the marginalized	
“I don’t think enough of us people understand the importance of understanding Jesus as a political and a spiritual presence.” (Pastor 6)	Understanding the role of Jesus	
“After spending 14 years in prison, I’ve decided to focus on theocracy and not theology and as a pastor, I need to stay low to the ground.” (Pastor 7)	Pastoral role	
“I ended up having to say to people that if the Gospel is just about helping individuals overcome injustice, then Rosa Parks’ problem could have been solved by someone buying her a car. You can address her issue by getting her a car as an individual or by serving her needs and giving her a ride. But the civil rights movement is more than serving needs and individual overcoming. It was about changing the system. So, the civil rights movement was a really important element of the Black church tradition to draw on, for our work to end mass incarceration.” (Pastor 8)	Using the Gospel as a tool for social justice	
“Jesus fought for those who were disenfranchised and disinherited and those who discounted them.” (Pastor 9)	Jesus teachings	
“All the way from Jim Crow up to the civil rights movement, the Black church was probably one of the only places where Black men and women could speak truth to power and without at least immediate repercussions.” (Pastor 10)	Role of the church	
“Well, you know, I would say that a pastor who did not engage in social advocacy and seek to practice the ethics of Jesus was involved in half of the gospel. That was my orientation. So, I never felt any contradiction. In fact, if I look at Jesus as a rabbi, who is steeped in the tradition of the prophets, particularly the prophets, so many things he spoke about were directly from the prophet Isaiah.” (Pastor 11)	Jesus’s teaching	



Table 4.8

*Frequency of Codes Used by Research Participants*

In Vivo Codes	Frequency of Codes Used by Pastors
“It was a resource”	P1, P3, P5,
“Systemic”	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P8, P10
“Opened my eyes”	P1, P4, P6, P9
“Advocacy tool”	P1, P2, P6, P8, P9
“Documentation”	P1, P5, P6, P11
“Number of families affected”	P1, P3, P4, P6, P8, P10
“Hearts and minds”	P1, P2, P3, P10
“Impact on the community”	P1, P6, P9, P10, P11
“Myth, stereotype, or false narrative”	P1, P2, P3, P9, P10
“Number of Black men”	P1, P2, P6, P10, P11
“Educate”	P1, P3, P4, P9
“Awareness”	P1, P2, P5, P6
“Scriptures”	P1, P4, P5, P6, P9, P8, P10
“Conversation and discussions”	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9
“Change laws and policies”	P2, P3, P4, P6
“My own experience”	P3, P8, P7, P10, P11
“Social justice”	P5, P6, P8, P9
“Slavery”	P6, P1, P2, P5, P8, P9

**Chapter Summary**

Chapter 4 provided the results of the qualitative phenomenological study. The research findings show the following: Black church pastors who participated in the research study responded to Michelle Alexander’s observation of a “relative quiet” in the civil rights movement by finding ways to: (a) utilize the book as a resource, (b) utilize the book as a blueprint to inform and dialogue with churchgoers and policymakers, and (c) publicize the severity of the problem of mass incarceration in the community.

Using in vivo and values coding, categorization and theming of the data, it was possible

to identify significant statements, categories, and themes that reflect the lived experiences of Black pastors who studied *The New Jim Crow* and acted on the issue. Based on the findings, those actions were influenced by the sheer impact of mass incarceration on the Black community; the gospel of Jesus, and the Black tradition of social justice advocacy and the legacy of the civil rights movements.

The findings also revealed the barriers to action and effective response to the issue of mass incarceration including: the culture of judgment and condemnation, piety, growing individualism, and the lack of care and compassion for those who are incarcerated or formerly incarcerated—evidenced by the stigma and negative perceptions associated with criminalized people. Additionally, Black pastors highlighted the lack of a clear and shared vision for addressing the crisis of incarceration from the Black church. Chapter 5 discusses the research findings, the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, as well as a conclusion of the research study.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### Introduction

Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness* was published by The New Press in 2010. In her book, Alexander (2010) posited that the disproportionate rates of Black men under correctional control in the United States has created a new caste system akin to the old Jim Crow. The success of *The New Jim Crow* is documented in a 2014 case study report by the Media Impact Funders. The researchers noted that for a book such as *The New Jim Crow*, the typical print run is 4,000 books. However, after its initial print run, *The New Crow* sold more than 400,000 copies (Media Impact Funders, 2014).

Scholars, advocates, and policymakers heralded *The New Jim Crow* for highlighting the failure of the war on drugs and the meteoric rise of mass incarceration. Alexander (2010) connected the dots between slavery, Jim Crow, and mass incarceration as forms of racialized social control and admonished civil rights organizations including the church to play an active role in addressing the problem—the overrepresentation of Black men in the criminal justice system—evidenced by a mass incarceration crisis.

The Black church has always played an activist role in addressing social issues affecting the Black community (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). It is often viewed as the social center of the Black community (Du Bois, 1903; Warnock, 2014), as epitomized by the victories of the civil rights movement of the 1960s in the United States led by the theologian Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

During the civil rights era, the Black church became the gathering place for activism and protest to end segregation and the unequal treatment of African Americans living in the southern United States (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Pinn, 2002; Tisby, 2019; Warnock, 2014). Looking at the Black church history and tradition of social justice and civil rights, the purpose of the study was to examine the response of Black pastors to Alexander's (2010) observation of a "relative quiet" in the civil rights community and to explore factors that influenced pastors' actions to address mass incarceration based on studying *The New Jim Crow* between 2012 and 2015.

The research findings show that *The New Jim Crow* had an impact on Black pastors' responses and actions to the mass incarceration issue. Black church pastors in the Northeast, Midwest, and South who studied the book between 2012 and 2015 described the impact of *The New Jim Crow* during in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The 11 pastors who participated in the study shared ways in which *The New Jim Crow* increased their understanding of the problem of mass incarceration. In addition, the book served as a source of motivation to take actions in their local communities. These local advocacy actions were inspired by the Black church tradition of fighting for social justice, as evidenced by the civil rights movement in the 1960s, the teachings of Jesus, Old Testament stories by the Prophets Isaiah and Amos and the Exodus story.

This phenomenological research study was completed in 2 months. Research interviews were conducted over the phone in the pastors' natural setting. Due to time constraints, the first 11 pastors who met the research criteria were purposefully sampled using a prequestionnaire survey. The 11 pastors met the research criteria: each pastor self-identified as being Black or African American, had pastored a church or played a

leadership pastoral role in the church between 2012 and 2015, and had studied *The New Jim Crow* between 2012 and 2015. A prequestionnaire was used to collect demographic and church data from research participants. The 11 phone interviews were crafted as follows: the questions were in-depth and semi-structured; there were 11 interview questions and the average length of an interview was approximately 40 minutes.

Using a prequestionnaire survey and the research interview as data collection instruments, it was possible to align the research questions to the interview questions. Subsequently, the data collected from the survey and interviews were transcribed using rev.com. After the interviews were transcribed by the transcription service, the data was coded using in vivo and value codes and categorized and themed to identify the essence of Black pastors' experiences of studying *The New Jim Crow* and acting locally to address the issue of mass incarceration (Saldaña, 2016).

In addition, the hermeneutic approach allowed for the interpretation data. After thorough examination of the data corpus, three themes emerged from the two research questions and the 11 interview questions. In addition, there were 19 values that guided the research participants' responses and actions. The most salient categories will be discussed in this chapter.

### **Implications of Findings**

To organize the data, the following categories were developed: impact, awareness, advocacy goals and actions, motivation, barriers, values, and vision. Black pastors who read *The New Jim Crow* posited that the book had a significant impact on their general understanding of the mass incarceration problem in the United States and provided a blueprint for taking action to address mass incarceration.

As a result of studying *The New Jim Crow*, pastors were able to identify barriers that hinder an effective response to addressing mass incarceration. Pastors stated that they were motivated to act after studying *The New Jim Crow* by several core values rooted in the teachings of Jesus and the Black faith tradition of fighting for social transformation in the Black community. However, pastors observed that the Black church lacks a shared vision on ways to tackle the mass incarceration crisis in the United States.

**Impact: Increased understanding of the problem of mass incarceration in the United States.** Black Pastors who participated in the research study described ways in which *The New Jim Crow* helped increase their understanding of the problem of mass incarceration in the United States. Pastors explained ways in which *The New Jim Crow* served as an eye-opener to the problem. Although pastors were previously aware of the mass incarceration issue and understood the problem anecdotally by laying out the information in one place, *The New Jim Crow* became a resource, tool, and blueprint that they used to strengthen local advocacy on mass incarceration. Pastors, particularly the pastors who had been formerly incarcerated, heralded the book as a vehicle that brought the crisis of incarceration to a broader audience (four pastors self-identified as being formerly incarcerated or having a felony label).

Pastors discussed the ways in which *The New Jim Crow* helped to connect the dots between slavery and Jim Crow in the southern United States. The assertion of a continuation of the systems of racial oppression that have been used to define and confine African American in what the sociologist Wacquant (2010) called the three peculiar institutions: slavery, the ghetto, and mass incarceration. Moreover, pastors discussed

ways the book impacted how they conducted their advocacy efforts on the issue of mass incarceration.

Pastors described *The New Jim Crow* as a tool and a resource to engage in dialogue and conversations with church members and with local policy makers to break the “relative quiet” and disrupt the “eerie silence.” Black pastors saw this scholarly documentation of the problem of mass incarceration as the blueprint that finally codified and gave voice to the problem they were witnessing in Black communities.

**Awareness: *The New Jim Crow* made pastors aware of the scale and scope of the problem.** Six of the 11 pastors referred to the connection Alexander (2010) made between the forms of oppression in the United States and mass incarceration, specifically the connection between slavery, the old Jim Crow, and the imprisonment of mostly Black men. Additionally, pastors described the revelation at the power wielded by judges and prosecutors in the criminal justice system. The pastors also acknowledged the lackluster role that the Black church has played to end mass incarceration. In discussing the role of the Black church, a place that should be welcoming to those who have experienced incarceration, pastors shared that marginalizing formerly incarcerated people was contrary to the call from Jesus to look after those who are less fortunate in the community.

Pastors also shared myths about incarcerated individuals, the Black community, and the functioning of the criminal justice system. The first myth is that individuals who are incarcerated deserve to be incarcerated. The second myth is that the criminal justice system is functioning the way it should function. In addition, pastors expressed concern that there is third myth that individuals who are behind bars, especially Black men, come

from communities that breed crime. The pastors believed that to effect change in the criminal justice system, those myths needed to be challenged and debunked by leaders in the Black community.

**Advocacy goals and actions: The plan to address mass incarceration in local communities.** The 11 pastors described goals that were developed after studying *The New Jim Crow*. Pastors' goals ranged from showing up in the courthouses to support community and church members who had been arrested or involved with the criminal justice system to organizing events at states' capitols and devising ways to educate church members, legislators, and family members of individuals impacted by criminalization and incarceration about their rights and about the severity of the problem of mass incarceration in the United States.

Pastors saw *The New Jim Crow* as an opportunity to engage in local policy work. They believed that small steps at the local level were doable. Several pastors described their advocacy goals and plans to address money bail reform as well as working to reform voting rights laws that would re-enfranchise voters in prisons and jails.

**Motivation: The inspiration to prioritize mass incarceration as an advocacy issue.** Pastors described the factors that inspired advocacy actions within local congregations and local communities. In several instances, they noted the role religious beliefs played in shaping their actions as advocates, specifically the New Testament and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Pastors described the sheer scope of the problem of mass incarceration as described by Alexander (2010) in *The New Jim Crow* and the impact of incarceration on the African American community in general and on Black men in particular. Additionally, the civil rights movement and the leadership and advocacy of



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Black church in particular played a key role in guiding pastors' actions on mass incarceration and their work to end the racial, social, and economic oppression of Black people in the United States and to advocate to end mass incarceration.

**Barriers: Obstacles to effective advocacy engagement.** Pastors described the barriers to effective engagement within their respective congregations and in the communities in which their churches are located. They identified the following as obstacles: (a) perceptions within the African American community on criminality, (b) stigma against those who are currently incarcerated and formerly incarcerated, (c) the lack of information on ways to effectively challenge the systems of social and racial control, and (d) the “myth that the Black church is the vanguard for social justice and social change” (Pastor 11). Additionally, they believed that mass incarceration was not a priority issue for church members due to the “myriad issues facing the Black community including high unemployment rates and homelessness” (Participant 4).

