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# Who Let the Elephant in the Room? Analyzing Race and Racism through a Critical Family Literacy Book Club

Lamar L. Johnson

*University of South Carolina - Columbia*

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Who Let the Elephant in the Room? Analyzing Race and Racism through a Critical  
Family Literacy Book Club

by

Lamar L. Johnson

Bachelor of Arts  
University of South Carolina, 2010

Master of Arts in Teaching  
University of South Carolina, 2011

Master of Education  
University of South Carolina, 2012

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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2014

Accepted by:

Gloria Boutte, Major Professor

Tambra Jackson, Major Professor

Allison Anders, Committee Member

Rhonda Jeffries, Committee Member

Lacy Ford, Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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## DEDICATION

To my parents, Robert and Barbara Howard and my grandmother, Fannie Mae Johnson.

Your words of wisdom, your hard work, and most importantly, your unconditional love were sources of inspiration and encouragement.

And

To my students

Thanks so much for supporting me through this project. Remember, we are freedom fighters who are fighting to create the world that is not yet.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to interpret, investigate, and analyze how race, racism, and power are embedded and intertwined not only in society but also in the education system and in homes and communities. Specifically, through parent and student engagement during a series of book club meetings, I investigated how parents' racial identities impacted how they created critical dialogue pertaining to issues of race, racism, and power with their children.

Guided by critical race pedagogy, critical race theory (CRT) and CRT methodology, this study used race as a critical analytic lens to examine the lives and work of people of color and Whites as well as the roles their homes, schools, and communities played in the development of their racial and cultural identities. I conducted in-depth reflexive interviews and focus groups with high school freshmen and their parents to investigate their experiences as they maneuvered race-related processes and discourses in society, schools, home, and communities.

Drawing from interviews, memos, field notes, and other forms of research data, I created composite characters, and I presented the findings of this study through a dramaturgical performance.

Findings showed that parents created dialogues with their children about social and equity issues in "episodic" moments (our memory of experiences and specific events in time in a sequential form). Furthermore, because of their involvement in the book club parents and students gained a deeper critical understanding of race and racism as

evidenced by the findings and reoccurring themes from the data. Throughout the book club, some of the students and parents possessed a colorblind approach when it came to race. Furthermore, implications are provided to support educators, policy makers, researchers, parents, and students in challenging and overturning racial practices in various social institutions such as homes and schools as we begin to address and challenge the perplexity and the systemic effects of racism while taking different approaches to foreground an anti-racist agenda.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Imagine a “typical” little boy consumed by the loud bangs and booms of video games, the plastic Wal-Mart brand of a G.I. Joe figure, and wooden tracks filled with miniature racing cars. I was that “typical” little boy. In addition to my amusement with video games and toys, books also fascinated me. The simplicity of endless pages bound together to create a vision captivated my attention. The intricate linking of words to create images, the use of words to convey a message, and the simple beauty of language itself gave me a great love and appreciation for education and knowledge. Indeed, my great love of books contributed to my decision to become an English teacher.

When my students look at me, they see a young, African American man standing alone at the front of the class, teaching. They cannot see the people who have surrounded me all my life with a hedge of protection. My students may not see the personal burden of racism that have shaped my multiple identities and who I am as a teacher. Although I encounter(ed) racial oppression and marginalization, these hegemonic experiences push(ed) me to develop inner strength and to fight for justice, equality, and fairness for all humankind. However, there was a point in time when I rejected my Black identity. I viewed being Black as an impediment. During this point in my life, I believed I was incapable of excelling because of my skin color.

I had my first deliberating encounter with racism when I was in fifth grade. One of my White male classmates was turning 10, and was having a birthday party. He gave

each child an invitation. I was thrilled. When I got home, I told my parents that I needed swimming trunks because I had been invited to a pool party. However, the next day, the boy came to class and uninvited all of the Black children although I did not understand exactly why he had done so. All of this was very confusing to me as a 10-year old child.

Devastated and depressed, I went home and explained the situation to my parents. They were outraged, and my mom called the boy's mother, Mrs. Thomas (pseudonym), who was my former second grade teacher. Until that time, I thought she "adored" having me as her student---at least that was what she had told me. My mother explained to me that Ms. Thomas had disinvited me because of the color of my skin. I vividly remember Mom on the phone with Mrs. Thomas asking, "How can you call yourself a teacher and you are behaving like this? You are supposed to love each and every child no matter what his or her skin color is."

My parents later explained that Mrs. Thomas did not want the Black children there because of our race. This act of immoral and malevolent racism triggered something in me. Internalizing the racism without knowing it, I realized that my skin color prevented me from engaging in a desirable social opportunity. I began to question my culture and Black people's place in society. Since this event taught me that Whites are able to do things that Blacks cannot, my outlook on White people changed. I began to view them as superior to Blacks. I thought that they were more intelligent than Blacks, and believed that they all came from privileged backgrounds. Unbeknownst to me at the time, these ideas were also reinforced in books I read in school. Secretly, I was ashamed of my culture, my community, and my identity. I gradually went from being an extrovert to an introvert in class. Now hyper-aware of the low status that Blacks held, I always

tried to ensure I gave well-informed responses before I spoke, because I did not want my White peers to think I was unintelligent and incompetent. Even though I put on a great facade, I was defeated and thought I was incapable of succeeding as a Black male.

All of these thoughts contributed to my understanding of what it meant to be both Black and a male—to be the absolute lowest on the racial totem pole. I witnessed and experienced firsthand how the interplay of race and gender often propel the disenfranchisement and marginalization of people of color, especially Black males.

Later, when I became a doctoral student, I learned and became familiar with the grim statistics and body of literature which reified what I had lived firsthand. For example, the Schott Foundation for Public Education (2012) presented alarming statistics that showed of all the racial/ethnic and gender groups, Black males are the least likely to obtain a high school diploma. Nationally, in 2011, only 10% of Black males were proficient in eighth grade reading (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2013), in 2007, 57% of Black male high school students were suspended from school and 15 % of Black males were expelled from high school as opposed to only 2 % of White males. These statistics were exacerbated by the immense amount of mass media, which positioned Black males as incompetent, inhumane, unemployed, imprisoned, and fatherless (Jackson, Boutte, & Wilson, 2013). On many levels, Black males are frequently viewed as the problem for many social problems; however, few sources acknowledged the micro and macro systems of power that continue to stifle the social mobility, cultural/racial uplifting of Black males (Howard, 2010; Jackson, Boutte, & Wilson, 2013). Yet, despite this dismal backdrop, while some African American males have drowned in the hegemonic forces that continue

to oppress them mentally and physically, others are able to dodge the tumultuous waves of structural inequities. Despite many odds like some of the Black males who do manage to succeed, I believe that I have been able to defy the pervasive and prevailing negative forecasts about Black men. I attribute my success to my parents, family members, selected teachers, and community members who supported me, while also lovingly and forcefully pushing me to become a successful Black man.

One teacher, in particular, who was instrumental in what I am labeling as my success, was my seventh grade English language arts teacher, Ms. Ryans. She emphasized the importance of literacy. Ms. Ryans was an excellent teacher whose reputation preceded her. When I was in the sixth grade, I remember riding the bus and hearing the older kids talk about Ms. Ryans. They spoke about how great a teacher she was.

Mrs. Ryans was one of the six Black teachers who taught at my middle school. She was a native of the school district; therefore, she knew and understood the community, the demographics, and most importantly, the students well. She invested her time in, and demonstrated her love and care, not only for me, but also other kids. She positively helped me to transform in a way that allowed me to develop an appreciation for and see the importance of my identity and my culture through books. As Rosenblatt (1996) noted, “(a)ny knowledge about man and society that schools can give him should be assimilated into the stream of his actual life” (p.3). I began to see how I could use books as a vehicle to learn more about other cultures, the world, and myself. She provided me with the first book in which I positively saw my culture, language, and experiences take center stage. I became re-engrossed with literacy because of one life-

changing book, titled *Johnathon*. Jo Ann Burroughs's (1999) novel, *Johnathon*, had a profound impact on me. In the book, the main character Johnathon was a first grader who came from an abusive family. He was neglected and unloved. His first grade teacher became his "success coach" and she provided him with the nurturance and the unconditional love, which he did not receive from his home environment. Johnathon was put into foster care, and he moved to another city. Years later, the first grade teacher became ill. She was rushed to another city to have major heart surgery performed by a renowned heart surgeon. Right before her surgery, she saw a tall Black man with big, brown eyes and a round face. In a slow, solemn voice she said, "Johnathon." The surgeon replied, "Teacher" (p.121).

Johnathon inspired me in such a way that I could never forget. Despite odds greater than I could imagine, Johnathon succeeded as a Black man. This storyline caused me to view Johnathon as a role model of sorts. This was the first book that I had encountered with a successful, Black male character. It gave me hope. Johnathon became a renowned heart surgeon, and surpassed numerous obstacles along the way. But most importantly, Johnathon became a successful Black man. This changed my perception of how I viewed African Americans, particularly African American males. Sitting in my seventh grade English language arts class, I thought to myself how I too could be like Johnathon. His success motivated me. Realizing the damage that my second grade teacher caused me, I wanted to be the teacher in the book. I developed a hunger and thirst to save lives through education. My goal was to fight for people of color who are encountering impediments because of their race or culture. I was

motivated to do well in school. I knew if I wanted to impact lives, I had to pursue higher education.

Teaching became my passion and students were my focus. Reading became my drug and I was hooked. Ms. Ryans pushed and challenged my human psyche. At the time, I wondered why she was pushing me because I was only a middle school student. Because of her hard work and her rigor, I became more self-determined and intrinsically motivated not only to do well in school, but also in life. Ms. Ryans genuinely cared for all of her students, and she explicitly showed each student how much she valued them. Ms. Ryans found something special to love in each child.

As a teacher, I constantly reflect upon and draw from my experiences as a student and as an African American male. Looking back on my K-12 experience, out of all of my teachers, I only had one teacher who took an interest in the cultural capital (Moll, 1992) that I brought from home and who practiced a pedagogical style I came to know as culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2009). I believe it is important for teachers to show students how much they care by validating who they are as cultural beings (Au, 2009; Howard, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009). When I saw how much Ms. Ryans cared for me, it made me want to excel as a student, a brother, a son, and a Black male. She was not biologically related to me; therefore, she did not have to care for me, but she did. This has directed me to believe how pertinent it is for teachers to show every student how much they care.

I draw upon this particular racial narrative because this memory forged the beginning of my racial identity as a Black male. I want teachers, policymakers, scholars, principals, students, and parents to understand how their racial and cultural identities

inform and shape their ideologies and practices inside and outside of schools (Greene, 2013) while exploring the roles that homes and schools play in the development of one's racial and cultural identities.

If my work can prevent even one Black male or student of color—from the pain and damage that I experienced to my psyche, then my teaching would have made a difference. I will never forget that one pivotal incident from my fifth grade class of being disinvited from a party, which resulted in my temporary loss of hope as a young, Black male. The poem, “Incident” by Countee Cullen graphically captures the indelible pain that I felt. Nevertheless, while I did not know it then, this unfortunately all-too-common incident of being excluded or ridiculed propelled me into being a “Freedom Scholar” who plan to dedicate my career and life interrupting racism. My goal is to be like Ms. Ryans and other educators whom I now know who are determined to be a power for good in the world.

#### The Incident by Countee Cullen

Once riding in old Baltimore,  
Heart-filled, head-filled with glee;  
I saw a Baltimorean  
Keep looking straight at me.

Now I was eight and very small,  
And he was no whit bigger,  
And so I smiled, but he poked out

His tongue, and called me, "Nigger."  
I saw the whole of Baltimore  
From May until December;  
Of all the things that happened there  
That's all that I remember (Cullen, 1923).

### **Statement and Discussion of the Problem**

Racism is entrenched and deeply ingrained within the American landscape (Bell, 1992; Gay, 2002; Hammond, Hoover, & McPhail, 2005; Jackson & Boutte, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Landsman & Lewis, 2011; Tatum, 2009). Furthermore, Bell (1992) develops the claim that racism is worldwide and deeply-rooted in society that it is normal and inescapable. Although a significant body of literature exists on best practices for serving students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, dialogues about how racism and racist ideologies shape our country, our lives (particularly our schooling), our sense of self, and our ways of knowing are not transpiring between teachers and students (Bolgatz, 2005; Baszile, 2003; Jay, 2006; Lynn & Parker, 2006).

The problem addressed in the present study is threefold. First, many teachers and parents do not tackle issues of racism inside or outside the classroom (Au, 2009; Matias, 2013). Second, there are a plethora of studies that have focused on the pedagogical application of critical race theory in higher education (Cook, 2013; Hughes & North, 2012; Lynn, Jennings, & Hughes 2013; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Matias, 2013); however, there are few studies that illustrate the ways teachers can pedagogically enact critical race theory in the K-12 classroom (Matias, 2013). Third, few studies have examined the effect of educating parents and students through critical race pedagogical and critical race

theoretical frameworks in a secondary school space (Lynn, 1999; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Matias, 2013). Each of these problems are discussed in turn.

### **P-12 Teachers Typically Do Not Address Issues of Racism**

Racial inequality continues to seep through the day-to-day life in schools. According to Lewis (2003) schools play a major role in the drawing and the redrawing of racial lines. There is a growing body of literature that indicates schools as central institutions involved in the reproduction and transformation of race (Baszile, 2006; Boutte, 2012; Jay, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Matias, 2013). Race shapes classroom practices, and it is an integral part of students of color daily experiences in schools. However, oftentimes, adults such as teachers do not fully address the issue of race and racism, which in return perpetuates racial inequities (Lewis, 2003). Race-based conversations open the window for those who witness(ed), live(d), or possess(ed) knowledge about racial inequity to speak their truth about particular racialized experiences (Lewis, 2003; Matias, 2013; Parker & Lynn, 2006). Those who do not live with the everyday burden of racism can learn about people who are racially oppressed. In the meantime, those who are free from such a burden can challenge their roles in the oppression of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Matias (2013) explains racial discussions are sometimes viewed as awkward and taboo or what I refer to in the present study as the “elephant in the room” (the issue that people know exists, but do not talk about). In a society where discussions of racism is considered to be taboo, it is not surprising that teachers and parents may experience discomfort around discussions on race and racism (Baszile, 2006; Bolgatz, 2005; Jay, 2006; Lynn & Parker, 2006). Conversations about race, racism, and power (both inside and outside of the

classroom) can be quite frightening. Teachers, students, scholars, and parents dysconsciously<sup>1</sup>, consciously, fearfully, and/or angrily avoid these topics (Bolgatz, 2005; King, 1991). Reflecting on my prior experiences, I have encountered both parents and teachers who are unnerved by discussions on race and racism. If we as educators desire to tackle these issues that derive as a result of what Anna Deavere Smith (1993) calls, “our struggle to be together in our differences,” (p. x), it is important to engage in critical dialogue about these issues. There is a need for parents and teachers to eradicate the trepidation of discussing issues such as race, racism and power with children. When educators purposefully avoid these issues, barriers and boundaries that continuously place students of color on the margins are being perpetuated (Matias, 2013). That is, avoidance of discussions of race and racism stifles the humanity and critical consciousness of people who are disenfranchised while reproducing Eurocentric ideologies and values that pathologize people of color in a negative light. The creation of a “critical” relationship between parents and educators, which allows for open discussion, can put a dent in the system of oppression (Yosso, 2002). Hence, in the present study, I used a critical family literacy book club as a mechanism for engaging parents and students in discussions about race and racism.

### **Critical Race Frameworks and Pedagogies Have Not Been Used Widely In Schools**

Since paradigms and frameworks used in P-12 schools often lag behind those in higher education, many recent theoretical and conceptual frameworks have not permeated school settings. It is not a revelation to note that practice in P-12 schools tend to trail behind new and emergent bodies of literature that are commonly discussed in

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<sup>1</sup>King (1992) defines dysconscious racism as an uncritical habit of mind in regards to race. This form of racism is unintentional, a covert, and nonviolent form of racism.

teacher education programs. While many academic discussions are *about* P-12 schools, they are often largely theoretical and not readily accessible to practitioners (Lynn, Jennings, & Hughes, 2013). Consequently, CRT and Critical Race Pedagogical practices have not been widely applied in school settings. Yet, in order to understand the role that race and racism play in the academic achievement among students of color in P-12 school settings, it is important to examine how social constructions of race and racism are ingrained throughout school structures, processes, and discourses (Jay, 2006).

Although Critical Race Theory (CRT) was introduced by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) nearly two decades ago, in many ways it is still relatively new to teacher education programs. While popular and considered to be cutting-edge in some academic circles, it is not without criticism or contention (Cole, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1998). A discussion of major criticisms of CRT is beyond the scope and relevance of the present discussion; however, it should be noted that many emerging non-positivistic paradigms and theories are often slow to gain notoriety and momentum. So as a relatively recent theoretical framework in teacher education, CRT's tenets in teacher eduP-12 school settings remain understudied. More needs to be known concerning whether CRT can be used as an analytic tool to understand P-12 settings. For example, how might CRT be applied to incidents like the one described in the anecdote about my fifth-grade experience? In the present study, Critical Race Theory was used to conceptualize, implement, and examine a critical literacy book study with parent-student dyads in a secondary school setting.

## **The Need for Critical Race Theoretical Studies Involving Parents and Students**

As evidenced by the incident that I encountered in fifth grade, parents are essential players who can help shape knowledge of race and racism (Harro, 2000). Indeed, parents and educators remain two of the most essential learning resources children have. However, parents are typically not involved in discussions about race unless a problem emerges (Yosso, 2002). Both teachers and parents are influential in promoting or contradicting notions of love or hate (Grosland & Horsford, 2013); hence, families should be invited into discussions about race and racism.

Few studies have examined the effect of educating parents and students through critical race pedagogical and critical race theoretical frameworks in a secondary school space (Lynn, 1999; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Matias, 2013). The present study sought to illuminate, and thus better understand, the racial experiences and understandings of parents and students across various racial and ethnic backgrounds. More specifically, it was designed to capture the voices of parents and students of color regarding their experiences with and challenges to, race, racism, and power while simultaneously welcoming the voices and experiences of White parents and students as a way to begin critical dialogue across different racial and age groups. The present study will add to the extant literature on this topic by adding findings on the role that these issues (race and racism) play among high school students and their parents.

### ***Purpose of the Study and Research questions***

The purpose of this study was to investigate, analyze, and interpret how race, racism, and power are embedded and intertwined in homes, schools, and communities.

This study examined the role a critical family literacy book club played in helping parents build cultural competence and critical consciousness with their children.

This study was guided by two research questions: (1) What happens when parents and students are engaged in a critical family literacy book club? (2) What roles do parents' racial identities play in how they create dialogue pertaining to issues such as race, racism, and power with their children?

### **Significance of the Study**

According to Critical Race Theory, racism is permanent, pervasive, and persistent (Bell, 1992). The acts of racism that are interwoven throughout American society are also mirrored in social institutions such as schools. As demonstrated by the historical and contemporary (mis)treatment of African Americans, none of these malicious acts are incidental (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). Stated more pointedly, there is pervasive and systematic devaluation of African Americans in society, which systematically seeks to eradicate critical consciousness from African Americans (and other people who have been marginalized) while attempting to convince them that they are inferior to whites (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). This systematic devaluation is not limited to society at large, but is also threaded throughout classrooms, instructional practices, and curricular designs. Most of the media, images, and mainstream curriculum are distorted and depict people of color in a negative light (Jackson & Boutte, 2009; Lynn & Parker, 2006).

Historically and presently, systemic racism coupled with subtle racial microaggressions<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Microaggressions are small and ongoing acts of racism and racial oppression such as words, actions, or environments which communicate small racial insults or derogatory comments intentional or unintentional towards people of color and other oppressed groups (Bryan & Browder, 2013; Sue & Constantine, 2007).

encourage the misinformation and miseducation of African American children (DuBois, 1903; Woodson, 1933; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003).

### **Rationale For A Critical Family Literacy Book Club**

Following the line of reasoning that parents, teachers, and students should engage in ongoing discussions about race and racism instead of ignoring these issues, a critical family literacy book was used in this study as a mechanism for conversation and dialogue. The book club stemmed from the hope and faith in the possibilities for schools to act as forces for equity and justice and “from an understanding that they often fall short (Lewis, 2003, p. 11). With the initial focus on the book’s characters and settings, the idea was that opening conversations about race may be less threatening (Morrell, 2004). The critical nature of the book club provided a space for families to critique, challenge, and evaluate the roles that race and racism play in their lives as well as other intersections such as gender, sexual orientation, class, and nationality (Crenshaw, 1991). In addition, family literacy book clubs enable schools to build upon families’ literacy practices by exploring how students and parents engage in literacy practices outside of school. Furthermore, if used effectively, the book club can serve as an essential tool that can contribute to the creation of a bi-directional partnership between homes and schools (Boutte & Johnson, 2014) since they are two social institutions that need to work together to ensure that children are able to maintain their own cultural, racial, and ethnic identities while also excelling academically (King, 2005). That is not to say students should not go beyond their own social identities; however, in order to counter hegemony, racism, and bigotry, students need to have a complete and full understanding of their ethnicities (Hilliard, 2009). Through critical family literacy book clubs, parents and teachers can

collaborate and work toward helping students to accept themselves and to recognize their full potential and value. An underlying assumption is that once people of color learn how to fully love ourselves, it should be easier to understand, accept, appreciate, and love the full humanity of other racial and ethnic groups.

The instructional approach used in the present study was unique since it welcomed parents as learners into a secondary English language arts classroom to build cultural competence, racial literacy, and critical consciousness among the teacher, parents, and students. The present study examined a newly created family literacy book club, which served as a tool for creating an open space in which parents and students were able to engage in critical responses to micro and macro systems of power.

### **Terms and Definitions**

Terms and definitions that are pertinent to this study are defined below.

**Critical Literacy:** Critical literacy interrogates society by critiquing injustices and inequities such as racism, sexism, classism, and gender inequality. The intent of critical literacy is to build cultural competence, liberation, and critical consciousness (Morrell, 2004). Critical literacy can be used to critique texts of all types, including (but not limited to) media, print, non-print, and movies.

**Critical Race Pedagogy:** Critical race pedagogy situates race in the K-12 classroom. It engages students in self-reflexivity and critical dialogue about race, while disrupting issues of White supremacy (Lynn, 1999).

**Critical Race Theory:** Critical race theory in education examines the relationship of race, racism, and power in P-20 school settings. Critical race scholars and activists try to ascertain how society situates itself along racial lines (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

**Dysconscious Racism:** This form of racism is unintentional, a covert, and nonviolent form of racism. King (1992) defines dysconscious racism as an uncritical habit of mind in regards to race.

**Microaggressions:** Microaggressions are small and ongoing acts of racism and racial oppression such as words, actions, or environments which communicate small racial insults or derogatory comments intentional or unintentional towards people of color and other oppressed groups (Bryan & Browder, 2013; Sue & Constantine, 2007).

**Racial Literacy:** Racial literacy is a tool that enables individuals to understand race in American landscape and how race operates throughout various institutions such as schools and political policies. The concept of racial literacy focuses on a set of practices structured to teach individuals how to recognize, respond, and counter different forms of everyday racism as well as develop strategies for coping and countering these oppressive forces.

### **Overview of Chapter 2—Literature Review**

Chapter 2 will provide an overview of the literature. It begins with the conceptual framework, which include critical race theory and critical race pedagogy about how they inform the proposed study. Additionally, a synthesis and discussion of related research and conceptual works are included.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Prior to beginning this study, I reviewed extant literature in education, which would inform the study. The nexus of my inquiry focused on two interrelated bodies of literature: literacy as it relates to racial justice and parent involvement. Hence, these bodies of literature are the impetuses that gave rise to this particular research study. Below I describe the conceptual framework for the study, followed by a review of the bodies of literature on literacy and parental involvement. The discussion of literacy includes three major topics: (1) the sociocultural nature of literacy; (2) critical literacy; and (3) literacy as a tool of racial justice. Since parent involvement research and literature are vast and covers many schools of thought, it is presented via three major paradigms: (1) positivistic; (2) ecological; and (3) critical. Additionally, the review of literature on parent involvement is limited to urban contexts like the one for the present study.

#### **Conceptual Framework**

This study is framed from a Critical Race Theoretical perspective in order to understand how parents' racial and cultural identities impact conversations about social and equity issues with their children, in particularly race and racism. This study also draws from Critical Race Pedagogy (CRP), which applies Critical Race Theory (CRT) tenets to teaching in classrooms. Concomitantly, critical race pedagogical and critical race theoretical frameworks dismantle "traditional" ideologies and epistemologies while encouraging new ideological and epistemological understandings that aim to restore a

positive racial identity development and liberation of teachers, students, and parents. The following discussion of CRT explains key tenets as well as points of departure from “traditional” epistemologies.

