

Leading While Black and Male:  
A Phenomenology of Black Male School Leadership

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## ABSTRACT

Leading While Black and Male:

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This study explored the ways in which the racial identities and lived experiences of Black male K-12 public and independent school leaders inform their professional lives and leadership. Through a qualitative phenomenological study, use of online descriptive survey, and in-depth semi-structured interviews, including the use of visual elicitation methods, with 14 Black male school leaders from across the United States, this research study provided structural and textural descriptions as well as a synthesis of meanings and essence of the experience and phenomenon of Black male K-12 school building-level leadership. This can be summarized as: (a) growing up as a Black boy; (b) leadership as ministry; (c) when a Black man is in the principal's office; and (d) safeguarding the village. The research expands understanding of paradigms of critical race leadership and disrupts the normative educational leadership axiology. These leaders developed a range of strategies that enabled them to navigate the multidimensional aspects of their racial identity within a dominant White-racialized education system. Additionally, their articulation of action-oriented social justice leadership was influenced by their personal lived experiences, values, and sense of community.

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DEDICATION

In Loving Memory of

my Father,

***Alton Philemon Smith,***

Sunrise: 6th November 1935 – Sunset: 15th January 2017

and

my Brother,

***Trevor Alton Smith***

Sunrise: 31st August 1966 – Sunset: 15th March 2019

*Sometimes the strong die, too!*

## CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: We come this day seeking healing, so we bring you our pain.

**People: We come this day seeking answers, so we bring you our questions.**

Leader: We come this day seeking comfort, so we bring you our dis-ease.

**People: We come this day seeking freedom, so we bring you our insecurities.**

Leader: We come this day seeking peace, so we bring you our conflicts.

**People: We come this day seeking love, so we bring you our pride.**

Leader: We come this day seeking forgiveness, so we bring you our sins.

**People: We come this day seeking success, so we bring you our fears.**

**All: We come to you, O God, who makes a way out of no way. We come seeking to be in your presence one more time. Amen.**

The Abyssinian Baptist Church

March 17, 2019

## PREFACE

*And let us not grow weary of doing good,  
for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.*  
Galatians 6:9 (ESV)

Born in England of Jamaican parentage, I am firmly rooted and proud of my African Caribbean heritage and the benefits that the multidimensionality of my identity brings to all aspects of family, civil society, and global education. My personal journey is not too dissimilar from that of many men from the African Diaspora, yet it is a story that is largely unheard in the dominant narrative, oftentimes negative stereotyping that characterizes young Black boys and men as academic and professional underachievers. My early negative experiences of the English education system during my formative years heightened my attention to the issues and tensions within the education system(s) to sufficiently encourage and support boys and young men from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds to reach their full potential. I, like many of my contemporaries, returned to education as a mature student, and went on to achieve notable success, both academically and professionally. In Fall 2013, I entered the Educational Leadership Ph.D. program at Teachers College, Columbia University as an International Student from London, England. I arrived as a visitor to what it means to be a Black man in America. I graduated as an owner of what it means to be living while Black and male in the world.

Notwithstanding my record of personal and professional accomplishments, I am very cognizant that my academic, professional, and personal achievements are only possible because “If we stand tall, it is because we stand on the shoulders of many ancestors” (African Proverb). It is on behalf of them that I offer and dedicate this Ph.D. dissertation. A further important and constant aspect of my (life’s) education has been the role of family, race-cultural identity,

church, faith, spirituality, and community. First and foremost, I acknowledge the power and Majesty of Almighty God who has consistently made a way and carried me through, making the seemingly impossible possible. Yet, to what extent are the ancestral knowledge, wisdoms, traditions, truths, faith, and spirituality of people of the African Diaspora celebrated and used to inform contemporary understandings of (education) leadership and success? My research and exploration of the intersection of race and gender in educational leadership seek to do this, in particular through understanding the ways in which the racial identities and lived experiences of Black male K-12 school building-level leaders—principals and heads of schools in public or private school settings—inform their professional lives, leadership preparation, and leadership development. There has not been an extensive collective body of work on Black male school building-level leaders across both public and private school settings, only tremors or whispers. This phenomenological research project puts it on the world map and for others to see.

My first memorable conceptualization of leadership—Black male leadership in particular—was that of my late father, Alton Philemon Smith, who was born in 1935 in Santa Cruz in the parish of St. Elizabeth, Jamaica. “Show me the boy and I will show you the man.” My father attended Santa Cruz All Age School where he proved to be an excellent student. He was to go on to become head boy at school (equivalent to valedictorian). He also served as a cross bearer at his local St. Matthews Church. On leaving school, Alton moved to the big city, Kingston, where he worked as a clerk at one of the most prestigious Hardware Supplies on the island. It was during this time that his childhood friendship with Eunice (Hyacinth Eunice), the younger sister of a school day friend and neighbor, blossomed. The sweethearts later got married. A short while later, Alton decided to travel to England in search of a better life. He arrived in 1960, and was followed a few months later by Hyacinth, making the tough decision to

leave behind their first two children, Angela and Winston. The couple had three other children, Phillip, Trevor, and Lorna, all of whom were born in England. Alton was a hard-working individual who always did his best for his family. In 1963, he joined the West Midlands Passenger Bus Service, where he worked for over 30 years, initially as a bus conductor and subsequently as a driver.

Alton was anything but one-dimensional. He consistently, every day without fail, read newspapers and watched the local, national, and international news on T.V. He was an avid reader, and the family home was filled with books and encyclopedias. Alton was a font of wisdom and knowledge, with gems and points of views on all aspects of life. Indeed, there were very few topics on which he was not knowledgeable and could not debate. The genius that was Alton Philemon Smith was somewhat hidden under his unassuming, quiet, and thoughtful disposition. Alton was highly respected among his family, friends, and wider community, viewed by many as an elder statesman. After too many years of contending with the cold and bitterness of England, a dream deferred becomes a dream fulfilled. In 1997, Alton and Hyacinth fulfilled a lifetime dream; they retired and returned home to their childhood district of Santa Cruz, Jamaica. It was here where Alton and Hyacinth were able to relax and get some respite from the harshness—weather and otherwise—that had been England. The couple made regular return visits to England to see family and friends. It was during his last visit to England in October 2016 that Alton was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and his health rapidly declined. Despite his illness, Alton showed an inner strength, a resilience, a faith in miracles—no matter how large or small—and a sense of dignity. On Sunday, 15th January 2017, Alton Philemon Smith drew his last breath and transitioned to rest. On that day, my world stopped, for not only did I lose my father, I lost my greatest friend, my counselor, advisor, life educator, and greatest exemplar of



excellence in life, in being Black and male, and in leadership. My father would continually inquire about my doctoral studies and life in the United States, read and give feedback on manuscripts that I had written, and engage me in critical conversations about the importance of knowledge, understanding, and belief in self. He instilled in us a sense of pride in a Black race-cultural identity, and the cultural norms and traditions that inform who we are as people of African (Caribbean) descent. I have often wondered what could have become of that brilliant young man, Alton Smith. I wonder what would have happened had he continued to achieve great success in his professional, academic, and personal life. I wonder what would have happened had he decided to stay in Jamaica, surrounded by the warmth, love, community, and prosperity of Black love, rather to travel to the harshness, bitterness, racism, and discrimination of England—a country that invited him but never wanted him. I wonder if Alton Philemon Smith might have progressed to pursue an advanced terminal degree—a Ph.D.? I wonder, and so in my wonderings, I completed and offer this dissertation and Ph.D. degree on behalf of my father, Alton Philemon Smith. A dream deferred becomes a dream fulfilled . . . perhaps.

On 15th March, 2019, Trevor Alton Smith, my younger brother by 5 years, became a U.K. national headline. “Birmingham police shooting: Man killed in Lee Bank.” Eight words that would change the lives of his family forever. Eight words that would reverberate in our every morning and every night. 15th March, 2019, a date that before those words were uttered was never in our psyche or our worst nightmares. Trevor and I attended the same primary and secondary schools in Birmingham, England, Highfield Infants and Junior School, and then Hodge Hill Secondary School. I have often wondered how could two brothers have attended the same “good” schools, and yet their lives take such different trajectories. Trevor was a very bright, talented, and creative individual. He was very artistic, constantly producing artwork and

animation, and what would ultimately become a part of his personal signature, fashion. Trevor's artistic expression was forever present. After leaving school, Trevor had a number of early career aspirations, including at one point to follow in the footsteps of our older brother, Winston, to join the military. In finding, or perhaps more accurately, in his continual search to find self, Trevor would go on to pursue a number of trade occupations. Trevor lived a larger-than-life life, making many choices throughout his adult life about who and how he would show up in the world. He also faced many challenges, some of which he was able to navigate much better than others. He found great comfort, support, and affirmation among his former wife, two daughters, and friendship groups. Trevor's friends walked with him, stood by him, and at times carried him through this journey we call life. There is something so terribly painful to see the life of a loved one reduced to a sensationalized headline, absent of the great pain, loss, and sense of disbelief that I and we as a family have, and have had to endure every single day since his killing. In acknowledging my brother Trevor, I also present an alternative 8-word headline, a counter-narrative to that presented in the dominant press in the United Kingdom—"Trevor Alton Smith, promise unrealized, loved by many." Trevor, I praise you, I celebrate you, I commit to do right by and for you. I also offer this dissertation and Ph.D. degree on behalf of my brother, Trevor Alton Smith. A promise unrealized becomes a promise realized . . . perhaps.

Two days after my brother's life was extinguished by the hands of those who serve to protect us, I sat 3,361 miles away from family and comfort, in the sanctuary of the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, New York, my regular place of worship. Totally lost for words in trying to make sense of this world. Trying to make sense of what it (really) means to be a Black man in this world, in this life—the ever-presence of "Black misandry" (Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007, p. 563), hypervisibility, and surveillance of the Black male body, yet color

blindness to the brilliance of the Black man? The answer was to be found in the Call to Worship for that Sunday morning, March 17, 2019 service, as follows:

The Abyssinian Baptist Church

CALL TO WORSHIP

March, 17, 2019

Leader: We come this day seeking healing, so we bring you our pain.

**People: We come this day seeking answers, so we bring you our questions.**

Leader: We come this day seeking comfort, so we bring you our dis-ease.

**People: We come this day seeking freedom, so we bring you our insecurities.**

Leader: We come this day seeking peace, so we bring you our conflicts.

**People: We come this day seeking love, so we bring you our pride.**

Leader: We come this day seeking forgiveness, so we bring you our sins.

**People: We come this day seeking success, so we bring you our fears.**

**All: We come to you, O God, who makes a way out of no way. We come seeking to be in your presence one more time. Amen.**

The Abyssinian Baptist Church community has remained the one constant, a place of worship, spiritual guidance and instruction, refuge and self-care for me during what has been a tumultuous acclamation (socialization) of what it means to be living while Black in America. Abyssinian serves as a reminder that “there is a Balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole.” As I continue to seek answers to that larger, perplexing question, “What does it mean to be a Black man in this world?”, I open this dissertation manuscript with that same Call to Worship, inviting all readers of this manuscript—Black men, my brothers, in particular—to also read it in the hope that you too may find those words to be a source of comfort, healing, and strength.

While the focus of this dedication thus far has been to the now departed men, pivotal in my life—my father, Alton Philemon Smith, and my brother, Trevor Alton Smith—I am most cognizant that none of this—my achievements, their achievements, our achievements—could have been possible without Black women. I also dedicate this narrative and scholarly contribution on leading while Black and male to the foremost Black woman in my life, my mother, Hyacinth Eunice Smith. My mother has dedicated her life to her family and made so many sacrifices so that I/we were never without. Words cannot express the depth of love, gratitude, and admiration that I have for my mother. My personal loss and hurt are deep, yet I hurt even more so for my mother. In such a short period of time, my mother has lost her husband of 58 years, very reluctantly made the hard decision to leave her dream delivered, end retirement in Jamaica and return to England to be closer to my (then) two siblings and her grandchildren in England. Less than 3 weeks after freighting all of my mother's belongings to England, her son Trevor was killed in such tragic and unbelievable circumstances. One of the worst things imaginable is for a mother to have to bury her child. Yet, in that nightmare tragedy, there was something serenely comforting to experience the outpouring of love and comfort for my mother, and us as a family, from the 400+ members of family, friends, and community who came to pay their last respects by attending Trevor's funeral and celebration of life service. Mom, I salute you, I love, honor, and respect you. Your grace, elegance, and regality are testament to the beautiful queen mother that you are. I also give honor and respect to the army of strong Black women across the Diaspora, who like the Dora Milaje warriors of the nation of Wakanda, fight tirelessly each and every day to protect and safeguard their communities, and especially the Black men and boys (kings and princes) of their village nations.

I also wish to acknowledge my other siblings, my sisters Angela and Lorna, and brother Winston. A special and important acknowledgment and thank you to my niece, Christina, a future research analyst, researcher, and scholar who has worked tirelessly to support her “Uncle Phillip” in his research and work. I am also truly appreciative of other family members: Alana, Tia, Patrick, Sharifa, Joan, and Pamela. Thank you for the constant reminder that when the Smiths come together with God at the center, all things are possible.

I am forever grateful to those in my village, both seen and unseen, who have covered me with love, support, encouragement, and guidance. Who in the darkest and most challenging moments of this doctoral journey have lifted me up, carried me, and reminded me that “Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up” (Galatians 6:9). That reaping, the harvest is much more than the printed pages of this dissertation manuscript. I would like to extend a special heartfelt thank you to members of my dissertation committee. Individually and collectively, you epitomize Black excellence. To Professor Sonya Douglass Horsford, my faculty advisor, dissertation sponsor, and friend, I thank you deeply for helping me to think more critically on issues of race, Black education, leadership, policy, and practice. Working with Sonya has without doubt been one of the greatest highlights of my academic and scholarly experiences to date. I have benefited greatly from Sonya’s mentoring and “frientoring,” her constant and ongoing professional, moral and spiritual support, encouragement, affirmation, evidenced mutual respect, leadership, mentoring, and guidance. To the other members of my committee, Professors Mark Gooden, Michelle Knight-Manuel, Ernest Morrell, and Kofi Lomotey, I am truly and humbly appreciative of your individual and collective support of me, my research, my scholarship, and importantly my general well-being. As is the ways of African village communities, you each have been my *Habari gani menta* (“mentor”),

supporting, holding, and lifting me up in ways that ensured I never felt disconnected from the village and community dedicated to Black excellence through research and scholarship.

There are several people and affiliates of Teachers College, Columbia University whom I would like to recognize. In particular, I would like to recognize and thank Professor Erica Walker, Veronica Holly and the Institute for Urban and Minority Education (IUME), and also Professor Sonya Douglass Horsford (in her role as founding Director) and the Black Education Research Collective (BERC), for providing space, resources, and support for me to engage in intellectual and critical thought and dialogue on issues relating to race, racism, and inequities within the broader domain of educational leadership and education policy. I thank Professor William Baldwin and the Department of Organization and Leadership, and the Education Leadership program; Janice Robinson, ESQ, and Professors Robert J. Carter, Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz, and Amy Stuart Wells for their respective support. I would also like to acknowledge the administrative support that I have received throughout this journey, from both former and current colleagues. I am particularly thankful to Florence Achega, Russell Gulizia, and Gabriella Oldham for their assistance in my completion and submission of this dissertation manuscript.

On “community,” Sobonfu Somé (2002) said in part, “the goal of the community is to make sure that each member of the community is heard and is properly giving the gifts he has brought to this world” (p. 22). Sincere thank you to Dennis Francis, Alquena Reed, Dyron Holmes, Dr. Andre Harper, Rosemary Campbell-Stephens, MBE, Dr. Jonathan Ashong-Lampsey, Dr. Ronald Whitaker II, Bishop Derek Webley, MBE, Curtis Armstrong, Iris Thomas, Anthony Corriette, Gail Brindley, Danny and Lisa Swaby, Romero Williams, Val Barclay, Beverley Lyseight, Loist Robinson, Jason O’Connor, Thando Kafele, Rev. Dr. Calvin O. Butts III, Rev. Rashad Moore, Dr. Barry Goldenberg, Dominique Lester, Moises Lopez, Steve

Alexander, Charlyn Henderson, Angel Acosta, Dr. Lauren Fox, and my dearly departed sisters Maureen John and Angelina May, and also dearly departed Mr. William Cohen. I thank you for your unwavering friendship, and personal, unconditional, and unequivocal support throughout my completion of this doctoral degree. You provided a space, a listening ear, and a welcoming heart where I could be heard and bring my gifts, my ministry, to the world. Thank you.

Finally, I am truly indebted to the invaluable contributions of the Black male school building-level leaders—principals and heads of school, the men of African descent whose voices go unheard in our schools. You impassioned and graciously shared your lived experiences of leading while Black and male with me, and in so doing “make the invisible visible” (Lavery, 2003, p. 27) to the world. As Black people, we are used to having our leaders defined for us, often through instances which Anderson (2016) described as “the blackness that whiteness created” (p. 13). Through the descriptions of experiences of Black male principals and heads of school on leading while Black and male, we gain insights into the Blackness that Blackness created. You send a powerful reminder that true leaders are anointed by the people. I thank you for responding to the call and for your ministry. This research would not have been possible without you. I trust that I have honored and respected your truth and accurately illustrated the ways in which the splendor and nobility that are you show up in the world each and every day. A dream deferred becomes a dream fulfilled. A promise unrealized becomes a promise realized. May the reader be moved by your voices.

In strength, unity, and love,

Phillip A. Smith

September 30, 2019

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*At present, it cannot be said that what is known about principal leadership is necessarily applicable to African-American principals.*

(Lomotey, 1989, p. 6)

### **Background**

#### **Statement of the Problem**

There have been limited attempts to explore paradigms of educational leadership enacted by Black men, and this holds significant implications for research, theory, principal preparation, policy, and practice (Echols, 2006; Gooden, 2012; Lomotey, 1989, 1993; Lomotey & Lowery, 2014). Black male K-12 school building-level leaders—public school principals and independent school heads—remain underrepresented, both quantitatively and qualitatively, in the field of educational leadership, even though demographic, racial, and cultural contexts of schools across the United States have changed rapidly. Quantitatively, their representation in senior leadership roles is not reflective of either the percentage distribution of enrolled K-12 students by race or the wider population. In looking at school building-level leadership, both public (traditional public or charter school) and private (Catholic, other religious and nonsectarian) schools, for school year 2011-12, the most readily available data, of an estimated 115,540 public and private school principals, indicated that approximately 11,438 (9.9%) self-identified as Black or African American, non-Hispanic. Of the total 11,438 Black principals, approximately 4,238 (37.1%) identified as Black male and 7,079 (61.9%) identified as Black female; 121 (1.0%) of Black principals did not report a gender (Hill, Ottem, & DeRoche, 2016; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2012-13).



Toldson's (2011) analysis on diversifying the teaching force in the United States provides further insights into the challenges of the Black male teacher-to-school leadership pipeline. Toldson identified several reasons for the underrepresentation of Black males in the teaching workforce. Toldson noted that Black men are less likely to have a major in education, and those who do graduate with a degree in education are less likely to become a teacher. However, as Toldson also observed, "Black men [with a degree in education] are more likely than any other race gender group to become educational administrators" (p. 183). It is reasonable to assume that completion of a degree in education and subsequent progression to the role of school principal or educational administrator are possible indicators of an intentional decision to pursue a career in educational leadership. However, there is a seemingly real disconnect in that Black males, the race gender group most likely to be suitably qualified (with a major in education) and to progress to educational administration, are the most underresearched subgroup within educational leadership theory, research, and scholarship.

Qualitatively, the voices and style of leadership of Black male K-12 school building-level leaders are absent from the educational leadership canon, which further holds significant implications for research, theory, policy, principal preparation, and practice (Echols, 2006; Gooden, 2012; Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Lomotey, 1989, 1993; Madsen & Mabokela, 2013), and expands a global understanding of the attributes of effective school leadership (Johnson & Campbell-Stephens, 2010). Despite the absence of significant research on Black (male) principals, generalizations are made about all principals based on sample populations of White principals. On this, Lomotey lamented that "at present, it cannot be said that what is known about principal leadership is necessarily applicable to African-American principals" (p. 6).

In 2019, 30 years later, this statement continues to resonate. There continues to be a lacuna of research or any substantial discourse on the importance of race-critical approaches to leadership and leadership development enacted by Black educational leaders from across the African Diaspora and the benefits that these senior leaders are able to bring to school leadership (Echols, 2006; Gooden, 2012; Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Horsford, Grosland, & Gunn, 2011; Johnson, 2006; Johnson & Campbell-Stephens, 2010; Witherspoon & Mitchell, 2009). The term *African Diaspora* is used to describe the collective peoples of African descent who, as a result of a history of enslavement, were forcibly colonized to the United States, the United Kingdom, the Caribbean, or other Western jurisdictions. Several generations of this subgroup have entitled identities of the respective colonized nations and should therefore not be considered as *migrants* to said nation jurisdictions. The term *African Diaspora* may be used interchangeably with the terms *African American*, *Black American*, *Black Caribbean*, *Black*, or other similar derivations.

Further, there has been little, if any, attention to the application of race-critical leadership philosophies and perspectives, centered in the race and cultural traditions, philosophical thoughts, notions of spirituality, and models of African-centered or Afrocentric models of leadership that support the holistic leadership enacted by Black educational leaders (Alston, 2005; Asante, 1995; Brigham, 2012; Dantley, 2003b, 2010; Gooden, 2012; Hopson, Hotep, Schneider, & Turenne, 2010; Horsford et al., 2011; Johnson & Campbell-Stephens, 2010; King, 2005; Lomotey, 1989, 1993; Lomotey & Lowery, 2014; Tillman, 2004a, 2005). Shujaa (2005) defined Afrocentricity as “the interpretation and/or reinterpretation of reality from an African perspective” (p. 63). For the purposes of this research study, Asante’s (2003) definition of *African-centered* (also termed *African-centredity* and *Afrocentric*) applied:

A mode of [philosophical] thought and action in which the centrality of African [heritage] interests, values, and perspectives predominate. In regards to theory, it is the

placing of African people in the center of analysis of African phenomena. . . . In terms of action and behaviour, it is a devotion to the idea that what is in the best interest of African consciousness is at the heart of ethical behaviour. (p. 2)

Related, *African-centered leadership* is defined as models of leadership that draw on the history, indigenous wisdoms, and experiences of people from the African Diaspora, and also the cultural traditions and perspectives of peoples of African heritage (Echols, 2006; King, 2005; Tillman, 2005).

The *silence* or any substantial race-critical discourse on Black educational leadership has allowed the continuance of a largely deracialized “color-blind” (Mabokela & Madsen, 2005, p. 196) and “color-blind racial ideology” of color evasion and power evasion (Neville, Awad, Brooks, Flores, & Bluemel, 2013, p. 455), which results in a sociology of education and education system that are “overwhelmingly run by White administrators” (Thomson, 2009, p. 21) to exist throughout the United States, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere (Davis, Gooden, & Micheaux, 2015; Gooden, 2012; Thomson, 2009). Smith, Yosso, and Solórzano (2007) argued that the *silence* or absence of substantive scholarship and research affirming the Black male experience is the result of “Black misandry”; that is:

an exaggerated pathological aversion toward Black men created and reinforced in societal, institutional, and individual ideologies, practices, and behavior. . . . Black misandry exists to justify and reproduce the subordination and oppression of Black men. Scholarly ontologies (understandings of how things exist), axiologies (values, ethics, aesthetics, religion, spirituality), and epistemologies (ways of knowing) reinforce the ideological pathology of Black misandry and misogyny. (p. 563; also see Witherspoon & Mitchell, 2009)

Research has suggested that a diverse leadership team contributes to more effective collective leadership and decision making (Barta, Kleiner, & Neumann, 2012). Within the context of schools and education, the research has demonstrated that a diverse schools workforce representative of the racial and ethnic backgrounds of the student population is most effective

(Bell, 2004; Hemphill & Mader, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Lomotey, 1989, 1993; Toldson, 2011, 2019). Yet, there have been limited attempts to explore paradigms of educational leadership enacted by Black men (Echols, 2006; Gooden, 2012; Lynn, 2006a, 2006b).

There is a real and urgent need to authentically document the leadership experiences, philosophies, and understandings of Black male school leaders. Understanding the (changing) demographic characteristics of the school leadership workforce aids in the creation of race-critical, supportive, culturally aligned leadership development opportunities, and ultimately will lead to more culturally relevant and responsive leadership (Echols, 2006; Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Horsford et al., 2011; Howard, 2003; Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Khalifa, 2018; Lynn, 2006b; NAIS, Fall 2018; Taie & Goldring, 2017). There is a need for more authentic research on the lived experiences of Black people (Toldson, 2018, 2019). Within the context of educational leadership, there is a need for race-critical, culturally specific research and scholarship that explores the professional lives and experiences of Black male school building-level leaders—and how their approaches to leadership may expand our notions of leadership, praxis, and leadership development activities.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to explore the ways in which the racial identities and lived experiences of Black male K-12 school building-level leaders inform their professional lives, leadership preparation, and leadership development. The study documented the phenomenon of leading while Black and male, as described through the experiences, perceptions, and understandings of Black male K-12 school principals and heads of schools, currently or previously employed in either a public or private school setting in the United States. The research makes a significant contribution to an improved understanding of what it means to be a

Black male K-12 school building-level leader. This phenomenological research study applied a race-critical theoretical approach and sought to challenge the normative theoretical paradigms and assumptions that inform educational leadership theory, research, and practice. In locating Black male principals and heads of school at the center of the research inquiry, this study explored the intersection of race in leadership (Gooden, 2012; Horsford, 2014; Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016; Lomotey, 1989, 1993). This is a significantly underresearched area, which largely remains absent from the canon of research and scholarship on educational leadership research, theory, and practice. In a May 2017 Hechinger Report “How to Hire More Black Principals,” author Lillian Mongeau, noting recent research on “pronounced benefits for black children with same-race teachers” (p. 2), went on to report that “although the body of research on the effects of same-race principals is still relatively small, it does point to Black students benefit” (p. 3).

This phenomenological research study documented “on-the-ground realities” of Black male school leadership as perceived, experienced, and understood by Black male school building-level leaders (Fairchild, Tobias, Corcoran, Djukic, Kovner, & Noguera, 2012, p. 190; Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016). The study presents humanized portraits of Black male leadership, and in so doing, sought to address a significant disconnect in leadership theory and lived reality. A critical examination of educational leadership theory, particularly through an exploration of race-/color-conscious, race-critical leadership approaches that are grounded in the lived experiences and mores of peoples of African descent, further challenges assumptions of what is considered *good and effective* approaches to educational leadership and leadership development. Black male principals and heads of school develop a range of strategies that enable them to navigate the multidimensional aspects of their racial identity within a dominant White

racialized education system. Additionally, their articulation of action-oriented social justice leadership is influenced by their family and childhood educational experiences of growing up as a Black boy; leadership philosophies, influences, and values that inform leadership as ministry; navigating racialized spaces as a Black man in the principal's office; and safeguarding the village through an evidenced commitment to students and sense of community. The research sought to build theory, expand understanding of paradigms of critical leadership, develop grounded theory of Black male school leadership, and formulate a new and comprehensive definition and typology of Black male school leadership and leadership development.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study presents a critical review of literature and research towards the development of theory as well as a nuanced understanding and description of the phenomenon—leading while Black and male. The study draws on literature and research from the field of educational leadership, intersections of race and gender as part of educational leadership, African-centered leadership models, critical leadership, social justice educational leadership, and critical race theory and educational leadership. The review of literature was further extended to provide a critical perspective of the philosophy of phenomenology and its applicability as a lens through which to explore the lived experiences of Black male K-12 school building-level leaders. The voices, perspectives, and lived experiences of Black male principals and heads of school remain absent from the broader canon, body of research, and work on educational leadership. This study sought to address that gap in the literature. The conceptual framework applicable to the research study and inquiry, and the exploration of the phenomenon of leading while Black and male, drew on the following connected and interrelated bodies of literature:

## **Educational Leadership Theory, Research, and Practice**

While theory may be informed by and/or responsive to practice, practice only does not constitute theory. In moving toward a contemporary and nuanced (re)definition of the leadership phenomenon, as applicable to the leadership and leadership development of Black male K-12 school building-level leaders, it is important to understand the context, history, and evolution of the broader domain and traditional perspectives in educational leadership theory, research, and practice (Bogotch, 2005; Bozeman & Feeney, 2007; Rousmaniere, 2013). Historic and contemporary paradigms on effective culturally relevant, culturally responsive approaches to education, as well as the salient attributes of culturally responsive educational leadership (Horsford et al., 2011; Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016), specifically in the educational schooling of Black-students, provide important context. Critical perspectives in educational leadership, specifically racialized aspects of action-oriented social justice leadership practice through a critical race theory lens, also provide further important context.

### **The School Building Leader: Principals and Heads of Schools**

To understand fully the context in which leadership, as enacted by Black male K-12 principals and heads of schools, takes place, there is a need for what Brown (2005) described thus: “to investigate school administration in specific social, political, and racial contexts” (p. 587), as well as the role of leadership identity, values, and culture (Pinkett, Robinson, & Patterson, 2011). Notwithstanding the existence of research and evidence of the benefits of a racially diverse and culturally congruent school leadership workforce relative to the student community, there is evidence of significant underrepresentation of individuals of African heritage in school and senior educational leadership positions (Brown, 2005). Negotiating the

politics of race and racism in schools is a foundational aspect of the leadership experiences of Black male K-12 principals and heads of school (Echols, 2006; Lomotey, 1989, 1993).

### **Missing Perspective: The Black Male School Leader**

For Black leaders, the exercise of leadership is inevitably enacted within environments that “challenge or attempt to define you based on racial stereotypes, baseless assumptions, or ignorance” (Pinkett et al., 2011, p. 28). Much of the literature on Black school principal leadership identified a faith-based or spiritual dimension to the leadership values and philosophies of Black school principals. This is often evidenced in what may be broadly termed a leadership theology of liberation—a commitment to race equity, social justice, and community activism that actively resists race-neutral/color-blind notions of leadership (Dantley, 2010; Horsford et al., 2011; Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016; King, 2005; Lomotey, 2019).

### **Lived Experiences of Black Male School Leaders**

The research study also drew on a prior study that I conducted in the United Kingdom on male leaders of African Caribbean heritage in senior leadership positions in secondary schools in London, England and which provided important descriptive narratives of Black male school leadership (Smith, 2012). The focus of the research project further draws on and contributes to the work of the Black Education Research Collective (BERC), and in particular the collective’s research and work on leading while Black and exploration of political and symbolic dimensions of the urban school superintendency and education leadership (Horsford, Smith, & Lester, 2017). BERC is a national collective of leading scholars in the field, researchers, educators, and policymakers who conduct and advance research on Black education leadership. It aims to generate cross-disciplinary research and dialogue related to the education and leadership of people of African descent (BERC, 2019).



## **Research Questions**

In order to capture the range of narratives and humanized portraits of Black male school leadership, the research study was intentionally framed by the following two research questions:

1. What experiences inform the leadership philosophies of Black male principals and heads of school regarding leadership and Black education?
2. What experiences do Black male principals and heads of school encounter related to the principalship?

## **Limitations and Delimitations**

The research study documented the phenomenon of Black male school leadership as described, experienced, perceived, and understood by Black male K-12 school principals and heads of schools. The research study was delimited to participants who: were male; self-identified as being Black, of African heritage, from the African Diaspora located in the United States; currently or previously served as a school building-level leader in public or private school setting; and have external recognition of their leadership success.

The rationale to focus the attention of this research study on Black male school building-level leaders was scientifically justifiable. Previous research within the broader domain of educational leadership and leadership development has specifically focused on class of subjects with specific status characteristics (e.g., gender and/or race). For example, Horsford (2010, 2011, 2014), Gooden (2012), Gooden and Dantley (2012), Brooks (2012), and Brooks and Jean-Marie (2007) spoke extensively on the context of race and racism within the construct of educational leadership. The scholarship of Lomotey (1989, 1993, 2019), Lomotey and Lowery (2014), Tillman (2004a, 2004b), Echols (2006), and Brown (2005) focused specifically on the experiences and leadership of African American principals. There is also an increasing body of

work exploring culturally congruent approaches to the leadership and leadership development of Black educators more broadly (Horsford et al., 2011; Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016). Other significant contributions to this canon of scholarship include: Dantley (2003a, 2003b, 2005, 2010), King (2005), Caldwell (2000), Asante (2003), Hopson et al., (2010), Tolliver (2010), Coleman and Campbell-Stephens (2010), and Lynn (2006a). Within this tradition, this research study purposed to focus on the experiences of Black male principals and heads of school who remain an underresearched demographic group within the field of educational leadership.

While the research reached its aims, a number of important limitations and constraints need to be considered. The research, conducted as a doctoral dissertation study, was by its nature bound by a number of funding and time constraints. The research design—an online descriptive background survey, two separate one-on-one, in-person interviews, and the use of visual/photo elicitation methods—was such that it required a measure of extended time commitment from participants and me as researcher. Geographic site locations and other constraints further limited the number and geography of participants who took part in the research study. To illustrate, over 50-plus Black male school leaders responded to the initial call for participants, 26 of whom completed the online descriptive survey. A total of 14 Black male principals and heads of school also contributed to the interview conversations. The nature of a phenomenological study using in-depth semi-structured interviews is such that extensive information-rich narratives and insights are collected, which was impractical to explore and analyze fully within the confines of this research project. Further, there is limited substantive literature or critical cases on the lived experiences of Black male school-building leaders, that is, who they are as individuals, as described, perceived, and understood by the leaders themselves. Much of the available research on principal preparation and leadership development presents an

essentialist view on race and cultural identity, and is therefore limited in any analysis of how the different cultural norms, experiences, and leadership approaches of Black men might influence our understanding of educational leadership (Johnson & Campbell-Stephens, 2010).

### **Researcher's Perspective**

As a Black man, researcher, and former education professional with 25 years of experience in executive-level local, school district, and national administration and leadership, I describe myself as a critical race scholar activist. My race and gender are critical aspects of my identity and lived experiences, and have informed my understanding of (educational) leadership and leadership development. This supports my capacity to engage authentically in critical research and scholarship, present humanized portraits of Black male educational leaders, and lead in race-/color-conscious research on the lived experiences of Black male school building-level leaders and other senior-level professionals. In conducting research on Black male school building-level leaders, I situated myself in the ways Banks (1998) and Tillman (2006) described as “an indigenous-insider (and sometimes outsider) in the research process” (Tillman, 2006, p. 267). Further, my positionality in relation to the research is in congruence with Toldson’s (2018, 2019) call that research seeking to humanize the lived experiences of Black people without the perspectives of Black people is invalid.

### **Significance of the Study**

This phenomenological research project, *Leading While Black and Male*, builds on the research and findings of a previous study, *The London Study*, that I conducted to explore the leadership of African Caribbean leaders in London secondary schools (Smith, 2012). The research study built on the work of Leffler (2014), Lomotey (1989, 1993, 2019), Lomotey and Lowery (2014), Gooden (2012), Echols (2006), Horsford et al. (2011), Tillman (2003, 2004a,

2004b, 2005), Dantley (2003b, 2005, 2010), Dantley and Tillman (2010), Gooden and Dantley (2012), and others, to document Black male school leaders' responses and descriptions of the phenomenon leading while Black and male. The research also drew on seminal texts from across critical educational leadership, psychology and identity theory, Black intellectual thought and theology, African-centered philosophies, and community and social justice leadership. These domains of research have not hitherto been brought together in such a nuanced way. The research extends the aforementioned scholarship and, in so doing, addresses a significant gap. This research study and scholarship were seen as a vehicle to promote interdisciplinary collaboration and transdisciplinary thinking to transcend boundaries of educational research and theory through the defining and development of race-critical, culturally aligned approaches to educational leadership and leadership development. The critical research inquiry applied a CRT methodology and interpretative framework, and specifically sought to document through counter-storytelling and narratives the descriptions, experiences, perceptions, and understanding of participating Black male school leaders—the phenomenon of what it means to be a Black male K-12 school building-level leader. It also sought to build and document theory on Black male school leadership and to move beyond monolithic interpretations of Black male school leadership attributes towards a (re)definition of race-critical educational leadership and leadership development.

The research project provides notable implications for theory, practice and future research. Currently established generic, color-blind (Mabokela & Madsen, 2005) approaches to principal preparation and leadership development promote a color-blind racial ideology, evidenced through color-evasion and power-evasion (Neville et al., 2013) and hegemonic formulation and design of leadership and provide limited support to the leadership development

of Black male school building-level leaders. The research project sought to disrupt the normative educational leadership axiology, and in so doing, expand understanding of paradigms of critical race leadership. The research documented leadership philosophies, values, and customs of leading while Black and male, towards an improved understanding of the range of educational leadership paradigms, experience, and practice of Black male principals and heads of school.

The experiences of leading while Black, described by Black male principals and heads of school, provide significant implications for leadership practice. There is a pressing and urgent need to address the dearth of Black leadership across the school leadership workforce. Critical to this is a need for demonstrable strategies that disrupt negative stereotyping and more than tacit acknowledgment of the invaluable contributions of Black male school leaders. Black male school leaders are actively supportive of race-centered approaches to principal preparation and leadership development, which are seen as key-enabling factors to leadership ambitions. The results corroborate the need for principal preparation and leadership development opportunities, networks, and frientoring (Brown, 2019) to reflect the multidimensionality of culturally sensitive approaches to leadership preparation and development. The research also aims to provide an impetus for increased critical examination; (1) to make a valuable and original contribution to the analysis of the experiences and leadership development of Black male principals across public (traditional district and charter), private (independent), and international contexts, in particular in the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Caribbean; and (2) to broaden our understanding of the phenomenon of Black male school building-level leadership.

The research builds theory and formulates a new and comprehensive definition and typology of Black male school leadership. Implications for future research include theory development on Black leadership epistemology, school leadership theology of liberation, an

Anansi school leadership model, African-centered school leadership, and related concepts. The research project is poised to open a new line of inquiry in the study of race-critical perspectives to educational leadership, principal preparation, and leadership development—specifically, to expand research with Black male school leaders regionally, nationwide, and internationally across the African Diaspora.

### **Organization of the Study**

This research study explored the ways in which the racial identities and lived experiences of Black male principals and heads of school, currently or previously employed in either a public or private school setting, inform their professional lives, leadership preparation, and leadership development. Through the use of personal narratives and presentation of humanized portraits of Black male school leaders, the research documented the phenomenon of leading while Black, as described, experienced, perceived, and understood by these leaders.

Chapter 2, draws on evidence from literature and research, and explores the multidimensionality aspect of leadership by and leadership development for Black men through: (a) educational leadership theory, research, and practice; (b) the school building leader: principals and heads of schools; (c) missing perspective: the Black male school leader; (d) lived experiences of Black male school leaders; and (e) phenomenology as philosophy and methodology.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the aims of the research, critical research methodology and interpretive frameworks, participants, methods for data collection and analysis, and procedures for the presentation of humanized portraits and descriptions of experiences of contributing Black male school leaders.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the structural descriptions and leadership contexts in which participating Black male school leaders lead, and includes an analysis of the completed survey responses. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 present humanized portraits of leading while Black and male as described through the narratives and counter-stories of participating leaders. The leaders' narratives are presented through an intergenerational conversation and dialogue between the participating Black male school leaders, with participants grouped into one of three demographic groups of the Initiates (Chapter 5), the Warriors (Chapter 6), or the Elders (Chapter 7), based on number of years of principal or head of school leadership experience.

The final chapter, Chapter 8, draws on the key descriptions of the lived experiences and essence of leading while Black and male to document new understandings of Black male school leadership. The chapter also provides a review of the research project methodology. Finally, the chapter and study conclude with implications and recommendations for theory, practice, and future research.

### **Definitions**

There are a number of key *working definitions* of terms which aid in the engagement of the research inquiry described. For the purposes of this research, the following definitions of terms applied.

*African-centered leadership*: models of leadership that draw on the history, indigenous wisdoms, and experiences of people from the African Diaspora, and also the cultural traditions and perspectives of peoples of African heritage (Echols, 2006; King, 2005; Tillman, 2005).

*African Diaspora*: the collective peoples of African descent who, as a result of a history of enslavement, were forcibly colonized to the United States, the United Kingdom, the Caribbean, or other Western jurisdictions. The term *African Diaspora* may be used

interchangeably with the terms “African American,” “Black American,” “Black Caribbean,” “Black,” or other similar derivations.

*Afrocentrism*: “a mode of [philosophical] thought and action in which the centrality of African [heritage] interests, values, and perspectives predominate. In regards to theory, it is the placing of African people in the center of analysis of African phenomena” (Asante, 2003, p. 2).

*Anti-blackness*: “a social construction, as an embodied lived experience of social suffering and resistance, and perhaps most importantly, as an antagonism, in which the Black is a despised thing-in-itself (but not person for herself or himself in opposition to all that is pure, human(e), and White” (Dumas, 2016, pp. 416-417).

*Black misandry*: “an exaggerated pathological aversion toward Black men created and reinforced in societal, institutional, and individual ideologies, practices and behavior” (Smith et al., 2007, p. 563).

*Blackness*: “not a static agreed on definition, but an unfinished construction that can aid us to move towards liberation. . . . [T]he essentialism at the heart of Blackness is political and not cultural. There is no attempt made to make people conform to a particular dress, style or language; cultural representation does not demarcate the lines of Blackness. There is no reductive identity politics at work in liberatory Blackness. . . . Blackness is by nature a construction rooted in global understandings and connections” (Andrews, 2016, p. 207).

*The Black Church*: “a faith-based community structure, which is characterized by spiritual, social, and communicative patterns specific to African culture that set it apart from European and Western Christian churches of the same denomination” (Julian, 2005,



p. 118)—that is, any church or faith institution under a Black leadership that currently or historically ministered to predominantly Black congregations in the United States.

*Color-blind racial ideology (CBRI)*: “consisting of two interrelated domains: Color-evasion (i.e. denial of potential racial differences by emphasizing sameness) and power-evasion (i.e. denial of racism by emphasizing equal opportunities) . . . ultramodern or contemporary form of racism and a legitimizing ideology used to justify the racial status quo. Four types of CBRI are described: denial of (a) race, (b) blatant racial issues, (c) institutional racism, and (d) White privilege (Neville et al., 2013, p. 455).

*Community*: “the spirit, the guiding light of the tribe, whereby people come together in order to fulfil a specific purpose, to help others fulfil their purpose, and to take care of one another. The goal of the community is to make sure that each member of the community is heard and is properly giving the gifts he has brought to this world. Without this giving, the community dies. And without the community, the individual is left without a place where he can contribute. The community is that grounding place where people come and share their gifts and receive from others” (Somé, 2002, p. 22).

*Critical spirituality*: an expression of culturally congruent care, ethical behavior, values, practices, motivation, and guided moral disposition in the exercise of leadership (Dantley, 2010; Gay, 2010; Lomotey, 2019) that is committed to an “envisioned radical reconstruction” of schools and society overall (Dantley, 2010, p. 218).

*Elders*: Black male K-12 principals and heads of schools with 10 or more years of leadership experience, nationally recognized for their respective contributions to the profession of educational leadership, advancement of Black education and leadership, and unswerving commitment to community.

*Eurocentric*: “the view or assumption that places Europe at the center of world history and culture, ranking Western values, languages, literature, art, and so on as superior to those of other cultures” (Herbst, 1997, p. 81).

*The indigenous-insider*: “This individual endorses the unique values, perspectives, behaviors, beliefs, and knowledge of his or her indigenous community and culture and is perceived by people within the community as a legitimate community member who can speak with authority about it” (Banks, 1998, p. 8).

*The indigenous-outsider*: “This individual was socialized within his or her indigenous community but has experienced high levels of cultural assimilation into an outsider or oppositional culture. The values, beliefs, perspectives, and knowledge of this individual are identical to those of the outside community. The indigenous-outsider is perceived by indigenous people in the community as an outsider” (Banks, 1998, p. 8).

*Initiates*: Black male K-12 principals and heads of schools with less than 3 years of leadership experience.

*Intergenerational relationships*: “involvement of all generations, irrespective of age, gender, race, location and socioeconomic status; uniting effectively in the process of generating, promoting, and utilizing ideas, knowledge, skills, attitudes and values in an interactive way; and applying the outcomes of such unification and interactions to the improvement of self and the community” (Oduaran & Oduaran, 2004, pp. 173-174).

*Leadership*: “a process of influence leading to the achievement of desired purposes. Successful leaders develop a vision for their schools based on their personal and professional values” (Bush & Glover, 2003, p. 8).

*Leadership development*: “expanding the collective capacity of organizational members to engage effectively in leadership roles and processes” (Day, 2001, p. 582).

*Leadership praxis*: informed action, and a guided moral disposition to act truly and rightly in the exercise of leadership.

*Racial consciousness*: “a set of political attitudes that address a person’s relationship to or feelings about his race, an understanding of his race’s status in the social structure, and his orientation or tendency to act given the understanding of the group’s position” (Hall & Allen, 1989, p. 179).

*School building-level leader*: The highest-ranking administrator in an elementary, middle, or high school with responsibility for the overall operation of a school. Commonly referred to as “principal” in public schools (traditional public or charter schools), and “head master or head of school” in private schools (Catholic, other religious, non-sectarian or independent). The roles and responsibilities of a principal and head of school, although the private school head of school may also be responsible for fundraising (Encyclopedia of Education, 2019, August).

*Social justice leadership*: “the exercise of altering these arrangements by actively engaging in reclaiming, appropriating, sustaining, and advancing inherent human rights of equity, equality, and fairness in social, economic, educational and personal dimensions” (Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002, p. 162).

*Warriors*: Black male K-12 principals and heads of schools with 4-9 years of leadership experience.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

*Much of the literature developed in educational leadership in the last century essentially came about without the voices or perspectives of African Americans and this continues to be an issue.*

(Gooden, 2012, p. 68)

#### **Introduction**

This chapter presents a critical integrative review of literature (Cooper, 2010) and research that contributes to the development of theory, a nuanced understanding and description of the phenomenon leading while Black and male in the role of school principal or head of school. The research project sought to address the underrepresentation of Black male K-12 leaders, both quantitatively and qualitatively, from the field of educational leadership. The study drew on literature and research from the field of educational leadership, intersections of race and gender as part of educational leadership, African-centered leadership models, critical leadership, social justice educational leadership, and critical race theory and educational leadership. The review of literature was further extended to provide a critical perspective of the philosophy of phenomenology and its applicability as a lens through which to explore the lived experiences of a Black male K-12 school building-level leader. Also, in conducting this review, it is acknowledged that the voices, perspectives, and lived experiences of Black male principals and heads of school remain absent from the broader canon, body of research, and work on educational leadership. This chapter highlights substantive literature documenting the Black leadership experience as well as the gaps in the literature and research on leading while Black and male as a K-12 school building-level leader.

The research project focus—exploration of the leadership of Black male K-12 school building-level leaders—initially emerged from the previously conducted “London Study” (Smith, 2012), and was further formulated through engagement and discussion with other researchers and scholars in the field, both within and external to my home institution. Literature used to inform the research project was limited to empirical studies and research, conceptual papers, policy briefings, and opinion pieces that specifically focused on documenting the Black experience and understandings of the school administration profession. The use of limited, relevant literature is consistent with a “methodologically adequate studies” approach, as supported by Jackson (1980, p. 455), Demerath and Roof (1976), and Jackson (2003). Specific studies were identified through a search of literature using keyword, phrases, and subject searching of library databases and citation indexing. A separate “author” search of the scholarship of leading scholars within the field of Black education and leadership was also conducted. Particular attention was given to literature and research that provided historical, factual, substantiated accounts that examined “the inner-relations between race, leadership, leadership development, socialization, and identity” (Floyd, 2012, p. 224) as experienced and understood by Black education professionals. In recognizing the absence of significant research on the leadership experiences of Black male K-12 school building-level leaders, and that generalizations on effective principals and leadership attributes are based on White (male) sample populations, it was critical that specific and intentional references were also made to the narratives, philosophical thoughts, and oral traditions of peoples of the African Diaspora.

The critical review of literature is presented under five broad domains: (a) Educational Leadership Theory, Research and Practice; (b) the School Building Leader: Principals and Heads

of Schools; (c) Missing Perspective: The Black Male School Leader; (d) Lived Experiences of Black Male School Leaders; and (e) Phenomenology as Philosophy and Methodology.

### **Educational Leadership Theory, Research, and Practice**

. . . the very words *leader* and *leadership*—have been culturally framed to equate effective leadership with authoritarian control imposed by those at the apex of a hierarchy.

(Preskill & Brookfield, 2009, p. 2)

Understanding the context, history, and evolution of the broader domain of educational leadership theory, research, and practice is important in developing theory, theorizing what it means to lead while Black and male, and moving toward a contemporary and nuanced (re)definition of the leadership phenomenon, as applicable to the leadership of Black male principals and heads of school. The formulation of theory and presentation of dominant perspectives, normalized as “traditional,” in educational leadership is problematic; it is oftentimes presented through a White-centered, color-blind, race-evasive theoretical framing (Mabokela & Madsen, 2005; Neville et al., 2013) with a desire and an intent to inform generalizable phenomena. There is evidence of a disconnect between how one addresses the disparities between theory and practice that is apparent in many schools, in urban contexts, and as exercised in the leadership praxis of leaders from race-marginalized backgrounds. While theory may be informed by and/or responsive to practice, and practitioner knowledge, practice alone does not constitute theory (Riehl, Larson, Short, & Reitzug, 2000). While dominant (traditional) educational leadership theory and research provide a useful lens through which to improve understanding of the educational leadership phenomena, there are also inherent limitations in much of the research conducted in the field—limitations in the design and approach to the research inquiry, researcher bias, and generalizability of findings. Further, as Bush (2012) highlighted, there is an increasing recognition within the field of educational

leadership research that “each school provides a distinctive context for practising school leadership” (p. 79) that increases the potential for bias, subjectivity, and few robust conclusions (Firestone & Riehl, 2005). This is particularly salient when engaging in a critical exploration of approaches to educational leadership outside of a normative, dominant, White, Eurocentric lens (Turnbull, 2011; Turnbull, Case, Edwards, & Schedlitzki, 2012), specifically in moving toward paradigms of critical-race leadership, and a nuanced understanding and description of the phenomenon of leading while Black and male. *Eurocentric* is defined as “the view or assumption that places Europe at the center of world history and culture, ranking Western values, languages, literature, art, and so on as superior to those of other cultures” (Herbst, 1997, p. 81).

### **Traditional Perspectives in Educational Leadership**

For the purposes of this research project, *leadership* is defined as “a process of influence leading to the achievement of desired purposes. Successful leaders develop a vision for their schools based on their personal and professional values” (Bush & Glover, 2003, p. 8). The term *leadership* itself is multifaceted, ambiguous, and complicated by the variety of contexts within which school leadership takes place—urban, suburban, rural, public; traditional or charter; independent or private sector (Bush, 2012; Day, 2001; Rousmaniere, 2013). There are tensions and/or contradictions in attempts to develop theory that is simultaneously unique and also universally applicable to educational leadership research. In theorizing the racialized dimensions of educational leadership, specifically the leadership of Black male K-12 school building-level leaders, it is important to be cognizant of the “distinctive context” (Bush, 2012, p. 79) of leading while Black and male as central to the educational leadership intellectual discipline and inquiry. Further, the term *leadership* is often normalized as a Eurocentric paradigm that focuses on hierarchical or positional “power” and authority as a means through which leadership is

exercised and enacted, and in so doing ignores the politics of race in schools, school systems, and school leadership (Horsford, Alemán, & Smith, 2019). An exploration of leadership as described, experienced, perceived, and understood by leaders of African descent, and the development of theory to support an improved understanding of that leadership, center on the personal values, attributes, and strong identity that the individual embodies and utilizes in order to enable the individual to lead with purpose (Lomotey, 1989, 1993; Pinkett et al., 2011).