**Values: Beliefs and attitudes that guided response and actions to address mass incarceration.** The prevailing values that guided Black pastors' responses and actions were the ministry of Jesus and the New Testament. Specifically, Biblical texts served as the foundation on which pastors shaped and staged their efforts. Pastors described beliefs on what they considered the work of a Christian leader and what it means to be Black and Christian and living up to the ideals of Jesus's ministry. To be a Black pastor means “looking out for the dispossessed and the disinherited; the lost and the lonely; the least of these among us; the incarcerated and the drug addicted in local communities” (Pastor 9).

**Vision: Where do we go from here? The role of the Black church in ending mass incarceration.** Research participants see the Black church as the harbinger of social justice and racial justice in the African American community and reckon the Black church to play a greater leadership role in calling for an end to the crisis of mass incarceration in the United States. This is in line with the history of the Black church—an institution that was birth out of slavery, played a leadership organizing and mobilization role in the triumphed over Jim Crow laws and segregation in the southern United States, and continues to play a pivotal role as the social center in the African American community where pastors adhere to and is committed to Black theology, integrating piety and protest (Du Bois, 1903; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Warnock, 2014).

### **Limitations of the Study**

The limitations of the study include the criteria for selecting participants, geography, and gender representation.

**Additional pastors who studied *The New Jim Crow*.** Several church denominations and faith-based organizations (FBOs) selected *The New Jim Crow* as denominational-wide and organizational-wide reading for pastors, and lay leaders as well as church members and staff between 2010 and 2015. Because of time and the research design, it was not possible to hear from additional Black pastors outside of the Northeast, Midwest, and South who studied *The New Jim Crow* and are advocating for criminal justice reform in respective cities and states, and nationally.

**Geographical limitation.** Due to time constraints and the scope of the problem, this research study did not include pastors from California and the Pacific Northwest or New England states.

**Gender representation.** Due to time constraints, the research study focused primarily on Black pastors who identified as male except for one female.

**Researcher bias.** For many years, the researcher served as an organizer and advocate on criminal justice reform and for ending the war on drugs. This included working with religious leaders on ways to effectively advocate for an end to mass criminalization and incarceration in the United States. Throughout the interview and analysis process, the researcher was oftentimes checking her opinions, thoughts, and feelings on the research topic and in many instances the insights, challenges, and opportunities identified by the pastors resonated with the researcher.

### **Recommendations**

A review of literature and data from study reveal that Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* served as a blueprint and chronicler of the problem of race-based criminalization in the United States. Black pastors despite being previously aware of the problem were alarmed by the sheer scope of the impact of the crisis on African American families and specifically on Black men.

This new awareness of the national scope of the mass incarceration compelled Black pastors to take action to address the severity of this civil and human rights quagmire plaguing the African American community. This more informed activism and advocacy is guided by the Black church tradition of civic engagement and protest as exemplified by the civil rights movement of the 1960s and modeled by the leadership, advocacy, and martyrdom of a fellow pastor, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In addition, the Bible, especially the Prophets of the Old Testament, the Exodus story, and the New Testament scriptures, including the gospel of Jesus in particular, played an

important role in influencing and shaping the actions of Black pastors who were motivated to act after studying Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*.

Moreover, research findings from the study on Black pastors' responses and actions to address mass incarceration, subsequent to studying *The New Jim Crow*, engendered a possible reason for Alexander's (2010) assumption of "relative quiet" and "eerie silence" in the civil rights community. Based on the review of literature and the research findings, the following observation was made: The Black church was silent on the issue of mass incarceration due to the prevailing stigma and negative perceptions that are associated with incarceration and having a criminal conviction. To stimulate a conversation on a social and criminal justice, issue such as mass incarceration requires individuals who are impacted by the problem to self-identify and speak out on the issue and volunteer to be at the center of the conversation.

The movement that Alexander (2010) envisioned did not happen because the individuals best positioned and equipped to shape the conversation and the movement to end mass incarceration were themselves shrouded by a veil of secrecy and shame that effected a "relative quiet." Therefore, to be successful, advocates, including Black church pastors, formerly and currently incarcerated individuals, families, and supporters, must engage in a sort of "coming out" campaign akin to the gay rights advocacy movement of the 1990s and the 2000s. Until then, the conversation about ending mass incarceration will remain insular and the "relative quiet" and "eerie silence" observed by Alexander (2010) will persist. The role of the Black church will remain marginal at best (Alexander, 2010, pp. 179–224).

In addition, disrupting the “relative quiet” and acting to end the crisis of mass incarceration will require more intentional and strategic collaboration between criminal justice scholars, advocates, and Black pastors. This collaboration must include the co-creation of a shared vision, goals, and clear measurements to track successes and setbacks in the fight to end mass incarceration in the United States. Several pastors indicated in the interview process that they were unsure of the impact of their actions to address the mass incarceration crisis since the goals to reduce or end mass incarceration are not clearly stated or defined by criminal justice advocates. Further research is needed to explore the strength of the relationship between Black pastors and criminal justice advocates and organizers working to reduce or end mass incarceration in the United States.

Additional recommendations for measuring the impact of *The New Jim Crow* on Black pastors’ actions to address mass incarceration include improving the ways Black pastors are informed about incarceration and criminalization. *The New Jim Crow* is now almost 10 years old; there needs to be other means to disseminate information to Black church pastors who are willing and able to use moral authority to end the “eerie silence” and fill the moral vacuum that currently exists in the criminal justice space. There needs to be an information-sharing space where Black pastors and criminal justice advocates and organizers can assemble to share data and stories; develop campaign strategies and craft a counter narrative that dispels and debunks the myths and perceptions that serve as barriers to effective action on the issue of mass incarceration.

Black pastors must become important allies in the social and racial justice fight to end mass incarceration in the United States. As many more municipalities and states, as

well as the federal government look to reform their criminal justice system, more individuals are released from prisons and jails. Formerly incarcerated persons are returning to local, mostly Black communities.

The Black church—led by Black pastors—must be equipped with the information they need to best support individuals with criminal convictions and families impacted by criminalization. Black church pastors have a leading role to play in destigmatizing incarceration and lessening the collateral consequences of individuals burdened by a conviction label. The Black church also has a role to play in changing perceptions that currently exist around certain crimes, especially when it comes to drug selling, drug use, and what are considered violent and nonviolent crimes, as the war on drug has been a major driver of criminal convictions in the United States (Alexander, 2010).

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This research study revealed that *The New Jim Crow* had a significant impact on Black pastors' understanding of the mass incarceration problem in the United States. The book also framed the historical context of the problem by connecting the dots between slavery, Jim Crow, and mass incarceration and provided national data on the state of incarceration in the United States. As a result of the sheer scope of the mass incarceration problem, Alexander (2010) admonished civil rights organizations including the Black church to play a more active role in addressing the issue of mass incarceration fueled in large part by war on drugs. Below is a list of recommendations for future research:

1. Black pastors must be at the table with criminal justice advocates, organizers, and policymakers co-creating a shared vision, agenda, goals, and action plans

to dismantle the structures that support and perpetuate the mass criminalization and incarceration mostly of Black men. Further research is needed to better understand the barriers that may prevent the coming together of Black pastors, scholars, advocates and organizers, and policymakers to collectively envision and strategize an end to mass incarceration in the United States.

2. Despite anecdotal accounts of incarceration and its impact on local communities and despite being motivated to take action to address criminal justice issues at the local level, pastors were unable to assess the effectiveness of church-based and clergy-focused local actions to end mass incarceration in the United States. Further research is needed to identify local, state, and national goals for ending mass incarceration and to create a clear plan to disrupt the observed complacency and silence on the issue of mass incarceration.
3. Alexander (2010) specifically called on civil rights organizations to prioritize mass incarceration as a human rights issue. Further research is needed to identify barriers to effective advocacy and actions taking by civil rights organizations such as the NAACP, the ACLU, as well as major Black church denominations, such as National Baptist Convention, Church of God in Christ (COGIC), and the African Methodist Episcopal church (AME).
4. Research is needed to better understand ways in which Black theology can more sturdily undergird Black church advocacy to end mass incarceration.
5. Black pastors have the moral authority to shape perceptions and to change

beliefs and attitudes in society. Alexander (2010) highlighted the stigma that exists toward criminalized individuals within the Black church. This study supports Alexander's charge. Several pastors described the stigma and negative perceptions associated with being labeled a criminal. Stigma and negative perception serve as barriers to effective engagement with church members and the broader Black community on the issue of incarceration. Further research is needed to determine the extent to which stigma and negative perceptions of criminalization are hindering efforts to end mass incarceration in the United States.

6. *The New Jim Crow* focused on the incarceration of Black men and because of that focus, this study focused primarily on the response and actions of Black pastors to address the large number of Black men in the criminal justice system. Further research is needed to examine the impact of *The New Jim Crow* on girls and women and ways in which Black pastors are advocating to end the incarceration of girls and women in the United States.
7. This research study focused on Black pastors, with predominantly Black church members in the Northeast, Midwest, and South. Further research is needed to examine ways in which non-Black pastors in the United States who studied *The New Jim Crow* between 2012 and 2015 and pastored churches in other regions and nationally responded to Alexander's (2010) observation of "relative quiet" on the issue of mass incarceration. Almost 10 years after the publication of *The New Jim Crow* and with steady reform at the state and national levels, there is still no cogent or robust campaign akin to the civil



rights movement, the movement to preserve affirmative action, or the Black Lives Matter movement to address the issue of mass incarceration. Further research is needed to answer the question: why not? (Alexander, 2010, p. 224).

8. Research is needed to understand why there isn't a broad-based social movement to end mass criminalization in the United States.

The study of the impact of *The New Jim Crow* on Black pastors' responses to the charge of complacency and subsequent efforts made to address mass incarceration in the United States answered the following research questions:

1. How did Black church pastors respond to Michelle Alexander's observation of a "relative silence" among civil rights organizations on the issue of mass incarceration in the United States after studying *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in Age of Colorblindness* between 2012 and 2015?
2. What factors influenced Black church pastors' actions to address the crisis of mass incarceration documented by Michelle Alexander in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* in the United States between 2012 and 2015?

The discussion of the results of this research study focuses on the seven major findings. The seven findings are indicative of the essence of the experiences as described by the research participants (Creswell, 2014).

**Black pastors' overall description of their responses to *The New Jim Crow*.**

Overall, Black pastors described *The New Jim Crow* as having a significant impact on activism and advocacy to address the mass incarceration problem in the United States.

The book provided pastors with the language they needed to engage in focused advocacy efforts with church members and with local policymakers and to rely on Black Christian values and the tradition of Black church activism, specifically the civil rights struggles of the 1960s to frame their advocacy efforts subsequent to studying the book.

**Major Finding 1: Impact on understanding.** *The New Jim Crow* shed light on the myriad ways in which the war on drugs and mass incarceration were impacting the Black community in general and specifically Black men. Pastors knew that incarceration was a problem in their local community but Alexander (2010) connected the dots between slavery and Jim Crow laws in the southern United States and the local and national problem.

**Major Finding 2: Awareness.** Overwhelmingly pastors described the clear connections Alexander (2010) made between the forms of oppression in the United States, specifically the connection between slavery, the old Jim Crow and imprisonment mostly of Black men. Additionally, pastors described their revelation at the power wielded by judges and prosecutors in the criminal justice system. Pastors also described the lackluster role of the Black church on the issue of mass incarceration and noted that the church should be a welcoming place for those who had experienced incarceration and shared the following: marginalizing the formerly incarcerated was contrary to the call from Jesus to look after those that are less fortunate in the community.

**Major Finding 3: Developing a plan to address mass incarceration in their local communities.** All 11 pastors described the goals they developed after studying *The New Jim Crow*. Pastors' goals ranged from showing up at court houses to support community members who had been arrested or involved in the criminal justice system to

organizing events with city and state legislators and devising ways to educate congregants of their rights as well as the severity of the problem of mass incarceration in the United States, especially congregants with family members of individuals impacted by crime, criminalization, and incarceration.

**Major Finding 4: The inspiration to prioritize mass incarceration as an advocacy issue.** In several instances, pastors noted the role religious beliefs played in shaping their positions as advocates, specifically the New Testament and the gospel of Jesus. Moreover, pastors described the sheer scope of the problem of mass incarceration as described by Alexander (2010) in *The New Jim Crow* and the impact of incarceration on the African American community. Additionally, the civil rights movement and the leadership and advocacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Black church were factors in guiding pastors' actions on mass incarceration and in working to end the racial, social, and economic oppression of Black people in the United States.