### ***Critical Race Theory***

Race has become metaphorical---a way of referring to and disguising forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than biological “race” ever was. Expensively kept, economically unsound, a spurious and useless political asset in election campaigns, racism is as healthy today as it was during the Enlightenment. (Morrison, 1992, p. 63).

Nearly two decades ago, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) introduced critical race theory (CRT) to the field of education. CRT evolved from Critical Legal Studies (CLS), which was created in the mid-70s by a group of legal scholars who were involved in the Civil Rights Movement. In Mark Kelman’s (1987) foundational piece, *A Guide to Critical Legal Studies*, Kelman illustrated how CLS challenged the social and political issues during that era. These challenges contradicted and served as a paradox to the assumption of the U.S. law being a fair and just system (Unger, 1986). More specifically, critical legal scholars examined the ways the law contributed to the social hierarchical production of the wealthy and powerful. CLS challenged and critiqued legal theories and practices that seemed normative. An earlier work by Unger (1986) also contended that laws reflected the practices and ideologies of the people who were in power and of higher socioeconomic statuses. Unger explained that people in power utilized laws as tools to sustain their place in societal hierarchies; thus, legitimizing the injustices that transpired

in society. Critical legal scholars challenged the notion of the law as a neutral device and recast it as a device that perpetuates oppression (Kelman, 1987). Furthermore, critical legal scholars worked to overturn the unethical and misuse practices of the law; and, they used the law as a tool that could achieve this goal (Unger, 1986).

Critical race theory evolved in the 1980s. Unlike Critical Legal Studies, CRT called for a critical analysis of *race* in the American society (Milner, 2007). Advancing the proposition that racism is normal and interwoven throughout the American society, leading CRT theorist, Derrick Bell, (1992) postulated that race should be situated within its social and historical contexts social structures and institutions such as the educational system should be evaluated to determine how racism is embedded within them.

Critical race theory is an intellectual and social mechanism that focuses on the deconstruction of marginalization and hegemonic forces and discourses that people of color encounter. It works to reconstruct the humanity and agency of people of color while focusing on the construction of equitable and fair distribution of power within society (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Seven major propositions guide critical race theory when used as an analytic framework. CRT: (1) recognizes and accepts the permanence of racism (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995); (2) recognizes the intersectionality of race, racism, and power with other forms of oppression such as sexism, classism, sexual orientation, and religion (Cook, 2013; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Soloranzo & Yosso, 2002); (3) challenges and critiques liberalism's notions of colorblindness, meritocracy, and neutrality (Bell, 1992; Cook, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1998); (4) challenges White supremacy and Whiteness as property (Bell, 1992; Cook, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1995); (5) exposes and challenges deficit thinking and language

through the lived experiences of the oppressed individuals and groups through counterstorytelling (Bell, 1992; Cook, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Lynn & Parker, 2006); (6) recognizes racial equality for people of color can transpire or can be accommodated when it converges with the interests of the individual in power (Bell, 1992, 1997; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012); and (7) is committed to social justice (Yosso, 2000).

A brief definition of each tenet follows.

1. ***Permanence of Racism:*** There are some CRT scholars who believe that race is permanent (Bell, 1992). From this point of view, African Americans and other people of color will never gain full equality in this country; however, racial realists believe individuals can obtain a certain freedom from knowing the truth. Racial realists believe that combating racism is a struggle that is ineffective for ending racism, but suggest that the struggle can liberate African Americans and other people of color (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).
2. ***Intersectionality:*** CRT scholars have beliefs that race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, and marginalized other social identities are other oppressive factors that can function separately or can add to the multiple forms of oppression depending upon the setting (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The intersectionality makes it difficult to self-identify which particular intersection(s) are being operated.
3. ***Critique on Colorblindness/Meritocracy:*** CRT critiques liberalism as a framework to handling America's racial issues (Delgado & Stefancic,

2012). Liberals tend to embrace a meritocratic notion of “we have arrived,” and society is not racially stratified. They embrace and employ colorblindness. Colorblindness can be nebulous because it can stand in the way of recognizing racism. CRT scholars argue liberalists disregard the tacit forms of racism, which are embedded in the thoughts, discourses, and structures of the oppressor. Not identifying these microaggressions (or daily, ongoing, and covert acts of discrimination) contributes to the ongoing oppression of people of color.

4. ***Counterstorytelling:*** CRT scholars draw upon counternarratives to challenge and counter the master or dominant narrative that continue to oppress people of color. Counternarratives illustrate how racism and racial discrimination are entrenched in the everyday lives and experiences of people of color. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).
5. ***Interest Convergence:*** Racial equality and fairness are met when Whites remain privileged and are benefited (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Whites will support racial justice only when it benefits them. Thus, there is a merge between the interests of White people and racial justice (Bell, 1992).
6. ***Whiteness as Property:*** CRT makes a link between Whiteness and property. Historically, Whites have been the proprietors of institutions, education, language, knowledge, citizenship, and literacy. Thus, to be White is parallel with having collateral since it translates into accompanying privileges. CRT disrupts and refutes the dominant

ideology and assumptions about the normalization of Whiteness as property (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Harris, 1995).

7. ***Commitment to Social Justice:*** CRT challenges racism, sexism, classism, and other hegemonic and subordinate forms that are in place to marginalize people of Color. Hence, merging CRT and social justice enables individuals to build a critical consciousness. Critical consciousness unmask the beliefs and ideologies that may impede humanity, freedom, justice, and democracy. Building a critical consciousness is an architecture that enables CRT scholars to challenge and interrogate the dominant ideology and power structures through providing the lived experiences of the oppressed groups and individual (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

The last tenet, in particular, is also a key tenet of critical race pedagogy. Indeed, critical race theory, critical race pedagogy, and social justice are inextricably linked in that they are linked and threaded through liberatory practices, while resisting and challenging dominant structures and narratives.

### ***Critical Race Pedagogy***

Critical race pedagogy (CRP) was introduced by Marvin Lynn in 1999 (Lynn, 1999). Having previously studied Critical Theory and, later, Critical Race Theory, Lynn found that CRT addressed race in a direct way that Critical Theory did not. Adapting CRT's tenets for application in the classroom, he coined the term, "Critical Race Pedagogy."

CRP can be used in classrooms to challenge racial inequities within the context of schooling in the U.S. It draws from African American epistemological frameworks and theories (DuBois, 1908; Hilliard, 2009; King, 1991; Woodson, 1933) that challenge and critique social and equity issues *while building the racial and ethnic uplifting of people who are often on the margins in society* (Lynn, Jennings, & Hughes, 2013). Like CRT, critical race pedagogy strives to understand the racial and hegemonic repressive structures that are in place to disenfranchise students of color (Lynn, 1999). CRP is viewed as a promising route for educators to use when confronting racial blind spots and knowledge about living, learning, and teaching race (Hughes & North, 2012). Racial blind spots are hidden biases that people possess, and individuals may or may not recognize how these hidden biases sustain racial oppression. Five key tenets of CRP are presented below (Lynn, 1999).

1. CRP must be intimately cognizant of the necessary intersection of other oppressive constructs such as class, gender and sexual orientation (p. 26).
2. CRP must recognize and understand the endemic nature of racism (p. 25).
3. CRP must recognize the importance of understanding the power dynamics inherent in schooling (p. 26).
4. CRP must emphasize the importance of...reflexivity...[and how the] exploration of one's 'place' within a stratified society has power to illuminate oppressive structures in society (p. 27).

5. CRP must encourage the practice of an explicitly liberatory form of both teaching and learning...advocating for justice and equity in both schooling and education as a necessity if there is to be justice and equity in the broader society (pp. 27-28).

These five tenets of CRP are the foundation for directing teachers, parents, students, and teacher educators toward transformative instructional practices that dismantle narratives that continue to oppress people of color.

Because of the rapidly changing racial demographics in U.S. schools, employing a critical race pedagogy in educational institutions is vital if schools are to avoid mirroring historical and current types of institutionalized racism that are prevalent within the American society (Lynn, Jennings, & Hughes, 2013). Virtually 80% of the teaching force is comprised of White, monolingual, middle-class women (National Education Association, 2013). However, the student population is increasingly comprised of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Moore & Lewis, 2012). As noted in the academic literature, there is a cultural/racial mismatch between teachers and students (Anderson, 1988; Emdin, 2013; Hill, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Moore & Lewis, 2012; Morrell, 2004). Many teachers encounter teaching students who are demographically different than they are (Perry, Steele, & Hillard, 2003). While not arguing that critical race pedagogy is a panacea for social and racial justice, it does have the potential to empower students politically, socially, intellectually, and emotionally (Esposito & Swain, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995) and can lead to educational success while building students' cultural, ethnic and racial identities (Matias, 2013).

Critical race pedagogy creates a space for critical dialogue and praxis about race-related issues. In contrast to issues of gender and social class, race remains largely untheorized (Hughes & North, 2012). That is, there is not a language that enables us to discuss race and racial disparities in manners that are beneficial and emancipator to those who are oppressed by racism. This pedagogy sheds light on the endemic nature of racism and enables teachers to re-conceptualize critical race studies by situating race at the forefront of classroom practices, while moving oppressive situations from private to public spaces (Lynn & Parker, 2006; Lynn, 1995).

In Ladson-Billings' (1995) book, *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African Americans*, she argued that the effect of racism continues to permeate and invade U.S. schools. Racial disparities perpetuate political, economic, and social injustices and inequities. Racial incongruence between teachers and students frequently impedes on the representation of students of Color in gifted and talented courses, amount of funding distributed for each child, obtainment of a high school diploma, success on standardized tests, and literacy and numeracy achievement (Anyon, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Landsman & Lewis, 2011; Moore & Lewis, 2012).

Critical race pedagogical practices create a space for critical discussions about social and equity issues in society. In such contexts, critical race pedagogical teaching will likely cause discomfort to those who are already uncomfortable with race-related discussions (Bolgatz, 2005; Matias, 2013). It provides a contested environment that critiques, challenges, and evaluates the oppressed and the oppressor, which requires naming the key players and how these significant people or events exacerbates and sustains racial oppression.

CRT and CRP were selected for the framework of the proposed study because I view critical race pedagogy as the impetus for approaching critical race theory issues in the classroom. Both CRP and CRT refute deficit types of thinking and language, which are prominently seen and implemented in the classroom. Valencia (2010) explained that deficit thinking is positioned in racial and class bias; it “blames the victim” for school failure instead of evaluating how educational institutions such as schools are designed to prevent poor students and students of color from learning. Critical race pedagogical and critical race theoretical frameworks can assist in enabling the participants in this study to challenge, evaluate, and analyze the various micro and macro institutions of power while dismantling and countering dominant/deficit ideologies by capturing the participants’ voices, lived experiences, and stories. The next section examines racial justice as it relates to literacy.

### **Review of Literature on Literacy**

While literacy is a broad topic, this review of literature illuminates how literacy as a social practice can foster cultural identities and racial justice. The following review of literature explores: (a) the sociocultural nature of literacy, (b) critical literacy, and (c) literacy and racial justice.

#### ***The sociocultural nature of literature***

Building on the work of Morrell (2004) and Perry (2012), literacy is defined as “a communicative act in which any text is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and interpretive processes” (Morrell, 2004, p. 11). Literacy is seen as a meaning making process with any type of text. Literacy practices are fluid and social practices, which are forged by attitudes, beliefs, values, and social relationships.

A review of the academic literature on literacy yielded two major ways of thinking: (1) literacy as a neutral process and (2) literacy as a social process (Bandt, 2001; Freire, 1970; Hagwood, 2002; Morrell, 2004; National Early Literacy Panel, 2008; National Reading Panel, 2001; Street, 2001). Earlier conceptions of literacy did not consider its sociocultural nature; however, more recent accounts focus on its social nature. Table 2.1 presents a summary of major assumptions from literature on the two different schools of thought—traditional and sociocultural.

Table 2.1: Traditional and Sociocultural Assumptions About Literacy

Traditional Assumptions About Literacy	Sociocultural Assumptions About Literacy
Literacy is viewed as a technical, skill-based and neutral process (National Reading Panel, 2000).	Literacy is a social practice, which involves interactions between the reader and the text. Texts reflect the writer’s ideas and readers’ ideas and experiences affect how texts are read (Kirkland, 2008).
Literacy is an intricate system where meaning is derived only from print with a main focus on fluency, decoding of words, vocabulary, and active comprehension strategies (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008).	Literacy is a meaning making process where meaning derives from readers’ prior knowledge and experiences. Comprehension and understanding texts are important (Perry, 2012).
The focus is on isolated skills and strategies such as knowledge of the letters of the alphabet, comprehension of the names and sounds of letters associated with printed words, phonological awareness, and the ability to work with, to think about, and to notice the individual sounds in words (Wise, 1992).	Literacy practices are dynamic and constantly evolving---new practices are learned through everyday practices and sense making. Literacy is broader than reading skills. Holistic approaches to reading are preferred so reading involves more than phonological awareness. Context clues and making sense of texts are stressed (Hagwood, 2002; Street, 2001).
The ability to read a text and rapidly recall selected events and characters in the story are emphasized (Girolametto, L., Pearce, P. S., & Weitzman, E., 1996).	Literacy is more than a set of rigid cognitive skills; it also involves power relationships where social institutions are evaluated and critiqued (Freire, 1973; Morrell, 2004).  Through one’s reflection of the world and his/her place in the world, literacy is a transformative practice that can build

A limitation of traditional conceptions about literacy is that many students do not see texts as relevant or as familiar stories that are related their lives (Morrell, 2004; Perry, 2012). Contrastingly, sociocultural perspectives on literacy view the various ways in which people incorporate literacy in their everyday practices (Perry, 2012). Scholars who view literacy as a social practice explore ways to make instruction relevant and meaningful by incorporating children’s home language and literacies in the classroom (Heath, 1983; Freire, 1970; Perry, 2012; Street, 1984). Language and literacy are used in many ways depending on the context. As Street (1984) explained:

The rich cultural variation in these practices and conceptions leads us to rethink what we mean by them and to be wary of assuming a single literacy where we may simply be imposing assumptions derived from our own cultural practice onto other people’s literacies (p. 430).

Expounding on these ideas, Street (2001) noted that much of sociocultural research in literacy is constructed on the assumption that in order to understand literacy it demands detailed and comprehensive accounts of actual practice in various cultural settings. Street cautioned, however, that it is not enough “to extol simply the richness and variety of literacy practices made accessible through such ethnographic detail; we also need bold theoretical models that recognize the central role of power relations in literacy practices” (p. 430).

Conceptions of literacy as a social practice has been profoundly influenced by Perry and Hart (2012) work with refugee English learners (ELs) which was grounded in data that explicated the numerous ways people utilize reading and writing in their everyday lives. Perry and Hart (2012) conducted a study with 10 adult educators who

worked with local refugees. In the study, the authors' examined tutors and teachers of adult refugee learners to better understand how English as a second language (ESL) and adult basic literacy (ABL) programs are preparing teachers to provide better language and literacy instruction to adult refugees. Brandt's (2001) concept of literacy sponsorship served as the theoretical framework for this study. Literacy sponsorship is defined as, "any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy" (p. 111). Bandt's notion of literacy sponsorship foregrounds societal issues such as, racism, economic, political, gender and immigration; furthermore, this study is guided by two broad research questions: (1) From their point of view, how prepared are local educators to teach refugees? (2) What supports are needed to help these educators better meet refugees' educational needs? The analysis focused on three local organizations in one Southeastern U.S. city that provided most of the ESL and literacy education and instruction to local refugees. Data methods consisted of responses of open-ended questionnaires, semistructured interviews, and observations. The authors' analyzed their data through several coding processes. The findings suggested that although many of the teachers of refugees were certified, it was evident that such certification was not required or expected. Hence, adult refugees who were seeking language and literacy classes could be taught by someone with no certification and little, if any, training in language and literacy. Thus, the findings illustrated the ways in which literacy practices for refugees is being sponsored, more specifically the ways it is being controlled, contained, and withheld (Bandt, 2001), even if it is unintentional. The authors provided implications on how to better prepare and serve teachers of adult refugees.

The concept of literacy as a social practice is greatly influenced by Street's (1985) work contrasting the autonomous and ideological models of literacy. The autonomous model is formal literacy instruction, which conceptualizes literacy in a rigid and technical manner. This particular model views literacy as a set of skills that one has or does not have (Hammond, Hoover, & McPhail, 2005; Perry, 2012). The ideological mode conceptualizes literacy as practices not as a set of skills. These practices are situated in specific spaces and linked to cultural and power structures in society (Perry, 2012). Building on sociocultural conceptions about literacy practices being shaped by power structures (Hammond, Hoover, & McPhail, 2005). Critical Literacy schools of thought about literacy address issues of power in more detail.

### ***Critical Literacy***

From a Critical Literacy perspective, literacy is viewed as a tool of liberation and as a tool that unveils and challenges the structures and systems that oppress different groups of people, and as a tool of liberation and critical transformation (Street, 1984). Critical literacy focuses on identities and the ways in which individuals respond to power and domination through literate practices (Freire, 1970; Hammond, Hoover, McPhail, 2005; Morrell, 2004; Perry, 2012). Therefore, identity construction is a vital component that is linked to critical literacy Hagood (2002). Texts reflect cultural and societal structures of race, gender, and class and, therefore, represent varying position of power (Hagood, 2002).

Moje and Luke (2009) presented a theoretical overview of how identities are mediated by the texts that individuals encounter. Identities are negotiated and are negotiated by the texts that people read, write, and converse about (Moje & Luke, 2009);

furthermore, a theoretical construct about identity, “is crucial, not to control the identities that students produce, construct, form, or enact but to avoid controlling identities” (p. 61). French sociolinguist theorist, Bourdieu (1991), provided a framework for understanding critical theory and for recognizing the ways in which critical theories can and do connect with theories of literacy as a social practice. Bourdieu’s areas of research provided connections among language use, power, and politics. Bourdieu contended that “(t)he social uses of language (including literacy) also symbolically reproduce power relationships and social differences. Various agents have more or less symbolic power, depending upon whether or not their symbolic capital is recognized by those in power” (p. 62). The work of Bourdieu and others emphasize the need for educators to understand the multiple ways in which people practice literacy and understand how these practices are linked to who we are and the environment in which we exist. In the U.S. race is a key social identity that can be examined in relation to literacy issues.

### ***Literacy and Racial Justice***

Historically, Black people who were enslaved and those who were free fathomed and embraced the importance of literacy since it was inextricably linked to freedom (Jackson & Boutte, 2009). Literacy was and is considered to be necessary for gaining power and liberation--physically, mentally and spiritually. “Literacy is inseparable from the struggle for freedom because education interrogates power. Hence, African-centered philosophies that guide effective teaching practices for African American students are, in fact, a matter of liberation” (Jackson & Boutte, p. 110) and empowerment. On the other hand, literacy has also been a tool that has perpetuated the marginalization and

disenfranchisement of people of color as it is in public schools today (Hammond, Hoover, McPhail, 2005; Morrell, 2004; Perry, 2012).

Throughout history and currently, literacy has been a barrier for African Americans and people of color (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Prendergast, 2003). It is one of the tools society uses to perpetuate this cycle of oppression and hegemonic actions, which sustains the privilege and power Whites continue to have over the oppressed (Prendergast, 2003). Historically, African American children have been subjugated and deprived of an equitable education (Anderson, 1988; Perry, Steel, and Hilliard, 2003). Literacy has been racially and socially stratified as a right for White students and as a privilege for children of color (Rogers & Mosley, 2006). Furthermore, the notions of literacy as a *right* and *privilege* can be explicated. Hence, if literacy is situated in a historical context, literacy operated in favor of Whites by symbolizing literacy as an alienable right that no one would contest. On the other hand, if we explore the intersections of race, literacy, and education, we can gain a better sense of how students of color have fought for access to be seen or heard throughout classroom practices, curricular designs, policies, and literature and literacy practices. Ladson-Billings (2003) expatiated that literacy is a device that signifies a form of property owned and utilized by whites in the society. Literacy educators, scholars, teachers, and policy makers need to restructure the meaning of literacy and restructure how literacy should be implemented in the classroom. Drawing upon literacy as a social practice, enables a site for racial and cultural uplifting while moving away from literacy as a site of oppression and dehumanization. Using literacy as it is in this study, is a pivotal part of the architecture

of how racial justice allows students to understand race, how it developed, why it is, and how it is used to propel social and equity issues (Grosland & Horsford, 2013).

Racial literacy conveys a more fluid structure of understanding race in American society. Often, race is a forbidden subject, but in order to disrupt individual, institutional, and collective racism, first, there must be critical dialogue about this particular issue. In one of the few empirical pieces on racial literacy (Matias, 2013; Rogers & Mosley, 2006). Rogers and Mosley (2006) conducted a study that used racial literacy as an analytic tool, diagnostic device, and as an instrument of process. In the study, the authors demonstrated the ways in which White children do engage in dialogue about race, racism, and antiracism within the context of literacy curriculum. Critical race theory, Whiteness studies, and critical discourse analysis served as the analytic frameworks for this study. Data were collected at an elementary school in the Midwest during the 2002-2003 school year in a second grade classroom. Participants included five African American students, one Korean American student, and 13 White students. Data consisted of classroom literacy lessons through ethnographic documentation, researcher/teacher journal, student artifacts, and interviews. Rogers and Mosley (2006) analyzed their data through using a critical discourse analysis which helped to make clear the interpretations, descriptions, and explanations between the text, discursive practices, and social interactions. The authors' findings suggested that children began to see whiteness in their visual and linguistic analysis and synthesis of the texts while simultaneously enacting and disrupting white privilege. However, Rogers and Mosley (2006) contended that in order for individuals to understand race—race has to be addressed rather than ignored. Creating a space for students to name, claim, and analyze race, racism, and power opens a window

for students to operate within a democracy; but, more importantly, it provides students with the chance to become critical democratic citizens. Hence, racial literacy is a framework that needs to be further explored. Although this study was conducted at the elementary level, the study adds to this body of knowledge by illustrating racial literacy at the secondary level space.

Au (2009) explained how most literacy scholars and literacy teachers do not employ racial literacy, and yet race is notably tacit in literacy scholars and literacy teachers' classrooms. Dialogue about race, racism, power, and antiracist education is typically rooted in the language of diversity, multicultural education, and culturally relevant pedagogy; however, classroom teachers and scholars can employ these principles and frameworks, and the topic of race can still remain silent (Au, 2009; Knaus, 2011; Prendergast, 2003; Rogers & Mosley, 2006). Hence, there are some classroom teachers who use literature that overtly depicts racism, but conversations about race and racism do not occur. The avoidance of racial discussions can be detrimental to all students. For example, students who are oppressed are not able to challenge and critique the pervasive and systemic social structures that continue to marginalize them; in addition, the avoidance of racial discussions in classrooms reifies the silencing of students of color voices and their epistemic orientation of living and knowing. More specifically, this issue exacerbates the marginalization of students of color because White students are not challenged to explore, critique, and evaluate where they situate themselves living in a racially stratified society as well as understanding the roles they play in the perpetuation of racial oppression and White supremacy. Therefore, the

process of exploring literacy and racial justice is the key focus for the proposed study. In the subsequent section, I provide an overview of literature on parental involvement.

### **Parental Involvement**

Parental involvement is generally defined as parents' participation in their child's educational processes, experiences, and growth (Moore & Lewis, 2012). Because the body of literature on parent involvement is extremely broad, this review of literature focuses on parental involvement in urban contexts since that is the context for the present study. This definition of parental involvement refers to guardians, family members, siblings, or anyone who may serve as parents (Greene, 2013). Goals 2000: Educate America Act and NCLB define parental involvement as,

the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities including: assisting their child's learning; being actively involved in their child's education at school; serving as full partners in their child's education and being included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child (No Child Left Behind, 2002, Section 1118).