In considering dominant paradigms of educational leadership, transformational leadership is one which, for the most part, is liberally applied across the field and is considered relevant to most leadership contexts. Developed by James MacGregor Burns (1978), transformational leadership is seen as a leadership approach that enhances the motivation, morale, and job performance of followers through mutual support for a common purpose, and thus “has a transforming effect on both” (p. 20; see also Zhu, Avolio, Riggo, & Sosik, 2011). Northouse (2013) argued that individuals who exhibit transformational leadership have strong internal values and ideals, and are effective at motivating and garnering support from followers. Northouse proffered a four-factor leadership model to further illustrate the utility of transformational leadership: (a) idealized influence and charisma, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration. Northouse’s observations concurred with the earlier work of Leithwood and Jantzi (2005), who conducted an extensive review of transformational school leadership research provided by 32 empirical studies published over a 10-year period (between 1996 and 2005) and commented that transformational leadership (theory), as part of effective leadership, “emphasizes emotions and values, attributes importance to symbolic behavior” (p. 178). A normative description of transformational educational leadership, through a White-centered lens, limits understanding of this leadership approach as



seen, experienced, and enacted by Black school building-level leaders. In considering transformational educational leadership approaches from a race-conscious perspective, as applicable to the leadership praxis of African American school leaders, Dantley (2005) wrote:

the transformative [transformational] educational leader, grounded in African American spirituality and critical theory will examine carefully the dissonance between what presently happens in schools that perpetuates the status quo and what could happen in schools that would bring about marked change in these institutions. (p. 14)

We shall return to the nuanced and distinct ways in which the literature further describes a transformational leadership paradigm as understood by Black school leaders. A further leadership model that has much attention within educational leadership theory and research, and in particular in exploring leadership in “urban” school contexts, is that of social justice educational leadership. The discourse on the development and application of theory to educational leadership, and social justice educational leadership specifically, is interesting. Many of the scholars whose work encompasses aspects of a social justice mandate as part of leadership (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Driscoll & Goldring, 2005; Orr, 1999; Stanton-Salazar, 1997) have associated theory with activity through not-too-dissimilar paradigms, typically either through a working conception of education (school) leadership (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005), or through attempts to draw (limited) generalizable associations in field activity in the development of theory (Stein & Spillane, 2005). Furman and Shields’s (2005) contribution to the role of educational leaders in supporting a social justice mandate provides further insights into the positioning of theory in the educational leadership discourse. The authors provided a distinct and helpful theoretical model for “leadership for democratic community and social justice in schools” (p. 131). The authors’ (re)thinking and understanding of social justice was of a “broad and holistic conception of learning” (p. 125), and was very much aligned with Dewey’s (1897) theories and thinking on the influences of the social and physical environment on a child’s

learning, as well as a more contemporary theorizing on the cognitive perspectives on educational leadership (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Hallinger, 1993). This is an important aspect of the “new agenda” for educational leadership theory because theoretical frameworks that explore cognitive aspects of leadership, leadership approach, and leader behavior are better placed to examine and improve understanding of leadership responses to the stronger demands and complexity of school leadership (Firestone & Riehl, 2005). While the actual theoretical model developed may differ across the range of scholarship, what remains a central thread is an attempt to associate principle(s) with practice, to understand the discipline of (social justice) educational leadership. Generally established theoretical models of leadership highlight a potential weakness in theorizing in relation to educational leadership, that of generalizability of the leadership paradigm being explored, and in the case of the cited examples above, social justice educational leadership. However, to what extent is each theoretical framework generalizable across a range of contexts, and specifically in examining critical-race dimensions of school leadership? Arguably, this is what distinguishes educational leadership theory and research from more scientific research inquiries—theory is contextual and, in many ways, specific to the activity of school leadership.

While several authors have been more explicit in the development and use of a theoretical framework to define social justice educational leadership, a definition of the term remains contested. As Bogotch (2002) highlighted, “There are no fixed or predictable meanings of social justice prior to actually engaging in education leadership practices” (p. 153). Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002) presented a more humanized definition of social justice leadership as “the exercise of altering these arrangements by actively engaging in reclaiming, appropriating,

sustaining, and advancing inherent human rights of equity, equality, and fairness in social, economic, educational and personal dimensions” (p. 162).

Speaking specifically on the leadership of school building-level leaders and the wider social inequities that their leadership seeks to address, Theoharis (2007) stated, “Principals make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision” (p. 223; also see Theoharis, 2009). Reyes and Wagstaff (2005) endorsed a departure from traditional, race-neutral theory and framing of educational leadership, which are problematic when applied to urban contexts and field of activity. This was further evidenced in the leadership ability/leadership values matrix that the authors developed to inform their research. Reyes and Wagstaff concluded, in part, the importance and ability to “test different constructs of leadership and connect them to student academic achievement” (p. 117). For Reyes and Wagstaff, social justice educational leadership is cognizant of and responsive to context.

Closely aligned with leadership is leadership development and leadership praxis, both considered integral to the support and maintenance of effective leadership. Leadership development may be defined as “expanding the collective capacity of organizational members to engage effectively in leadership roles and processes” (Day, 2001, p. 582). Leadership praxis is informed action and a guided moral disposition to act truly and rightly in the exercise of leadership. Theory and research on leadership development, and principal preparation in particular, are often presented as central pillars of effective leadership paradigms. However, a critical perspective of educational leadership and leadership development also necessitates a rethinking of contemporary educational leadership toward a deeper understanding of holistic, sensitive issues of identity, values, culture, and cognitive, psychological, and motivating

influences associated with leadership and leadership development. Marsick and Sauquet (2006) highlighted this importance of context thus: “people are often guided in reflection by internalized social rules, norms, values, and beliefs that have been acquired implicitly and explicitly through socialization. These internalized perspectives can distort our interpretation of an experience” (p. 489). In addition, Ingersoll and May (2011) indicated, “Contemporary models of education leadership [and leadership development] are ones that actively and intentionally seek to inculcate motivated demonstration of a ‘humanistic commitment’ to advancing the student experience” (p. 2). Leadership identity, values, and culture are integral in both describing and understanding the essence of leadership attributes, and how best to support and develop those attributes in individuals. Mentoring has long been considered one of the primary approaches to supporting the professional and leadership development of individuals (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007; Daloz, 2012; Ghosh, 2012; Ragins & Kram, 2007). The term *mentor*, as generally understood, is adapted from Greek mythology to mean a wise guide, teacher, and protector (Ragins & Kram, 2007, p. 3), based on the story of Mentor, taken from Homer’s *The Odyssey*. Odysseus (also known as Ulysses), King of Ithaca, leaves to fight in the Trojan War and entrusts the care of his household to Mentor, who serves as teacher, adviser, guide, and overseer of Odysseus’ son Telemachus (Fagles & Knox, 1996). The term and construct *mentor* are now commonplace (Daloz, 2012), arguably overused within everyday lexicon, with common expressions and enactments of the term largely remaining the same as that described in Homer’s work.

As illustrated in Ghosh’s (2012) chronological review of the seminal work of teacher mentoring in education and organizational mentoring in business, there is a plethora of contemporary definitions and expressions of the term *mentor* and of the mentoring relationship

itself. While helpful in moving toward a definition and an understanding of the terms *mentor*, *protégé*, and *mentoring relationship*, we are reminded by Sharon Merriam (1983) that “how mentoring is defined determines the extent of mentoring found” (p. 165). Any exploration of mentoring as a phenomenon is both informed and constrained by the determinants and attributes used to define the term itself (Bozeman & Freney, 2007; Daloz, 2012).

However, the Greek origins of the term and notion of *mentor* raise important questions as to the relevance and applicability of a dominant, Western, Eurocentric construct, absent of other cultural histories (Turnbull, 2011), to support the leadership development of senior leaders of African heritage, located across the African Diaspora in the United States, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere. Tillman (2005) also highlighted concerns of dominant definitions and expressions of mentor and mentoring relationships, which are invariably informed by “Eurocentric epistemological and cultural perspectives” (p. 313). Normalized notions and expressions of the terms *mentor*, *protégé*, and *mentoring relationships* that dominate the discourse present a race-neutral, color-blind, de facto Eurocentric perspective and interpretation of “mentoring” as part of leadership development. This leads to insufficient cultural synchronicity between mentor and mentee (Ingersoll & May, 2011), and especially so in any meaningful exploration of appropriate and effective professional development and socialization activities (Echols, 2006; Tillman, 2005) to support the leadership and leadership development of Black male school principals and heads of schools. This highlights that in building theory on the leadership of Black male K-12 school building-level leaders, there is a critical need for both a rethinking and reframing of current expressions of the term *mentoring*, considering more culturally relevant approaches to educational leadership development (Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Horsford et al., 2011; Johnson,

2012; Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016) and mentoring that are cognizant of wider, global perspectives and traditions of leadership development and support.

Bozeman and Feeney (2007) cited a series of pertinent guiding questions (see Table 1) to illustrate that definitions of mentoring, as well as research exploring the mentoring phenomenon, are limited and underdeveloped. The questions raised also have considerable relevance and applicability, germane to this current research, inquiry, exploration of what it means to be a Black male K-12 school building-level leader, and associated strategies to support the leadership development of these individuals who are leading while Black.

Table 1

*Defining Mentoring Relationships*

	<b>Guiding Questions</b>	<b>Exploration</b>
1	Is mentoring different when the mentor is the protégé’s boss?	The extent to which the mentoring relationship may be compromised when the mentor also occupies a supervisory role.
2	Is acknowledgment required for a mentoring relationship?	If mentoring is viewed as a phenomenon not requiring awareness or acknowledgment by the persons involved, then how does one conduct research on the mentoring phenomenon?
3	Who is the mentor?	To what extent does the imparting of knowledge between parties become reciprocal as the mentoring relationship advances.
4	Must the mentor and the protégé like one another?	Is friendship and liking prerequisites of successful mentoring and career development? Are psychosocial outcomes such as friendship, counselling, and emotional support, outcomes of mentoring or just the outcomes of friendship?

Table 1 (continued)

	<b>Guiding Questions</b>	<b>Exploration</b>
5	What part of knowledge transmission is “mentoring” and what part is not?	Given that knowledge does not take place in discrete moments, what stage(s) of the parsing of knowledge transmission constitute knowledge acquisition, and what stage(s) may be defined as mentoring?
6	Can groups mentor individuals?	Is mentoring best viewed as a relationship between two people or among a group of people? What is the role of groups, inter-/intra-teams, professional associations, and social networks in the mentoring of a protégé?
7	When does the mentoring begin and end?	Does mentoring only begin when knowledge is transmitted (see question 5 above)? Does it end when one or both parties change role and/or leave the organization? Is there a frequency requirement to constitute the sustaining of the mentoring relationship?
Adapted from Bozeman, B., & Feeney, M. K. (2007). Toward a useful theory of mentoring: A conceptual analysis and critique. <i>Administration and Society</i> , 39(6), 719-739.		

Part of the exploration of leadership development paradigms, mentoring support specifically, in support of the leadership development and principal preparation of Black male school building-level leadership is the question of racial/cultural congruence between the leader as protégé and the individual(s) (for example, district superintendent, network leader) assuming the role of mentor. Given the broader demographic characteristics of the educational leadership profession, Black male school principals and heads of schools are most likely to find themselves (either as mentor or protégé) in a cross-racial and/or cross-cultural mentoring relationship (Barker, 2007; Grant, 2012; Grant-Thompson & Atkinson, 1997; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2002, 2004, 2008; Sánchez & Colón, 2005). Understanding the racialized aspects of mentoring

relationships is therefore an important consideration in exploring the leadership experiences of Black male school building-level leaders. In terms of mentoring support to and from Black male school building-level leaders, this is ostensibly within a context of racial/cultural incongruence between mentor and protégé, resulting in a cross-cultural mentoring relationship. An understanding of the nature of and extent to which cross-cultural mentoring relationships support the leadership development of Black male principals and heads of schools is pivotal in formulating a definition of leading while Black and male.

Through a trilogy of related, co-authored articles, Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2002, 2004, 2008) explored the nature of cross-cultural mentoring in higher education through the paradigm of their own lived experiences and mentoring relationship—she (Johnson-Bailey) a Black female associate professor, and he (Cervero) a White male (more senior) professor—providing personal narratives, independently compiled, of their mentoring relationship. Both authors were very cognizant in their respective reflections of the influence and import of race, gender, and positional power dynamics within the relationship and highlighted a number of considerable factors of particular importance in cross-cultural mentoring relationships. In their findings, Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2004) highlighted issues relating to: (a) trust; (b) racism (acknowledged and unacknowledged); (c) visibility and risks pertinent to faculty of color; (d) power and paternalism; (e) who benefits from the mentoring relationship; and (f) the impact of “othering” and marginalization in the academy.

Barker’s (2007) exploration of cross-cultural mentoring relationships between White mentors and Black student protégés within predominantly White institutions (PWI) in comparison to the mentoring experiences of Black student protégés attending historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU) provided some further insights into the potential underlying



implicit and explicit assumptions that gave rise to the issues highlighted in the findings from Johnson-Bailey and Cervero's (2004) study. Barker (2007) presented a *Cross-Cultural Mentoring Dyad with Individual Cultural Ideology and Institutional Context* outlining the internal and external influences that exist within a cross-cultural mentoring relationship, as well as how these influences may be perceived by mentor and protégé and invoke different racialized interpretations, responses, and reactions within the cross-cultural mentoring relationship. It is this potential for misalignment of understanding between the (typically) White mentor and (Black) protégé that gives rise to attention when exploring the descriptive narratives presented by Black male school leaders on leadership.

Fully understanding the dynamics and racialized interactions (perceived and real) between parties within a cross-cultural mentoring relationship is complex, requiring individuals, both mentor and protégé, to be cognizant of their own racial identity and how that identification informs their leadership and mentoring practice, as well as their perceptions, emotions, and behaviors toward individuals from other racial groups (Carter, 2005). Attending to school leadership, there is evidence of significant underrepresentation of individuals of African heritage—principals and heads of schools—in leadership roles (Bitterman, Goldring, & Gray, 2013; Brown, 2005; Gooden, 2012; Smith, 2016). In 2015-16, of an estimated 90,400 K-12 public school principals, approximately 9,582 (10.6%) were Black/African American, non-Hispanic (Taie & Goldring, 2017). The predominance of an ostensibly homogeneous, White school leadership workforce highlights the lack of racial diversity within the professions, and insufficient cultural synchronicity between the Black administrator and other educators more generally (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Consequently, there is an absence of meaningful, if at all any, opportunities for Black educational professionals to benefit from supportive, wholly

racially/culturally congruent leadership development experiences (Gooden & Dantley, 2012). To illustrate, findings emerging from Echols' (2006) study of coping strategies adopted by Black school principals highlighted that while 90% of participating principals indicated mentors guided them in achieving their career development (skills development) goals, only half of those surveyed indicated a shared racial identity with their mentor (Echols, 2006): "Some of the respondents indicated mistrust in confiding to a principal colleague but felt greater comfort in speaking to someone of color who holds a higher ranking position" (p. 7).

To a greater or lesser degree, the findings and observations emerging from each of the aforementioned empirical studies (Barker, 2007; Echols, 2006; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2002, 2004, 2008) concurred with the findings from research conducted in the United Kingdom by Ashong-Lampety (2015) on the experiences of Black And Minority Ethnic (BAME) professionals in the United Kingdom, and the utility of mentoring and developmental networks to support these professionals. Ashong-Lampety found that Black professionals struggle to find mentoring relationships that are supportive of both their career development (skills development) and psychosocial (intimate, caring) needs. Further, and as suggested from the findings emerging from the earlier *London Study* (Smith, 2012), cross-cultural mentoring relationships also fail to be fully supportive of the psychosocial needs of Black male principals, heads of schools, and other senior-level school administrators.

As indicated in Barker (2007), an understanding and expression of the multiple dimensions of one's own identity, cultural ideology and perception, as well as personal expressions need to form essential composites of developing a suitable culturally sensitive grounded definition of culturally congruent leadership development and mentoring support, and also the larger explorative research and description of leading while Black and male. This

concur with Pinkett et al.'s (2011) emphasis on the importance and cognition of a strong identity (as an African American) that grounds and supports purpose as a leader. Thus, in continuing to build theory to theorize Black male K-12 school building-level leadership and supportive leadership development strategies in leading while Black and male, it is important to extend the review beyond “mentoring” as a strategy, to consider the race politics of adult and leadership development more broadly. Typically, adult and leadership development for senior-level leaders is distinct from and in contrast to experiential skill development and acquisition of core functional, technical, or operational competencies (Fink & Resnick, 2001), and more about developing individuals as adaptive, politically astute, and transformational leaders—that is, becoming “leaders who inspire followers to transcend their own self-interests and who are capable of having a profound and extraordinary effect on followers” (Robbins, Judge, Millett, & Waters-Marsh, 2008, p. 699). This very much concurs with findings from *The London Study* (Smith, 2012), which in part found that male leaders of African Caribbean heritage in London secondary schools are “generally highly qualified and experienced individuals who have succeeded in their promotion to senior leadership and headship positions through the role of agency, viz. hard work, resilience and determination as well as support and encouragement from others” (p. xi).

Ashong-Lampety's (2015) United Kingdom study further endorsed the need for and importance of adult development as part of leadership support. In his study, Ashong-Lampety revealed that BAME U.K. professionals experience difficulties in securing both career/skills development mentoring support and psychosocial, intimate, caring mentoring support. As Brookfield (2005) highlighted, the domain of adult education is fraught with evidence of what Freire (1970) termed “malefic generosity,” whereby the privileged White educator seeking to

racialize the field of adult education determines the race-based initiatives and perspectives deemed most appropriate to support the adult education and development of the oppressed, race-marginalized adult learner (Brookfield, 2005). The resultant “supposedly emancipatory initiatives” (Brookfield, 2005) promulgated by the privileged, liberal thinking White educator is at best misguided, patronizing, ineffective, and ultimately both unsupportive and damaging to the adult development of Black or other race-marginalized adult learners. A (re)conceptualization of understanding adult development in support of leadership development is therefore particularly important when building theory and seeking to apply a critical race leadership lens to paradigms of educational leadership and leadership development, and in moving toward a nuanced definition, description, and understanding of what it means to be a Black male K-12 school building-level leader.

The narrative and social history that informs educational leadership theory accentuates school leaders who are “knowledgeable educators; social, political, and community activists; system builders; and democrats” (Bogotch, 2005, p. 8). Yet, “the normative practices of school administration reflect stereotypical identity constructions of White, heterosexual, middle class, Christian, able-bodied males” (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017, p. 826; see also Costello, 2005). The evolution of educational leadership research and theory, development of leadership paradigms, and historicizing of public and private school leadership in particular is one that covets and documents the biographies and leadership as enacted by White educators such as Horace Mann (1786-1859), Ella Flagg Young (1845-1918), Cyrus Peirce (1790-1860), Angelo Patri (1876-1965), and William Maxwell (1908-2000) (Bogotch, 2005). There is little documentation or celebration of the historical contributions, lived experiences, and successes of Black educators and school leaders, who for the most part have led successfully, in extremely

challenging, race-discriminatory environments. There is much to be gained from centering the lived experiences of these individuals in (re)theorizing contemporary effective leadership praxis. Remaining absent from the canon of education and school leadership research and theory are the significant achievements and contributions to the field by individuals such as: Charles Lewis Reason (1818-1893), the first African American university professor at a predominantly White institution, who served as school principal in New York's desegregated public school system; Alexander Crummell (1819-1898), minister and professor who in 1897 founded the American Negro Academy, the first school dedicated to African American learning; Sarah J. Smith Thompson Garnet (1831-1911), who in 1863 became the first African American woman appointed as a principal in the New York City public school system; Fannie Jackson Coppin (1837-1913), who in 1869 became the first African American principal for the Institute for Colored Youth (ICY), a high school for African Americans in Philadelphia; and Edward Alexander Bouchet (1852-1918), who in 1876 became the first African American to earn a doctoral degree (Yale University) in the United States and taught at the School for Colored Youth in Philadelphia (BlackPast.org, 2016; OnlineCollege.org, 2016). There is also the army of Black principals, school leaders, and educators who have tirelessly and successfully led the schooling of generations of African Americans during enslavement and reconstruction, Jim Crow and segregation, and contemporary re-segregation of our school system. The names and significant contributions of these stalwart African American principals and educators largely remain unacknowledged and undocumented in the canon of educational leadership theory and scholarship. Consequently, significant models of leadership excellence have been lost and are not reflected in mainstream educational leadership theory and practice (Horsford, 2010, 2011; Walker, 1996, 2009, 2018).

In enhancing understanding of educational leadership and leadership development theory and practice toward more nuanced, critical-race definitions of the terms, it is necessary to depart from dominant, normative expressions and conceptualizations of leadership and leadership development toward a (re)expression of the critical race conceptualization of educational leadership and leadership development. This phenomenological research project sought to document and present humanized portraits of Black male K-12 school leadership, to build theory, and to improve understanding of school leadership while Black and male.

### **Culturally Relevant and Responsive School Leadership**

The praxis of the culturally relevant and responsive principal or head of school is emphatically one of social justice activism and advocacy on behalf of the student communities served (Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016). Social justice activism and advocacy through paradigms of care is an intrinsic motivator for the authentic, committed culturally responsive and relevant school leader. Ladson-Billings (1995, 1998, 2009b) posited that the culturally relevant *ethic of caring*, when evidenced through a “humanistic commitment” and concern for students as individuals, as members of communities, as well as in tackling wider socioeconomic-political inequalities, is a central demonstration of culturally relevant education and cultural competency in teaching and learning (and leadership) praxis (Ingersoll & May, 2011, p. 2). For Gay (2010), culturally responsive *care* is an essential element of a Model of Cultural Dynamics that informs classroom instruction and pedagogy. The culturally responsive *power of care* directs teachers and leaders to consider their demonstration of care holistically in a student-centered way from multiple perspectives of academic achievement, social emotional, and the general well-being of students. Gay (2010) and Ladson-Billings (1995, 1998, 2009b, 2014) presented stark reminders of the inequalities and inequitable provision of education and schooling that permeate across all

school levels pre-K through 12, and the enactment of public policies that perpetuate the status quo.

One cannot theorize Black male school building-level leadership in isolation, as though phenomena develop in a vacuum, absent from historical context and lived experiences. The debate and discourse on effective culturally sensitive strategies and approaches to education, specifically in the education and schooling of Black students, are not new. Genovese (1976), Webber (1978), Anderson (1988), Butchart (2010), and others recounted the history and early education and schooling experiences of Black people as part of enslaved communities in America and emancipation during the 19th century and beyond. Walker (1996, 2009, 2018), Horsford (2010, 2011), Woodson (2010), Du Bois (1903), and Washington (2014) continued the dialogue on effective culturally sensitive approaches to the education of Black people.

This historical context is important in both reading and understanding (1) culturally responsive school leadership (Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016), (2) the import of Gay's (2010) culturally responsiveness, (3) Ladson-Billings' (2009b, 2014) culturally relevant articulation of effective education and teaching praxis, and (4) Paris's (2012) and Paris and Alim's (2014, 2017) subsequent contributions to the field on the importance of promoting culturally sustaining environments across the school system. Further, critical reflection, described by Howard (2003) as reflection that "centers on moral, political, and ethical contexts of teaching [and leadership]" (p. 197), as well as a demonstration and commitment to social justice leadership, have historically also been core attributes of the care exhibited by the sociopolitical conscious Black male K-12 school building-level leader. Bass (2019) developed a framework of Black Masculine Caring (BMC) towards conceptualizing a culturally relevant ethic of care for Black male educators and observes that:

Black men have the capacity to care, and often care deeply. Black men's capacity to care as well as their approach to caring is influenced by their prior experience *as Black men*. Another core tenant of the BMC framework is that caring is often demonstrated by Black men as much as by others—just differently at times. The caring exhibited by Black men is influenced by their culture, which sometimes renders certain aspects of their caring to be misunderstood or misinterpreted. (p. 34)

Bass (2019) concluded that a paradigm of culturally responsive school leadership is a care-based approach to school leadership. Effective educational civil rights activism—a nexus of a social justice mandate, advocacy, and care—transcends the stronghold barriers that maintain a range of contemporary educational civil rights injustices. Educational civil rights activism ignites a commitment to dismantling structural and systemic forms of racism and seeks to create safe-haven learning environments and “envisioned radical reconstruction” (Dantley, 2010, p. 218) of schools, school districts, and ultimately society overall. In this regard, civil rights activism and advocacy are also important aspects of Black school leadership.

Through a review and synthesis of literature on culturally responsive education and school principal-level leadership, Khalifa et al. (2016) identified four clarifying strands, salient behaviors of culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL). This important research and scholarship within the field of educational leadership provide significant signposts toward the formulation of race-critical leadership models. Khalifa et al. highlighted a number of key aspects germane to culturally responsive school leadership (see Table 2) that have significant relevance to the building of theory and exploration, description, and understanding the phenomenon of leading while Black and male. The authors acknowledged the limitations of their initial study and review of literature, and highlighted the potential for further study and research: “we could not address all of the types of culturally responsive leadership” (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 21). The authors went on to highlight five substantive contexts of culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL): “Latino, U.S. Indigenous, Black children and families, as well as postcolonial and



spiritual contexts. Collectively, these creative expressions of CRSL can help us understand patterns across context, and they can also inform perpetually emergent forms of CRSL practice” (p. 21).

Table 2

*Key Attributes of Culturally Responsive School Leadership*

<b>Leadership Attributes</b>	<b>Evidenced By</b>
Critical self-awareness	A critical consciousness that enables him or her to have an understanding of the racial and cultural context in which he or she leads
Establishing a culturally responsive school context and curriculum	Promoting culturally responsive and inclusive school environments and school climate
Resist race-neutral/color-blind expressions of leadership	Proactive in their validation and demonstration of respect, and valuing the cultural identity of the school community of students, staff, and wider community
Adapted from Khalifa, M. A., Gooden, M. A., & Davis, J. E. (2016). Culturally responsive school leadership: A synthesis of the literature. <i>Review of Educational Research, 86</i> (4), 1272-1311.	

**Critical Perspectives in Educational Leadership**

Critical race theory (CRT) provides an appropriate theoretical lens and methodology and interpretative framework for the development of theory and exploration of Black male K-12 school building-level leadership attributes. The principles and overarching aims of CRT provide a helpful lens in presenting more nuanced, critical perspectives on educational leadership (Brown, 2005; Capper, 2015; Capper & Green, 2013; Davis et al., 2015; Horsford, 2010; Horsford et al., 2019; Parker & Villalpando, 2007). CRT has its origins grounded in the intellectual activism (Hatch, 2015), anti-racist scholarship, and works of African American scholar activists such as W. E. B. Du Bois (1868-1963), Frederick Douglass (1818-1895), and

Ida Wells-Barnett (1862-1931). Contemporary (post-Civil Rights era of the 1950s and 1960s) CRT scholar activists such as Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Alan Freeman, William Tate, Kendall Thomas, and their intellectual-activist progeny continued in the commitment and tradition of those early CRT pioneers, and sought to examine, challenge, and transform the manner in which race, systemic racism, and powers and structures that operate to maintain systems of White domination exist (Ladson-Billings, 2009a; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Patton & Catching, 2009).

The “Bell et al. era” (post-1987) form of CRT had its genesis in legal scholarship and the traditions of Critical Legal Studies (CLS), as well as influences from neo-Marxist theories and other philosophical traditions and ideologies (Tate, 1997), as illustrated in Yosso’s (2005) intellectual genealogy of critical race theory. As highlighted by Yosso, CRT now extends to a much larger base and encompasses critical theory in the fields of social sciences, including education, history, ethnic studies, feminism, gender, and sexuality.

Also, while initially emerging to address the struggles, subjugation, and oppression of African Americans, CRT has expanded beyond a “Black/White binary” (Yosso, 2005, p. 72) discourse on race and racism to encompass a critical discussion on the racialized experiences of “Othered” marginalized groups. These include: Asian Americans (AsianCrit), women (FemCrit), Latina/o and Chicana/o communities (LatCrit), and Native Americans (TribalCrit) (Yosso, 2005). The genealogy of CRT has been further expanded to encompass “WhiteCrit,” reflective of an increasing introspection or “looking behind the mirror” (Delgado & Stefancic, 1997, p. 1) among some White scholars to expose the construct of “Whiteness” and White privilege and challenge racism (Yosso, 2005).

CRT posits a commitment to the eradication of social and racial injustices, oppression, and inequalities, which are explicit within the defining elements or core tenets of CRT, as summarized in Table 3 below (Capper, 2015; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Harris, 1990; Horsford, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009a; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; López, 2003; López & Parker, 2003; Lynn & Parker, 2006; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Solórzano, 1997; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Tate, 1997).

Table 3

*Tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT)*

<b>CRT Tenet</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>References</b>
Permanence of racism	The centrality of race and racism and other forms of subordination in society is endemic and a defining characteristic of American society.	Bell (1992)
Counter-storytelling	A method of telling a story that aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority. Centering the experiential knowledge of people of color as appropriate, legitimate, and integral to analyzing and understanding law and society.	Delgado & Stefancic (2001); Matsuda (1995)
Critique of liberalism	Challenge to dominant ideology and legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy in society.	Crenshaw (1988)

Table 3 (continued)

Whiteness as property	“Whiteness” as an identity that is neither problematic nor particularized within discourses on race because it assumes a status of normalcy. Whiteness can be considered a property interest, associated with attributes of property rights and functions.	Harris (1995); Hayes & Juárez (2009)
Interest Convergence	White elites will tolerate or encourage racial advances for people of color when they also promote White self-interest.	Bell (1980, 2004); Ladson-Billings (2003)

Within the specificity of education and educational leadership research, the overarching aims and core tenets of CRT may be synthesized into a framework that informs theory, research, practice—leadership, leadership preparation, leadership development, and public policy development and enactment. The principles and overarching aims of a CRT methodology and interpretative framework approach to research represent a paradigm shift from a positivist (objectivity based on a belief that reality is stable) or interpretivist (based on subjective meaning and interpretation of the world view) approach to research, toward a critical research position that emphasizes the oppressing and inequitable nature of social structures, systems, and experiences. Through the use of experience, reasoning, and research (Mouly, 1978), CRT purposes to provide an analysis while simultaneously challenging the historical, ideological, and psychological contexts, social structures, and experiences through which race and racism exist (Parker & Lynn, 2002). This makes it an appropriate methodological approach with applicability to the context and “politics” of the paradigm of critical educational leadership research (Alemán, 2007, 2009; Capper, 2015; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Horsford, 2010, 2014; Horsford et al., 2019;

Lynn & Parker, 2006). This research project and exploration of the leadership of Black male K-12 school building-level leaders drew on a CRT methodology and interpretative framework, specifically the utility of counter-storytelling as a diagnostic tool to challenge deficit racialized notions and stories on people of color, erroneously presented in research as “objective truths” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 23). Parker and Lynn (2002) argued that much of the social scientific inquiry on the concerns of disenfranchised groups has been informed by antediluvian knowledge claims and use of culturally inappropriate methods, routes of inquiry, and exploration. Consequently, the findings, outcomes, and recommendations arising from such inquiries are unrepresentative of the interests of researched minorities. Tillman (2002) also recognized the inherent problems and limitations of racially biased epistemology based on the knowledge claims and “world reality” assumptions of Whiteness, and presented a case for the use of culturally sensitive research approaches that both recognize ethnicity and position culture as central to the inquiry. In looking at the work of Black male teachers, Lynn (2002) argued that because “Black men see teaching as an opportunity to correct social, political and even economic barriers to success for African-Americans, they practice a kind of critical race praxis that is aimed at ending racial inequality” (p. 127; also see Lynn, 2006a, p. 239).

CRT as a “new” race-based epistemology (Scheurich & Young, 1997) may have profound implications for educational leadership research, critical policy analysis (Horsford, Scott, & Anderson, 2019), and wider discourses on race, racism, and disadvantage. There is increased attention to an exploration of educational leadership practice through a CRT lens. Racialized aspects of leadership practice examined through a CRT lens include: models and approaches to leadership preparation and leadership development (Brown, 2005; Davis et al., 2015; Parker & Villalpando, 2007); hiring and recruitment of school administrators (Smith,

2016); school finance policies, practices, and implications (Alemán, 2007); school/district desegregation (Horsford, 2010; Lindle, 2009); school/college climate and related policies (Marx & Larson, 2012; Smith et al., 2007; VanDeventer Iverson, 2007); the politics of education (López, 2003); and school district reform (Rorrer, Skrla, & Scheurich, 2008). Capper (2015) explored a number of aspects of educational leadership where a CRT methodology and interpretative approach to research and inquiry would prove helpful. Through a literature analysis of CRT in educational leadership as well as a review of key publications that employed a CRT theoretical lens to analyze educational leadership practice and interrelatedness to the core tenets of CRT, Capper identified a total of 24 studies, of which a total of 16 articles made specific reference to the CRT tenet of the *permanence of racism* as salient to an analysis of educational leadership practice. *Counter-storytelling* was also referenced in 16 articles. Of the other CRT tenets, *critique of liberalism* was directly referenced in 11 articles; *Whiteness as property* and *interest convergence* were both directly referenced in nine articles. While all of the scholarship identified through Capper's analysis referenced the multiple dimensions of leader identity—race and/or social class, gender, ability, sexual identity—only four articles specifically identified intersectionality as a CRT tenet (Parker & Villalpando, 2007; Sherman, 2008; Stovall, 2004; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). Capper (2015) proposed a CRT Inventory for Leading to Eliminate Racism containing directed questions to guide leadership practice for each of the aforementioned CRT tenets. Solórzano (1998) identified commitment to social justice—that is, the elimination of racial oppression as part of the broader social justice agenda and goal of ending all forms of oppression and subordination of people, as a CRT tenet, applicable to the field of educational leadership (Alemán, 2007; Capper, 2015; Horsford, 2010). However, on

social justice, Knaus (2014) cautioned that social justice terminology is often embraced as part of a broader discourse as evidence of interest convergence:

CRT suggests that it is in the interest of White educators to adopt social justice language instead of integrating anti-racism into the foundation. This anti-change stance makes individuals who challenge racism subject to personal, professional, and institutional punishment, exacerbating racism that faculty of color already face. (p. 422)

Several authors have specifically examined action-oriented paradigms of social justice educational (school) leadership through a race-based theoretical lens, demonstrating the nexus between social justice leadership and critical race theory in educational leadership. Alemán (2009) posited LatCrit educational leadership as an alternative social justice framework that supports (social) activism as central to educational leadership practice. Capper and Green (2013) examined the use of critically oriented theories, including CRT and social justice leadership, as part of the development of a suitable organizational theory for integrated, socially just schools. DeMatthews, Carey, Olivarez, and Saeedi (2017) applied a composite of CRT and social justice leadership in their exploration of the racialized dimensions of and inherent racism in school discipline policies and practices. Horsford's (2010, 2011) exploration of the schooling and leadership experiences of eight Black school superintendents elicited a rethinking and understanding of the context of education and race-oriented social justice leadership through race and economic segregation, desegregation, and perceived notion of integration. Dantley and Tillman (2010) further expanded our understanding of social justice leadership, which they closely linked to the concept of moral transformative leadership: "leaders as transformative or public intellectuals serve as social activists who are committed to seeing a greater degree of democracy practiced in schools as well as in the larger society" (p. 19).

The nexus between social justice leadership and CRT is further evidenced through Santamaria's (2014) examination of the ways in which the racial identities of educational leaders

of color inform purposeful enactment of social justice leadership and educational equity. The authors further demonstrated considerable overlaps in several approaches to applied critical leadership—namely, critical multiculturalism, culturally specific/responsive/relevant leadership, transformative leadership, and CRT (Santamaria, 2014). As researchers and scholars continue to rethink, understand, and engage with a critical educational leadership agenda, it is also important to consider the ways in which those theories and research results can give rise to new knowledge foundations within leadership practice. This is particularly important in attempts to explore a model of critical race leadership—that is, leadership that centers race, racism, social justice, and activism as core aspects of leadership enactment. The potential for applying a critical-race framework of leadership extends beyond normative models of educational leadership, moves toward paradigms of leadership that recognize the racial and cultural context of leadership, and purposively and actively seeks to enact effective culturally sensitive strategies in situ that support the leadership and leadership development of Black male school principals and heads of school. While, as illustrated above, a CRT theoretical and/or methodological approach has been applied to critical exploration of educational leadership across a variety of leadership domains, there remain limited attention and literature on the critical leadership of Black male K-12 school building-level leadership. This phenomenological research project further sought to address that gap.

### **The School Building Leader: Principals and Heads of Schools**

*The historical context of race set the stage for the kinds of challenges to success that Black principals face in the 21st century.*

(Echols, 2006, p. 6)

Understanding the demographic characteristics of the school leadership as well as the wider school workforce aids in identifying who among the educator collective may form the



vanguard as educator civil rights activists and provide the much needed “realistic rather than symbolic relief” (Bell, 2004, p. 24) to an entrenched, segregated school system and structure. Typically, while not exclusively so, Black male school building-level leaders—school principals and heads of schools—lead schools in more challenging, underresourced circumstances than their White counterparts. Black school principals are required to exhibit “racial-fortuity” (p. 200), demonstrated through civil rights activism and advocacy, to advance racial goals toward what Bell termed “the disestablishment of the dual school system” (p. 24).

The social history of school building-level leadership and the impact of the role on school management and administration as well as the power relations with teachers, students, and school districts, provide an important context for understanding the nature of the role and exercise of school leadership today. School leadership is integral to school effectiveness and student success. The leadership drives and is responsible for the implementation of policies and mandates as well as the desired direction, ethos, and culture of the school. The extent to which a school is able to support its students and wider community successfully is very much tied to the developed strategies of the leadership team. The very nature of educational leadership has changed in unprecedented ways. There are greater challenges in leading schools, examples of which include increased levels of socioeconomic disparities as experienced by students from marginalized communities and backgrounds; different and new models of educational institutions—charter schools, networks, and other school designs and formations; a younger, inexperienced, and transient school teacher workforce; and a greater reliance on the use and analysis of data as part of school effectiveness and decision-making processes. The increasing and complex nature and operation of schools have necessitated an unprecedented changed understanding of the models of educational leadership. The social history, demands, and

complexities associated with the U.S. school system broadly, and school building-level leadership specifically, are multifaceted and challenging. Race segregation across the U.S. school system is increasing. Despite significant advancements through the Courts, civil rights advocacy, and public policy reform, the prospect of a truly equitable, integrated public, and to some extent private, school system remains illusory. The state of the U.S. school system continues to be one that is defragmented, delivering a dual educational experience that significantly disadvantages students and communities from race-marginalized backgrounds. The demands of 21st century school building-level leadership, as summarized in Table 4, further complicate the context, workload, and nature of the 21st century principal’s office and the role of the school building-level leader.

Table 4

*Demands of 21st Century School Building-Level Leadership*

<b>Demand</b>	<b>Commentary</b>	<b>References</b>
Leadership Crisis—School Building-level Leader as Business Manager	Traditional role has metamorphosed, requiring that principals and heads of schools possess an extensive portfolio of skills and expertise	DeAngelis & O’Connor (2012), Gates, Ringel, Santibanez, Chung, & Ross (2003); Murtadha & Watts (2005); Rousmaniere (2007, 2013); Tillman (2004b)
School/Leadership Context	Geographical location—urban, suburban, rural; and type of school—public (traditional, charter, parochial) or private (independent, Catholic, other religious, or non-sectarian)	Bush (2012); Erwin, Winn, & Erwin (2011); Lomotey & Swanson (1989)
Supply Problem	Perceptions or misperceptions of a supply problem or shortage of suitably qualified school administrators	DeAngelis & O’Connor (2012); Huber & Pashiardis (2008); Pounder, Galvin, & Shepherd (2003); Thomson (2009)

Table 4 (continued)

Aging Workforce	Average age of currently serving public school principals is 47 years old. 22.7% of principals aged 55 years or more.	Taie & Goldring (2017)
Decentralization/Increased Accountability	Greater local accountability for student outcomes and an overall marketization of education.	Horsford, Scott, & Anderson (2019); Leithwood (2001)

While having an impact on the school principal profession as a whole, the demands of 21st century school building-level leadership, also present themselves as additional “challenges” for Black school leaders and individuals from other race-marginalized and nondominant groups, with limited and/or inequitable access to social and cultural capital. Typically, Black school leaders are less successful in navigating or circumventing the impact of these demands and challenges to the same degree as school principal peer colleagues from the dominant, White racial group (Echols, 2006). To illustrate, education reform, demands to improve student attainment levels, and insufficient resources are most likely to be a greater challenge for school building-level leaders serving urban and suburban communities of predominately Black and Brown students, with higher proportions of English language learners, than for predominately White principals in more suburban or rural districts and locations serving more homogeneous, majority White, English first-language speaker student cohorts (Akom, 2011; Franklin, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2009c; Oakes, 2005; Tallerico, 2000). This changing context, and additional demand on the role of the principal or head of school—and in particular as it relates to leadership and the leadership praxis of school leaders from race-marginalized backgrounds, has important implications for understanding the phenomenon of leading while Black and male.

There continues to be alarming disparity and disconnect between educational leadership theory and practice in many schools. Theory, research, and practice are all important aspects of a composite that contributes to an improved rethinking and understanding of an educational leadership phenomenon. However, any exploration of an educational leadership phenomenon also has to be a catalyst for improved understanding and articulation of critical educational leadership—that is, an exploration of paradigms of leadership that serve to critique and deconstruct undemocratic power relations and models of educational leadership that are unresponsive to the sociocultural, racial, and broader demands of 21st century school leadership that (un)intentionally marginalize Black school leaders; lack cultural synchronicity between leader(ship), teachers, and students; and ultimately are a disservice to students from race-marginalized backgrounds and wider school communities (Dantley, 2003a; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Theoharis, 2009).

### **The Role of Black Identity, Values, and Culture**

Examining the potential ways in which (race-informed) identity, values, and culture inform leadership and leadership praxis aids in the development and description of the mores of what it means to be a Black male school building-level leader. In considering the “sociocultural roots of identity,” it is important to acknowledge that ethnic and racial identity is “simultaneously personal and social and that stereotypes about social categories are the link that binds them” (Way & Rogers, 2014, p. 269). Who we are, how we define and make sense of our racial and ethnic identity is a “cultural, contextual, and relational process” (p. 281). Further, as we are reminded in Worrell (2014), “it is through identity that culture as race and ethnicity is manifested” (p. 251). Culture, as part of identity, occurs both within and between cultural groups—that is, our understanding and definition of cultural mores, cultural stories, and cultural

stereotypes are created and changed by people through discourse and power (Azmitia, 2014).

Race, while acknowledged as a social construct, is central to identity. On race, Thompson (2008) opined:

[Race is] a label that is commonly ascribed to individuals in certain societies based on their affiliation with a group of people. Members of racial groups typically share common characteristics in physical appearance or phenotype, but more significantly, they share a common stature within a given society . . . race is a social construction. (p. 1279)

“Culture” within the context of race may be described as “submitting a racial and ethnic group’s accomplishments” (Worrell, 2014, p. 251), the embodiment of which Hall and Allen (1989) termed “racial consciousness,” which they defined as “a set of political attitudes that address a person’s relationship to or feelings about his race, an understanding of his race’s status in the social structure, and his orientation or tendency to act given the understanding of the group’s position” (p. 179).

Race consciousness necessitates understanding, evidenced through values, behaviors, and action (Hall & Allen, 1989; Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003), of the significance of race, color, and cultural diversity in how and whom we lead. The context of Black racial consciousness is evidenced through valuing “a constellation of African-American [Black] cultural mores” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 469; also see Ladson-Billings, 2014) and “seeks to sustain both within-group cultural practices and common, across-group practices to exist and thrive” (Paris, 2012, p. 195; also see Paris & Alim, 2014, 2017). The terms *race* and *culture* are often erroneously used interchangeably when describing the Black experience. The naming of peoples of African descent in the Americas, and across the Diaspora more broadly, is simultaneously contested and evolving. The naming and acceptance of names of people of African descent from Negro to Black to African American are political activities representative of societal power dynamics across and within racial groups (Martin, 1991). The naming of

groups as part of a codifying racial and cultural identity further results in “creating myths of shared origins and destinies [as] an important part of ethnogenesis (Singer, 1962)—the process whereby ethnic groups come into being” (Martin, 1991, p. 91). Speaking directly on the negative stereotyping of the ethnic and racial identity and cultural mores of African Americans, Azmitia (2014) recorded that “Historically, no ethnic group in the United States has been stereotyped as negatively as African Americans. . . . In constructing their identities, US-born African Americans must challenge stereotypes and find a way to succeed in an unjust, prejudicial society” (p. 290). This has significant and long-lasting (un)intended consequences for members of race-marginalized communities. Within the field of educational leadership, McCray, Wright, and Beachum’s (2007) observed that the extent to which “the historically negative presumptions as it relates to the leadership capabilities of African American principals are still part of the thought patterns of decision makers regarding the placement of these administrators” (p. 247).

Returning to naming and association of identity attributes to racial groups, Simms (2018) explored the persistence of structural racism directed to people of African descent in the United States and commented that for many people, the terms *Black* and *African American* are often used interchangeably. In 2017, approximately 10% of the 41.4 million Black people in the United States were foreign-born, from Africa, the Caribbean, and elsewhere (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). The term *Black* is now considered more inclusive of the collective, different combinations of history and experiences of the U.S. (Black) population (Simms, 2018). This raises important and related questions: Is “Black” and “Blackness” a race or a culture? What does it mean to be Black? What does it mean to be a *Black* male K-12 school building-level leader? While race and culture are composites of Blackness and a Black identity, Andrews (2016) reminded us that:

Blackness is not a static agreed on definition, but an unfinished construction that can aid us to move towards liberation. . . . [T]he essentialism at the heart of Blackness is political and not cultural. There is no attempt made to make people conform to a particular dress, style or language; cultural representation does not demark the lines of Blackness. There is no reductive identity politics at work in liberatory Blackness. . . . Blackness is by nature a construction rooted in global understandings and connections. (p. 207)

While there are phenotype characteristics—skin color, hair texture, among others, typically associated with Blackness—these serve as “physical cues” and reminders of a connection, shared history, and shared experience(s) of peoples from across the African Diaspora (Andrews, 2016, p. 205). On this sense of shared history and experiences, Hall (1993) acknowledged that “a very profound set of distinctive, historical defined black experiences” (p. 111) contributes to our understanding of Black cultural practices (Dumas, 2010; Marable, 2000). Blackness as an emancipatory category is political, not cultural, and necessitates active participation in a movement and politics of liberation (Andrews, 2016). Notwithstanding the politically affirming aspects of a Black identity for people of African descent, notions of Blackness and othering of a Black identity continue to be derided writ large, specifically through an ideology and sentiment of “anti-blackness,” described by Dumas (2016) as:

a social construction, as an embodied lived experience of social suffering and resistance, and perhaps most importantly, as an antagonism, in which the Black is a despised thing-in-itself (but not person for herself or himself in opposition to all that is pure, human(e), and White. (pp. 416-417)

In looking at the potential ways in which the sociocultural roots of Blackness and Black identity influence the leadership approach of Black professionals, Pinkett et al. (2011) posited that establishing a strong personal and social identity, as well as the ways in which we negotiate the interaction between our personal and social identity, are of paramount importance for African Americans—a vital component of the foundation for building successful careers and important consideration in a race-conscious society (Hall & Allen, 1989). Pinkett et al. further posited that

for African American professionals who inevitably find themselves in environments that challenge or attempt to define by negative racial stereotypes: “establishing a strong identity can be the difference between *thinking* that people who look like you can succeed at anything and *knowing* it to be the case” (p. 28).

In considering the intersections of identity, values, and culture as part of Black leadership, Leffler’s (2014) study on Black leaders in leadership and conversation with more than 50 Black leaders, from across a range of contexts, explored the ways in which race and identity inform leadership vision, philosophy, and style. In documenting leadership lessons from participating Black leaders, Leffler observed, “Black leaders repudiate the boundaries of race. Simply put, they refuse to be diminished by circumstances or to be defined by others. They develop inner strengths that transcend and shatter the straight-jackets society imposes” (p. 209).

An understanding of the extent to which individuals are cognizant of their own racial identity and how that identification informs their leadership practice as well as their perceptions, emotions, and behaviors toward individuals from other racial groups (Carter, 2005) is of pivotal importance in an exploration, description, and understanding of phenomenon of leading while Black and male. While there are a number of racial identity theoretical frameworks and measurements (Carter, 1996, 1998, 2005; Cross, 1971, 1991, 1995; Hall & Carter, 2006; Helms, 1990, 1993, 1994, 1995; Spickard, 1992; Thompson & Carter, 2013), Cross’s (1971, 1991, 1995) nigrescence theory and application of the Negro to Black experience, Black Racial Identity development, and measurements were considered most appropriate for this line of inquiry. Black racial identity theory provides a suitable theoretical framework to inform the research proposition and concept of Black male school leadership, and serves to illustrate the multidimensional nature of racial identity (Hall & Carter, 2006) as well as the extent to which



the development of racial identity, leadership identity, philosophies, values, and cultures reflect a process of self-actualization and personal growth (Maslow, 1968, 1970; Maslow, Stephens, Heil, & Bennis, 1998; Thompson & Carter, 2013).

Cross (1971, 1991, 1995) considered Black racial identity from its social dimension as distinct from a biological dimension (Spickard, 1992). A theoretical examination of racial identity from its social dimension is in stark contrast to and in refutation of any contra, implicitly racist perspective discourse or attribution of a false racial intelligence hierarchy across different racial or cultural groups on the basis of biological dimensions of racial identity (Hargrow, 2001). Further, centering race and racial identity as part of the research inquiry counters the notion of race-neutral, color-blind approaches to support and develop educational leaders from race-marginalized backgrounds (Tatum, 1999). This is an important distinction, particularly as this phenomenological study sought to theorize school leadership while Black and male and provide a nuanced description of the essence of the phenomenon leading while Black and male. Cross (1971, 1995) explored the application of Black racial identity statuses and measurement, as part of the psychosocial process and cognitive complexity of personal identity development, defining the self and self-actualization (Carter, 1998; Chávez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999; Thompson & Carter, 2013). This further makes Cross's model of Black psychological racial identity an appropriate conceptual framework for a research focused on leadership development strategies in support of Black male school principals and heads of schools. Similar models also exist for White racial identity and the racial identity of people of color. Cross (1971) defined five different levels or multidimensional stages of Black racial identity, as shown in Table 5.

Black racial identity development (Cross, 1971, 1991, 1995), similar to self-actualization, is a dynamic, ongoing, continuously changing, lifelong process (Chávez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999;

Maslow, 1968; Thompson & Carter, 2013). While an individual may, at any given point in his or her personal racial identity development and racial socialization, exhibit a predominant status, the stages operate together with all five stages (pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment) being available to an individual as part of his or her personality structure (Carter & Pieterse, 2005). As an individual advances in the development of his or her racial identity, he or she moves toward racial self-actualization, increased cognitive strengths and self-awareness of the multiple dimensions of his or her identity, and sense of double-consciousness (Du Bois & Huggins, 1986) as a leader. A detailed application of a Black racial identity model and theory and calculation of associated racial identity attitude scale and measurements is considered beyond the scope of this phenomenological research project and will therefore not be discussed in any detail.