**Major Finding 5: Eliminating obstacles to effective advocacy response.** Pastors described the barriers to effective engagement within respective congregations and in the communities in which churches were located. They identified the following obstacles: perceptions within the African American community on criminality, stigma against those who are currently incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals, and the lack of information on most effective strategies to challenge the systems of social and racial control. Additionally, pastors shared the belief that mass incarceration was not a priority issue for church members due to “myriad of issues facing the Black community including, high unemployment rates and homelessness” (Pastor 4).

**Major Finding 6: Beliefs and attitudes as factors that guided advocacy**

**efforts.** The prevailing values that guided Black pastors' advocacy actions was the ministry of Jesus and the New Testament. Specific biblical texts served as the foundation on which they built their advocacy efforts. Pastors described their beliefs on what they considered the work of a Christian and what it means to be Black and Christian and by living up to the ideals of Jesus's ministry. To be a Black pastor means "looking out for the dispossessed and the disinherited; the lost and the lonely; the least of those among us; the incarcerated and the drug addicted in local communities." (Pastor 9)

**Major Finding 7: Where do we go from here? The vision for the Black**

**church in ending mass incarceration.** Research participants see the Black church as the harbinger of social justice and racial justice in the African American community. This recognition reckons the Black church to play a greater leadership role in calling for an end to the system of mass incarceration in the United States. The Black church is an institution that emerged out of slavery and played an organizing and mobilization role in the triumphed over Jim Crow and segregation and in the Southern United States. The Black church continues to play a pivotal role as the social center in many African American communities where pastors adhere to and is committed to an ethic of Black theology and integrated piety and protest (Warnock, 2014).

In general, the research study showed that Black pastors responded to Alexander's (2010) observation of "relative quiet" after studying *The New Jim Crow* by starting conversations among key stakeholders in the community and with respective congregations and by taking action to address mass incarceration. Pastors' actions ranged from engaging in local advocacy efforts to reform local jails and ending money

bail, voting rights reform, showing up at local courthouses to support individuals involved in the criminal justice system, advocating for criminal justice reform at the federal level, and educating church members on the problem of mass incarceration including the creation of prison ministries within the church and strategizing ways to curb the power of judges and prosecutors in the criminal justice system. Michelle Alexander's book served as a reminder to Black pastors of the church's tradition of civic engagement and struggle on behalf of Black people in the United States. The need to recall and reclaim that sacred memory in service to those that have been stigmatized and marginalized in this new caste system, that is the new Jim Crow as described by Alexander.

**Unexpected Finding 1.** Four of the 11 pastors self-identified as being formerly incarcerated or criminalized. Their criminal justice involvement ranged from spending time in jail to serving 14 years in state prison. This finding was unexpected because there were no interview questions that yielded this response. Also, other pastors may have spent time in jail or prison or had a felony conviction and chose not to disclose their criminal justice status.

**Unexpected Finding 2.** Pastors expressed concerns related to the negative impact of incarceration on the African American community and specifically on Black men. In reference to Interview Question 1 regarding the impact of *The New Jim Crow* on Black pastors understanding of mass incarceration, there was no mention of righteous indignation as it relates to the plight of Black women and men involved in the criminal justice system and the collateral consequences associated with a jail, prison or felony conviction. This finding was unexpected because pastors identified the Social Gospel

and Jesus's teaching to protect and defend the "least of these" among us as a value guiding their advocacy actions to end mass incarceration.

**Unexpected Finding 3.** Alexander (2010) focused on the impact of the war on drugs and mass incarceration on the African American community and specifically on Black men. In describing the impact of incarceration on the African American community there was no mention of incarcerated Black women and girls. Data from a report released by The Sentencing Project (2016) show that a Black woman has a one in 18 chance of being incarcerated compared to a one in 111 chance for White women. This finding was unexpected because pastors spoke about being alarmed at the impact of incarceration on the African American community and the plight of Black men and did not mention the negative impact of incarceration on Black women.

**The impact of *The New Jim Crow* on Black pastors' advocacy actions.** *The New Jim Crow* impacted Black pastors' actions by creating a space to reflect on the challenges that still exist among Black churchgoers and in the Black community in general. Barriers identified were the focus of Black churches on saving souls versus healing and repairing communities damaged by economic disinvestment, social neglect, and over criminalization and the stigma and negative perception associated with criminalization. These barriers serve to stymie action on criminal justice reform.

In a critical and poignant examination of Black theology in general and the work of Black theologian James Cone, Warnock (2014) posited that the role of the Black church is to stand in solidarity with the marginalized. Warnock recognized the chasm that exists between Black theology and the Black church and suggested that this gap could be bridged by integrating the function of piety and the necessity for protest.

Warnock advanced his argument, “if the black church is to strengthen and maintain its prophetic voice, it must ask itself, ‘what does that basic liberationist trajectory mean today for both the American churches and the American nation?’” (p. 143). This question posited by Warnock is part of a bigger question on the mission of the Black church and the role of Black pastors in implementing that mission. In answering the question on the mission of the Black church, Warnock (2014) opined, “part of what the Black church needs is a deeper understanding of the relationship between the ministry of social activism, embodied in the civil rights movement, and the reality of a liberationist faith rooted not only in the Black church’s history but in scripture” (p. 177).

The research findings revealed the need for Black pastors to be more intentional in engaging church members in the struggle for criminal justice reform. Black pastors must develop strategic actions to achieve racial justice and to shape a vision that leads to thriving Black communities. The research findings suggest that the prioritization of mass incarceration on the Black church agenda is urgent. If this 21<sup>st</sup> century civil rights issue remains at the bottom of the Black church’s freedom and justice agenda—racial injustice, mass incarceration, and the Exodus motif will remain a constant in the struggle for Black liberation in the United States. Mass incarceration and overcriminalization will become yet another river that the Black community will have to cross to reach the Promised Land—Black liberation. As Warnock (2014) in a challenge to the Black church argued:

A sustained conversation among black theologians and black pastors regarding the social circumstances and contradictions that cry out today for critical reflection on the central issues of human life is well overdue. Among them are a politically motivated and profit-driven prison-industrial complex, HIV/AIDS,

drug addiction and the so-called war on drugs, homelessness, glaring racial and class disparities in public education, and the stresses on millions of families trying to survive without a living wage. If the black church will not give itself over to this work, then it will prove that it is indeed has lost sight of its liberating heritage and reason for being. And if so, it deserves to die. (p. 187)

Finally, the research findings from this study show that *The New Jim Crow* had a significant impact on Black church advocacy by providing Black pastors with the tools (data, narratives) they need to advocate at the local and national level for criminal justice reform. Alexander's (2010) book allowed Black pastors to lean into their Black faith tradition of social justice and civic engagement to propel this advocacy work forward.

*The New Jim Crow* highlighted the crisis of incarceration and provided opportunities for Black pastors to practice their Black Christian faith rooted in and sustained by the Gospel of Jesus in the New Testament. Recognizing the need for ongoing engagement with Black pastors using *The New Jim Crow* as an important text on mass incarceration, the following four recommendations are made:

1. Given the scope of the problem of mass incarceration and the important role that the Black church and Black pastors can play in advocating to end mass incarceration, there is a need for more intentional and strategic engagement between criminalized individuals, criminal justice reformers, and Black church pastors.
2. Leaders within the criminal justice field, in collaboration with Black pastors, must engage in a process that leads to the development of a shared vision, goal, plan, and metrics for ending mass incarceration. The research findings



reveal that Black pastors have been unable to accurately measure the impact and effectiveness of their advocacy efforts to end mass incarceration.

3. Black pastors view the issue of stigmatization of criminalized individuals and the perception that individuals involved in the criminal justice system are deserving of their criminalization and subsequent collateral consequences as barriers to effective advocacy to end mass incarceration. As a result, Black pastors and Black theologians should find ways to develop narratives that are rooted in care, compassion and reparatory justice.
4. The research findings show that there is a lack of serious engagement between Black pastors and Black families impacted by incarceration. To fully and effectively address the problem of mass incarceration and its negative impact on Black communities in general and specifically Black men, there must be a serious attempt made to make Black churches a welcoming place for those impacted by the criminal justice system. The Black church should serve as an oasis for those seeking refuge from marginalization and mass incarceration.

## **Conclusion**

Race-based criminalization in the United States has emerged as a major racial justice, civil rights, and human rights issue. Criminalization as a form of racialized social control has been well-documented by legal scholars such as Alexander (2010) in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. This overreliance on the criminal justice system is wreaking social and economic havoc on Black communities. However, the overcriminalization of mostly African Americans women

and men is an issue that is yet to engender widespread public outcry from within and outside of the Black community.

An indictment of the Black church for its failure to notice that one million individuals were removed from the Black community is in order. How could the institution that is considered the “social center” not notice that its “center” was not holding and that things were falling apart socially and economically for Black families? The fact that the Black church has remained silent on the issue of mass criminalization for more than four decades is concerning. This silence in many ways facilitates and supports the moral vacuum that currently exists on the mass incarceration issue and perpetuates the stigma and negative perception that persist of criminalized individuals. This silence is prevalent, despite the Black church being viewed as the vanguard of social justice in the African American community because of its past civil rights work on behalf of oppressed and marginalized African Americans in the United States.

The Black church is heralded for its role in ending legal segregation in the southern United States with leadership provided by Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the 1960s but as Warnock (2014) posited, many Black pastors in the 1960s were inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., but were less inspired by the call to engage in social transformation of the communities in which they serve. This lack of commitment to protest on this 21<sup>st</sup> century civil rights issue is akin to the church’s reluctance to fully engage in civil rights struggle in the 1960s.

Despite being a relevant and influential social institution in the Black community, Black pastors interviewed for this study were overwhelmingly unaware of the magnitude of the overincarceration problem at the state and national levels. How could this be?

One possible reason for this lack of awareness on the part of Black pastors on social justice issues in their communities and specifically the mass incarceration problem is rooted in the assumption that the Black church as a collective is the eyes and ears of the Black community. However, the lack of awareness or failure to acknowledge a crisis as daunting as mass incarceration, unfolding in its own backyard, is an indication that the assumptions of the true role of the Black church in the Black community must be re-examined.

Working to end mass incarceration in the United States cannot be episodic. If criminal justice advocates working to end the new Jim Crow are looking to the Black church for leadership and support, they must be willing to challenge prevailing assumptions of the role Black pastors actually play in the communities in which their churches are located and cannot use the civil rights movement and the activism of a few Black pastors as a guide. The civil rights movement of the 1960s had a visible and vocal leader whose life was deeply grounded and motivated by Black church preaching and practice.

Dr. King's leadership on civil rights issues, while supported by a few pastors, cannot be misconstrued as collective Black church leadership. Dr. King as the messenger and leader who achieved civil and human rights for African Americans is historic and socially transformative on its own and Black churchgoers who followed his leadership with or without their pastors can provide much-needed lessons on what can be done today to address the mass criminalization crisis plaguing African American communities.

Based on observations from the civil rights movement, it is clear that to end mass incarceration, the messenger matters. Therefore, Black church pastors must identify

ways to join in solidarity with the members in their pews who have experienced incarceration or who are involved in the criminal justice system. There are lessons from the civil rights era on what a movement with the right messenger and a cadre of leaders that emerged from the depths of oppression can do to transform a social enigma such a race-based criminalization.

Although, Black pastors and theologians identify the ministry of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as a pivotal moment in Black church activism (Cone, 2011), there has been insufficient reflection on the mistakes that should not be repeated. Therefore, it begs the following question: Is the prevailing silence of the Black church on the issue of mass incarceration consistent with Black church practice on racial justice and civil rights issues—absent a visible and vocal messenger. A leader from within the Black church who is rooted in Black church culture—and is supported by churchgoers who self-identify as being impacted by social conditions they are working to address in their respective communities.

If that is the case, there is a lot of work ahead in getting Black pastors to be in solidarity with the people in the pews who are impacted by criminalization. A movement to end mass incarceration that is fully supported by the Black church will only happen when there is an intentional and strategic commitment to unveil the mass that is mass incarceration by asking the following questions and actively listen for answers: Who are the two million plus men and women behind bars? What are their names? Where do they call home? Who are their family members and what would coming home look like for these men and women? How are they going to be welcome back into the community

and into the churches? And what is the role of the Black church as a collective, with or without a leading messenger in working to end mass incarceration?

Until these questions are addressed and the Black church creates space to reflect on its role in civil rights movements of the past and with a goal of identifying mistakes and missteps, the silence that Alexander (2010) observed in *The New Jim Crow* and the moral vacuum and lack of moral leadership that currently exist on the mass incarceration issue will continue. And sadly, millions of African American men and women will continue to be saddled with long prison sentences and felony convictions and the Black community will continue to fall apart socially and economically while the Black church holds on to the illusion that the social center is intact.