Parental involvement is usually defined as how often parents help with homework, attend parent-teacher conferences, and attend school events; but, the traditional view of parental involvement fails to illustrate how parental involvement also reflects parents' relationships to the world and lived experiences. Greene (2013) introduced an ecological framework that focuses on the ways families' roles, lived experiences, and histories of education and schooling are limited by policies and the

amount of resources they receive. Within the context of race and a changing economy, researchers of parental involvement have to situate the roles of parents within these two contexts. The change in the political economy has left families of color from low-socioeconomic backgrounds on the margins as a means to continue its economic supremacy in a global economy. As an illustration, Greene (2013) conducted an empirical study that explored parental involvement in urban communities through the integration of family literacy practices. In addition, this study helped bridge the gap between families and schools through incorporating the voices of families and children, which served as counternarratives to the dominant discourse of privilege and marginalization. In the study, Greene provided the stories of 17 parents who participated in a parent involvement workshop for two years in an economically depressed city in the Mid-west. The goal of the workshop was to provide a space for parents, students, administrators, and teachers where they engage in dialogue with each other, build partnerships, and share stories. Furthermore, Greene (2013) contended there are major discussions, debates, and policies concerning educational reform and the allocation of resources. Moreover, the distribution of resources have been stifled by what Greene (2013) calls “private interests”, nonetheless private interests silences parents’ voices; and, when it comes to resource distribution and decision-making policies, parents are marginalized. As quoted in Greene (2013), “these private interests are what Fine (1993) referred to nearly 20 years ago as a “privatized public sphere” in which powerful corporate interests determine educational policy” (p. 13). Indeed as others (Greene, 2013; Howard, Flenbaugh, & Terry, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2006) have contended families need access to resources; and, the lack of opportunity for families of color

exacerbates inequity. In fact, schools need to build on the value and support of families—not try to assimilate parents into a certain culture but provide them the space to present who they are. To clarify parental involvement is not an individual responsibility, but it is a collaborative effect. Parental involvement is a partnership between institutions and families to ensure the highest level of learning for each child (Boutte & Johnson, 2014; Greene, 2013; Howard & Reynolds, 2013).

In an educational atmosphere distinguished by an immense emphasis on accountability with the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), our nation has been occupied with refining and defining its educational goals to allow its citizens to participate in a global economy (Anfara & Mertens, 2008). Within this context, family and parent involvement in school has remained one of the top priorities. Two examples illuminate this argument. First, in 1994, Congress established the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*. As indicated in Goal Eight, “Every school will promote parental involvement in the social, economic and academic growth of children” (Anfara & Mertens, 2008). The Goals 2000 movement made its first public appearance over a decade ago when President Bush and the nation’s Governors met at a National Education Summit and created a set of national goals for schools (Anfara & Mertens, 2008). Second, the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2002) has a specific section focused on parental involvement. Section 1118 requires all schools and districts that receive Title 1 funds to create a written parental involvement policy and effectively implement these policies. However, it has been more than two decades since the *Goal 2000* reform (and more than a decade for the *No Child Left Behind*) passed, and these two reforms have made slight impact on school achievement, especially in the context of parental involvement in urban

school settings (Lewis et al., 2008; Yosso, 2002). Boutte and Johnson (2014) argued that rural, suburban, and urban contexts alike theoretically support the notion of parental involvement as an essential component to the educational success of students. However, exploring parental involvement in an urban school setting often differs from suburban and rural settings because of various social ills that prevent parents from being invited into schools (Anyon, 2005).

Anyon (2005) contended that many urban students encounter limited access to funding and other supplemental learning resources. In addition, school factors and non-school factors add to the plight of students of color in an urban environment. How funds are allocated, the quality of teachers, and how schools are funded---all of these factors contribute to the ills of urban settings (Moore & Lewis, 2012). Although parental involvement is one of the many debates that remain at the crux of various educational reforms, a devastating reality is that many researchers, teachers, policymakers, principals, and politicians view parents of urban school children through deficit lenses (Yosso, 2002). Deficit thinking blames the oppressed for their oppression while ignoring systemic inequities and builds upon the distorted stories and stereotypes that are constantly replayed in the American backdrop (Kozol, 2007).

At times, the traditional definitions of parental involvement fail to notice certain factors such as offering care and nurturance at home; engaging and providing cultural, linguistic, and spiritual morals; or other non-school acts of parent involvement (Howard, Flenbaugh & Terry, 2012). Furthermore, traditional definitions of parental involvement tend to disregard the methods, cultures, and techniques of how some parents situate

themselves in their children’s education (Moore & Lewis, 2012). Bowers and Griffin (2011) explained:

(t)he traditional definition of parental involvement includes activities in the school and at home. Parental involvement can take many forms, such as volunteering at the school, communicating with teachers, assisting with homework, and attending school events such as performances or parent-teacher conferences...However, viewed through this lens, African American and Latino families demonstrate low rates of parental involvement...Traditional definitions of parent involvement require investments of time and money from parents, and those who may not be able to provide these resources are deemed uninvolved” (p. 78).

As a result of traditional models, urban parents have often times been marginalized because they may not fit in these traditional frameworks. Table 2.2 presents a summary table illustrating assumptions about parent involvement with the traditional framework.

Table 2.2: Summary of Assumptions Used in Traditional Parent Involvement Models<sup>3</sup>

Traditional Parent Involvement Models
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rely on Western European ideologies and beliefs.</li> <li>• Use single modes of learning and knowing (e.g., unidirectional information given to parents from schools).</li> <li>• Utilize stagnant and mono-cultural definitions of parent involvement in terms of (i.e. communication styles, nurturance, care, and family beliefs about schooling).</li> <li>• Do not attempt to learn about families in a substantive or authentic way.</li> <li>• Make minimal attempts to learn about the community and culture of the families.</li> <li>• Follow fixed policies and practices that are already in place with little or no input from families.</li> <li>• Adheres to <i>one-size fits all</i> model (this particular model does not acknowledge the fact that students bring prior knowledge and experiences to the classroom).</li> <li>• Home and community visits are usually static and grounded in deficit beliefs and</li> </ul>

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Boutte, G. S., & Johnson, G. (2014). Community and family involvement in urban schools. In H. R. Milner & K. Lomotey (Eds.). Handbook on urban education, pp. 167-82. New York, NY: Routledge.

assumptions.

In the U.S., there is a pressing and vital need to study the historical, institutional, and cultural factors that impede on the academic achievement of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Perry, Steele, & Hillard, 2003). Furthermore, traditional parental involvement models exacerbate the gap between families and schools. More specifically, the traditional assumptions of parental involvement do not welcome the voices and lived experiences of children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse settings.

Despite the amount of studies, practices, and policies, urban education parental involvement still remains static and guided by assumptions listed on Table 2 (Boutte & Johnson, 2014; Howard & Reynolds, 2013; Moore & Lewis, 2012; Landsman & Lewis, 2011). Parental involvement is an essential tool that should work in conjunction with other efforts to improve urban education. Ideally, there must be collaboration with families, community members, and educators (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Hence, educators must begin to re-create robust work of utilizing families and community members within urban educational settings while moving away from the current dominant narrative and

ideologies to one of, “collaboration, promise, and hope” (Boutte & Johnson, 2014, p. 167).

In their review of parent involvement literature for urban contexts, Boutte and Johnson (2014) used three paradigmatic lenses: (1) positivistic; (2) ecological; and (3) critical. Before delving into an in-depth analysis of parental involvement through this particular lens, I have provided a brief overview of each lens as summarized by Boutte and Johnson (2014).

***Positivistic***-This particular lens views knowledge as objective. Positivistic approach usually relies heavily on quantitative studies: “Researches are guided by deductive logic, hypothesis testing, and the like. This approach often seeks to find universal or generalizable patterns of behavior” (Cannella, 1997). There are few, if any, efforts made to understand and acknowledge the voices and experiences of families and community members (Delpit, 1988).

***Ecological***-Ecological paradigms capture human development over time and the role of environment in shaping individual growth. The ecological theories explain the issues pertaining to parent involvement and student achievement (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Boutte & Johnson, 2014; Johnson, 2014). This paradigm usually omits issues of race and class—two critical factors that play a crucial role in students’ schooling experiences.

***Critical***-Critical approaches acknowledge the fact that researchers come to certain studies with certain ideologies, beliefs, and deficit-based assumptions (Milner, 2007). This paradigm critiques and challenges structures and institutions that are put in place to oppress different groups of people, while working to emancipate those who are marginalized. Table 2.3 summarizes critically responsive parent involvement practices.

Table 2.3: Summary of Critically Responsive Parent Involvement Practices<sup>4</sup>

Critically Responsive Parent Involvement Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are culturally responsive to families and communities whose culture is often devalued in schools (e.g., minoritized groups).</li> <li>• Use two-way relationships (parents take on leadership roles and contribute to curricular decisions).</li> <li>• Create robust relationships and partnerships with parents and community members.</li> <li>• Guided by dynamic and fluid definitions of parent involvement.</li> <li>• Acknowledge, respect, and utilize multiple literacies.</li> <li>• Make efforts to learn with families and communities through creating partnerships</li> <li>• Are based on immersion within the culture and community as an approach to learn through and about families and communities.</li> <li>• Invite parents to voice their opinions and give their input on school policies.</li> <li>• Are flexible and elastic</li> <li>• View students’ culture as strength rather than a weakness. The curriculum hones in on what the students know.</li> <li>• Are interactive and grounded in strength-based norms and practices.</li> </ul>

Like Boutte and Johnson (2014), this review of literature is organized by positivistic, ecological, and critical paradigms. Hence, a summary of studies is presented under each paradigm, respectively.

***Positivistic Literature on Parent Involvement***

Many parent involvement studies within a positivistic paradigm have used data from the National Educational Longitudinal Studies (NELS). Drawing from NELS data, Yan (2000) contended that there is extensive evidence that social capital leads to better student academic achievement regardless of other social and economic factors a family may possess. Yan referred to social capital as social networks and social interactions that help to bring about educational attainment. Data for this study were drawn from the

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<sup>4</sup> Adapted from Boutte, G. S., & Johnson, G. (2014). Community and family involvement in urban schools. In H. R. Milner & K. Lomotey (Eds.). Handbook on urban education, pp. 167-82. New York, NY: Routledge.

National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88). NELS:88 was a panel study designed and conducted by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics. The authors explained that the NELS:88 database is the largest and most comprehensive database in the field of education. The NELS:88 sample was composed of eighth graders first interviewed in 1988 and follow-up surveys were conducted in 1990, 1992, and 1994. The authors' data comprised of data from all four waves of NELS:88 data including student and parent data; this led to a total sample of 6,459 students, which consisted of a subsample of 707 successful African American students, 5,293 successful European American students, and 459 other (nonsuccessful) African American students. These data illustrate information from a national sampling of students from 8<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade and two years after these students graduated from high school. Yan studied three groups: the target group, which comprised of successful African American students and two comparison groups, one which consisted of successful European American students and the other group consisted of non-successful African American students (2000). The author explained how SES, ethnicity, and family makeup all contribute to the theory of social capital. Thus, the author provided four variables that highlight the social interactions and relationships in the family involvement process: (1) parent-teen interactions, (2) parent-school interactions, (3) interactions with other parents, and (d) family norms. The author identified these four variables from the National Educational Longitudinal Study questionnaires and which were used to do an exploratory factor analysis. In the study, the author found there were significant differences between Black and White families in relation to parental education, family income, and family structure. Yan (2000) contended African American students were

more likely to come from *economically disadvantage* households than Western European American students. Additionally, African American households had lower incomes, parents with lower levels of formal education, and higher percentages of single parents. In short, the author concluded that higher levels of family income were aligned with a higher level of social capital. The assumption was that family social capital is influenced by both family socioeconomic status and family makeup.

### ***Ecological Literature on Parental Involvement***

Greene (2013) noted that many studies and parental involvement models fail to acknowledge how families define parental involvement, the roles and responsibilities of parents and teachers, the resources parents possess, or how schools view certain families through a deficit lens. For example, the work of Joyce Epstein has been widely used in parent involvement efforts. In 1995, Epstein created a framework to assist schools in building partnerships. Her research focused on examining school programs, school climate, and community partnerships as modes to create strong partnerships to aid all children excel in school and in life. Epstein summarized the theory, framework, and parameters that have assisted the schools in her research on constructing partnerships. She suggested that her framework and model could be used in elementary, middle, or high schools that were interested in improving and increasing parent involvement. In this conceptual articles, Epstein (1995) outlined six types of involvement and caring: (1) parenting (assist every family with establishing home environments to support children as students), (2) communicating (design successful forms of communication between home and school in regards to school programs and children's progress), (3) volunteering (create and recruit parent help and support), (4) learning at home (provide material and

concepts about how to help students at home with school work and other curricular decisions), (5) decision making (incorporate parents in school decisions and creating parent leaders and representatives), (6) collaborating with community (identify and incorporating resources and services from the community to increase school programs, family practices, and student learning and growth). Epstein explained the importance of a caring educational environment and how this particular environment can improve academic excellence, good communications, and productive interactions. The author presumed that if children feel cared for and challenged to work hard, they would be more likely to become better students who would try their best to learn to read, write, and learn other essential skills to remain in school. This conceptual work falls under an ecological paradigm. In addition, Epstein's model focuses on how parents need to work with the schools, and it does not focus on the roles and responsibilities that the school has to families. Greene (2013) argues Epstein's model surmises the educational field to be an equal playing field between families and schools. It does not acknowledge the roles that ideology and hegemony play in decision-making and policies.

While useful in their own right, positivistic and ecological paradigms overlook how race and racism operate within society and within educational arenas. Positivistic and ecological studies fail to critique and analyze the various hegemonic structures that impact parents, students, and communities and how the omission of race and racism perpetuate oppressive ideologies and epistemologies (Milner, 2007). Many teachers, administrators, researchers, and policy makers have adopted the traditional practices and policies that are valued as successful and effective practices for working with parents. However, research about parental involvement in urban spaces should focus on bi-

directional and culturally responsive approaches, programs, and models (Reynolds, 2010). Thus, there is a need to illustrate what effective parental involvement should look like in urban schools.

Due to the various oppressive structures, African American parents are often viewed and blamed as the problem even though the problem does not lie solely outside of the school but within the school as well. There is a void in the literature that does not illuminate the resistance parents may encounter from the teachers and school officials because of their (parents) race and socioeconomic status (SES). Race and SES are two variables that have stifled and disenfranchised students and parents' relationships with schools (Anderson, 1988; Anyon, 2005). Indeed, racial disparities permeate throughout institutions and various social structures in this country. It demarcates access to housing, jobs, knowledge, education, resources, social mobility, and other opportunities (Anyon, 2005; Kozol, 2005; Milner, 2007). Kozol (2005) highlighted the complex intersection of race and SES. Research shows that many impoverished areas are separated by race. "Racial isolation and the concentrated poverty of children in public school go hand in hand, moreover, as the Harvard project notes" (p. 288). The voices and the experiences of African American parents from low SESs are particularly absent in the academic literature (Howard & Reynolds, 2013; Lareau, 2000). Much of the existing literature suggests that regardless of the socioeconomic status, students and parents of color still encounter micro and macro aggressions of racism (Kozol, 2005; Lareau, 2000). Many educational institutions overlook parents of color who are middle-class (Lareau, 2000). There is an increase of African American people who are moving into more affluent neighborhoods; however, in these more affluent schools, the academic performance of

middle-class students of color still falls short compared to their White counterparts (Anderson, 1988; Anyon, 2005; Jackson & Boutte, 2009; King, 2005; Lareau, 2000). Evaluating parental involvement through a critical lens moves beyond deficit perspectives of parents in urban settings by uplifting the voices and experiences of parents and students of color

### ***Critical Literature on Parental Involvement***

Because traditional frameworks for studying parent involvement have disregarded race and racism, these studies have excluded the voices of culturally and linguistically diverse people (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Howard and Reynolds (2013) examined the school experiences of middle-class African American parents and students, because they are overlooked in the literature concerning underachievement and parent involvement. The authors employed a critical race theoretical framework to evaluate parent involvement as it relates to African Americans in middle-class schools. Howard and Reynolds draw upon the intersection of race and class to be used in their analysis. In addition, critical race theory enabled the authors to incorporate counterstorytelling as a methodological which allowed them to capture the voices of the parents in this study. The authors explained the increasing numbers of African American families who are finding their way to more affluent neighborhoods with affluent schools. However, the academic performance of these African American students still falls behind their white counterparts. Howard and Reynolds contended that issues of race and racism remain possible reasons in understanding this phenomenon. The authors illustrated how most literature centered around parent involvement fails to problematize the roles of race and class in parenting practices with schools; therefore, when race and class are part of the

analysis, there is a paucity of scholarship that fails to consider upper-class families of color.

Howard and Reynolds conducted a qualitative study and the data were collected from a number of individual and focus group interviews with African American parents whose children attended predominately White, suburban schools. There were a total of 20 mothers, and 10 fathers who participated in the study. There was a total of 73 students who were represented by 30 parents, with 40 of the students being female and 33 being male. The authors' findings highlighted that most of the parents believed in the importance of their involvement in their child's education. But, the parents seemed to have different perspectives about how that involvement should be implemented. The parents in the study stressed the importance of being informed about the happenings of school life. Several participants in the study revealed the lack of engagement between the home and the school. The data analysis revealed that parents want to be allowed to question, critique, and challenge the school and the schooling experiences of their children. For the parents who are engaged with the school, they find themselves in positions where the decisions, rules, and expectations are already negotiated without their voices. The lack of a collective voice has made it easier for schools to ignore parents as one vital resource for educational change. Howard and Reynolds elaborated on the interplay of race and class when it comes to parent involvement. Many parents expressed how they still encountered racism as they work to advocate on behalf of their children despite their socioeconomic status. The authors of this study explained the plethora of scholarship on the lack of parental involvement from African American families from low-income environments and recommended that scholars begin to capture the voices

and the experiences of more affluent African American families and their children's education, which may illustrate the fact that race does not disappear as people move up the socioeconomic ladder.

Educators, researchers, and policymakers must reevaluate parental involvement and consider how the failure to positively create a robust school and family partnership may contribute to widening the "achievement gap." Factors such as the allocation of resources unequally distributed in urban environments, high poverty rates, lack of high quality teachers, discipline disparity, literacy, and academic tracking all play an essential role in the contradictions of the achievement gap (Greene, 2013; Kozol, 2005). Indeed, scholars such as Ladson-Billings (2009) have challenged and pushed the field of education and policymakers to rethink this idea of the "achievement gap" and to view it as an "educational debt." The educational debt calls the social and historical inequities into play and how these social inequities impact and silence the voices of parents of color. That is, the educational debt challenges the ideologies and ideas of individuality and meritocracy by bringing in the broader structural institutions into play.

This chapter embodied a review of literature that helps the reader to situate the present study. The present study explores the intersections of race, literacy, and parent involvement. Furthermore, this review of literature was written from the viewpoint of what educators can do in urban contexts and how we may reorganize our efforts to engage and reengage families and communities from urban backgrounds. Parental involvement should include robust, validating, cooperative, and liberating practices that engage and connect families and communities to schools. This dissertation study adds to this body of research. I designed a study that enabled me (the teacher) to engage in

critical and reflexive dialogue with parents and students from various racial and ethnic backgrounds as a way to build racial and cultural identities while challenging and critiquing the various systems of power. Next, in Chapter 3, I provide an overview of the critical family literacy book club pilot study.

## CHAPTER THREE

### IMPETUS FOR THE PILOT STUDY

Before discussing the pilot study, I will explain how and why I decided to do a Critical Literacy Book Study and chronicle the process chronologically. Prior to conducting the pilot study, I sent a letter to the parents and guardians of my students explaining the study. It was my first year teaching, and I wanted to conduct a year-long workshop for parents and guardians. I wanted to learn more about my students with a focus on the idea of 21<sup>st</sup> century literacies. The goal was to explore how technology and social media played an important role in children's learning. The first step in planning the workshop series was to listen to the parents' insights and feelings about school-home communications; what we can do better to help children succeed; and what the school needs to do to involve parents more effectively. I interviewed the parents of my students as a way to elicit the parents' voices about their involvement within the school (see interview questions in Appendix A). In short, most (60%) of the African American parents who were interviewed explained how they felt underrepresented and voiceless, and they believed their children were receiving similar treatment from teachers and administrators. Three major themes emerged from the parent interviews: (1) Parents felt that race played a role in the way that they were treated; (2) Some parents expressed the need to help students to develop better literacy skills; and (3) A few parents wanted to figure out ways to incentivize reading for their children.

Regarding issues of race, one parent expressed the presence of intergenerational and covert racism. She explained,

My experience is based on having attended Pine Hill High School (Pseudonym) as a student myself and being the parent of a child attending the school. I have found that the school does not treat all children the same and operates with a different set of standards for some kids. I think it is sometimes very elitist in how it treats parents, even at Open House meetings. I do attend orientations and find them helpful, but the Open House is not as much fun. There is not enough time to engage with the teacher and I have observed that some teachers cater to certain parents. To me it seems kind of based on race, sometimes (C.M., personal communication, September 5, 2011).

The parent's comments conveyed feelings of not being respected. After reflecting on this and other similar comments, I wanted to find a way to overtly demonstrate respect to all parents. Recalling my own personal traumatic experience with racism in school, this motivated me to be cognizant of not contributing to the dysconscious racism that several parents described. Data from the interviews also revealed that some parents were aware that their students needed help in English and wanted strategies to motivate their children.

One parent lamented,

I would like to know about how to use technology at home to get him more interested in English Language Arts. He has literacy issues, especially being able to comprehend. So, I would like to know more about helping him read. He is receiving help at school and I would like to know what we can do on our end to help push him onward.

Another parent shared,

I want my son to stay engaged with school and I'd like to help finding the right incentives.

Hence, the idea of engaging parent-student dyads in critical book study emerged from the intersection of thinking of these two themes (race and literacy); in conjunction, these were the issues I was learning about in my graduate level courses. During the fall semester of 2012, I was in the beginning of my data collection stage. In the spring of 2013, I took a course on Critical Race Theory (CRT), which morphed the many ways I tackled the critical family literacy book club. However, taking courses such as CRT in which race is placed at the nexus of events that transpire in society as well as taking A Black Education Congress course on learning about decolonizing theories and Afrocentric understandings all shaped my epistemic orientation of how I began to view and understand knowledge. The guidance and instructors of the courses have impacted me to become a critical English educator who implements critical literacy as a way for students and parents to speak against racial oppression and as a way to uplift and transform those who are often on the margins in society. After reflecting and analyzing the parent interviews, I shifted from conducting a parent workshop to conducting a critical family literacy book club. The parent workshop approach contradicted the paradigm that I was seeking to implement. After actively engaging in the literature and critically reflecting on my goals of the study, I recognized that the workshop technique was a positivistic approach; however, I believed that a critical paradigmatic approach served best for this particular study. I wanted to work and to learn *with* and *from* my participants. I also made a decision to do a pilot study on the Critical Literacy Book Club.

### ***The Pilot Study***

Maxwell (2005) referred to pilot studies as investigative and experimental studies where the researcher can test ideas and hypotheses. During the 2012-2013 school year, I conducted a critical family literacy book club pilot study to test parents and students' views on race and racism and to develop a better understanding of how these social constructs affect the lives of parents and their children.

### ***Research Site and Context***

The southern U.S. serves as the broader context for this study using a critical case site selection. Michael Patton (2002) described critical cases as those “that can make a point quite dramatically... that would yield the most information and have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge” (p. 236). The south serves as a key critical case selection for understanding the historical and contemporary dimensions of race and racism in both educational and societal contexts (Morris & Monroe, 2009). Morris and Monroe (2009) argued that nowhere else in the United States have people of color experienced more barriers than in the south.

The pilot study was conducted at Pine Ridge High School (pseudonym). Pine Ridge is an urban school in the South where I taught freshman English and Language Arts. The school enrolled 1,456 students. Nearly half (45%) of students received free or reduced lunch. The school's demographics were 66% Black/African American; 21%, White; 8%, Latino/a; 3%, Asian, and 2%, two or more races. The faculty and staff were comprised of 80% White and 20% of color. My classroom demographics enrolled 105 students--45% Black/African American; 35% Latino/A; 15% White; 2% Asian; 2% two or more races.

### ***Participants***

All of the parents and guardians of my students were given a letter about joining the critical family literacy book club (See Appendix B). Although 30 parents agreed to join the critical family literacy book club, only 18 participants actually participated in the book club (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Pilot Study Participants

Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Students	Parents
7 Black/African American	10 Males	8 Students	10 Parents
8 White	8 Females		
3 Biracial			

### ***Research Questions***

This pilot study was guided by the following research questions: (a) How (if at all) are students' and parents' beliefs and dispositions about the importance of culture and identity impacted when they are engaged in a family literacy book club? (b) What happens when students and parents are engaged in a critical family literacy book club?