Table 5

*Cross's Nigrescence Theory—Five Stages of Black Identity Development*

<b>Racial Identity Statuses</b>	<b>Characterized By:</b>
<p><b>1. Pre-Encounter</b> – Race has little or no personal or social meaning to the individual.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Strive to be assimilated in a desire to be accepted into White society and culture (Ogbu, 2004)</li> <li>▪ “White is right” and “Black is wrong.”</li> <li>▪ Accepting of negative attributions and stereotypes applied to Blacks as a group.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Encounter</b> – Individual re-evaluates prior beliefs in racelessness and becomes more cognizant of self as a Black person.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Experiencing multiple emotional traumas on meaning and significance of race and the psychological impact of race and identity on his or her lives (Hall &amp; Carter, 2006).</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Immersion-Emersion</b> – Individual’s deep involvement in discovering his or her own Black heritage and identity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Immersion</i> – “Adaptation of a pro-Black, negative-White psychological stance” (Hall &amp; Carter, 2006, p. 157)</li> <li>▪ <i>Emersion</i> – Individual develops a more balanced view of the strengths and weaknesses of Black life and his or her own Black racial identity.</li> </ul>

Table 5 (continued)

<p><b>4. Internalization</b> – Secure in one’s own sense of racial identity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ An appreciation for White culture while primarily valuing one’s own Black racial-cultural heritage.</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Internalization-Commitment</b> – Individual both <i>lives</i> in accordance with a new self-image and <i>becomes</i> that new identity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Confidence in one’s personal standards of Blackness.</li> <li>▪ Actioned-oriented in support of community and change.</li> </ul>
<p>Sources: Cross, W. E., Jr. (1971, 1991, 1995)</p>	

I turn next to the role of identity, values, and culture as part of Black school leadership. Historically, educational leadership theory and research have been dominated by a White, male, normative-guised, race-neutral discourse. The context of race within the construct of school leadership provides important insights into the leadership lessons on what it means to be a Black male school building-level leader. The socioeconomic and political contexts that assume a color-blind, color-evasive, power-evasive, or post-racial constitution (Neville et al., 2013) and thus ignore the complexities, import, and impact of race and identity as part of leadership attributes, stand juxtaposed with any intentional and purposeful exploration of educational leadership from a critical-race perspective (Brooks, 2012; Brown, 2005; Chávez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999; Davis et al., 2015; Echols, 2006; Gooden, 2012; Lomotey, 1989, 1993; Mabokela & Madsen, 2005; Tillman, 2004a, 2004b; Tolliver, 2010). Further, racism is ubiquitous and universal at individual, institutional, and cultural levels throughout society and particularly within the realms of education and schools (Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Horsford, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2009a, 2009b, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Leffler, 2014; Leonardo, 2009; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Smith, 2016; Tate, 1997). In fully understanding the context that leadership, as enacted by Black male principals and heads of

school takes place, “there is a need to investigate school administration in specific social, political, and racial contexts” (Brown, 2005, p. 587). The need for and importance of positioning race as central to this research inquiry and in the building of theory, vis-à-vis what does it mean to be Black male K-12 principals and heads of school, are further supported by Gooden’s (2012) examination and signaling of the absence of any substantive discourse on race or racism within the field of educational leadership research. The notion of establishing strong Black identity, values, culture, and purpose is foundational to the research project (Lynn, 2006a, 2006b; Pinkett et al., 2011). This research sought to engage participating Black male principals and heads of schools in a critical and intentional culturally sensitive exploration of their own identity, and the potential ways in which the development of a strong identity may inform their leadership praxis. Critical-race leadership looks to the richness of the indigenous wisdoms and spiritual enlightenment of the Diaspora to instill a celebratory affirmation of “*Thank you [God] for allowing me to see myself the way you see me*” (Franklin, 2005) for Black male school building-level leaders in particular, as well as for senior educational professionals from across the African Diaspora more broadly.

Lomotey (1989) in the seminal text *African-American Principals: School Leadership and Success* argued that “African-American leaders—and African-American principals in particular lead differently than their White peers” (p. 2). Race cultural identity is an important factor in looking at leadership attributes, as further illustrated in Lomotey’s exploration of the significance of African American principals’ influence on the school experience and academic achievement of African American students. Lomotey contended that:

The culture of a people defines (1) situations, (2) attitudes, values, and goals, (3) myths, legends, and the supernatural, and (4) behavior patterns. The way a person relates to others and to circumstances that he or she encounters is shaped by the culture of that

individual; African-American people respond differently to situations than do people from other cultures in America. (p. 3)

Lomotey went on to highlight some of the distinctive differences between the leadership of African American and White school leaders. African American principals are more likely to prioritize community engagement than do their White peers. Community is defined as “the spirit, the guiding light of the tribe, whereby people come together in order to fulfil a specific purpose, to help others fulfil their purpose, and to take care of one another” (Somé, 2002, p. 22).

Community/civil rights activism and advocacy have had a historical presence and are integral to understanding the Black educational experience. For the Black school principal, “community” is an expression of social justice educational leadership, civil rights activism, and advocacy (Ginwright, 2015b), and commitment to the transformation of entrenched, segregated school system and structure (Bell, 2004). This is evidenced through greater (and positively encouraged) levels of parental and other community member involvement in school activities, as a core aspect of the leadership and decision-making processes of African American school principals. This is particularly so in schools serving predominantly African American student communities, where race-culture synergy between the African American principal and student community is also seen as a key factor to improved academic outcomes for African American students. For the African American principal, leadership attributes associated with a race-culture identity are a composite of what Lomotey (1993) termed the “bureaucrat/administrator role identity” and the “ethno-humanist role identity” of African American principals (p. 396). The bureaucrat/administrator aspect of the principal’s role identity is focused on schooling, centered on meeting societal goals and expectations on the schooling experience through: clearly developed and articulated organizational goals; the principal’s ability to capture the energies of the teachers to work collaboratively toward shared goals; facilitation of effective two-way

communication between principal and staff; and successful instructional management, including curriculum planning, teacher supervision, and student assessment. The principal's ethno-humanist role identity is focused on pursuing the goals of education and supporting students in the meeting of cultural goals and objectives associated with the race-cultural identity and well-being of the student learners. For the African American principal, an ethno-humanist role identity is evident through: a commitment to the education of all students, and in particular to those from a Black race-cultural background, as well as students from other race-marginalized communities; a compassionate understanding of African American children, relative to both their local community context, and also their lived realities as being racialized Black in the wider society; and confidence in their professional abilities as leaders to support students effectively in race-sensitive ways (Lomotey, 1993).

Lomotey (1989) further emphasized that much of the prior research on the impact of the race-culture identity of African American principals has been through a White normative principal leadership research lens. For example, "one study suggests that African-Americans tend to be less expressive and more inhibited in the exercise of their leadership responsibilities" (p. 5). However, as Lomotey reminded us, "it is possible that what may be construed as inhibition may be a culturally different way of dealing with leadership" (p. 5). The racialized (mis)interpretation of the leadership attributes of Black principals is further accentuated in the relationships that these leaders develop with both the staff they lead and supervise, and also with their district- and/or network-level supervisors. Oftentimes, the African American school principal alters his or her leadership style in order to bring about a desired, seemingly supportive, response from colleagues (Lomotey, 1989). This has significant implications for both exploring and supporting the leadership of Black male K-12 school building-level leaders.

Armstrong and Mitchell (2017) explored the intersection of race, gender, and professional identities in their examination of how two Black female Canadian principals negotiate their professional identities in administrative contexts. While both principals acknowledged the gender- and race-related pressures to fit normative expectations of administrators as White males, there was consensus that racial pressures were more difficult to navigate, recognizing that “their blackness stood in stark contrast to the overwhelming whiteness of the administrative cadre” (p. 837): “Both principals further located their individual identity negotiations within the larger collective struggle that black principals faced” (p. 830).

The principals described the co-existence of two different professional identities, framed and often imposed by others. The first, an institutional identity, was constructed around clearly articulated institutional norms, expectations, and objectives of administrative roles, competencies, and behaviors. The second or “shadow identity” was framed by racial and gender expectations and stereotypes in educational leadership. For Black female principals, this double framing of their identity, as Black (female) principals, through systemic pressures was analogous to a sense of “containment” and being “boxed in” to fit normative identities. For the principals, this led to a sensed pressure to “pass” and “fit in” that “resulted in practices of overcompensation and the belief that they needed “to work twice as hard” (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017, p. 830). The principals also spoke of a constant shifting of identity, suppressing or erasing aspects of their salient identities that seemingly conflicted with dominant institutional or administrative identities, “depending on different stakeholder groups and situational contexts” (p. 831). Both principals were also intentional in their efforts to project positive images of their race and gender consistently and maintain visibility in their respective communities. Armstrong and Mitchell reported, “This was achieved by narrating, authoring and staging desired identities through a

variety of visual and verbal messaging techniques and direct interactions with students, staff and parents” (p. 833).

Further, the principals recognized the associated costs and benefits of identity shifting, and consistently reaffirmed the importance of authenticity as part of their leadership, staying true to themselves and their inherent values (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Leffler, 2014). Armstrong and Mitchell (2017) noted that while the research and study focused on the leadership experiences of two Black female principals, the experiences reported centered more on these leaders’ racial identities than on their gender identity. The findings therefore may also have some relevance and applicability to the leadership experiences of Black male school principals and heads of school. Importantly, the documentation of the descriptive narratives of Black male K-12 school building-level leaders will potentially provide insights into the ways these leaders negotiate their professional identities while leading as Black men.

### **Underrepresentation of Black Males**

The historical context and knowledge of the presence, experiences, and contributions of African Americans within education and school leadership are important (Horsford, 2010; Smith, 2016; Tillman, 2004a, 2004b; Walker, 2018). Senior educational leadership positions assumed by African Americans are not a new phenomenon. Notwithstanding the constitutional challenges and landmark victories gained through the Civil Rights movement, especially the Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), the changing demographic landscape of the nation’s population, and an increased need for school administrators, the role of the school principal has, according to Pollard (1997), remained the long-considered “bastion of White men” (p. 354).



The placement of Black K-12 school building-level leaders and administrators juxtaposes the comparative experiences of White administrators. Black school principals are most likely to be placed in schools and school districts serving predominately students of color (Ortiz, 1982). In many instances, Black principals are completely excluded from leadership positions in predominately White public schools (Rousmaniere, 2007, 2013). In contrast, White school principals are placed in predominately White and predominately minority schools, as well as in schools with diverse student groups (Horsford, 2010, 2011; Tillman, 2003). Similar patterns of the placement of Black heads of schools are also evident within the private-independent school sector.

The promised *integration* of the school system following the 1954 *Brown* decision and desegregation of education led to the amalgamation and wholesale closure of Black schools, with devastating consequences for the provision of education, Black school principals, the school teacher workforce, and the wider African American communities that these schools served (Ethridge, 1979; Hudson & Holmes, 1994; McCray et al., 2007). The post-*Brown* era marked a period in the history of education in the United States that, according to Karpinski (2006), resulted in the “decimation” (p. 251) of the numbers of Black principals.

The future status and threatened job security of African American principals and educators were two of the most consequential travesties of the perceived gains of the post-*Brown* era (Fultz, 2004; Karpinski, 2006). Between the period 1954 to 1964, the number of African American principals was reduced by 90% (Rousmaniere, 2007, 2013; Tillman, 2004b).

According to Karpinski (2006), the displacement of African American principals and teachers “removed some of the most competent educators in the U.S. public school system,” resulting in the “withdrawal of potential African American candidates from the principalship”

(p. 248). The significant displacement of Black students to the teaching profession, and subsequently to the pool as potential principals and school administrators, continued for several decades, through to the early 2000s (Brown, 2005). The introduction of teacher and leadership education programs as well as new teacher and school building-level certification requirements have both contributed to in the significant displacement of educators of color (Smith, 2016). This has further increased the levels of underrepresentation of Black principals and heads of schools, senior school leaders, and teachers relative to the student population. To illustrate, in 2011-12, 12.1% of all public school teachers were Black/African American, whereas 15.7% of students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools were Black/African American. For the same period (2011-12), 10.1% of all public school principals identified as Black/African American (USDOE, July 2016). As stated by Rance (1992), there is some evidence to suggest that “even though minorities are becoming increasingly more qualified to hold high level administrative positions, the number of Blacks in the field of school administration has not significantly increased” (p. 14).

In 1970, the Race Relations Information Center prepared a special report “*Displacement of Black Teachers in the Eleven Southern States,*” commissioned by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education (Hooker, 1970). The report, referring to the displacement of Black public school principals following border states “compliance” with federal law mandates on desegregation, in part said:

The demise of the black principal has ominous implications for the South and its black community. . . . The black principal was for years the linchpin of his community—the link between the white and black communities, the idol of ambitious young blacks, the recruiter and hirer of new black teachers (Hooker, 1970, p. 7).

Sixty-four years after *Brown*, de jure racial segregation has been replaced with de facto segregation (Tillman, 2004b). A wide range of structural inhibitors and racial microaggressions

prevalent within the education system and schools continue to contribute to the underrepresentation of Black Americans in senior K-12 administration positions remains evident (Smith, 2016). There is a need for wider policy discourse and examination of the longer-term effects of racialized and race-bias practices within education in aspects of principal preparation, school building-level certification, and leadership development. A critical-race documenting of humanized narratives of Black male school leadership, as provided through this phenomenological research project, captured the essence of the leaders' experiences. This not only will help in better understanding the lived experiences of Black male principals and heads of school in situ, but will also aid in developing supportive strategies intended to provide a gateway into the profession for aspiring, emerging school leaders from Black or other race-marginalized backgrounds.

There is a need to increase diversity and representation of senior school leaders comparable to students and wider community populations (Alston, 2000; Tallerico, 2000; Toldson, 2011, 2019). Commentators have previously argued for the importance of and need for increasing diversity and representation of school principals and administrators comparable to the student and wider community populations they serve. Further, there is significant evidence to suggest that a diverse workforce comprised of people from a wide range of backgrounds, representative at all levels across the organization hierarchy, is a stronger and more effective one (Gershenson, Hart, Hyman, Lindsay, & Papageorge, 2018; Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Dittmann, & Crosby, 2008; Ross, 2002; Tallerico, 2000; Toldson, 2011, 2019).

As illustrated in Table 6 below, the demographic trends and projections for the racial and cultural context of the United States are rapidly changing. Increasingly, similar to the wider population trends, public schools are moving from monocultural nondiverse contexts to serving

more heterogeneous and diverse student cohorts (Jones, 2002; Noguera, 2003). It is estimated that by the year 2020, only 49.8% of children under the age of 18 years will be White, decreasing to 36.5% by 2060 (Karpinski, 2006; Riehl, 2000; Vespa, Armstrong, & Medina, 2018). In looking specifically at the experiences of boys, Toldson (2011) reported that “nationally, Black and Hispanic boys spend the majority of their school experiences under cross-gender and cross-cultural supervision” (p. 183; also see Toldson, 2019). It will be incumbent on schools, school administrators, and school districts to find ways to support the evolution of human capital and shift to a majority minoritized ethnic student and wider population over the next few years to enable diverse cohorts of students to be fully prepared as global citizens.

Table 6

*Population Racial Demographic Trends 1970, 2016, 2060*

	1970		2016		2060	
	millions	%	millions	%	millions	%
Total Population	203,210		323,128		403,697	
White, non-Hispanic	169,623	83.5	198,077	61.3	178,838	44.3
Black	22,539	11.1	42,976	13.3	60,555	15.0
Hispanic (of any race)	8,921	4.4	107, 925	33.4	206, 693	51.%
Asian	1,526	0.8	18,418	5.7	36,736	9.1
Two or more races	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	25,029	6.2
Other	1,025	0.5	13,248	4.1	6,863	1.7
Sources: Hacker (2003); U.S. Census Bureau (2001); Vespa, Armstrong, & Medina (2018); Young & Brooks (2008)						

Jones (2002), Brown (2005), and others have argued that “schools in a racially diverse society will require leaders and models of leadership that will address the racial, cultural, and ethnic makeup of the school community” (Brown, 2005, p. 585). Ingersoll and May (2011), in

citing Irvine (1988, 1989), opined that “cultural synchronicity” between teachers and students from race-marginalized backgrounds, and the “insider knowledge” that teachers with similar life experiences and cultural backgrounds to those of the students they support share, are particularly beneficial in the instruction of those students (p. 1). This is supported by Fairchild et al.’s (2012) research on the impact of “relational demography”—that is, racial and gender congruency in principal-teacher-student relationships. Relational demography within the school environment has a positive impact on job satisfaction for school professionals. In view of their findings, Fairchild et al. highlighted a “continued and urgent need to rethink teacher [leadership] education programs” (p. 190) and encourage a move toward innovative, critical (leadership) programs that intentionally bridge the gap between education preparation theory and the realities and practices of on-the-ground urban school leadership.

Notwithstanding the existence of research and evidence on the benefits of a racially diverse and culturally congruent school leadership workforce, relative to the student community, there is continuing evidence of significant underrepresentation of individuals of African heritage in school and senior educational leadership positions (Brown, 2005). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2012-13) Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) School Principals Data File 2011-12 provided the most recent publicly available (unrestricted) data on the Black or African American male school principal workforce specifically. In 2011-12, of a total of 115,540 public and private school principals, approximately 11,438 (9.9%) self-identified as Black or African American. Please note that there is a slight discrepancy between the NCES SASS 2011-12 summary-level data and raw data. The summary-level data provide composite data for individuals who identified as Black or mixed in the summary analysis of the total number of Black or African American school principals. The following analysis and presentation are based

on the NCES SASS 2011-12 raw data for school principals who identified as Black or African American only—a total of 9.9% of the total schools’ principal workforce (NCES, 2012-13). All available data are approximate and for the school year 2011-12. Table 7 provides an overview of the total number of public and private school principals by race/ethnicity for 2011-12, the latest readily available (unrestricted) data.

Table 7

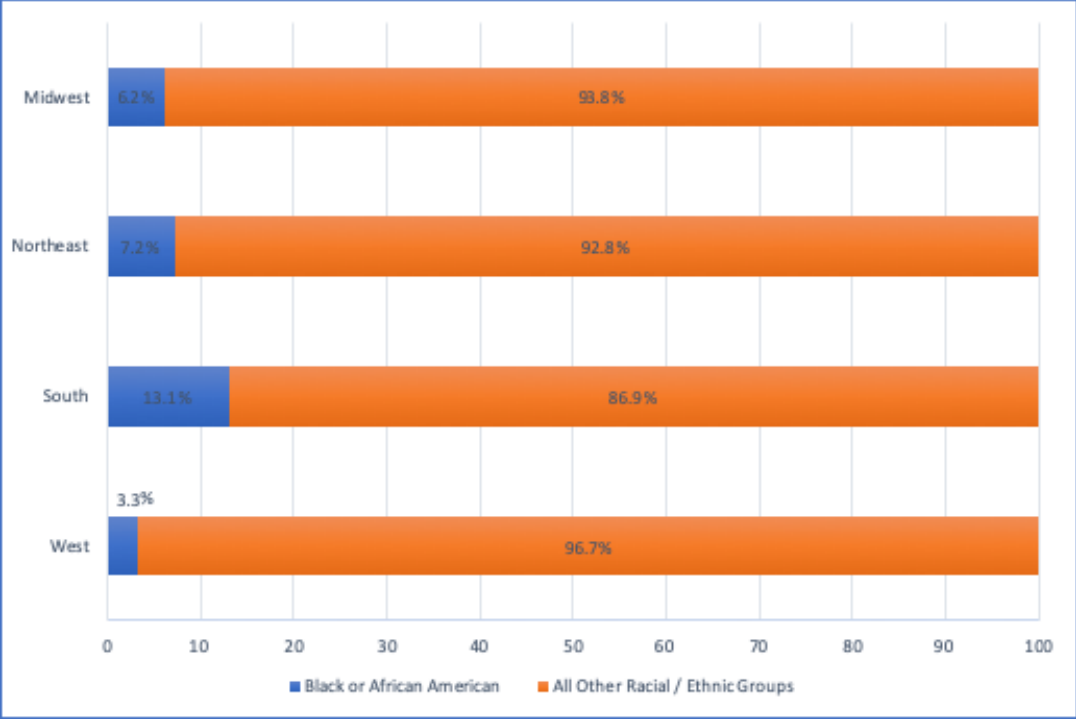
*Total Number of Public and Private School Principals by Race/Ethnicity for 2011-12*

	<b>Public</b>		<b>Private</b>		<b>All Schools</b>	
Total School Principals	89,810		25,730		115,540	
White, non-Hispanic	72,117	80.3%	22,462	87.3%	94,512	81.8%
Black or African American, non-Hispanic	9,071	10.1%	1,750	6.8%	10,861	9.4%
Hispanic (of any race)	6,107	6.8%	849	3.3%	6,932	6.0%
Other	2,515	2.8%	643	2.5%	3,120	2.7%
Source: Bitterman, Goldring, & Gray (2013)						

In considering the total number and percentage distribution of Black or African American principals by gender, in 2011-12, approximately 11,438 (9.9%) of the total public and private school principal workforce self-identified as Black or African American, of which approximately 4,238 (37.05%) self-identified as male, and 7,079 (61.89%) identified as female. Approximately 121 (1.06%) of Black or African American principals did not report a gender.

Focusing on Black or African American male public or private school principals, Figure 1 below shows the percentage of Black or African American male principals within each U.S. census region, based on American National Standards Institute (ANSI) state code. The highest proportion of Black male public and private school principals is located in the South, with 13.1%

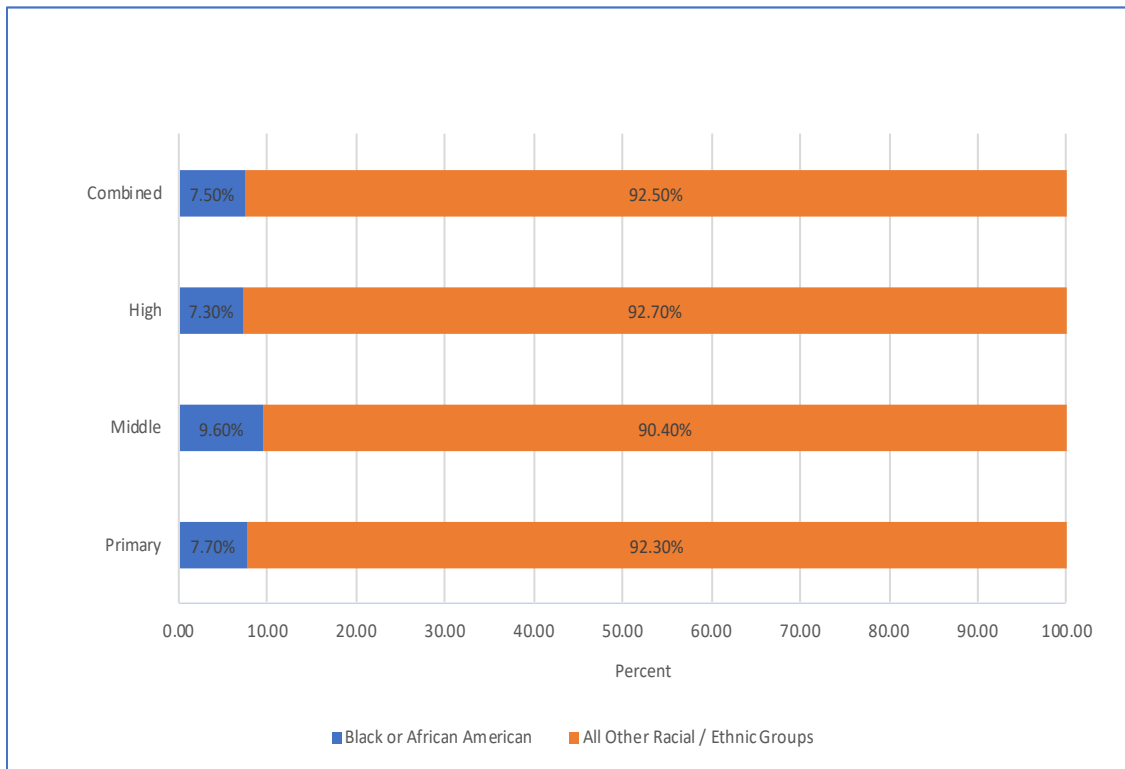
of all school principals in the region identifying as Black or African American. The West region has the least reported number of Black male school principals, with 3.3% of all principals self-identifying as Black or African American.



Data source: NCES (2012-13)

Figure 1. Proportion of Black or African American male school principals by region, 2011-12

In looking at the school levels served by Black or African American male K-12 school principals, as illustrated in Figure 2, 9.6% of all middle school principals were Black or African American. Overall, less than 8% of school principals in each of the remaining school levels—primary, high, or combined—were Black or African American men.



Data source: NCES (2012-13)

Figure 2. Proportion of Black or African American male school principals by school level, 2011-12

Black/African American male school principals commonly lead schools serving higher student populations from race/ethnic diverse backgrounds, as compared to school principals from all other racial/ethnic (nonBlack or African American) groups. As Table 8 illustrates, more than 25% of all school principals serving schools with 75% or higher students from a race-marginalized background were Black or African American male principals. In the case of schools serving predominately White student populations (less than 10% students from a race-



marginalized background), less than 1.6% of those male school principals are Black or African American.

Table 8

*Male School Principals by Racial/Ethnic Minority-Populated Schools, 2011-12*

	<b>Black or African American (%)</b>	<b>All Other Racial/Ethnic Groups (%)</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Estimates</b>			
Total	7.8	92.2	100%
Percentage of students in the school who are of a racial/ethnic minority			
Less than 10%	1.6!	98.4	100%
10% to less than 25%	1.0!	99.0	100%
25% to less than 50%	5.0	95.0	100%
50% to less than 75%	11.9	88.1	100%
75% or higher	25.3	74.7	100%

! Interpret data with caution. Estimate is unstable because the standard error represents more than 30% of the estimate.

Data source: NCES (2012-13)

Black male school principals varied in age (Table 9): 56.4% of all Black male school principals were under the age of 49, with 24.1% being under the age of 40. The majority of male school principals across all ethnicities were aged between 40 and 59 years of age. The data suggested that more Black men were achieving a school building-level leadership role (principalship) at younger ages. The data may also suggest that Black men leave the profession as they get older.

Table 9

*Male School Principal Age by Ethnicity, 2011-12*

	<b>Under 40 (%)</b>	<b>Age 40 to 49 (%)</b>	<b>Age 50 to 59 (%)</b>	<b>Age 60 or older (%)</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Estimates</b>					
Total	19.4	33.0	32.4	15.2	100%
American Indian, Alaska Native American Indian or Alaska Native	21.3	33.1	26.2	19.4	100%
Asian	22.4	28.1	25.5	24.0	100%
Black or African American	24.1	32.3	30.7	12.8	100%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	‡	‡	‡	‡	100%
White	18.7	33.2	32.8	15.3	100%

‡ Reporting standards not met

Data source: NCES (2012-13)

As illustrated in Table 10 below, 55% of Black male K-12 school principals had between 5 and 10 years of teaching experience prior to becoming a principal. By comparison, 46% of male principals across all ethnicities had between 5 and 10 years teaching experience before assuming a principal leadership role.

Table 10

*Years of Teaching Experience Prior to Becoming a School Principal, by Male Within Ethnicity, 2011-12*

	<b>Less than 5 years (%)</b>	<b>5-10 years (%)</b>	<b>11-15 years (%)</b>	<b>More than 15 years (%)</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Estimates</b>					
Total	16.6	46.2	19.6	17.6	100%
American Indian, Alaska Native American Indian or Alaska Native	11.5 !!	50.4	15.7 !	22.4	100%
Asian	25.2 !	51.8	16.4 !	6.6 !!	100%
Black or African American	16.0	55.0	13.3	15.7	100%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	‡	‡	‡	‡	100%
White	16.6	45.3	20.3	17.8	100%

! Interpret data with caution. Estimate is unstable because the standard error represents more than 30% of the estimate.

!! Interpret data with caution. Estimate is unstable because the standard error represents more than 50% of the estimate.

‡ Reporting standards not met

Data source: NCES (2012-13)

In considering the level of education of the school principal workforce, 13.3% of school principals were Black and male and had achieved at least a doctorate or first professional degree. Looking at male school principals specifically, Table 11 provides details of the highest qualification gained by male principals, by race/ethnic identity. However, Black male school principals tended to have achieved a doctorate or first professional degree (16.2%), significantly higher than the average (9.5%) for male principals across all race and ethnic groups. Of those male principals who did not have a degree, the vast majority (3.5%) were White.

Table 11

*Male Principals' Highest Qualification Gained by Racial Identity, 2011-12*

	<b>Associate Degree (%)</b>	<b>Bachelor's degree (B.A., B.S., etc.) (%)</b>	<b>Master's degree (M.A., M.A.T., M.B.A., M.Ed., M.S., etc.) (%)</b>	<b>Education specialist or professional diploma (at least one year beyond master's level) (%)</b>	<b>Doctorate or first professional degree (Ph.D., Ed.D., M.D., L.L.B., J.D., D.D.S.) (%)</b>	<b>Do not have a degree (%)</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Estimates</b>							
Total	0.4	5.0	60.4	21.5	9.5	3.2	100%
American Indian, Alaska Native American Indian or Alaska Native	‡	‡	67.1	20.5	9.3 !!	‡	100%
Asian	‡	14.7 !	66.4	10.7 !	8.3 !!	‡	100%
Black or African American	‡	3.2 !	56.9	23.4	16.2	‡	100%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	100%
White	0.4	5.0	60.3	21.6	9.1	3.5	100%

! Interpret data with caution. Estimate is unstable because the standard error represents more than 30% of the estimate.

!! Interpret data with caution. Estimate is unstable because the standard error represents more than 50% of the estimate.

‡ Reporting standards not met

Data source: NCES (2012-13)

The data in Table 11 demonstrate that quantitatively, Black male school building-level leaders were underrepresented across the principalship profession. The data also provide helpful structural descriptions of the leadership contexts in which Black male school leaders lead. The proportion of individuals in these senior leadership roles was not reflective of either the percentage distribution of enrolled K-12 students by race, or by race of the wider population. Underrepresentation of African Americans and other racial minority groups within the K-12 administrative workforce, comparable to their representation in the wider population, may be an indicator of intentional or consequential racism within the employment practices of the profession. There is also a pressing need for the collective professional practice of education and school administration to reflect the full spectrum of cultural and social traditions and systems within society. Schools and school districts need to be more responsive to rapidly changing student demography to become diversity-enhanced institutions and beacons of culturally sensitive school leadership—that is, places of vibrant opportunities to support racial, cultural, and linguistically diverse student cohorts (Howard, 2007). Further, as proffered by Tillman (2003), “despite our commitment to diversify [educational administration], our field remains predominantly White” (p. 1). The predominance of a homogeneous school leadership workforce is further compounded by a decentralized, localized model of education that results in variable routes to the hiring and promotion of school administrators dependent on type of school, urbanicity, school district, and state. Invariably, such decentralized systems and practices provide the starting point for race discrimination (Bush & Moloji, 2008). It is therefore vitally important that effective strategies aimed at supporting and developing Black male K-12 school building-level leaders acknowledge and are not only responsive to the context of race within which the education sector and wider society exist, but also actively seek cultural synchronicity, draw on

the benefits of cultural insider knowledge, and differentiate accordingly in meeting the leadership development needs of a racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse leadership workforce (Fairchild et al., 2012; Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Ingersoll & May, 2011; Khalifa et al., 2016). A coherent, shared definition and critical understanding of the phenomenon leading while Black and male are integral to this.

### **Negotiating the Politics of Race and Racism in Schools**

Building theory on leading while Black and male engenders consideration of substantive literature on the politics of race and racism in schools, as pertains to the leadership of Black educators and school building-level leaders. It is also important to examine the multiplicity of ways in which schools as workplace settings inform, impact, influence, and are responsive to leadership identity, values, and culture. The context of race and racism at individual, institutional, and societal levels is central to this research project and in the theorizing of Black male school leadership attributes. In looking at schools as the institution, the place in which leadership takes place, it is also important to acknowledge that in many ways, workplace organizational structures replicate the social hierarchies that lay at the foundation of wider society, with careers and professional positions becoming synonymous with racial and culturally determined social positioning and stratification. In situating the research in the workplace organizational structure and context of school (educational) leadership, I posit that the school institution operates as a racial state apparatus (RSA), which Leonardo (2005) described as follows: “the school is a material institution where race takes place, where racial identity is bureaucratized and modernized, where people are hailed as racialized subjects of the state” (p. 409).

As a racial state apparatus, the school institution adopts a pragmatic approach through which to produce and reproduce racial and social disparities and acts as part of what Omi (1994) termed a “racial state” (p. 83). School leadership, administration, and teacher workforce (Brooks, 2012; Gooden, 2012; Horsford, 2014; Murtadha & Watts, 2005); curriculum choices, limited access (or denied access) to advanced curriculum options and subjects (Ladson-Billings, 2009c); student tracking, assessment and “labelling” (Gillborn, 2008; Rothstein, 2004); disparities of resources (Franklin, 2002); impact of social and environmental health inequalities on educational outcomes (Akom, 2011; Oakes, 2005); and educational opportunity gaps (Ladson-Billings, 2006) are all mechanisms or filters that conspire to ensure racial inequities continue to exist across the education system. Importantly, and within the specific context and focus of this research project, schools as racial state apparatuses perpetuate the social formation and reproduction of social conditions that contribute to a deficit school-to-leadership pipeline where Black men are significantly underrepresented in school building-level leadership positions. Black male school building-level leaders, as is the case for most leaders from race-marginalized backgrounds, have generally, oftentimes out of necessity, developed skills to traverse multiple dimensions and expressions of their identity successfully in different cultural environments and contexts (Lynn, 2006a; Pinkett et al., 2011). W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) described this as follows:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois & Huggins, 1986, pp. 364-365)

Du Bois (1903) was both poetic and profound in his pronouncement of what it necessitates to be American—and Black, and arguably male. It is most poignant that his pronouncement was made in *The Souls of Black Folk*, Chapter 1: Of Our Spiritual Strivings. This

sense of “double-consciousness” and “unreconciled strivings” that Du Bois described encompasses the whole being of the American Negro—mind, body, and soul—in his striving and “longing to attain self-conscious manhood” and requires “dogged strength” on the part of the individual to avoid “being torn asunder” (Du Bois & Huggins, 1986, p. 365).

Due attention to the whole being is an integral part of the Black American experience. In Echols’ (2006) study on the challenges associated with the principalship of Black principals, we are reminded that historically, “when faced with challenges and resulting despair, African Americans have often leaned upon spirituality as a means of optimism and encouragement” (p. 5), which presents much corollary between the dogged strength as part of the spiritual strivings that Du Bois expounded (Du Bois & Huggins, 1986). For the Black male school building-level leader who “simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American” (p. 365), the challenges associated in “working while Black” (Johnson, 2011) and concerns about “not fitting-in” (Echols, 2006, p. 7) a White-aculturated education system require a similar “dogged strength” and spiritual striving (Du Bois & Huggins, 1986, p. 365), manifested through a range of coping strategies—self-efficacy; determination; resilience; hard work; confidence/self-belief; support of close family members, friends, community, and other networks; and faith and spirituality (Smith, 2012).

Structural and textural descriptions of what it means to be a Black male K-12 school building-level leader provide a critical exploration and description of the essence of school leadership while Black and male. Similar to Lynn (2006a), the research project adopted a critical race theory methodology and interpretative framework in exploring the larger issues concerning the presence, role, and importance of Black men in school leadership. On the application of a



critical race theory lens to the construction of the Black male identity (Jones, 1998), Lynn (2006a) observed that:

While Black men are mythologically constructed as the epitome of hyper-masculinity and macho prowess, they are not men in the eyes of white America (Jones, 1998). Manhood as defined within a Eurocentric conception of gender, represents order, rationality, and economic, social and political dominance. In this society, images of Black men are not consistent with these notions. Rather, Black men represent irrationality, disorder, hypersexuality and economic depravity, all of which are considered 'feminine' characteristics within an androcentric cultural framework. (p. 238)

Through the construction of theory and documentation of humanized portraits of Black male school leadership phenomena, this research deconstructed the mythology (Lynn, 2006a) of Black male K-12 school leadership, documented the lived reality of Black male school-building level leadership, and gave nuanced language and understanding to what it means to be required to be constantly vigilant of the double-consciousness/multiple dimensions of one's identity. As experienced by the Black male educators who participated in Lynn's study, for Black men there is a need for a constant navigation, while being forced "to play the [White middle class] game" at considerable cost and loss to self (p. 238), that necessitates a double-consciousness (Du Bois & Huggins, 1986) and sense of "dancing between two worlds" (Lynn, 2006a, p. 221) with Black male educators. It is envisaged that a greater understanding of this double-consciousness, multiple dimensionality of leadership for Black male school building-level leaders, in both public and private independent school settings, will provide insights that inform a broader and wider understanding of what it means to be a Black male school leader.

As a result of having to constantly dance between two (or multiple) worlds, many Black male educators—teachers and school building-level leaders—are forced to take a different career path in order to preserve self (Lynn, 2006a). The cost to self is that of "spirit-murder" (Lynn, 2006a, p. 238; Williams, 1987), which Lynn (2006a) defined thus: "Spirit-murder is the death of

the soul. It is a form of annihilation that consumes one from the inside out. It is what happens to someone who chooses a path that is not his/her own (p. 238).

In a related move, Horsford (2011) made reference to the historical trauma theory literature (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Danieli, 1998; Degruy, 2005; Duran & Duran, 1995; Duran, Duran, Heart, & Horse-Davis, 1998; Sotero, 2006) and its applicability to understanding the effects of inherent racism and racial prejudice that permeate the history of the United States more broadly, and the field of education in particular: “Populations historically subjected to long-term mass trauma exhibit a higher prevalence of disease even several generations after the original trauma occurred” (Sotero, 2006, p. 94).

The legacy of a history of trauma, as experienced by African Americans and other populations from race-marginalized backgrounds, results in what generations of indigenous people have characterized as a “soul wound” (Duran et al., 1998; Horsford, 2011; Sotero, 2006). In much the way that many of the problems existing in the contemporary Native community may be traced back to the historical trauma and soul wound of White imperialism and colonialism, so the present problems and challenges faced by African American communities have their etiology in the “traumatic physical, psychological, and emotional injury that African Americans have experienced as a result of slavery, segregation, and oppression” (Horsford, 2011, p. 103). There has, however, been limited research on the potential influence/impact of childhood experiences and generational and intergenerational trauma on leadership.

### **Missing Perspective: The Black Male School Leader**

*As Black leaders we do things differently. . . . It goes beyond what’s written in books. It goes beyond all of those theories about leadership and it goes to the core of who you are.*

(Smith, 2012)

As has been illustrated, much of the educational leadership theory is absent of the perspectives of the Black male school leader. For Black leaders writ large, the exercise of leadership is inevitably enacted within environments that “challenge or attempt to define you based on racial stereotypes, baseless assumptions, or ignorance” (Pinkett et al., 2011, p. 28). The reality of educational leadership as understood and experienced by Black leaders is, in contrast, a counter-narrative to the race-neutral, *color-blind* discourse that informs educational leadership theory and research. Gooden (2012) also highlighted the prevalence of race-neutral/color-blind discourses within the field of education research in his examination of race, racism, and the growing pressures of the urban principalship. In Gooden, we are reminded that “much of the literature developed in educational leadership in the last century essentially came about without the voices or perspectives of African Americans and this continues to be an issue” (p. 68). Gooden continued to make a more explicit reference to the multiple levels in which racism within the realms of educational leadership development “advantage Whites and subordinate Blacks and those from other racial minority groups” (p. 79).

### **Values and Culture: Myths, Legends, and the Supernatural**

Returning to Lomotey’s (1989) assertion that for the Black American culture, Black race-culture identity specifically shapes and defines not only our encounters with others, but also our individual and collective sensemaking of the world more broadly. For Black people of African descent, faith and spirituality, or what Lomotey described as the “myths, legends, and the supernatural” (p. 3), are defining features of the Black American identity. Given that “myths, legends, and the supernatural” (p. 3) are central to the Black racial identity, it was also considered critically important to review literature that documented constructs of the faith, spirituality, oral histories, myths, and traditions of people of African descent and, in particular,

those narratives that inform leadership and leadership development of African people across the Diaspora. Thus, in seeking to understand the phenomenon of what it means to be a Black male school building-level leader, it is important to consider the faith/spirituality aspects of a Black race-culture identity that remain salient in the experiential descriptions of phenomena—leading while Black and male. Much of the literature on Black school principal leadership identified a faith-based or spiritual dimension to the leadership values and philosophies of Black school principals. This is often evidenced in what may be broadly termed a leadership theology of liberation—a commitment to race equity, social justice, and community activism that actively resists race-neutral/color-blind notions of leadership (Bass, 2019; Dantley, 2003a, 2003b, 2005, 2010; Horsford et al., 2011; Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016; Lomotey, 2019; Mabokela & Madsen, 2005; Theoharis, 2009). Within the context of spirituality in leadership, viewing work as a vocation, spiritual calling, or ministry (Dantley, 2010; Lomotey, 2019) may be considered a critical aspect in the demonstration of ethical behavior, values, and practices as part of leader motivation. This is evidenced through the school principal’s demonstration of a culturally relevant *ethic of caring* (Ladson-Billings, 2009) and culturally responsive *power of caring* (Gay, 2010) as part of their leadership praxis (Bass, 2019). A school leadership theology of liberation is emphatically one of social justice advocacy, civil rights activism, community, and evidenced action-orientated commitment to a dismantling of structural and systemic forms of racism, entrenched segregation, and other inequities that discriminate and disproportionately marginalize significant numbers of students and their communities (Bell, 2004; Ginwright, 2015a, 2015b; Horsford, 2010, 2011; Murtadha & Watts, 2005). The principal or head of school—actively engages in revolutionary action to “disrupt and subvert arrangements that promote marginalization and exclusionary processes” (Theoharis, 2007, p. 223).

Building theory on Black male leadership epistemology also necessitates connecting these critical leadership values and philosophies through the structural and textural descriptions of the essence of what it means to lead while Black and male.

**The sociohistorical role of the “Black Church.”** Julian (2005) defined the Black Church as “a faith-based community structure, which is characterized by spiritual, social, and communicative patterns specific to African culture that set it apart from European and Western Christian churches of the same denomination” (p. 118). That is, any church or faith institution under a Black leadership that currently or historically ministered to predominantly Black congregations in the United States as well as a legacy of theology are pivotal in defining the leadership identity, values, and culture of Black male school leadership. Looking at the spiritual dimensions of leadership, as experienced, described, and understood by Black leaders, humanizes the Black experience and counters a history and legacy of dehumanization, trauma, and oppression of people of African descent from across the Diaspora. By contrast, critical-race leadership values and philosophies are ostensibly grounded in experiential thought and practice, historical traditions, and rituals, as well as by way of a healing response to the legacy of a history of trauma (spirit wounds/soul wounds), as previously discussed (Duran et al., 1998; Horsford, 2011; Lynn, 2006a; Sotero, 2006; Williams, 1987). Within the context of spirituality in leadership, viewing work as a vocation, “spiritual calling,” or “ministry” (Reave, 2005, p. 657; also see Dantley, 2010, p. 218; Lomotey, 2019) may be considered a critical aspect in the demonstration of ethical behavior, values, and practices as part of leader motivation. The sociohistorical role of the Black Church in the education and (educational) leadership of African Americans can be traced back to the pre-Civil War and Antebellum period (1789-1849), and arguably earlier (Carr & Kemmis, 2003; Cochran-Smith, 2012; Dantley, 2003a, 2003b, 2010;

Frazier, 1974; Lincoln, 1974; McNeil, Robertson, Dixie, & McGruder, 2014; Smith, 1994, 2014; Smith, Francis, & Harper, 2015; West, 1999). African Americans have a long and established history of being responsible for their own education and leadership. It is therefore important that any contemporary theorizing of phenomenon leading while Black and male is grounded in the history of Black education and Black educational leadership. In Frederick L. Ware's (2002) *Methodologies of Black Theology*, we are reminded that "For the first time in American History, a broad and concerted effort has been made over the past three decades to put into print beliefs and conceptions that have for centuries been transmitted orally among African Americans" (p. vii).

A phenomenon unique to the Black experience is that of critical spirituality, described as an expression of culturally congruent care, ethical behavior, values, practices, motivation, and guided moral disposition in the exercise of leadership (Dantley, 2010; Gay, 2010, Lomotey, 2019) that is committed to an "envisioned radical reconstruction" of schools and society overall (Dantley, 2010, p. 218). The critical spiritual leader comes to a deep understanding of self and also the wider social, racial, and cultural context within which educational leadership takes place, sufficient to create transformational change (Dantley, 2010). The utility of critical spirituality as part of leadership and leadership values, as enacted by African Americans, is as typically and historically evidenced, although not exclusively, within the Black Church (Echols, 2006; Frazier, 1974; Lincoln, 1974; McNeil et al., 2014; West, 1982). Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Civil-Rights activist and educator, served as a noteworthy example of an individual whose leadership praxis and professional development were nurtured through the community of the Black Church (West, 2015). Understanding of and appreciation for the sociohistorical context of critical spirituality and liberation, the Black Church, and the Black theological movement on the ways in which

African American people lead, navigate a sense double-consciousness, and seek healing from a legacy of a history of trauma are key in sense-making the phenomenon of leading while Black and male.

As Taylor, Thornton, and Chatters (1987) highlighted, the importance and influence of the Black church spans almost every aspect of African American life. So why the Black Church? The sphere of influence of the church may well be attributed to what Taylor et al. described as its position as “one of the few institutions within the black community that is primarily built, financed, and controlled by blacks” (p. 123). The authors conducted research examining the perceptions of a nationally representative cross-section of the adult Black population in the United States on the extent to which “the church has helped, hurt, or made no difference in the condition of blacks in America” (p. 129). Of a total of 2,107 Black households that participated in the study research, the vast majority (82.2%) viewed the church positively (Taylor et al., 1987). The study further revealed that “the church was an integral part of the Civil Rights Movement . . . and that the church has improved the status of blacks in society through its position as an advocate for better jobs, housing, and schooling for black Americans” (p. 133).

It is the aspect of the sociohistorical role of the Black Church as germane to the education and educational leadership of African American communities that is of importance in the building of theory and describing the essence of Black male K-12 school building-level leadership. Further, several noteworthy historical narratives have documented the intersections between church/religion/spirituality/faith and education to inform the educational experiences of African Americans.

Thomas L. Webber’s (1978) *Deep Like the Rivers: Education in the Slave Quarter Community, 1831-1835* presents real insights into the lives and community of the slave quarters

of the 19th century South. Webber's study of the history of education, as seen through the lens, perspectives, and world views of these individuals, constitutes a refreshing paradigm shift when compared to the typical historical accounts of the *slave experience* as (re)presented through the dominant narrative of the White Slave owner. Eugene D. Genovese's (1976) *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* also investigated the world of Black enslaved people, but adopted a slightly different mode of inquiry to that of Webber. Genovese set out the primary strategies and approaches adopted by the enslaved community to, in many ways, circumvent the prevalent paternalistic slaveholding culture instigated by White slave owners, and simultaneously retain the self-respect and inner freedom of enslaved Black men and women. While Genovese's position and framing of his argument are from a somewhat different perspective to that of Webber, both authors highlighted the importance of self-efficacy and agency. Webber highlighted the import and utility of agency, self-determination, resilience, and racialized cultural values as distinct from White culture, and a quest for (their own) education and schooling by Black enslaved people during slavery (Alridge, 2003; Webber, 1978). Similarly, Genovese (1976) cited the utility of the inner and spiritual strength (critical spirituality) of Black enslaved communities as being significant contributory factors for social reform. E. Franklin Frazier (1974) posited a different perspective on the sociohistorical role of the Black Church and education from those proffered by Webber (1978) and Genovese (1976), respectively. Frazier (1974) discussed the various ways in which the Black Church served as a social capital building enterprise, as an agency for social control, economy, and community building as well as educator. Frazier commented on the limited success of the Black Church denominations to establish and maintain successful schools and colleges, which he argued have been less successful in "[supporting] the intellectual development of Negroes even more than the schools



established for Negroes by the White missionaries” (p. 41). Vanessa Siddle Walker’s documentation of the educational experiences of a segregated African American school community in the South between 1935 and 1969 moves us closer in time to the continuation of de jure racial segregation during the 20th century. Walker (1996, 2000) provided evidence of the role of the Black Church in galvanizing individual and community involvement and support in the local schooling and provision of educational programs. Apropos is Nicolas Dillard, Principal of Caswell County Training School. Principal Dillard, a man of faith and active church member, exhibited a strong and purposeful approach to his leadership and effective “interactional style” of community engagement (Walker, 1996, p. 85; also see Pinkett et al., 2011; Walker, 2009, 2018).

While considering the role of the Black Church in providing a spiritual foundation from the different perspectives of Webber (1978), Genovese (1976), Frazier (1974), and Walker (1996, 2000), one may conclude that the Negro Church, religion, and demonstration of critical spirituality act as conduits for the maintenance of social cohesion among Black people. Further, authors Randall Pinkett, Jeffrey Robinson, and Philana Patterson, who each professes a faith and belief in God, opined that “spirituality has always been a cornerstone of African and other cultures” (Pinkett et al., 2011, p. 41). Exploration of the extent to which the sociohistorical role of the Black church and education influences a contemporary understanding and expression of a theology of liberation and critical spirituality, a ministry of care, and demonstration of humanistic commitment (Ingersoll & May, 2011) in turn enhances a nuanced understanding of Black male school leadership attributes.

It is also important to consider critical spirituality, outside of the confines of an establishment or institution, as part of leadership and leadership development. The concept of spirituality is very distinct and different from religion in that “religion is an institutionalized

space where spirituality may be nurtured and celebrated” (Dantley, 2010, p. 214). This is an important distinction for understanding the notion of spirituality in leadership and as part of a school leadership theology of liberation, race equity, social justice, and community activism. Dantley (2003a, 2003b, 2005, 2010) has written extensively on the utility of critical spirituality to inform the leadership praxis of African American school leaders, a phenomenon that in part builds on Cornel West’s (1999) notions of prophetic pragmatism. In his review of 57 research reports on Black women principals for the period 1993 to 2015, Lomotey (2019) observed that “the centrality of family, community, and spirituality is essential in the lives of many Black leaders” (p. 339). Lomotey further noted that

religion is a fundamental component of the lives of Black women principals. It is, they believe, pivotal to their leadership; they rely on it every day. They credit their religious belief for their achievements. As it relates to their leadership, these women are inspired, motivated, and confident in their responsibilities in part because of their faith in religion. (p. 339)

Continuing the exploration of spirituality as part of leadership attributes, I have, through earlier empirical research, also explored spirituality as part of race-/color-conscious approaches to leadership in support of the leadership development of Black male principals and senior school leaders (Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2015). Fry (2003) defined spiritual leadership as “the values, attitudes, and behaviors necessary to intrinsically motivate one’s self and others so that they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership” (pp. 694-695).

Within the context of spirituality in leadership, viewing work as a vocation, “spiritual calling” (Reave, 2005, p. 657), or “ministry” (Dantley, 2010, p. 218) that is “motivated by a *humanistic commitment* to making a difference in the lives of disadvantaged students” (Ingersoll & May, 2011, p. 2) is also considered a critical aspect in the demonstration of ethical behavior, values, and practices as part of leader motivation. The critical spiritual leader demonstrates care

through ethical behavior, values, practices, and motivation (Beals, 2012; Dantley, 2003a, 2003b, 2010; Echols, 2006). A burgeoning body of scholarship is exploring the nature of spiritual values and practice as an attribute of effective leadership, particularly in defining critical-race paradigms of leadership (Bridges, 2001; Dantley, 2003a, 2003b, 2005, 2010; Fry, 2003; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2004; Pinkett et al., 2011; Reave, 2005; Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2015; Stewart, 1999; Tisdell, 2003; West, 1982). The spiritual values and practices attributed to effective leadership are very much associated—almost synonymous—with the attributes of the transformational educational leadership phenomenon. Indeed, Dantley (2010) proffered that “principals who are transformative leaders are those who allow their spiritual selves to assist them in the execution of their leadership responsibilities” (p. 215).

Building on the earlier critical review and problematizing of a normative paradigm of transformational leadership, the concept of transformational leadership arguably is, for Black principals and heads of school—synonymous with a critical spirituality-centered leadership praxis (Carr & Kemmis, 2003; Cochran-Smith, 2012; Dantley, 2003a, 2003b, 2005, 2010; Echols, 2006; Frazier, 1974; Lincoln, 1974; McNeil et al., 2014; Smith, 1994, 2014; Smith et al., 2015; West, 1982, 1999). The spiritually conscious Black male school building-level leader comes to a deep understanding of self and also of the wider social, racial, and cultural context within which educational leadership takes place, sufficient to create transformational change (Dantley, 2010). A theology of liberation and critical spirituality ignites in these leaders a spiritual calling or ministry that is considered a critical aspect in the demonstration of ethical behavior, values, and practices as part of leader motivation.