The Black church in general and Black pastors specifically have played a crucial role in disrupting systems of oppression against Black people in United States beginning in the antebellum South and the invisible institution—slavery (Warnock, 2014). Alexander's charge to the civil rights community and the Black church is to spark a conversation on mass incarceration that would ignite a movement akin the civil rights movements of 1960s.

Scholar Anthony Pinn (2002), writing on the Black church in the post-civil rights era, noted:

Although the Black church has faltered on its promise to address the needs of Black Americans during much of the early twentieth century, it had during the civil rights movement emerged as a vital factor in the socio-political and economic life of the United States. (p. 17)

Pinn (2002) opined that “the Black church provided the ‘foot soldiers’ for this battle and in this way made a claim for being a place of power both within the Black community and as the Black community’s representative in the White society” (p. 17).

Recognizing the essential role of the Black church in Black life in the United States as a civil rights institution, Alexander (2010) alluded to the “relative quiet of civil rights organizations on the mass incarceration issue” (p. 224). This lack of social action on the part of the Black church is contrary to its history “as one of the strongest institutions for social reform within Black communities” (Pinn, 2002, p. 17). Pinn (2002) continued, “church members of past struggles and movements for racial justice have used the history and insights of this institution to act in the world” (Pinn, 2002, p. 17). Pinn stated further “that within the Black church, salvation is linked to new conduct, and this new conduct has consequences with respect to activism. In other words, Black Christians argue that people “are saved to serve” (Pinn, 2013, p. 43).

Black pastors who lead predominantly Black churches located in communities disproportionately impacted by mass incarceration are acutely aware of their responsibility to act on behalf of the individuals and families affected by the problem of criminalization and incarceration. The charge comes from two distinct sources: the first is the gospel in the New Testament and the second is the liberationist past that forged and shaped the emergence of the Black church including slavery, Jim Crow, and the civil rights movement (Warnock, 2014). In addition, the Old Testament plays a role in how Black pastors respond to injustice. Pinn (2013) posited “a prime example of this is presented by Martin Luther King, Jr. in explaining the spread of the struggle for civil

rights by reference to the spread of God's message through biblical prophets and apostles" (p. 43). Pinn (2013) cites the following statement by Dr. Martin Luther King:

I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the prophets of the eight century B.C left their villages and carried their "thus saith the Lord" far beyond the boundaries of their hometowns, and just as the Apostle Paul left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of the Greco-Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own hometown. Like Paul, I must constantly respond to the Macedonia call for aid (Pinn, 2013, p. 43).

*The New Jim Crow* has had an impact on Black pastors' ability to fluently discuss the disproportionate impact of mass incarceration and the war on drugs to their congregants and the broader community. Additionally, they were able to share information with local policy makers. This action could be evidence that if and when the Black church in general and Black pastors in particular are engaged, motivated, and informed about issues negatively affecting Black life, they can be a powerful and effective ally in the quest for justice.

In pondering Alexander's (2010) observation of complacency within the civil rights community and the Black community on the issue of mass incarceration, one is forced to reason whether Black theologian West's (2017) observation of a crisis in Black leadership is a serious consideration in assessing the slow response from the Black church on *The New Jim Crow*. West observed:

The crisis in Black leadership can be remedied only if we candidly confront its existence. We need national forums to reflect, discuss, and plan how best to

respond. It is neither a matter of a new messiah figure emerging, nor of another organization appearing on the scene. Rather, it is a matter of grasping the structural and institutional processes that have disfigured, deformed, and devastated Black America such that resources for nurturing collective and critical consciousness, moral commitment, and courageous engagement are vastly underdeveloped. We need serious strategic and tactical thinking about to create new models of leadership and forge the kind of persons to actualize these models. (p. 45)

This research study revealed that slow Black church leadership response on the issue of race-based criminalization—plus, barriers to effective advocacy actions including the negative perception of incarceration and individuals that are incarcerated—must be addressed if the Black church led by its most active and motivated pastors seeks to end mass incarceration. In addition, other barriers to effective engagement include the focus on saving souls versus saving the community, the growth of prosperity gospel ministries rooted in individualism, and the stigma associated with drug use and subsistence drug selling that currently shape churches' response to the mass incarceration problem. To be effective advocates on the issue of ending the new Jim Crow, the Black church must confront and address those issues.

Despite these barriers there is a vision and roadmap identified by Black pastors. This vision summons Black church leaders to play a leadership role in ending *The New Jim Crow*. The road map is guided by the activist past of the Black church, most importantly the work of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the civil rights movement. Black pastors see the church as playing a pivotal role in informing



congregants as well as the broader community on the issues of mass incarceration and criminalization of Black men.

Similarly, the Black church and its leaders must seize the opportunity to embrace and practice the Black Christian faith by preaching and practicing the gospel of Jesus using New Testament texts that speak to the prioritization of the poor, the marginalized, and the imprisoned. Pastors see an opportunity to connect the Old Testament's Exodus story to the current plight of Black men and women in prisons today and to construct a narrative based on the following themes: bondage, justice, and freedom.

Mass incarceration as the new Jim Crow is also testament to how deeply rooted racism is in the United States. Today, one manifestation of racism is as a form of racial control via the criminal justice system over mostly Black men and women throughout the United States (Alexander, 2010). Therefore, the actions of the Black church must be consistent. Ending mass incarceration in the United States will require a sustained effort that involves not just Black pastors, Black theologians, and criminal justice advocates but this work must have at the center individuals who are currently incarcerated, formerly incarcerated persons, individuals with felony convictions, past and active drug users, violent and nonviolent offenders, as well as family members and supporters.

To do otherwise is myopic and will only position the Black community to confront future iterations of racial oppression akin to the new Jim Crow. This movement to end mass incarceration and in many ways dismantle the prison industrial complex must emerge from the pews with intentional and strategic support from the pulpit and with Black theologians providing the theological clarity to fight 21<sup>st</sup> century powers and

principalities. Ultimately disrupting the silence and filling the moral vacuum that currently exist on criminal justice reform.

Black pastors—Black and Christian—have the moral authority to change the narrative on what it means to be Black and to be labeled a criminal in the United States. The Black church can disrupt the prevailing conversations on crime and criminalization—conversations guided by fear, judgment, and punishment—and dismantle current systems of control, including the criminal justice system as a form of social and racial control (Alexander, 2010). Alexander’s (2010) *The New Jim Crow* provides the blueprint for such righteous indignation and radical protest. The Black church in general and Black pastors in particular have a unique opportunity to ignite a conversation among a new generation of advocates and organizers in the spirit of Harriet Tubman, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and many Black Christians from slavery through to the civil rights era who stood up and spoke out on behalf of the oppressed and marginalized and demanded justice and liberation.

*The New Jim Crow* was a lesson on the scope and scale of mass incarceration in the United States. It provided advocates with data needed to take informed action on race-based criminalization; the language to craft narratives about the impact of incarceration on the African American community and served as a motivating factor to end this 21<sup>st</sup> century’s system of racialized social control (Alexander, 2010). More importantly, *The New Jim Crow* created an opportunity for civil rights organizations, including the Black church to echo the cry of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., (1963) and shout from the highest mountain top—for the very last time: “Free at last, Free at

last, Great God, a-mighty, We are free at last” (National Archives of the United States, 1963, p. 6).

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## Appendix A

### Prequestionnaire Survey

1. Please indicate your age range: 25–35; 36–45; 46–55; 56–65; 66–75; 76 and above.
2. Please indicate the region of the country where your church is located: Northeast, Midwest, South, Other.
3. Is your church located in a rural or urban setting?
4. What was the size of your congregation at the time you read *The New Jim Crow* (less than 50; 51–100; 101–150; 151–200; 201–250; 251–300; above 501)?
5. Is your church considered a megachurch? A megachurch is defined by the Hartford Institute as any Protestant church having 2,000 or more in average weekend attendance. (Yes; No)
6. Please indicate your church's denomination.
7. What motivated you to purchase *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*?
8. When did you read *The New Jim Crow*? \_\_ 2012, \_\_ 2013, \_\_ 2014, \_\_ 2015.
9. Please list 3–5 key takeaways from *The New Jim Crow*.
10. Please list 3–5 advocacy actions you (as a Black church leader) or your congregation took to end mass incarceration after reading *The New Jim Crow*.
11. Did you purchase a study guide to accompany the reading of *The New Jim Crow*? (Yes; No).
12. If you did purchase a study guide, please indicate the publisher of the study guide.

13. What was most helpful about *The New Jim Crow* study guide?
14. What was least helpful about *The New Jim Crow* study guide?
15. What would you change about *The New Jim Crow* study guide?
16. Did you recommend the book or study guide to your congregants? To other Black pastors? Please provide 2–3 sentences on the results of your recommendations.
17. Did you develop and preach sermons, et cetera., on the issue of *The New Jim Crow* and mass incarceration? If so, what were the theme/s or topic/s of the sermons? What biblical scripture verses guided the development of the sermon/s? What advocacy actions did you recommend to your congregation as part of your sermon?
18. Were you involved in any denominational-wide activities based on *The New Jim Crow*? If yes, please describe your engagement and outcomes/s.
19. Are you a member of a faith-based organization such as: Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, Gamaliel, PICO, American Friends and Services Committee, United Methodist Church Social Justice Initiative, or other?
20. Overall, what were your key takeaways after reading *The New Jim Crow*?
21. What are 1–2 actions you believe the Black church could take to help alleviate the problem of mass incarceration in United States?

## Appendix B

### Informed Consent to Participate in Research

**Title of study:** Black Church Advocacy and Mass Incarceration in the United States

**Name of researcher:** Yolande A. Cadore

**Faculty Supervisor:** Sr. Remigia Kushner

For further information:

[redacted phone number]

**Purpose of study:** The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to examine and understand the impact of Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* on Black church leaders' advocacy to end mass incarceration.

**Place of study:** National in scope

**Length of participation:** 60 minutes – 90 minutes

**Method(s) of data collection:** Data for this study will be collected by conducting audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions.

**Risks and benefits:** There are no anticipated risks associated with this study. As a participant in this study, you have a right to request receipt of a copy of the summary of findings from this study, upon completion of the dissertation. With your consent the interview will be digitally audio recorded. The audio recordings will be transcribed by the researcher or by a transcription service.

**Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy of subjects:** In the written dissertation, a pseudonym will be used in place of your first name. The institution you are affiliated with will be generally described by type, size, and geographical location. Your information may be shared with appropriate governmental authorities ONLY if you or someone else is in danger, or if we are required to do so by law.

**Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy of data collected:** All digital audio recordings and transcriptions of interviews will be maintained using a private, locked, and password-protected file and password-protected computer stored securely in the private home of the principal researcher. Electronic files will include assigned identity codes and pseudonyms; they will not include actual names or any information that could personally identify or connect participants to this study. Other materials, including notes or paper files related to data collection and analysis, will be stored securely in unmarked boxes, locked inside a cabinet in the private home of the principal researcher. Only the researcher will have access to electronic or paper records. The digitally recorded audio data will be kept by this researcher for a period of 5 years following publication of the dissertation. Signed informed consent documents will be kept for 5 years after publication. All paper records will be cross-cut shredded and professionally delivered for incineration. Electronic records will be cleared, purged, and destroyed from the hard drive and all devices such that restoring data is not possible.

**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 question without penalty.
4. 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

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher(s) listed above.

The Institutional Review Board of St. John Fisher College has reviewed this project. For any concerns regarding this study/or if you feel that your rights as a participant (or the rights of another participant) have been violated or caused you undue distress (physical or emotional distress), please contact Jill Rathbun by phone during normal business hours at [redacted phone number] or [redacted email address]. She will contact a supervisory IRB official to assist you.

## Appendix C

### Introduction Interview Letter

Greetings!

I hope you are doing well. My name is Yolande Cadore and I am currently a doctoral student pursuing a doctorate in Executive Leadership at the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education at St. John Fisher College. This e-mail is to kindly request your participation in my research study: [Examining Black Church Advocacy in the Era of Mass Incarceration](#). After you have completed the survey, please indicate a day and time for a Zoom interview in the coming weeks: <https://doodle.com/poll/r6sb2d244id2728h>.

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* on Black church advocacy to end mass incarceration. If you agree to participate in this study on Black church advocacy in the age of mass incarceration, you will be asked to do the following:

1. Consent to participate in this research study by completing an informed consent form.
2. Complete a prequestionnaire that will be available online via Qualtrics.
3. Consent to participate in a 60- to 90-minute recorded video interview.
4. Consent to be audio and visually recorded.