### ***Procedures***

Engagement in the critical family literacy book club spanned two semesters. The teacher (myself), parents, and students were expected to read the book *Mexican Whiteboy* by Matt de la Pena (2009) and to attend monthly book club meetings from August to May. I selected the book because this novel shows how parents' racial identities can have an impact on how they create critical dialogue pertaining to issues of race, racism,

poverty, gender, and power. Also, the participants in this study were from various diverse backgrounds, and the novel incorporated the voices and lived experiences of multiple families from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. My intent was for the critical family literacy book club to serve as a vessel for dispelling racial and prejudicial stereotypes about people of color, which assisted parents, students, and teachers and unlearning some biases and beliefs. The book club was a mechanism that I implemented to put parents, teachers, and students on what I hope will be a lifelong journey of love for literacy. Additionally, the book club allowed space for individuals to discuss books in a non-traditional manner since a critical literacy book club extends beyond a simple reading of the book. As with typical book clubs, the book is the apparatus and the foundation of discussion. However, in the critical literacy book club, participants had the opportunity to name, claim, and analyze the hegemonic forces that continue to oppress certain groups of people based upon their race, class, or gender.

### ***Data Sources and Data Collection***

During the pilot study, I gathered most of the data from the book club conversations/topics and informal conversations. With permission from the participants in the study, I audiotaped each book club meeting, and took copious notes. Each participant was asked to bring one question that they had about the book, character, or anything else related to the book. I also had questions in case the participants had no questions. Most of the sessions ended up being a combination of participant and researcher-generated questions. A summary table is provided in Table 3, which presents the dates, topics/discussions, and themes from the book club.

Table 3.2: Critical Family Literacy Book Club Meetings

Date	Topics/Discussions	Key Themes	Sample Questions
October 23, 2012	Personal connections with the characters in the novel	Identity Stereotypes	How does Danny's race and culture impact his identity? (Participant generated question)
November 13, 2012	Assimilation	Meritocracy Myth/Colorblindness	In Chapter 3 "Shot heard around the Cul-de-sac," what are your thoughts about Danny wanting to eradicate his American identity and culture? (Teacher generated question)
December 11, 2012	White Supremacy/Privilege Spaces	Intersectionality of race, gender, sexual orientation, and class Oppression	How is this notion of privilege and power shown in this passage? (Participant generated question)
January 22, 2013	Race/Racism	Race as an identity constructor Race in the South Internalized Racism	How do parents perpetuate racism with children? (Participant generated question)
February 26, 2013	Innocence and Race	Race-related conversations between parents/guardians and children Parents/guardians perpetuation of racism Media perpetuation of racism and White supremacy	Can you describe what will need to happen for you to engage with other ethnicities and other race groups on a frequent basis? (Teacher generated question)
March 12, 2013	Counterstories	Countering dominant	What do we do as parents and teachers

		beliefs and ideologies through the use of storytelling, lived experiences, and realities	to ensure that our kids are culturally, racially, and ethnically competent? Also, how do we teach children how to counter dominant beliefs and ideologies? (Teacher generated question)
April 16, 2013	Social Justice and Equity	Building a critical consciousness	How has the book club changed your perceptions about culture, identity, and race? (Teacher generated question)

***Findings***

In this particular section, I will briefly discuss findings from the pilot study. The findings are organized by the two research questions for this pilot study.

***How (if at all) are students’ and parents’ beliefs and dispositions about the importance of culture and identity impacted when they are engaged in a family literacy book club?***

The text for the book club illustrated the notions of power and privilege---looking at how Whites possess privilege and power individually and collectively. In the novel of study *Mexican Whiteboy*, Danny, the main character, is in Mexico visiting his family. Danny explains whenever it is time to eat dinner his grandma feeds him first. Danny does not understand why she does this. He exclaims how his grandma makes his Hispanic uncles, aunts, and cousins wait until he is served. During the book club, I posed the question: How is this notion of privilege and power shown in the passage? A sampling of responses from parents is presented below.

“I wonder if he wasn’t good in school or smart would she had done this? In the book he mentioned she is ashamed of her Mexican heritage” (C.H., personal communication, September 5, 2012).

“She is probably glad that he is part White. She sees it as a good thing” (C.J., personal communication, September 5, 2012).

“He is going to have opportunities” (C.H., personal communication, (September 5, 2012).

“Because he would make it as a White person than Mexican”

“I would be curious to know what the rest of the family thinks about Grandma treating him like this” (D.C., personal communication, September 5, 2012).

This was an ongoing conversation between an African American female participant and two White male participants. When the question pertaining to power and privilege was first posed, the White participants did not address the question of power and privilege, and they highlighted how the grandma serves Danny first because he is intelligent and makes good grades. Consciously or dysconsciously there seemed to be an underlying notion of meritocracy and colorblindness. The two White males did not understand how Whites are privilege and obtain power because of their skin, “White privilege, the way that white people benefit from a racist society, refers to unearned advantages that are based solely on skin color and sometimes unnoticed by white people” (Rogers & Mosley, 2006, p. 466). Thus, these two White males discussed and argued how the grandmother is rewarding Danny for being intelligent and subliminally making a statement to the rest of the family---if Danny can do this why can’t you? After this conversation, the African American female participant explicated how the grandmother feels inferior to Danny; and, she is probably glad he is White, because he will make it easier in society as a White individual rather than Mexican.

*What happens when students and parents are engaged in a critical family literacy book club?*

After this conversation about White power and privilege, another White female participant who is a parent of one of my students and a teacher at the school diverted to how it is not a race issue, but it is more of a socioeconomic issue: The parent states:

I have taught at inner city, small towns, heavy Hispanics' populations, heavy African American, and even heavy Caucasian schools. And, I have seen it more or less with socioeconomic status opposed to race. We see it less in the poor White communities and more in the poor Black communities. So, which I can see why we tend to associate it more with race. But, you know in my classroom, all of my students are on that even playing field. (J.H., personal communication, March 5, 2013).

The participant's statement brings in this notion of colorblindness. Colorblindness impacts not only White teachers but also teachers of color. Ms. Harmon, a middle-aged White woman, made clear how she views students as individuals without recognizing the students' race or culture. Lewis and Landsman (2012) argue, "On the surface, racism seemed to disappear according to many White people because to them it had only been overtly visible. Whites began to perceive society as being equal for all individuals/People began to argue that race was no longer a significant factor for people of color" (126). Many African American parents and students shared their lived and shared experiences as tools to deconstruct and disrupt this practice of colorblindness. On the surface, colorblindness seems appealing; and, it appears to be a strategy for stifling race and eradicating racism; however, it impedes on the disruption of recognizing oppression because of race and racism. Hence, it perpetuates the status quo, and

knowingly or unknowingly it propels whiteness (Delgado, 2009). During the book club, an African American participant dispelled the colorblind myth by sharing her experiences she had with her seven year old daughter. The participant stated:

“My daughter used to go to school in Richland Five School District (pseudonym). At her old elementary school, she was surrounded by kids who looked like her, even her teachers were African American. But, now she goes to school in Richland Five, and she is around more White students and all of her teachers are White. So, one day she came home and she said, “Mommy, I want my hair to be straight, and I want bangs. Also, I want some cowgirl boots.” I had to explain to her how she is beautiful the way she is, and how her hair does not define who you are. So, I am now starting to share more stories with her---stories that show the beauty of who she is” (Brenda Jacobs).

In this episodic moment, I decided that it would be a good time to have a conversation about what is colorblindness and how this belief handicaps people of Color, reifies White privilege, and sustains racism (Boutte, Lopez-Robertson, & Powers-Costello, 2011). The participants and I discussed the importance of discussing race---one cannot unlearn the colorblind method if he or she does not recognize racism; thus, hiding race can be problematic. Practicing colorblindness suppresses people’s history, experiences, culture, race, language, and identity. During this book club meeting, I showed a clip from the film *Corrina Corrina*. In short, the film illustrated how a little Black girl and White girl recognized race and engaged in critical dialogue about their skin. This clip and the participant’s comments about her daughter assisted in deconstructing and dispelling the

colorblindness myth while showing the importance of why parents and teachers should engage their children in conversations about race and racism.

The findings and results of this pilot study informed the next iteration of my study. Based upon the data from the pilot study, I wanted to further explore how families' racial experiences impact how they create critical dialogue with their children as well as explore and investigate parents and students' racial-related experiences. In the next chapter, I provide an in-depth overview of the methods and methodologies that will guide the data collection procedures used to capture the experiences of parents and students.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to explicate the research methods, context, methods of data of collection and analysis of this study. In this chapter, I discuss the ways by which I collected the data, and the process by which I analyzed it. Specifically, I addressed the selection of my participants, the interview process, and the process of crafting their stories and analyzing their stories (and mine) for meaning. As explained in the subsequent section, employing a critical race methodology influenced some of the steps in the data gathering and analysis process.

Qualitative research methods and methodologies were used in an attempt to capture the stories of those who are oppressed and disenfranchised. After analyzing the data from the book club meetings and the conversations with the participants for the pilot study, I wanted to explore and document the racially-related experiences of the participants and how parents' racial identities impact or informed how they create conversations pertaining to issues such as race, racism, and power with their children. I wanted to capture the dialogue, interactions, and complexities from actual book club meetings through a dramaturgical performance. I created composite characters to illustrate the lived experiences and realities of the participants in the critical family literacy book club.

Table 4 illustrates the research questions for the study, and it provides the data sources and method of analysis for major themes.

Table 4.1: Research Questions, Data Sources, and Analysis

Research Questions	Data Sources	Method of Analysis
<p>1. What happens when parents and students are engaged in a critical family literacy book club?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• field notes recorded during book club meetings</li> <li>• semi-structured individual interviews</li> <li>• participants' documents and notes from the book club meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Descriptive coding, Protocol coding, and In Vivo coding of field notes and observations to identify how the parents and students' perceptions and beliefs about race, racism, and power have changed throughout the book club</li> <li>• Descriptive coding, Protocol coding, and In Vivo coding of parents and students' book club documents and notes</li> </ul>
<p>2. What role do parents' racial identities play in how they create dialogue pertaining to issues of race, racism, and power with their children?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• field notes and observations of book club meetings</li> <li>• semi-structured individual interviews</li> <li>• unstructured interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Descriptive coding, Protocol coding, and In Vivo coding of parents and students' racial narratives for major themes</li> <li>• Descriptive coding, protocol coding, and In Vivo coding of book club meetings conversations and discussions</li> <li>• Descriptive coding, protocol coding, and In Vivo coding of parents and students' day-to-day experience as a student/parent and, if relevant, the ways</li> </ul>

		in which they see race play itself out in those events, processes, and activities throughout the day.
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***Role of Narratives in Critical Race Methodology***

What makes critical race theory intriguing is its simplistic, yet complex components that blur the boundaries of theory and methodology (Cook, 2013). The theory of CRT documents and explores how the systems and structures of inequalities operate regarding race and racism. Furthermore, the methodological component of CRT centers the lived experiences and realities of oppressed individuals while simultaneously rejecting positivistic epistemologies and historical ways of knowing and truth (Soloranzo & Yosso, 2002). Critical race methodology is a component of critical race theory that unveils the ways in which race and racism impact the lives of racial minorities. Thus, CRT methodology uses counterstorytelling and strives to work against the continuation of oppressing those who are usually “silent and invisible as subjects of the research” (Cook, 2013, p. 184).

Soloranzo & Yosso (2002) assert that counterstorytelling challenges the dominant ideology and the traditional claims educational institutions construct about colorblindness, objectivity, meritocracy, and racial and social justice. More specifically, critical race scholars purport a critical race methodology in education confronts White privilege, counters notions of neutral or objective research, and reveals deficit research that silences epistemologies of people of color (Soloranzo & Yosso, 2002). Soloranzo and Yosso (2002) proclaim that the ideology of racism supports, creates, and validates

the implementation of the “master narrative” in storytelling. Monovocal, majoritarian, master narrative, and dominant narrative are stories that perpetuate White privilege, middle/ upper class, heterosexuals, and White men by identifying these social situations as static and normative (Yosso, 2002); and, as a way to dismantle the “master narrative,” CRT scholars utilize counterstorytelling. Bell (1992) elucidates counterstorytelling as a mode of telling the stories and narratives of those whose realities are often not told and silenced. Solorzano & Yosso (2002) and Cook (2013) discuss three types of counterstories: personal narratives, other people’s narratives, and composite narratives that (a) build community between those who are marginalized (b) resists and challenge the epistemology of those at the center (c) helps individuals and groups to develop our understanding of reality and possibility. For this study, I created composite characters through the implementation of performative writing as an analytic tool.

### ***Context and Participants***

The study took place at an urban high school in the South (See the demographics from the pilot study). The participants were the same from the pilot study (See Table 3). In the aforementioned section, I explained the overview of my participants from the pilot book club study. All 18 participants from the pilot study participated in the full study as well. In the second part of the study, I conducted semi-structured interviews, unstructured interviews, and follow-up focus groups, which I will explain more in-depth below. Convenience sampling was utilized to select the participants for this study. Maxwell (2013) explains how convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique and the subjects are selected because of their proximity and accessibility. Both parents and students were the participants from the pilot study. I chose this method of

sampling because I had access to these participants because of my position at the school and had an established rapport and relationship with my participants.

### **Data Collection Methods**

Building from the pilot study, for the second iteration of this study, primary data sources included semi-structured interviews, unstructured interviews, and focus groups. These data sources captured the dialogue, narratives, and verbal interactions of parents and students as well as my observations and reflections upon families' interactions.

*Observations and Field notes:* I observed, audio recorded, and then transcribed the discussions of parents and students as they participated in the critical family literacy book club. I paid particular attention to parents and students' perceptions and beliefs about race, racism, and power and how their conversations, thoughts, and perceptions changed throughout the book club.

### **Interviews**

Before conducting individual and group interviews with the participants from the book club, I sent a letter to the parents and students of the book club asking them if they would like to participate in this study (See Appendix C). The participants of this study were interviewed separately for a total of two times. The first individual interview was a semi-structured interview. The participants were asked to recall a memory or memories that made them realize their racial identity. The semi-structured interviews were approximately 30 minutes long and audio recorded (See Appendix D). I conducted these interviews more as a discussion rather than a formal interview. In addition to semi-structured interviews, the participants participated in one unstructured interview. For the unstructured interview, the participants were provided a prompt and they had to respond

to the prompt in any written format (i.e., song, illustration, essay, self-stories, poems, journal, prayers, etc.). Unstructured interviews allowed me to use interviews not as a way to collect information but as a method to produce performance texts about self and society (Denzin, 2001). Interviews as an interpretive practice are active--meaning is created and disseminated through performative representation (Dillard, 1982). Thus, the interview functions as an autobiographic device, which enables individuals who are willing to tell stories about themselves. Reflexive interviews use language to unite individuals (Denzin, 2001). Interviews are transformed into performative texts where the interviewees become performers whose words are performed by others (Dillard, 1982). More specifically, the marginalization and the lived experiences of the participants are made visible.

### ***Focus Groups***

Participants participated in two focus group interviews. Each focus group was 30 minutes. One focus group took place during the beginning of the study, and the second focus group was conducted at the end of the study. Please see (Appendix E) for focus interview questions.

### ***Data Analysis: Creating Composite Characters***

To code and analyze the data, I engaged in two coding cycles. For the first coding cycle, I utilized protocol coding. Saldana (2013) exerts that protocol coding is the gathering and the coding of qualitative data according to a pre-established system.

“(P)rotocol coding is appropriate for qualitative studies in disciplines with pre-established and field-tested coding systems *if* the researcher’s goals harmonize with the protocol’s outcomes” (Saldana, 2013). Guided by a critical theoretical framework, I created an

electronic analysis chart where I specifically coded for the tenets of CRT from the participants' stories. In the left column, I created a chart with a description of the tenets, and in the right column, I placed the actual word(s) and phrase(s) from the participants' interviews. Subsequently, I employed descriptive coding. Saldana (2013) defines descriptive coding as the summarization of the main premise of the main topic. Descriptive coding enabled me to look for early patterns and themes. Building on my critical race theoretical framework, for the first round of reading, I searched for examples of permanence of racism, colorblindness/meritocracy, whiteness as property, intersectionality, and commitment to social justice. These examples were illustrated in different colors to denote their significance. Then, I read and reread the data to document early emerging descriptive coding patterns, and then I utilized a color-coded method for identifying the descriptive codes. An example of the color-coded method can be found in Table 4.2

Table 4.2 Color-Coded Method

Color	Descriptive Code
Red	Permanence of Racism
Yellow	Intersectionality
Green	Colorblindness/Meritocracy
Blue	Commitment to Social Justice
Purple	Whiteness as Property

In coding the transcripts, documents, and interviews, I paid close attention to the counterstories, dominant stories, and the detailed roles race, racism, and power play in

education and in homes. After receiving the transcriptions, I coded the interviews and documents regarding participants' in school and out of school experiences with racism. The CRT tenets and thematic stories provided the foundation for the composite characters.

For the second round of coding, I utilized In Vivo coding. Saldana (2013) exerts that In Vivo Coding refers to an actual phrase or word found in the qualitative data. These are the actual phrases and words from the participants in the study. I employed In Vivo Coding as a mechanism to acknowledge and honor the participants' voices and examples for each of the color-coded descriptive codes. This method enabled me to capture each participant's attributes and personality as I engaged in analysis. For example, when discussing struggles with racism, David discussed an example of intersectionality when discussing the socioeconomic disparity between Blacks and Whites and the refusal to acknowledge race when it comes to the discussion of class, David noted, "When most people talk about poverty they don't touch racism at all! They think okay if you are poor it's your fault. We have targets on our backs. You have one on your back." The participant explains and illustrates the inextricable link between race, class, and gender. An example of CRT Tenets and In Vivo Codes are presented in Table 4.3

Table 4.3 In Vivo Codes

CRT Tenets	In Vivo Codes
<p><i>Racial realism</i>: Exposes racism along with the intersection of race and power. CRT scholars not only believe racism is embedded within society, but also racism is not abnormal (Bell, 1992; Delgado &amp; Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• So, you said race is over; so, in today's world is race over? (Interviewer) / No, I'll go against that. It happens every day.</li> <li>• I mean everybody isn't racist.</li> </ul>

<p>Racial realism exposes and challenges micro and macro aggressions of racial hegemony, structures, processes, and discourses, while shedding light on how race and racism permeate throughout society on a daily bases</p>	<p>Racism is still here.</p>
<p><i>Intersectionality:</i> CRT scholars have beliefs that race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, etc. are other oppressive factors that can function separately or can add to the multiple forms of oppression depending upon the setting (Delgado &amp; Stefancic, 2012). The intersectionality makes it difficult to self-identify which particular intersection(s) are being operated.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It's like they are always stereotyping us as Black people. So, when I was younger, my mom would always tell me what to do as a young Black male and the things that I shouldn't do because of my race and gender.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Critique on Colorblindness/Meritocracy:</i> CRT critiques liberalism as a framework to handling America's racial issues (Delgado &amp; Stefancic, 2012). Liberalists embrace this meritocratic notion of "we have arrived," and society is not racially stratified. They embrace and employ colorblindness. Colorblindness can be nebulous, because it can stand in the way of recognizing racism.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You are right about the Upstate, and I lived there for 21 years. And, I spent four years in Clinton. It was like back in time, but if you move to Columbia and you learn that it is a melting pot of everybody. And, it is just different. I think it is more advanced because it is a melting pot</li> <li>• Recognizing power / privilege we are 20 years behind. Unless you go further South.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Commitment to Social Justice:</i> CRT challenges sexism, classism, racism, and other hegemonic and subordinate forms that are in place to marginalize people of Color. Hence, merging CRT and social justice enable individuals to build a critical consciousness. Critical consciousness unmask the beliefs and ideologies that may impede humanity, freedom, justice, and democracy. Building a critical consciousness is an architecture that enables CRT scholars to challenge and interrogate the dominant ideology and power structures through providing the lived experiences of the oppressed groups and individual.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not to say the dominant culture, but who is to say the best culture? You don't want to get rid of the best of yourself to bring yourself down just to be like somebody else.</li> <li>• I never thought about that. You know some names go back to the African culture. But, when people see it on applications they say, "Oh, this is a Black name or it's ghetto."</li> <li>• Not only that, but it has a meaning and a connection (referring to the importance of names)</li> </ul>

*Whiteness as Property*: Whiteness is a racial discourse utilized as a tool to deconstruct how Whiteness privileges one group while devaluing and oppressing another group. There is a linkage between Whiteness and property. Historically, Whites have been the proprietors of institutions, education, language, knowledge, citizenship, and literacy. CRT disrupts and refutes the dominant ideology and assumptions about the normalization of Whiteness as property.

- I remember during the time of segregation. I lived off of Farrow Rd. It was this kid named Rufus, and he was the only Black kid who attended the school. Then, the school district rezoned and I (Dave) was rezoned to a predominantly Black high school, and I became the fly on the wall. It changed everything about me because I didn't fit in...ummm...and it was scary...you know it was scary. I never tried to develop friends who weren't of my same color. I couldn't relate.
- I guess you would say dark skin was ugly to a lot of people. You had to be light skinned or even White...and even when it came to dating a lot of the guys would consider dark skin women ugly
- This whole notion of assimilation meaning to eradicate who you are to fit in with the norm. Right now, we know the norm is the dominant culture
- When I go to my dad's side, I am like the outcast you know. I am not brown skin. When I go to Korea, I still don't fit in.
- When you said fitting in, the first thing that came into my mind was names. People change their names to get certain jobs. People use names to reflect who people are, and sometimes, people are judged because of their names.
- She is probably glad that he is part White. She sees it as a good thing.
- He is going to have opportunities.

	B/c he would make it as a White person than Mexican.
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### ***Creating Composite Characters***

For this study, I used an etic approach. With this approach, the theory drove my study and this particular perspective drove the coding of the data (Saldana, 2013). A major barrier with this etic approach was the chance of privileging my understanding and interpretation. This was countered by staying close to the data and using direct quotes or paraphrased comments when possible. I crosschecked this information with the participants, and I triangulated data from interviews along with other sources. In conjunction with coding the data for themes, I wrote the racial narrative of each participant, reflecting traditional narrative writing. This step was essential for creating the composite characters. The participants' individual interviews honed in on creating a three-dimensional image of that particular individual by looking at the words, feelings, personalities, and histories of the participants. In addition, these stories were created from observations, exchanges, and experiences (Cook, 2013). It was imperative to capture the nuances of each participant before crafting composite characters. When creating the composite characters, it was essential that I capture the distinct voices of each character. I had the goal of creating what Cook (2013) and Bell (1997) call modular stories. Quoting M. Bell (1997) defines modular stories as, "as stories...composed as a mosaic, a design made up of component parts: What modular design can do is liberate the writer from linear logic, those chains of cause and effect, strings of dominoes always falling forward" (p. 158). Hence, utilizing composite characters required me to be descriptive and to move away from *telling* to *showing* (Cook, 2013) which required me to engage in creative literature and writing. I chose three prolific creative writers from

whom I modeled (Walter Dean Myers, Octavia Butler, and Toni Morrison). I read these authors' work to document and explore the representation of voice from the characters in their novels. I wanted to make sure that each composite character had a well-developed, distinct voice that captures the data.

Creating composite characters challenged me to create coherent and cohesive narratives that incorporated themes gleaned from the field notes, data, and other data sources. In effort to create composite characters, I had to interweave various participants into composite characters, which required me to look closely at the body language, verbal phrasing, and personal backgrounds. Table 4.4 shows how I outlined and captured the personalities and attributes of the characters.

Table 4.4: Characterization Chart

Character	One Word Description	Feelings	Appearance

Cook (2013) explains within this frame how the voice of the researcher is fully present, acknowledge, and problematize; engagement in self-reflexivity enables race researchers and researchers of race to critique and challenge our individual beliefs and assumptions to move away from positivistic restraints of objectivity and subjectivity. The stories of

the composite characters are not fictional narratives taken from transcripts, interviews, field notes, and observations. As Solorzano and Yosso (2002) assert, “we are not developing imaginary characters that engage in fictional scenarios. Instead, the ‘composite’ characters we develop are grounded in real-life experiences and actual empirical data and are contextualized in social situations that are also grounded in real life, not fiction” (p. 36). Experiential knowledge is an important asset of CRT; thus, the development of composite characters enable us to view and to understand the stories and realities of how African Americans understand their lived experiences (Bell, 1997; Cook, 2013).