Reave (2005) asserted that “In the case of effective leadership, we shall find that spirituality expresses itself not so much in words or preaching, but in the embodiment of spiritual

values such as integrity, and in the demonstration of spiritual behaviour such as expressing caring and concern” (pp. 656-657). The critical spiritual Black male school building-level leader demonstrates a spiritual calling or *ministry of care* through ethical behavior, values, practices, and leader motivation. For the critical spiritual educational leader, leadership praxis is one that is committed to an “envisioned radical reconstruction” (Dantley, 2010, p. 218) of schools and, ultimately, society overall.

Continuing to build theory and understanding of the factors—“myths, legends, and the supernatural” (Lomotey, 1993, p. 3)—and also the range of critical race leadership philosophies that underscore descriptions of Black male school building-level leadership, it is also important to consider the historical moments. The historicity of the wisdoms, knowledge, and traditions of peoples from the African Diaspora as pertaining to education, educational leadership, and leadership development is further and particularly important. Within the spirit of *Sankofa*, a word and mystical bird from the Akan people of Ghana, symbolizing the wisdom of learning from the past in order to build for the future, so contemporary approaches to educational leadership and leadership development benefit from an (re)examination of the historicity of ideology and praxis in support of the education of Black and other race-marginalized communities in America. So rather than being a “new or faddish” approach to leadership, African-centered models of leadership are in many respects reminiscent of past pedagogical practices and leadership, indigenous wisdoms, grounded in African knowledge, oral traditions, and storytelling; they look forward to providing contemporary examples of strategies utilized by previous generations of Black school principals, teachers, and educators in support of both the education of children and sustaining their own personal leadership development. That is the spirit of *Sankofa*.

A discourse on African-centered and other non-Western models of leadership and leadership development therefore both is timely and enhances our understanding of the leadership of Black male principals and heads of school. During the mid-2000s, Dr. Joyce King (AERA past president, 2015) and other scholars progressed an AERA-commissioned initiative, the Commission on Research in Black Education (CORIBE), intent on exploring opportunities to provide culturally sensitive mentoring experiences for historically underrepresented groups. The edited findings of the commissioned activities are found in King's (2005) *Black Education: A Transformative Research and Action Agenda for the New Century*. Looking specifically at approaches to leadership and professional development, Tillman (2005) argued that culturally sensitive approaches to adult development, grounded in African-centered traditions, would be more beneficial in the support and development of Black educators and professionals.

Echols (2006) highlighted the often unique and distinct adaptive challenges associated with race, attitudes, organizational structures, and policies as encountered by Black principals, and requiring psychosocial support, intimate care, and empathy. According to Echols, for Black principals, mentoring and mentoring support are closely connected to self-efficacy and spiritual belonging. This is very different and distinct from Homer's (Greek *Odyssey*) Eurocentric model and interpretation of the mentoring relationship.

Dr. Leon D. Caldwell, a culturally competent educational consultant and psychologist, described this self-efficacy and spiritual belonging that people of African heritage exercise as being culturally authentic. This cultural authenticity, grounded in African-centered traditions and culture, is inclusive of God, spirituality, ritual study, worship, ancestors, community, and immediate and extended family (Caldwell, 2000; Pinkett et al., 2011). Cultural authenticity, informed by "cultural memory" (Love, 2014, p. 293) of a shared African/diasporic history and

heritage, undergirds African-centered leadership development models grounded in African-centered philosophy and cultural traditions and perspectives. Further, as Jinadu (2014) reminded us:

traditional African philosophy as it's being used here refers to the indigenous ways by which Africans [and peoples from the African Diaspora] from time immemorial, before the advent of colonialism, have been reflecting on their daily experiences as individuals or groups. The mode of reflection could be theoretical or practical as the situations dictate. (p. 184)

In turning specifically to adult learning, Brookfield (2003) proffered the term *African American lifeworld* (p. 158) to describe the historical and sociopolitical context of systemic racism and oppression, “cultural memory” (Love, 2014, p. 293) that informs the ways in which African Americans construct and formulate paradigms of knowledge (mental frameworks) and sense of reality (Echols, 2006). Considerable noteworthy aspects of African-centered leadership and leadership development have been appropriated, often as part of a misguided act and demonstration of malefic generosity by White hegemony, into normalized, dominant paradigms of leadership and leadership development (Brookfield, 2005; Freire, 1970). The (mis)appropriation of distinctive elements of indigenous, African-centered wisdoms and traditions, such as the use of culturally responsive proverbs, aphorisms, folklore, and storytelling, are often colonized without a sense and appreciation of the cultural sensitivity, location, and context through which the wisdom and philosophy emerged. To illustrate, there is increasing interest in the African leadership philosophy of *Ubuntu*, popularized through the leadership stance exhibited by the former President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela (Stengel, 2010). However, the use of the term *Ubuntu* by White hegemony and leadership theorists, developed in part to describe a communal humanism—*I am what I am because of who we all are* (Ventor, 2004)—found in Blacks but lacking in Whites, particularly in Zimbabwe and South Africa, is

oxymoronic. In centering race, specifically the Black American experience in the research project, there is a return to the authentic use of oral storytelling traditions to describe the essence of the phenomenon, leading while Black and male.

Leadership development models grounded in African-centered traditions and philosophies are by their very nature communal (Ani, 2007; Asante, 1995, 2003; Harris & Smith, 1999; Hilliard, 2000, 2002; Hopson et al., 2010; Tolliver, 2010), and founded on the collective of the West African proverb “*It takes a whole village to raise a child*” (Adelekan, 2004, p. 65), as evidenced in the “What’s Happening?” mentoring support of the *Habari gani menta* (Ross, 2014). By their very nature, the values and culture that inform the leadership models of people of African descent are communicated, shared, disseminated through oral histories, folklore, aphorisms, and proverbs of the myths, legends, and supernatural (Lomotey, 1993, p. 3) that define the people. The following are examples of leadership models and influences that are grounded in African-centered philosophical thoughts, cultural traditions, and perspectives, and which have considerable relevance in considering critical-race approaches to leadership.

Anansi leadership draws on the philosophies of Anansi the spider, also known as Ananse, Anancy, Kweku Ananse, or Aunt Nancy (Garner, 2014; Marshall, 2012), a West African folklore character, developed as part of the oral traditions of the Asante people of Ghana, representing wisdom and creativity (Garner, 2014; Marshall, 2012). Stories of Anansi were safeguarded as part of the ancestral wisdoms and oral storytelling during the enslavement and forced migration of peoples of African descent. Today, Anansi stories may be found across the African Diaspora—the Americas, Caribbean—Jamaica in particular, the United Kingdom, and globally (Garner, 2014; Marshall, 2012; Stewart, 2013). Anansi leadership traits include cunningness, wisdom, visionary, caring, endurance, and humility (Marshall, 2012; Stewart, 2013). Stewart

(2013) built on the oral history and folklore to develop Anansi—a spider’s view on leadership. Six of the eight legs of the spider are representative of leadership traits commonly associated with Anansi, as illustrated in Figure 3 below. The remaining two of the eight—the front two legs of the spider—are subject to one’s own personal definition. For these are the legs that one as a leader will have to stand on by oneself:

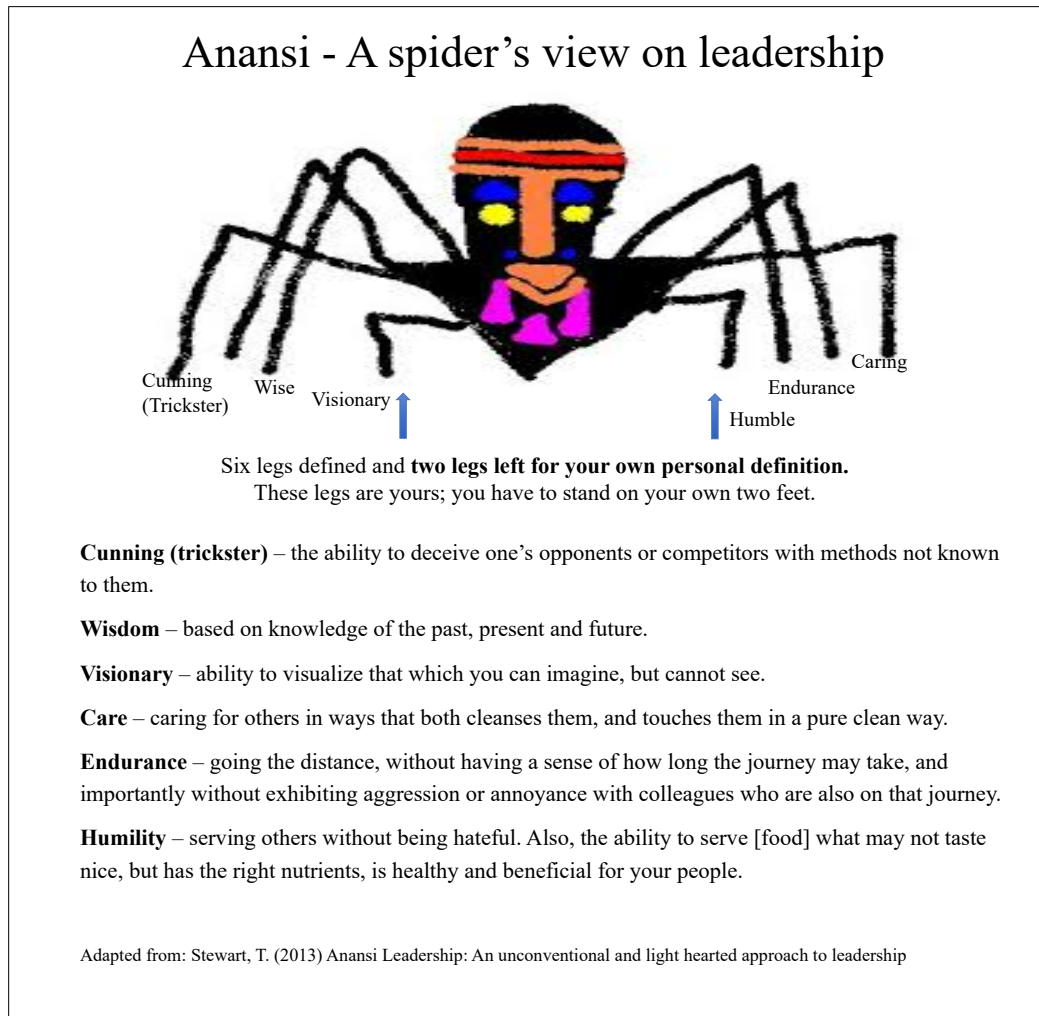


Figure 3. Anansi—A spider’s view of leadership

African folklore provides an account of the term *Habari gani menta*, “mentor,” which predates the Greek and Roman interpretations of the term. Ross (2014) noted that according to ancient African customs and traditions:



When a child was born, each village shared the responsibility for raising and educating the child into the customs and traditions associated with that village. While the child had contact with every member of the village, there was always one older child (not a family member) who would be assigned the responsibility to ask questions and listen carefully to the younger child. In Swahili, this questioning person was called, “*Habari gani menta*,” which in English means “the person who asks what’s happening.” (p. ix)

A core responsibility of the *Habari gani menta*, a term often translated as “mentor” was to ensure that mentees were sufficiently supported to avoid feeling disconnected from the village and community.

Intergenerational Brotherhoods are dynamic groups established to support the wellness, empowerment, and leadership development of African American men across age ranges. Similar sisterhood groups also exist. Intergenerational relationships may be described as those that feature

involvement of all generations, irrespective of age, gender, race, location and socioeconomic status; uniting effectively in the process of generating, promoting, and utilizing ideas, knowledge, skills, attitudes and values in an interactive way; and applying the outcomes of such unification and interactions to the improvement of self and the community. (Oduaran & Oduaran, 2004, pp. 173-174)

In commenting on the benefits and applicability of intergenerational relationships, Hoffman (2003) stated, “The principle of intergenerational support present in Africa should be recognised, supported and harnessed into creative programmes, as it is and will continue to be the guiding principle of social organisation on the continent” (p. 175).

The intergenerational contract is essentially embedded as a way of living in Africa (Hoffman, 2003). While an increasingly growing movement, research and available literature on organizational structures and operations of Intergenerational Brotherhoods are limited, arguably intentionally so. The Brotherhood of Elders Network (BOEN), based in the Northern California/Bay area, is an example of a vibrant, integrated brotherhood (BOEN, 2015; Ginwright, 2015a). The BOEN is structured to support collaboration and effective leadership development

opportunities across three generations of African American men: (a) Elders—men 55 years and older; (b) Brother Manhood—men age 35-55 years old; and (c) Warriors—young men 20-35 years old. The collective knowledge, experience, action, and wisdom of these Black men, typically representing hundreds of years, is used in meaningful ways to support and advance a “community” of brotherhood learning, and leadership is a continuous two-way and reciprocal communication circle in these organizations, irrespective of the generational position—elder, brother manhood, or warrior—that individual members hold (Hoffman, 2003; Oduaran & Oduaran, 2004).

*Jegna*, an Ethiopian (Amharic) word—*Jegna/Jegnoch* (plural)—and broadly translated as “excellence in our own tradition” (Hilliard, 2002; Tillman, 2005), are special people who have demonstrated determination and courage in the protection of their people, land, and culture, and show diligence and dedication to people. Notably, *Jegnochs* are known for their exceptionally high-quality work and dedication to the untiring development of their young, very much akin to an elder (wisdom) within a village (Hilliard, 2000, 2002; Tillman, 2005; Toure, 2012). Tillman (2005) pointed to the applicability of a *Jegna* phenomenon by citing an example of where she served as *Jegna* to two doctoral candidates under her care.

In 1966, Dr. Maulana Karenga created the philosophy of *Kwanzaa* to support the importance of collective collaboration between peoples of African American heritage, and specifically to promote self-determination and collective responsibility through the use of the *Nguzo Saba*, The seven principles of Blackness (Karenga, 1977). The cultural idea and expression of the seven principles of Blackness, the *Nguzo Saba*, are summarized in Figure 4 below:

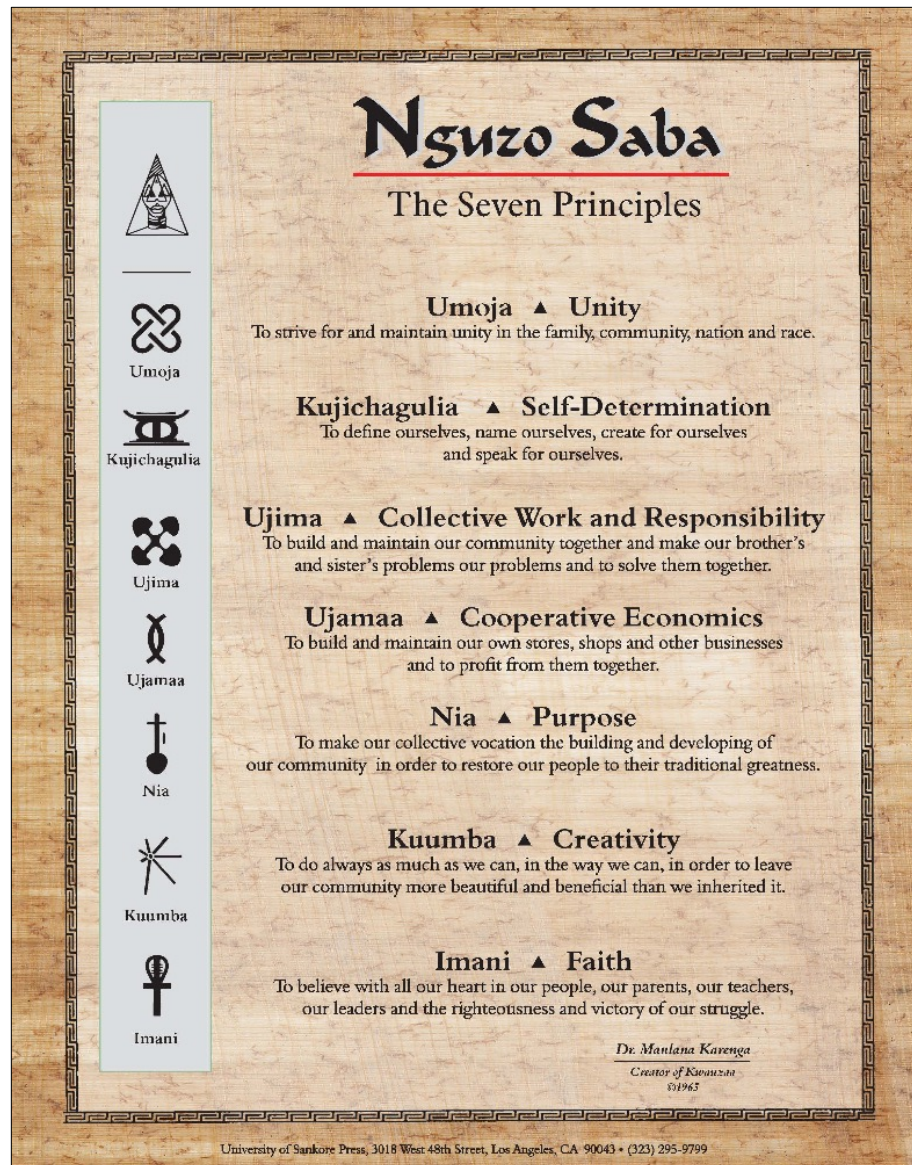


Figure 4. Nguzo Saba, the seven principles

Application of the *Nguzo Saba*, seven principles to inform leadership is not new. Pinkett et al. (2011) considered the *Nguzo Saba* (seven principles of Blackness) as a means through which to codify “the values that have historically kept our [African American] community together when political, economic, social, and institutional forces attempted to tear us apart” (p. 39). Further, Pinkett et al. found that the sense of pride that is inculcated through an

understanding of the history, heritage, and cultural capital of the African American experience, and pride that it instilled in one's identity, is present among other accomplished African American leaders and professionals.

The notion and foundations of the African philosophy of *Ubuntu*, which broadly translates as “human kindness,” have considerable applicability in educational leadership and leadership development theory, research, and practice (Bush, 2007; Venter, 2004). *Ubuntu* centers on collective personhood and morality as evidenced through various human acts, clearly visible in social, political, and economic situations as well as among family (Mbigi, 1997). The common expression and tradition “*Ubuntu nguntu ngabanye abantu*” that we owe our selfhood to others, that we are first and foremost social beings, are, as previously mentioned, lucidly epitomized through the leadership style of His Excellency Nelson Mandela (Stengel, 2010). Mandela's approach and style of leadership demonstrated that *Ubuntu*, the philosophy of human kindness, is not one of weakness but one of strength represented through community, social, and political activism for the eradication of economic and social justice and inequality in support of a greater, common cause. The philosophy of *Ubuntu* is transcultural, highlighting that notions of effective leadership are multifaceted, and necessitates a commitment to social justice and equity. Further, the philosophy of *Ubuntu* has much resonance with the culturally relevant core tenet of the *ethic of caring* (Bass, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 1998, 2009b) and culturally responsive *power of caring* (Gay, 2010), and is as demonstrated in the exercise of a critical spirituality leadership *ministry of care* (Dantley, 2003a, 2003b, 2005, 2010; Lomotey, 2019).

There is considerable corollary between the foundations of *Ubuntu* and the increasing prevalence of the system leadership phenomenon in educational leadership. Within the context of education, system leadership refers to collaborative approaches to leadership that extend beyond

a single school site, such as is required in the leadership of networks of schools (Bush, 2007; Highman, Hopkins, & Matthews, 2009). Yet, traditional interpretations of system leadership present a normative, Eurocentric paradigm of leadership that is limited in an articulation of forms of collaborative school leadership, as expressed by a racially diverse school leadership workforce (Turnbull, 2011). Bush (2007) highlighted the utility of the principles of *Ubuntu* as part of a changing leadership paradigm in schools and also the need for more research to examine the extent to which *Ubuntu* and other African models of leadership may influence school leadership more broadly. Further, evidence has suggested that the notion of *Ubuntu*, once incorporated into the leadership approach of participating educational professionals, provides greater insights into how racial identity, values, beliefs, and racialized paradigms of philosophical thought may be utilized to enhance our understanding and interpretation of leadership.

Looking specifically at the field of educational leadership, Alston (2005) presented a composite of African-centered leadership models and philosophical thought through the incorporation of indigenous wisdoms in her development of a conceptual framework for consideration and exploration of the educational leadership experiences of Black female school superintendents in particular, as well as the leadership by people from race-marginalized backgrounds more broadly. Alston drew on three indigenous, African-centered wisdoms and knowledge: the *Nguzo Saba*; the ancient Kemetic concept of *Ma'at* and representation of truth, justice, righteousness, harmony, balance, reciprocity, and order; and the African concept of *Sankofa* used to emphasize the importance of “historicizing self in a social and political context” (p. 684). She considered the utility of these African-centered traditions as appropriate culturally sensitive research approaches for examining the lived leadership experiences of Black female educational leaders as well as leaders from race-marginalized backgrounds.

## **Lived Experiences of Black Male School Leaders**

Lomotey and Lowery (2014) conducted extensive research and analysis of existing studies of the lived experiences of Black principals leading in urban school contexts. The authors conducted a review of a total of 31 studies exploring “aspects of the relationships between Black principals and Black students’ (p. 329) in predominantly Black urban schools. Of the 31 studies, eight focused specifically on Black male school principals—five dissertation studies (Derrick, 2009; Henderson, 2008; Jones, 2010; Khalifa, 2008; Miller, 2011) and three journal articles (Brown & Beckett, 2007; Gooden, 2005; Walker & Byas, 2003). An overview of each of the eight studies is provided in Table 12 below.

In their review, Lomotey and Lowery (2014) noted that the eight studies emphasized four characteristics of Black male principals, namely: (a) a focus on community involvement; (b) parental involvement; (c) providing a nurturing environment for students; and (d) a commitment to student academic performance. The authors also conducted a related review of 14 of the 31 studies that focused on effective/“successful” principal attributes and noted characteristics (a), (c), and (d) as being identified as the three most common characteristics of “successful” Black principals, both male and female. Community involvement as evidenced through “being an example of leadership” (p. 344) was particularly salient for Black male principals. Lomotey and Lowery’s research and associated referenced studies provide invaluable insights into the Black male school principal leadership experience and make a significant contribution to the research and scholarship on Black male principal leadership.

Table 12

*Overview of Lomotey and Lowery's (2014) Reviewed Studies on Black Male School Principals*

<b>Author/Year</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Data</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Additional Information</b>
Brown & Beckett (2007)	Journal Article	Interviews	One Black male elementary/ middle school principal	Encouraged teachers to reach out; facilitated parent involvement; interest convergence (a tenet of critical race theory employed).	Communication barriers in a diverse community
Derrick (2009)	Dissertation	Qualitative (portraiture): interviews, observations, and focus groups	Two Black male high school principals	Mentoring has positive effect; self-esteem, self-confidence, and ambition positively impacted.	No focus on race by anyone
Gooden (2005)	Journal Article	Case study, interviews, and document analysis	One Black male high school principal	Bureaucrat/administrator and ethno-humanist roles. Ethno-humanist role critical for effectiveness.	
Henderson (2008)	Dissertation	Survey, interviews, and focus group	Six Black male high school principals	Focus on culture of inclusion; love and support focus; self-respect and student-centeredness; commitment to academic success and life of students; community involvement; importance of inclusive and caring environment; belief that students can achieve; paternalistic role models; consistent and fair; concern for students' lives	Black principals develop extensive skills to deal with urban student academic success

Table 12 (continued)

<b>Author/Year</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Data</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Additional Information</b>
Jones (2010)	Dissertation	Interviews	Six Black (5 high school and 1 elementary school) male principals; a retired principal and an assistant superintendent	Hat-switching, code-switching, and church as center; spirituality-influenced leadership through family values, relationship building, serving opportunities.	Pastors and principals; spirituality important
Khalifa (2008)	Dissertation	Qualitative observation, field notes, interviews, and document review	One Black male high school principal	Student and community relationships; earned trust and credibility and had rapport; challenged teachers.	At-risk alternative school student success
Miller (2011)	Dissertation	Interviews	One Black male high school principal	Autocratic, dogmatic, immoral, directive, intimidating, charismatic, and caring.	Exploration of one principal's leadership style; controversial but successful
Walker & Byas (2003)	Journal Article	Interviews, speeches, and document review	One effective Black male high school principal	Focus on achievement; community support; public communication/ marketing; community leader; exemplary leaders; sought tight-knit community.	

Adapted from Lomotey, K., & Lowery, K. (2014)



I also previously conducted research on Black male school principal leadership attributes. The research project, *Succession Planning in London Secondary Schools: Implications for Male African-Caribbean Leaders* [*The London Study*] (Smith, 2012), examined the experiences and perceptions of eight male leaders of African Caribbean heritage in a headteacher (principal) or senior leadership position in secondary schools in London, England. This phenomenological research project and inquiry exploring Black male school leadership built on this previous research project. *The London Study* research was of pivotal importance in its critical exploration of educational leadership and leadership development as described, experienced, and understood by Black male school leaders.

The findings reported in *The London Study* highlighted the factors that constitute effective and ineffective mechanisms of leadership development for male secondary school leaders of African Caribbean heritage. The findings made several contributions to the current literature and provided additional evidence that, from a pipeline perspective, the underrepresentation of male African Caribbean leaders can be directly linked to several inhibiting factors. Participating Black male senior secondary school leaders spoke extensively on the limitations of dominant ideologies, and research in educational leadership to articulate fully the nature and benefits of the knowledge, experience, expertise, and cultural competencies that male African Caribbean heritage secondary school leaders contribute to any expression of educational leadership praxis. One leader summarized this thus:

As Black leaders we do things differently. . . . It can be interpreted in all sorts of manners and ways to such an extent that the capability or the capacity of the Black leader is called into question. . . . They think leadership in a one size fits all. . . . [sadly] the educational paradigms used to develop leadership does not always take into consideration the cultural skills and talents that Black leaders bring with them. . . . It goes beyond . . . what's written in books. It goes beyond all of those theories about leadership and it goes to the core of who you are. (Smith, 2012)

While encountering a wide range of structural inhibitors, racial microaggressions, and invisible selection criteria, participating male African Caribbean leaders recognized the nature and multidimensionality of their racial and cultural identity and ability as race-marginalized individuals to traverse dominant cultural environments and educational professional spaces successfully (Lynn, 2006a). Over half of the participating Black male senior leaders in *The London Study* identified culturally congruent networking, role models, coaching and mentoring as effective and beneficial tactics in supporting their own leadership ambitions.

The participants' commitment to and exercise of culturally congruent approaches to leadership was particularly evident across a number of aspects of leadership. Leaders' sense and need to be in service to and support of one's community, be that geographically located or culturally and ethnically congruent, in order to '*make a difference*,' was cited as one of the primary reasons that participants decided to pursue a career within the education profession and directed leadership praxis. One school leader, in particular, was very clear that service to the community was an integral element of his vision for education. This was further evidenced in the choice of schools where participating school leaders led. There was a strong association between cultural and ethnic identity of senior school leader and the challenging characteristics of the school where they assume leadership. There was an overall consensus among participants, and further evidenced in the Ofsted (2012) national external assessment of schools performance reviews of the characteristics and demographic profiles of their respective schools, that male secondary school leaders of African Caribbean heritage are most likely to be located in challenging school environments, with above average levels of social deprivation. Notwithstanding the concerns about the seemingly limited 'choice' of schools led by male leaders of African Caribbean heritage, all participants demonstrated a genuine vocation,

overwhelming desire and commitment to ‘serve’ and lead in culturally and ethnically diverse schools. Male senior education leaders of African Caribbean heritage choose to lead in challenging, urban schools as part of “*a service*” to their communities, a recognition that “*we are still bound by cultural norms,*” as well as a desire to “*change people’s lives.*” Commitment to these strong internal values and ideals were openly and positively communicated throughout their schools, teaching teams, students, parents, and the wider community.

Over half of all respondents in *The London Study* identified both “good leadership role-modelling” and “access to coaching and mentoring” as effective tactics in supporting leadership ambitions. The research demonstrated that “the benefits of networking, role models, coaching and mentoring were linked to culturally congruent, customised leadership development opportunities” (Smith, 2012, p. 72).

The extent to which participants felt that senior colleagues and professional networks specifically supported them in the pursuit and exercise of their leadership and leadership development was variable. While over half of all participants signalled support from senior colleagues as a key enabler, overall this ranked a joint seventh position (from a total of 17 identified enablers). There was also some evidence of the benefits of genuinely supportive professional networks. For example, one participant spoke of the willingness of his supportive professional networks “*to go the extra mile.*” However, overall, fewer participants identified professional networks, ranked 11, as a key enabler. The influence of close family members, friends, community, and other networks was deemed as being of pivotal importance in the development and exercise of their leadership. The majority of participants were positively influenced, supported, and encouraged by close family members, friends, and other members of their local community networks. Students, both former and current, were also seen by most of

the senior leaders interviewed as a significant source of encouragement and support, and an enabling factor in the development and exercise of their leadership.

Faith as an attribute of spirituality—a belief in God or a Supreme Being—was identified by the participants in *The London Study* as a culturally prominent component and enabling influence in the pursuit of leadership ambitions and leadership praxis. When asked to describe the key sources of support and encouragement throughout their professional journey thus far, most of the participating male African Caribbean heritage school leaders spoke of the utilization of faith-based attributes to support and facilitate their personal career pathways and leadership ambitions. A number of the school leaders interviewed spoke in detail specifically on the role that faith played in their respective approaches to leadership and leadership praxis.

*The London Study* research project highlighted the need for effective and sustainable strategies to address the inequalities in school leadership diversity and the lack of representative role models within schools, as well as the challenges specific to aspiring head teachers and senior secondary school leaders of African Caribbean heritage. The research findings documented the perspectives of these school leaders, nationally recognized for their leadership and management, and in so doing made a contribution to the limited research and literature on race-conscious (Hall & Allen, 1989) perspectives and understanding of transformational educational leadership. The research further provided evidence that participating male African Caribbean heritage secondary school leaders are intentional in their approach to leadership and leadership praxis. For the majority, leadership was motivated by a sense of a spiritual-centered moral purpose (Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010) and commitment to providing an equitable education to students, families, communities, and “significant others” (Maylor, Ross, Rollock, & Williams, 2006) from ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds (Tillman, 2004b). These factors are generally

excluded in the research, theory, and formulation of paradigms of educational leadership and leadership development.

### **Phenomenology as Philosophy and Methodology**

The historical and philosophical foundations of phenomenology are grounded in the work of mathematician Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) (Husserl, 1999). Other contributors to the philosophical foundations of phenomenology include: Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Alfred Schütz (1899-1959), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), Clark E. Moustakas (1923- 2012), Max van Manen (1942-), and others who have built on, critiqued, or refined Husserl's initial thinking on the philosophy and methodology of phenomenological research (Creswell, 2013; Laverty, 2003; Scott & Morrison, 2006).

Phenomenological research describes the structure of experience and elucidates the essence and key principles that give meaning and sense making to lived experiences.

Phenomenology seeks “to make the invisible visible” (Laverty, 2003, p. 27). This phenomenological research study “describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences” towards a collective “description of the universal essence (Creswell, 2013, p. 76), or as van Manen (1990) described it, “a grasp of the very nature of the thing” (p 177), of what it means to be a Black male K-12 school building-level leader.

### **Methodology vs. Method**

The distinction of phenomenology as a methodological approach to research rather than a method is an important one. Methodology allows latitude for creativity in research design and approach applicable to the research inquiry and phenomena explored. Methodology is not bound by exact knowledge and procedure as prescribed by method, but rather allows, even encourages,

the use of good judgment and responsible principles (Creswell, 2013; Laverty, 2003; Madison, 1988; Polkinghorne, 1989; van Manen, 1997).

Traditional phenomenology philosophy recommends that the researcher discuss his or her personal experiences with the phenomenon in an endeavor to *bracket*, suspend his or her personal past knowledge and/or experience while determining the experiences of others of the phenomenon as part of the research inquiry (Creswell, 2013). My role as researcher and attempts to bracket myself from the phenomenology are detailed in Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology. Also, there are potential tensions of adopting a normative, traditional approach of researcher bracketing while applying a critical research methodological approach in documenting the lived experiences of people from race-marginalized backgrounds. Paris and Winn (2014) also highlighted and problematized a less-than-critical application of traditional qualitative research methods when used to explore the humanized, lived experiences of peoples from race-marginalized communities.

The history of qualitative and ethnographic work seeking, at worst, to pathologize, exoticize, objectify, and name as deficient communities of color and other marginalized populations in the United States and beyond, and at best, to take and gain through research but not to give back, stretches back across the 19th century and forward to the current day. (p. xvi; also see Chrisler, 2015)

In conducting the research inquiry, I acknowledged that exploration of a phenomenon—leading while Black and male—is supported by a critical methodological approach that authentically captures the essence of said phenomenon. The multiple perspectives of the identity of Black male school building-level leaders, as related to understanding and describing what it means to be a Black male K-12 school building-level leader and as posited by Yoon (2018), “breaks past normative conceptions of educational leaders as White, straight, cis-male, typically abled, English-speaking, school principals” (p. 115). This has significant implications for

exploring “the situated meaning of a human in the world” (Laverty, 2003, p. 24), as perceived, described, experienced, and understood by Black male school leaders. Yoon’s (2018) commentary on applying critical research perspectives to school leadership further provided helpful guidance in one of the core aims of this phenomenological research project—to present humanized portraits of the lived experience of leading K-12 schools while Black and male.

The centrality of context, the desire for narratives and knowledges from silenced and oppressed people, and the engagement in local projects may be why qualitative methodologies appeal so strongly to many critical scholars. Such advocacy challenges traditional assumptions about objectivity and bias; the potential for the researcher to influence the phenomenon and people in the study is not only taken for granted but also accounted for and desired. (p. 103)

In Polkinghorne (1989), we are reminded that the purpose of data collection as part of phenomenology research is to gather “reports of the experience as it actually appears in a person’s consciousness” (p. 46). Polkinghorne went on to identify three primary sources through which phenomenological researchers may generate descriptions of experiences: (a) the researcher’s personal self-reflections—this self-reflection or individual phenomenological reflection (Colaizzi, 1973) is typically only used as a preparatory step to gathering data from participants; (b) research participants’ descriptions of the experience (phenomenon) under investigation—these may be through written statements, such as questionnaires, or orally, in response to interview questions; and (c) “depictions of the experience from outside the context of the research project itself” (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 46). Such previously developed depictions of the experience (phenomenon) may be drawn from a range of sources, including philosophical texts and research articles (literature review) and creative literature and non-literary art forms, such as poetry, plays, novels, paintings, and other forms of visual representations (photo/visual elicitation methods, culturally responsive proverbs, and aphorisms) (Laverty, 2003; Polkinghorne, 1989).

A critical race theory (CRT) methodological and interpretive approach, particularly in centering race and racialized experiences (Bell, 1992) of phenomena through the use of narratives and counter-storytelling (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Matsuda, 1995) and critique of claims of colorblindness and neutrality (Crenshaw, 1988), supports a race-based dialogue and inquiry. Additionally, application of a CRT methodological approach supports a race-based dialogue and inquiry, elevates a polyvocal research presence of participating Black male principals and heads of schools, and provides a helpful lens for understanding the leadership development of “historically underrepresented professionals” (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Echols, 2006, p. 2; Lynn & Parker, 2006). This is also consistent with the use of significant statements, textural descriptions of what participants experienced of the phenomenon, and structural descriptions of the context and setting of those experiences as supported through a phenomenology research approach (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989). An expressed methodological stance of critical race phenomenology—a composite of the defining features of phenomenology (Creswell, 2013) and a CRT methodological approach to inform a critical education research inquiry (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Parker & Lynn, 2002)—is part of a continuum of a methodology movement that is “constantly open to [new] experience” (Lavery, 2003, p. 28).

### **Summary**

This chapter presented the primary literature and research relevant for understanding “the inner-relations between race, leadership, leadership development, socialization, and identity” (Floyd, 2012, p. 224) toward theorizing the phenomenon of leading while Black and male. The chapter highlighted the need to move beyond color-blind or color-evasive (Neville, et.al., 2013) theorizing of educational leadership theory, research, and practice to expand understanding of



paradigms of critical race leadership and to disrupt the normative educational leadership axiology. There is a need for more extensive research, literature, and scholarship on culturally responsive models of school leadership as well as for more critical perspectives and paradigms of leadership where the context of race and racial identity is centered. In rethinking paradigms of educational leadership as applicable and responsive to the complexity and challenges of contemporary schools and education systems, it is important to improve understanding of the range of educational leadership paradigms, experiences, and practice of Black male school building-level leaders. The leadership praxis of Black male principals and heads of school is informed by a nexus of a school leadership theology of liberation, critical spirituality, race equity, social justice, and community/civil-rights activism, considered apropos paradigms of contemporary educational (school) leadership. In looking at the leadership of Black male school building-level leaders, African-centered models of leadership provide important, formal, nuanced language in developing grounded theory and phenomena of Black male school leadership and in describing the foundational leadership attributes of leading while Black and male—care endurance, humility (Anansi leadership); valuing one’s own tradition (*Jegna*); self-determination and collective responsibility (*Nguzo Saba*); and collective personhood morality (*Ubuntu*); truth, justice, righteousness, harmony (*Ma’at*); and the importance of using the past to inform current and future leadership praxis (*Sankofa*).

The large majority of the research on Black principal leadership was conducted over the past 30 years (Lomotey & Lowery, 2014) and provided important insights into HOW Black men lead—the context, leadership attributes, leadership styles, student and community advocacy of Black male principals in urban contexts. However, there is limited in-depth research and scholarship on Black male school leaders across the range of public and private school contexts.

Importantly, research and scholarship on WHO are the Black men leading our schools—their racial and self-identity, leadership philosophies, motivators, and supports—are limited. This phenomenological research and inquiry sought to humanize Black male school leadership through descriptions of experiences of what it means to lead schools while male and Black, and in so doing sought to make a significant contribution to the limited literature and research in this area.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

*Research practices that place the perspectives of African Americans on the margins of the inquiry are challenged.*

(Tillman, 2002, p. 6)

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which the racial identities and lived experiences of Black male K-12 school building-level leaders inform their professional lives, leadership preparation, and leadership development. I used a phenomenological research design to conduct a “study of lived experiences or the life world” (Laverty, 2003, p. 22) in order to address the following research questions:

1. What experiences inform the leadership philosophy of Black male principals and heads of school regarding leadership and Black education?
2. What experiences do Black male principals and heads of school encounter related to the principalship?

Specifically, this study examined the personal experiences of Black male K-12 school building-level leaders, their description and interpretations of the meaning of the phenomenon—leading while Black and male. The critical methodology and interpretative framework of critical race theory (CRT) as applied to education research also informed the research design (Ladson-Billings, 2013; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Tate, 1997). Through the use of this methodology, I was able to critically explore, describe, and analyze the ways in which Black male school building-level leaders perceive, describe, understand, feel about, judge, remember, make sense of, and give meaning to their lives and lived experience as Black male

principals and heads of school (Creswell, 2013; Laverly, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Moustakas, 1994; Paris & Winn, 2014; Patton, 2002; Polkinghorne, 1989; Scott & Morrison, 2006; Yoon, 2018). In the section that follows, I describe my research procedures, including participant selection, data collection, and data analysis. I conclude with a discussion of how I maintained credibility, trustworthiness, and my role as the researcher.

### **Participants**

*The search is toward understanding of the experience from particular philosophical perspectives . . . as well as the horizons of participants and researcher.*

(Laverly, 2003, p. 30)

This phenomenological research project is a collective endeavor, with participating Black male school building-level leaders, “research collaborators” (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 47), who are in close(r) proximity to the research problem, contributing to the development of theory, description, and definition of the phenomenon. The research project focused on the experiences, understanding, and perceptions leading while Black and male as described by 14 current and/or previously serving Black male K-12 public, private, and independent school building-level leaders, specifically principals and heads of schools from across the United States. The nature and focus of the research study were such that participants were limited to category membership of being male; self-identifying as being Black, of African, African American, Caribbean, or Black/Afro Latino heritage; currently and/or previously serving as a school principal, school building-level leader, or head of school; employed in either a public, private, or independent school setting; located in the United States; and having largely succeeded in their professional career and school leadership.

The rationale to focus the attention of this research study on Black male school building-level leaders is twofold. First, there has been no substantive exploration of the leadership

attributes of Black male school principals and heads of schools, to inform and improve understanding of educational leadership and effective leadership attributes (Lomotey, 1989). Second, previous research in the broader domain of educational leadership, principal preparation, and leadership development has specifically focused on class of subjects with specific status characteristics (e.g., gender and/or race). For example, Horsford (2014), Gooden (2012), Gooden and Dantley (2012), Toldson (2011), Smith (2016); Brooks (2012), and Brooks and Jean-Marie (2007) have spoken extensively on the context of race and racism within the construct of educational leadership. The scholarship of Armstrong and Mitchell (2017), Dantley (2003a, 2003b, 2005, 2010), Lomotey (1989, 1993, 2019), Lomotey and Lowery (2014), Bass (2019), Tillman (2004a, 2004b), Echols (2006), Brown (2005), Murtadha and Watts (2005), and Smith (2012) focused specifically on the experiences and leadership of Black principals. There is also an increasing body of work exploring culturally congruent approaches to the leadership, principal preparation, and leadership development of Black educators more broadly. Within this tradition, this research study purposed to focus on the experiences of men.

### **Participant Selection**

Phenomenological research seeks to describe, both in detail and essence, the phenomenon being explored, and participant selection is key to this. Within a phenomenology discipline:

The aim of participant selection is to select those individuals who have lived experience that is the focus of the study, who are willing to talk about their experience, and who are diverse enough from one another who to enhance possibilities of rich and unique stories of the particular experience. (Laverly, 2003, p. 29; also see Polkinghorne, 1989; van Manen, 1997)

For the phenomenology researcher, the number of individuals selected to participate in the study is dependent on the range of experiences captured through to a point of saturation, in which a clearer understanding of the experience will not be found through further discussion

with participants (Laverty, 2003, p. 29). While diversity of participant experiences is important, as Padilla-Díaz (2015) cautioned, the more diverse the experiences of participants, the greater the challenge to find the common meanings and essence of the phenomenon under exploration.

Padilla-Díaz (2015) recommended a studied group of 3 to 15 members. A total of 14 Black male K-12 school building-level leaders participated in this phenomenology research study.

Purposive criterion sampling was used to identify appropriate participants who have all experienced the phenomenon of interest, that is leading while Black and male (Creswell, 2013; Padilla-Díaz, 2015). As Bryman (2008) stated:

[Purposive] sampling is essentially strategic and entails an attempt to establish a good correspondence between research questions and sampling. . . the researcher samples on the basis of wanting to interview people who are relevant to the research question. (p. 458)

Research participants were carefully selected based on the research project topic and associated research questions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Maxwell, 2013). This facilitated focus on a limited number of “information,” “critical cases” (Patton, 2002) that could illuminate the racialized experiences of Black male educational professionals (Jay, 2009; Tillman, 2002). Participants were selected from across the states of Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania.

An initial “invitation to participate in the research project” (Appendix A) was posted through message boards, mailing lists, and/or direct email through a variety of networks and sources, including:

- Teachers College Educational Leadership programs and contacts;
- Other university links and contacts—TC and otherwise;
- National and local political organizations;
- Professional bodies and associations;

- Social group organizations—Black Greek fraternities; Black Faith-based organizations and networks;
- Social networks—Facebook, LinkedIn, and other social media forums;
- Individual direct mailing;
- Other—personal recommendations; word of mouth; snowballing; workshop facilitation and conference presentations.

This was followed up by a formal letter invitation to participate in the research project (Appendix B). Obtaining the informed consent of research participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Groenewald, 2004) and constructing trust between researcher and participants (Madison, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Maxwell, 2013) were considered of pivotal importance from the outset of the research. Respect for the anonymity and confidentiality of individuals who provided personal accounts of their experiences was safeguarded, and every effort was made to ensure that there was no harm to participants, whether physical or psychological, at all stages of the research (De Vaus, 2005; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).

There was a three-step process to obtaining participants informed consent to participate in the research. First, current and/or previously serving Black male principals and heads of schools who met status characteristic requirements for the study were sent an invitation to participate in the research study and to complete the survey (Appendix C). The online survey included a requirement for participants to confirm their eligibility to participate in the study and to give consent before progressing through the survey. Individuals willing to volunteer to participate in the phase two and three interviews were asked to indicate this on completion of the survey. All consenting participants were then contacted and further details of the research project were explained, including what further participation would involve (interviews), as well as any

potential risks/benefits of participating in the study. School principals and heads of schools who remained interested in participating in the phase two and three interviews were asked to complete a more detailed Informed Consent Form prior to commencement of the formal research interviews. The sharing of the Informed Consent Form at this stage reinforced the purpose, procedure, and participation in the study and ascertained that participants were not only informed of the study project but also had an opportunity to reflect on their willingness to participate in the study. Finally, at each stage of study—completion of the online, descriptive Background Information Survey, and two rounds of one-on-one semi-structured, in-depth phenomenological interviews—participants were given the opportunity to raise any points for clarification in relation to the research study and/or decide to abandon their involvement in the study at any time.

A total of 26 participants, Black male school building-level leaders, completed the online (Qualtrics) background information survey. Of these, 14 also participated in two one-on-one semi-structured in-depth phenomenological interviews (Seidman, 2013; Spradley, 2016), including the use of visual elicitation methods. During the interviews, participants were invited to select an image that spoke to their individual leadership philosophy. Details of images selected are provided in Table 14 and Appendix F. The use of visual elicitation methods as part of the research design and data collection is described in further detail elsewhere in this chapter. This research study focused on the 14 Black male principals and heads of school who participated in all three stages of the data collection process (online descriptive survey and two one-on-one interviews).



## Participant Profile

All participants represented a diverse range of Black male school building-level leaders, sufficient to reach saturation to a point in order to gain a clear understanding of Black male K-12 school building-level leadership identity, and where no new perspectives on topic may be gleaned (Groenewald, 2004). Participant diversity was across geographical location, school type, grade levels served, leadership role, and number of years of experience served as a school principal or head of school, as summarized in Tables 13 and 14 below.

Table 13

### *Participating Black Male School Building-level Leaders—Diversity*

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<u>Geographic Location</u>		<u>School Type</u>	
New York	8	Public-District (D.O.E.)	10
Other Metropolitan Areas	6	Private-Independent	2
	<b>14</b>	Education Foundation	2
			<b>14</b>
<u>Grade Level</u>		<u>Leadership Role</u>	
Elementary School (Grades PK-5)	1	CEO/Executive Director	2
Middle School (Grade 6-8)	4	Education Consultant	2
Secondary (Grades 6-12)	1	University Professor / Consultant	1
High School (Grades 9-12)	6	Assistant Superintendent	1
Other (Grades PK-12)	2	Head of School	3
	<b>14</b>	Principal	4
		Assistant Principal	1
			<b>14</b>
<u>Years of Experience as a Principal or Head of School</u>			
0-3 years (Initiate)	2		
4-9 years (Warrior)	7		
10+ years (Elder)	5		
	<b>14</b>		

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Table 14

*The Initiates, Warriors, and Elders: Participant Characteristics*

	Name*	State	Grade Level	School Type	Teaching/ Education Experience	School Building- Level Leadership Experience	Leadership Role	Images
1	Craig Lee	NY	Grades 9 to 12	Traditional Public	4-9 years	Less than 3 years	Consultant	C
2	William Long	NY	Grades 6 to 8	Traditional Public	15-19 years	Less than 3 years	AP/Principal	E, F
3	Blizzy, Ed.D.	NY	Grades 6 to 8	Traditional Public	25-29 years	4-9 years	Consultant	G
4	Eric Carter	MA	Grades 9 to 12	Traditional Public	20-24 years	4-9 years	School Principal	J
5	Thomas Jean	NY	Grades 9 to 12	Traditional Public	15-19 years	4-9 years	School Principal (former)	I
6	Frederick Monroe, Ph.D.	NY	Grades 9 to 12	Traditional Public	25-29 years	4-9 years	School Principal	H
7	Eric Pounds	DL	PK to 12	Private School	25-29 years	4-9 years	Head of School	B, J
8	Hadley Truant	CT	Grades 9 to 12	Traditional Public	25-29 years	4-9 years	Assistant Superintendent	I, J
9	Carlos Washburn	NY	Grades 6 to 8	Traditional Public	15-19 years	4-9 years	School Principal	A, E
10	Ali	NY	Grades 6 to 12	Education Foundation/ Network	15-19 years	10 or more years	President/CEO	D, K
11	Damani Camara	MA	Grades 6 to 8	Traditional Public	20-24 years	10 or more years	Head of School	F
12	James Johnson	PA	PK to 5	Independent School	20-24 years	10 or more years	Head of School	J
13	Baba R	MA	Grades K to 12	National Education Practitioners Organization	50-plus years	10 or more years	Executive Director	
14	Frank Stanley, Ed.D.	NY	Grades 9 to 12	Traditional Public	30-34 years	10 or more years	University Professor/ Consultant	D

\* All of the names of the participants are pseudonyms

## **Data Collection**

*Strong bonds build trust and foster open conversations with research participants about areas ordinarily left unspoken.*

(Charmaz, 2006, p. 113)

The primary data-gathering methods were an online (Qualtrics) open-ended background information survey (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014), requesting key topic and demographic information, and use of two one-on-one semi-structured in-depth phenomenological interviews (Seidman, 2013; Spradley, 2016). My role as a researcher and as a research instrument was also a considerable aspect of the data collection process, with participants seen as active and informed “research collaborators” in the research project (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 47). Interviews also incorporated the use of visual elicitation methods to stimulate and support conversation and reflection (Harper, 2002; Hartas, 2015; Lapenta, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Prosser & Loxley, 2015). In addition, participants were invited to make available any secondary data or documentation relating to their leadership context, that they felt relevant and helpful. Several participants shared copies of their resumes, press releases, newsprint, articles, videos, and other media release documentation of their leadership and professional career, and also publicly available school marketing materials and resources. A primary aim of the data collection process was to gather data that “[would] lead to a textural and structural description of the experiences, and ultimately provide an understanding of the common experiences of the participants” (Creswell, 2013, p. 81) and descriptions of leading while Black and male.

### **Background Information Survey**

With surveys and questionnaires the researcher is able to capture key basic information which may escape one during the course of the interview. An online (Qualtrics) open-ended descriptive survey was developed and widely distributed among constituent category members.

The survey requested key topic and participant demographic information across the areas of personal details; professional experience and qualifications; current or most recent school leadership; school staffing; student population; principal preparation and leadership development; and social networks. The development and design of the survey instrument were informed by a previous survey constructed as part of the *London Study* (Smith, 2012) used to assess perceived inhibitors and enablers to leadership ambitions of male school leaders of African Caribbean heritage in London, England. That initial survey design was in turn based on findings presented from empirical research from related studies on inhibitors and enablers to leadership ambitions of male and female school leaders of a Caribbean background in the United Kingdom (McNamara, Howson, Gunter, & Fryer, 2010; Smith, 2012). A total of 26 Black male school building-level leaders completed the online survey, of which 14 also participated in two one-on-one interviews. This phenomenology research project and report was limited to the 14 participating school leaders who completed all three phases of the data collection process. In making the decision to use written, descriptive questionnaires, I acknowledge the limitations of using questionnaires alone, as posited by Stevick (1971), to potentially distract or prestructure participants' responses. The design of the research project was such that "recorded interviews were found to correct these problems"

(p. 135; also see Polkinghorne, 1989).