Additionally, you will 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 in the study.
2. Withdraw from participating in the study at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a question without penalty.
4. Be informed of the results of the study.

The benefits of the study include: Participants will be contributing to an important body of research on Black church capacity to engage in criminal justice reform. And, the likelihood and impact of physical and psychological harm anticipated in this research are no greater than those experienced in daily

life activities. The Institutional Review Board of St. John Fisher College has reviewed this project. For any concerns regarding this study/or if you feel that your rights as a participant (or the rights of another participant) have been violated or caused you undue distress (physical or emotional distress), please contact Jill Rathbun by phone during normal business hours at [redacted phone number] or [redacted email address]. She will contact a supervisory IRB official to assist you. Thank you so much for considering my request and I look forward to speaking with you very soon.

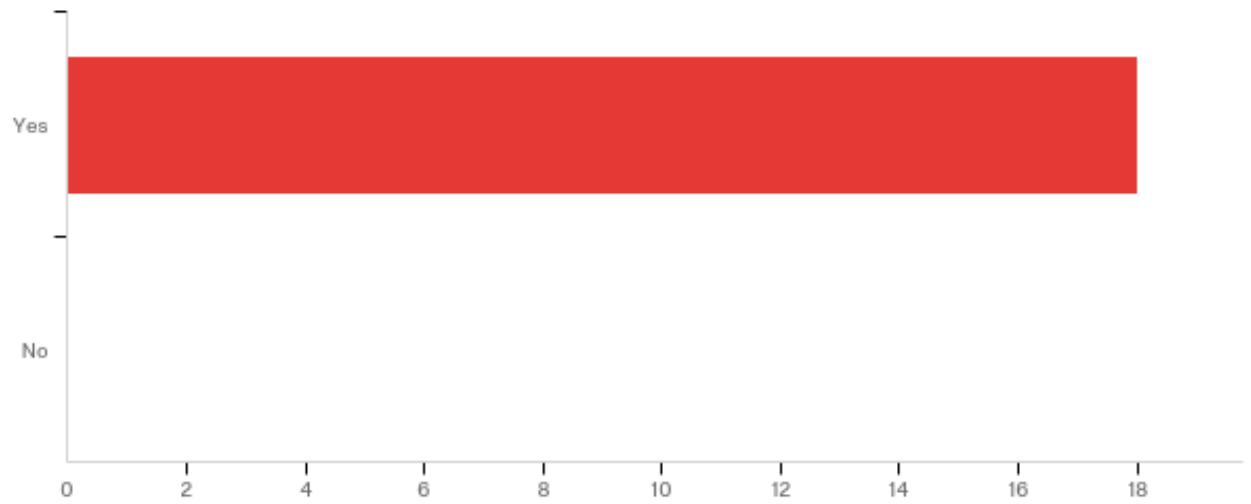
Sincerely,

Yolande Cadore

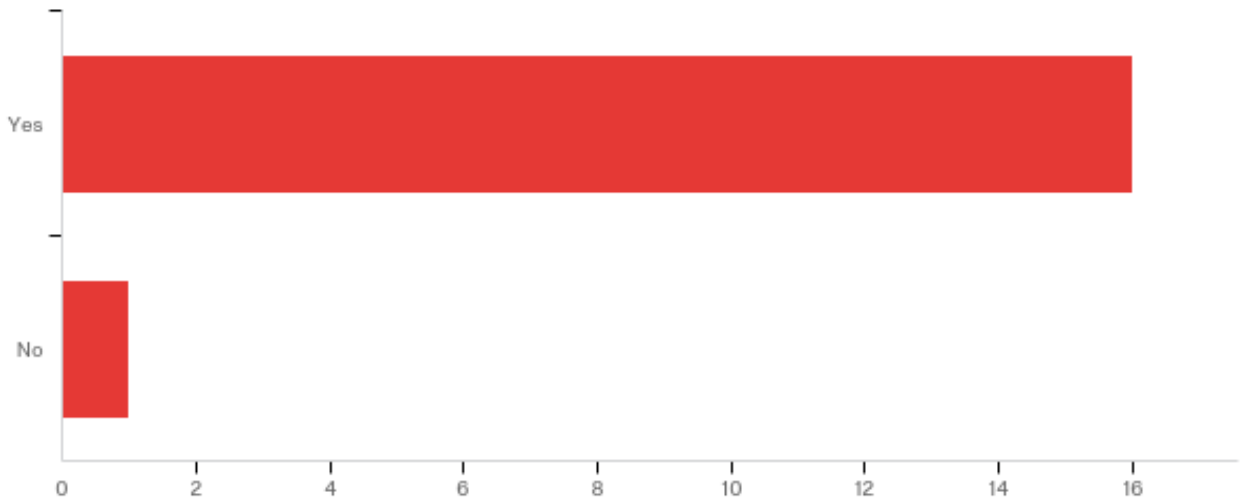
## Appendix D

### Survey Findings

Q2 - I have read the consent form and I agree to participate in the above-named study.

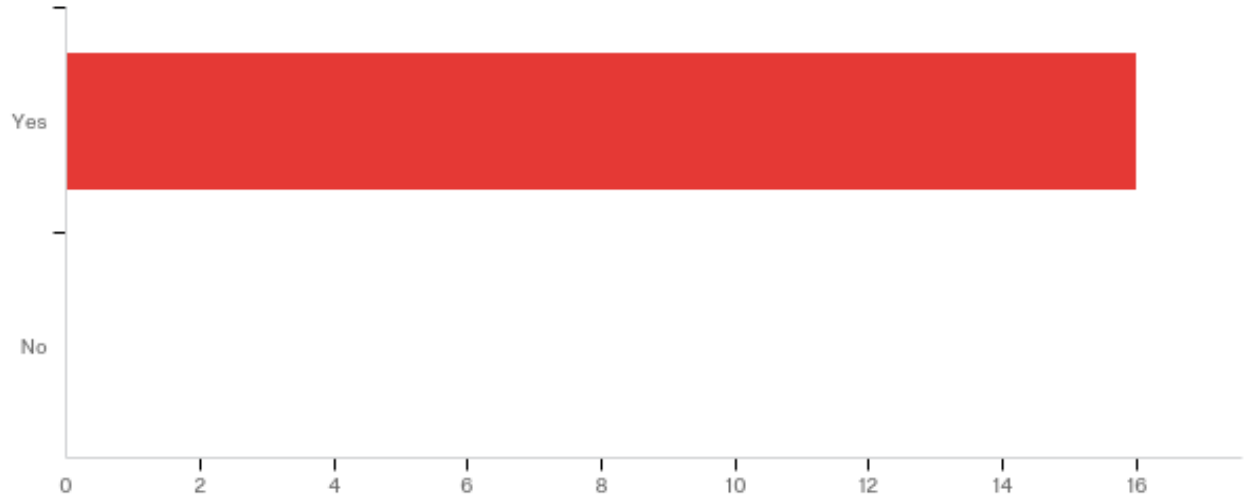


Q3 - Do you identify as Black or African American?

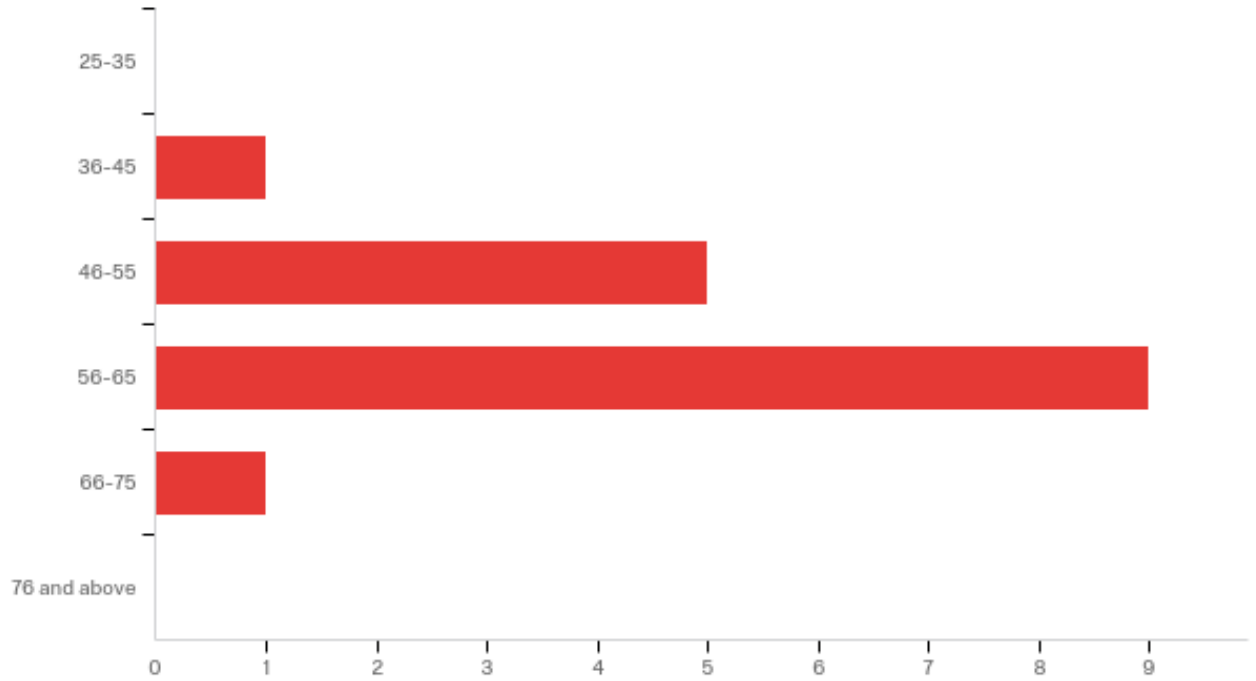




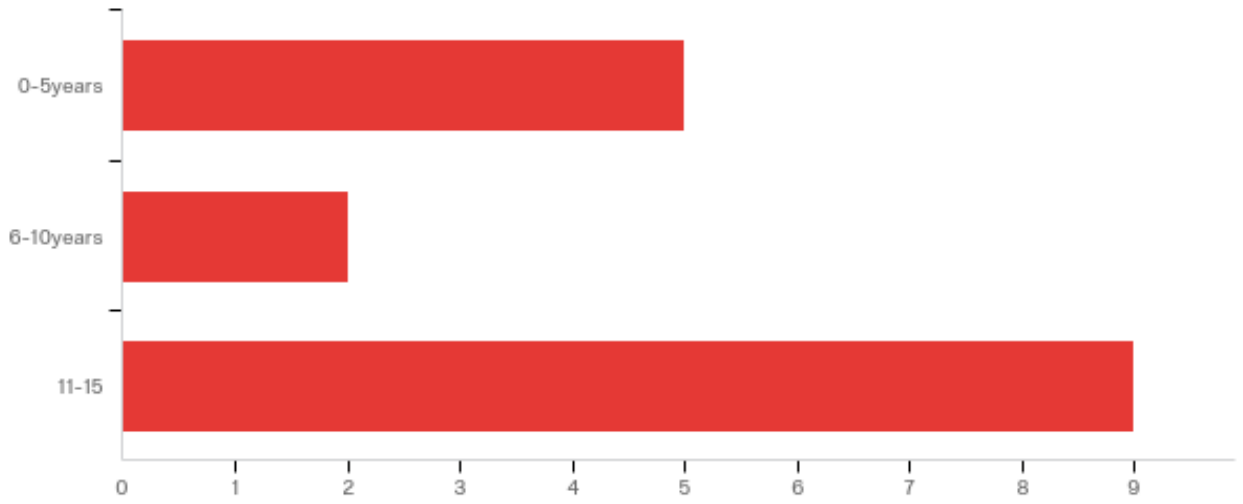
Q4 - Did you read *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*?