Coupled with the creation of composite characters, I employed performative writing to show the lived experiences and realities of the participants in this study. Denzin (2001) explains how performative writing is about the world and how the world is constantly being performed. This particular form of writing does more than move writers to tears, “they criticize the world the way it is, and offer suggestions about how it could be” (Denzin, 2001, p. 24). Furthermore, performative writing is an alternative research method that enables researchers to disseminate research in a non-traditional way. It creates a portal for allowing performers and audiences an opportunity to engage in the stories being told and retold (Denzin, 2001). In this dissertation study, I present my data findings and analysis through a dramaturgical performance. Through this process, the marginalization and lived experiences of the participants are made visible. Participants’ experiences move from private to public; creating a space where the audience and the performers engage in dialogic conversation about social and equity issues that plague and subordinate individuals based upon their race, gender, and class. In addition, using

performative writing enables participants and audience members to critique, challenge, and evaluate the world in which we live while offering recommendations on how to make it better.

### **Researcher's Situated Knowledge**

#### ***Advantages of Qualitative Work***

Employing a critical race theoretical framework required me to interpret how the worlds of my participants are socially constructed, fluid, and perplexed (Bell, 1992). Utilizing a qualitative study enabled me to interact with participants in their societal contexts and to learn about their perceptions (Glesne, 2011). According to Glesne (2011), human beings construct their own realities, and their individual experiences and perceptions are valued. Oftentimes people of color voices are silenced and misrepresented in academic research (Milner, 2007). Conducting a qualitative study required me to contextualize, interpret, and understand the epistemological natures that form my participants' world. My epistemic orientation of how I see and understand knowledge informed this study. As an emerging critical race scholar, I believe knowledge is dynamic and fluid and socially constructed (Villalpando & Bernal, 2002). Villalpando & Bernal (2002) argue there is an "apartheid of knowledge" where epistemological racism is sustained and demarcates other epistemologies within mainstream research and community. Knowledge is constructed based upon our personal experiences. The separation of knowledge ignores the cultural resources that are formed based upon the epistemologies that many people of color possess (Milner, 2007). Villalpando & Bernal (2002) elucidate this notion of cultural resources; cultural resources include the beliefs, practices, knowledge, and ideologies that are constructed

from culturally specific lessons throughout the home space and communal space of people who have been marginalized by the dominant society. The cultural resources and lessons are often formed by the collective experiences and passed on through generations. Epistemologically, these resources and lessons can be liberating and of nurturance while also assisting us with how to live with everyday life by providing ideas and strategies to tackle and overcome subordinating conditions (Villapando & Bernal, 2002).

To build on this argument, CRT challenges a Eurocentric epistemological idea of what knowledge is by accepting and acknowledging people of color as holders and constructors of knowledge that challenge and critique the “standard” way of knowing (Lynn & Dixson, 2013). With a critical race theoretical framework in mind, I captured the stories of my participants. Turning to the participants’ lived experiences challenged and countered the dominant narrative. Approaching this work through a critical lens enabled the participants and me to critique and challenge various power structures.

A critical stance enabled me to (de)contextualize the structure of power (Freire, 1970; Glesne, 2011). According to Lynn, Jennings, and Hughes (2013), critical theory research operates to expose and critique distorting ideologies and structures that operate to keep suppressive structures in place. Understanding the stories of my participants allowed me to cast doubt on scientific objectivity while shedding light on how our realities are formed by political, social, economic, gender, and ethnic constructs (Glesne, 2011; King, 2005).

### ***Disclosure of Personal Interest-positionality***

Within the African American community, we share similar attributes and characteristics (King, 2005). Historically, in the United States, African Americans have

encountered numerous impediments; in particular, racial oppression and marginalization. “These two factors combined lay foundations for current values, traditions, beliefs, ways of knowing, modes of expression, language attributes, etc. among African Americans today” (Jay, 2006, p.49). Our experiences and stories as African Americans are stifled and missing in education, institutions, and discourses (Jay, 2006; King, 2005). All of these factors positioned the sensitive-self (me) within this study. As the researcher, I am fully present in this study. I bring my many positionalities, lived experiences, and realities.

There are many intersections that play an intricate role in my life. There is the intersection of being African American and male. I struggle with systemic subordination and the system of oppression. Therefore, during the actual book club meetings, it will be easier to play the role as the participant/researcher versus observer. My racial experiences and multiple identities will enable me to become a participant of the critical book club since my experiences allow me to connect with other participants of Color and share our collective stories.

I am a high school English teacher. My research agenda is situated around critical race theory, culturally responsive teaching, and racial literacy. I believe that since we live in a racially stratified society, literacy is a tool that can ignite liberation or perpetuate oppression. In order to be a critical citizen, I believe that we must appreciate and embrace other people’s cultures, multiple identities, and races. However, many inequities exist and remain in place because of individuals’ negative perceptions and beliefs about other groups of people based upon their race and culture.

This research topic is an amalgam of autobiographical, personal, and professional experiences. I honed in on how race, parental involvement, culturally responsive teaching, and literacy have all played a significant role in my life. My parents played a major role in my life since they valued and appreciated education. However, growing up my parents did not have critical dialogue with my sister or me about issues such as race and racism. My parents made comments that showed me that they have experienced oppression because of their race; nonetheless, they did not create critical conversations about race related issues with their children. At the beginning of this study, I shared my racial narrative and how one particular experience negatively impacted my life. That racial experience could have likely been less traumatic if my parents would have made me critically aware about racism, my race, my culture, and my multiple identities, which helped me to create this phenomenon. Hence, I speculate that if parents are engaged in a critical family literacy book club, it will not only promote literacy but also serve as a space that enables parents and students to engage in critical dialogue about race and racism.

As noted earlier, I argued that we live in a racially stratified society (Bell, 1992). Since racism is embedded within various social institutions such as homes and schools, I decided to draw from critical race theoretical and critical race pedagogical frameworks—both of which acknowledge the existence of racism. Race, racism, and power were the underpinnings for the creation of this particular study. Therefore, I explored what critical race scholars say about parental involvement and race, and literacy and race. When I initially thought about the critical literacy book project, the existing literature from all of these factors seem isolated, but utilizing race, racism, and power as the impetuses for the

inequities and unfairness that people of color often encounter made it apparent that parental involvement, literacy, and critical race pedagogy were interrelated and there were common intersections. If racism is permanent that means it is not going anywhere--it is here to stay. However, if individuals are taught to counter and recognize racism, racial microaggressions, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression, change could begin to take place and racism could be interrupted and perhaps minimized. Although it may be on a small scale with a small number of people, it does not matter because any type of positive change is beneficial to the humanity of all people (King, 2005). As I develop as a researcher of race and a race researcher, I am learning to think and plan strategically. One strategic action that I decided to make was to target parents; that is, educating and building parents' critical consciousness and cultural competence, which in return can impact students' critical consciousness and academic achievement.

### **Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, trustworthiness signifies the gathering of visible effort on the behalf of the researcher to ensure that the data collected and analyzed are valid (Glesne, 2006). Having acknowledged my positionality and subjectivity, I continued to examine how those may impact my study. I utilized various data methods as a way to obtain multiple sources, information, and perspectives. In addition, I employed member checking. Member checking allowed me to share interview transcripts with the participants to ensure the participants' words are presented accurately. I emailed each participant a copy of their interviews throughout this study to make sure that I have captured their stories accurately and to make sure that I have not provided misinformation. I invited my participants to review transcripts, thoughts and direction,

and share my drafts for feedback (Glesne, 2006). I also kept a personal journal where I reflect upon my research practices; also, I wrote about my biases and how my biases could impact my study.

### **Limitations**

Counterstorytelling dismantles the dominant narrative while centering the lived realities and experiences from people at the bottom (Bell, 1992,1997). I designed a study that situated the experiences of people of color as a tool to resist the oppressive structures and discourses that are inculcated throughout the different social institutions. In this study, I used literary methods to illustrate my data analysis and findings, which is different from traditional way of presenting academic research. The creative component of this study creates a space for critique.

In effort to create composite characters to represent the participants and data from the study, scholars may problematize the creation of the composites as fictional stories. In the aforementioned, I explained how composite counterstories derive from the literature, data, observations, and researcher's experiences. Farber & Sherry (2009) critiques the use of storytelling within academic spaces. The authors believe the more fictionalize the story, the more problematic the story becomes, "the risk is compounded when the author of the fiction is a scholar, publishing in a scholarly journal, because the audience is unsure whether the author is speaking as a scholar or solely as an artist" (Farber & Sherry, 2009, p. 326). Coupled with fictionalized stories is the notion of truthfulness; and, I am not referring to the objective or positivistic form of "truthfulness" but the type of truthfulness that demonstrates the accuracy and retelling of the stories. When creating counterstories the researcher has to make sure he/she stays close to the

data as a way to capture the stories and to make sure the stories are being told in an honest manner. Although my voice is interwoven throughout, it is limited. Critical race theory is still new to the field of education. The first CRT conference was held in the late 80s--this theory is still evolving. Nonetheless, before we start attacking, challenging, and dismissing the method of counterstorytelling and CRT, we should treat CRT like we would treat an infant—we should nurture it, interact with it, get to know it, and observe it (Delgado, 2009). I ask that readers suspend any judgment and approach this study in a non-myopic manner. I want readers to approach this with open, receptive ears to the stories of the marginalized groups as a way to enrich their own reality. Critical race theory and methodology capture storytelling as a method of survival and empowerment—those whose voices are often distorted and silenced gain healing through the use of storytelling (Bell, 1992; Cook, 2013; Delgado, 1989; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present findings to the two research questions that guided this study: (1) What happens when parents and students are engaged in a critical family literacy book club? and (2) What roles do parents' racial identities play in how they create dialogue pertaining to issues such as race, racism, and power with their children? Findings for this study are presented in the form of a play. Using dramaturgical performance, I created a play based on composite characters, which resulted from data analyses. As an attempt to develop dialogue that was representative of all characters, I created a play to present the findings from this particular study. The play was derived from seven book club meetings, two focus group interviews, and one structured/one unstructured interview. I noted pivotal events from the meetings based on themes which emerged from the data. Based upon my interpretations of the characters and events, I created a play in a way that captured the racial-related experiences of the participants. Drawing from major themes, which emerged from the data, I honed in on how parents discussed race and racism and how these factors played a role in their lives. I also paid attention to parents' racial identities and how their current or past issues with race and racism impacted how they created dialogue with their children. My goal for implementing this genre was an attempt to capture the parents and students in that space, to illustrate their thoughts, beliefs, and reactions and to present research in a way that challenges the historical ways of presenting and conducting research. In addition, this

literary style was strategically chosen to serve as a tool of resistance from the historical ways of presenting findings and research.

In an effort to enhance the analysis of the participants' experiences with race, racism, and power, I attempted to humanize this study by working *with* and learning *from* my participants rather than viewing participants as objects to be studied. As part of the data collection process, I specifically asked each student in the book club to explain and to reflect on his/her racially-related experiences and to illustrate his/her stories through a variety of genres. Students illustrated their experiences through poems, prayers, rap songs, and scripts. These stories reflected their experiences and personal identities and some of them are interwoven throughout each act. Throughout the play, I used direct quotes of participants' speech, and therefore, the play is written in their dialect to maintain the integrity of their language.

### **Who Let the Elephant in the Room? Analyzing Race and Racism through a Critical Family Literacy Book Club**

#### **ACT ONE (AN OVERTURE)**

*Mr. Johnson's classroom furnishings are typical, longstanding, rugged hand-me-downs from teachers who now see these furnishings as obsolete. The furnishings in this room have served many children for many years. As shown on Figure 5.1, there are 28 desks arranged in a U-shape. The arrangement and setup of Mr. Johnson's classroom was selected with care, love, and pride.*

*Languishment has won in this room. Entering the room there is a thin, worn rug from Mr. Johnson's university. At right, above the door of the classroom, there is an*

*American Flag. Two chestnut bookcases edge off the room—books are leaning forward and are disheveled from students desperately searching through torn and coarse pages for something that relates to their lives and experiences. These experiences, although often unheard, are similar to the diverse set of books that are often overlooked. Although, in many spaces, they are both not acknowledged, they still have certain knowledge and value to offer.*

*There is a table located in the front of the classroom under the Smartboard where the teacher showcases children’s literature, which spans across the African diaspora. At right, adjacent to the teacher’s desk, there is a short narrow bulletin board with dingy orange and faded royal blue borders that run horizontally. Scattered around the discolored, beige walls are students’ work and artifacts.*



Figure 5.1 Mr. Johnson’s Classroom

*Furthermore, it is ironic the display table is blocking the emergency exit; this is an interesting metaphor as well. Racism has caused a state of emergency from which an escape is needed (or at least a rescue). Therefore, knowledge and information on African*

*and African American culture provided a great wealth of knowledge for Mr. Johnson's students. The children's literature on African and African American culture provided a space for students to have a voice and express their experiences. Mr. Johnson's students were able to examine their experiences and reposition their stories against dominant narrative and paradigms. In his classroom, students were not allowed to escape without this essential knowledge.*

*In this classroom, the yearning for equality, freedom, and justice clashes with the misconceptions and stock stories that continue the oppression of people of color. The atmosphere is a contested space---a site that is situated in cultural, racial, and ethnic struggle. This classroom is not only about the historical moment, but it also mirrors the present. Mr. Johnson feels that it is important for him to make clear how the social and equity issues from the past situate themselves in the present. Mr. Johnson's classroom would be a comfortable and ordered room if it were not for the various unyielding conflicts that oppress the students who walk in and out of his classroom and the people in society*

*As the curtain rises, Mr. Johnson, a tall, slender young African American male with dark skin is sitting on the edge of his desk. The young man is in his mid-20s, and he is in his third year teaching. As always, he is meticulously dressed sporting a white long-sleeve Ralph Lauren Polo button-up along with a bright pink, green, and blue paisley bow tie; also, he is wearing a pair of khaki pants with some light, tan boat shoes. His haircut is short and neat. Mr. Johnson is easygoing, but firm; and, he is quick to smile. The desk is smothered with stacks of reading quizzes, makeup work, and essays, which are scattered on the top left corner of his desk. Blue and green sticky notes are posted on*

*the sides of his Dell computer screen. It is early spring sometime between 5:30-5:45pm. He is reviewing his illegible notes and thinking aloud about the critical family literacy book club. The motor of the mini-fridge gently hums in the background. The silence and the piercing smell of Mr. Johnson's powdery, sweet, spicy, and strong cologne shrouds the room. Through the crack of his door, the teacher hears a woman with a light but high-pitched voice on the phone with her child trying to find the classroom. Hurriedly, Mr. Johnson rises and straightens his clothes and takes a deep breath.*

*Nervously, he walks to the door to meet the first parent to arrive. Cynthia is a nurse at one of the feeder middle schools in the district. She is in her middle forties, and she carries a still, calm smile. The sheltered upbringing from her mom and grandma still carries over in her life and with her own parenting techniques with her two high school children. Although she is reserved and a woman of brevity, her gentle voice displays a sense of penetrating wisdom. As Mr. Johnson finishes his quick introductory conversation with Ms. Harris, he realizes more parents and students have entered the classroom.*

*Mr. Johnson notices two of his current students standing by the bookcase having a conversation. Noah and Jessica are freshmen in Mr. Johnson's English I class. They are both 15 years old. Jessica is tall, thin, and athletic. She is a star runner on the track team. Jessica is self-confident. She is assertive---not bossy, but has characteristics of a good leader. Jessica is determined and straightforward; characteristics she possesses from coming from a strong, positive matriarchal family.*

*Noah is a popular young man. He is on the JV football team and varsity baseball team. Noah is short but heavily built. From the outside looking in, it seems like Noah has everything together, but on the inside, his mind is muddled with conflicting thoughts. In*

*particular, the issues of race and racism have conjured up feelings of mixed emotions. To the right of Noah is his dad, Dan.*

*Dan Cooper, another parent, sits slouched over with his elbows on the desk with his hands clutched together. Dan is in his late forties. Growing up in the South during the time of segregation, Dan had many perceptions and beliefs about African Americans. But, through the years, Dan has grown strong in his faith and believes God is the reason why he now has this universal love for all people.*

*Sitting across from Dan is 37 year-old Denise Jacobs. She attended Tuskegee University (a Historically Black University), and she is invested in learning and exploring her culture, race, and identity. She understands the complex world in which we live. Because Denise fully embraces her racial and ethnic identities, this has led her to be a strong-minded individual who is critically conscious and aware about the world.*

*Right before the book club begins, a short and slender young man who is roughly 5'6 slowly walks into the room. He is wearing a white t-shirt with a pair of black gym shorts. As he takes his seat, he smiles and nods his head at Mr. Johnson. David is a unique teenager. His wit and use of satire show what an intelligent young man he is. But his wittiness isn't what makes him unique. Many of David's peers depict him as the "angry" or "hostile" Black male who is mad at the world. In reality, David is not this stereotyped archetype. His friends and classmates do not know he is working through the different stages of his racial identity. During the summer of David's seventh grade year, he took an Afrocentric course as part of a summer enrichment program. The course and the program connected him deeply to his heritage as well as his multiple identities while*

*opening his eyes and making clear of the various systemic oppressive structures that are deeply entrenched throughout society.*

## **Act 2: “Here in the South, We Are Twenty Years Behind”: Race in the South**

**Mr. Johnson:** Good evening, I would like to thank all of you for taking the time out of your busy schedules to join me this evening. During this book club, we are going to engage in critical dialogue pertaining to topics that are deemed sensitive or taboo, in particular race, racism, and power. My goal is for us to engage in these discussions through the implementation of literature. Also, I want this to be an atmosphere where we all can learn together. *(stopping and thinking)* It is my bias *(He waits for a few seconds, pondering his next word choice carefully. Then, he continues.)* But, I believe we live in a racially stratified society; and, to counter these issues, we first have to address them. *(As he glances around the room, he notices several of the people nod their heads.)* Nonetheless, I am not going to belabor you any longer...with that being said, welcome! Okay, so let’s go ahead and get started. How do you relate to the main character in the novel, Danny?

**Dan:** *(Right away, Dan begins).* Well, in the novel, Danny feels out of place when he goes to school because his skin is too dark. He attends a predominately White school. So, he feels out of place. *(He pauses for a second. He removes his glasses from his face and places them on the desk. Dan leans back in the desk, and he crosses his arms)* I remember during the time of segregation. I lived off of Farrow Road. It was this kid named Rufus, and he was the only Black kid who attended the school. Then, the school district rezoned, and I was rezoned to a predominantly Black high school *(tacitly, the other members of the book club begin to whisper to each other.)* Then, I became the fly on the wall. It changed everything about me, because I didn’t fit in. *(He waits. Then, looks down)* And, it was very scary. *(He looks up.)* You know—it was scary. I never tried to develop friends who weren’t of my same color. I couldn’t relate. *(Before he can continue his story, several of the members begin to raise their hands in response to his story.)*

**Denise:** *(Abruptly)* So, how did you handle that? Did you ever get used to being the outcast?

**Dan:** *(Respectfully.)* No, I rebelled. Being one of the only White kids in an all Black school can be hard. Especially, during the 70’s when they were integrating schools. I constantly had to fight, because many of the students there viewed me as a racist. Often leading to four-on-one fights. *(with a smile on his face and in a playful manner)* Let’s just say I lost a lot more than I won. *(There is laughter from the other parents and students).* I established myself as a “bad boy.” *(He looks down and drops his head with incredulity).* I started to wear this jacket and on this jacket it had swastikas patches and KKK patches. *(Moving his hands while mustering through his thoughts)* I wore this not because I was racist but as a sign to show them not to mess with me. Now, I know it sounds crazy, but it actually worked—very few people messed with me after that.

**Cynthia:** *(Startled)* No one confronted you about your jacket?

**Dan:** Unfortunately, no.

**Denise:** *(Shaking her head with a look of despair).* That shows how much power you had even in that type of environment--- you were the minority you still had the power and privilege of a White male. *(members of the book club nod their heads in sign of agreement.)*

**Dan:** Unfortunately, God reached down and pulled me out the miry clay and really did show me something that really interested me. So, I went on to college. Otherwise, I was going down a bad road.

**Mr. Johnson:** Wow, Dan, that is a powerful story; and, thanks for sharing that story with us...*(Before Mr. Johnson can speak again, Dan's son, Noah interjects).*

**Noah:** I know I am different because of my parents.

**Mr. Johnson:** Elaborate, please.

**Noah:** *(Frowning impatiently).* I am different, and I feel the reason I am different is because of my parents' experiences and how they have raised me.

**Dan:** *(Looking up and shaking his head repeatedly).* Noah is different and yeah I feel part of the reason he is different is because he came to accept Jesus Christ at an early age. And, fortunately, my wife had a very strong foundation and eventually got me on the right track. *(He waits for a few second, then he continues).* And, Noah understood at a very young age that the color of your skin doesn't matter. *(He raises his right hand).* It is what is in here *(He points to his heart).* And, how you treat other people...you know is what makes the difference of who you are; and, I think that served him well *(Nodding his head and clutching his hands together).* Even though *(He stops in his statement and sighs).* We raised him in the Brownsville, SC (pseudonym) which is located in the upper region of South Carolina... When Noah was in the second grade, he came to me and he said, *(Gleefully, he begins to imitate a child)* "Dad, Black people don't like me very much." *(In his normal voice).* I asked, "Why not?" *(Switching back to the role of a young boy).* He said, "Daddy, are we rednecks?" Then, I said, "Son, why do you say that?" Noah replied, "Well, I was playing basketball today at recess and these group of Black kids asked me what color I was and I told them I am White. Then, they asked me was I a Redneck, because they know I am from the Upstate, so they figured we lived on a farm and had cows." *(Confused).* I began to think how interesting that was. I found it weird.

**Denise:** *(Looking up at him).* You are right about the Upstate. I lived there for 21 years.

**Dan:** When I lived there, it was like I was back in time. But when I moved to Columbia, I learned that it is a melting pot of everybody. And, it is just different. (*With affirmation*). I think it is more advanced because it is a melting pot. There is a culture up there that you don't take like to. Rednecks (*Shaking his head from left to right repeatedly*). They don't have any respect for themselves or no one else. I can't go back. Here in the South, we are 20 years behind, especially, if you go further South.

*[The classroom goes dark. Noah walks to the center of the stage. Simultaneously, a dim light illuminates him and he begins his monologue].*

**Noah:**

I wake up, an my teeth start to grit, lazy got the best of me, but why I always keep L's lit? I hate school they ain't teachin us nothin'. an I hate Obama every time he talks people think he's preachin' or somethin'. we live in a messed up world, an it's colder then ice. you tell someone a small lie long enough they start to believe it, so them stereo types y'all startin' to believe em right? people wastin' food an it's an theirs children starvin' every night. every body's degrading their own kind. but as soon as someone else takes a life it's a crime? blacks killin' blacks is okay, but when a white person does it's racist. there's no such thing as race, we're all the same people, just different backgrounds, with different colored faces.

society done switched up, got people thinkin' it's alright to sin. there's no hope for humanity. all the snakes in the world it's hard to call someone a friend. it's okay to be gay, do drugs an disobey authority. an we look at religion like naw they the minority. but really there ones that's gone be saved, when everything comes to an end, an the whole world stops, we need a change, leaders who care. no crooked cops. we need help, an we need it bad. an it needs come fast. our worlds messed up cause every body wants to change why can't I live in the past? we need to go to our old ways, when people feared God. an didn't laugh when his name got brought up, kids don't know how read but stay drinkin till they slump. I look around, an I can't find any hope. all every body wants do is get high off the dope. cause it makes you look cool? you don't even know why you do it. thinkin it's not bad but damn right you knew it.

be your own person. don't take after someone else. have your own style an ways that's what everybody's forgettin'. now a days everyone's caught up in other people opinions. why do they matter? oh yea, we're all in society haze, where everybody's caught up in there materialistic ways. if you don't have the nicest clothes best shoes you a lame? naw you're the lame. takin after big labels, you're a jackass they should keep you locked up in the stables. you care about yourself an that's it, selfish as hell. how can a grown man kill a teenager an not even have to worry about seein a cell?