### **Phenomenological In-depth Semi-structured Interviews**

In-depth open or semi-structured interviews are considered the most appropriate data-gathering strategy for phenomenological research (Kyale & Brinkman, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2010; Padilla-Díaz, 2015; Polkinghorne, 1989). "These two types of interviews allow the researcher to address the phenomenon profoundly, providing a space of aperture for the

informants to express their experiences in detail, approaching reality as faithfully as possible” (Padilla-Díaz, 2015, p. 104).

Citing Rubin and Rubin (2012), Padilla-Díaz (2015) further recommended more than one participant interview, in that additional interviews “verify the information obtained, allow the participant the opportunity to provide further detail or expand on the information offered and lastly, for the participant’s final approval” (p. 104).

The research design intentionally incorporated two individual one-on-one, in-depth semi-structured interview conversations with participants as part of the exploration of experiences of leading while Black and male. Interviews were constructed using a hybrid of Seidman’s (2013) three-interview series and Spradley’s (2016) six-phase framework. The second and third phases of the data-collection process consisted of in-depth phenomenological, semi-structured interview conversations. Interview questions were “directed to the participant’s experiences, feelings, beliefs and convictions about the theme in question” (Welman & Krugger, 1999, p. 196; also see Groenewald, 2004). Again, in this way, participants were essential collaborators in the research inquiry. The first-round interviews were seen as an introductory meeting and conversation to gain a general understanding of participants’ personal and professional path to school building-level leadership. Second-round interviews were a more in-depth conversation on individuals’ personal experiences, understanding, and perceptions of leadership as a Black male principal or head of school. Each individual interview lasted between 45 to 144 minutes in length. A total of 2,280 minutes (38 hours) of interview data were collected. The interviews were also used to expand on the topics discussed and participant responses provided in the completed online descriptive background information survey. Visual elicitation methods (Harper, 2002; Hartas, 2015; Lapenta, 2012; Prosser & Loxley, 2015), through the use

of developed photo and visual flashcards depicting culturally sensitive images of race/color conscious, leadership, leadership development, and mentoring, were also used during the interviews to stimulate discussions with participants on Black male leadership identity and attributes.

### **Visual Elicitation Methods**

The interviews incorporated the use of visual elicitation methods (Harper, 2002; Hartas, 2015; Lapenta, 2012; Prosser & Loxley, 2015). As noted by Polkinghorne (1989), “depictions of the experience from outside the context of the research project itself” may also be used to generate descriptions of experiences and phenomena (p. 46). The use of other forms of data gathering such as observations, journals, poetry, music, visuals, and other forms of art are well established within phenomenology research (Creswell, 2013; Laverly, 2003; Padilla-Díaz, 2015; Polkinghorne, 1989; van Manen, 1990). van Manen (1990) provided a helpful guide and yardstick in considering the relative merit of incorporating expressions of the experience from data sources outside the context of the research project itself, in order to gain an understanding of the themes and essence of the phenomena. van Manen asked, “What is this example an example of?” (p. 86).

Visual elicitation, the most popular and common data-gathering method in participatory visual research, involves “using photographs, drawings, or diagrams in a research interview to stimulate a response” (Prosser, 2013, p. 187). While “the method is not researcher-proof,” there is strong evidence to suggest that visual elicitation, when used as an “ice-breaker or neutral third party,” helps “participants feel less pressured when discussing sensitive topics” and “more able to express difficult memories and powerful emotions” (p. 187). Further, as Prosser went on to

observe, “one of the strengths of visual research is the wide range of response possibilities and their capacity to harness the creative abilities of researchers and participants” (p. 195).

Further, the use of visual elicitation and considered benefits of this approach in describing the focus experiences of this phenomenological research project are poignantly encapsulated in the following quote from Sandra Weber (2008), Professor of Education at Concordia University, Montreal, and co-founder of the Image and Identity Research Collective (IIRC, [www.iirc.mcgill.ca](http://www.iirc.mcgill.ca)):

Images make us pay attention to things in new ways . . . images are likely to be memorable . . . images can be used to communicate more holistically, incorporating multiple layers, and evoking stories or questions; images can enhance empathic understanding and generalizability . . . through metaphor and symbol, artistic images can carry theory elegantly and eloquently . . . images encourage embodied knowledge . . . images can be more accessible than most forms of academic discourse . . . images provoke action for social justice. (pp. 44-46)

In Luttrell (2016), we are reminded that the use of photographs to describe phenomena and [re]present humanized portraits of the lived experiences of African Americans is not new. In 1923, W. E. B. Du Bois used photographs, collected from a range of sources, as part of an effort to “re-create a theory of African American childhood” (Luttrell, 2016, p. 174). Du Bois sought to build not only a “more democratic imagery but a more democratic imaginary” of African American childhood and personhood (Phillips, 2016, p. 137). Luttrell (2016) also utilized visual elicitation methods as part of her research with young people and saw distinct benefits of this as a data-gathering approach. According to Luttrell, visual images can be used to communicate human values and social conditions; “to introduce topics that might otherwise be overlooked or poorly understood by ‘outsiders’”, and to give research participants “maximum control, authority, and say over their self-representations” (p. 185). In much the same way as Du Bois (Phillips, 2016), Luttrell (2016), and others, the use of visual elicitation as a data-gathering

approach in this research inquiry sought to build a more democratic imagery, a more democratic imaginary, and an insider perspective and understanding of what it means to be a Black male K-12 school building-level leader.

A set of 80 developed visual/photo flashcards depicting culturally sensitive images of leadership, leadership philosophies, leadership development, and mentoring were used during the interviews to stimulate and support conversation and reflection with participants on Black male leadership identity and attributes. Participants' individually selected images are summarized in Table 14 above, with copies of selected visual/photo flashcards provided in Appendix F. The use of photo/visual flashcards was seen as particularly impactful and effective in exploring individual leadership philosophies with participants, for "images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words" (Harper, 2002, p. 13). Further, in several instances, more than one participant selected the same image to represent his personal leadership philosophy yet shared different reasons for the selection of said image. The activity in part resonated with Harper's (2002) assertion that "when two or more people discuss the meaning of photographs they try to figure out something together" (p. 23).

### **Digital Audio Recordings**

All interviews were digitally recorded, with prior informed consent (Appendix C) and approval of all 14 participating Black male school building-level leaders (Denscombe, 2010; Floyd, 2012). Further clarification and reassurances of the intended use of all survey and interview data collected were also provided on the occasion of each interview conversation. During the interviews, the audio recording equipment was discreetly placed to avoid having digital recordings be a barrier to free-flow conversations (Denscombe, 2010). Nonverbal expressions of communication, as well as moments of silence and the absence of speaking, were



also considered important, and these were noted throughout the interviews and linked to participants' responses (Laverty, 2003; van Manen, 1997).

### **Confidentiality**

Respect for the confidentiality of individuals who provided personal accounts of their experiences was safeguarded, and every effort was made to ensure no harm to the participants, whether physical or psychological, at all stages of the research (De Vaus, 2005; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).

Collected data were kept confidential and secure. The web-based survey software (Qualtrics) was secure and participants' individual responses remained confidential to me as the researcher. Raw survey and interview data were only available to me, unless required by law. Any other related secondary data collected (copies of resumes, school demographic data, and other publicly available data and reports) were also filed securely. All coding, data materials, and digital data were stored securely in a personal locked cabinet in my office. Confidential nondisclosure agreements were in place between myself and the transcription service for the interview, and also between myself and an independent research analyst who assisted in checking the data coding. All digital data were stored electronically on my password-protected computer.

### **Role of Researcher**

I identify as a Black male researcher, of African descent, and former education professional with significant years of experience in executive-level local, school district, state, and national administration and leadership. My racial and researcher identity supports my capacity to engage authentically in critical research and scholarship, and to lead in race-/color-conscious research on the lived experiences of Black male school building-level leaders and

other senior-level professionals. I was able to draw on the multiple dimensions of my identity as a Black male researcher of African descent as well as my own significant years of experience as an executive-level education administrator and professional to mobilize category memberships (Black senior-level educators and professionals) in order to promote effective communication and dialogue between researcher and participant. This self-disclosure proved invaluable at all stages of the research process (Song & Parker, 1995). This concurs with Toldson's (2019) assertion that studies focused on Black people and the Black experience should be conducted from the perspectives of Black people. I also acknowledged the duality of my position and status as an "indigenous insider" (Banks, 1998, p. 8)—as a Black man of African descent with significant education leadership and administration experience. I also acknowledged my "indigenous outsider" status (p. 8)—as a Black man, born in England of Jamaican, I was not socialized or racialized as a Black American man. While there are commonalities of the Black (male) experiences across the African Diaspora, the nuances and specificity of national history, context, race and racism, and the racializing of groups was an important consideration. While my "shared racial identity" and shared "dimensions to black experience" with those of participating Black male school building-level leaders privileged me to lead the research study project and inquiry (Banks, 1998; Tillman, 2006; Toldson, 2018, 2019), it was of vital importance that I afforded agency and self-efficacy to participants throughout the research process (Madison, 2012). In setting aside any personal preconceptions, judgments, or prejudices of the phenomenon, strident efforts were made to "bracket [my] own preconceptions and enter into the individual's lifeworld and use the self as an experiencing interpreter" (Miller & Crabtree, 1992, p. 24). All interviews were conducted in-person, at times and locations most convenient to the participants. Where interviews were conducted at participants' site locations, my travel was

always by local public transportation, which provided an invaluable opportunity for me to gain a first-hand sense of the “lifeworld”—community, locale, and surrounding neighborhoods served by the Black male school leader and his school. I made extensive observational and self-reflection notes throughout the process, which further helped in documenting the phenomenon as described by the participants. As researcher, it was important to acquire a sense of the location of mutual interest between researcher and participant at the earliest opportunity, appraising participants of the purpose, context, and drivers for the research inquiry and phenomenon description.

### **Data Analysis**

*We all know that we can go through life convinced that our view of the world is the only valid one. If we are interested in new perceptions, however, we need to catch a glimpse of the world through other eyes. We need to be aware of our own thoughts as well as the way life is viewed by other people.*

(Okakok, 1989, p. 248)

In phenomenology research, data analysis consists of: *epokhé*, the suspension of judgment; the horizontalization of data, attributing equal value to every statement; a textural analysis of what is expressed by participants and structural analysis of how it is expressed; identifying common meanings and essences, as well as any hidden discourses (Smith & Osborne, 2003). This is used to provide a description of the invariant or essential structures of the phenomena experienced, without which the phenomena would not exist (Creswell, 2013; Laverty, 2003; Padilla-Díaz, 2015). Data were presented as an intergenerational conversation and sharing of wisdoms between the selected 14 participants (Hoffman, 2003; Oduaran & Oduaran, 2004). For the purposes of data analysis and presentation of findings, participants were grouped into one of three demographic groups, based on number of years of leadership experience: Elders—leaders with 10 or more years leadership experience (5 participants); Warriors—leaders

with 4-9 years leadership experience (7 participants); and Initiates—leaders with less than 3 years leadership experience (2 participants).

Digital audio recordings and verbatim transcriptions of interview conversations from 2 x 14 participant interviews (28 interviews in total), totaling 2,280 minutes (38 hours) of interview audio and typed transcripts, as well as other hand notes taken as part of the interview conversation process, and my own researcher reflective journal, were analyzed extensively and repeatedly to identify key significant statements and participants' descriptions of experience of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989) of leading while Black and male. Audio and transcripts of interviews were reviewed multiple times, passed through a four-stage dialogue process—Objective, Reflective, Interpretative, and Decisional (ORID) analysis (Hogan, 2003; Maltbia, Ghosh, & Marsick, 2010; Spencer, 1989). The ORID dialogue process and analysis begin with initial “objective” coding of core concepts and themes. A second “reflective” stage analysis of data was used to develop clusters of related codes. The clustered data sets formed the basis of the third “interpretative” stage of the analysis and initial sense making of category data. The fourth and final stage of the dialogue process, the “decisional” data analysis, linked the patterns of grouped data into themes to form a series of analytic categories. The four levels of the ORID guided dialogue process is summarized in Table 15 below.

Table 15

*The ORID Four-stage Dialogue Process*

Four-stage Dialogue Process	Description
1. Objective Data	using the senses to gather the “facts” of a given situation based on relatively directly observable data from multiple perspectives for the purpose of creating a shared pool of information—externally focused
2. Reflective Data	eliciting the imagination and emotional responses of people to surface how each is experiencing the “external data”—internally focused and inclusive of reactions, feelings and associations
3. Interpretative Data	Catalyzing the sharing of lived experiences through the identification of patterns, themes, and lessons learned from the experience—meaning making focused to highlight explore the significance and/or impact of the situation
4. Decisional Data	pulling insights gained to generate options, examine potential benefits and consequences, determine priorities and make decisions—action focused and includes experimentation, pilots and full implementation.
Source: Maltbia, Ghosh, & Marsick (2010)	

The interview audio recordings and transcripts for all 14 participants were reviewed in their entirety multiple times to identify the mega messages emerging from within individual interviews and across multiple participant interviews and to consider which were most relevant. Participant statements were grouped into 11 meta themes or larger “meaning units,” as listed in Table 16 below. An initial judgment was also made as to whether each meta theme contributed to structural understanding (indicated by *s*) or a textural understanding (indicated by *t*) of the phenomenon.

Table 16

*Data Analysis: Leading While Black and Male—Meta Themes*

<b>Meta Themes/Meaning Units</b>	
1. family and childhood experiences ( <i>s</i> )	7. social construction and stereotypes on Black male racial identity ( <i>s</i> )
2. faith and spirituality ( <i>t</i> )	8. barriers and opportunities to leadership development ( <i>s</i> )
3. personal leadership philosophies ( <i>t</i> )	9. White privilege and how it shows up in the workplace ( <i>s</i> )
4. family, community, professional, and other networks ( <i>s</i> )	10. biggest issues facing Black educational leadership ( <i>t</i> )
5. leading and supporting students through character education ( <i>t</i> )	11. creation of formal leadership development opportunities and networks ( <i>s</i> )
6. caring communities—developing community partnerships and engagement ( <i>s</i> )	

This first pass through of the data (transcripts) resulted in a reduction of the total number of pages and analysis of the overall data. These significantly reduced interview transcripts (relevant data sets) formed the basis of the next stage, round #2 of the data reduction and data analysis strategy. The mega messages in each reduced transcript were then coded, using a manual application of qualitative data analysis (color highlights), highlighting the sections of the data set most relevant to the 11 selected concept themes. Round #3 consisted of a further review of the coded data sets for each participant under each of the 11 meta themes/meaning units in order to identify any common views (potential coding classification) across all 28 data sets (participant interview transcripts). Participants were subdivided into one of three subgroups, based on number of years of school building-level leadership experience—Initiates, Warriors, and Elders. A further pass and reduction and coding check were carried out in the generation of

descriptions of experiences and significant statements from the participants’ interview conversations. Participants, seen as “co-researchers” and “research collaborators” (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 47), also received copies of their interview transcripts for review, feedback, and comments. The application of the data reduction and data analysis strategy, as set out above, identified significant descriptive statements that contributed to the description(s) of the essence of what it means to be a Black male K-12 school building-level leader. Moving from data analysis to development of meta themes/meaning units to significant structural and textural statements led to a synthesis of meanings and essences of the experiences and phenomenon of leading while Black and male. These are summarized below in Table 17.

Table 17

*Leading While Black and Male—The Essence of Black Male School Leadership*

Description of Essence	Comments
Growing up as a Black boy	family and childhood educational experiences
Leadership as ministry	leadership philosophy and influences
When a Black man is in the principal’s office	navigating racialized spaces
Safeguarding the village	supporting students through social, emotional learning, leadership, and community

Examples of significant statements of Initiates, Warriors, and Elders, describing experience within meaning units of (iii) personal leadership philosophies (*t*); (vi) caring communities (*s*), and (xi) creation of formal leadership development opportunities and networks (*s*), are set out in Table 18 below.

Table 18

*Data Analysis: Leading While Black and Male—Example Meaning Units/Significant Statements*

Meta Themes/ Meaning Units	Significant Statements		
	The Initiates	The Warriors	The Elders
<b>Personal Leadership Philosophies</b>	I have to believe that it can work out. I have to believe that things can get better. I have to believe that the purpose that I'm serving is worth, and the time that I'm spending is worth you know, it's worthy.	I do believe in a higher power, and I believe that I was put on this earth to advocate for those who have less than, my group being one of them. And I came—it resonated for me early on.	Your legacy is what's done after you've gone, it's not just what's done when you are here. So if you are doing some good things, they should be institutionalized beyond you, it shouldn't be about you. So I was saddened by the fact that those things that I thought were a part of our school were really a part of my personality in the eyes of others.
<b>Caring Communities</b>	I thought what the ones that they were praying together because I'm a man of faith, right, and spiritual. But the one where the football players teammates were gathered around, and because I think that often times, that's what a leader needs, they need their team, and them to the extent that even if they are injured or look weak, this is still our leader and we are going to support.	Mentoring is what really gets you to where you are, [text] the coursework of the principal preparation will not make you a good principal. It is the experience as of doing the job, having people who've done the job be able to offer you advice, not tell you what to do, help you know what you don't know as yet, and help you test out what you can do, how you can fix it, and keep going and explore further.	So I mean also being Black to me means looking for community in other Black people. Yeah, yeah. I mean in the community in the sense of fellowship, of building, true collaborations, family, yeah.
<b>Creation of Formal Leadership Development Opportunities and Networks</b>	What I think would be you know the most helpful is a program for leadership, for Black male principals provides a real—provides them a reality of the situation and a network. So with concrete things, but also a support system that focuses on identity as a Black male, that goes beyond skin color, and you know provides a you know, the sustainability because you can't rally around the color of your skin alone.	I begin working next month with the scholars and I'm sure some of you are developing a community event that coincides with the January inauguration . . . I will continue to challenge each of us to embrace and deploy culturally relevant practices within and beyond the classroom. I will continue to be stride in my efforts to diversify our faculty and our practices so that [school] authentically reflects all of humanity's dimensions.	I mean some people call that networking, and I could say it's a good way to describe it, but I do it more—I do it on different levels. So on a micro level, I'll know that [redacted] is interested in looking at a certain practice, and so—or he may be looking to meet someone in a particular area, and I'll use my network and I'll reach out and make these things happen.



## Trustworthiness

*The focus is not on the factual accuracy of the story constructed, but on the meaning it has for the respondent.*

(Dhunpath, 2000, p. 545)

The measures of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2016) were applied to assess the trustworthiness of this phenomenological research project. The research design intentionally involved repeated, respectful, and supportive engagement with participants, considered collaborators (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1989), and co-researchers. This included initial discussions with individuals as part of the recruitment and selection of participants process, 2 rounds of in-person interview conversations, follow-up conversations, sharing of research data, and member checking, and sharing the findings (core essences of Black male school leadership) emerging from the study, as well as the detailed findings chapters of this phenomenological research report—copies of Chapter 4 were sent to all participants, and copies of Chapters 5, 6, and 7 were sent to individuals based on their respective demographic group of Initiates, Warriors, or Elders. All of these steps served to build trust and establish a supportive and credible relationship with participants. A central focus of the collection and analysis of participants' descriptions of experiences was “not on the factual accuracy of the story constructed [per se], but on the meaning it has for the respondent” (Dhunpath, 2000, p. 545). Further, in ensuring credibility, considerable efforts were made to bracket or suspend any preconceptions, judgments, or prejudices that I may have had with respect to the phenomenon and inquiry (Padilla-Díaz, 2015). This was primarily achieved through reflexive journaling, in addition to ensuring that I was fully engaged and intentionally focused on the descriptions and experiences shared by participants (Laverty, 2003). Further, to safeguard participants'

contributions to and descriptions of the phenomenon, all personal information of individuals who participated in the study remained confidential. Pseudonyms, self-selected by participants, were used for all participants, with any personal identifiers limited to geographical location by state, type of school, grade levels served, number of years of leadership experience, and current or most recent leadership role.

The coherence of the research project design, in particular the interconnectedness between the statement of the research problem, research questions and framing of the inquiry, exploration and documentation of the essence of the phenomenon, provided a robust indicator of the dependability of the emerging descriptions of the essence of leading while Black and male. There was extensive and repeated analysis of transcripts. While there was some possibility to draw alternative inferences based on individual statements, collective descriptions of experiences and the context(s) in which those experiences occurred provided dependable and nuanced descriptions of the essence of the phenomenon. Further, participants' descriptions of experiences were analyzed by individual participants (across all 14 participants) and within and across each of the three category subgroups of Initiates, Warriors, and Elders. Literature and existing topic research were also used to determine dependability of the research.

All participants confirmed their willingness to be a part of the research project, giving full consent at each stage of the data collection process—completion of online descriptive survey; in-person interviews, audio recordings, transcripts, and use of visual/photo flashcard cues; and otherwise, to form part of the study results. Member checking of the findings with participants was further used to improve accuracy, credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the research study project. Continual peer review and debriefing with my

supervisor of the research process and findings further supported the confirmability and trustworthiness of the emerging results.

### **Summary**

This chapter described the approach adopted to gather data in order to carry out this critical phenomenological research project and inquiry. The chapter set out the research philosophies and frameworks that informed the choice of exploratory research design critical to the development of a valid and critical thesis. This research study utilized multiple data points as part of the data collection process—a descriptive online survey, and 2 rounds of in-person in-depth phenomenological interviews, including the use of visual elicitation methods. Every effort was taken to establish trustworthiness—demonstrable through effective measures of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability in the research findings and data analysis—and to mitigate against any potential for bias.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS: STRUCTURAL DESCRIPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP CONTEXTS

*The hand of the child cannot reach the shelf, nor can the hand of the elder  
get through the neck of the gourd on the shelf.*

(Akan proverb)

#### **Introduction**

This chapter provides an overview of the contexts in which participating Black male K-12 school building-level leaders lead. Presented by demographic categories of Initiates, Warriors, and Elders, the chapter provides structural descriptions of the biographical profiles of Black male school building leaders; their professional experience and qualifications; school leadership context including type of school, staffing, and student populations served. The chapter also documents the range of supports these leaders utilize in support of their leadership and leadership development, as well as the inhibitors they encounter. The analysis concludes with an overview of the social networks that support leading while Black and male.

Findings are presented within the methodological and interpretative framework of critical race theory (CRT) utilizing narrative, biographies, storytelling, counter-storytelling, and critical histories (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) as valid epistemological approaches to a critical examination of race and racism (Ladson-Billings, 2009a, 2009c; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Tate, 1997). According to Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2011), a narrative and biographical approach to organizing and presenting data analysis catches “the human condition, human intentionality, the vividness of human experience very fully and the multiple perspectives and lived realities of participants” (p. 136; also consider Bruner, 1986). The rationale for presenting the findings and analysis of descriptive data from the perspective of

the research participants, “[their] definition of the situation” (Cohen et al., 2011), is central to legitimizing the methodological approaches and emerging conclusions arising from this research inquiry.

Leffler’s (2014) *Black Leaders on Leadership*, which documented a series of conversations on Black leadership between Julian Bond and prominent African Americans—“a group of remarkable African American leaders” (p. xxi), provided inspiration for documenting the quality of the rich, in-depth, personal, and meaningful conversations that I had with participating Black male school building-level leaders during the interview conversations. Through the use of oral history, storytelling, and interviews, Leffler foregrounded “stories of identity” (p. xiv), and explicitly and intentionally identified and named each leader interviewed. In so doing, Leffler added an important culturally sensitive sense of authenticity and realism to the narratives presented, in acknowledgment and celebration of the exceptional contributions of these stalwart leaders, “elders” to African American leadership.

On humanizing research, Paris (2011) asserted that researchers “can humanize through the act of research” (p. 147), observing that humanizing research is “ethically necessary” and often “increases the validity” of research (p. 137). Blackburn (2014) defined humanization as “the infinite process of becoming more fully human” (p.43). This is apposite where individuals are “made less human by having their individuality, creativity, and humanity taken away. . . . This is especially true for those marginalized by systems of inequality based on race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, or language, among other identity markers” (p. 43). Through analysis and presentation of descriptions of experience, this phenomenological research project presents humanized portraits of Black male K-12 school building-level leadership. This also includes “depictions of the experience from outside the context of the research project itself”

(Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 46) through the use of culturally responsive proverbs, aphorisms, and scriptural verse throughout the phenomenological research project, in much the same way that Kinlock and San Pedro (2014) stated:

Beginning each section with the words of others does two things: It gives homage to conversations that have happened before us, before us, and it reveals that our voices, words, and understandings are a collection of others' discourses. In this way, we are using others' words and ideas as catalysts for our own construction of thoughts. (p. 29)

### **The Initiates: Leadership Context**

Two of the 14 Black male school leaders who participated in the study were categorized as Initiates—that is, leaders with less than three years of leadership experience (see Table 14). In both cases, the Initiates no longer occupy school building-level leadership—principalship positions. One is currently employed as an assistant principal, and the other is an education consultant. The two Black male K-12 school building-level Initiates are Initiate Craig Lee and Initiate William Long.

One Initiate identified as Black/African American and one identified as Black Caribbean. In terms of age, one of the Initiates was between 31-39 years old and the other was between 40-49 years old. While both Initiates had less than three years of experience in a school building-level leadership role (principal or head of school), commensurate with the criteria for this demographic group, one Initiate had a total of between 4-9 years of teaching/education experience (entire career) and one between 15-19 years of experience. Both Initiates possess a Master of Education. One of the Initiates also possesses an MBA and a doctoral degree. Both Initiates have earned additional professional qualifications: one has principal licensure/school building leader (SBL) certification, and the other holding both a school district administrator (SDA) certification and a school administrator and supervisor (SAS) certification.

Both Initiates previously served as principals in similar-sized school settings, New York State, district secondary and high schools. The Initiates previously led schools with teaching staff teams of between 26 and 50, leadership teams, and other administrative staff of less than five. One Initiate works in a school serving between 201 to 250 students, and the other in a larger school serving between 501 to 750 students. In both instances, the schools’ student community is majority students of color, with none or almost none of a White (non-Hispanic) racial/ ethnic background. In both schools, the majority of students (about three-quarters) are of Black/African American or Black/Caribbean background, with the remaining students being of either Black/Afro Latino/a or a Latino/a racial/ethnic background.

Similar with the other leadership demographic groups, Black male K-12 school building-level Initiates were asked to identify key enablers or sources of support in their leadership. From a selection of 28 items, both participants ranked nine items as being key enablers (Table 19).

Table 19

*The Initiates: Enablers to Support Leadership*

<b>Rank Order</b>	<b>Enablers to Support Leadership</b>	<b>Responses (Initiates)</b>
=1	Confidence/Self-belief	2
=1	Hard work	2
=1	Leadership experience	2
=1	Qualifications	2
=1	Resilience	2
=1	Self-determination	2
=1	Resilience	2
=1	Self-efficacy	2
=1	Spiritual belonging	2
=1	Support from various “significant others”	2

From a possible selection of 24 items, the Initiates ranked four shared items, inhibitors—structural and systemic challenges and obstructions to realizing their personal leadership ambitions. These are outlined in Table 20 below.

Table 20

*The Initiates: Inhibitors to Leadership Ambitions*

<b>Rank Order</b>	<b>Inhibitors</b>	<b>Responses (Initiates)</b>
=1	Lack of support from school district/board/network	2
=1	Lack of/ineffective mentoring support	2
=1	Racial bias in the recruitment and hiring process and practices	2
=1	Unsupportive family members	2

There was less corollary between the two Initiates’ responses to the question: identify the most supportive/influential people—professional, family, personal, or otherwise that had supported your individual leadership development and growth. The total ranked responses are listed in Table 21.

Table 21

*The Initiates: Most Supportive/Influential People*

<b>Rank Order</b>	<b>Most Supportive/Influential People</b>	<b>Responses (Initiates)</b>
=1	Faith/God	2
=1	Other school principal colleague	2
=3	District superintendent/network/board	1
=3	Family	1
=3	Friend	1
=3	Partner/Significant other	1
=3	Personal Black role model	1
=3	Self	1



Consistent with other participating Black male principals and heads of school, the two Initiates were asked to identify personal membership and/or affiliation to social networks, in particular, a Black Greek or other fraternity, membership in a Black professional and political association, and any identified religious or spiritual path. Both Initiates confirmed membership in a fraternity, but neither was a member of the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC). Neither Initiate was a member of a Black professional or political association. Both Initiates identified as Christian, one of whom is Seventh Day Adventist.

### **The Warriors: Leadership Context**

Seven of the 14 Black male K-12 school building-level leaders who participated in the research project were categorized as Warriors—that is, leaders with 4-9 years of school leadership experience—principal or head of school (see Table 14). The seven Black male school building-level Warriors are: Warrior Dr. Blizzy, Warrior Eric Carter, Warrior Thomas Jean, Warrior Frederick Monroe, Warrior Eric Pounds, Warrior Hadley Truant, Ed.D., and Warrior Carlos Washburn.

With the exception of one Warrior who identified as Black/African, all of the Warriors identified as Black/African American. The ages of the Warriors ranged from 31 to 60-plus years of age. One was aged between 31-39, four between 40-49 (the largest single group), one between 50-59, and one was 60+ years. All of the Warriors had 15+ years of teaching/education experience (entire career): two Warriors had between 15-19 years of experience; one Warrior, 20-24 years of experience; and four Warriors, 25-29 years of teaching/education experience. All of the Warriors possess a degree or higher-level qualification. Three of the Warriors possess a Master of Education, two possess a Master of Arts; three possess a doctoral degree. In terms of educational leadership-specific qualifications, five of the seven (71%) of the Warriors possess a

principal licensure/school building leader (SBL) certification. Two of the Warriors possess both a superintendent/school district leader (SDL) and school district administrator (SDA) certification; one, Warrior Frederick Monroe, Ph.D., also possesses a school administrator and supervisor (SAS) certification, as do two other Warriors. Leadership experience and qualifications were both identified by 86% of the Warriors as key enabling factors used to support their leadership, the highest across all three study demographic groups (Elders, Warriors, Initiates) of Black male K-12 school building-level leaders.

Looking at employment context, four (57%) of the Warriors are currently employed as a district school principal and one as an independent school head. The remaining two Warriors currently work in assistant superintendent or other district-level leadership roles and have previous school principal leadership experience. Four of the Warriors serve education communities in the state of New York, with the other three Warriors based in Connecticut, Delaware, and Massachusetts. These Black male school building-level Warriors lead schools from across the range of PK-12 education, specifically Grades 6 to 8 (2 leaders) and Grades 9 to 12 (4 leaders). One Warrior supports schools across grades PK to 1. The Warriors work across various-sized educational settings and contexts. One Warrior leads a school employing between 16 to 20 teachers, one a school with 21 to 25 teachers, and another between 26 to 50 teachers. Two of the participating Black male school building-level Warriors lead schools employing between 76 to 100 teachers; the remaining two Warriors, both in district-wide leadership roles, serve communities employing 101 or more teachers. There was reported variance, commensurate with school size, in the number of administrators, support/custodial, and other staff employed in the schools and district-wide contexts led by the seven Warriors. Six of the seven (86%) of the Warriors led leadership teams of less than 10, and one Warrior led a leadership team of between

11 to 15 members. Other administration staff was less than five in six of the school contexts and between six to 10 in one. The total number of support/custodial staff ranged from less than five in three cases (43%), between six to 10 in three cases (43%), and 16 or more in one case. Other staff employed ranged from less than five, through to 16 or more, across the school leadership context of each of the participating seven Warriors.

For student populations served by these Black male school building-level Warriors, one Warrior currently or most recently led a school serving between 151 to 200 students, one 251 to 500 students, two 501 to 750 students, one 1,001 to 1,500 students. The remaining two Warriors led school communities serving between 1,500 to 2,000 students each. All Warriors led schools serving diverse, multiracial, multiethnic student populations. Four (57%) of the Warriors led schools serving none or almost no students of a White (non-Hispanic) racial/ethnic background. Within the remaining three schools, although higher, White students constituted upwards to about half of the total student population. Students from a Black/African American racial/ethnic group formed the single largest racial/ethnic group of students across all schools. Black/African American students formed about one-quarter of the total student population in five of the schools, and about one half in two of the schools led by the Black male school building-level Warriors. In several instances, they were unable to determine the proportion of students across the range of Black ethnicity groups—Black/African, Black/Caribbean, and Black/Afro Latino/a backgrounds. There were none or almost no students of a Latino/a racial/ethnic background in two schools, about one-quarter in two schools, and about half in three of the schools led by the Warriors.

Black male school building-level Warriors were asked to identify key enablers or sources of support in their leadership. “Confidence/Self-belief” and “Support from various ‘significant others’” ranked a joint first, identified as a key enabler by all seven participating Warriors. The top-ranked enablers to support and progress the leadership ambitions of the Warriors subgroup are summarized in Table 22 below.

Black male school building-level Warriors also identified a range of inhibitors— structural and systemic challenges and obstructions to realizing their personal leadership ambitions (see Table 23).

Table 22

*The Warriors: Enablers to Support Leadership*

<b>Rank Order</b>	<b>Enablers to Support Leadership</b>	<b>Responses (Warriors)</b>
=1	Confidence/Self-belief	7
=1	Support from various “significant others”	7
=3	Culturally relevant mentoring/coaching	6
=3	Leadership experience	6
=3	My race/racial identity	6
=3	Qualifications	6
=3	Resilience	6
=3	Self-determination	6
=3	Self-efficacy	6
=10	Hard work	5
=10	Mentoring/Coaching	5

Table 23

*The Warriors: Inhibitors to Leadership Ambitions*

<b>Rank Order</b>	<b>Inhibitors to Leadership Ambitions</b>	<b>Responses (Warriors)</b>
=1	Institutional racism	5
=1	Professional isolation and exclusion	5
=3	Cultural/Societal racism	4
=3	Direct/Indirect prejudice and discrimination	4
=3	Lack of support from school district/board/network	4
=3	My race/racial identity	4
=3	Racism by individuals	4
=8	Absence of appropriate networks	3
=8	Negative stereotyping	3
=8	Racial bias in the recruitment and hiring process and practices	3
=8	Workload commitment and pressure	3

The participating Warriors were also asked to identify the most supportive/influential people—professional, family, personal, or otherwise—who had supported their individual leadership development and growth. “Self,” “Faith/God,” and “Black personal mentor/coach” ranked as the top three by the Black male school building-level Warriors. Total ranked responses by this group are provided in Table 24.

Table 24

*The Warriors: Most Supportive/Influential People*

<b>Rank Order</b>	<b>Most Supportive/ Influential People</b>	<b>Responses (Warriors)</b>
1	Self	6
2	Faith/God	5
3	Black personal mentor/coach	4
4	Other (non-Black) professional mentor/coach	3
=5	Black professional mentor/coach	2
=5	District superintendent/network/board	2
=5	Fraternity brother(s)	2
=5	Other (non-Black) personal mentor/coach	2
=9	Other (non-Black) personal role model	1
=9	Other (non-Black) professional role model	1
=9	Personal role model	1
=9	Professional Black role model	1
=13	Faith-based leader	0
=13	Local community leader	0
=13	Other (please specify)	0

All participating Warriors were asked to identify personal membership and/or affiliation with social networks, in particular, a Black Greek or other fraternity, membership in a Black professional and political association, and any identified religious or spiritual path. Among the seven Black male school building-level Warriors, two were members of Black Greek fraternities, one a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., and one a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. Looking at Black professional and political associations, three of the seven (43%) of the Warriors were members of the National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE); one of the three was also a member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored

People (NAACP). The remaining four Warriors reported no membership or affiliation with a Black professional or political association. Five Black male K-12 school building-level Warriors most identified as Christian, including Episcopalian, Quaker—Religious Society of Friends, Presbyterian/Baptist, and Baptist. One Warrior identified as a follower of Islam. One Warrior identified as having no affiliation to a religion or spiritual path.

### **The Elders: Leadership Context**

Five of the 14 Black male school building-level leaders who participated in the phenomenological research project were categorized as Elders—that is, leaders with 10 or more years of leadership experience (see Table 14). The five Black male K-12 school building-level Elders are: Elder Ali, Elder Damani Camara, Elder James Johnson, Elder Baba R, and Elder Frank Stanley, Ed.D.

Two of the five Elders identified as Black/African, with the remaining three identifying as Black/African American. In terms of the ages of the Elders, one was between 40-49 years old, two were between 50-59, and two were 60+. All five Elders were born in the United States. Looking at professional experience, all of the Elders had 14+ years teaching/education experience (entire career). One Elder, Baba R, had over 50 years of education experience. All of the Elders sampled possess a degree or higher-level qualification, with one Elder, Elder Frank Stanley, Ed.D., also possessing a doctoral degree. In terms of educational leadership-specific qualifications, all of the Elders completed a Master's level educational leadership degree program; four of the five (80%) Elders completed a school district principal preparation program; three of the five elders (60%) possess a principal licensure/school building leader (SBL) certification. One elder, Elder Frank Stanley, Ed.D., possesses both school district administrator (SDA) and school administrator and supervisor (SAS) certification. Qualifications

and leadership experience were both identified by 40% of the Elders as key enabling factors used to support their leadership. This may help to explain the extensive additional credentials held by the Elder demographic group of Black male school building-level leaders, compared to the highest level of qualifications held by school principals nationally (NCES, 2012-13).

Two of the Elders serve education communities in the state of Massachusetts, two in New York, and one in Pennsylvania. Four of the five Elders were currently or most recently employed in a district school, with Elder James Johnson employed as Head of School in an independent school. Collectively, these Black male Elders had experience leading schools across the range of K-12 education. With the exception of Elder James Johnson whose school employed between 16 to 20 teachers, all of the other Elders led schools employing between 51 to 75 teaching staff. There was reported variance in the number of administrators, support/custodial, and other staff employed in the schools led by the five Elders. On school leadership teams, three of the five (60%) of the Elders led leadership teams of less than five, one Elder led a team of 6 to 10, and one Elder led a leadership team of between 11 to 15 members. Other administration staff membership was less than five in each of the schools led by the Black male Elders. The number of support/custodial staff ranged from less than five in two cases (40%), between 6 to 10 in two more cases (40%), and between 11 to 15 in the remaining case (20%). Other staff employed ranged from less than five to 16 or more, across the school leadership context of each of the participating five Elders.

Three of the five Elders (60%) currently or most recently led schools serving students populations of between 501 to 750 students, with the remaining two Elders serving smaller-sized student populations of 51 to 100 students and 251 to 500 students. All Elders led schools serving diverse, multiracial, multiethnic student populations. Three (60%) of the Elders led schools



serving none or almost no students of a White (non-Hispanic) racial/ethnic background. The majority of students in all of the five Elders' school contexts were from diverse racial/ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Students of Black/African background formed up to one-quarter of the total student populations in four of the five (80%) school contexts. The numbers of Black/African American students in each of the five schools covered a wide spectrum, ranging from none or almost none in one school context, through to all or almost all of the total student population in another. Black/Caribbean students were about 50% of the total student population in three (60%) of the five schools and about three-quarters of the total student population in one school. Only two Elders reported serving students who self-identify as being of a Black/Afro Latino/a background, with those students forming approximately one-quarter of the total student population. The schools led by three (60%) of the school building-level Elders also serve students from a Latino/a racial/ethnic background who form approximately one-quarter of the total student population in each of the three schools.

Participating Black male school building-level Elders were asked to identify key enablers or sources of support in their leadership. Extensive use of agency and self-utility in order to support and progress leadership ambitions was a consistent enabler and source(s) of support across all three Black male principals and heads of school demographics: Elders, Warriors, and Initiates. For the Black male school building-level Elders, "Hard work" and "Self-determination" ranked a joint first, identified as key enablers by all five participating Elders. The top 10 ranked enablers to support and progress the leadership ambitions of the Elder subgroup are summarized in Table 25 below.

Table 25

*The Elders: Enablers to Support Leadership*

<b>Rank Order</b>	<b>Enablers to Support Leadership</b>	<b>Responses (Elders)</b>
=1	Hard work	5
=1	Self-determination	5
=3	Confidence/Self-belief	4
=3	Mentoring/Coaching	4
=3	Professional Black role model	4
=3	Resilience	4
=3	Self-efficacy	4
=7	Black professional networks	3
=7	Spiritual belonging	3
=7	Support from various “significant others”	3

Participating Elders identified a range of inhibitors—structural and systemic challenges and obstructions to realizing their personal leadership ambitions (see Table 26).

Table 26

*The Elders: Inhibitors to Leadership Ambitions*

<b>Rank Order</b>	<b>Inhibitors to Leadership Ambitions</b>	<b>Responses (Elders)</b>
=1	Cultural/Societal racism	3
=1	Direct/Indirect prejudice and discrimination	3
=1	Institutional racism	3
=1	Insufficient professional support	3
=1	My race/racial identity	3
=1	Racial bias in the recruitment and hiring process and practices	3

Table 26 (continued)

<b>Rank Order</b>	<b>Inhibitors to Leadership Ambitions</b>	<b>Responses (Elders)</b>
=7	Lack of self-confidence	2
=7	Lack of/ineffective mentoring support	2
=7	Negative stereotyping	2
=7	Professional isolation and exclusion	2
=7	Qualifications and Experience	2
=7	Racism by Individuals	2
=7	Unsupportive recruitment & hiring process and practices	2

Participating Elders were also asked to identify the most supportive/influential people—professional, family, personal, or otherwise—who had supported their individual leadership development and growth. “Family” and “Self,” identified by all five Elders, ranked a joint first for this demographic group. “Faith/God” and “Partner/Significant Other,” both identified by four of the five Elders, ranked a joint third as most supportive/influential person. Table 27 outlines the ranked top 10 most supportive/influential persons identified by the Black male school building-level Elders.

Table 27

*The Elders: Most Supportive/Influential People*

<b>Rank Order</b>	<b>Most Supportive/Influential People</b>	<b>Responses (Elders)</b>
=1	Family	5
=1	Self	5
=3	Faith/God	4
=3	Partner/Significant other	4
=5	Black professional mentor/coach	3

Table 27 (continued)

<b>Rank Order</b>	<b>Most Supportive/Influential People</b>	<b>Responses (Elders)</b>
=5	Friend	3
=5	Other school principal colleague	3
=5	Professional Black role model	3
=9	Local community leader	2
=9	Personal Black role model	2

All participating Black male school leaders were asked to identify personal membership and/or affiliation with social networks, in particular, a Black Greek or other fraternity, membership in a Black professional and political association, and any identified religious or spiritual path. Among the Black male school building-level Elders, one Elder was a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. Looking at Black professional and political associations, four of the five (80%) Elders were affiliated with the Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color (COSEBOC). Of these, one Elder was also a member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and another Elder a member of 100 Black Men of America, Inc. One Elder reported no membership or affiliation with a Black professional or political association. Four Black male building-level Elders most identified as Christian. The fifth Elder described his religious or spiritual path as “I believe in God.”

### **Summary**

All participating Black male school building-level leaders were located in the U.S. Northeast region (Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, New York, or Pennsylvania). The ages of the participants ranged from 31 to 60+ years old, with the largest number (6) in the 40-49 year age range, slightly older than the national average (under the age of 40) for all Black male principals, and within the national average (between 40-59 years old) for male principals across

all racial and ethnic backgrounds (NCES, 2012-13). The majority of Black male school leaders had between 15-19 years through 25-29 years of teaching/education experience; for the largest proportion of participants, this included between 15-19 years of school leadership experience (entire career). Nationally, the majority of male principals, across all ethnic groups, had between 5-10 years of teaching experience prior to becoming a principal (NCES, 2012-13). Black male K-12 school building-level leaders had generally greater credentials than their White male counterparts (NCES, 2012-13). A composite of the findings across all three subgroups of Initiates, Warriors, and Elders revealed that the majority of participating Black male school leaders (11 of 14 participants) were currently or most recently employed in a district school. Two participant heads of school were employed in an independent or private school setting. One Black male school leader was no longer employed in a school setting. The majority of the leaders led in secondary education serving middle schools (Grades 5 to 8) (4 participants) or high schools (Grades 9 to 12) (6 participants). This is broadly in line with latest available (2011-12) national data sets indicating that Black male principals are predominantly employed in middle school settings (NCES, 2012-13). School size varied across the range, with participants serving schools with from 51 to 100 students upwards to 1,500 to 2,000 students, with the largest number of Black school building-level leaders (6) leading schools with between 501 to 750 students. All leaders served students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, primarily from Black (African, African American, Caribbean, Afro Latino/a) and Latino/a communities. This is in line with NCES data indicating that Black principals commonly lead schools that have 75% or higher students from a racial/ethnic minoritized background (NCES 2012-13); this is also supported in the literature (Lomotey & Lowery, 2014). In terms of teaching and other staff employed, across all school contexts, the majority of staff employed were White, ranging from about one-quarter

to about three-quarters. Black staff—in particular, African Americans—made up approximately one-quarter of total staff employed within the majority of all schools. Staff of a Black/Afro Latino/a or Latino/a background were least represented across all school contexts.

On leadership and leadership development, “confidence/self-belief” and “self-determination” co-ranked first and were identified by the majority (13) of participating Black male principals and heads of school as very effective in supporting their leadership. “Hard work,” “resilience,” “self-efficacy,” and “support from significant others” were also highly ranked, joint third position, as each was identified by 12 of the participants. The term *inhibitors* rather than *barriers* was used to determine structural and systemic obstacles encountered in pursuit of leadership ambitions. For the majority of participants, the identification of inhibitors was presented within the wider context and prevalence of race, racial macro- and microaggressions, and racism and discrimination at individual, institutional, and societal levels. Seven of the eight top-ranked inhibitors to leadership ambitions explicitly related to race, racism, or discrimination. In looking at supportive/influential people and networks, “family,” “other school principal colleagues,” “self,” “faith/God,” and “partner/significant other” all ranked relatively high as supportive/influential people by the Black male school building-level leaders across all three leadership subgroup categories (Initiates, Warriors, and Elders). Participants also shared details of affiliation with supportive social networks. A small number of participating Black male school leaders (5) were members of a Black Greek or other fraternity. Several participants reported membership or affiliation with a Black professional or political association, in particular the National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE), Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color (COSEBOC), National Association for the Advancement of Colored

People (NAACP), and 100 Black Men of America, Inc. The majority (13) of participants identified a religion or spiritual path—Christian, Islamic, or other faith.

## CHAPTER 5

### FINDINGS: THE INITIATES—HUMANIZED PORTRAITS

*Patience puts a crown on the head.*  
(Ugandan Proverb)

This chapter presents humanized portraits of leading while Black and male as a school building-level Initiate (with less than 3 years school building-level leadership experience) through textural descriptions of experiences of the essence of: (a) growing up as a Black boy; (b) leadership as ministry; (c) when a Black man is in the principal's office; and (d) safeguarding the village. Humanized portraits through the textural descriptions of Black male K-12 school building-level Warriors and Elders will be presented in Chapters 6 and 7, respectively.

#### **School: Love It? Hate It?**

Initiate William Long showed a disconnect in regard to education while at school. There was no interest in making efforts to achieve high grades; this Initiate described his aspiration: "I aspired to go to school and hang out. I was misguided." This Initiate prioritized social standing and status rather than educational achievement during childhood. In describing his formative years at school, Initiate William Long later mentioned that he felt as though it was easier to play the role of "tough guy." This may have been a result of the expectations of him during his childhood, or the lack thereof. When reflecting on his childhood, there was no mention of parental guidance, more so an "influence" toward being a "good student."

I struggled growing up and going into middle school and education was far from a big positive for me, and I ended up failing school and going into the juvenile justice system.  
(Initiate William Long)

Having later experienced the juvenile justice system, this Initiate was encouraged to gain a GED, in line with the incentive of a shorter time spent at Boot Camp.



The other Initiate, Craig Lee, placed emphasis on a strong element of his Jamaican upbringing, which focused on the belief that the strength of one's work ethic determines one's extent of success.

So I grew up believing and being taught that everything that you did, your success, all of those were tied intricately to your work ethic. Jamaicans are, you just come out born like that. And so that's what I really put emphasis on. (Initiate Craig Lee)

This leader went on to speak about how he was affected by this notion: "the majority of whatever I did always revolved around work ethic, working smart, being able to do things that others either might not want to do because it was too hard, et cetera." Initiate Craig Lee further described the ways in which his Jamaican heritage shaped his sense of the world and the things that he experienced:

The Caribbean or West Indian experience is very different from what some might refer to as the Black American experience. And so a lot of the ways that my colleagues or friends growing up saw the world, as a Black man, I did not see the world in that same way given my upbringing. (Initiate Craig Lee)

### **With God, All Things Are Possible**

Initiate William Long, while "misguided" during his formative school years, later became a committed Christian. His strong spiritual belief and faith were described as pivotal anchors in his life and leadership. This leader's confidence and adult life choices were closely associated with his faith, and there was a strong belief that "all things are possible. I don't think of myself as having limits and not being able to do things" (Initiate William Long).

I believe that with God, all things are possible. It's harder for me to have an excuse or even remain angry, or an anger without productivity. It forces me to believe that things can still work, that there is, that things can get better, that I can be a part of making them better. (Initiate William Long)

Faith also played a significant part in the conduct of this leader and his ability to lead and mentor.

Initiate Craig Lee made similar comments, sharing an observation that those who are actively supportive tend to have a faith-based philosophy:

I can say that the individuals that I have found who have been most solid, have endeavored to actively support, have also been guided spiritually, and have been strong—have termed themselves to be active Christians, or individuals of faith. (Initiate Craig Lee)

Initiate William Long, in recounting the factors that have informed his leadership philosophy, described the ways in which a review of the visual/photo flashcards helped his reflection of his personal leadership philosophy, which he indicated was founded in the desire to care for and support others: “I think the ones that touched me more were the ones that showed the care and the concern, finally and then being able to take care of somebody” (Initiate William Long). He went on to share that:

There were a lot of good pictures . . . I chose the one with the man that is sitting down reading the book entitled, Who Am I [visual/photo flashcard image E]. . . . So you can’t develop a vision if you don’t know who you are or what you are meant to do, where you come from. (Initiate William Long)

Initiate William Long also shared his attraction towards a second flashcard image of being surrounded by a team of supporters who are there to help in difficult situations (visual/photo flashcard image F). This highlighted his desire to support others—a key component of his leadership philosophy. However, this may also speak to his desire to be supported by others. For Initiate Craig Lee, flashcard image C—“It’s not who [you] are that holds you back, it’s who you think you’re not—Basquiat”—had particular resonance.

So I think leadership really certainly is about learning and enacting with things that you learn for a specific context. (Initiate Craig Lee)

Initiate Craig Lee also has a desire to do what is right, in particular, to do what is right for the benefit of the children he serves: “For me, my leadership philosophy is to do right by kids, at all costs. And that is literally to make every single decision based on what you know is the right

thing to do” (Initiate Craig Lee). This philosophy is strongly founded on the idea of integrity and strength of character—something that may have stemmed from his upbringing and/or his professional experiences.

There was some familiarity with African-based models of education among the Initiates, but not regarding leadership style. One Initiate described potential efforts that educators can make in order to implement culturally responsive practice into the classroom:

Being able to incorporate methodologies, analogies, curricular that pull on things that are familiar to them [students with heritage from African Diaspora], that affirm and reaffirm their culture, their ethnicity . . . there are moves that teachers can make to be able to make. (Initiate Craig Lee)

The Initiates considered culturally sensitive, African-centered models of teaching and learning to be effective forms of pedagogy in theory. However, there was some expressed concern about the practicalities of introducing African-centered models within the context of schools, and the extent to which the use of such models would enable students to be deemed to have met required learning standards and expectations. For the Black male school building-level Initiates, this was in part symptomatic of a broader minimization and devaluing of the leadership styles and contributions of Black educators.