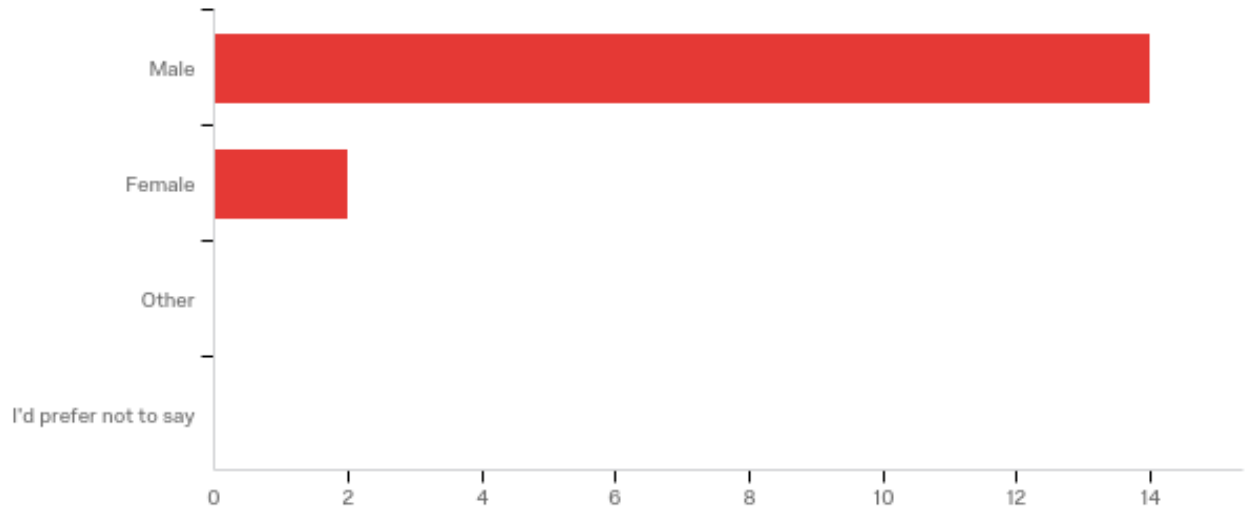
Q5 - Please indicate your age range:



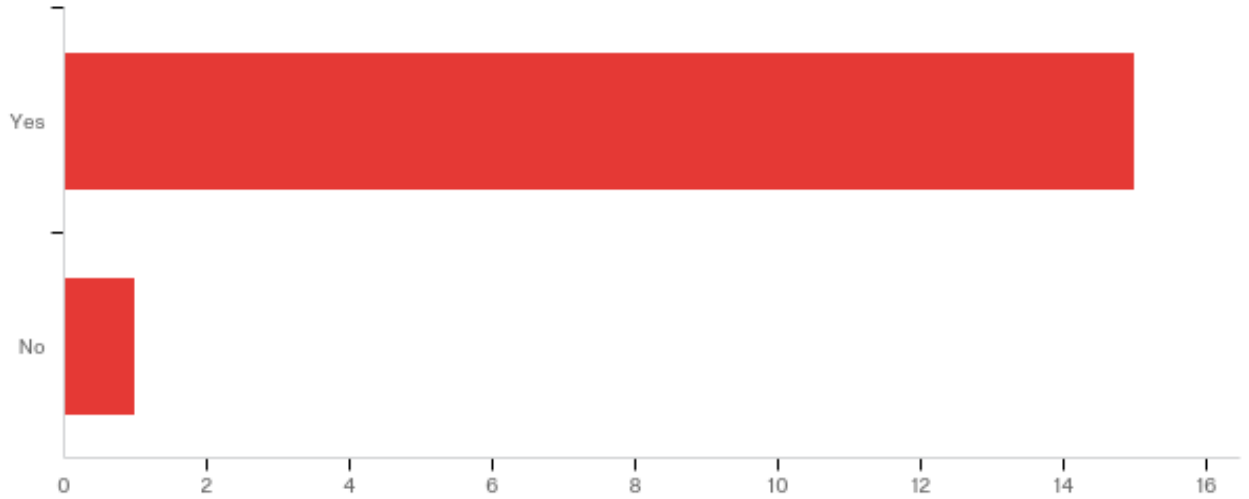
Q6 - How many years have you served as an ordained pastor of a Black church?



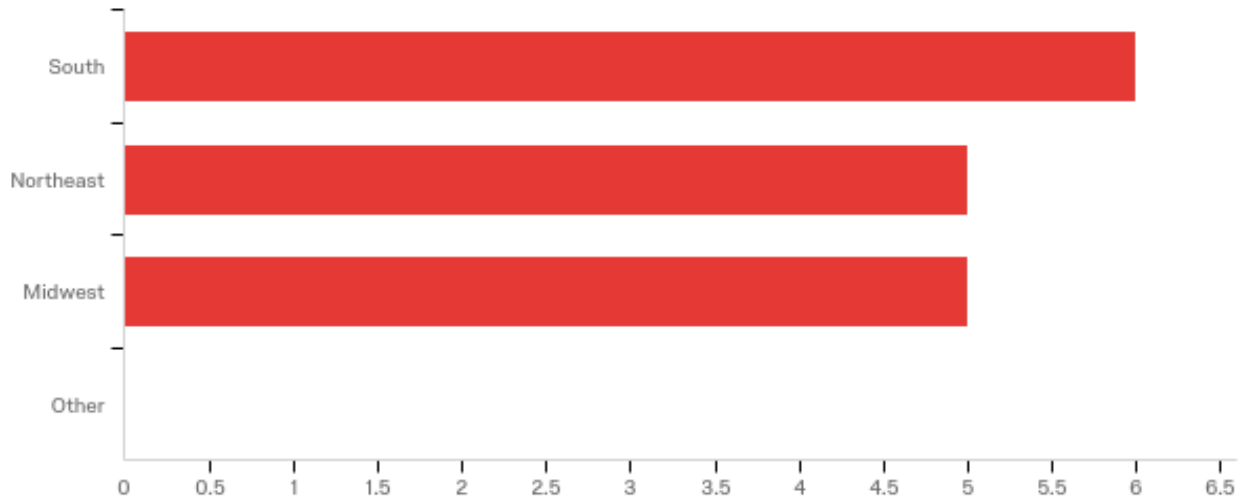
Q7 - What is your gender?



**Q8 - Are you the pastor of a Black church in one of the following regions: Northeast, Midwest, or Southern United States?**



**Q9 - Please indicate the region of the United States where your church is located.**



**Q10 - If your church is not located in the Northeast, Midwest, or Southern United States, please indicate the region of the United States where your church is located.**

South

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N/A

---

n/a

---

n/a

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Na

---

southern

South

---

Midwest

---

South

---

NA

---

Northeast

---

Midwest

---

Northeast

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Midwest

---

Northeast

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N/A

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**Q11 - Please indicate the ZIP Code in which your church is located.**

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37209

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37221

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07050

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28081

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19142

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70126

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36303

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43201

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70802

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33605

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46407

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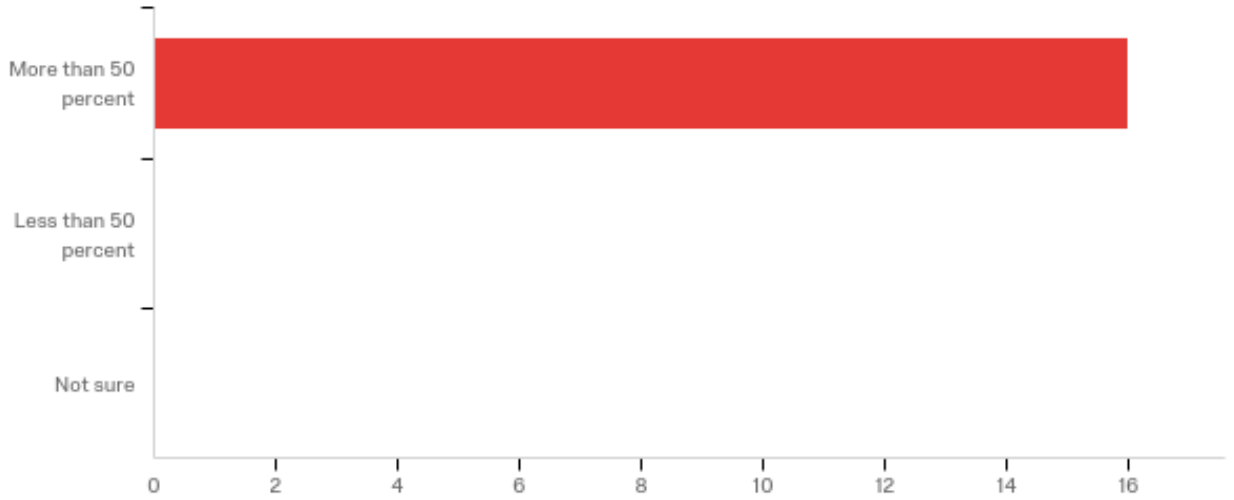
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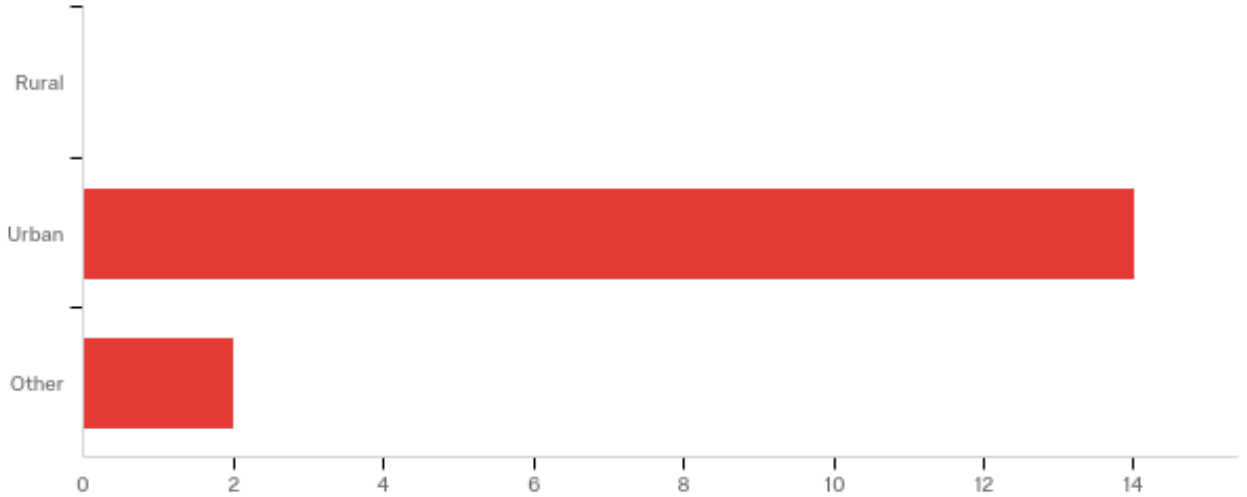
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Q12 - What percentage of your congregation identifies as Black or African American?



Q13 - Is your church located in a rural or urban setting?



Q14 - Please indicate your church's denomination.

- Interdenominational
- Disciples of Christ
- Baptist
- Baptist
- Pentecostal
- United Methodist
- Nondenominational
- Nondenominational