I'm scared to grow up. cause everything's changin'. things aren't what they use to be. the governments keepin' secrets only showin' us what we want to see. I laugh all the time case it covers up the pain, I'm supposed to be a good kid but I'm ashamed. all the thoughts weighin' on my brain, I'm tired of this life I'm tryna make a change. we all need to. stop being hypocrites. stop all the judgin, don't worry about other people you got

problems but you run from em. I know I'm a bad kid, I can always see. but fix yourself before you an try an fix anyone else. especially me. humanity hasn't been happy in a while, but we need hope cause I'm forgettin how to smile. *(Noah bows his head and closes his eyes. Then, he begins to pray).*

**Noah:** Dear Lord, as I stand here tonight. I pray that you take away racism. In the schools, in homes, in public, on the news. It just needs to go away. You made us equal when you created us. There's nothing that makes us different from each other besides the color of our skin. An that's no reason to hate somebody. So I please ask to help change all these all these things because we're all equal. I just wish everyone could see it. *[Noah looks up gently and the light slowly dims]*

*[Curtain].*

### **Act 3: "I Feel Like I Don't Belong": Race as an Identity Constructor**

*[Suddenly, the light illuminates the stage. Mr. Johnson is taking copious notes in a black and white composition notebook. The members of the book club sit quietly. Patiently waiting].*

**Mr. Johnson:** Thank you. Does anybody else want to share? *(Looks around with a short grin on his face).*

**Cynthia:** *(Disappointed).* You know I noticed that about SC *(Looking at him)* they are racist against each other. Especially, when it comes to the different complexions. So, it is like an identity thing. Defining who you are and believing in yourself.

**Dan:** *(Looking at Cynthia. Dan begins to connect her comment about identity to the main character in the book.)* That's why he went back to stay with his father's family. Because he wanted to get closer to his father's Mexican side of the family. I mean he was apparently well educated. He wanted to hide who he was. If he became more like his father's culture, he would have a way to connect to his dad.

**Cynthia:** *(Long pause).* I was thinking that even when he was on the White side, he couldn't fit in and even with his Mexican side he couldn't. When I go to my dad's side, I am like the outcast you know. I am not brown skin. *(Speaking softly, expertly, and rapidly).* When I go to Korea, I still don't fit in. They know that I am half Asian, but then they know that I am something else. So, it is hard to fit in. *(She looks down, thinking).* But, it is so hard to fit in; so, I guess he is trying to find out who he is and it takes time if you are biracial. Maybe, it takes time for anybody and any child. *(There is silence after this remark).*

**Denise:** *(Surprised)*. You know *(Looking at Cynthia)* it is interesting that you said any child, because my first grader is having some identity issues. *(Sitting in a desk next to Denise is her six year old daughter. The little girl is holding a Black baby doll. The other book club members turn to look at the little girl. With a timid look, the little girl puts one of her fingers in her mouth and covers her face with her other hand)*. Recently, we moved, and my daughter had to change elementary schools. In my previous district, she had all Black teachers and most of the students looked like her. *(she takes a deep breath, worriedly)* Well, she now attends school where her teachers are White women and most of the children are White. So, she came home a few days ago and she says *(Quickly, Denise clamps her hands together, and she begins to speak in the voice of a six year old girl)* “Mommy! Mommy! *(Smiling)* can you get me some cowgirl boots like the White girls wear? *(Long pause and she looks up, thinking)* And, can you cut my hair in a bang and make my hair longer like my White teacher?” *(The little girl gets out her desk and grabs her mom by the waist. Then, she places her head on her mom’s shoulder)*.

**Dan:** *(Looking at the young girl)*. You are just beautiful the way you are. And, you have nice, long hair. *(Denise looks up and smiles)*.

**Denise:** She and I had a conversation about this. I went to my bookshelf, and I pulled some children’s books on Black beauty and Black hair. Then, we talked about what it means to love yourself and to accept your blackness in a positive manner.

**Cynthia:** *(Concerned)* So, do we have to assimilate to the dominant culture? *(Looks around at the members waiting for a response)*. Should we eradicate our culture? Our identity? *(Long pause, still concerned)*. Do we change who we are? *(Echoes of the word no fill the room. Then, she continues her story)*. Well, growing up, um, you know, my dad always said you know one drop of Black, you’re Black, no matter what. *(With a look of confusion)*. But going to school when there was, you know, they ask you, “What are you?” I’m like, well, my dad’s Black, so I guess I’m Black, they were like, no you look more Asian. Then that’s like in elementary, well not really elementary, more like middle school, coming to the states. When I was overseas, everybody’s like, you know, they understand that, you know, everybody’s different, and nobody really focuses on race and stuff like that. But when I came to South Carolina that’s when I realized, you know, you either Black, White, As – there’s like a certain race. So, it was hard for me to identify myself, and I was like in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, I believe, and *(With excitement)* when I tell people I’m Black, they are like, “No, you not Black. You want to be Black, but you’re not Black.” So, and then I questioned, well, my mom is Asian, so I can’t just really, you know, leave her out too, so, I guess I am mixed, you know, with Korean and Black. But that was like – and then high school, you know, my senior, well junior year, that’s when a lot of people coming out with the Black and Asian, I don’t know if it’s cause Tiger Wood, he came out with his own word. So, that’s when – at that time in high school is when I identified myself as a BK and they was like well a Bird King? *(Sarcastically)* NO. Black Korean. Growing up, I always tend to go with people who are Black than Korean *(Perplexed)*. I think cause that’s what my father is and I really don’t click too much with Asians. *(Surprised)*. I don’t know why. But then like when I go to my father’s home, to his, his, - I don’t feel like I belong there because I look more Asian compared to my sister and

brother, they look more Black, so I feel like they get more accepted. But when I go to Korea I'm not accepted because I'm not all Korean. So I always feel like I don't belong. So I'm gonna just make my own – I'll just be myself, you know, just – you have to – and I try to teach my children, just be yourself. So, now, I, you know, when people ask me what I am, I tell 'em I'm Black and I'm Korean, so, and that's in high school so that's not it. Now when I go do applications and stuff, I put down "Other" cause I don't wanna leave out my other half, you know, the Asian side. So, cause we do practice both cultures, so, it's not one or the other. *(Relieved)*. Now, I accept both cultures---instead of believing in the melting pot. *(She makes eye contact with several of the book club members. There is a long pause)*. Who has the right to say who has the best culture? You shouldn't have to get rid of the best of yourself to bring yourself down just to be like somebody else.

**David:** *(Drily)*. It's like they are always stereotyping us as Black people. So, when I was younger, my mom would always tell me what to do as a young Black male and the things that I shouldn't do because of my race and gender. *(Looking at his mom)*. My mom would be like... *(He pauses)* anytime we go into the store she's like take your hands out your pockets and stuff like that. Maybe, because I am a Black male, they may think I'm up to something---trying to steal something. She also told me don't wear my hoodie cause they might think you're in a gang.

**Jessica:** *(With affirmation)*. Yeah, my mama always tells my brother stuff like that.

**David:** *(Stern with his back rigid)*. Black males are born with targets on their backs. *(Confidently)*. The target of being labeled as thugs and thieves. *(Looking at his mother)* My mom taught me how...how the world works.

**Jessica:** *(Assuredly)*. It seems like Black males are judged more harshly. I just saw something on Facebook where they had Richard Sherman's picture, the football player, who is getting all the heat for what I like to call friendly competition *(Sarcastically)* where he called out another player. They called him a thug. This picture was split in half. And, the other side of the picture was a picture of Justin Bieber, the White pop singer, who was arrested for a DUI, and he resisted arrest. *(Rolling her eyes)*. They labeled him as a confused kid. Even in schools Black boys are labeled thugs or what not, especially when they get in trouble, and it follows them. *(There is light whispering between the book club members)*

**Cynthia:** *(Disappointedly)*. Yeah, I am a nurse at a middle school here in the district, and I witness how horribly young Black males are treated. They may get expelled...while the other person only gets a slap on the wrist. *(Calmly)*. We left home to go to Trader Joe's *(Trader Joe's is a local grocery store)* and since we were out we decided to get something to eat and you know. *(She begins to describe her son who is an eighth grader)*. Matthew is this tall guy *(She raises her arm high to illustrate her son's height)*, you know, a tall Black guy and he's wearing his hoodie. And, I did tell him this *(quick pause)* and I don't know if this is right or wrong, but it was in the moment and I told him he is perceived as a threat. Especially, with the Trayvon Martin case, he has to be

careful. But, it's the truth...he is a threat. Although, in actuality, he isn't a threat, he needs to know how some people may perceive him to be.

**David:** (*Understanding*). Well, my parents are divorced, and the summer of my seventh grade year, I went to visit my dad. He put me in this program called Freedom School. (*Mr. Johnson looks up from jotting notes, surprised*).

**Mr. Johnson:** (*Rapidly*). Can you tell everyone what Freedom School is? (*Smiling*).

**David:** Freedom School is like when you learn about who you are and the world through books. (*He pauses*) and, it is like an Afrocentric course. It is like the place where you learn about where you are from, how you were treated, how your past ancestors were treated, and how you can come back some of the things that are put upon you as a black man or black woman. (*His eyes wide, and his hands clutched together on the desk*). We may need an Afrocentric course here. (*Taken aback*) But, wait, it provides too much truth that too many White people aren't ready for!

**Mr. Johnson:** (*Inquisitively*). What do you mean by truth?

**David:** (*Smiling*). See that's the stuff they are not ready for. (*Moving his hands*). They don't think..or they think everything is equal. If you are poor, that is your fault, or if you don't have a job that's your fault. Sometime people aren't as blessed or as gifted. If you're (*He pauses. There is a look of concernment*) how do I say this without...If there was an Afrocentric course here...it's just too much truth. White people will say, "Oh...well, why would he say that?" (*Wittingly*). Oh, Black people can do the same thing White people can do. Or there could be a lot of things that can happen. That really can bring out the White supremacists or the racist people that go here. "Why do they have that here? Why does that matter?" (*The stage goes dark. The light begins to shine on David as he walks to the center of the stage. He begins his monologue*).

**Chorus:**

I've got something on our mind  
Racism these days ain't that hard to find  
You could be accused for something you didn't do  
Hey, it's hard to believe, but we all gotta face the truth

**Verse 1:**

Where we come from, we're all the same  
Same color, same stories just play a different game  
Makes you wonder, huh? Who's the one to thank?  
We did it all together, just like a puzzle game.  
Racism, is all around  
to the point where we wouldn't be surprised if they were not found  
just think about it, life would be much easier and better,  
safe to do things without being judge and we can all work together,  
no crime or hate, nothing to it, just like the Nike slogan, we all need to just do it.  
Wait, that's just a fantasy, of how things really not are  
If you really think about it, racism is like a scar

That will never heal, and it will always stay opened  
Witnessing it everyday but still standing there unspoken

**Chorus:**

I've got something our my mind  
Racism these days ain't that hard to find  
You could be accused for something you didn't do  
Hey, it's hard to believe, but we all gotta face the truth

**Verse 2:**

Nowadays, white's the new black  
All that matters is what you wear and the way you act  
Whenever you think of race, you think about of school  
Diversity can be real crazy man but also cruel  
You'd sometimes hear your teacher say something out of anger  
Especially when it's toward blacks  
You'd assume that teacher's life's in danger  
on the news this white boy killed his teacher and then commit suicide  
they blamed it on bullying that caused him to do that, why aren't we surprised  
if the boy was black, they would make a big scene out of it,  
they would think the boy was crazy cuz hes black, nothing really to it,  
when we see racism, all we do is shake our head,  
but yet we're standing here doing nothing about it, with alot of things unsaid.

**Chorus:**

we've got something our my mind  
Racism these days ain't that hard to find  
You could be accused for something you didn't do  
Hey, it's hard to believe, but we all gotta face the truth  
Hey, it's hard to believe, but we all gotta face the truth

*(lights out. Curtain).*

**Act 4: "We Have to See Color": Colorblindness**

*(Suddenly, a soft spotlight simultaneously illuminates the seated characters).*

**Mr. Johnson:** So, my next question is how do you create conversations about issues with race with your children? *(the parents and students are looking around at one another waiting for someone to speak)*

**Cynthia:** *(softly)* A lot of times it's based on current events, and what's going on. *(several of the participants begin to nod their heads and echoes of the word yeah fill the room).* Um...I never really wanted to stress race a lot, but it seems like the more they grow up, especially now with Matthew and Jessica being teenagers, we're talking about it more than ever. And depending on, you know, what's going on in the news, and stuff, I don't want them to see color all the time when they walk in a room, saying, "I'm the only Black person here" *(she laughs awkwardly)* and, that really was not a problem, I don't think, for them until we came to this district *(the members begin to laugh).* When my son

Matthew went to Timberwood (pseudonym) all of his friends were White. *(Rosewood is an elementary school in a neighboring school district)*. Yeah and he was friends with some kids at Rosewood whose parents were wonderful, you know, and even when he left Rosewood, I missed those parents, cause they were the type of people who would do anything for you. They voted for Obama. *(Parents and students begin to chuckle)*. Yeah, the mom was actually upset because there's a piece of land that she and her neighbor share, but she said actually it's hers, but, you know, she lets them use it and the lady put a McCain sign up there and she took it down *(pauses)* so, you know, the friends he had, those were the type of parents that they had, you know. And they...*(Looking around with raising of the voice)* you know, they treated him really nice and he went places with them. Those kids came to my house, so, it was..it was nice *(Smiling)*. One day, I was showing someone a picture of him---a soccer picture with his team, and he was the only Black kid on the picture. *(She pauses)*. And, there were plenty of Black students at the school, but just so happened that all of his friends were White or he had one friend that they called Japanese that was Black and Japanese. His mom was from Japan and his dad was Black. But, he was the only Black student, or the Black player on the picture and one of my co-workers asked me about this, she says, "How does he feel about being the only Black person on the team?" *(Looking around and fidgeting with her fingers)*. And I said, "Honestly, I don't think he knows". It didn't bother him. Those were his friends.

**Denise:** *(Looking at Cynthia, confused)*. You said you don't want your children to always see color, right?

**Cynthia:** *(Quickly)*. Yes, that is right. *(There is an extensive pause. No one moves or speaks for a long, awkward moment. Then, Cynthia breaks the silence)*. Well, I just didn't want them to concentrate on it as much. *(Looking around for some type of verbal or body affirmation from the other members)*. You know, I didn't want them to ever use it as an excuse...*(She continues to quickly look around the room)* you know, not to try hard or to think *(She cuts her eyes up to the right while slightly turning her head to the right)*. "Well, I'm not gonna get it because I'm Black." You know...I just want them to always to be the best that they are going to be regardless of their color. Okay, well, I guess I should say when I was in school, I really didn't experience a lot of racism *(Pauses)* that I knew about...*(Thinking)* yeah, or maybe, I was too blind to see it...and so.

**David:** *(Looking down at the desk)*. We have to see color. *(He begins to look up and he looks at Mr. Johnson)*. Most people who are in power, they don't see color *(Sarcastically)* or they do see it, and they don't care to acknowledge it. *(He pauses)*. When most people talk about poverty, they don't touch racism at all! *(Rapidly, he clutches his hands together and he slightly bends over in his desk)*. They think *(Drily)* okay if you are poor, it's your fault. *(Looking around)*. We have targets on our backs. *(He looks at Cynthia)*. You have one on your back. *(The room becomes silent and the humming from the mini-fridge fills the room)*. They think *(In a snarky voice)* *Oh why do we have to learn about the Black man they can do whatever they want. This is America we are all equal*. Like Sergeant Major, my drill coach, says we all step off on the left foot--not everyone steps off on their left foot. Sometimes we crawl we don't even walk. He says is one of us does things we all step off on the left foot we are a unit we step off

on the left foot. I think that could be compared to America not everyone steps out on their left foot. There are some people that crawl or walk...sometimes their feet don't even touch the ground.

**Denise:** *(Supporting her son while nodding her head)* We are all different. We share similarities but at the same time, we are all different.

**David:** *(He continues his story about his drill coach).* Not all of us start off on the same foot. You can live in the projects. *(His voice rises).* White people think *Oh you can get out the projects you can go to the navy you can go to college and make a living out yourself.* But, sometimes, if that is all you know. *(Moving his hands quickly as he talks).* You are going to get on your grind...sell this...as a way to make a living. If I am already poor and this is how I live, my father, his father, we all live the same. This is the next generation that lives in this house. The 6<sup>th</sup> generation of someone that lives in this house. *(He switches the inflection in his voice and he begins to speak. He appears to be upset there is a sharp tone).* "We have always lived in poverty. My father sold drugs. Next year, my son needs to start, because we need money. I got six brothers and sisters. I gotta start selling these drugs or we won't be able to eat". People don't see that. I'm pretty sure 80% of white people that are born, they live decent. They start out living great. *(Shaking his head).* I had a Black friend who was born on the street, and he is still living in poverty.

**Cynthia:** *(Taking deep breaths while pausing in between)* I am trying to wrap my head around all of this. Because we probably feel like if you talk about these issues – I mean nothing really get resolved *(She raises her shoulders)* because like Dr. Martin Luther King, he talked about the issue, you know, and everybody say I want peace, you know, get together, but then if you look at today...it's still the same. *(Softly).* Nothing really changed. *(She looks at Mr. Johnson).* But, I understand you are trying to figure out what we can do. Maybe, you can be the next President and that could change everything. *(Mr. Johnson looks back and smiles).* But, you know *(She pauses)* you are opening their eyes outside of the box. *(Waits)* Do you know what I am saying?

**Mr. Johnson:** *(Nodding his head).* Yes.

*(Curtain).*

### Act 5: "Black is in and Light is out": Colorism

*(Suddenly, a soft spotlight illuminates the seated characters).*

**Jessica:** *(She smiles and waits for someone to respond to her question).* *(In the book, the main character, Danny, does not fully embrace his American identity. He struggles with his Mexican identity and American identity).*

**Denise:** *(Assuredly)* I understand how he wanted to get rid of his identity, and how he wishes he were darker. I remember when I went to high school. *(She scrunches her face and begins to reminisce).* I guess you would say *(She waits)* dark skin was ugly to a lot of

people. (*Jessica smirks*). You had to be light skinned or even White! (*Her voice gets louder and her eyes become wider*). When it came to dating a lot of the guys would consider dark skin women ugly (*Disappointedly*). As the years past, people started saying, “Black is in and light is out!” (*Simultaneously, she laughs and claps her hands together. Then, she reaches over and slaps hands with another parent who is laughing and making commentary in regards to Denise’s comment*).

**Jessica:** (*With a strong, excited voice*). This made me think about when I was growing up. I realized I was bi-racial in elementary school. (*Looking around*). I guess...um, cause I was half Black and half Asian, everybody though I was cool. So, as a fourth grader, I felt like I was on a pedestal, because of my light skin (*Still looking around*). If you are light-skinned, sometimes you aren’t treated the same as somebody who is dark-skinned. If you are darker, most of the times people perceive dark-skinned people to be a threat, or they automatically get labeled like a thug or something.

**Noah:** (*Puzzled*). So, why do you think it is like that? (*Looking at Jessica*). The Black guys on the football team are always talking about this light-skin and dark-skin battle.

**Jessica:** (*Staring back at Noah*). Well, it goes back to slavery.

**Noah:** (*Surprised*). Slavery? How does it connect to slavery?

**Jessica:** (*Confidently*). Roots! During slavery most dark-skinned people had to work in the fields, and most light-skinned people worked in the house. Light-skinned people did not want their kids to marry dark-skinned people. (*Staring at Noah*) it was just that way. I don’t know why, but whenever I watch Roots, my mom pointed out, she said like back in the day, it was real – if you were light-skinned, you wanted to stay light-skinned or whatever, cause like light-skinned people had the better jobs, usually.

**David:** (*Looking at Jessica and Noah in a concerned manner*). So, how do we see that play out today?

**Jessica:** (*Waiting to see if Noah is going to say something*). I am on the track team and the guys are always joking around (*Smiling*) the light-skinned guys are always saying they are going to take the dark-skinned guys’ girlfriends (*Laughter from the book club members*) and the dark-skinned guys say the exact same thing about light-skinned guys.

**David:** (*Looking at Jessica*). How do you think that makes Black people look (*He pauses*) when we separate ourselves...with this division amongst ourselves based upon skin complexion? (*The other book club members look around. David’s mom, Denise, is smiling while whispering to Cynthia.*)

**Jessica:** We are already divided. (*Pauses*). We’re already divided in a way...it’s White and Black. (*Dan nods his head*). And, then, within the Black community, you got dark-skin versus light-skin. I know that we shouldn’t disown each other because of our skin

complexion, because it puts White people on a pedestal (*Long pause of silence*), which means we aren't really going to get anywhere.

**Mr. Johnson:** Right, when we create a division amongst ourselves, it reifies White dominance. When people of the same racial background discriminate against one another because of their skin color, it is called colorism. Usually, the lighter skin is treated better than the darker skin. The lighter you are the prettier you are and the closer you are to White. Colorism is detrimental to the human psyche. People can internalize these negative thoughts and ideologies and not fully embrace who they are. If we don't love ourselves how do we expect others to love us? It is important that we learn how to love ourselves without hating others.

*(Lights out. Curtain).*

### **Act 6: Blackness as a Tool of Resistance**

*(The light slowly illuminates the members of the book club.)*

**Denise:** *(Sitting upright and looking around the room).* I have a question... this question is pertaining to the book. *(puzzled)* How did you guys feel about Danny's grandmother always serving him first for every meal and putting him on a pedestal as opposed to the other elders in the house?

**Dan:** *(His glasses are on the tip of his nose. He carries a look of uncertainty).* I wonder if he wasn't good in school or smart, would she had done this? *(Waits and he continues to look around).* She is ashamed of her Mexican heritage.

**Denise:** *(Shaking her head in agreement).* She is probably glad that he is part White. She sees it as a good thing.

**Dan:** *(Turning to Denise).* He is going to have opportunities.

**Denise:** *(Turning and looking at him).* Because he would *make* it as a White person than a Mexican?

**Dan:** I would be curious to know what the rest of the family thinks about grandma treating him like this?

**Denise:** *(Disappointed)* Older generations are hard to change. *(Her head is tilted back and her eyes are cut to the left..looks like a moment of reflection).* Talking about all of this reminds me of my college years. *(She sighs).* Um, when I was in college I had an experience when we played *(She pauses and continues to look up. She is searching for her thoughts).* Ah, um, I think it was Troy State University, *(She points to herself)* and I went to a predominantly Black school, Tuskegee. And, um, it was so much racism there and we went to play a basketball game. This was in '88...and, it was in Troy, Alabama.

They had no Black players on the team; and, of course, we had all Black players. *(Thinking)*. We were winning the game, and the crowd was nasty *(With a disgruntled expression)* oh, they were nasty. *(Leaning forward with her arms folded to her chest)*. Oh, they were saying everything from Black to nig *(she stops her statement)* oh, they were...*(Confidently)*. Now, before this, I knew I was Black, and I understood I was a Black woman. It was fine. *(Looking around)*. And, you know, but that was one of the events that really made me, *(She pauses and thinks for a second)* I really wanted to just stand up and let everyone know about my identity and who I am. I was proud of my identity. You know I knew it all along growing up, but it really, you know, sunk in that you are gonna be faced with challenges *(Simultaneously, with cadence, she begins to move her hands while moving her head to the rhythm of her speech)* and you need to know how to represent your race, who you are, who you stand for, don't let no one change it!

**Cynthia:** *(Gently)*. Right.

**Denise:** *(Collecting her thoughts)*. It's that we have been *(Still collecting her thoughts)* to me, um, my husband and I tell my daughter, we taught her that in the past, I mean and it still kind of exists *(She is fidgeting her fingers while trying to conjure up her words)* that we are not, *(Softly)* I mean, *(Hesitantly)* we are, *(Sighs while rapidly releasing her statement)* we don't get what we deserve. You know people always try to belittle us. *(With certainty)*. Now, they do it in a real fancy educational way, and that is what I want my children to be aware of, you know. *(She looks at Mr. Johnson)*. We deserve more. Go out and don't let no one steal whatever you got. *(Shaking her hand from left to right)*. Don't let them take it, because they're good. Be smart. And, I tell her don't go around talking about what you want to do—just do it.

**Dan:** You mentioned education in your last statement can you explain what you meant by your statement?

**Denise:** Well, when I say they do it, they be very crafty with it. *(She is fighting with herself to choose her words carefully without offending anyone)*. You know, you can – for instance, my niece, she's a very good actress. But she's a little heavy, and she's dark skinned. *(Upset)* She does not get the leading roles, but she gets good roles in the plays, but she has never been a lead character...but she should be, you know, she's a South Carolina Junior Scholar and, um, a candidate for the Duke Scholar. You know *(Pauses)* and that's just an example of the stuff that they do to try to hold us back. You know *(Looking around the room at the other members)* we know we can do it. We invented a lot of stuff. *(Pointing to herself and the other African American book club members)* it's you, *(Looks around)* you know, we're the ones, but that goes back to our history and you have to teach the kids; and, I tell her don't think that no one is over you. *(Affirmative)*. Because you know we are all humans. We can do just what we want to do, but they have a way of trying to hold us back. I like to use the term *crafty*. But I don't know if that's the best one, but. *(Shrugs her shoulders)*.