Same thing applies with Black leaders. We can have all of those things in place, but at the end of the day, the measuring stick, the things that they are measured against is not about their blackness. Actually it is about their blackness. It is about why they are still Black as opposed to, why are, they not showing up, as their nonBlack selves. (Initiate Craig Lee)

In considering the ways in which others—family, community, professional and other networks—support leadership possibilities, one Initiate described how he gained support from those outside of the realm of educational leadership:

The people that have my back for the most part are people that are not directly in the system because the people that are in the system are trying to survive themselves, right. So it’s harder to have somebody’s back and support when you are not. (Initiate William Long)

There is a perception that because Black leaders do not receive support, many are not able to support others. This was presented as a reason for this Initiate's support system being made up of those who are "not directly in the system." Another had a formal mentor who was accessible when needed for advice. The Initiates, however, seemed to have a limited support network. There was a need for support from those who were able to understand their experiences as Black male leaders, specifically as Black male principals. However, both Initiates felt as though this was not accessible or possible during the period of their tenure as school building-level leaders.

### **The Social Construction of Blackness**

I was born in Jamaica, I immigrated to the United States, with my parents when I was very young, about eight months old. And the Caribbean or West Indian experience is very different from what some might refer to as the Black American experience. And so a lot of the ways that my colleagues or friends growing up saw the world, as a Black man, I did not see the world in that same way given my upbringing. And so fast-forward to this experience [experienced strong opposition, racial microaggressions and racism while serving as founding school principal], as things were playing out, I initially did not contextualize these experiences as being racially motivated, or microaggressions or any of these things. It wasn't until after the fact—and what I've been referring to, as me coming into my Blackness, understanding how race plays out, understanding how you know, some of these systemic forms of oppression make their way into educational systems, that I began to see sort of what was really happening at that time.

. . . quite a few of my friends and others who are Black Americans, often rapt experiences that were happening in, or contextualize them or understood them through the lens of race. And that's just not how we were raised. I wouldn't say that we were color-blind because some people refer to is as being color-mute. But the idea was that you came to this country to take advantage of all of the opportunities, and that with hard work anything could be achieved. And so this was my first experience where I ran up against the truth that there's a certain element of society that is either unwilling or unable to put aside certain, either expressions of racism, or ways that they were raised, or how they understand, or think of people to basically just see one's hard work, or one's intelligence et cetera. This was the first time that I had seen something play out that didn't underscore or confirm the narrative that I had been raised believing which is, it's all about hard work.

(Initiate Craig Lee)

As a Jamaican-born American raised within a Caribbean household, Initiate Craig Lee recognized the difference between the “Black Caribbean American experience” in comparison to the “African American experience.” As a result, this Initiate had developed a particular mindset that differed from that of his fellow Black counterparts. This Initiate had adopted a firm belief in the system of meritocracy—that working hard, taking opportunities, and showcasing talent would inevitably result in reward and progression, despite one’s race. Initiate Craig Lee was pointed in his description of his outlook as “color-mute” rather than “color-blind.” This school building-level Initiate was conscious about his race and ethnic and cultural identity, and did not believe that this would negatively impact or affect his ability to progress or prosper in his pursuit of the American Dream. Initiate Craig Lee recalled moments throughout his career and, particularly while serving as a school building-level leader, when this was not the case. This was relayed as a moment of epiphany, in which the harsh reality of the permanence of race, racism, and anti-Blackness at individual, institutional, and societal levels within the United States became unavoidably clear. Initiate Craig Lee referred to this process of cognizant realization as “coming into my Blackness,” becoming more conscious of his racial identity as a result of the acts of racism and racial microaggressions that he directly faced. There was a gained understanding that despite one’s efforts and talent, race and racism *would* in fact play a significant role in the treatment and governance of Black people, and particularly of him as a Black male leader within the school principalship profession. As a school building-level leader, Initiate Craig Lee fundamentally believed that he had worked hard and showcased his talent, yet still faced persistent impediments and hostile resistance meted out by others. The Initiate did not initially consider the possibility of his hindrance being a result of anything related to race. Neither did he consider the possibility of any perceived hindrance relating to professional

competence or unreadiness to assume a leadership position. Initiate Craig Lee's story potentially highlights the tremendous impact of as well as the (intentional) ways through which the White gaze homogenizes Blackness and the Black experience. For this school building-level Initiate, this harsh epiphany enhanced his consciousness of Blackness as well as his leadership philosophy and praxis. The challenging and persistent experiences endured ultimately led to Initiate Craig Lee's departure from his school principal position.

In line with their demographic categorization, Black male school building-level Initiates have less than 3 years of school building-level principal experience. In both cases, the Initiates no longer occupy school building-level (school principal) positions. Both Initiates described limited principal preparation or leadership development support.

I really think I've learned especially from that seven-month period that leadership is in a lot of ways dealing with the things that people shielded you from before you became a leader. (Initiate Craig Lee)

Participating Initiates attribute their transition from a school principal leadership position to an assistant principal position or education consultant as indicative of the lack of professional support, barriers, and racial microaggressions during their respective periods of assuming a school principal-level leadership role.

The Initiates expressed uncertainty about what it means to be Black and struggled to settle on a personal definition: "I wish that I can define what it means to be Black, but to be honest, even in this moment, I'm still defining that for myself" (Initiate Craig Lee). However, as the interviews progressed, we saw that for the Initiates, "Black" related to the physical presentation of a person, his or her heritage and "state of mind." For one Initiate in particular (Initiate William Long), this concept was discussed in regard to the limitations that are presented as a result of being a Black leader: "unfortunately, it [being Black] limits what you consider to be

able to lead. Black principals would be given all-Black schools or schools that are struggling” (Initiate William Long). There is a perception that as a Black male school building-level leader, he is restricted to leading either all-Black or struggling schools. This could be interpreted in a number of ways. It may suggest that this leader perceived “all-black schools” as less affluent, with limited and insufficient resources, or undesirable in the same terms as a school that is “struggling.” There may also be a believed lack of autonomy and control over the roles and types of schools that are open to Black male school building-level initiates, suggested by the use of the words “limited” and “given,” as though he as a Black leader does not have a choice or is unable to broaden his sights to alternative options. This was further supported by the Initiate’s statements as the interview conversation progressed:

I can look back at every classroom position that I’ve had and I realize it was almost designed for a Black male. . . . I got a job because I was a Black male. . . . It was obvious, I got the job because I was a Black man, and there are some jobs that I won’t get. (Initiate William Long)

The ideology presented here suggested that Initiate William Long saw a difference in the suitability of roles for Black men in comparison to others and believed that some roles will be unobtainable for him as a Black man. Similarly, this perception was also presented by Initiate Craig Lee who said, “as I think about my future, I sometimes find that the things that I tell myself are either possible or not possible. . . . There are opportunities that maybe I am not pursuing, in effect holding myself back because of what I think others think” (Initiate Craig Lee).

Throughout the Initiates’ narratives, there was a sense of seeking acceptance. This may have some relation to their self-identity and experiences as Black men, leading while Black and male: “there is a desire among Black leaders to belong, and unfortunately it is not about belonging amongst other Black people. There is a desire to be accepted” (Initiate Craig Lee).

One Initiate (Initiate William Long) spoke about the lack of ownership and autonomy he experienced as an assistant principal. Due to the hierarchy of educational leadership, he had experience of limited ability to be an effective leader in his own right. When in the role of principal, it was easier to take control and make decisions. Another Initiate supported this notion as he also shared his experiences of limited autonomy.

Some key experiences were shared relating to the inequality and lack of fairness that these leaders were presented with during their career. Black male school building-level Initiates described a sense of being assessed by different and stricter measures and standards than their White peer colleagues:

. . . But at the end of the day, again, the things that Black male leaders particularly are measured by—again, has nothing to do with knowledge, it’s not what they learn or how they learn it, or how well they learned it. Has nothing to do with those things. There’s a layer of the game that is being played that unfortunately, you are unable to touch, manipulate, or change, such that even when you demonstrate proficiency, high aptitude, the rules of the game can be changed such that those things don’t apply, or people don’t even acknowledge the achievements.

Related, there were experiences that taught one Initiate in particular that in cases when the organizational culture was to “support and protect,” this value did not always apply to Black people. This leader shared his experience of explicit bullying and the ways in which “higher powers” had a negative effect on his leadership and opportunities.

### **Relationships with Children and Young People Have to Be Earned**

On leadership in support of the social-emotional learning and leadership of children and young people, one of the Black male school building-level Initiates described the critical need for awareness and acknowledgment that Black youth require bespoke support, tailored to their needs. For Initiate Craig Lee, this included providing practical developmental opportunities for students:



. . . we provided these students with opportunities to either job shadow or actually have internships where they were paid as well. (Initiate Craig Lee)

In developing authentic supportive relationships between student and educator/leader, mutual trust is integral and, thus, these student/educator relationships have to be “earned.”

I think children here are more open to a variety of people standing in front of them, but a lot of the relationships that our kids eventually find valuable or useful or impactful have to be earned. (Initiate William Long)

One Initiate related to the children as a father figure and approached his role as a leader with the same guidance and philosophy as his role as a father. This leader has a core values of meeting the needs of his pupils, both emotional and educational:

Unconditional support, or concern. A father—you know children, they want love, teachers, leaders, they don’t necessarily need you to love them, what they need is that support that they can just rely on, consistently. I think consistency is a big one. They want you to know what you are doing, they want you to be consistent with it compassionate. (Initiate William Long)

In contrast to the other Black male school building-level leader participants, from the demographic groups of Elders and Warriors, the Initiates said little and did not emphasize a need (or expressed desire) to engage with community and/or develop community partnerships as part of the holistic education and care of the whole child. They did, however, highlight a need and the importance of Black male school building-level leaders being present within the communities they serve: “I think it’s very powerful when parents, students, the community sees a Black male principal” (Initiate Craig Lee).

### **Summary**

This chapter presented humanized portraits of Black male school leadership through the descriptions of experience of the Initiates—individuals with less than 3 years of school building-level leadership. Two of the 14 participants fell into this demographic group of leaders. As was the case for all participating leaders in the study, the Initiates described what for them informed

their understanding of leading while Black and male. In both instances childhood and formative education experience shaped their sense of belonging, identity, and to some extent the ways in which they would subsequently engage with schooling, education, and the school principalship. Initiates demonstrated a strong leadership philosophy, directed moral purpose, and desire and commitment to take care of others, to provide support, and to do what is right as part of their leadership praxis. Of particular concern for the Initiates was a seemingly general lack of support for Black leaders within education. These leaders expressed concern at the limited available school principal leadership opportunities that would enable to feel supported and to lead authentically as Black men with autonomy and freedom of choice, and without any untoward repercussions. Both Initiates previously served as principals. They made a distinction between the role of principal and other (junior) leadership roles: “[Being assistant principal] you’re assisting the principal, so you have kind of a leadership but not quite a leadership. So you don’t really cast a vision as such as you follow the visionary and carry out delegated tasks” (Initiate William Long). The Initiates also spoke extensively of an absence of targeted supportive networking, mentoring, or professional development opportunities to support them in their school leadership progression as Black men. “As a leader, you sometimes feel so alone, and what also ends up happening is [you] become a target” (Initiate William Long). On supportive networks and mentoring, the Initiates further thought that support and mentoring from other Black principals were key, and especially networks and supports that center brotherhood and Black male leadership identity were considered crucial. The Initiates were supportive of the concept of “grow your own” Black male school principals, through the supportive hiring, placement, and development of Black male educators within the profession, as a possible solution to addressing the issue of the underrepresentation of Black men in educational

leadership roles. Whether conscious or not, the Initiates expressed a need and desire to fit in and be accepted by others. This was expressed in ways that often presented their Blackness and Black racial identity as a hindrance and/or setback (Cross, 1971, 1991, 1995). There was a characterized sense of defeat when confronted with difficult and/or challenging situations. The Initiates appeared not to have the requisite advanced leadership skills, political astuteness, or experience to navigate racial politics successfully within school leadership. Rather than proactively take control of challenging and disrupting macro- and micro-acts of racial aggression, the Initiates tended to adopt a mindset of defeat, feeling disempowered and with little sense of agency and ownership. Oftentimes, this limitation was seen as something outside of their control.

## CHAPTER 6

### FINDINGS: THE WARRIORS—HUMANIZED PORTRAITS

*The warrior fights with courage, not with anger.*  
(Ashanti Proverb)

It was a high school, I got the job, I went through the interviewing process and so on and so forth . . . okay. Throughout the interviewing process, I was never told that the school was going to be a phase-out. Quite literally on my second day on the job, I was told that by the way, this school is going to be phased out. I had already left my assistant principalship in my other school, so people had already sent me off with parties and cards and this and that. . . . I was told that, “Oh, by the way you know this school is going to be phased out and one of your options is stay here or if you want, you could go back to your previous [school].” How did I feel about it? It was hard, it was very difficult because, as I said before, once I decided to go into administration . . . I feel like I was duped. I mean I don’t know how else to say it because I felt like this should have been told to me while I was going through the interviewing process, and then I could have made up my mind whether or not I would like to do this.

But the fact that it was withheld from me, it left a very bitter pill in my mouth. Up till today, when I talk about it, it still sends shivers off my spine because I mean, imagine, you feel that you are ready to take on a leadership role. And I mean, I’ve gone to school, I’ve done all these professional developments, I’ve read all kinds of things on leadership, and that your first principal’s job in the second day of the job, the powers that be come to tell you, “By the way, this is going to be a phase-out school.” I mean, that’s not an easy thing to do, to grapple with. . . . Probably like a week or so, I decided okay, I’m going to stay, I’m going to do it, and I’m going to make the best of it. I’m going to learn as much as possible, and then maybe this would be—this would turn out to be a good learning experience for the next job.

(Warrior Frederick Monroe, Ph.D.)

Warrior Frederick Monroe, Ph.D., found himself in an unprecedented situation of being faced with deceit and being placed into an extremely troubling situation, formed outside of his control and with the potential to have a detrimental effect on his career. He then had to manage and strive to overcome this hindrance. He struggled with practical and emotional implications while also having the strength and character to move forward with optimism. Warrior Frederick

Monroe, Ph.D.'s description of leading while of Black and male is not too dissimilar to the narratives and descriptions of experiences shared by all Black male school building-level Warriors across the range of essences of: (a) growing up as a Black boy; (b) leadership as ministry; (c) when a Black man is in the principal's office; and (d) safeguarding the village. Presentation of humanized portraits of Black male school building-level Warriors leading while and male follow.

### **A Lot of Tough Things Happened**

The Black male K-12 school building-level Warriors described a variety of childhood and familial experiences. These influences ranged from hip-hop culture to the behaviors and encouragement of teachers. The childhood and lived experiences during those early formative years were closely linked to the leadership philosophies and motivations of this group. It is clear that the Warriors' philosophies streamed from familial relationships and experiences of being a young Black boy, a son, a father, and in one case, a brother.

A lot of tough things happened. I happened to be around for the crack epidemic, parents splitting up. I played sports, and I was into hip-hop. And for me I think that it was never like hip-hop raised me so to speak, but it was always there. It is the entrée point. (Warrior Eric Carter)

Warrior Eric Carter went on to describe the effect of his relationship with his father and how this played a role in his leadership philosophy:

I did not enjoy a really strong relationship with my dad, he was in my life, but not in my life in lots of ways, and when I think about leadership at the fine-grain size is about being, you know, a leader in my family and being a leader for my children. So those things also pulled at me. (Warrior Eric Carter)

Another leader spoke about playing the role of a teacher for his younger brother and presented this as his first experience of having a student:

My brother was born when I turned eight; then I had my own personal student inside my home. And so he became my first student, and [I] taught him how to read and write (Warrior Carlos Washburn)

Warrior Carlos Washburn subsequently recalled his personal experiences as a student in the classroom, specifically as a child being educated by Black teachers. First, he shared a prominent memory of a Black female teacher expressing her belief in his abilities to excel and do better, which motivated him to achieve higher grades. Then, a Black male teacher explicitly branded Warrior Carlos Washburn a “C student,” implying that despite his actual, demonstrable ability as a student, he would always be graded less than. This led to a decreased effort and desire to achieve. These experiences were shared as key moments in his educational development and highlight the significant impact that educators have on their students as well as the potential to shape the future leadership and self-belief of a child. By reflecting on these experiences in such a way, this Warrior had an understanding of the impact that educators have on children and young people, and in particular when leading or supporting the education of students with whom a teacher or leader has a shared racial identity. This may have contributed to Warrior Carlos Washburn’s current leadership philosophy: to lead schools serving majority students from race-marginalized backgrounds.

### **Al-'Ankabut (The Spider)—Sura 29**

[29:2] Do the people think that they will be left to say, “We believe,” without being put to the test?

[29:3] We have tested those before them, for GOD must distinguish those who are truthful, and He must expose the liars.

[29:4] Do those who commit sins think that they can ever fool us? Wrong indeed is their judgment.

[29:5] Anyone hoping to meet GOD (should know that) such a meeting with GOD will most assuredly come to pass. He is the Hearer, the Omniscient.

[29:6] Those who strive, strive for their own good. GOD is in no need for anyone.

[29:7] Those who believe and lead a righteous life, we will certainly remit their sins, and will certainly reward them generously for their righteous works.

The Black male school building-level Warriors expressed the significance of faith and spirituality as cultural concepts that fed into their leadership styles and perceptions as adults. Many of the Warriors identified with a religious or spiritual path, including Christianity, a number of traditions, as well as Islam. Warrior Dr. Blizzy, a follower of Islam, shared the scriptural text Al-'Ankabut (the spider)—Sura 29, which encapsulates the essence of his leadership philosophy. Other Warriors also described their lived experiences of growing up within a faith-based household and/or being introduced to Christianity at a young age. These Black male leader Warriors have a well-developed relationship with faith, God, and spirituality. For these, faith and spirituality are ingrained elements of family and Black culture, which inevitably play a role in shaping philosophies and behaviors. As a part of these spiritual beliefs, there is a sense of being a servant, where leadership is seen as part of ministry or vocation in service to the needs of their students and their communities.

Part of my spiritual background as a Christian is to go out and serve people, and in our quest to be more like Jesus who was a teacher, I wanted to also be a teacher and share information with others because knowledge is power. (Warrior Carlos Washburn)

The ideology, experiences, and practicalities of leadership expressed by the Black male school building-level Warriors have foundations in spirituality, social justice, racial equality, fatherhood, and community engagement. These leaders also provided examples of the practical measures taken to promote these philosophies.

There is also a clear sense of practicing leadership with consideration for community development with the intent to support communities to thrive. This involves having sociopolitical understanding of the surrounding areas, the local people, and the ways in which the

community operates. These Black male school building-level Warriors show self-awareness and understanding that in order to best perform as leaders, they first need to have gained a holistic understanding of themselves—that is, their strengths, limitations, values, and intent as individuals and also as leaders.

. . . The words of Rudyard Kipling “If,” “Or walk with kings—nor lose the common touch; If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you; If all men count with you, but none too much.” So it’s this moderation that you have to walk, and I think a lot of leadership is about moderations. (Warrior Hadley Truant)

I think you need to understand where your growing edges are so that you can get better, know whether you want to be viewed only being strong in this one specific area. (Warrior Eric Pounds)

“The challenge of leadership” [visual/photo flashcard image J]—it speaks to the swings and balance that a leader must have, so that’s the challenge, right? And I think it personally resonates because of the complexity of the community that I work in. You are always wondering if I have put too much emphasis or not enough emphasis on one thing as opposed to something else. (Warrior Eric Carter)

This thing about “Growth and Comfort rarely coexist” [visual/photo flashcard image H] speaks to the very core of who I am. (Warrior Dr. Blizzy)

The Warriors discussed leadership in a practical way, with reference to working together with their staff and being heavily involved with their schools:

I’m very much about we’re all trying to roll together. I get down in the trenches with my teams. That I always feel there’s no job too small, no job too big. (Warrior Hadley Truant)

No significant emphasis was placed upon hierarchy within this group. Although strong in leadership and guidance, the Warriors showed a willingness to provide support on all levels.



If serving is below you, leadership is beyond you. And I think that one [flashcard] really sums up where I come from . . . I'll do whatever it is. I don't always have to be, you know, in front of the room in charge, the seat of honor, it's like just, I like doing a lot of work in the corners and just getting it done. (Warrior Hadley Truant)

The Black male school building-level Warriors tended to be well supported by their communities and colleagues: “When it was announced to the staff that I was becoming the principal, there was a great reaction from them, very supportive” (Warrior Hadley Truant). They voiced that this support, as well as that of mentors, had been pivotal in their development and progression as both leaders and individuals.

### **The Dichotomy of the Warriors and White Model of the Principal**

Narratives and descriptions from the Black male school building-level Warriors highlighted a strong sense of self-awareness in relation to race and leading while Black and male. Negative perceptions of self in relation to others were presented with a clear sense of imposter syndrome. These negative self-images were further fueled by experiences and interactions with White colleagues and associates who question these leaders' worthiness of being among fellow leaders. The Warriors described the prevailing impact of racism in America on the Black (male) experience.

I really like this one [visual/photo flashcard image E], this person sitting by themselves . . . it highlights the Black American experience. From my perspective in all the trials and tribulations, the struggles, the negativity that we've experienced that we have tried to turn into something powerful, all of that struggle led to a lot of progress for us as a people. . . like myself, a Black man in this country, going to two top universities and to be able to be a leader in a predominately White community, even though my school is segregated, it's not a small feat, and it's something that would not have taken place forty, fifty, sixty years ago. (Warrior Carlos Washburn)

The Warriors shared experiences of their abilities being invalidated: “When I was being presented as the leader of the organization, he didn't congratulate me. He said, ‘Why did they choose you?’” (Warrior Eric Pounds). Another leader, Warrior Dr. Blizzy, experienced

institutional discrimination in the form of false allegations, public shaming, and relentless attacks on his character, integrity, and career as a Black leader.

The Warriors had an awareness of how being a Black man is perceived by others, and therefore how this has a detrimental impact on their ability to progress and collaborate genuinely and effectively with particular groups of people. However, it was suggested that this awareness allows these leaders to think through alternative methods and strategies in order to achieve their desired outcome. It may be by seeking out White colleagues who are more racially and culturally literate and understand the dynamics of race (and racism) and how it plays out in the workplace. Or, as one Warrior suggested, it may be by becoming an expert in code switching:

This notion around code switching . . . it's so engrained in my experience that I think I would say, African and Black men . . . are experts at code switching, and compartmentalizing. (Warrior Eric Carter)

These narratives also highlighted the need to prepare the younger generation of Black youth for the racialized experiences and anti-Blackness they are likely to encounter as a result of being socialized and racialized Black in America.

We have to teach our kids to code switch, we have to teach our kids how you handle something in school, or eventually the workplace. . . . And you try to define those things as different and teach them a path away from that, and try to teach a relevancy of that. (Warrior Hadley Truant)

The same words and counsel would also apply to aspiring and serving Black male K-12 school building-level Initiates. One leader expressed the difference in comfort and familiarity that he feels towards young Black male students in comparison to others:

The kids I make physical contact with most are probably boys of color, right, and that's just the traditional dap you know. And you know, there's occasionally a couple of White kids who I do that with . . . but you think about that like ideally everybody comes in and gets some dap, but you can't do it to everybody. (Warrior Eric Carter)

Warrior Eric Carter then went on to speak about the discomfort of being the only Black person in the room and how he navigated these situations by seeking out others like him.

I'm used to looking for allies. So whether it's a Latino person, or an Asian person, or an East Asian person, or a woman, I'd go into a space and you kind of add up, who's on my team, right? And you look for those people.

This Warrior sought support in situations where he felt alone and/or uncomfortable to fit in—a common experience among this group of Black male school building-level Warriors.

Throughout their career as a leader, partnered with their experience of being Black and male, these men are able to understand the racialized political implications placed upon them, their schools, and the students they serve. As a leader of a school serving predominately Black student populations, with average or lower measured academic outcomes, one leader, Warrior Carlos Washburn, is required to act as both a salesman and a politician in order to gain resources for his school. He noticed a clear difference between the funding provided to his school compared with more affluent, notable, and White-populated schools: “We are the city with a lot of resources, but you know those can be spread thin” (Warrior Carlos Washburn). Another Black male school building-level Warrior, Warrior Dr. Blizzy, shared his experiences within a school such as this, where particular groups of teachers would assert their power by taking advantage of the dysfunction of the system:

All around power. You know, a certain group of teachers asserting power, and because the school was so dysfunctional, informal focus of power arose because in a dysfunctional system or setting, the one who can solve a problem can grab the power, and that in grabbing the power they developed cliques and held on to that power. (Warrior Dr. Blizzy)

It was made clear throughout the textural descriptions, narratives, and storytelling of these leaders that their existence in leading while Black and male is political. One Warrior described it this way:

There is a compartmentalization I think of that I'm not sure if other people have to do, I had never considered it because it's always been engrained in me that the personal is always political. I learned that and I thought it and believed it, the personal is political. (Warrior Eric Carter)

As a Black man, this leader has a belief that his personal identity provokes political effect. This seems to be common among this group of leaders who routinely shared experiences of double consciousness, a concept that speaks to necessity for these Black male principals and heads of school to manage and temper their behavior differently for the benefit of others. In another case, the overwhelming success of one Black male school building-level leader, Warrior Dr. Blizzy, was met with persistent and public sabotage. This Warrior created new innovative ways to improve student outcomes through the use of hip-hop. Warrior Dr. Blizzy's success was televised and praised on a national scale, with support from influential public figures, including Oprah Winfrey, and others. His students showcased their hip-hop project at the Tribeca Film Festival. However, when met with resistance and strong disagreements with the Teachers' Union, this leader was repeatedly accused of major misconduct; misappropriation of funds, and later assaulting a student. These attacks were supported by colleagues, members of the union, and local politicians. As a Black man, leading while Black and male, this leader fit the stereotypical image of a "wrongdoer" in a way that made it easy for these allegations to be considered "believable," "credible," resulting in a detrimental effect on his career and livelihood. After being found innocent of misappropriating funds, this leader was then accused of assaulting a student. In the investigation, eyewitness testimonies in support of Warrior Dr. Blizzy's leadership were discredited, while the testimony of a White female secretary was used as a basis to rule in favor of these allegations.

This is an example of a lived experience of relentless institutional discrimination, thuggish efforts to destroy a person who does not fit the majority's desired mold of success,

conforming to White male social norms and expectations of what is/is not deemed acceptable behavior, used in the controlling of Black bodies and minds-, and a clear bias against this Black man—once in a case of false allegations and later in a case presented as an unjust and unfair ruling. The substantiated facts of Warrior Dr. Blizzy’s case vividly highlight the lengths and depths to which Black misandry, directed to Black men in school leadership positions, manifests at individual and institutional levels.

If you let too many of us in or if you let our perspective shine, then just like the White basketball player, the White boxer, the White tennis player, and all of those things became obsolete—so will the White model of what a principal should be, or a school leader should be, that would become obsolete as well. And that’s the fear. (Warrior Dr. Blizzy)

The Warriors showed a strong sense of learning and gaining from their negative experiences and the various issues they have encountered throughout their career. When confronted with obstacles, these Black male school building-level Warriors demonstrate an ability to acknowledge and utilize these lessons learned with a mindset of moving forward, despite setbacks. When reflecting on such setbacks, these leaders present a perception of positivity rather than hindrance. The Warriors show their ability to demonstrate courage, determination, and strength of character. After his career was publicly destroyed with accusations of gross misconduct, Warrior Dr. Blizzy expressed the traumatic effects on his well-being as well as his career. However, when reflecting on this experience, this leader stated: “It was a sad end but actually it was a beautiful beginning” (Warrior Dr. Blizzy). Although there are/were long-lasting effects of this trauma, the leader was able to acknowledge and accept that there was “a beautiful beginning.” This leader, despite this very personal, targeted attack, has since gone on to achieve considerable success as a Black male educational leader, advisor, and

consultant to principals and schools from across the city and beyond. Again, this can be used as an example of the strength of character within this group of men.

The Black male school building-level Warriors spoke extensively on the need to dismantle negative stereotypes of Black men as leaders, as well as the politics of race and racism within the school leadership profession. There was a lack of assurance that others are able to understand these leaders from a point of view that incorporates racial dynamics and cultural difference—along with the difficulty of changing the predeveloped attitudes and behaviors of others.

The challenge is, how do you share your experiences in ways that it's a multiplicative effective? . . . Can people understand how this becomes a dynamic issue of racial class identity, right, and you know, you just want to know people are thinking across that broad spectrum and sometimes you're not a hundred percent sure if that's true. . . . that's the challenge I think for Black male leadership. How do you take that which seems to be innate to you and share it in a way that's meaningful for other folks? (Warrior Eric Carter)

Another leader, Warrior Thomas Jean, expressed the exhaustion of having to spoonfeed White teachers and other White colleagues who do not understand how to interact and/or regulate their behavior when interacting with nonWhite students and leaders:

[It is] tiresome when I have to play daddy principal and do sociology 101, with some Caucasian teachers who were new to the city, new to dealing with African American, Latino students, and dealing with a Black, male leader. And it's like, okay. Here's what we have to do here. Now you don't say words like that. (Warrior Thomas Jean)

These descriptive narratives highlighted the seemingly oblivious nature and extent of racial illiteracy that exists among a predominately White school/teacher workforce. This lack of awareness supports the maintenance and growth of racism and discrimination, whether conscious and explicit, or unconscious and indirect. The concern of these narratives encourages reflection on the extent to which this insensibility has impacted their leadership and, more broadly, their lives as Black men.

Warrior Thomas Jean expounded on the ways in which the race-gendered identities of Black male school building-level leaders adds at times overwhelming, multiple responsibilities to the Black male leadership identity.

To be a Black male leader is to have to also understand that you are not going to make friends with everybody, everybody's not gonna love you, and that's what leaders in general have to do. . . . You are Black, you are male, and you're a leader. So those are three mantles that, you know, some of the [other] leaders don't necessarily carry . . . because you wear so many mantles you end up sometimes being overwhelmed. You get tired of fighting those stereotypes that are attached to that mantle. And sometimes you just don't feel like battling. (Warrior Thomas Jean)

For several of the participating Black male building-level Warriors working within lower-performing schools with predominantly Black and Latino students, there are additional challenges of having to compete against other, higher-performing, better resourced schools in order to gain essential resources and funding. As a result, these leaders are required, out of necessity, to promote/market their schools within a broader context, discourse, perceived understanding, and misconception that attribute negative connotations and assumptions to schools serving majority Black communities. This further evidences the additional, dual role of politician and salesman that many of the Black male K-12 school building-level Warriors take on.

I have to serve more as a salesman and politician because I have to go out and practically sell my school and to the constituents so they would choose me over other schools which you know places challenges on my schedule and with my goals. . . . Because my school typically has lower test scores, there are automatically assumptions about my school that I have to go out and try to change people's perceptions. (Warrior Carlos Washburn)

Due to the negative preconceptions, unfair treatment, and views toward lower-performing schools, particularly those that serve students from predominantly race-marginalized backgrounds, these leaders face constant battles for equity of funding in order to maintain semblance of adequate resourcing of their schools. This speaks to the gross inequalities and

inequities that permeate the school system, and the impact that this unfair prioritization of schools serving affluent, White, middle-upper-class communities has upon students from race-marginalized backgrounds who attend schools serving nonaffluent, nonWhite, nonmiddle-upper-class communities. As well as the effect this has on the leaders of those schools, this also highlights further issues for Black male school building-level leaders who lead while Black and male.

### **Whole Child Development**

The Black male school building-level Warriors presented clear gratitude and pride in their role as leaders and the various experiences they have had throughout their careers. Through their textural descriptions of experience of leading while Black and male, it is clear that the Warriors have achieved great things for themselves and also for their students. These leaders have distinct ways of tailoring their leadership styles and practice as educators in order to best engage and support their students, particularly those of African descent. “We were one of the most improved schools in the state in terms of the state measurements” (Warrior Hadley Truant); “Since I’ve taken over as principal, we have grown from an overall 11 percent proficiency in ELA up to 47 percent as of today for the last year. And so we are showing growth in our test scores” (Warrior Carlos Washburn).

In describing the selected visual/photo flashcard “Boys will be boys till someone teaches them to be more” (visual/photo flashcard image A), Warrior Carlos Washburn shared how the image described a core aspect of his personal leadership philosophy in supporting children and young people:

I picked that one [visual/photo flashcard image A] because I think it speaks to my life and how I try not to be overly concerned about stereotypes. . . . And so I love celebrating diversity, I love doing different things. I love doing things differently, I love presenting something different than what is expected. . . . One of the things I bring into education



and leadership is allowing others to be different around me and teaching boys that they don't necessarily have to play into the stereotypes of what a boy and what a man should be, and the same thing for girls. . . . I think this probably speaks to who I am personally and what I bring to the table, and what I'd like to see in other people is to know how to be different. (Warrior Carlos Washburn)

One Leader, Warrior Dr. Blizzy, described how he used hip-hop and creative filmmaking to encourage young Black students to engage with their school curriculum and develop critical thinking skills. This leader also referred to "MTV" and his students' "favorite rappers" as a method to promote the school's uniform policy. "I made sweeping changes, got these improvements and promises, made it the number one in the district, gave it national recognition. All while being a principal for the very first time" (Warrior Dr. Blizzy). Another leader, Warrior Carlos Washburn, believed that rather than focusing solely on academic learning, it is also crucial for teachers, leaders, and educators more broadly to take a holistic approach to student learning.

I've always been a believer in whole child development, which is why I focused on character education and social-emotional learning, and making sure kids actually get a physical education class. (Warrior Carlos Washburn)

An emotional motivation is fueling these leaders. This not only stems from childhood experiences and key influencers, but also a strong desire to protect and service children while supporting them to succeed. For one Black male school building-level Warrior, "the ultimate is that the outcome, I just want to see our kids do better" (Warrior Thomas Jean). "My whole purpose for all of this, so people, my students will grow up and they'd become productive citizens. And so whatever I can do to support that in whatever way" (Warrior Carlos Washburn).

The majority of these leaders were not aware of any programs or support relating to African-centered models of educational leadership, although one leader used a cultural and spiritual basis to his leadership style:

As you build that culture and climate within the building, it does come from a spiritual place of a family sense which does have its spiritual elements that we're all connected. (Warrior Hadley Truant)

Another Warrior shared his experience of working within an all-Black school and having an educator who introduced students to “Afro-centric” philosophies, Iyana Vanzant (1993), and learning about the *Nguzo Saba*, seven principles. This leader went on to express that he felt as though the implementation of African-centered models can in some ways be “corny” and pretentious. Another leader shared that although he is proud of his African heritage, these models of leadership are not something to which he subscribes: “I think that we function in a world that is not just Afrocentric. We have to learn to function in a world that encompasses all other centrics right, and so that’s my view on that” (Warrior Frederick Monroe). For another leader, there was a concern around intersectional relations within the Black community for African-born Americans and the African Diaspora. “I’m not sure about African-centered, but I do know that there is this push for curriculum experiences and opportunities that resonate for American-born Blacks in a schooling experience . . .” (Warrior Eric Carter). While this suggests a need for models that resonate with African Americans, different consideration is also needed within education for the nonAmerican-born Black students from the African Diaspora.

In looking to community as part of leadership philosophy, this group of Black male school building-level leaders, the Warriors, have a strong connection to their communities, whether it be academic/institutional affiliations, or home/familial relations. These connections feed into a passion for investing in the community and a hope for communities to prosper.

I live in this community, so the dream for me is to see some of our young people turning into teachers, and mentors, and leaders for my children who are seven and three years old. And to see you know, our whole community, just do better, I have a big role in that. (Warrior Eric Carter)

The Warriors described the ways in which they have engaged with their communities, highlighting that for this group of leaders, being actively involved and present within their schools is a significant part of their practice as school building-level leaders.

I engaged in lots of things, got to know many families. . . . I was one of the greeters at the door, so as the families are coming in, they saw me every day, and would help them with whatever issue that was going on. (Warrior Hadley Truant)

One Warrior prioritized his students' exposure to opportunities through field trips and personal development. Others were in a position to utilize their skills in order to provide support through mentoring and open conversation. Another provided his own hip-hop programs to support students and staff. These leaders have established relationships with local institutions, allowing them to build partnerships that better support children and young people and their access to opportunities.

Because of our proximity and the fact that we were the only local school in the area, we have a special relationship with Harvard. And so we get a fair number of kids every year who go. And we also have built up a special relationship or building special relationship with MIT and because we're in local area. (Warrior Eric Carter)

The successes derived from building strong community partnerships and collaboration are not without challenges. A number of participating Black male school building-level Warriors shared descriptive narratives of some of the resistance they encountered in their efforts to implement and lead on change. These leaders strive for improved outcomes and are often supported in their efforts to do so. However, they emphasized that the will, support, and commitment of colleagues and other stakeholders, both within as well as outside the school community, are essential for achieving embedded, sustained change and success.

I always say, everybody likes change when it's abstract. But when we start saying, in order for change to happen, you have to change, then you start dealing with not the technical aspect of change, then you start to deal with the human dynamics of change which is slippery. (Warrior Dr. Blizzy)

Another leader added:

Issues, one of them is definitely convincing a segment of our population, of our community that education is important, that it should be taken seriously, and that it requires sacrifice. (Warrior Frederick Monroe, Ph.D.)

These leaders highlighted seeming struggles and tensions with their efforts (ministry) to get all sections of the school community on board with driven change and the proactive development and learning that are promoted by these building-level leaders.

### **Summary**

This chapter focused on the textural descriptions of leading while Black and male of the seven Black male K-12 school building-level Warriors—individuals with 4-9 years leadership experience. Key elements of childhood and growing up as Black boys shaped these men and their future ideology of leadership. The Warriors placed importance on self-awareness and practical engagement. These philosophies were based on an espoused belief that in order to be an effective leader, one must first have a thorough understanding of self. For this demographic of Black male school leaders, this involves identifying strengths and weaknesses not only within themselves, but also within their schools, staff, communities, and surrounding areas. This is partnered with having an established view of how and whom they want to be perceived as a leader—principal or head of school. This idea of self-awareness and self-perception may also be closely associated with a larger sense of duty toward safeguarding the village—supporting their communities as well as being proactive in the development of their schools. These Black male school building-level Warriors have adopted a hands-on approach to their leadership style, placing little emphasis on formal organizational structures, hierarchy, and workplace politics. For some, this feeds into their personal leadership philosophy and preconceived ideas of the type of leader they want to be, with an intentional focus on making concerted efforts to enhance the

development of students and wider communities. This may also (wittingly or unwittingly) feed into the ways in which they, as Black male school building-level leaders, wish to be seen by others. The Black male school building-level Warriors were equally concerned by the underrepresentation of Black educational leaders across the profession and the negative and long-lasting impact this has on students. The lack of representation of Black people in general and Black men in particular highlights a need for effective, focused, supportive structures, leadership development, and networking opportunities to be in place for these men. The underrepresentation of Black men across the school leadership profession is a constant thought, with leadership being described as “an isolating place to be” (Warrior Frederick Monroe, Ph.D.). The Warriors described the difficulties they encountered in attempts to have their views and perspectives both heard and listened to, even as senior leaders—principals and heads of school—within their own schools. Through the extended descriptive narratives shared, the challenge of being heard and listened to may be linked back to negative stereotyping and bias against Black men, the Black male identity, and especially directed toward Black men in a responsible, senior-level leadership role.

The Black male school building-level Warriors also described leadership development opportunities and networks as being beneficial to their leadership development. They seemed to find formal networks useful for connecting with other professionals, however, there is a preference among participating Warriors for informal network groups, which are presented as their main source of support, mentoring, and frientoring. The Warriors seek out groups made up of people who are able to provide advice and support when needed, good friends, and close professional relationships with colleagues and/or like-minded professionals. This demography of Black male school building-level leaders expressed comfort in having close groups of friends.

This would be “very specific customized support for a narrow band” (Warrior Eric Carter), focused on the issues that affect Black men within educational leadership. For some of the Warriors, there is a longing for such an environment in which they can be within a “safe place.” It could be suggested that the psychosocial demands of their leadership role means that they experience a need for respite and relief that can be gained in the presence of like-minded peers who understand the pressures of the role of Black leaders and, specifically, Black male principals or heads of school.

## CHAPTER 7

### FINDINGS: THE ELDERS—HUMANIZED PORTRAITS

*The words of the elders become sweet some day.*  
(Malawian proverb)

I was sitting here and one of the teachers who were in the interview committee which is populated by parents and teachers was a White teacher who said, Baba R, if you were hired to be the principal, what would you do with Black boys? I kind of took a quick breath but I rebounded very quickly and said, “The same thing I’m going to do with White boys. Educate them well, and ensure that they all get a quality education.” I know the urban experience helped me, but what I was able to discern is that there was a bigger picture behind that question. That question was just the tip of the iceberg. The bigger picture was that this was a school at that time in 1984 that was as I said, a high-end school, that was getting their first influx of Black students because they were going through a voluntary desegregation. So they had no experience working with significant numbers of Black and Brown kids. And so that question was: Are you going to suspend them? We hope you will, are you going to make sure you drop the hammer on them because you’re a six-foot-four Black man, and we need that. And by my answer saying the same thing that you’re going to give the White boys, high quality education—it sort of startled the room, and in a way they knew that I wasn’t just here to be a showpiece of 6’4, I was here to get the work done in a quality way.

(Elder Baba R)

This statement highlights Elder Baba R’s strength of character and integrity, in line with his personal values of equality, equity, and fairness. The way in which Elder Baba R recounted this story speaks to his awareness of self and his understanding of how he is perceived by others, particularly White colleagues, teachers, administrators, and parents, within such an environment. This further showcases the strength of Elder Baba R’s character and leadership attributes to stay firm within his beliefs during a time of heightened racial indifference, racial microaggressions, and White-centered political assertion. In a situation where many would choose to appease or placate, Elder Baba R poses a subtle challenge by voicing his intention to provide quality education for all children. The idea that his statement “startled the room” serves as a reminder of

the ingrained educational inequality and institutional racism that continues to appear in present day, though now often less explicit and more insidious in nature. Elder Baba R's narrative documents important racialized aspects of leading while Black and male. Herewith presented are the collective narratives and descriptions of experiences of Black male school building-level Elders of a phenomenon leading while Black and male across the essences of: (a) growing up as a Black boy; (b) leadership as ministry; (c) when a Black man is the principal's office; and (d) safeguarding the village.

### **I Am My Ancestors' Wildest Dreams**

The Black male K-12 school building-level Elders spoke extensively on their childhood, family, and early experiences of community, sharing narratives of the ways in which their formative childhood years both influenced and impacted their learning and development as educators and leaders. The leadership philosophies and motivations of participating Elders were closely linked to these formative childhood experiences and the village that contributed to the growth and development from child to adult. It is clear that the Elders' ideology and philosophies on leadership stemmed from familial relationships and experiences of being a son. Throughout childhood and adulthood, these close relationships informed the leadership and behaviors of the Black male school building-level Elders.

Participating Elders show a strong sense of closeness with their families. One Elder, Elder Ali, described his father as "my hero":

I am the product of [parents' names]. My mother was a secretary for many years working for State Government. My dad, who is my hero, was a police officer. My mom and dad raised three boys. I'm the oldest of three. . . . So I had the benefit of a very strong father, disciplinarian, but loving, at the same time, and a wonderfully strong, loving mother.  
(Elder Ali)



Another Elder, Elder James Johnson, spoke of moments of vulnerability and bonding he shared with both his mother and father:

My parents were very, very heavy-handed and old-school, top-down, and didactic with their parenting style—my way or the highway. I respect it now, I hated it especially as an adolescent. I'll never forget my undergrad graduation. I attended a school that my mom worked at. . . . She told me when I was in high school that she had hoped that one of her kids, one of her seven, would go to this school. I mean she was just a nurses' assistant at the hospital on campus. . . . I remember after the [graduation] ceremony was over, my mom just couldn't stop crying. And I said to my mom, "Mom, would you stop, this is so embarrassing." And I look at it now and I'm like, you're such a jerk, James. A lot of what I do is informed by parents' will and hopes and certainly the example they set. . . . After my mom had passed . . . my dad came up and spent a little time with my wife and I and our kids. In a moment of vulnerability, he looked at me and he said, "James, I had no idea that you would do this stuff. By this stuff he meant just everything that I had done in my [life] since high school. (Elder James Johnson)

Members of the Elders' group attributed their current perspectives and motivations not only to the ways of their parents and families, but also to their communities and others who played a pivotal role in their childhood learning and development.

One Elder shared that his optimism towards "always seeing the good in people" is a result of his mother. Another, Elder Baba R, believed that his personable nature is an attribute of his father's doctrine to "know everybody from thugs to kings and everybody in between":

Both my parents were from the Jim Crow South, my mother from Alabama, father from South Carolina. . . . my father could not read or write, and made his way through the great migration. It's interesting to talk about migration to get a better life. I was in a home where a father who never had an education, understood the importance of it, a mother who understood the importance of it but couldn't go beyond a certain ceiling. So that helped to sort of give me the underpinnings. . . . One thing he told me is that, "Son, I don't have the education, but let me give you a piece of wisdom." He said, "When you have the opportunity, know everybody from thugs to kings and everybody in between." (Elder Baba R)

Elders made strong reference to their teachers and educators growing up. Elder Ali described a Black teacher, Ms. Mildred Scott, who introduced him to the work of Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Paul Robeson, as "The teacher who had the most profound

impact on me and my life.” Other Elders expressed similar childhood experiences that shaped their self-identity and future motivation and mission to become a principal or head of school.

One Elder, Elder Damani Camara, described a very different experience. Having grown up in a predominantly White community, he expressed the extent to which he did not have a sense of belonging—he did not fit in and often felt inferior within this environment as a young Black man. This may be attributed to experiences such as one this Elder shared from his time at school: “sitting in the third grade and having Ms. Lincoln talk about how the pilgrims did their writing on slate with charcoal, and every White kid turned around and looking at me when she said charcoal” (Elder Damani Camara).

For Elder Frank Stanley, Ed.D., his mission was founded by his intent to prevent the re-enactment of the challenges faced by his mother as a result of him being a self-proclaimed “wayward student”:

When my mother passed away, I really reflected on—I guess the role that I played in terms of challenging—being a troubled, or disturbed, or wayward student—a child, you know. . . . As a student, I was exposed to all these different things as a child, the abandonment piece, the crime, the navigating all of that—dealing with social workers, guidance counselors, and then—oh, police, you know dealing with that whole piece. . . . In some ways the school system discarded me when I was younger and I happened to still make it, I survived in spite of the system. . . . I wanted to teach Black boys because I wanted to play a role in preventing them from causing their mother the same headaches that I caused my mother. So that was purely my motivation for teaching. (Elder Frank Stanley, Ed.D.)

By becoming an educator, Elder Frank Stanley, Ed.D. aimed to shape the lives of young Black boys in a way that did not have a negative impact on their mothers. This meant leading with the intent to prevent the development of challenging behaviors and supporting Black boys who were “troubled” or “disturbed” in the way that he was as a young Black boy. These childhood experiences and the effects they had on his mother were clear foundations to Elder Frank Stanley’s motivation and leadership philosophy.

The narratives suggest/ed that those Black male school building-level Elders who were educated and surrounded by a wealth of Black culture found enjoyment during childhood and throughout their school experiences. Being a part of such a community “built a certain kind of confidence” (Elder Ali). This suggested that for these Elders, being in an environment of familiarity and Black culture played a key role in building their confidence as Black boys and later on in life as Black male principals and heads of school. Elder Baba R described the significance of being in the presence of Black male teachers who acted as role models:

It was a school in this day and age when we are searching for Black male teachers, the school was inundated in the positive way by Black male teachers. . . . I saw earlier on what excellence and quality teaching from my Black male teacher looked like, felt like. And I know that had a shaping impact on my future steps. (Elder Baba R)

This was in contrast to the schooling experiences of Elder James Johnson, who attended an affluent, predominately White-serving school where he struggled to “fit in.” In order to progress socially while at this school, he made a conscious decision to change the way in which he carried himself as a young Black boy. This Elder later went on to share that he once deemed his Black identify a hindrance.

I mean I almost failed out, and I made a conscious decision as my tenth grade year went along at school to change the way that I spoke, the way that I carried myself, the way that I walked, the way I dressed [because] then maybe I’ll stand a chance, then maybe I’ll fit better, and then maybe I’ll do better, you know, academically and so forth. And I ended up doing okay—but the cost was high. (Elder James Johnson)

The textural descriptions and narratives on the difference in school experiences shared by the participating Black male school building-level Elders informed a unique perspective of self-identity and confidence, both of which have an inevitable impact on leadership philosophy and practice as an adult.

The Elders shared experiences of their parents being disciplinarians, referred to as being “very, very heavy-handed” and “didactic with their parenting style” (Elder James Johnson).

Elder Ali shared that he had a “very strong father, disciplinarian, but loving, at the same time” and being fearful of the repercussions of bad behavior. It was suggested that the results of this authoritative approach were what steered these Black male school leader Elders into their current career path and fueled their ability to progress: “It wasn’t abusive, it was to keep you in line, and in line I stayed, all the way into a brilliant and bright future” (Elder Ali).

The Black male school building-level Elders understood themselves in relation to their family, history, and culture. Discussions highlighted the way in which their parents’ experiences shaped them as children and as leaders. For one Elder (Elder Ali), it was not only his parents but also his grandparents who enhanced his consciousness of Black history and his social standing as a Black man in the United States. The Elders gained an understanding of the hardship and suffering faced by their ancestors as well as the brilliance and determination from which Black people originate. Other Elders expressed their self-awareness regarding the experiences of their parents: “I piece together aspects of what I know about his [father’s] journey and my mom’s journey and how hard it was for them growing up in the Jim Crow South” (Elder James Johnson). This Elder showed an appreciation for the struggles that his parents were forced to withstand, and with regard to this, there was an acknowledgment that his achievements were extraordinary in the eyes of his parents. Another Elder, Elder Baba R, went on to share: “My mother went to a high school, was very able as a student. She received an academic award, a rhetorical contest and had a book signed by Langston Hughes. So she was bound to college but had no way to get there.” For these Elders, there is strong recognition and acknowledgment that, individually and collectively, they are their ancestors’ wildest dreams.

### **Who Shall I Send? . . . Send Me (Isaiah 6:8)**

The Black male K-12 school building-level Elders showed a strong appreciation for faith and spirituality. Their faith and spirituality guided and informed this group of experienced Black male principals and heads of school. Spiritual belonging was described as being “foundational” (Elder Frank Stanley) and a key component of these Elders’ leadership.

I mean I think that’s foundational. . . . I see spiritual as of a wholeness, or foundation because if I’m not standing on that, I don’t think I have legs. . . . spiritual it’s definitely connected to everything I do, I mean it is what I am. (Elder Frank Stanley)

Elder Baba R is Executive Director and National Leader of a national education organization of practitioners focused on promoting the educational success of boys and young men of color. The organization was formally incorporated in 2008. Elder Baba R places significance on a biblical scriptural message of being called to serve—“Isaiah 6:8 and that’s where the Lord is asking Jeremiah, Who shall I send?”—as part of the impetus and early vision that propelled him to lead on this work. Elder Baba R, who also serves as a Deacon for his local church community, shared an intimate testimony on the ways in which “a higher power has helped to shape who I am.”

I am a man of faith, and I heard the faith call go out to me. . . . I also learned from Moses’ story. Moses had five different excuses, right? And the Lord said none of it is good enough. You’re still going to go. So that whole notion of being called to lead, called to serve. . . . You’ve got to believe not in your ability to be a difference maker, but a higher power has helped to shape who I am. (Elder Baba R)

Similar to many of the other participating Black male school building-level Elders, Elder Baba R saw his school leadership and work as part of a ministry, vocation, and calling—a responsibility and call to action, or “Stop stallin’ on your calling and just jump right in” (Shawn Dove, 2017). This may signify a sense of noble responsibility with regard to Elder Baba R’s leadership philosophy.