United Methodist

United Methodist

Methodist

UCC

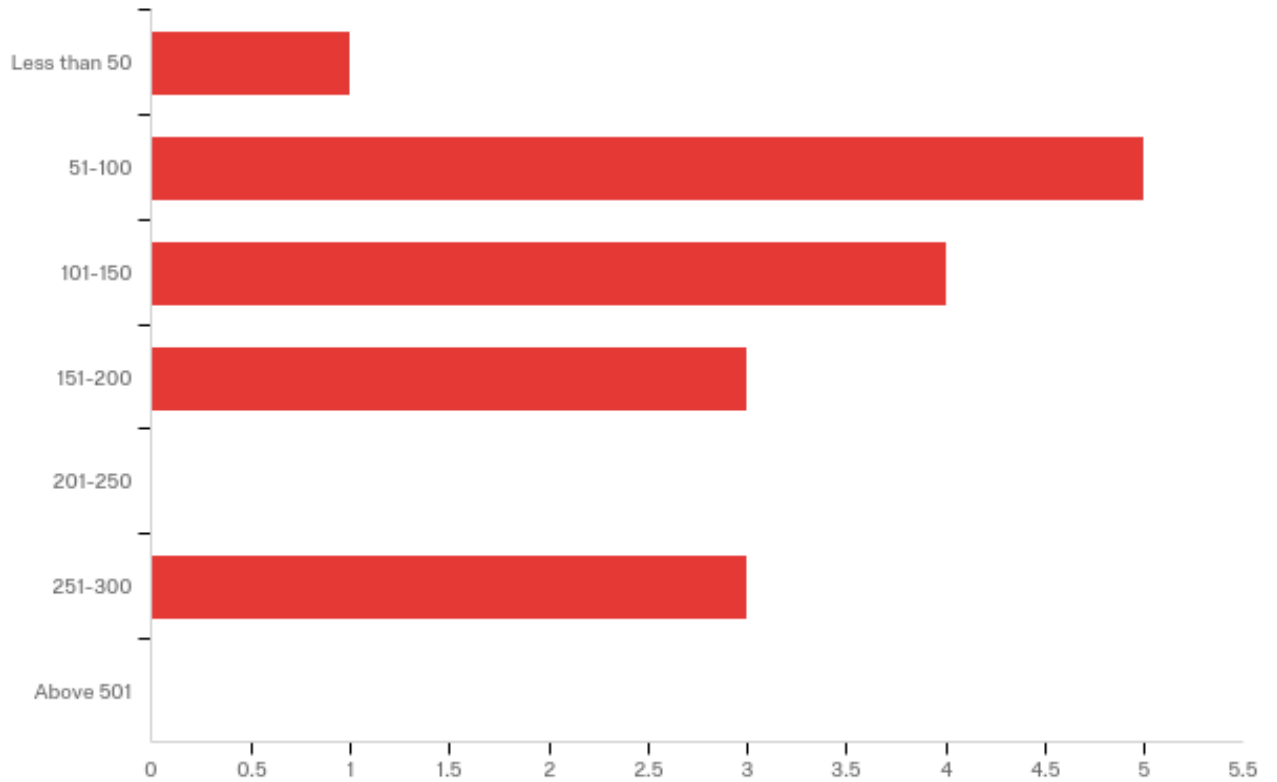
United Methodist

UCC

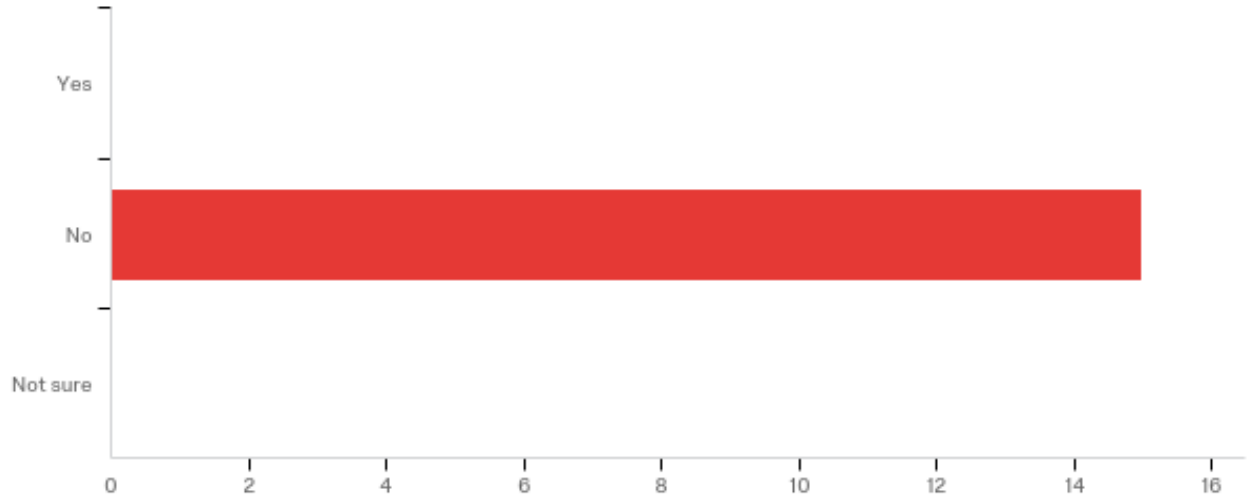
United Methodist

Baptist

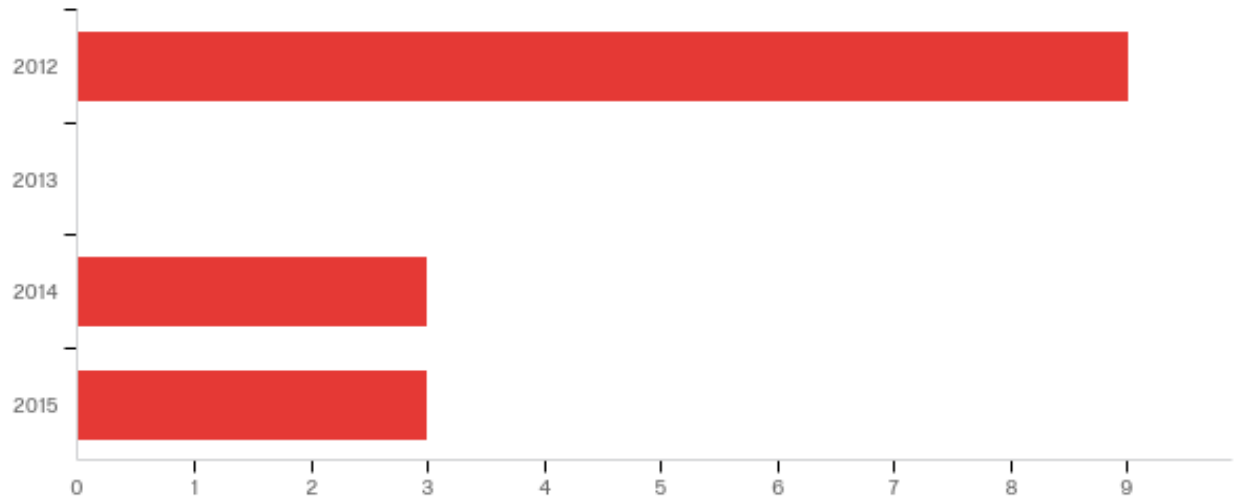
**Q15 - What was the size of your congregation at the time you read *The New Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*?**



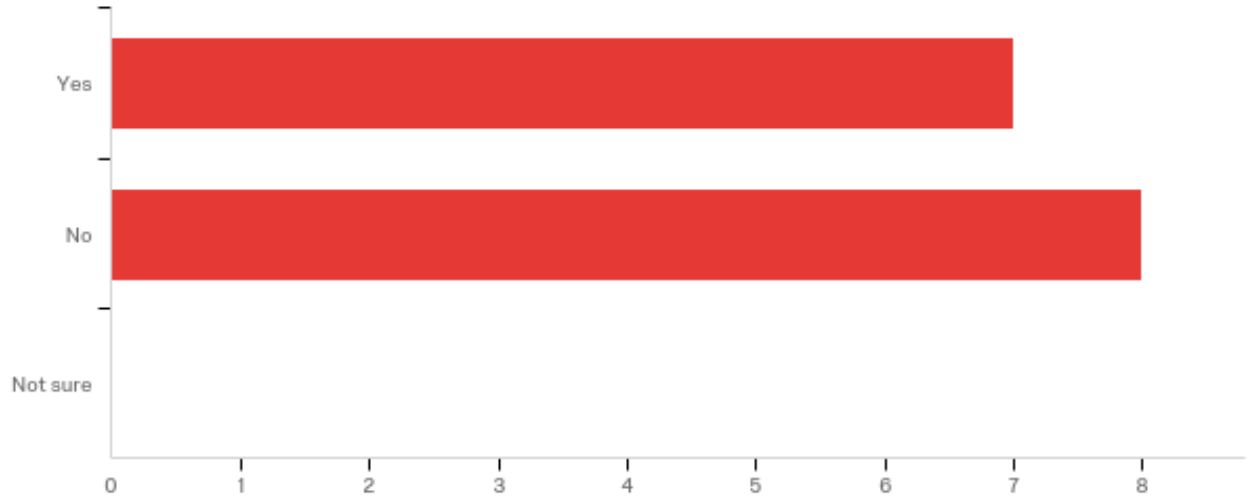
**Q16 - Is your church considered a megachurch? A megachurch is defined by the Hartford Institute as any protestant church having 2,000 or more in average weekend attendance.**



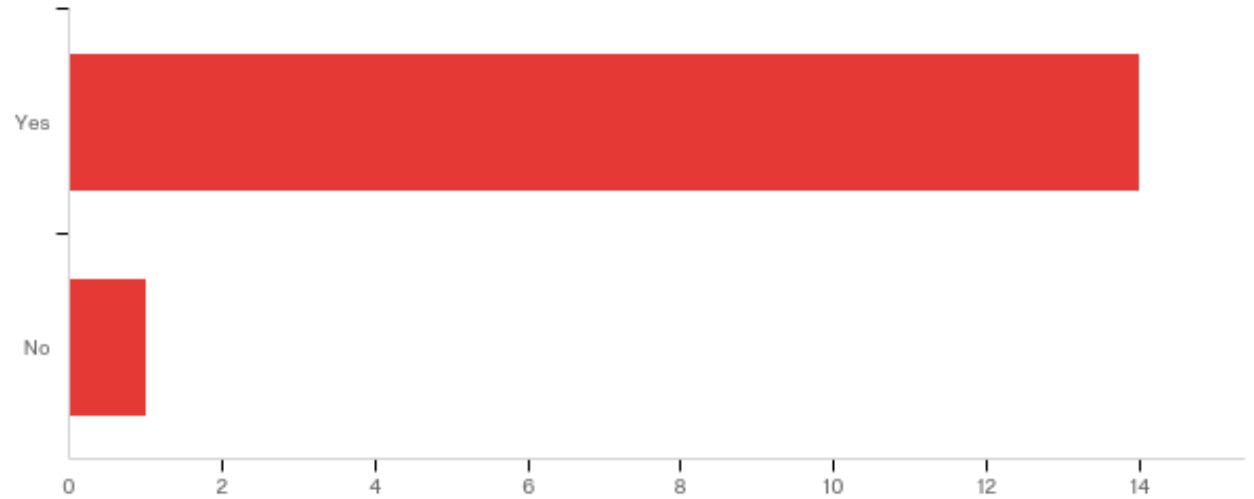
**Q17 - In which year did you read *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*?**



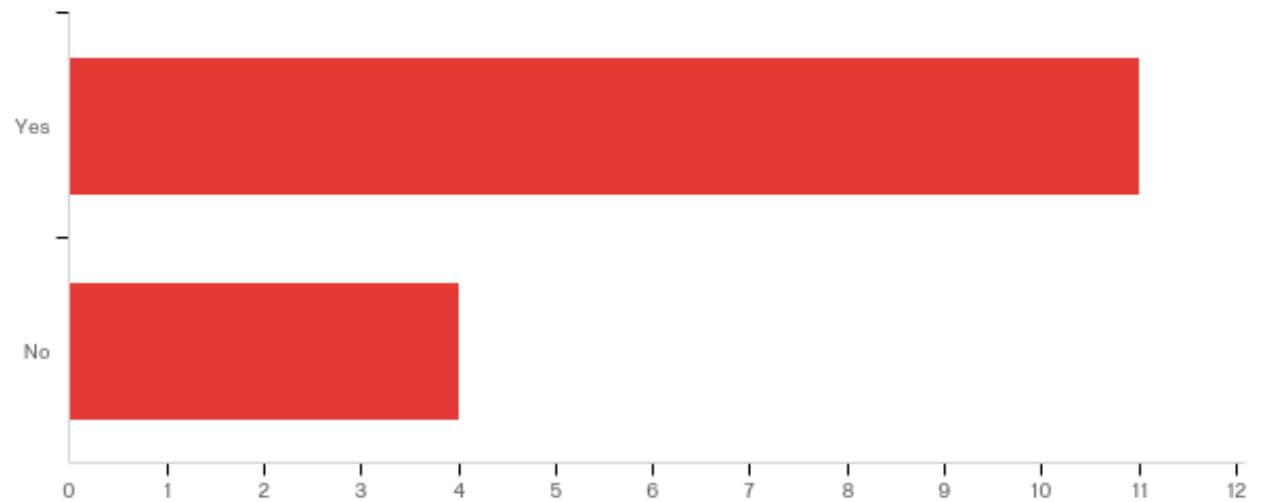
**Q18 - Did you use a study guide to accompany the reading of *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*?**



**Q19 - Did you recommend the book or study guide to your congregants? To other Black pastors?**



**Q20 - Did you develop and preach sermons, etc., on the issue of *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*?**





**Q21 - What were the theme/s or topic/s of your sermons on mass incarceration?**

Rethinking the prison industrial complex
Criminal justice; the disparity of Black folks who are incarcerated; solitary confinement; policy change
n/a
Reentry and family connectivity
who is our neighbor, church what do you see? coming home
None
The primary theme was that injustice in the justice system is real but that faith, combined with knowledge, is the way to combat it.
"Conditions that caused fear"
Justice, fairness, equality, addiction
Justice in African American communities
Deliverance from oppression
John 9:1 "As Jesus Passed, He Saw a Man." Subject: It's good to be seen
Injustice and God's justice
Misidentified, Black and Beautiful, how to overcome opposing voices, The Revolution will not be Televised
N/A