**Mr. Johnson:** *(Surprised)*. What does that mean, crafty? Can you elaborate? *(Staring at Denise)*.

**Denise:** *(looking at Mr. Johnson)* Crafty would be *(she pauses)* um...*(in a deep and evil voice)* sneaky...putting on a façade. They make you think it is supposed to be this way. *(With assurance)* Many times our kids are getting manipulated. They are being taught a lot of the wrong stuff. *(she makes eye contact with each parent)* That's why parents are so...parents need to be involved with the kids. *(she slowly moves her head around the room making sure to look at each member)* You are the kids' first teacher. You're a parent...so, you really have to put it down. I'm always on to stuff. In my house, my husband and I are on to this stuff. We have a lot of books written by Black authors, and they are about the Black culture and identity. *(She pauses while looking around)*. You know...how things have been taken from us? *(Moving her hands)*. They don't tell us about *how* the land actually was...*(Gently)* you know?

*(Several of the people agree with verbal cues while others silently nod their heads in agreement).*

**Denise:** *(Looking up to the ceiling while slowly lowering her neck, contemplating)*. Um..*(Pauses)* you know what is on my mind? *(Waits)*. Something just crossed my mind. *(With a high inflection in her voice, drily)*. Like how *they* say things are better, and how they are always talking about Martin Luther King was fighting to make it equal *(Simultaneously, she begins to move her neck from the left to the right while talking)* this, that, and the other. *(She sits up in her desk while moving her hands)* My six year old came home and she said, "Oh, Martin Luther King, he is the one who made it better?" *(Inquisitively)*. "Isn't that what he wanted?" *(Pause)*. But, I told my daughter that is what he wanted *(Her eyes widen and there is a high modulation of her voice)* but, it is not here. *(Looking around the room at the other book club members)*. You know what I am saying? We still have those people who think the world is okay because of Dr. King. And, they're teaching it to kids like we all get along and like we have moved on from those issues. *(Staring at the other parents, assuredly and rapidly)*. We have a lot of work to do---we have to teach our children about *our* history *(She points to her chest)* the real stories. My husband and I bring it real hard, *(She chuckles as well as other parents and students)*. Yes...*(she pauses and looks around)* who else gone give it to 'em?

*[The stage goes dark. The light begins to shine on Jessica as she walks to the center of the stage. She begins her monologue].*

Our Father who lies in heaven,  
May I ask why is the world so segregated,  
Why can't we just be all ONE  
If it's so true we all came from you then why is there so much hatred  
Almost everyday I face with racism may not be towards me but I still see it  
Martin Luther King Jr had a dream, his dream came true but is it really true  
segregation has not but we are still separated so I guess we are still waiting on that dream  
to come true

*(Curtain).*

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION

In this chapter I present a summary and discussion of the study's findings, implications for policy and practice, recommendations for future research (my own as well as others), and concluding thoughts. The implications provided speak directly to three specific audiences: school administrators, classroom teachers, and teacher educators. Through the research recommendations, I return to the point that I began with---my school experiences and personal reflections, which provided the foundation for why I have engaged in this research.

#### **Discussion Section**

I envision a world where race, class, gender, and ethnicity peacefully co-exists; a world where language and performance liberate and a world where differences do not cause fear and loathing, instead they are seen as cause for celebration because they support individual autonomy and build collective identity (Joyce, 2005). Thus, I attempted to create a study that examined the inextricable link between the various intersections of race, class, gender, and ethnicity and presented my data through a dramaturgical performance as a way to liberate my participants, my readers, and myself through performance and language. In my study, I used performative writing as a vehicle for telling the cultured stories and lived experiences of families from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. I used this specific literary genre as a language to bring people together as well as to evaluate, critique, and challenge society while simultaneously

providing recommendations and suggestions on how to make the world a more equitable place. Prior to conducting this study, I imagined the critical literacy book club as a site for dialogue---a discursive place that could produce knowledge and critical narratives about self, race, community, and identity (Denzin, 2001).

The findings presented in the play in Chapter 5 revealed how some of the parents and students in the study possessed some level of racial consciousness while simultaneously sustaining the racial oppression of people of color through factors such as racism, internalized racism, colorism, and colorblindness. In essence, these notions were heavily intertwined into the backdrop of the parents and students' lives that at times they were easily indistinguishable. Therefore, working alongside families and learning how to become aware of racial oppression, understanding and acceptance became important components of this book club. For example, in the book club, Cynthia a biracial female participant states, "Yeah, I am a nurse at a middle school here in the district, and I witness how horribly young Black males are treated. They may get expelled...while the other person only gets a slap on the wrist." In this statement, Cynthia hints on the disciplinary disparity between African American males and their white counterparts. In contrast, during the same book club discussion, Cynthia exclaims, "I never really wanted to stress race a lot, but it seems like the more they grow up, especially now with Matthew and Jessica being teenagers, we're talking about it more than ever. And depending on, you know, what's going on in the news, and stuff, I don't want them to see color all the time."

Five themes were evident in the data analysis which led to the play: 1) The nature of racism in the south 2) Race as an identity constructor; 3) Colorblindness; 4) Colorism;

and 5) Blackness as a tool of resistance. The themes are discussed below as they relate to the acts in the play. I begin with Act 2 of the play, because Act I is an overture of the play.

***Act 2: "Here in the South, We Are Twenty Years Behind": Race in the South***

There are habitual routines that occur in our lives on day-to-day bases. For example, I know my grandma usually calls me every day between 3:30 and 4:00 p.m.. For 30 minutes or so, she spends her time explaining to me how I need to go to church more often, worrying because I do not visit enough, expressing to me how proud she is of my accomplishments, or complaining because I have not given her any great-grandchildren. However, on one particular day, the typical routine was catapulted by an event that forced my grandma to call me on a Saturday morning around 11:00 a.m.. My phone rang, and I saw my grandma's name on my screen so, I answered, "Hey grandma!" With tension and panic in her voice, she replied, "Lamar!" I responded, "What's wrong grandma?" She continued, "There is a klan rally today in front of the courthouse from one to three. There are a bunch of White men and children dressed in their robes and their KKK t-shirts. It is June 19, 2010 and this foolishness is still going on." In a sarcastic tone, I exclaimed, "Grandma, it's Edgefield County." While my grandma continued to talk about the situation, I was in deep thought about Edgefield. Edgefield is widely known for its beautiful landscape and agriculture. It is the home of Senator Strom Thurmond---the longest serving and oldest member of the Senate. However, Senator Strom Thurmond was one of the key players in Edgefield County who exacerbated the racial subjugation between African Americans and Whites. In essence, Edgefield's

shared culture and history with racial inequities and many of its key player/ actors including Strom Thurmond make it a unique place.

I share this story to point out that place contributes to the social, political, economic, and educational situations and outcomes. During the study, parents and students openly discussed the major role the U.S. South had on their racial and cultural identities. Moreover, in this study, families critically examined South Carolina—one of the southern states. Participants described in elaborate detail the ways in which race and racism in the South impacted their experiences with racism and the construction of their identity. “The South is very racist. We are 20 years behind, especially the further you go South,” one parent noted. Therefore, the exploration and the relationship of race and place need to be further examined because it helps make clear of the development and understanding of the role that race plays in the U.S. South (Morris & Monroe, 2009). The participants highlighted how race in the South is different from race and racism in other parts of the U.S. During one of the book club meetings, a participant indicated, “We have to think about how the historical issues with race and racism pertaining to the South still transpire today in the present.” The assumptions seem clear that the historical roots of the South and its relationship with race and racism have shaped the participants’ identities and how they are identified. While racism exists all over the world, racism in the South tends to be more overt---particularly in reference to Black and White relationships, more specifically with the long history of slavery and Jim Crow.

One of my research goals was to see how parents and students’ formation of the racialized self and racial experiences were (if at all) similar to the main character, Danny, in the book, *Mexican Whiteboy*, and issues he encountered with racial identity

development and racism. During the first critical family literacy book club, I posed the following questions: “Do the characters seem real and believable? Can you relate to their predicaments? To what extent do they remind you of yourself or someone you know?” These questions laid the foundation for this particular book club and the following meetings. Parents were open about their relation to the main character, Danny. They sympathized with Danny and with the issues he encountered. The following is a response from a Dan Cooper

I remember during the time of segregation. I lived off of Farrow Rd. It was this kid named Rufus, and he was the only Black kid who attended the school. Then, the school district rezoned and I (Dan) was rezoned to a predominantly Black high school, and I became the fly on the wall. It changed everything about me because I didn't fit in. It was scary. I never tried to develop friends who weren't of my same color. I couldn't relate. It was a very difficult time in my early adulthood. So, I rebelled. I was a bad kid. Although I didn't consider myself racist, I bought a jacket, and I put swastikas and KKK patches on my jacket. I did this so Black kids would leave me alone. This critical time period in my life was one of the major events that helped me to come to terms with my identity

In response to Mr. Cooper's story, several Black participants in this study made reference to Mr. Cooper's whiteness. The construction of whiteness is deeply ingrained in racial domination and often White people possess a single consciousness (Landsman & Lewis, 2011). Mr. Cooper's story lends credence to this idea of what Landsman and Lewis (2011) described as single racial consciousness, single sight. Before being rezoned to an

integrated school, Mr. Cooper, maneuvered through the world without the realization of his second racial self---the self viewed by others. He possessed a single consciousness, which privileged him. Despite the pervasiveness of racism and the systemic social structures, most White individuals do not have to consider racism or carry around that burden. Therefore, when Dan was rezoned to the predominantly Black high school, he became the “other.” In fact, W.E. B. DuBois (1903) articulated the complicated experiences with Blacks and Whites in America when he explains the “double consciousness” that Blacks must possess to survive. As a result of double consciousness, African Americans can encounter a damaged identity formed by the ideologies and beliefs of Whites. A damaged identity can cause one to devalue who he/she is as a person; it can also lead to the depreciation of one’s language, culture, race, and ethnicity. In return, Black life and experiences are often shaped by stereotypes created by mainstream culture. In his new setting, Dan had a chance to experience a sense of double consciousness---the practice of viewing oneself through the eyes of others. When Dan realized he was the “other,” he immediately fought to reclaim his single consciousness and power as a White male. After realizing Dan’s whiteness and his privilege, Denise, an African American female parent in the study, exclaimed, “That shows how much power you had even in that type of environment--- you were the minority and you still had the power and privilege of a White male.” Denise seemed aware of Dan’s white privilege and supremacy; she witnessed the single consciousness of a White male who intentionally continued the oppression and silencing the voices of people of color.

### ***Act 3: “I Feel Like I Don’t Belong”: Race as an Identity Constructor***

In Act 3, discourses of race as an identity constructor became foundational throughout the critical family literacy book club discussions. Several participants discussed the role that race played in the identity development of Danny, the main character in the novel. During a book club discussion, the participants reflected, connected, and discussed how race is an essential factor that makes them who they are. For example, Cynthia, a bi-racial participant noted,

I was thinking that even when he was on the White side, he couldn’t fit in and even with his Mexican side he couldn’t. When I go to my dad’s side, I am like the outcast you know. I am not brown skin. When I go to Korea, I still don’t fit in. They know that I am half Asian, but then they know that I am something else. So, it is hard to fit in. But, it is so hard to fit in; so, I guess he is trying to find out who he is and it takes time if you are biracial. Maybe, it takes time for anybody and any child (Cynthia Harris).

Throughout this particular discussion on race and identity, Cynthia used race as the determining factor that makes up her identity. I found this discussion to be intriguing because often we find ourselves using our racial identity as determining factors that make us who we are rather than a social construction. I believe this partial view of exploring one’s unified identity is simply because of the social and inequity issues that transpire daily due to race. Race is socially constructed, and people created it. More specifically, it is a concept created by White society without any biological foundations in science (Au, 2009). Furthermore, the bi-racial participant explained her racial and cultural experiences coming from Korea to South Carolina. She explained the tensions she

encountered at high school in South Carolina because of her racial identity. During her discussion, she posed the following questions, “So, do we have to assimilate to the dominant culture? Should we eradicate our culture? Our identity? Do we change who we are?” Furthermore, this discussion of race as an identity constructor and social construction challenged me to contemplate this notion of racial identity---as a person of color. I believe we need to take our full ethnicity into consideration by exploring who we are across time, space, and culture (Hilliard, 2009). I am not saying that race does not matter or that it is not a part of our identity, because it is (Lynn & Dixson, 2013). However, race is not the only factor that makes human beings unique. By this I mean, when we continue to concentrate on race without any regard for ethnicity or other social identities (e.g., gender), we uphold White supremacy. We were ethnic before we were raced. Before the 1700s, identity was essentially an ethnic identity formed by cultural traditions, linguistic traditions, and historical traditions (Hilliard, 2009). Bell (1992) documented the interminable existence of racism. However, if racism is permanent, we must continue to work against it but also find ways to empower ourselves by embracing our ethnic backgrounds. There are atrocities that race and racism produce such as racial battle fatigue and racial microaggressions (Sue & Constantine, 2007), to say the least. Racial microaggressions are small subtle acts of racism such as racial putdowns towards people of color and other marginalized groups and whether overt or covert racial microaggressions can lead to racial battle fatigue which causes stress and psychophysiological symptoms which stems from living in a racist setting (Sue & Constantine, 2007). These acts can be emotionally, physically, and mentally draining. Therefore, African Americans and other marginalized groups need to be able to heal from

malicious forms of racism. In order to begin to heal from racial subjugation, King (1991) elucidated the idea of cultural repossession from marginalized groups by explicating how cultural repossession can start one on the excursion of self-journey and healing.

Therefore, while marginalized groups name, claim, and analyze racial oppression, we need to acknowledge this concept of race and at the same time begin to restore and reclaim our humanity by embracing our ethnicity (who we were before we were enslaved). Cynthia's comment illustrated how she conceptualizes race as the main factor that shapes her identity. However, it is important for everyone to understand how race and racism are two factors that Eurocentric civilization constructed to divide and dominate the world (Au, 2009).

In addition, the discussion of racial identity development conjured up a discussion on Black male identity. The conversation about Black males and racial identity was interesting to me because I am a Black male whose everyday experiences are replete with race and racism. During the conversations, several contradictions arose among the African American participants, particularly among the parents in the study. For example, an African American male participant interwove his voice and thoughts from a young Black male perspective. The African American male, David, discussed the various stereotypes that plague Black males:

**David:** (*Drily*). It's like they are always stereotyping us as Black people. So, when I was younger, my mom would always tell me what to do as a young Black male and the things that I shouldn't do because of my race and gender. (*Looking at his mom*). My mom would be like... (*He pauses*) anytime we go into the store she's like take your hands out your pockets

and stuff like that. Maybe, because I am a Black male, they may think I'm up to something---trying to steal something. She also told me don't wear my hoodie cause they might think you're in a gang.

**Jessica:** (*With affirmation*). Yeah, my mama always tells my brother stuff like that.

**David:** (*Stern with his back rigid*). Black males are born with targets on their backs. (*Confidently*). The target of being labeled as thugs and thieves. (*Looking at his mother*) My mom taught me how...how the world works.

There were conversations during the book club where the parents of the students challenged and critiqued the oppressive systemic structures, and there were moments when parents inadvertently played into the stereotypes. However, Black males are oftentimes victims of oppressive schooling and social systems that negatively impact our lives (Howard, 2010). I have found myself constantly trying to negotiate and reconcile my own individual lived experiences and realities that come prearranged societal limitations and expectations (Howard, 2010; Milner, 2007). Due to my positionality, I grappled with these contradictions from the African American parents in this study. I asked myself, "Are they inadvertently playing into the stereotypes or is it due to their awareness of what could possibly happen to their young Black sons because of how society views Black males?" I am still searching for the answers.

#### ***Act 4: "We Have to See Color": Colorblindness***

We live in a world filled with pervasive dialogue on acknowledging everyone as the *same* despite their race. Oftentimes, this idea of sameness is ascribed because most

White people are not comfortable talking about race and racism, thus keeping intact White comfort (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Sadly, many teachers, researchers, parents, and students internalize this message and sometimes act out these kinds of messages (Boutte, Lopez-Robertson, & Powers-Costello, 2011). Act 4 of the play illustrated the theme of colorblindness. For example, after a conversation about race and privilege, a White female participant who is a parent of one of my students and a teacher at the school diverted to how it is not a race issue, but it is more of a socioeconomic issue. Joyce Hamilton stated:

I have taught at inner city, small towns, heavy Hispanics' populations, heavy African American, and even heavy Caucasian schools. And, I have seen it more or less with socioeconomic status opposed to race. We see it less in the poor White communities and more in the poor Black communities. So, I can see why we tend to associate it more with race. But, you know in my classroom, all of my students are on that even playing field.

This particular statement captured the social class versus race explanation generated by many Marxist scholars in the extant literature, coupled with colorblind mantras of “we are all the same” (Cole, 2009, 2011; Darder & Torres, 2004, 2009). On the surface, colorblindness seems appealing and it appears to be a strategy for stifling race and eradicating racism. However, colorblindness impedes on the disruption of recognizing oppression because of race and racism (Delgado, 2009). Hence, it perpetuates the status quo, and knowingly or unknowingly it propels whiteness. We live in a racially stratified society; therefore, this notion of colorblindness needs to be problematized. The refusal to

see race intentionally or unintentionally stifles a person's multiple identities, history, and struggles. During the family literacy book club, Cynthia, a bi-racial female participant, explained how she does not want to stress race to her two teenage children, and she does not want them to see only race; although her comment she made was race centered. Furthermore, she reflects on her son's experiences with attending a predominately White elementary school. She noted,

When my son Matthew went to Timberwood (pseudonym) all of his friends were White. Yeah and he was friends with some kids at Timberwood whose parents were wonderful, you know, and even when he left Rosewood, I missed those parents, cause they were the type of people who would do anything for you. They voted for Obama.”

This changes drastically after students leave elementary school. However, things also happen within elementary schools too that reify race and racism. Our beliefs and ideologies continuously develop as we grow up. If a child grows up in a family that practices racism and discrimination, children can learn these practices and view issues such as racism as normal and acceptable. In addition, if parents teach their children from a colorblindness view, it is possible for their children to internalize this notion of not seeing race. These explicit conversations about not seeing race frequently were had repeatedly between parents and their children. Furthermore, Cynthia explained that some of the parents from this particular elementary school voted for President Barack Obama. More specifically, this does not make someone non-racist because they voted for President Obama, “it is important to note that racialized outcomes do not require racist actors” (Boutte, Lopez-Robertson, & Powers-Costello, 2011, p. 1). However, this

demonstrates a colorblind mentality. With the election of a bi-racial President, some people believe we have arrived at a post-racial stage of social development (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). From a Critical Race Theoretical perspective, nothing could be further from the truth.

In contrast, David, an African American male student who had experienced working with Freedom Schools, exclaimed, “We have to see color. Most people who are in power, they don’t see color *or* they do see it, and they don’t care to acknowledge it.” This statement from David made clear of how colorblindness can be nebulous, because it can stand in the way of recognizing racism. Tacit forms of racism should not be avoided or disregarded by parents and educators. These subtle forms of racism are embedded in the thoughts, discourses, and structures of various social institutions that reproduce the negative stereotypes that are constantly infused in mainstream consciousness.

***Act 5: “Black is in and Light is out”: Colorism***

From the book club meetings, focus groups, and participant interviews, a number of conversations transpired around the theme of colorism. Colorism is discrimination or biased based on skin complexion (Hochschild & Weaver, 2007). As long as racial subjugation continues to be a problem, colorism most likely will continue to be one also. It has historical roots in racism and classism, and it is an undeniable issue in the African American community (Monroe, 2013). Individuals who believe in colorism typically favor lighter-skinned people than darker-skinned people. For example, in the book club, Jessica an African American female teenager posed a question trying to elicit thoughts from other book club members about the main character in the novel Danny on how he wanted to eradicate his American identity and culture. Answering this question, Denise

an African American female parent provided her experiences based upon this idea of eradicating one's culture and identity:

I understand how he wanted to get rid of his identity, and how he wishes he were darker. I remember when I went to high school. I guess you would say dark skin was ugly to a lot of people. You had to be light skinned or even White! When it came to dating a lot of the guys would consider dark skin women ugly. As the years passed, people started saying, "Black is in and light is out!"

In this statement Denise pushed the discussion forward by bringing in the issue of colorism. More specifically, Denise made clear of how dark-skinned denoted ugliness, and light-skinned indicated beauty. Furthermore, parents and students explored and discussed how colorism reflects white supremacy because lighter-skinned people are assigned privileges based upon their skin complexion. Consider a conversation between three high school student book club members:

**Jessica:** (*Staring back at Noah*). Well, it goes back to slavery.

**Noah:** (*Surprised*). Slavery? How does it connect to slavery?

**Jessica:** (*Confidently*). Roots! During slavery most dark-skinned people had to work in the fields, and most light-skinned people worked in the house. Light-skinned people did not want their kids to marry dark-skinned people. (*Staring at Noah*) it was just that way. I don't know why, but whenever I watch Roots, my mom pointed out, she said like back in the day, it was real – if you were light-skinned, you wanted to stay light-

skinned or whatever, cause like light-skinned people had the better jobs, usually.

**David:** (*Looking at Jessica and Noah in a concerned manner*). So, how do we see that play out today?

**Jessica:** (*Waiting to see if Noah is going to say something*). I am on the track team and the guys are always joking around (*Smiling*) the light-skinned guys are always saying they are going to take the dark-skinned guys' girlfriends (*Laughter from the book club members*) and the dark-skinned guys say the exact same thing about light-skinned guys.

**David:** (*Looking at Jessica*). How do you think that makes Black people look (*He pauses*) when we separate ourselves...with this division amongst ourselves based upon skin complexion? (*The other book club members look around. David's mom, Denise, is smiling while whispering to Cynthia.*)

**Jessica:** We are already divided. (*Pauses*). We're already divided in a way...it's White and Black. (*Dan nods his head*). And, then, within the Black community, you got dark-skin versus light-skin. I know that we shouldn't disown each other because of our skin complexion, because it puts White people on a pedestal (*Long pause of silence*), which means we aren't really going to get anywhere.

Through this dialogical interaction, two African American participants, David and Jessica, used this moment as a teachable one to help Noah and other book club members to see and to understand the historical roots of colorism as well as challenge African

Americans to distinguish the division and oppression that colorism costs. More specifically, David and Jessica explicated how this division amongst the Black community reifies white dominance and is a form of colorism. Colorism stems from the desire by people of color for a preference of whiteness (Monroe, 2013). That is to be White is akin with having collateral since it translates into accompanying privileges (Harris, 1995). In addition, colorism is detrimental to the human psyche since oftentimes people internalize these negative thoughts and ideologies and do not fully embrace who they are. Furthermore, colorism can sometimes have a negative impact on people of color making them hate their skin complexion and race which results to the bleaching of the skin and other treatments as ways to protect themselves from this oppressive act that sustains the racial marginalization and division of people who are of the same racial groups.

#### ***Act 6: Blackness as a Tool of Resistance***

Throughout the following acts, the themes of race in the U.S. South, race as an identity constructor, colorblindness, and colorism all help make clear of the pervasiveness and the detrimental impact racism plays in people's lives. Through the media, schools, places of employment, laws, and policies, the American society has placed an added value on whiteness and an undervalue on blackness (hooks, 2003). In numerous ways, Blacks are shown and told that their culture and racial identities are lacking and not of importance which can lead to self-hatred, discouragement, and despair (King, 2005). Oftentimes, Blacks have to maneuver through society by altering their identity or losing some part of themselves in order to operate within society. Thus, we must learn how to matriculate in society without losing our blackness but actually staying

true to who we are. In particular, Act 6 of the play captured various methods of how African American participants utilize their blackness as a tool of resistance. For example, an African American female participant, Denise Jacobs, openly reflected on her racially-related experiences from playing college basketball at a historically Black college and her racially-related experience when her basketball team competed against an all white basketball team. Furthermore, this particular racial-related experience assisted Denise in taking pride in her racial and ethnic identities while learning how to use her blackness as a means of resistance:

We were winning the game, and the crowd was nasty (*With a disgruntled expression*) oh, they were nasty. (*Leaning forward with her arms folded to her chest*). Oh, they were saying everything from Black to nig (*she stops her statement*) oh, they were...(*Confidently*). Now, before this, I knew I was Black, and I understood I was a Black woman. It was fine. (*Looking around*). And, you know, but that was one of the events that really made me, (*She pauses and thinks for a second*) I really wanted to just stand up and let everyone know about my identity and who I am. I was proud of my identity. You know I knew it all along growing up, but it really, you know, sunk in that you are gonna be faced with challenges (*Simultaneously, with cadence, she begins to move her hands while moving her head to the rhythm of her speech*) and you need to know how to represent your race, who you are, who you stand for, don't let no one change it!