In reference to personal leadership philosophies, there is a strong link between leadership philosophy and identity:

“Who Am I?” [visual/photo flashcard image E] And I think that is my philosophy as a principal, particularly as it relates to the children I serve, but also to everybody else. Who am I? Where do I fit in? (Elder Damani Camara)

The Black male school building-level Elders made reference to prominent historical and contemporary Black figures such as Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Muhammad Ali, Maya Angelou, and President Barack Obama, presenting their quotes, ideologies, and actions as a doctrine and philosophy to live by:

When I think about the sacrifice that she [Harriet Tubman] demonstrated, what she did, when I think about what that experience was. When I think about the Middle Passage, I always think, “How hard is anything that I do today?” (Elder Ali)

In terms of who we are in the journey that we travel, in the luggage we have to carry. So also a sense of pride of all that you’ve done to us for centuries, and like Maya said, “And still we rise.” And so I feel good. (Elder Damani Camara)

My hero besides my father, Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali, and those examples for me, to be a strong Black man. (Elder Ali)

In referencing a selected visual/photo flashcard image of President Barack Obama welcoming a young African American boy and his family at the White House (flashcard image D), Elder Ali went to share:

So as it relates to leadership, I see Obama in that moment as a kind of leader that I try to be, as a school leader, somebody who is approachable, and somebody who young people can identify with. That moment of bending over and lowering his head is akin to what I say is, showing the sense of humor, telling your personal story. What is it that would take for the young people to draw closer to you and not see you as simply the big principal of the school, but somebody that they can in fact come to with their problems? Somebody that they—when they have ideas about things that it would take to improve the school, feel comfortable enough sharing with you. (Elder Ali)

Elders expressed a strong association with the use of quotes, proverbs, aphorisms, and scriptural verses such as “If you don’t stand for something, you will fall for anything” and “The

hottest places in Hell are reserved for those who, in a time of moral crisis, maintain their neutrality” (Elder Frank Stanley). The use of such quotes and aphorisms highlighted a strong sense of self-assurance, strength, and character among participating Black male school building-level leaders. The Elders’ reflections on the stories and accounts of Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, and others also conveyed a sense of motivation and encouragement to continue in the work—leading while a Black male school building-level leader, and to continue being resilient through tough and challenging times. There was a clear expressed appreciation and an admiration of the determination and resilience of the ancestors, whom our Elders considered inspirational for their ability to exist through a dehumanizing and traumatizing history and secure a legacy of survival for generations to follow.

[On Harriet Tubman] There is not one thing that I do in my life that is so overwhelming that wears me out that it’s like, Oh, my god. . . . When I think about that. So that’s what keeps me going. That’s why I don’t really complain about work and hard work because I think about what my ancestors went through. (Elder Ali)

Leaders within this group ensured that they themselves and their schools have an understanding and appreciation for cultural differences: “It was about getting people to begin to think about race on a daily basis, and to think about how their practices impede inclusion, impede success, impede engagement” (Elder Damani Camara). When asked about their thoughts on African-centered models of education and leadership development, one Elder explained his view that the notion of these models is an “American phenomenon.” He went on to speak about his perception that “African-centered education” is about teaching true, honest Black history. This Elder saw such an approach as educating in a way that encompasses Black history and Black pioneers as the norm rather than the exception. This would involve making children and young people aware of key Black historical figures whose history and contributions are absent from mainstream curricula and general discussion across academia. “Why wouldn’t someone

like George Washington Carver be that scientist that every child knows just like you know George Washington, the former first president?” (Elder Frank Stanley). Another Elder, Elder Ali, stressed the importance of the approach and method of practice when implementing African-centered models of education. The Elder held the belief that this was not about embodying the superficial elements of African culture, but more so supporting students’ theoretical understanding of African culture and history. This then acts as a foundation to build strength of character and develop a strong sense of self-confidence for students. Strong emphasis is placed on truth seeking—knowing the truth about who you are and where you come from as a person of African heritage. This is expressed as a key aspect of self-identity and the realization of potential: “Unless the light goes on, you can’t act truly on your brilliance. And the light goes on when you’ve been exposed to the knowledge of yourself” (Elder Ali). These leaders had their own definitions of African-centered education. However, each pointed toward the teachings of true, authentic African history in a way that raises awareness, builds knowledge, and develops an understanding of self.

In recognizing and responding to the calling, the ministry to lead, Black male school building-level Elders also acknowledged the wealth and depth of support they received from family, community, professional, and other networks. Participating Elders spoke extensively on the power of mentorship, frientorship, and the support they received. The Elders take example and advice from educational leaders in the form of mentorship. As protégés, these Black male school leader Elders express the wealth of knowledge and experience they have received through being supported by the educational leaders who have gone before them—pioneers and forerunners in their own right. The Elders showed a clear admiration and respect for those who have mentored, supported, and guided them throughout their careers. These mentors shared



practical advice on how to become effective educational leaders, while also informing their developed philosophy of what it means to be a Black male school building-level Elder and to lead with impact. Relationships such as this are communicated as a key element in the leadership development of these Elders.

If I had to go through the principalship today, I would insist on signing-bonus, and that signing bonus would be that I have a consultant or coach that I can call on. And I think every principal, particularly the new ones, is required to have somebody who's going to be a critical friend, and who helps you get over all the hurdles. (Elder Baba R)

Whether you're a Black principal or what, a new principal needs mentorship. That the road, the journey is too fraught with difficulty for one to just think you can walk in here, and do it on your own. (Elder Damani Camara)

And I met someone who became my mentor and then later friend, Dr. Frank Mickens. Legendary principal. His relationship with the children was phenomenal, and he was a father figure, but he was also a mentor, a coach, I mean he wore all the hats that people often referred to when they're talking about an ideal principal. And so I took a lot from him. (Elder Frank Stanley)

It was a Fellowship to do some work in Boston University, and to work under a national guru that was studying the impact of parent and citizen participation in education. And his name is Don Davis, kind of an icon during those years, and this was a White male. But he challenged me to go beyond what I thought I could do, so the expectation bar was set up. (Elder Baba R)

This one-on-one relationship also played a key role in supporting and guiding the decision making of the Elders. Notwithstanding clear evidence of some exceptionally strong and supportive mentoring and frientoring relationships, the Elders also voiced a cautionary reminder that:

There's no one person that has it all for you. You're building your toolkit, and you've got to have other people. . . . Do not lean on simply one person as your mentor. Try to find several mentors. Don't limit your scope. No matter how good any one principal is, they don't have everything to teach you. You're not trying to be a duplicate of that person. You're trying to build your own toolbox. (Elder Ali)

It is suggested that a broad network of support is most conducive in supporting the development and learning of school building-level leaders. This is a view supported in the

experiences expressed by the other Elders, who shared similar thoughts that having a network of people providing support is crucial for their leadership development. In order to create this theoretical “toolbox” of knowledge and skill, leaders need to find a broad, diverse group of supporters.

The Black male school building-level Elders often rely on informal support groups made up of friends, like-minded professionals, and those occupying similar positions, and importantly the wider community. These Elders presented a clear sense of confidence in themselves as leaders and in their abilities to help others while achieving their desired outcomes. It could be suggested that this confidence stems from the wealth of experience that these leaders have gained. However, along with this, the narrative suggests that strong Black male figures such as Malcolm X, Muhammed Ali, as well as parents and communities contributed to the self-assurance and confidence of these Black leaders: “I always know that I’m capable of doing anything that I put my mind to. I’ve never doubted that. I’ve never had to overcome that. I know who I am” (Elder Ali).

### **I’m Black, I’m Six Feet Tall**

The Black male school building-level Elders had an understanding of the way in which they are perceived as Black men and showed a consciousness of not wanting to feed into negative stereotypes. One Elder, Elder Frank Stanley, turned down a job offer after being unexpectedly told that he would also be leading on security.

So when I got to the school, I arrived early because that’s part of my DNA. I got to the school around 6:30, I was actually waiting for the principal, and this custodian didn’t show up. And so on day one when they gave me the orientation to what I was doing, they gave me a big large ring of keys, and it had to be over a hundred keys on that ring. And the thought was eventually you will know what each of these keys go to, so I’m thinking, then I said, “This is crazy.” But that was okay, and by the way, I had no clue what the AP organization does, I just wanted to be an AP.

But then as I was sitting at the table, the principal who was an Asian woman, and then there was a woman who was in charge of guidance, she was Caucasian, before I got to the school, she was in charge of guidance and discipline, I mean security. So when I came, they gave me organization, then the principal let me know that day and one addition to organization, you will also be the assistant principal of security. Now the only reason I could think that I would be the assistant principal of security is because I'm Black, I'm six feet tall, and I was bald-headed at the time and I'm bald-headed now.

So that image of the Black male as disciplinarian, and I felt—I just didn't feel right about it, it was a gut feeling that this is not right. By the end of the day, I had felt like this—and I got on the train on the way home and I said one or two things will happen. I said, either or maybe both, I said I will end up getting divorced and I'm likely to have a heart attack based on the amount of stress I'm feeling today. And so when I went home, I called my mentor, and he said to me, "Call the principal and tell her that you don't want to take the job," and I was like, "All right, thank you," because I didn't know what to do. And I called the principal and I told her that I was going to decline the position. And it was by far the best decision that I probably ever made as an administrator. (Elder Frank Stanley)

This story relays the emotional experience of this leader, Elder Frank Stanley, during the process of initial orientation and being offered a new role. The beginning of this experience alludes to a sense of excitement and anticipation for fulfilling his desired role as an Assistant Principal. This is then followed by a strong feeling of unsettlement when offered an additional role of leading on security. When reflecting, this leader expressed his discomfort and distress with what he believed to be an offer based on stereotypical judgment and image. This caused a clear conflict for this Elder, who later turned to a trusted mentor for advice. This leader presented elements of vulnerability; when confronted with an emotional conflict, he did not know what to do and later turned to a mentor for support: "Now the only reason I could think that I would be the assistant principal of security is because I'm Black, I'm six feet tall, and I was bald-headed . . . that image of that Black male, you know, disciplinarian. . . . I just didn't feel right about it, it was a gut feeling that this is not right." The unsettling of Elder Frank Stanley when asked to lead on security in addition to his role highlighted the negative effects of preconceived notions relating to Black men, and the extent of how casually these pre-judgments are projected within

educational settings and beyond. The Elder later shared that he turned down this job offer. Elder Baba R also gave a similar description of where his 6'4 stature as a Black man impeded a job search committee, at interview, to fully see and recognize his abilities and potential contributions as a school leader principal. The association stereotyping of Black male school leaders and educators as disciplinarians was a common, recurring theme, present in the narratives of participating Black male school building-level leaders across all three demographic groups of Initiates, Warriors, and Elders. The Black male school building-level Elders present a strong awareness of their race:

I know that I'm Black. I think about that every day . . . at one point in my life, that was a hindrance. . . . When I got to undergrad, I started to consciously understand why I went to that place. . . . It was through some of my peers, who just had a more developed sophisticated understanding of racial identity. (Elder James Johnson)

This leader then went on to say that when confronted with other aspects of his identity, such as sexuality, gender, and religious affiliation, he felt some sense of privilege. This was expressed as being contrary to his experiences of being confronted by his race as a Black man.

The Elders expressed their experiences of being on the receiving end of disdain and explicit disrespect. They experienced their ability as a leader, and specifically as a principal or head of school, as being belittled and questioned by their staff/colleagues and other professionals who (either consciously or otherwise) expressed their bias against these Black male leaders. "I felt that there were certain teachers who did not respect the fact that I was principal as if it was a gift that was given to me rather than something that I earned" (Elder Frank Stanley). This concern was also presented as part of a larger narrative, in terms of White people not understanding, or being unwilling to understand, the effects and impact they have on these leaders. Stimulated through a review of the 80-plus visual/photo flashcards, Elder Damani Camara was moved to share:

I have been blessed I believe along the way, but I've also had many trials and tribulations. . . . It resonates because number one, it touches the part of the things that have gotten in my way in my life, the various things—race the racism thing, and they never see it. They never see how their behaviors get in the way. (Elder Damani Camara)

Discrimination and explicit/implicit racial bias as described by participating Black male school building-level Elders are systematic of a history and legacy of pandemic race discrimination in the United States.

There's been an assault against Black men in this nation for a long time. And that runs deeper than anybody else. And so therefore, there's less than two percent in teaching, but if you look across all industries, Black men are underrepresented. . . . The only place that they are not underrepresented is being incarcerated—they can find plenty of us to fill up the prisons. (Elder Ali)

The whole mission to recruit Black males in education, I'm one thousand percent behind. I'm one thousand percent behind recruiting the same Black males to think about being a Black principal because I know what it symbolizes in terms of the community. (Elder Baba R)

These narratives presented examples of the lasting impact that the social construction of race, racism, and anti-Blackness have and continue to have on Black men, and particularly, as in the context of this research project, for Black men in leadership positions. These social constructions and stereotypes pose a long-standing challenge for these Black leaders.

Navigating the ways in which Whiteness and White privilege show up in the workplace was consistently a matter of serious concern and disquiet among all participating school building-level Elders.

There is an internalized inferiority that comes with looking at the world—looking at how the world sees you and thinking it's a mirror. And so me being a principal in this community with White folks, I would say, No, I'm interested in advancing the cause of racial equity . . . but it was also too that I was scared out of my wits that I was unable to do what these people were doing. I went to State University. They went to these fancy-wancy colleges et cetera. (Elder Damani Camara)

Elder Frank Stanley described an incident where he was critiqued by a White female observer on his interaction with a Black male student. He went on to explain that he felt

discriminated against and extremely uncomfortable with the notion of a White woman expressing her judgment(s) on the interactions between two Black males as being wrong and in need of correction. This indicated a frustration caused by nonBlack professionals who may lack an understanding of cultural synergy and cross-cultural differences. The Elders communicated the exasperation with such individuals projecting their personal, White-normalized, culturally inappropriate ideas and perspectives around what is considered acceptable and unacceptable. This lack of understanding, partnered with a self-conferred sense of entitlement to express personal ideas and behaviors as being “the norm” or best practice, presents a privileged stance that works to the detriment of these Black male leaders—seasoned and experienced school building-level Elders and professionals. In Elder Frank Stanley’s descriptive narrative, he went on to further highlight the student-focused values of his leadership philosophy and also his confidence in refusing to accept situations that are not congruent with his personal ethics and values.

Elder Frank Stanley continued to recount the confirmation from others and self-realization that the racial microaggressions and disparaging behavior of an individual directed toward him may in fact have been a result of said individual’s resentment of Black Men, particularly those in leadership positions. This speaks to the phenomenon that many believe that people of color, and Black men in particular, “do not belong” in positions of leadership or authority. This preconceived notion is often projected within the workplace. As Black male leaders, in the field of education, with a teaching profession dominated by White females, these Elders expressed their experiences of this resentment directed towards them in various forms throughout their careers.

Another Elder spoke of his experiences of working within both an “urban setting” and later a “White suburban community”:

In the Urban setting . . . we had an armed policeman on duty during those days, now it’s ubiquitous in many urban schools. But then it was unusual in the suburban district, no such worry, the top-quality resources wouldn’t have to stretch to get, you know, leading equipment, books, urban school. (Elder Baba R)

The difference in these two environments highlights the effects of inequality as a result of location and demography, and also of the ways in which schools and education are primary conduits in the socialization and racialization of children and young people. This Elder went on to share:

You can see the inequalities and the intention by the taxpayers in the suburban district to education expectations that their children would be surrounded with high-quality experiences, not so much a parent involved in the engagement in the urban setting. So I could see those differences. (Elder Baba R)

The expectations, access to resources, and quality of education of these two institutions stand juxtaposed to each other: one, the suburban district school located in White-based suburbia, the other located within an “urban setting,” evidence of a racialized two-tier public education system.

There is an indication that when faced with discriminatory workplace politics and race relations, the Elders made efforts to fight against them. Elder Frank Stanley expressed that he would be explicit in rejecting the unwarranted attempts of White women to take control. Elder James Johnson became aware that White-focused institutions have a preference for those who are “willing to speak differently, dress differently, carry themselves, in a way that fits better with social norms” but do not conform for this approval. The descriptive narratives of these experiences presented these Elders’ confidence and strength in character and highlighted their moral standing. When confronted with unethical practice, these leaders were outwardly resistant

to more senior colleagues. In situations where for many, it would have been easier to conform, these Black male Elders explicitly took a stand.

Other experiences highlighted the tokenism of diversity within White-centric environments, and the use of numerical diversity targets being used as “proof” of integration, inclusivity, and transparency; however, in reality, this false presentation of inclusivity has a negative effect on pupils and their families. In exploring other potential barriers and opportunities to leadership development as described and perceived by Black male school building-level Elders, the Elders expressed their initial unfamiliarity with environments that are outside of their usual community—in practical terms, taking a job in New England and having never been past New York. Also, in terms of the difference in workplace culture are pre-judgments and the insincerity of people within these unfamiliar environments. Another Elder shared his difficulty with accepting the implementation of political strategy and the impact this had on pupils. A political agenda that meant “sacrificing the children today for the children tomorrow” was a notion that conflicted with the values and parochial leadership style of this Elder.

Notwithstanding the racial macro- and microaggressions and other challenges encountered while navigating their leadership, Black male school building-level Elders actively sought ways to provide opportunities to support the leadership development of others. The Elders provided mentorship and frientorship by sharing their experience with others in the form of one-on-one support, using their networks to create mutually beneficial relationships and enhance social capital for less experienced and aspiring principals and other emerging leaders. This showed their ability and willingness to support others through the use of established relationships and experiences.



Closely linked to the issues affecting Black leaders and strategies for navigating racialized spaces is, as described by participating Elders, the creation of formal leadership development opportunities and networks as part of an effort and/or ideas on how to overcome the challenge for Black school leadership—that is, the lack of Black leaders in education and within the school system and the lack of support and/or will to develop future Black leaders. The limited number of Black male school building-level leaders has led these men (Elders) to feel a need to connect, network, and build relationships with others in similar positions. This was presented in the form of support groups, organizations, and support programs. Some Elders were heavily involved in the development of such groups, while others shared that they were members. It is clear that the aims and “mission” of these opportunities and networks are to (a) connect professionals working within Black educational leadership, and (b) support and develop future Black leaders in schools and education more broadly.

We are trying to also develop a pipeline of support that starts with these young men to showing them who they can be, and one of those to me might to become a principal. To see me or any other principal whose interests and investment is in them, is what we want to be the showcase. (Elder Baba R)

The Elders highlighted the importance of location when creating developmental opportunities. To best support the learning and development of Black leaders, teaching within a Black community was described as critical, along with a need to share practical skills such as curriculum scheduling and programing, money management, school funding, school financing, fundraising, and engagement. Through the collaboration of a diverse set of people, it was suggested that having a documented vision, mission, and set of core values was a key element of the formalization of organizations such as this. The consistent reference to the aim of these groups being a “mission” highlighted the Elders’ perception of importance with regard to connecting and supporting each other and those coming behind them.

The collective narratives and descriptions of experiences of Black male school building-level Elders highlighted the self-confidence that these principals and heads of school have with regard to taking ownership and shaping their schools through leadership. Although the Black male K-12 school building-level Elders may face a number of challenges, these leaders, by leading with authenticity and passion, remain confident in their decisions and take responsibility. “The fact of the matter is that you make these decisions, you don’t make them in a vacuum, and you don’t walk away unscathed” (Elder Damani Camara).

I approached one of the deputy superintendents and said, Look, they know they don’t want me. And I didn’t do this to become an assistant principal. I want my own school. They don’t want to give me my own school. . . . They released me from my contract and I went on to get a principalship. (Elder Damani Camara)

There was a humble acceptance of situations/opportunities that are not right for them, partnered with the confidence to progress regardless. This was reflected in the textural descriptions, narratives, and storytelling shared by all the Black male school building-level Elders.

### **Caring for Children Without Compromise**

The Black male school building-level Elders expressed great pride in reflecting on their achievements, in particular in support of students and community, and also a strong sense of appreciation for their current and past experiences:

I think I’m very fortunate to be in this school and in this community. I have worked in several communities as a principal and as an assistant principal. (Elder Damani Camara)

Well, really, I mean, to not be apologetic about caring for children, and really caring about them without compromise. (Elder Frank Stanley)

The Black male school building-level Elders presented a genuine care for students when reflecting on their leadership philosophy. There was a keen desire to provide protection and

enhance the lives of the children and young people they serve. In reflecting on visual/photo flashcard image K, Elder Ali commented:

A father said to his son, “Be careful where you walk.” The son responded, “You be careful, I’ll walk in your footsteps.” I think that is so powerful. I think that is so powerful. (Elder Ali)

These leaders showed great compassion for their students and communities. This stemmed from a clear emotional connection felt towards those they serve and an enjoyment in their sense of “mission” to protect and support young people.

In the sense of being a Black male and I saw myself as a defender, even like a father. As a protector, as a family, and I saw my students as family, and so I guess I bought into the male—being at the very least the head or co-head of the household, but in terms of being a principal, I saw myself definitely playing that role. . . . Definitely as a principal I saw myself as a protector, the defender of my children and my community. (Elder Frank Stanley)

Elders placed significant importance on socioemotional learning as part of a holistic approach to promoting student development and learning: “That cognitive development, if it’s going to happen in a healthy way, can’t be divorced from social, emotional, and physical elements” (Elder James Johnson). Another Elder spoke about the importance of leaders themselves being culturally relevant and responsive in order to better support those they lead and educate. Another shared that when students attend his school from a young age, they become socially and emotionally skilled in ways that prepare them for later school experiences. It is clear that these leaders have an understanding of the role of social and emotional development on the overall learning of children and young people. Black male school building-level Elders spoke of their involvement in such practices and the ways in which this is promoted within their leadership.

Within this, there is a sense of disheartenment at the idea that children and young people are not being protected and supported to achieve their best:

Being free to think, create a space that I hope is pretty humane and one of the things I love is that we have a happy environment. Even at the end of the school day. Kids are smiling, kids are just popping in to give me a high five or hug just because, like for no reason. . . . You know it's hard for kids to slip through the cracks when they have a network of support baked in. Between home, school, the wider neighborhood and community. (Elder James Johnson)

The bottom-line mission is that we save more young men than we lose. That we develop the next generation and beyond . . . of men of color who understand that education is liberation. That we are not schooling them for compliance, who understand that their identity has a lot to do with who they will become when they understand their story, they know their power. (Elder Baba R)

Elder Baba R's use of the words "mission" and "save" spoke to the perception that an important and integral aspect of what it means to be a Black male K-12 school building-level leader—leading while Black and male—is to liberate, protect, and prevent these young (Black and Brown) men from harm—a responsibility that requires care, compassion, and strength. For the Black male school building-level Elder, this evidenced capacity for care, compassion, and advocacy on behalf of students lay at the heart of leadership.

These Elders also presented a shared opinion on the importance of community relationships as part of their advocacy work on behalf of students. They were earnest in their strivings to become an established point of contact for those within the local area, some to the extent that a directed focus on the development of caring communities, community partnerships, and engagement is a critical element of "Who I am." There is a responsibility for not only supporting pupils, but also for supporting the community as a whole. This sense of responsibility encourages these leaders to take a holistic approach to their leadership strategy by considering the needs of families: "The businesses not only helped the students, but they also helped parents because we were getting jobs for the parents as well" (Elder Frank Stanley).

Although community partnership and engagement are what these leaders strive for, one Elder expressed that a lack of presence hinders the ability to build these relationships (Elder

James Johnson). However, other Elders went on to share the ways in which they have proactively encouraged community engagement and utilized their partnerships in order to support pupils and families:

We did a needs assessment, and based on that needs assessment, we began to reach out, and we did some of our partners were like, Wait a minute. You want us to come in? Absolutely, and in fact, what we'll do is we'll give you office space. . . . So we were looking to do initially some in-kind services, but we also wanted the partners to write grants to get some additional services. So our primary focus initially was on mental health service, and so that's where our emphasis was. (Elder Frank Stanley)

You want that local bodega owner to have an opportunity to come and visit the school, you are establishing relationship because he'll be the one to call you and tell you, "You've got two young men that are hanging out on the corner every day and they are smoking around the—like but if they don't know you, there's no connection?" (Elder Ali)

I would go to the churches in the community and ask them, "Could I have some pulpit time?" Okay, because I wanted to expand that notion about community faculty and empower them to be able to give me the support I needed to make a difference in kids' lives. (Elder Baba R)

These leaders have a keen passion for supporting their communities and are actively doing so through a number of initiatives. Elders are not only passionate about their communities, but also have a belief that by supporting the community, their students will benefit.

### **Summary**

This chapter documented the descriptions of experiences and essence of the phenomenon of leading while Black and male, as described through the lived experiences of the five participating Black male school building-level Elders, principals and heads of school with 10 or more years of school leadership experience. These Elders' experiences of growing up as Black boys was informed by their formative childhood experiences, and the village of parents, siblings, extended family members, church and local community, teachers and educators who supported them. The Elders made strong reference to their connection to historical Black figures such as Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, and Muhammad Ali,

presenting their quotes, ideologies, and actions as doctrines to lead and live by. One Elder spoke extensively on his childhood experience with a teacher who introduced him to the work of Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Paul Robeson. This Elder shared that being exposed to these Black figures steered his motivation for becoming a Black leader. It was suggested that strong Black male figures such as Malcolm X, Muhammed Ali, as well as parents and communities contributed to the self-assurance and confidence of these leaders, which then later informed their leadership philosophies and values. These childhood experiences, sometimes positive, sometimes challenging, have impacted these leaders' sense of "self," and their ethos, philosophies, and conceptualization of leadership as ministry that would subsequently inform the schools they would lead. For the Black male school building-level Elders, these values and philosophies involve leading with determination and morality. This was attributed to their close connection to the teachings of Black historical figures and the strife of their ancestors. It could be suggested that the Elders were more experienced in age and, therefore, to an extent, closer to the harsh impact of being Black and male in America, and particularly during a time of heightened politics, racism, discrimination, and increasing sentiments of anti-Blackness. One Elder shared his experience during the process of school desegregation and the ways in which he challenged the negative, preconceived notions on how Black students would/should be treated within the school setting. Experiences such as this remind us of the fact that educational inequity and racism at all levels—individual, institutional, and systemic—continue to be maintained and fortified through both de jure and de facto segregation across the school/ education enterprise. Moreover, being a Black male school principal or leader during these times would have been a herculean test of strength of character, and would have inevitably had an effect on personal identity and self-awareness as a Black man. For the Elders, there was a strong sense of refusal to

feed into the stereotypical image of a Black man. However, it could also be suggested that, in some instances, the projection of pervasive, negative stereotyping on the Black male identity and Black male leadership attributes stymied some Black male school building-level leaders' effectiveness as leaders—principals and heads of school. The Elders were also able to move forward when confronted with challenge. The Black male school building-level Elders showed their ability to anticipate difficult situations and fight back when presented with such issues. It could be suggested that this ability to predict and prevent negative situations was formed from the Elders' experience of leadership and politics as well as their strong sense of confidence. Similar to the Initiate and Warrior demographic groups, these leaders, Elders, also emphasized a need for and importance to “grow your own” Black educators and leaders from within the Black community and in the creation of leadership development opportunities. The Black male school building-level Elders presented a close connection to the lived experiences of hardship and struggle faced by Black communities, as evidenced through a demonstrable commitment to safeguarding the community of students and wider community. The Elders are intentional and strategic in creating substantive opportunities to support the education and learning experiences of their student cohorts, proactively securing community engagement and partnerships.

## CHAPTER 8

### IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION:

#### THE ESSENCE OF LEADING WHILE BLACK AND MALE

*Until the lion learns how to write, every story will glorify the hunter.*  
(African Proverb)

#### **Introduction**

Black men remain underrepresented, both quantitatively and qualitatively, in the field of educational leadership. This was the assertion at the beginning of this phenomenological research project and the framing of the statement of the problem that informed the research inquiry. The underrepresentation of Black male principals and heads of school is not limited to their underrepresentation quantitatively, in relation to the demographics of the school senior leadership workforce or the wider population. As evidenced throughout their descriptive narratives, the participating-principals and heads of school documented that in leading while Black and male, qualitatively, their voices, leadership philosophies, style of leadership, and values are silenced from dominant discourses of school leadership attributes. While quantitative representation—proportional representation relative to wider demographics and populations—is important and provides helpful contextual data, a focus on numerical representation alone is insufficient. Notwithstanding the multitude of policy initiatives and efforts to increase and/or diversify the schools' teaching and leadership workforce, Black male principals and heads of school remain underrepresented in the wider school leadership workforce. Efforts to implement intentional change to the culture, values, practices, and power dynamics at play that both shape and define the school institution and system as a racial state apparatus (RSA) (Leonardo, 2005) are required for sustained change to the demography of the school leadership workforce.



Arguably, and needing more urgent attention, are efforts to address the qualitative underrepresentation of Black men in the discourse on educational leadership—their voices, their experiences, and contributions of their understanding of school leadership. In 2011-12 (most recent, publicly available unrestricted data), there were approximately 4,238 Black male school principals employed across the U.S. public and private school system (NCES, 2012-13). The challenges in deriving more recent and accurate statistical data on the total number of Black male school principals and heads of schools in the U.S. K-12 school system are problematic. In contrast, there is a plethora of readily available, constantly analyzed without purposeful scrutiny, and frequently cited “bad stats” (Toldson, 2019, p. 3) endorsing negative narratives on the Black male educational experience. The old adage “We measure what we value and we value what we measure” resonates. The underrepresentation (absence) of Black male school building-level leaders’ collective voices and styles of leadership from the educational leadership canon, theory, and scholarship is of uppermost concern to me. The purpose of this research was to document the descriptions of experiences and essence of a phenomenon leading while Black and male and the ways in which Black male school building-level leaders describe, understand, feel about, judge, remember, make sense of, and give meaning to their lives and lived experience of leading while Black and male. This research project also provided an opportunity to document leadership philosophies, values, customs, and practices that have been central to the lived experiences and ways of knowing of people of African descent for centuries (Ware, 2002).

### **Motivations, Findings, and New Understandings**

*The demand on a Black principal is multifold. You know you are expected to walk on water and fly at the same time.*

(Elder Baba R)

The findings—the structural and textural descriptions of experience, as supported by the literature—evidenced that there is much to learn from the leadership experiences and attributes of Black male principals and heads of school. The additionality that these Black men bring through their race-cultural identity, socialization, and life experiences of leading while Black and male to leadership, their students, and communities further illustrates “How might different cultural norms in different ethnic communities influence school leaders’ practices?” and may also “reveal both similarities and differences that can expand our notions about the range of leadership approaches and practices” (Johnson & Campbell-Stephens, 2010, p. 864).

This study was informed by four key motivations that directed the formulation of the research problem, statement of purpose, and research questions; the review of literature and research; and importantly, the structural and textural descriptions of experiences and essence of leading while Black and male, as described by participating Black male school building-level leaders. Through a review of literature and substantive research, I concluded that there is an absence of documented narratives of “success” on Black male school leadership. My motivation was that the documenting of such narratives expands the educational leadership canon of research and scholarship and improves understanding of the range of educational leadership paradigms, experience, and practice. A second motivation was that much of the research and literature on Black male principals and school leadership focuses on WHAT these school leaders do, as opposed to a focus on WHO they are (Brown & Beckett, 2007; Derrick, 2009; Gooden, 2005; Henderson, 2008; Jones, 2010; Khalifa, 2008; Lomotey, 2019; Lomotey & Lowery, 2014; Miller, 2011; Walker & Byas, 2003). This research presented humanized portraits of Black male school leadership and, in so doing, attempted to humanize these individuals (Paris & Winn, 2014; Toldson, 2019; Yoon, 2018). Humanizing research and centering lived experiences as

described and understood by participating Black male principals and heads of school stand in stark contrast to dominant dehumanizing efforts of Black misandry, negative stereotyping, and anti-blackness ideology. In conducting this research, an exploration of phenomenon and experiences, the authentic presentation of humanized portraits of Black male principals and heads of school increases the trustworthiness of the research and emerging descriptions of leading while Black and male. Third, I was motivated in that much of what is shared on the experiences and understanding of leading while Black and male is not new, but as yet has not been recorded as valid or valued (Banks, 1998; Smith et al., 2007). This knowledge, and these leadership philosophies, traditions, and lived experiences have typically been shared among people of African descent for generations through oral histories, storytelling, narratives, visualization, proverbs, and folklore (Bank-Wallace, 2002; Finnegan, 2012; Kinlock & San Pedro, 2014; Luttrell, 2016). The research project sought to document those narratives authentically by applying a critical race methodology and interpretative framework to the exploration of evidence of culturally relevant and responsive paradigms of educational leadership. The motivation was that critical, race-conscious, and culturally relevant and responsive approaches to educational leadership challenge and disrupt the normative educational leadership axiology on what constitutes effective and/or successful paradigms of leadership, and what is valued and deemed valid within the field (Horsford et al., 2019). This research study and project presented substantive and rigorous research on a phenomenon of leading while Black and male and contributes to a nuanced understanding a broader exploration of what it means to be a Black male K-12 school building-level leader; in so doing, it “breaks past normative conceptions of educational leaders as White, straight, cis-male, typically abled, English-speaking, school

principals” (Yoon, 2018, p. 115; also consider Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Gooden, 2012; Herbst, 1997; Turnbull, 2011; Turnbull et al., 2012).

### **Leading While Black and Male**

The phenomenological research project was guided by the following two research questions:

1. What experiences inform the leadership philosophies of Black male principals and heads of school regarding leadership and Black education?
2. What experiences do Black male principals and heads of school encounter related to the principalship?

In responding to the research questions, the researcher concluded from the research and findings that there are four key and associated elements of the essence of descriptions of experience of a phenomenon leading while Black and male, namely: (a) growing up as a Black boy (family and childhood educational experiences); (b) leadership as ministry (leadership philosophy and influences); (c) when a Black man is in the principal’s office (navigating racialized spaces); and (d) safeguarding the village (supporting students through social, emotional learning, leadership, and community). *Growing up as a Black boy* plays a significant part in developing the racial and leadership identity and core motivations to enter the education/school leadership profession. In some cases, there was evidence of a link and association with the personal childhood experiences of the leader, and a sense of what Duran et al. (1998), Horsford (2011), and Sotero (2006) described as a healing of a “soul wound.” As one Black male school building-level Warrior commented, “I needed someone who looked like me who cared enough to say, you don’t have to do that. You can do this, and you’ll be all right” (Warrior Carlos Washburn). These narratives, as well as those that highlight trauma and pain,

shine a light on the person behind the title of Black male school building-level leader—principal or head of school. The Black male principal and head of school seeks to develop leadership ambitions, despite the often-negative early childhood schooling experiences and the constructive figurative and literal exclusion of boys and young men of African descent within the education system. *Leadership as ministry*, exemplified through faith, spirituality, a sense or moral purpose, and action-oriented social justice, are foundational to the leadership philosophy and influences (ministry) of Black male school building-level leaders. For many of these leaders, spirituality has guided and informed their practice and acted as a motivating influence behind their leadership. Several participating leaders cited scriptural passages from the Quran or Bible, invoking the Spirit and Word of God as central to their personal leadership philosophy and stance. These philosophies not only are personal but also have an ethical foundation. It was clear that these philosophies stemmed from childhood experiences and the influences that others had on these leaders during their formative childhood years.

Regarding *When a Black man is the principal's office*, the leaders found that they are constantly viewed through a prism where their Blackness and Black racial identity are constantly under inspection, suspicion, discrimination, and direct assault and racism through the normalized power relations of Whiteness. Black male principals and heads of school are often required to navigate these racialized spaces devoid of any cognizant humanization of them as individuals, their leadership attributes, and contributions to the field of educational leadership. The findings concurred with Brown's (2019) commentary on "Race, Hypervisibility and the Imposter Syndrome in Educational Leadership." In particular, within the context of Black skin and White politics where "race is an observable characteristic and cannot be concealed or disregarded simply because of its controversial implications . . . race becomes a perceived proxy for

ideology, as well as the schema for the epistemological context and stratification of human life” (pp. 6, 9). It is this (third) aspect of the essence of description of experiences of leading while Black and male that uniquely distinguishes Black male K-12 school building-level leadership from the leadership of principals and heads of schools from other race-ethnic groups. Arguably, albeit to varying degrees, school building-level leaders from across other racial and ethnic groups may also provide descriptions of leadership attributes informed by family and childhood educational experiences, individual leadership philosophy and influences, and a commitment to supporting students. However, school building-level leaders from other race/ethnic or gender identities are not received in the principalship in the same way as when a Black man is in the principal’s office.

In many cases, the descriptions of experiences of participating Black male school building-level leaders—of the hostile, oftentimes vehement reaction to when they, as Black men, are in the principal’s office—were very similar across all three demographic groups: Initiates, Warriors, and Elders. Participants generally found themselves marginalized, even ostracized from the dominant organizational power bases and decision-making structures, on the basis of their race-culture identity, Blackness, and leadership identity as Black male principals and heads of school. The findings contributed to the previous body of research and scholarship on race and racism within the context of Black educational leadership (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Echols, 2006; Gooden, 2012; Horsford, 2014; Lomotey, 1993). On race, Brown (2019) noted “race is an observable characteristic and cannot be concealed or disregarded simply because of its controversial implications” (p. 6). All participating Black male school building-level leaders reflected on their experiences of prejudice and racial discrimination as well as the negative preconceptions and stereotyping of others directed to Black male school leaders and the

“worthiness” of their leading while Black and male. These experiences shape their self-identity and leadership as Black men. The negative impact of being prejudged and stereotyped became apparent throughout the experiences of these leaders. The findings contribute to the previous body of research and scholarship of Dumas (2016), McCray et al. (2007), and others who explored the pervasive persistence of negative racial stereotyping and anti-Blackness within the field of school leadership, and education more broadly. The findings emerging from this phenomenology research project highlighted clear distinctions in the ways in which Black male school building-level leaders in each of the three demographic groups of leaders—Initiates, Warriors, and Elders—reacted to these experiences, and the extent to which this had an impact on their perceptions, behaviors, and emotional well-being. Black male school building-level Initiates, individuals with less than three years leadership experience, found it extremely challenging to navigate the perceived, pervasive race discriminatory and racism practices they experienced within their respective schools’ system. In both instances, the participating Initiates shared that race, racism, discrimination, and limited years of leadership experience compounded by a lack of professional support and mentoring were all contributory factors to their untimely departure from the principalship. Black male school building-level Warriors—principals and heads of school with four to nine years leadership experience—took a more direct/directed approach in responding to discriminatory practices and racism directed towards them. The Warriors developed a range of responses to the sources and impact of racism, ranging from a quiet acknowledgment, a “put-up and shut-up” response, through to a direct calling out of racial macro- and microaggressions as experienced in their respective cases. The Elders, individuals with 10 or more years or more years of school building-level leadership, developed a more strategic and intentional response to acts of racial prejudice, racial macro-/microaggressions, and

racism. Black male school building-level Elders recognize that racism is endemic and symptomatic of the permanence of racism within the school and education system, and across society more broadly. For the Elders, there is a realization and acknowledgment that in navigating racialized spaces and in addressing race inequities, racism necessitates strategy. School building-level Elders are more intent on developing and actioning strategies to address systemic race inequities, be they school, district, city-wide, state-wide, or national. The lived experiences of participating Black male school building-level leaders aid our understanding of the ways in which racial and cultural identity statuses exist within a racialized society, and the impact of race effect and racism on Black men in school leadership positions. This is supportive of what Smith et al. (2007) termed Black misandry: “an exaggerated pathological aversion toward Black men created and reinforced in societal, institutional, and individual ideologies, practices, and behavior” (p. 563).

The overall views and descriptions of experiences shared by participating Black male principals and heads of school across all three demographic groups of Initiates, Warriors, and Elders substantiated the belief that ethnocentrism and cultural parochialism that promulgate notions of the leader as White, male, middle-class, conforming to a “Great Man theory” representation of leadership, dominate the formulation and enactment of educational leadership broadly, and school building-level leadership specifically. This normalizes Whiteness, essentializes difference as negative. This further creates a racial glass ceiling of visible and invisible inhibitors to leadership ambitions, and arguably also a glass floor—steps, policies, and procedures that prevent aspiring Black male school leaders from gaining a firm foundation on which to develop a career and trajectory as a principal or head of school.



A central aspect of the leadership philosophy and leadership attributes of Black male school building-level leaders is being in service to and *safeguarding the village* that is supporting students through social, emotional learning, leadership, and community. Of primary concern for Black male principals and heads of school is the safeguarding of equitable, high-quality education for the students they serve. These leaders exhibit a care-based approach to school leadership not dissimilar to that described in Bass's (2019) developed framework of Black Masculine Caring (BMC). Their sensitivities, family relationships and aspirations, personal hopes and dreams, and community relationships are central to their leadership identity and to the ethos of the schools they lead. "If I do nothing else in this life, right, being a father and successfully transitioning my children from being children to adult men, I have lived a life that I—I'm the richest person in the world, right?" (Warrior Eric Carter). Accounts such as this further humanize these leaders, for these Black men are real people, with hopes and desire for their families to which many can relate. Participants revealed their sensitivity toward students, which is often the motivation of their leadership and determination: "just that extra heart-to-heart feel, and it's like okay, I don't want to let this kid down" (Warrior Thomas Jean). This was also highlighted through stories and accounts shared by these leaders of taking time and effort to provide tailored support for their students, particularly those in need.

The lived experiences of participating Black male school building-level leaders, ranging from childhood and family relations to the strife of their career as well as their success, all play a role in the humanistic nature of these men, their leadership, and individual and collective expressions of the phenomenon leading while Black and male. These Black male school leaders adopt a culturally relevant and responsive approach to school leadership, characterized by an action-oriented social justice mandate to address directed acts of racism, inequities, or social

injustice. This is an interpretation of leadership as ministry, grounded in an ethic of care for the students and communities they serve, and part of a larger theology of liberation. Through narratives, storytelling, counter-storytelling, proverbs, and quotes, Black male principals and heads of school shared experiences of joy, passion, resistance, resilience, and victory in the face of racism, macro- and micro-racial aggressions, and other adversities.

### **Valuing the Lived Experiences of Black Male School Leaders**

An important contribution that this research provided was evidence that Black male school building-level leaders make an intentional decision to pursue a career in education. For the majority, this decision was motivated by a sense of moral purpose and commitment to providing an equitable education to all students, oftentimes motivated by their own childhood educational experiences while growing up as Black boys. Also, and consistent with the results of previous studies, including my previous *London Study* (Smith, 2012), the research findings indicated that Black male principals and heads of school have strong leadership ambitions, and generally have higher credentials than their White counterparts (NCES, 2012-13). This links to evidence that has shown that these leaders continue to be significantly underrepresented (qualitatively and quantitatively), have more years of teaching experience, and are less likely to be promoted to school building leadership positions. There is limited evidence of progress in increasing representation of the voices and experiences of Black male school building-level leaders, humanizing their lived experiences in the canon of educational leadership, and any derived determinants of what constitutes “effective” and “successful” educational leadership.

A recurring issue raised across all demographic groups of participating Black male school building-level leaders—Elders, Warriors, and Initiates—was the lack of Black people in educational leadership positions, school principals, heads of school, and beyond. This constituted

the biggest issue facing Black educational leadership. Concern for this issue was shared by all participants. One Elder described this as “a dearth of Black leadership” (Elder Frank Stanley). Others expressed a fear of Black male school building-level leaders—principals and heads of school—“becoming extinct” (Elder Baba R). This issue with the representation of Black school leaders, and in particular the underrepresentation of Black men across both the teaching and school leadership profession, is partnered with a lack of opportunity and professional development for current and aspiring Black leaders. The lack of representation of Black men in school building-level leadership positions is detrimental to the school/education system. Young Black students, educators, and aspiring leaders who do not see themselves “represented” in school leadership are not encouraged, supported, or prepared to fulfill and aspire to principal, head of school, or other senior leadership roles. Also, the entire education and K-12 school enterprise of students, administrators, teachers, parents, and communities, from across all racial and ethnic groups, is unable to benefit fully from the range of knowledge, skills, experience, leadership philosophy, and expertise that comes with leading while Black and male. Every school and every student deserves a Black principal or head of school who exhibits the leadership philosophies and commitment to students and communities as described through the narratives of participating Black men in this research project. The participating Black male school leaders further expressed concerns about the absence of sustainable efforts to actively address the underrepresentation and absence of Black men in school leadership positions. This they considered would have a negative impact on a school-to-leadership pipeline of Black current, aspiring, and future leaders.

There was also expressed concern and a critical need to value the leadership paradigms of Black male school building-level leaders. Currently established “generic” approaches and

race-evasive (Neville et al., 2013) paradigms of educational leadership generally promote a hegemonic formulation and construct of leadership and provide limited understanding or descriptions of the attributes of what constitutes leading while Black and male. In contrast, African-centered models of leadership, while not explicitly adopted and applied by participating Black male school building-level leaders, provide nuanced language and diction to describe the foundational racial, cultural, and culturally sensitive ways of knowing, leadership philosophies, leadership traits, and culturally relevant and responsive interpretations of school leadership that collectively describe the attributes of effective Black male school leadership. African-centered leadership models are a means through which to codify “the values that have historically kept our [African American] community together when political, economic, social, and institutional forces attempted to tear us apart” (Pinkett et al., 2011, p. 39). In ways not too distinct from the oral histories and folklore of Anansi the spider and paradigm of Anansi leadership (Marshall, 2012; Stewart, 2013), Black male school building-level leaders exhibit leadership traits that in many ways are representative of those commonly associated with Anansi the spider—cunningness, wisdom, vision, care, endurance, and humility. Further, as is evidenced through individual structural descriptions of supportive enablers to leadership, for the majority (13) of the 14 participants, “confidence/self-belief” and “self-determination” co-ranked first as very effective in supporting their leadership. The research provides an opportunity to theorize a leadership model of Anansi school leadership. Other leadership attributes synonymous with Black male school building-level leadership, grounded in diasporic wisdom and traditions, include: “What’s Happening?” (*Habari gani menta*) (Ross, 2014); valuing one’s own tradition (*Jegna*) (Hilliard, 2002; Tillman, 2005); self-determination and collective responsibility (*Nguzo Saba*) (Karenga, 1977); truth, justice, righteousness, harmony, balance, reciprocity, and order

(*Ma'at*), “historicizing self in a social and political context” (Alston, 2005, p. 684) (*Sankofa*); and the importance of collective personhood and morality (*Ubuntu*) (Mbigi, 1997).

Brown (2019) reminded us that “the delivery of educational services is a function that occurs in the social/public space, education is bedeviled by the realities of race—race bias, race privilege, race effects, and racism” (p. 7). The narratives and humanized portraits presented through this phenomenological research project and findings vividly illustrate the relentless impact and onslaught of race, race bias, race privilege, and racism on the leadership and career pathway in leading while Black and male. The research project further documents the range of enabling factors that Black male school building-level leaders utilize in order to sustain themselves. This was exemplified in the high degrees of determination, hard work, and resilience that these Black male principals and heads of school, “exceptional pioneers,” exhibit when entering the principal’s office as Black men, and in exercising their leadership amid the ever-presence of the White gaze.

### **Toward New Theories, Visions, and Understandings of Leadership**

The research expands understanding of paradigms of critical race leadership and builds new theory, descriptions of experiences, and understanding of phenomenon of leading while Black and male. The research also expands understanding of the leadership attributes of Black male principals and heads of school. Leadership paradigms of the leader as bureaucrat/administrator and ethno-humanist (Lomotey, 1993), and culturally relevant and responsive school leadership (Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016), are expanded through an exploration and application of a critical race theory methodology and interpretative framework—specifically, WHO are Black male school building-level leaders and the ways in which race and race-cultural identity inform the professional lives, leadership preparation, and leadership development of

leading while Black and male. Black male school building-level leaders are motivated by a personal leadership philosophy and informed by lived experience as racialized Black man in America. There are clear associations between lived experience and leadership philosophy, and importantly the role and import of a racial/cultural synergy between lived experiences of Black male principals and heads of school, and the students and wider communities they serve. This research project sought to disrupt the normative educational leadership axiology, shrouded in what Yoon (2018) described as “concepts of educational leaders as White, straight, cis-male, typically abled, English speaking school principals” (p. 115). Further, this research project and findings signify a departure from the conceptualizing of “urban” educational leadership research, theory, and practice developed while living vicariously through the lived experiences of students, families, and communities from Black and other race-marginalized backgrounds. Exploration of phenomenon leading while Black and male humanizes the lived experiences of Black men; documents “the situated meaning of a human in the world” (Laverty, 2003, p. 24); and provides authentic interpretations and understanding of race-critical, culturally relevant and responsive school leadership that is supportive of all students. In leading while Black and male, leadership is viewed as a vocation, spiritual calling, or ministry. These Black male principals and heads of school adopt strategies informed by a school leadership theology of liberation, race equity, social justice, community activism, and care as a model of effective school leadership. In so doing, they actively and purposefully seek to address the inequities of a dual school system that perpetuates the existence and sustainability of separate-and-unequal worlds of neighboring schools, and move toward creating safe-haven, supportive learning environments of schools, communities, and, ultimately, society overall.

## Review of Methodology

*Phenomenologists need reports of the experience as it actually appears in a person's consciousness*

(Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 46)

In conducting the research as a phenomenological inquiry to explore and document descriptions of experience, I sought to present the multiplicity of experience, resilience, and success of leading while Black and male. Presentation of the findings through a critical race theory (CRT) methodology and interpretative framework, and use of the multiple modalities of communication utilized by people of African descent—narratives, counter-storytelling, culturally responsive proverbs, aphorisms, folklore, and use of visual representations—further sought to humanize the descriptions of the experiences of Black male school building-level leaders. The use of visual elicitation methods as part of the research project added a rich, culturally sensitive modality to the research inquiry and participants' subsequent descriptions of experiences of leading while Black. The research proposition, study, investigation, and approach were intentional in design to be an authentic exploration and documentation of the lived experiences of Black people vis-à-vis Black male school building-level leaders by myself as a Black male researcher, acknowledging the indigenous insider and indigenous outsider nature of my identity in relation to the research foci and participating Black male school building-level leaders (Banks, 1998; Tillman, 2006; Toldson, 2019). The research design and methodology were further predicated on a need to ensure that “until the lion learns how to write, every story will glorify the hunter” (African Proverb). In seeking to center the voices and descriptions of the lived experiences of the 14 participating Black male school building-level leaders, I considered them “co-researchers” and “research collaborators” of the phenomenological research project, as described by Polkinghorne (1989, p. 47). Therefore, in drawing implications and conclusions to

the research, and in particular the implications emerging from this work on understanding Black men in school leadership positions (including implications for practice), the voices and recommendations of these leaders—that is, those who DO the work—remain central.

### **Interviews, Conversations, and the Reflexive Journal**

Reflections and feedback of participants are integral to the research. Ensuring that the research was conducted in collaboration with participating Black male school building-level leaders, as opposed to research that renders them passive “subjects” within the research inquiry is central. Their thoughts and reflections on the research, as research collaborators, is invaluable. The methods and materials used during interviews, in particular the use of visual/ photo flashcards to stimulate conversation, were thought to be an especially effective tool for Black leadership development and exploring the leadership styles of principals. Leaders expressed gratitude for being a part of the research project and also for my focused effort on a phenomenological exploration of leading while a Black male school building-level leader. Participating leaders expressed that their experiences as participants were enjoyable, reflective, and very much appreciated.

I’m so thankful that you reached out to me, the conversations I really need to think a lot more. I’ve talked to my wife about the things that we’ve talked about. . . . I’m excited to see where it goes and I thank you for taking on this particular piece of research. (Warrior Eric Carter)

Black male school building-level leaders felt very reflective having taken part in this research. Having their experiences explored, and actively listened to, allowed these principals and heads of school to think deeply and intently on their past, present, and future with insight and introspection, making connections through the sharing of their lived experiences. One Elder described the experience as being a “form of therapy” (Elder James Johnson). This speaks to the



trust developed between this Elder and me, as researcher, and also the depth of conversation(s) that ensued.