**Q22 - What biblical scripture verses guided the development of the sermon/s?**

Is. 42
Amos 5:24; Luke 4:18; Matthew 25:31–46; Isaiah 40:28–31; Galatians 3:28; II Corinthians 5:17–20
N/A
1 Samuel 30 and Philippians 5
Several
Matthew 25: 33–46
Used many from the prophets (major and minor) as well as scriptures from the Gospels which emphasize Jesus's calls for justice.
Psalms 146:7

Mark 5:1-18

The books of Amos and Micah

Exodus

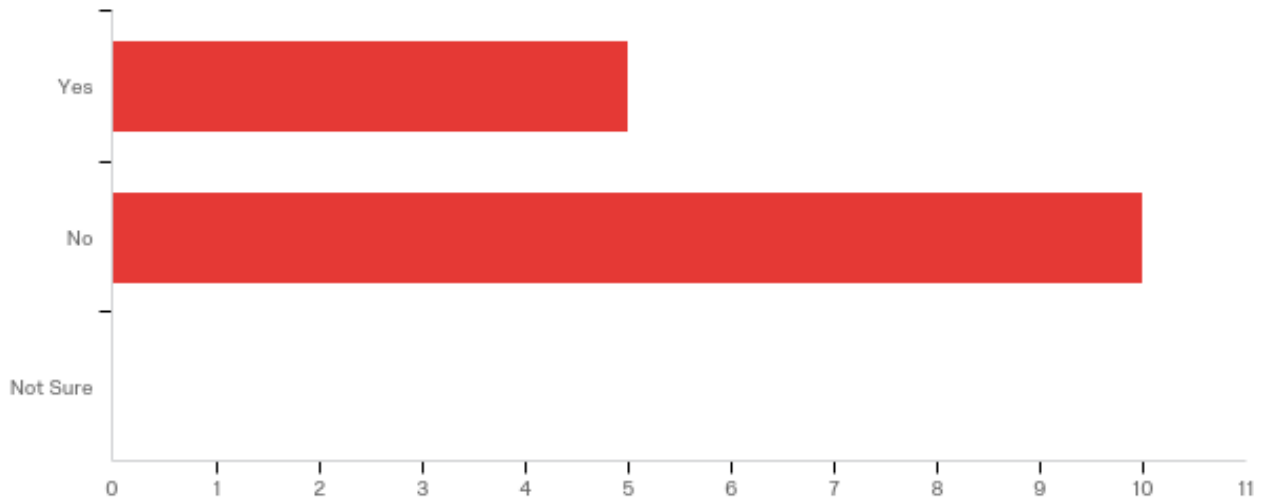
John 9:1; I've also preached using Luke 4 as a political lens from which to view Jesus's work on behalf of the incarcerated.

Exodus from slavery

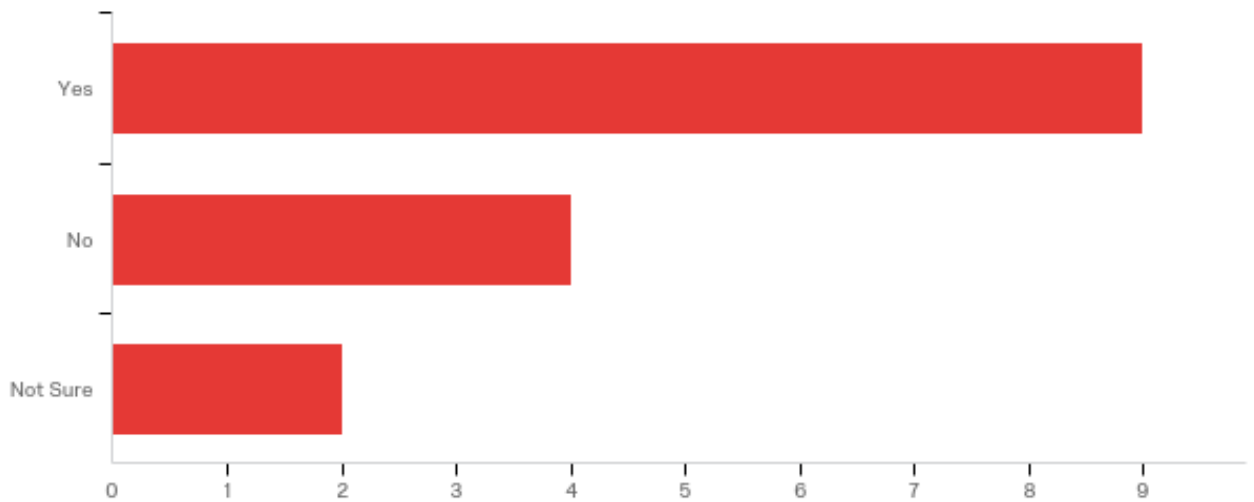
Matthew 11:12, Luke 4:18

N/A

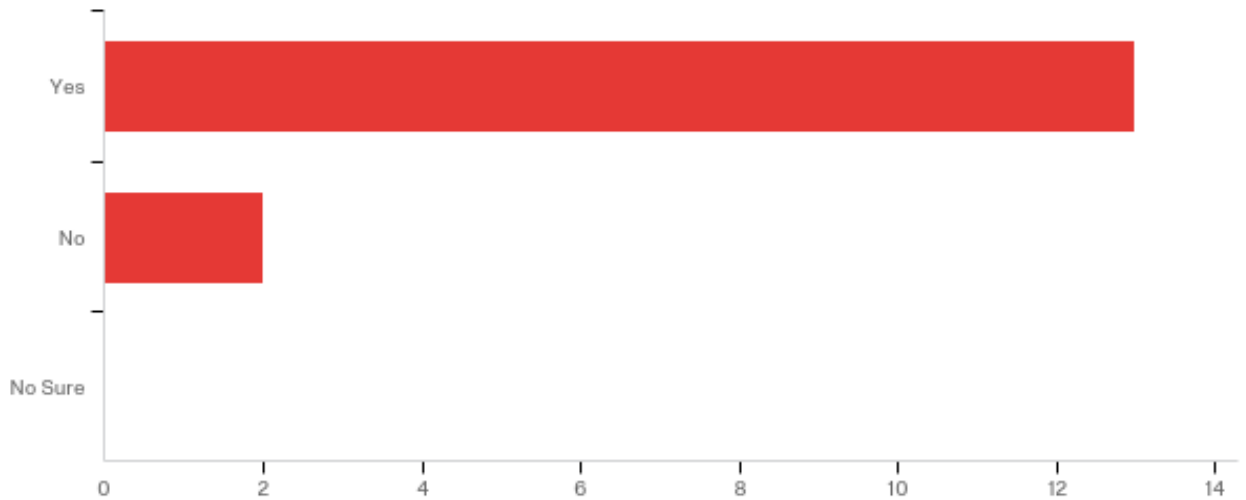
**Q23 - Were you involved in any denominational-wide activities based on reading *The New Jim Crow*?**



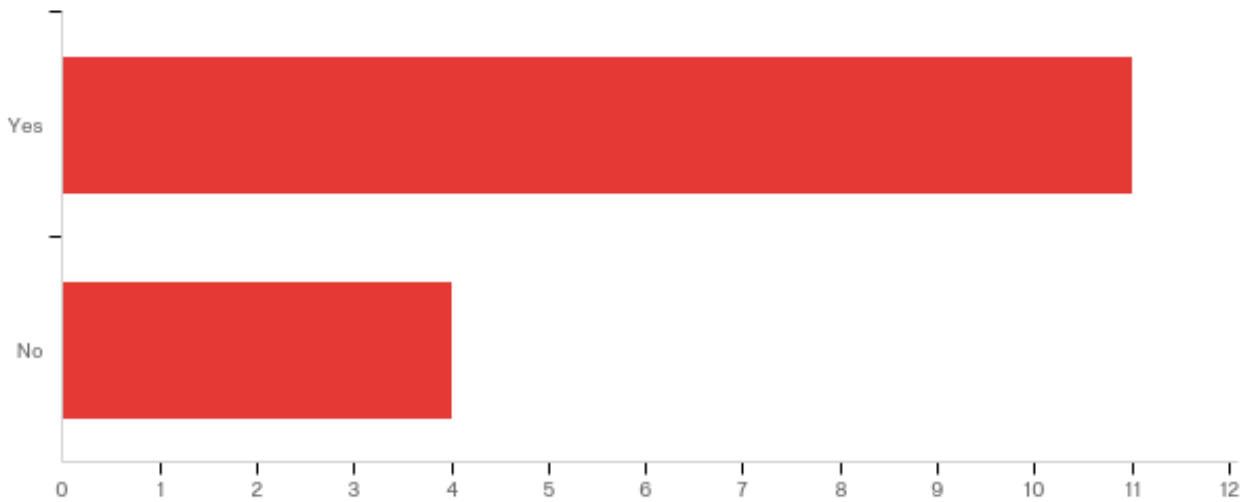
**Q24 - Did you recommend any advocacy actions to your congregation as part of the sermon?**



Q25 - Are you a member of a faith-based organization such as: Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference and Gamaliel.



Q26 - Did you engage in organizing or advocacy actions to address the issue of mass incarceration after reading *The New Jim Crow*?



Q27 - Overall, what were your key takeaways after reading *The New Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*?

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Having practiced law as a criminal defense attorney for better than 20 years before the book came out, my advocacy work predated the book. Once the book was published it made organizing around the issues raised in the book more feasible because it elevated the voices of those who had been championing the rights of prisoners and advocating for criminal justice reform much more prominently as a result of its meteoric rise.

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It was an affirmation of what I have already experienced as a Black man who has been incarcerated and a formal indictment of a system of oppression that I am called to oppose.

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How cast systems continue to be changed or restructure once the system injustices have been identified.

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That mass incarceration is a continuance of the dehumanization on Black people

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Need for overall community organizing and education

The stats

The biggest takeaway was that slavery still exists. The new plantations are prisons.

In part, it was a real timely history lesson of what happened to African American in the United States in the late eighteen hundreds. It was also a great struggle between perceived Christianity and the true love of God.

For me the real importance of Alexander's work is in her definition of mass incarceration. She identifies it as being more than just the number of bodies in our prisons and jails. Rather mass incarceration is a systemic issue that infiltrates traditions, policies, laws, and institutions. It is perpetuated by an attitude of mind and mood of the human spirit. For this reason, as she said at the 2012 convening of the Proctor Conferee, "The core challenge to ending mass incarceration is dispelling the myth that some of us are not worthy of genuine care, concern, and compassion."

Of course, the laws are disproportionately set up to incarcerate young African American men at a greater rate for petty drug charges than Whites, which also effects the education of African American young men. This also leads to socio-economic disparities.

That America has an original sin of racism and structural inequality.

The issue for people of color is urgent and that we must become more aware of the policies and behaviors of policy makers concerning justice reform in local communities. The urgency of now!

Mass incarceration is an original sin of America because of racism! Violence in the Black community has been exaggerated and over popularized by politicians and the media for profit.

There was information made available that college instructors and students did not know about. The local church is challenged to come along nonprofits, colleges to organize assisting families and persons returning to the community. The church doesn't have to lead but be willing to learn its role.

The response of the church has been woefully inadequate to the crisis of mass incarceration in our community.

**Q28 - Please share one or more collective action you believe that leaders of Black churches could take to address the issue of mass incarceration in the United States today?**

Organize to elect more conscious judges and DAs. The truth if the matter is that communities have the power to stop a good bit is the trend toward mass incarceration if they would target those elections, organize an informed public about them and move that as a single-issue agenda in local elections.

They can assist their congregations in becoming affirming and welcoming spaces for returned citizens; we can help form public sentiment in our respective congregations and we can institute worship services, conferences and such around these issues.

Continue to inform our congregation of the injustices of the criminal justice system

Hold a service in the parking lot of every correctional facility in the United States

Criminal justice reform

Voting rights

Gather more and more testimonies from individuals and families whose lives are being destroyed by mass incarceration.

Our church, [REDACTED] has taken a step to join Baton Rouge, that deals with mass incarceration across our city. Also, we are addressing the issues of mass incarceration by way of courthouse appearances, rallies and other means to help end mass incarceration in our state.

Voter registration, Souls to the Polls, Pay off fines for Amendment 4 voters in FL

Organize more interest in local elections to get some of these laws that are discriminatory in nature changed.

Education and economic development against neoliberalism

Signing on to Justice Reform Legislation, particularly as it relates to cash bail

Educate the populace of the systemic nature of mass incarceration

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Partner with community organizations and nonprofits to assist families and persons returning to the community from incarceration. Engage members in policy information and how to work with or against politicians to change them. Involve in a broader study of African American and American history study.

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Educational forums