This particular racial-related experience impacted Denise by influencing her thinking and how she discussed issues such as race, racism, and power with her children. For example, Denise shares a story with the other book club members about her youngest daughter who is a first grader at a predominantly white elementary school. Denise's daughter expressed interest of changing her hair texture and color to mirror the hairstyle and color of her white female teacher and white female peers. Furthermore, Denise illustrated how she countered this misconception about black hair, "She and I had a conversation about this. I went to my bookshelf, and I pulled some children's books on Black beauty and Black hair. Then, we talked about what it means to love yourself and to accept your blackness in a positive manner." Following, Denise explained how she and her husband teach their children about power and how power plays a major role in the educational arena; and, she challenges white supremacy by referring to white people as "crafty":

**Denise:** *(looking at Mr. Johnson)* Crafty would be *(she pauses)* um...*(in a deep and evil voice)* sneaky...putting on a façade. They make you think it is supposed to be this way. *(With assurance)* Many times our kids are getting manipulated. They are being taught a lot of the wrong stuff. *(she makes eye contact with each parent)* That's why parents are so...parents need to be involved with the kids. *(she slowly moves her head around the room making sure to look at each member)* You are the kids' first teacher. You're a parent...so, you really have to put it down. I'm always on to stuff. In my house, my husband and I are on to this stuff. We have a lot of books written by Black authors, and they are about the Black culture and

identity. (*She pauses while looking around*). You know...how things have been taken from us? (*Moving her hands*). They don't tell us about *how* the land actually was...(*Gently*) you know?

Denise used the word *crafty* to illustrate how people in power cajole and gain consent from those who are marginalized by the system that subordinates and oppresses them. Furthermore, Denise hones in on practices such as religion, policies, laws, and in particular, *education* to illustrate how the elite persuade the oppressed to believe these policies and laws are natural and fixed ideologies that are irreversible. Therefore, using blackness as a tool of resistance and as a counter-hegemonic tool distinctly invokes blackness as a tool that counteracts colorblindness and other racial structures that are prevalent in the American milieu.

In conclusion, this section discussed and interpreted how participants utilized events in the novel to express and articulate their lived experiences, shared history, and understandings of issues such as race, racism, identity, and power. In addition, this discussion section illustrated how the space of the book club functioned as a collective learning environment for families.

The activist piece of the critical family literacy book club is situated in its creation of alliances across families from various racial and ethnic backgrounds. The resulting findings from this study can illustrate to educators, researchers, parents, and policy makers the processes, challenges and successes surrounding the praxis and practice on how to engage families in critical race teaching and practices; and, all of these ideas explain why we should constantly ask ourselves, “Who Let the Elephant in the Room?”

## Summary

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate, and subsequently better understand how parents' racial identities impacted how they created dialogues pertaining to issues such as race, racism, and power with their children. Through the implementation of a critical family literacy book club, this study sought to capture the parents and students' beliefs, thoughts, reactions, and vulnerabilities when engaged in a book club centered on social and equity issues. The book club was designed to assist participants in reflecting on their past and current racially-related experiences. Critical race theory/methodology and critical race pedagogy guided every aspect of this study, from the conceptualization to the presentation of the findings. Both frameworks situate race at the forefront of issues that transpire throughout society and within various social structures. Not only do my own personal experiences serve witness to this reality but also it was clearly evident in the experiences of the study's participants. Thus, race was intentionally placed and remained at the center of the project.

Honing in on race, specifically the many aspects of racism evident in the participants' stories, was a way to confront and challenge dominant notions of objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy, particularly as those concepts are adhered to and embodied in educational settings and society. Finally, in effort to enhance the analysis of the participants' experiences with race, racism, and power, I attempted to humanize this study by illustrating the data and findings through the implementation of a dramaturgical performance as an attempt to fully capture each participant.

This study posed two research questions regarding the roles race and racism play in the lives and daily experiences of parents and students through qualitative research

methods: (1) What happens when parents and students are engaged in a critical family literacy book club? (2) How do parents' racial identities impact how they create critical dialogue with their children pertaining to issues of race and racism? Before I provide implications and recommendations, I will address each research question recapping the findings and showing what these questions add to the literature.

***What happens when parents and students are engaged in a critical family literacy book club?***

Five interconnected themes emerged from the data to answer the research question: 1) The nature of racism in the south 2) Race as an identity constructor; 3) Colorblindness; 4) Colorism; and 5) Blackness as a tool of resistance. Together, the themes provide a picture of how the racially-related experiences of parents and students fit together into a larger framework.

The first research question examined the ways in which families responded to issues of race and racism as well as engage in critical discourse about these important matters. This study is unique because it engaged the teacher, students, *and* parents. Through the family literacy book club, I aimed to work with families and learn how parents and students' experiences with race and racism impacted their racial identities. Furthermore, I used critical race pedagogy as one theoretical framework that helped to illustrate and to understand the racial and oppressive structures that are put in place to marginalized students of color. Thus, implementing a critical race pedagogical framework enabled me to capture the voices and experiences of various families across different racial and ethnic backgrounds. More specifically, the book club add to the existing body of knowledge by incorporating parents' childhood and young adult racial

experiences. Furthermore, this study has led me to reflect on the five tenets of critical race pedagogy which are the following: (1) understand and recognize the pervasiveness of racism; (2) acknowledge other intersections such as gender, sexuality, religion, and class; (3) understand the role that power plays in schools; (4) emphasizes the importance of critical self-reflexivity; (5) advocate for social justice both in schooling and education. Furthermore, as I reflect on these tenets, I have come to an understanding of how these components create a critique of racism in education while simultaneously conveying ideas on how to address race and racism in the classroom. In addition, I have learned how critical race studies of teaching and teacher education bring rise to the oppressive classroom practices that not only marginalize students of color but also tackle the multiple ways local and national policies influence teaching across America's diverse classrooms (Lynn & Parker, 2006). The findings from the present study have also led me to believe that it may be useful to include a tenet that incorporates a critical family and school partnership. Thus, it is important for teachers, families, and communities to form a coalition where they are able to engage in critical dialogue pertaining to these issues and become agents of change through working together to understand, critique, challenge, and change systemic oppressive structures. As teachers, parents, and students establish these partnerships, this can help foster healthy cultural, racial, and ethnic identities and increase the academic success of students (Greene, 2013).

***How do parents' racial identities impact how they create dialogue pertaining to issues of race and racism with their children?***

This particular question documented how parents' racial-related encounters impacted how they addressed issues of race and racism with their children; also, it

explored parents' levels of critical consciousness about these issues. Through the dramaturgical performance and discussion of the findings, it is evident how parents and students were all at different levels when it came to the understanding of race and racism. Through capturing parents and students' voices, a number of racial counternarratives transpired from their stories. For example, in the book club, a young African American male, David, provided a counternarrative that challenged and countered dominant narratives about Black males not being critically conscious (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). During one of the book club meetings, David exclaimed:

**David:** (*Understanding*). Well, my parents are divorced, and the summer of my seventh grade year, I went to visit my dad. He put me in this program called Freedom School. (*Mr. Johnson looks up from jotting notes, surprised*).

**Mr. Johnson:** (*Rapidly*). Can you tell everyone what Freedom School is? (*Smiling*).

**David:** Freedom School is like when you learn about who you are and the world through books. (*He pauses*) and, it is like an Afrocentric course. It is like the place where you learn about where you are from, how you were treated, how your past ancestors were treated, and how you can come back some of the things that are put upon you as a black man or black woman. (*His eyes wide, and his hands clutched together on the desk*). We may need an Afrocentric course here. (*Taken aback*) But, wait, it provides too much truth that too many White people aren't ready for!

This particular question adds to the body of knowledge because it helps capture the voices and lived experiences of marginalized individuals. More specifically, through David's comment, it is evident how he attempts to push the field forward by explaining how beneficial an Afrocentric framework can be to all people, especially Black children. An African-centered education addresses knowledge from the viewpoint of Africa as the genesis of human civilization. Although the focus is on African and African American culture and way of life, an Afrocentric pedagogy is multicultural, and it incorporates the study of all groups in the historical, political, social, and cultural context within the

United States and worldwide (Reviere, 2001). Channeling historical giants like Dubois (1903) and Woodson (1933), David believed that the more Black people knew about their cultural, racial, and ethnic heritages the better they could understand how to operate in the present culture.

As with society in general, parents in this study reflected a range of racial identities, depending on their life experiences. For some participants, the pain from their racial experiences was visceral like mine. Some chose to recast this pain into praxis, which allowed them to actively fight racism. Others chose to explain racial events on individual levels rather than to acknowledge or digest the depth and systematic nature of racism. Either way, the book study provided a beginning for much-needed conversations. One caveat of doing this work is that sometimes discussions open up lifetimes of pain that have remained beneath the surface for some. It is necessary for researchers to be prepared to find ways to support participants as they work through this difficult process. In the present case, we debriefed at the end of the study how the book club served as one tool that allowed families to share their stories and personal experiences with race and racism and all participants seemed to be appreciated of the discussions rather than regretful that they occurred. It would seem that the book study provided a need avenue and catharsis for participants. Nevertheless, I fully understand that some of the painful wounds that were opened during the book study sessions may surface again at a later point or be triggered by racist encounters.

## **Implications for Policy and Practice**

### ***Implications for School Administrators***

Many parents in this study hoped that this research would be useful in providing school administrators with salient insight about their schools in regarding parental involvement and how race and racism play a role in the creation of building a strong home and school partnership. As I provide these recommendations, I would like to suggest the intent is not to vilify schools or school administrators since we all have a reciprocal goal of improving parent involvement.

First, parents wanted administrators to understand that both educators and families have different roles in some ways. By this they meant that parents can assist schools with helping teachers incorporate their students' cultures, languages, prior experiences, struggles, and knowledge into the classroom. Therefore, schools and families should work together to ensure cultural and academic excellence for all children.

Second, the parents' stories and experiences in relation to schools give rise to the important questions about the roles educators play in promoting school practices and policies that continuously oppress parents and students of color. Capturing the parents' voices illustrate a rare depiction of parents and communities' relationships and barriers with schools. The book study sessions provided a robust, validating, cooperative, and liberating way to engage and connect families and communities to schools. Efforts such as parent-teacher-student book studies should be considered by schools as potential avenues for discussing pressing and difficult issues such as race.

Educators often lament the lack of visibility of African American parents' presence in schools and participation in school activities. Often, they question whether

African American parents care about the educational success of their children and if they promote the importance of learning outside of school contexts (Fields-Smith, 2005; Noguera, 2001; Yan, 2000). The issue to understand and to recognize is that parents of color lack of visibility in schools is clouded by deficit views from which schools view parents of color without considering the structural and systemic inequities that are described as *fixed* or *natural* practices. As I conclude this section, I would like to suggest the intent is not to belittle schools, educators, or researchers since all have a reciprocal goal of improving parent involvement. However, in actuality, both educators and families have different roles. By this I mean, parents can assist schools with helping teachers incorporate their students' cultures, languages, prior experiences, struggles, and knowledge into the classroom. Therefore, schools and families should work together to ensure cultural and academic excellence from all children (King, 2005).

Critically responsive parental involvement practices welcome parents' stories and experiences in relation to schools. Moreover, critically responsive parental involvement practices can provide a healthy, corroborating, supportive, and emancipatory ways to engage and to connect families and communities to schools. Further research necessitates extensive and long-term efforts to examine how critical parental involvement is culturally responsive to families and communities whose culture is often devalued in schools (e.g., minoritized groups). Hence, educators must be advised on how to carefully investigate daily routines that children engage in (Boutte & Johnson, 2014; Lee, 2008).

Further scholarship that deepens our understanding of critically responsive parental involvement practices in K-12 schools which have demonstrated success with working with families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may offer

models for programs, schools, and colleges dedicated to building two-way relationships with parents (e.g., parents take on leadership roles and contribute to curricular decisions). Therefore, schools need to create robust relationships and partnerships with parents and community members. These relationships can serve as potential avenues for discussing pressing and difficult issues such as race.

On the basis of the evidence currently available, it seems fair to suggest that schools create dynamic and fluid definitions of parent involvement. Similarly, dynamic definitions of parent involvement are based on immersion within the culture and community as an approach to learn through and about families and communities. Parents are invited to voice their opinions and give their input on school policies. Furthermore, critical responsive parental involvement practices view students' culture as strength rather than a weakness. These strength-based norms and practices are interactive and grounded in building on students' assets and prior experiences.

### ***Implications for Classroom Teachers and Teacher Educators***

Some parents and students from this study believed teachers should have more classroom discussions about race and racism without being afraid to discuss these critical issues and without being fearful to critique various power structures and the many nuances of whiteness. Also, in contrast, some parents seemed to avoid discussions about race. From my teaching experiences, I have witnessed teachers sweep race under the rug, speak about race through a post-racial lens, or only discuss race and racism during Black History Month. Contrary to these experiences, allowing a space for children to learn, challenge, critique, and discuss these issues are important, and these are critical factors that should be discussed and taught in every class. Yet, in order to have these discussions,

teacher education program must prepare teachers by ensuring that they have the necessary knowledge bases, dispositions, and strategies to lead these discussions. In the hand of teachers who are unprepared, these discussions could be mishandled and more damage than good can result (Matias, 2013).

Teaching can serve as a counter-hegemonic device that can counter the majoritarian narratives that are constantly told throughout classrooms. The dominant narratives that are rooted throughout many classrooms cannot be countered if teachers are not engaging students in critical dialogue pertaining to issues such as race, racism, and power as well as critically examining themselves and how they situate themselves around these issues. Many teachers are unnerved with discussing race and racism with students because these topics usually tend to make people uncomfortable and most teachers do not have the preparation for teaching about these issues (Matias, 2013). Hence, when discussing issues of race, racism, and power, some people may become uncomfortable and the notion of a “safe” place then becomes a contested space. Baszile (2003) postulates there is no such thing as a safe space when discussing issues related to inequitable distribution of power. When tackling social and equity issues, safety becomes a conundrum. Therefore, we need to problematize this notion of creating safe spaces. I want to make clear that I am not arguing that building classroom community and rapport with students are not of importance, because they are. However, I want to focus on this notion of the creation of a “safe place” as one that avoids conflict. For example, when thinking about this notion of “safety,” Baszile (2003) explains how we need to ask ourselves what exactly is meant by the term “safety”? Does it mean that we do not raise our voice? If someone cries, are we supposed to stop the conversation? Does

it mean that everyone will respect each person's opinion? Hence, in my opinion, safety becomes a security and climate issue. Therefore, the classroom is a contested space; it is not only about the historical moment, but it also mirrors the present time (Henry, 1993). The classroom is a site of cultural, racial, and ethnic struggle; therefore, this space is not perfectly harmonious or a space of ease. Hence, being positioned in a contested space, can become a tool that push people to learn, expand their understanding, take a new perspective, and stretch their awareness (Baszile, 2003; Henry, 1993).

### **Further Research**

Through the implementation of an adolescent novel in a series of book study meetings, this dissertation has served as a vehicle for illustrating the racially-related experiences of parents and students who attended monthly book club meetings. Through their stories and comments from the book club discussions, we have gained access to an alternative way of engaging and welcoming parents than we usually encounter. Briefly, I propose a few suggestions for future avenues of research as well as some reflections on my own pending research agenda. The recommendations made here also reflect, directly and indirectly, some of my thoughts about the limitations of the study.

### ***Research Recommendations***

One avenue for further research may be the exploration of what happens when parents, in-service teachers, pre-service teachers, and students are engaged in a critical family literacy book club. It would be interesting to further explore how a book club space would look if all of these constituents jointly meet for book study discussions. This could be beneficial on different levels. First, engaging parents, classroom teachers, future teachers, and students in a critical book club could lead to the creation of a strong

partnership between universities, schools, and families and communities. The book club could serve as a tool that may assist educators and families with unlearning biases and ideologies that marginalize people of color. Second, within this space, everyone has the opportunity to discuss and share his/her racially-related stories. Therefore, a critical family literacy book club could help pre-service teachers and in-service teachers with finding out creative ways to engage parents and work with them to better serve children as well as it allows a space for teachers to actively listen to the parents' stories and use these stories to positively inform how we teach children.

Further, I wonder about how the stories and conversations might change if the focus shifted to an elementary level. I believe that while parents and teachers' experiences with race and racism may be similar to the stories and experiences to those of the parents and students in this study; I think it would be interesting to see how the conversations would go with younger children.

Finally, I am pondering about the differences that may develop from conducting a similar study to this one in a different geographic location since the south has a long history of overt racism. With that thought, I turn to my future research agenda.

### ***Reflection on My Research***

I hope to start my career as an academic by conducting a similar study with educators, parents, and students from a local school and community. The present study convinces me that there is an important difference in the stories and discussions that warrants further examination. Collaborative research with other critical scholars (who are seeking ways to build school, university, and family/community partnership) across different geologic or grade level settings can be used to advance and build on the findings

from the present study. Also, I am opened to possibilities beyond what I expected to find; furthermore, I do understand book clubs are not a panacea for ending racism.

### ***Reflections on the Impact of My Research on My Teaching***

In the opening chapters of this dissertation, I presented my personal experiences and how those experiences informed this study. Because of my personal experiences and lived realities pertaining to race and racism, these experiences influenced my beliefs about how parents and teachers need to be able to discuss topics that are deemed controversial or awkward with their children. In my classroom, I teach from a critical race pedagogical stance. Hence, race is situated at the nexus of events that unfold in society. My students engage in language and literacy practices that position social and equity issues at the forefront of my classroom and pedagogical practices, which enable me to build students' academic achievement while simultaneously building their racial, ethnic and cultural identities

### **Concluding Thoughts**

As a racialized student who is a survivor of P-20 public education, I realize I have delicate and firsthand knowledge of how Eurocentric curriculum had negatively impacted my racial identity. I continuously reflect on my racialized, gendered, and classed self in relationship to my racialized students and parents. Thus, this dissertation has engaged the possibilities and challenges of using critical race theory/methodology and performative writing by exploring, describing, and documenting how eight parents and 10 students read and responded to a novel in a book club setting. Specifically, this critical race account has explored the stories that emerged from the members of the book club. This dissertation contributes to the literature in its exploration of the pedagogical possibilities

of critical family literacy book clubs for parents and students across different racial and ethnic backgrounds. This particular study challenged the view that I have to disconnect myself from the data and research; it allowed me to look at the emotional consequences that transpire when we start to evaluate race and racism. At the same time, I have to be aware of how this subjectivity can also lead to problems such as truthfulness when it comes to retelling of the stories, which means I have to stay close to the data to fully capture the experiences of the participants. I am also excited about the possibility of having scholars, researchers, educators, students, parents and communities engage in this particular study by reading and performing the research. Having readers, audience members, and performers read, listen, and/or perform these stories humanized this particular study and the participants within this study. Humanizing the critical family literacy book club enabled me to work *with* families and learn *from* them while challenging this idea of researcher versus participant and moving to researcher-as-participant-as-listener-as advocate (Paris & Winn, 2014). The book club was created as a mechanism that could possibly build relationships between schools and families as well as build relationships across families. It was not my intent to try to conform parents and students to believe what I see as truth or knowledge, but I wanted to create a space where parents, students', and even my own ideas and thinking were challenged and pushed. Each person's story helped to make clear how race and racism operate in our daily lives. Therefore, I hope that in sharing their stories with me and with each other, the participants who participated in this study felt avowed throughout this process. Most importantly, I hope my participants who are victims of racism and those who are reproducers of oppressive ideologies (intentionally or not) have become empowered

through actively listening to their own stories as well as stories of others. I hope each person has taken at least one thing away with him or her---something that resonates deeply within their souls that will help them grow and continue them on a trajectory to critical transformation.

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## APPENDIX A

### Parent Interview Questions

1. In what ways does Pine Hill High School communicate with you about what is happening in the classroom? Do you have any suggestions as to how the school or classroom could better keep you informed?
2. In what ways does Pine Hill High School and teachers make parents feel welcome to participate or engage with the teachers?
3. In what ways do you work to support your child at home? How often does your child's school provide support in helping you to know what you can do at home? Do you feel this is adequate? Do you have any ideas for ways that you could be better supported?

APPENDIX B

Parent Letter

7500 Brookfield Road  
Columbia, SC 29223  
January 8, 2013

Dear Parents,

I hope this letter finds you well. Literacy is an essential component that allows us to read and write our world. As teachers and parents, we need to promote the importance of literacy in school and at home, which will move our children forward to becoming independent readers and writers.

This semester, I have created a family literacy book club as a way to strengthen the gap between home and school. The book club will meet once a month, and parents, teachers, and students all engage in critical dialogue about the book in relation to their lives and the world. The book club will encompass people from different racial and ethical backgrounds. The family literacy book club teaches parents how the school can draw upon students' culture, which is one component for building academic achievement.

I know that you are busy, but I hope you will consider dedicating one weekday per month to engage in critical dialogue with other families about their cultures, beliefs, and dispositions through literature as a stepping-stone to create the world that is not yet.

Sincerely,

Lamar L. Johnson

If you want to join the family literacy book club, please provide your name, email address, phone number, and the number of your family members that will be participating. (Please return by Thursday, September 10, 2013)

-----

Name:

Phone number:

Email address:

Number of family members participating:

## APPENDIX C

### Parent and Student Letter

7500 Brookfield Road  
Columbia, SC 29223  
January 8, 2013

Dear Parents and Students,

I hope this letter finds you in good health, spirits, and strength. During the 2012-2013 school year, you participated in a critical family literacy book club. During the book club, we all engaged in rich dialogue, and we all created an open, safe space where we all felt comfortable to explore social and equity issues through telling our stories and our experiences.

Because of the powerful conversations during the book club, I would like to interview you and your child to explore and document the various conversations from the book club and your personal racial-related experiences. If you agree to participate in this study, I will conduct two individual interviews with each participant and one focus group with all participants who agree to participate in this study.

Taking part in the study is your decision. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also quit the study at any time or decide not to answer any questions you are not comfortable answering. Participation, non-participation or withdrawal will not affect your child's grade in any way.

I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at [lamarjohnson50@gmail.com](mailto:lamarjohnson50@gmail.com) or my faculty advisor, Dr. Gloria Boutte (803) 777-2018 (office) or email [gsboutte@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:gsboutte@mailbox.sc.edu) if you have study related questions or problems. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance at the University of South Carolina at (803) 777-7095.

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please sign the attached form and return it to Lamar Johnson.

Best,  
**Lamar L. Johnson**  
College of Education

University of South Carolina  
820 South Main Street  
Wardlaw Building  
Columbia, SC 29208

**Assent Form**

**Study Title: Who Let the Elephant in the Room?: Analyzing Race and Racism  
through a Critical Family Literacy Book Club**

**Researcher:** Lamar L. Johnson

---

I have read the information contained in the letter about the above titled study, which describes what I will be asked to do if I decide to participate. I have been told that the decision is up to me, that I do not have to participate, and that I can stop participating at any time I choose.

Yes – I want to participate in the study.

-OR-

No – I do not want to participate in the study.

Child's Signature

---

Date

---

Parent/Guardian's Signature

---

Date

---

## APPENDIX D

### Interview Questions

**The following questions will be provided for the first semi-structured interview.**

- Recall a memory (ies) that made you realize your racial identity.

**Second Interview Unstructured Interview:**

- You may choose to respond to the following prompt provided in any written format (song, illustration, essay, self-stories, poems, journal, prayers, etc.). Tell me about your day-to-day experience as a student/parent and, if relevant, the ways in which you see race play itself out in those events, processes, and activities throughout the day.

## APPENDIX E

### Focus Group Interview Questions

#### **Focus Group One**

- Discuss your experiences with race and racial injustice in schools and out of school contexts.
- How do you address and handle those injustices?
- How do your parents create dialog around issues such as race and racism?
- How do race and racism play out in your daily events, processes, and activities throughout the day?

#### **Focus Group Two**

- Do parents perpetuate racism with children? If so how? If not, why do you think they do not?
- Why aren't conversations about race taking place in homes, schools, and society?
- Has the book club changed your perceptions about culture, identity, and race? If yes, please say how. If not, please say why it has not.