It was a useful time for me personally, hopefully for you but for me, from a strict introspection standpoint, and there's so much value that comes from self and reflection. I felt like I was processing and it was almost a form of therapy I guess. You know, all we needed was one of those comfy little couches to lay back on, and cathartic as well in some respects for sure, so yeah, I enjoyed it. (Elder James Johnson)

The opportunity to reflect and share personal lived experiences with a degree of ease may also highlight the contentment felt by participating Black male school building-level leaders in being able to speak openly about their lived experiences. There was an appreciation for the efforts made to focus this research on the experiences of Black male leaders in education, along with hopes and curiosity for the potential impact that such research may have. It was also suggested that all participants meet to converse. As might be expected, for some of the participating Black male school leaders, there was a subtle sense of nervousness and slight anticipation regarding the conversation and topics being explored as part of the research project and inquiry. This was particularly apparent during the first phase of interview conversations with the Black male school building-level Initiates, individuals who in many respects felt they had been deeply treated unfairly by their respective school district administrations, and thus had good reason to enter the interview with a degree of caution and suspicion. However, as interviews progressed, all participants, across all three demographic groups, were open and receptive to discussion, sharing personal accounts and intimate details of the multidimensionality of their experiences, descriptions, and understanding of leading while Black and male. The following is one example highlighting the extent of trust participating Black male principals and heads of school felt during these interviews.

I find it interesting to share a continued story, kind of giving you an overview of my life in the context of this work. And so I think I'm surprised at how comfortable I am by

sharing this with you because after all you should [be able to] put somethings together, and you will have unprecedented access into my mind and my thoughts and my life.  
(Warrior Carlos Washburn)

As leaders reflected on this research, there were excitement and keen interest in the collective experiences of Black male school building-level leaders being publicized and explored, with the focal point being their personal perspectives, stories, and lived experiences. There was a hope that this research and exploration of the phenomena, leading while Black and male, would be effective in revealing the range of lived experiences of Black male school building-level leadership within the context of the U.S. K-12 school system—an account seldom heard but very much needed. As a result of these shared experiences, there was a further collective hope, shared by the participants and also by me, that the research project findings would be used to define and clarify a pathway for future Black male principals, heads of schools, and educators more broadly. Also, that the research and findings may encourage and inspire Black men to pursue a career in teaching and educational leadership. Moreover, participants were hopeful that the research could be used extensively to inform education leadership policy and practice, particularly to inform principal preparation and leadership development program and design, and policy development and implementation of culturally relevant and responsive leadership models at local and district levels.

A summary of the findings emerging from this phenomenological research project—descriptions of experiences and core essences of Black male school leadership—as set out in Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 of this research report was also shared with participants based on their respective demographic group of Black male school building-level leader—Initiate, Warrior, or Elder. This was an important step in member checking, ensuring that the research project and inquiry were authentic collaborations with participating Black male school leaders. Several of

the participants were moved to contact me and express their appreciation for being co-collaborators in the research project and inquiry.

I love the title and enjoyed reading what you sent especially and particularly Chapter 7. It rekindled memories of our conversation and flooded me with nostalgia about my work as an educator and leader over the decades. It was also a joy to read the quotes from the other elders. Great work! The read held my attention and inspired me as I consider future opportunities. (Elder Baba R)

Other selected participant feedback and comments included: “I am honored to have been part of your dream. Additionally, I so appreciated your interest in my ideas and feelings” (Warrior Thomas Jean); “I’m delighted that I could be of (minimal) help in the process. . . . I believe you captured our interviews/discussions pretty accurate” (Warrior Frederick Monroe, Ph.D.); “Went through, it looks great” (Elder Ali).

Descriptive narratives, as well as feedback and comments received from participating Black male school building-level leaders, conveyed a real sense of enjoyment in taking part in the research project—interview conversations in particular. All participating Black male school building-level leaders expressed a hope and desire to connect in future conversations with the other Black male principals and heads of school who also participated in the research project.

### **Limitations of Methodology**

While the research has reached its aims, a number of important limitations and constraints need to be considered. First, the use of purposive criterion sampling and the routes for identifying participants required a degree of trust between myself and participating Black male school building-level leaders. A number of potential participants may not have been sufficiently reassured to be willing contributors to the research. Time constraints and geographic proximity may have further limited the availability of, and access to, other potential participants. There was a national call and invitation to current and previously serving Black male principals

and heads of school. A total of 26 Black male school building-level leaders from across a range of U.S. regions completed the online descriptive survey and expressed an interest to also participate in the phase 2 and 3 interview conversations. A total of 14 individuals were interviewed, all of whom were located in the northern region of the United States. This provides an opportunity to extend the research across a wider geography in the future. The 14 participating Black male principals and heads of school were more than sufficient to exemplify the range of descriptions of experiences, perceptions, understanding, and essence of leading while Black and male. Also, in reviewing the presentation of the research and findings as an intergenerational conversation and sharing of wisdom by leaders, based on number of years leadership, it is important to remember that participating Black male school building-level Elders were once Warriors who were once Initiates. Thus, the range of descriptions of experiences shared was not limited to the literal number of participants within each of the three demographic groups of Initiates (2), Warriors (7), and Elders (5).

The nature of phenomenology and the use of in-depth semi-structured interviews were such that extensive informative-rich data were collected, which were impossible to explore fully within the time constraints of the dissertation. There is limited substantive literature or critical cases on WHO Black male school leaders are. Much of the available research presents an essentialist view of race and cultural identity within the context of educational leadership and is therefore limited in its analysis of how the race-cultural identity of Black male school building-level leaders might influence our understanding of leadership. The research and findings captured the narratives of Black male principals and heads of school—their racial identities, leadership philosophies, motivators, the support networks they utilize, and the inhibitors they encounter.

## Implications

*How might different cultural norms in different ethnic communities influence school leaders' practices?*

(Johnson & Campbell-Stephens, 2010, p. 864)

This phenomenological research project built on a previous research project that I conducted, *The London Study* (Smith, 2012), and provides important implications for this current research project. *The London Study* explored the nature of a school's headship (principalship) workforce that is culturally representative of the ethnicity and diversity of the secondary school student population of both African Caribbean heritage and British society, based on research with male Caribbean leaders in London.

By way of background and context, the trend and changing ethnicity profile of the student population in England necessitates a comparable diverse education system and culturally competent school leadership that understands the background and advocates on behalf of students from traditionally marginalized groups. *The London Study* research project focused on succession planning and leadership development for male secondary school leaders of African Caribbean heritage in London, England. The research highlighted the need for effective and sustainable strategies to address the inequalities in school leadership diversity and lack of representative role models within schools, as well as the challenges specific to aspiring head teachers and senior secondary school leaders of African Caribbean heritage. The research findings documented the perspectives of these school leaders, nationally recognized for their leadership and management, and in so doing make a contribution to the limited research and literature on race-conscious perspectives and the understanding of transformational educational leadership.

*The London Study* research provided evidence that participating male African Caribbean heritage secondary school leaders are intentional in their approach to leadership and leadership praxis. For the majority, leadership is motivated by a sense of a spiritual-centered moral purpose and commitment to providing an equitable education to students, families, communities, and “significant others” from ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds. Poignantly, these factors are generally excluded in the research, theory, and formulation of paradigms of educational leadership and leadership development. The research study project concluded that educational policy attempting to address the underrepresentation as well as the leadership development of male African Caribbean leaders would benefit from the use of cultural knowledge, color-conscious paradigms of educational leadership, and customized culturally relevant leadership development approaches as they relate to supporting the headship (leadership) ambitions of male African Caribbean leaders. Further, culturally relevant approaches to transformational educational leadership and leadership development motivated senior secondary school leaders of African Caribbean heritage who were committed to the successful education of students from race-marginalized backgrounds and narrowing the educational opportunity gap, as comparable to other student cohorts.

This current phenomenological research project, “*Leading While Black and Male*,” similarly provided insights into the ways Black male principals and heads of school (in the United States) negotiate their race-cultural, professional, and personal identities while leading schools as Black men. The composite of both the previous *London Study* (Smith, 2012) and this current research project *Leading While Black and Male* sought to demonstrate that rather than reducing the leadership of Black men to a study and an inquiry of the lived experiences of a minority (minoritized) group, the study of the lived experiences, leadership philosophies, values,

and leadership attributes of Black male school leaders of African descent from across the Diaspora—the United Kingdom, the United States, and elsewhere—is in fact a study and an exploration of the leadership attributes of individuals whom Johnson and Campbell-Stephens (2010) termed leaders of “Black and global majority” (p. 840). Also, and importantly, the composite of both research projects contributes to a nuanced understanding of what it means to a Black male school leader, providing significant implications for education leadership research, theory, and practice.

### **Implications for Theory**

The evolution and exploration of educational leadership theory, research, and scholarship have often been a study of practice and practitioner knowledge (Riehl et al., 2000), presented through a normative, dominant, White Eurocentric lens with a desire and an intent to improve generalizable phenomena. There is a need for the development of more critical theory that cultivates and promotes understanding of the concept of educational leadership across multiple contexts and perspectives. Exploration of the phenomenon of leading while Black and male expands an understanding of paradigms of critical race leadership. The research applied a critical race lens to inform assumptions made about the nature of reality (ontological); the ways of the research and inquiry (epistemological); and the values, beliefs, and judgments held (axiological) to explore a phenomenon of leading while Black and male. In so doing, the inquiry and development of theory disrupt the normative educational leadership axiology. The research documented leadership philosophies, values, and customs of leading while Black and male, centered in the race, cultural traditions, lived experiences, and ways of knowing of the Black male school building-level leaders themselves. The humanizing and documenting of experiences, perceptions, and understanding of the lived reality of Black male principals and heads of schools

are “ethically necessary” (Paris, 2011, p. 137) and increase the trustworthiness of the research. The textural and structural descriptions of experiences shared by participants, analysis, and findings presented herewith provide improved understanding of the educational leadership paradigms, experiences, and practices of Black male school building-level leaders across a range of contexts—traditional public school principals and heads of independent religious and non-sectarian schools. This phenomenological research project captured the essence of the common experiences by participants of leading while Black and male, and also what Corbin and Strauss, (2007) termed a “unified theoretical explanation” (p. 107) towards a grounded theory of Black male school leadership. The composites of this are: (a) growing up as a Black boy; (b) leadership as ministry; (c) when a Black man is in the principal’s office; and (d) safeguarding the village.

### **Implications for Practice**

Participating Black male school building-level leaders who are expert professionals identified a number of key and pressing implications for practice in the field of educational leadership. Of key concern necessitating urgent attention is a need to address the “dearth of Black leadership” (Elder Frank Stanley). Black male principals and heads of schools continue to remain underrepresented, quantitatively and qualitatively, within the field of education. This holds significant consequences and implications for practice. “I don’t see a pipeline being established, and that’s a major challenge, because if there is no pipeline, then there’s no future, at least no future growth” (Elder Frank Stanley). “If we don’t increase the incentives and the supports, we are in risk of them (Black male teachers) becoming extinct” (Elder Baba R). In addition to addressing the dearth of Black men across the educational leadership profession is the need for demonstrable strategies that disrupt negative stereotyping, Black misandry, and anti-Blackness at individual, institutional, and societal levels. Also, there is a related need for



acknowledgment, recognition, and welcoming of the invaluable contributions of Black male principals and heads of school to the educational leadership profession, as well as the schools and education enterprise more broadly. On the challenges to meaningful progress that persist, Elder James Johnson commented, “When I’m trying to engage at my best, it’s interpreted by the receiver in a way that may seem like I’m being a bully or lazy or arrogant or weak.” The research and findings presented more authentic descriptions of Black male school leadership; their leadership philosophy; and the range of leadership, personal, and professional attributes, skills, knowledge, and expertise that they bring to the practice of school building-level leadership.

Increased understanding and inclusion of models and approaches to critical race and culturally relevant and responsive school leadership expand the range of models and exemplars of practice, and should therefore be incorporated into the curricula for principal preparation programs, school building leadership certification, and other related formal leadership development programs and design. The description of experiences and essences of leading while Black and male that emerged from the research findings further aid in the design of a framework and toolkit to support implementation of race-critical, culturally relevant and responsive models of school leadership. A developed framework and toolkit would be invaluable in supporting a range of educational policy to practice activities centered on race, diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives at local, district, city, state, and federal levels; formulation and enactment of evidenced-based policy; critical policy analysis; strategic planning; professional development; workforce development and training; principal preparation and leadership development.

Importantly, the research and findings endorse the creation of formal leadership development opportunities, networks, mentoring and frientoring, and other pathways to support the leadership ambitions of Black male school building-level leaders in situ. The creation of

formal leadership development opportunities and networks was presented as a salient topic throughout the descriptive narratives. It was seen by Black male school building-level leaders as an appropriate and effective strategy to overcome the underrepresentation of Black leaders in education, to create a Black (male) school leadership pipeline, and to provide effective support and development for current and future Black educational leaders. The limited number of Black male school building-level leaders in education accentuates a need and an urgency among these men to connect, network, and build relationships with other Black male principals and heads of school. Participating Black male school building-level leaders primarily present this support as being through support groups, dedicated organizations, leadership development opportunities, and other support programs. In considering leadership development and mentoring support, it is clear that the most effective relationships are those based on a form of “frientering”—mentoring and friendship. Frientering is expressed as a key source of learning and development, and a support for each of the leaders at various stages of his career and professional development. However, the key source of support is that which is provided through groups of like-minded professionals and close friends who are able to relate to the experiences of these leaders and share fellowship. Both the Black male school building-level Elders and Warriors in particular expressed a value of having an environment in which they are able to be themselves among fellow professionals. This afforded these Black male principals and heads of school a space of respite, while also providing an opportunity for discussing shared experiences with a group of people who are able to understand the challenges faced in leading while Black and male. The Black male school building-level Initiates are intently in need of these sources of support.

Three of the participating Black male school building-level leaders, specifically Elder Ali and Elder Frank Stanley as well as Warrior Dr. Blizzy, are heavily involved in the development

of a region-wide support group for Black educators from across a major metropolitan area in the northeast, and beyond. Several other participating Black male school building-level leaders also described affiliation and/or association with the group. The work and activities of the group have been well received, with 150-plus Black educators in attendance at programmed networking events. State and city education officials have also attended and participated in the group's networked events. Other Black male school building-level leaders described membership, affiliation, and/or association with other similar leadership development and networking groups, including the Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color (COSEBOC); The Fellowship: Black Male Educators for Social Justice; and The Eagle Academy Foundation. Participants clearly expressed that a primary aim, mission, and affiliation with these targeted leadership development opportunities and networks are to: (a) connect professionals working within Black educational leadership; and (b) support and develop future and aspiring Black leaders in education.

### **Implications for Future Research**

The findings emerging from this phenomenological research project elicited new research questions and insights for future research. The research aids in the development of theory to support a critical exploration of educational leadership paradigms enacted by Black men. Four specific lines of theory were illuminated through the research and findings on leading while Black and male: (a) Black leadership epistemology—located in a theory of knowledge grounded in the social and historical context of the Black experience; (b) school leadership theology of liberation—a commitment to race equity, social justice, and community activism that actively resists race-neutral/color-blind notions of leadership; (c) Anansi school leadership—development and application of traits of a concept of Anansi leadership (Stewart, 2013) to the leadership

attributes of Black male school building-level leaders; and (d) African-centered school leadership models—grounded in the history, philosophical thoughts, cultural traditions, experiences, and perspectives of peoples of African heritage. The research also provides an opportunity for the review and exploration of a critical race phenomenology methodology approach that utilizes a critical race theory methodology and interpretative framework to center the race-cultural identities, values, and racialized lived experiences of participants in the exploration of “the situated meaning of a human in the world” (Laverty, 2003, p. 24) and phenomenon. The findings corroborated the need for expanded research on the leadership of Black male school building-level leaders across the range of public, private, and independent school contexts nationally. This supports a move toward increased and improved understanding of the range of educational leadership paradigms, experiences, and practices that is reflective of leading while Black and male. Further research is also needed to determine the extent to which the emergence of new race-critical paradigms of school leadership may serve as potential principal preparation and leadership development opportunities and pathways for Black male school leaders.

Improving the representation of the voices, leadership philosophies, and strategies for the success of Black male school building-level leaders as part of the educational leadership discourse also positively impacts on students and the wider communities these leaders serve. To what extent might a strategy of safeguarding the village through a model of race-critical and culturally relevant and responsive approaches to school leadership as described, experienced, and understood by Black male principals and heads of school positively support students holistically? How might attention and intentional care in supporting the social-emotional learning and leadership of students, across a range of school contexts, positively impact the student learning

experience? The projected trends and changing racial and ethnic profile of the U.S. student population necessitates a comparable diverse education system and culturally competent school leadership that understands the background and advocates on behalf of students from traditionally marginalized groups (Hernandez & Kose, 2012). If the debate is to be moved forward, more research is needed to gain a better understanding of the effect of the race of the school building-level leader and to determine specific ways in which a shared race/culture is directly linked to achievement for students from Black and other race/ethnic-marginalized backgrounds, particularly with respect to narrowing the education debt and opportunity gaps, as compared with other student cohorts. This would build on the work of Tillman (2004b) who has argued that the wholesale firing of Black educators following the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision had significant and detrimental (un)intended consequences on the academic success of Black children. As was demonstrated through a review of the respective findings of the previous *London Study* (Smith, 2012) and this current research project *Leading While Black and Male*, there is much corollary between the lived experiences of Black male school leaders in the United Kingdom and the United States. The research provides an opportunity for international comparative research with Black male school building-level leaders from across the African Diaspora—the United Kingdom, the United States, the Caribbean, and elsewhere. This furthers understanding of leadership while Black and male.

### **Conclusion**

*The leader knows the reality.*  
(Kenyan Proverb)

Contemporary leadership approaches as described, experienced, perceived, and understood by participating Black male school building-level leaders and their understanding of leading while Black and male—reveal similarities with the leadership as exercised by iconic

Black educators and champions of civil rights, and social justice advocacy intent on safeguarding the Black race-culture identity. In many respects, Black male school building-level leaders draw on the ancestral memories and leadership philosophies of those who came before them and upon whose shoulders they now stand (and lead). This is not dissimilar to the *Jegna* (*Jegnoch*, plural), an Amharic word translated to describe individuals who have demonstrated determination and courage in safeguarding their village and protecting their people, land, and culture. These Black male leaders—principals and heads of school—are deeply committed to the development of positively sustaining, life-altering strategies to leadership praxis. The strategies adopted in leading while Black and male draw on their lived experiences of growing up as a Black boy, viewing their leadership as ministry, recognizing and navigating racialized spaces that exist when a Black man is in the principalship, and ultimately safeguarding the village of students and community more widely. Black male school building-level leaders also demonstrate a commitment informed and motivated by a self-sacrificing, a fearless, and innate resilient desire to serve. What does it mean to lead while Black and male? To be a Black male school building-level leader is to have a clear sense of identity—that is, a clear sense of one’s racial-cultural-social-professional identities and understanding of the ways in which the multiple dimensions of identity coalesce to inform leadership. Black male principals and heads of school leading while Black and male start from within, with a clear sense of “Who am I?” and a celebratory affirmation of “*Thank you [God] for allowing me to see myself the way you see me*” (Franklin, 2005).

## AFTERWORD

Dear Black Man, Brother,

I write this letter to all Black men, and in particular to all who have positively responded to the call to lead while Black and male, and serve as K-12 school building-level leaders—principals and heads of schools. Your calling is an anointing to serve on behalf of our young people and community to safeguard the village. You are Initiates, Warriors, Elders of our village. Collectively, you are representatives of what is possible when experience and energy come together. Yet who takes care of you?

In closing, I share these words of meditation from sister Iyanla Vanzant (1993, March 8),

*Acts of Faith: Daily Meditations for People of Color:*

Sometimes the strong die, too!

—Louis Gossett, Jr.

Are you one of those people who is always there when somebody needs you? You know just what to say, exactly what to do to turn the worst situation into a conquerable challenge. Everybody calls on you. Everybody needs you. You are, after all, strong enough, smart enough, tough enough to make it through anything and everything. Well, who do the strong go to? Who do the strong lean on? Where do the strong go when they are not feeling very strong? When you set yourself up to be an anchor for everybody else, you jump ship on yourself! The need to be needed, the illusion that without us things would not get done, is. Actually the way we escape ourselves. The strong have needs. The strong have weaknesses! Sometimes those needs are so deep and painful that, rather than face them, the strong run away. When the strong take the weight of the world on their shoulders, they eventually break down. The question is, Who will be there for the strong?

*I take time for me, to do for me the same things I do for others.*

Selah

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## Appendix A

### Invitation to Participate in Research Study

**TEACHERS COLLEGE**  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

**Invitation to Participate in Research Study**  
**EXPLORING THE LEADERSHIP OF BLACK MALE PRINCIPALS**  
**AND HEADS OF SCHOOLS**

Teachers College IRB #17-341

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**Research Study**

The purpose of this doctoral research study is to explore the ways in which race and racial identity inform the professional lives, leadership preparation, and leadership development of Black male school principals, school building leaders, and heads of schools in a public, private, or independent school setting.

**To participate in this research you must be:**

- male
- self-identify as Black (for example, African, African American, Caribbean, or Black/Afro-Latino)
- currently or previously served as a school principal, building leader, or head of school
- employed in either a public, private, or independent school setting
- have largely succeeded in your professional career and school leadership

**Participation in this study is voluntary and involves:**

- completion of an on-line descriptive survey
- two separate 90 to 120 minutes one-on-one interviews

**CONTACT**

For further information about this study, please contact:

Phillip A. Smith, MBA, MPhil; PhD candidate, Education Leadership

Email: [pas2185@tc.columbia.edu](mailto:pas2185@tc.columbia.edu)

Phone: (646) 771-3885



## Appendix B

### Letter to Participants

Teachers College, Columbia University  
525 West 120th Street  
New York NY 10027  
212 678 3000

#### **INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH**

Teachers College IRB #17-341

**Subject:** Research Study: Exploring the Leadership of Black Male Principals and Heads of Schools  
**From:** Phillip A. Smith [pas2185@tc.columbia.edu](mailto:pas2185@tc.columbia.edu)  
**Date:** September 3, 2018

Are you a current or previously serving Black male school principal, school building leader, or head of school in a public, or independent school setting? Interested in sharing your experiences, understanding, and perceptions on leadership, leadership development and mentoring?

Does the following quote resonate with you:

*“The connection between mentoring and self-efficacy for Black principals is also connected with spiritual belonging”* (Celina Echols, 2006)

You are invited to participate in a doctoral research study led by Phillip A. Smith, PhD candidate in Education Leadership; Doctoral Research Fellow, Institute for Urban and Minority Education (IUME), Teachers College, Columbia University. The purpose of the study is to develop an understanding of the ways in which race and racial identity inform the professional lives, leadership and principal preparation, and leadership development of Black male school leaders, specifically public school principals and independent school heads of schools

Participation in the study is voluntary and includes completion of an on-line, descriptive survey that will take 30 minutes. You are also invited to indicate if you would also be willing to volunteer for two separate one-on-one interviews. Each interview will take between 90 to 120 minutes.

#### Eligibility Criteria.

You are:

- male
- self-identify as Black (for example, African, African American, Caribbean, or Black/Afro-Latino)
- currently or previously served as a school principal, building leader, or head of school

- Employed in either a public, private or independent school setting
- located in the U.S.
- Largely succeeded in your professional career and school leadership

Please email me directly if you meet the above criteria and are interested in participating in the study. Also, please do not hesitate to contact me should you any questions or concerns related to this research study.

Contact details: Phillip A. Smith  
Email: [pas2185@tc.columbia.edu](mailto:pas2185@tc.columbia.edu)  
Phone: [REDACTED]

Please feel free to forward this invitation to anyone else you know that qualifies and you feel might be interested in participating in this study.

Thanking you in advance for your consideration and participation.

Best regards

*Phillip Smith*

Phillip A. Smith, MBA, MPhil.  
PhD candidate, Education Leadership, Organization and Leadership Department  
Graduate Assistant, Education Leadership  
Doctoral Research Fellow, Institute for Urban and Minority Education (IUME)  
Teachers College, Columbia University  
525 West 120th Street, New York, NY 10027  
Phone: [REDACTED]

# Appendix C

## Informed Consent

Teachers College, Columbia University  
525 West 120th Street  
New York NY 10027  
212 678 3000

### **INFORMED CONSENT**

Teachers College IRB #17-341

**Protocol Title: Exploring the Leadership of Black Male Principals and Heads of Schools: Implications for Theory, Practice, and Culturally Sustaining Leadership and Leadership Development**

**Principal Investigator: Phillip A. Smith, MBA, MPhil, Teachers College 646 771 3885**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

You are being invited to participate in this research study called “Exploring the leadership of Black male Principals and Heads of Schools”. You qualify to take part in this research study if you are:

- Male
- Self-identify as Black (for example, African, African American, Caribbean, or Black / Afro-Latino)
- Currently or previously served as a school principal, school building leader, or Head of School
- Employed in either a public, or independent school setting
- Located in the U.S
- Largely succeeded in your professional career

Approximately 50 plus current or previously serving Black male public school principals and independent school heads of schools will participate in this study. All 50 plus participants will complete an on-line survey that will take 30 minutes. A subset of this group, approximately 10 to 15 principals or heads of schools will also participate in two separate one-on-one interviews. Each interview will take between 90 to 120 minutes.

#### **WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?**

This research project explores the ways in which the race-gendered identities of Black male public school principals and independent school heads of schools inform their leadership practice, leadership and principal preparation, and leadership development. The study also seeks to explore leadership development that incorporates African-centered leadership models, and is also informed by expressions of spirituality, as evidenced in a guided moral disposition, and ethic and power of caring in the exercise of leadership. Particularly, I am interested in learning how culturally sustaining school leadership development approaches might impact Black male principals leadership development.

The research will be conducted by Phillip A. Smith, a PhD candidate in Education Leadership at Teachers College, Columbia University, and the principal investigator for the study. The research will be conducted at a location of your choosing.

#### **WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?**

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete on-line, descriptive, Background Information Survey, at a time and location that is convenient to you. The survey asks a series of basic background and demographic questions relating to your professional career and leadership development as a school principal or head of school. You may also be invited, as

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**INFORMED CONSENT**

Teachers College IRB #17-341

one of a smaller group of 10 principals and heads of schools, to participate in two separate one-on-one interviews. The interviews are an opportunity for you to share with me your story and lived experience as a Black male school principal, head of school and leader. I am also very keen to explore with you what for you constitutes a model of effective leadership development support. With your permission, the interviews will be audio recorded.

**NAMING PROTOCOL**

There is a balance in both sharing and honoring the stories and lived experiences of Black professionals, and the need to honor and respect individual's confidentiality. To this end, you are invited to choose to either disclose your name, to be used in citations, references, presentations, and publications to the research study, or if you prefer to be referenced by a pseudonym. All information will be kept on a password protected computer and locked un a file drawer.

Please select one of the following three naming protocol options:

**a) I agree to be identified by my real name as part of the study:**

\_\_\_\_\_   
Real Name

\_\_\_\_\_   
Signature

**b) I agree to be identified by the following pseudonym as part of the study:**

\_\_\_\_\_   
Preferred pseudonym

\_\_\_\_\_   
Signature

**c) I agree to be identified by any pseudonym, selected by the researcher, as part of the study:**

\_\_\_\_\_   
Signature

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---

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### **WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

The risks of participating in this research are minimal. Activities are limited to an on-line, descriptive Background Information Survey and one-on-one interviews. The research study and questions focus on participant's personal experiences, understanding, and perceptions of leadership development.

The principal investigator is taking precautions to keep your information confidential. When writing about your experience, I will honor confidentiality. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to answer any question that choose not to, and may withdraw from. You may withdraw from, or terminate completion of the survey or interview at any time and for any reason without penalty.

### **WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study.

### **WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?**

There is no compensation for participating in this study.

### **WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?**

The study is over when you have completed the survey, and if selected to participate, the two one-on-one interviews. However, you can leave the study at any time even if you have not finished.

### **PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY**

The investigator will keep all written materials locked in a desk drawer in a locked office on the Teachers College, Columbia University campus. Any electronic or digital information (including audio recordings) will be stored on a computer that is password protected. The survey and interview data will be used for professional purposes only. Regulations require that research data be kept for at least three years.

### **HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?**

This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the principal investigator. The results of this study may also be used for future research studies, publications, and presentations. Your name or any identifying information about you will not be published, unless you have previously indicated that you willingly give consent for your name to be disclosed as part of the research study.

### **CONSENT FOR AUDIO**

Audio recording is part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded. If you decide that you don't wish to be recorded, you will still be able to participate in this study in this research study, and annotated notes of the interviews will be made.

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New York NY 10027  
212 678 3000

**INFORMED CONSENT**

Teachers College IRB #17-341

\_\_\_\_ I give my consent to be recorded \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_ I **do not** consent to be recorded \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

**WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY**

\_\_\_\_ I consent to allow written and/or audio taped materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_ I **do not** consent to allow written and/or audio taped materials viewed outside of Teachers College Columbia University \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

**OPTIONAL CONSENT FOR FUTURE CONTACT**

The investigator may wish to contact you in the future. Please initial the appropriate statements to indicate whether or not you give permission for future contact.

I give permission to be contacted in the future for research purposes:

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_  
Initial Initial

I give permission to be contacted in the future for information relating to this study:

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_  
Initial Initial

**WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?**

If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the principal investigator, Phillip A. Smith, at 646 771-3885 or email [pas2185@tc.columbia.edu](mailto:pas2185@tc.columbia.edu)

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) at 212-678-4105 or email [IRB@tc.edu](mailto:IRB@tc.edu). Or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, NY 1002. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection for Teachers College, Columbia University.

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**INFORMED CONSENT**

Teachers College IRB #17-341

**PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS**

- I have read and discussed the informed consent with the researcher. I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
- I have read and discussed the naming protocol with the researcher, and have indicated my preference and consent be referenced by my real name or by a pseudonym, as indicated above.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at his or her professional discretion.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the investigator will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent document.

**My signature means that I agree to participate in this study**

**Print name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

<p>Teachers College, Columbia University Institutional Review Board Protocol Number: 17-341 Consent Form Approved Until: 06/14/2019</p>
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## Appendix D

### Online Descriptive Survey

**QUALTRICS SURVEY**  
**EXPLORING THE LEADERSHIP OF BLACK MALE PRINCIPALS AND HEADS OF SCHOOLS**  
**(TC IRB #17-341)**

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Are you a current or previously serving Black male school principal, school building leader, or head of school in a public, private or independent school setting? Interested in sharing your experiences, understanding, and perceptions on leadership, leadership development and mentoring?

You are invited to complete this short survey as part of a doctoral research study led by Phillip A. Smith, a Ph.D. candidate in Education Leadership; Doctoral Research Fellow, Institute for Urban and Minority Education (IUME), Teachers College, Columbia University.

The survey covers the following areas:

- Personal Details
- Professional Experience and Qualifications
- Current or Most recent School Leadership
- School Staffing
- Student Population
- Principal Preparation and Leadership Development
- Social Networks

Participation in this study is voluntary. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions or concerns related to this survey or research study.

Contact details:

Phillip A. Smith, MBA, MPhil.

Email: [pas2185@tc.columbia.edu](mailto:pas2185@tc.columbia.edu)

Phone: [REDACTED]

Thanking you in advance for your consideration and participation.



### Q1 Eligibility Criteria

I am:

- Male
  - Self-identify as a Black (African, African American, Caribbean, Black/Afro Latino)
  - Currently or previously served as a school principal, school building leader, or head of school
  - Employed in either a public, private or independent school setting
  - Located in the U.S.
  - Largely succeeded in my professional career and school leadership
- I meet all of the above criteria and consent to participate in the study (1)
- I do NOT wish to participate in the study (2)

### PERSONAL DETAILS

---

Q2 Age:

- under 30 (1)
- 31-39 (2)
- 40-49 (3)
- 50-59 (4)
- 60+ (5)

Q3 Ethnicity / Race

- Black / African (1)
- Black / African American (2)
- Black / Caribbean (3)
- Black / Afro Latino (4)
- Black / Other (Please Specify) (5)
- 

Q4 In which country were you born?

▼ Afghanistan (1) ... Zimbabwe (1357)

---

Q5 In which state were you born?

▼ Alabama (1) ... I do not reside in the United States (53)

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE AND QUALIFICATIONS

---

Q6 Professional Experience

Years of teaching/ education experience (entire career) (1)	▼ Less than 3 years (1) ... 30+ years (7)
Years of school leadership experience (entire career) (2)	▼ Less than 3 years (1) ... 30+ years (7)
Years of experience in a school principal, school building leader, or head of school position (3)	▼ Less than 3 years (1) ... 30+ years (7)
Years of experience in current role (please specify role) (4)	▼ Less than 3 years (1) ... 30+ years (7)

---

### Selection Options

- Less than 3 years
- 4 – 9 years
- 10 – 14 years
- 15 – 19 years
- 20 – 24 years
- 25 – 29 years
- 30+ years

Q7 Professional Qualifications (please check all that apply)

- Professional degree (law, Medicine, or other professional degree) (1)
- Master of Education (2)
- Master of Arts (3)
- Master of Business Administration (4)
- Doctoral degree (5)
- Principal Licensure / School Building Leader (SBL) Certificate (6)
- Superintendent Licensure / School District Leader (SDL) Certificate (7)
- School District Administrator (SDA) Certificate (8)
- School Administrator and Supervisor (SAS) Certificate (9)
- Other (please specify) (10) \_\_\_\_\_

**CURRENT OR MOST RECENT SCHOOL LEADERSHIP**

-----

Q8 Current or most recent school leadership role

- CEO/ Network Leader (1)
  - Executive Principal (2)
  - School Principal (3)
  - Head of School (4)
  - Other (Please Specify) (5) \_\_\_\_\_
- 

Q9 Period of employment in current or most recent school leadership role

From (1) \_\_\_\_\_

To (2) \_\_\_\_\_

-----

Q10 What type of school are you currently or most recently employed in? Please select the one best answer

- District School (DoE) (1)
  - Charter School (2)
  - Independent School (3)
  - Private School (4)
  - African Centered School (5)
  - Other (please specify) (6) \_\_\_\_\_
- 

Q11 Grade level

- Nursery (PK) (1)
  - Elementary (or Primary) (2)
  - Secondary Education (3)
  - Other (please specify) (4) \_\_\_\_\_
- 

Q12 Grade levels served

- Grade PK (nursery school) (1)
  - Grades PK to 5 (elementary school) (2)
  - Grades K to 5 (elementary school) (3)
  - Grades 1 to 5 (elementary school) (4)
  - Grades 6 to 8 (middle school) (5)
  - Grades 9 to 12 (high school) (6)
  - Grades 6 to 12 (secondary school) (7)
  - Other (please specify) (8) \_\_\_\_\_
- 

Q13 In which state is your current or most recent school located

▼ Alabama (1) ... I do not reside in the United States (53)
---

---

Q14 Name the city in which your current or most recent school is located

---

Q15 The total number of teaching staff employed in your current or most recent school

Teaching Staff (1)	▼ Less than 10 (1) ... 101 or more (8)
--------------------	--

Selection Options:

- Less than 10
- 11 to 15
- 16 to 20
- 21 to 25
- 26 to 50
- 51 to 75
- 76 to 100
- 101 or more

**SCHOOL STAFFING**

Q16 The total number of administrators, support/custodial, and other staff employed in your current or most recent school

School Leadership Team (1)	▼ Less than 5 (1) ... 16 or more (4)
Other Administration (2)	▼ Less than 5 (1) ... 16 or more (4)
Support / Custodial Staff (3)	▼ Less than 5 (1) ... 16 or more (4)
Other Staff (4)	▼ Less than 5 (1) ... 16 or more (4)

Selection Options:

- Less than 5
- 6 to 10
- 11 to 15
- 16 or more

Q17 To the best of your knowledge, what would you say is the proportion of administrators, teachers, and support staff at your current or most recent school who are:

Staff of White (non-Hispanic) racial / ethnic background (1)	▼ None or almost none (1) ... Unable to determine (6)
Staff of Black/African racial / ethnic background (2)	▼ None or almost none (1) ... Unable to determine (6)
Staff of Black/African American racial / ethnic background (3)	▼ None or almost none (1) ... Unable to determine (6)
Staff of Black/Caribbean racial / ethnic background (4)	▼ None or almost none (1) ... Unable to determine (6)
Staff of Black/ Afro Latino/a ethnic background (please specify) (5)	▼ None or almost none (1) ... Unable to determine (6)
Staff of Black/Other racial / ethnic background (please specify) (6)	▼ None or almost none (1) ... Unable to determine (6)
Staff of Latino/a racial / ethnic background (7)	▼ None or almost none (1) ... Unable to determine (6)
Staff of Other (non White) racial/ ethnic background (please specify) (8)	▼ None or almost none (1) ... Unable to determine (6)

Selection Options:

- None or almost none
- About a quarter
- About half
- About three quarters
- All or almost all
- Unable to determine

## STUDENT POPULATION

---

Q18 Total student population in your current or most recent school (across all grades)

- Less than 50 (1)
  - 51 to 100 (2)
  - 101 to 150 (3)
  - 151 to 200 (4)
  - 201 to 250 (5)
  - 251 to 500 (6)
  - 501 to 750 (7)
  - 751 to 1000 (8)
  - 1001 to 1500 (9)
  - 1501 to 2000 (10)
  - 2001 to 2500 (11)
  - 2501 to 3000 (12)
  - 3001 or more (13)
-

Q19 To the best of your knowledge, what would you say is the proportion of students at your current or most recent school who are:

Students of White (non-Hispanic) racial/ ethnic background (1)	▼ None or almost none (1) ... Unable to determine (6)
Students of Black/African racial/ ethnic background (2)	▼ None or almost none (1) ... Unable to determine (6)
Students of Black/African American racial/ ethnic background (3)	▼ None or almost none (1) ... Unable to determine (6)
Students of Black/Caribbean racial/ ethnic background (4)	▼ None or almost none (1) ... Unable to determine (6)
Students of Black/Afro Latino/a racial / ethnic background (5)	▼ None or almost none (1) ... Unable to determine (6)
Students of Black/Other racial/ ethnic background (please specify) (6)	▼ None or almost none (1) ... Unable to determine (6)
Students of Latino/a racial / ethnic background (7)	▼ None or almost none (1) ... Unable to determine (6)
Students of Other (non White) racial/ ethnic background (8)	▼ None or almost none (1) ... Unable to determine (6)
Students of low socio-economic background (9)	▼ None or almost none (1) ... Unable to determine (6)
Students with IEP (individualized education plans) (10)	▼ None or almost none (1) ... Unable to determine (6)
English Language Learners (11)	▼ None or almost none (1) ... Unable to determine (6)

Selection Options:

- None or almost none
- About a quarter
- About half
- About three quarters
- All or almost all
- Unable to determine



## PRINCIPAL PREPARATION AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

### Principal Preparation Programs

Q20 Which (if any) of the following types of formal principal preparation programs have you attended? (Please check all that apply)

- School district principal preparation program (1)
  - Masters level Education Leadership degree program (2)
  - Doctoral level Education Leadership degree program (3)
  - Leadership residency (4)
  - Internship / shadowing (5)
  - Principalship (6)
  - Principal Apprenticeship (7)
  - Job embedded training (8)
  - Non-university based leadership development program (9)
  - University based principal preparation program (10)
  - School building leaders certification program (11)
  - Customized program for leaders of color (12)
  - Charter/ Network/Board principal preparation program (13)
  - African-centered leadership development programs (14)
  - Other (please specify) (15) \_\_\_\_\_
-

## Leadership Development

Q21 Which (if any) of the following do you use to support your leadership? (Please check all that apply)

- Self-determination (1)
- Self-efficacy (2)
- Hard work (3)
- Qualifications (4)
- Leadership Experience (5)
- Professional Action Plan (6)
- Support of senior colleagues (7)
- Support from various "significant others" (8)
- Mentoring/ Coaching (9)
- Culturally Relevant Mentoring/ Coaching (10)
- Professional Black Role Model (11)
- Other (non-Black) Professional Role Model (12)
- Access to leadership development programs (13)
- Access to customized leadership development programs for leaders of color (14)
- Resilience (15)
- Spiritual belonging (16)
- Confidence / Self-belief (17)
- Availability of suitable positions (18)
- My race/ racial identity (19)
- Black Professional Networks (20)
- Other (non-Black) Professional Networks (21)
- School District/ Board/ Network (22)
- Black led Faith-Based Organization (23)
- Other (non-Black led) Faith-Based Organization (24)

- Black led Social Groups/ Networks (25)
- Other (non-Black led) Social Groups/ Networks (26)
- Local Community (27)
- Other (please specify) (28) \_\_\_\_\_



Q22 Which (if any) of the following inhibitors have you encountered in pursuit of your leadership ambitions?  
(Please check all that apply)

- Personal decision not to pursue leadership opportunities (1)
- Lack of Self Confidence (2)
- Lack of availability of suitable positions (3)
- Unsupportive recruitment & hiring process and practices (4)
- Racial bias in the recruitment & hiring process and practices (5)
- Lack of opportunities for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) (6)
- Insufficient Professional Support (7)
- Professional isolation and exclusion (8)
- Absence of appropriate networks (9)
- Qualifications and Experience (10)
- Workload Commitment & Pressure (11)
- Lack of/ ineffective Mentoring Support (12)
- Lack of Support from School District/ Board/ Network (13)
- Lack of support from senior colleagues (14)
- Unsupportive community members (15)
- Unsupportive family members (16)
- Age(ism) (17)
- My race/ racial identity (18)
- Direct / Indirect prejudice and discrimination (19)
- Negative stereotyping (20)
- Institutional Racism (21)
- Racism by Individuals (22)
- Cultural/Societal Racism (23)
- Other (please specify) (24) \_\_\_\_\_

Q23 Who are the most supportive/ influential people that have supported your leadership development and growth  
(Please check all that apply)

- Self (1)
- Family (2)
- Partner/ Significant Other (3)
- Friend (4)
- Fraternity Brother(s) (5)
- Faith/God (6)
- Faith-Based Leader (7)
- Local Community Leader (8)
- Other School Principal Colleague (9)
- Black Professional Mentor/ Coach (10)
- Other (non-Black) Professional Mentor/ Coach (11)
- Black Personal Mentor/ Coach (12)
- Other (non-Black) Personal Mentor/ Coach (13)
- Professional Black Role Model (14)
- Personal Black Role Model (15)
- Other (non Black) Professional Role Model (16)
- Other (non Black) Personal Role Model (17)
- District Superintendent/ Network/ Board (18)
- Other (please specify) (19) \_\_\_\_\_

## SOCIAL NETWORKS

---

Q24 Are you a member of a Black Greek or Other Fraternity

- Alpha Phi Alpha (1)
  - Iota Phi Theta (2)
  - Kappa Alpha Psi (3)
  - Omega Psi Phi (4)
  - Phi Beta Sigma (5)
  - Other (please specify) (6) \_\_\_\_\_
  - No (7)
- 

Q25 Are you a member of a Black Professional and Political Associations (check all that apply)

- National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE) (1)
  - Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color (COSEOC) (2)
  - National Urban League (NUL) (3)
  - National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) (4)
  - 100 Black Men of America, Inc (5)
  - Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, Inc (6)
  - Other (please specify) (7) \_\_\_\_\_
  - None (8)
-

Q26 To which religion or spiritual path do you most identify (check all that apply)

- Atheist (1)
- Christian (optional - please specify) (2) \_\_\_\_\_
- Eastern-based religion (optional - please specify) (3)  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Indigenous/African-based practices (optional - please specify) (4)  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Islamic (optional -please specify) (5) \_\_\_\_\_
- Other (optional - please specify) (6) \_\_\_\_\_
- None (7)

Q27 Thank you for completing the survey. Would you be willing to participate in a two-phased interview

- Yes (1)
  - No (2)
- 

Q28 Thank you for indicating that you are willing to participate in a two-phased interview. Please provide your contact information below.

- First Name (1) \_\_\_\_\_
  - Last Name (2) \_\_\_\_\_
  - Email Address (3) \_\_\_\_\_
  - Contact Phone Number (4) \_\_\_\_\_
- 

Q29 Do you give permission to be contacted in the future for research purposes

- Yes (1)
  - No (2)
- 

Q30 Do you give permission to be contacted in the future for information relating to this study

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

-----  
Q31 Thank you for indicating that you are willing to be contacted in the future. Please provide your contact information below

- First Name (1) \_\_\_\_\_
- Last Name (2) \_\_\_\_\_
- Email Address (3) \_\_\_\_\_
- Contact Phone Number (4) \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix E

### Semi-structured Interview Protocol

#### **Exploring the Leadership of Black Male Principals and Heads of Schools: Implications for Theory, Practice, and Culturally Sustaining Mentoring**

**(IRB Protocol: 17-341)**

#### **Interview Protocol & Guide**

**Phillip A. Smith, PhD Candidate, Education Leadership**

### **Interview Questions**

2 x interviews. First round interviews focus on leadership (Questions 1 to 12). Round two interviews focus on leadership development (Questions 13 to 21).

#### Grand tour questions

1. Do you have any thoughts, comments, or questions in regard to the on-line survey you completed?
2. Tell me about your school, school district [network] and surrounding community. How do you view your leadership in relation to the community?
3. How does the community served by the school impact on your choice of school?
4. Why did you become a principal? How did you become principal of this school?
5. What experiences prepared you for the principalship?
6. How have these experiences shaped your leadership philosophy?

#### Mini-tour questions

7. Please select a flashcard [all pictorial images of leadership]. Which image did you choose and why?
8. How would you describe your identity [racial, professional, social, and community identity] as a Black male school principal?
9. What does it mean to be Black?
10. What does it mean to be a leader? An education leader?
11. How do you work with individuals who may question you based on your race/ gender identity?
12. How do you think your identity as a Black school principal informs your leadership style and choice of leadership development support?

### Example and Experience questions

13. What formal/informal leadership development programs have you followed? And how have you found these?
14. Could you share your experiences of the mentoring support that you have received?
15. Who have been your mentors and why were these individuals selected to support your leadership development?
16. Who have been your most influential mentors and why?
17. What have you found to be supportive in these relationships towards supporting your personal leadership development?

### Contrast questions

18. What are your thoughts on the use of African-Centered wisdoms, philosophies, knowledge, and traditions to inform leadership development support for Black school principals [give examples if required]
19. How would you interpret the following quote “*The connection between mentoring and self-efficacy for Black principals is also connected with spiritual belonging*” (Echols, 2006, p.5)?

### Direct Language questions

20. What are the biggest issues facing Black education today?
21. What advice do you have for aspiring Black principals?

Appendix F

Selected Visual/Photo Flashcard Images

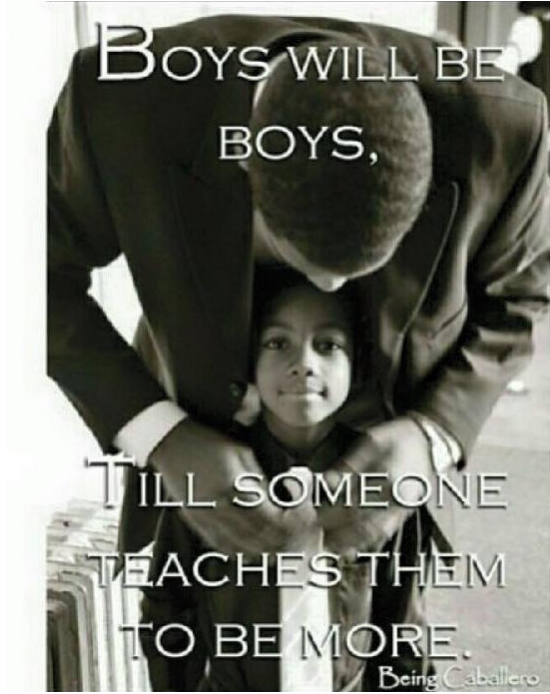


Image A



Image B



Image C



Image D

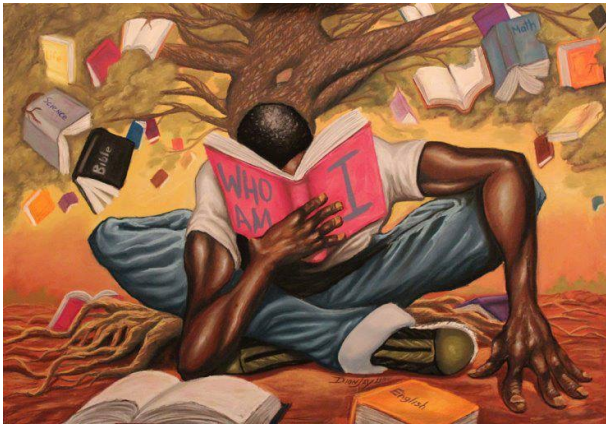


Image E



Image F



Image G



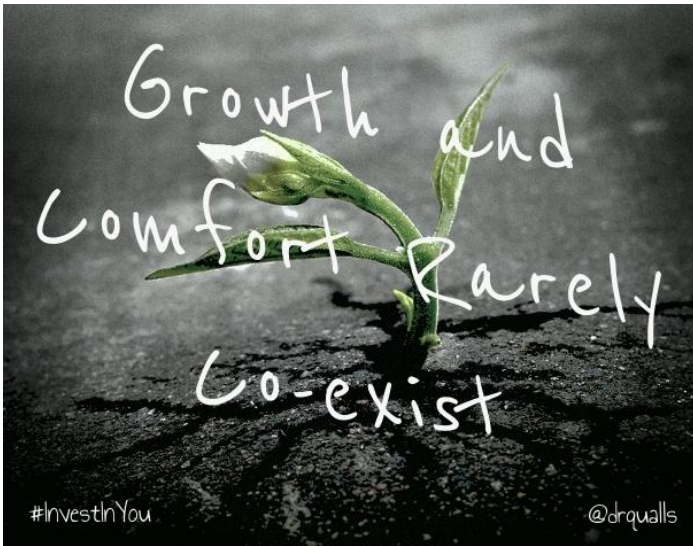


Image H



Image I

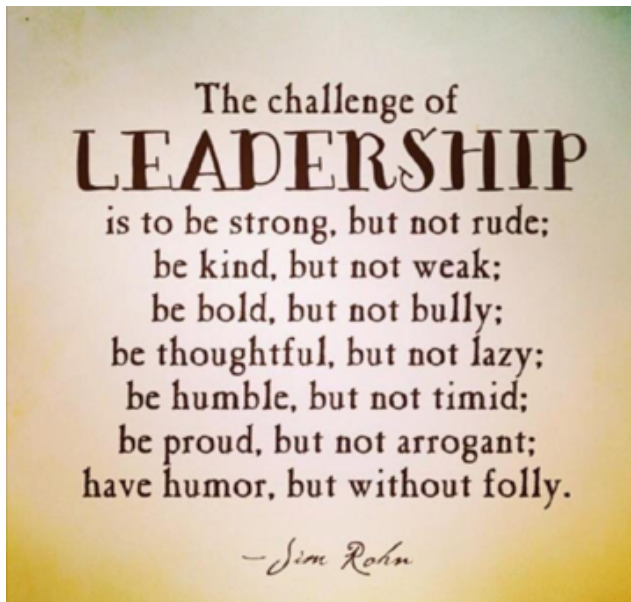


Image J



Image K

## Appendix G

### Vita

Teachers College  
Columbia University, New York

Phillip A. Smith

#### Degrees:

Master of Business Administration, 2013  
Warwick Business School, University of Warwick, England

Master of Philosophy, 2016  
Columbia University, New York

Master of Arts, Policy Studies in Education, 2017  
Institute of Education, University College London, England

#### Special Honors and Awards

W.E.B. Du Bois Scholar, Institute for Urban and Minority Education (IUME), Teachers College, Columbia University

Graduate Student Fellow, African Diaspora International Research Network, World Educational Research Association (WERA).

David L. Clark Scholar, University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), American Educational Research Association (AERA), Divisions A, Administration, Organization & Leadership; and Division L, Educational Policy & Politics

Asa G. Hilliard III and Barbara A. Sizemore Research Institute on African Americans and Education Fellow. American Educational Research Association, Research Focus on Black Education Special Interest Group

Dissertation Title: Leading While Black and Male: A Phenomenology of Black Male School Leadership

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