

**Black Organizations as a Way to Increase Black Students' College  
Attendance Rates by Improving Their Academic Performance at Primary  
and Secondary Schools**

**A Dissertation Presented**

**by**

**LEYDI MERCEDES VIDAL PERLAZA**

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## DEDICATION

To all the Black students in the world.

## ABSTRACT

BLACK ORGANIZATIONS AS A WAY TO INCREASE BLACK STUDENTS'  
COLLEGE ATTENDANCE RATES BY IMPROVING THEIR ACADEMIC  
PERFORMANCE AT PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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The racial academic achievement gap between Black students and other students is one of the most pressing education-policy challenges faced by the United States. This gap refers to the disparities in standardized test scores between these groups of students. Decades ago, Fordham and Ogbu's theory about the "burden of acting White" was one of the most cited studies indicating the causes of this achievement gap. This theory indicates that Black students who do not perform well academically, do not want to achieve success at school because it is considered as acting White. However, this is an old way of thinking that has been largely discredited because a growing body of research, in which Gloria Ladson-Billings, Derrick Bell, Patricia Williams, and Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw are part, shows that this theory is not accurate because it does not take into account other social and educational factors that affect Black students. For that reason, through interviews, questionnaires, and document revision, this

dissertation research attempts to analyze how Black organizations teach Black students to deal with their familial, educational, and community issues in order to help them focus more on an excellent academic performance in their primary and secondary school classes to increase their chances of going to college.

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## INTRODUCTION

For many decades, theorists have tried to figure out why the United States has a huge academic achievement gap between Black and White students. This means that according to the White Western academic frameworks in which students are assessed, a great quantity of Black students is not performing as well academically as many White students. This assertion is based on the multiple standardized tests that students take from kindergarten to high school, dropout rates, number of students taking advanced placement, honors, and gifted classes, as well as the number of students admitted to college. Frequently, researchers such as John Ogbu tend to blame Black students and their parents for their academic underachievement,<sup>1</sup> but the reality is more complex than that. In this research project, I will examine the historical, socio-political, cultural, and educational factors that affect Black students' academic performance such as historically unequal education, school conflicts, role of teachers, high levels of discipline, hidden curriculum, and no connection between home and school culture.

Black students' academic performance has been the main issue in a lot of research studies, especially underperformance and overperformance. Many researchers such as Kimberly O' Malley have focused their efforts in figuring out the discrepancy in the different math and reading standardized academic tests

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<sup>1</sup> Underachievement is defined as a discrepancy between a child's school performance and his or her actual ability. The word "underachiever" should not be a label placed on a child, but rather a definition used to describe a child's current progress in school. A child who is underachieving has a significant gap between his or her ability and what he or she is actually achieving at school. <http://www.cde.state.co.us/>

that students take every year. They have researched why some White students get the best scores and why some Black students get poor scores.

Since 1969, some of these standardized tests have been administered in the United States by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and have been taken mainly by fourth, eighth, and twelfth-grade students. These tests evaluate the minimal math and reading skills students should have already acquired according to the grade they are in. According to Adolph Delgado (2015), “there are four common types of testing in schools today—diagnostic, formative, benchmark (or interim), and summative. They all serve distinct purposes and should work together in order to make up a comprehensive or balanced assessment program” (p. 403). In addition, NAEP highlights that standardized tests examine what students should know and should be able to do, so the Board of Education can understand how prepared students are for life beyond high school. Additionally, this organization claims that it is important for them to identify educational strengths and weaknesses, and to recognize where progress is being made. NAEP also states that they have been a lens to view academic success, which has helped educators and policymakers measure success as they make decisions to improve education across the country. Their tests show how achievement varies by different student groups in some large urban districts and states, leading to important efforts that raise the bar for student achievement. Moreover, they assert that with that information, they contribute to improving education for the students and the nation, as well as increase the students’ chances for success.

It is understandable that the Board of Education needs to implement different standardized tests in schools in order to understand what needs to be changed to make the educational system work better. By taking into account NAEP's test results, educators and policymakers work together in order to both modify some aspects of the educational policies that might not be working proficiently, and design new educational policies to give a solution to the issues that might be affecting the quality of the education. On the surface, this explicit focus of using standardized tests to directly improve educational attainment for the most underserved sounds great, because as the world is changing every day, educational parameters need to be transformed to adjust to the new changes occurring not only in the schools' cultures but also in the society. For instance, new programs have been added to some schools' curricula that teach and make students reflect about issues that have emerged in recent decades. Programs such as gender studies and cultural studies have the purpose of preparing students to live in a world that is more socially and culturally diverse. It is not a secret that centuries ago, many of these realities could not have been mentioned in schools because they were prohibited. In the past, to talk about women's rights and equality was a blasphemy because women were considered to be inferior to men, so women needed to occupy a place in society that was relegated to the housework, procreation, and breeding. But now, although the same mentality persists in some people, the reality has changed. Nowadays, women can go to a university, vote, and even be political leaders at a local, state, regional, national, and international level. Lots of significant changes like this one have occurred in

the world; that is why academic content in schools has to be adjusted in order to go along with the current ways in which the world is working.

In that sense, designing new policies permits the educational system to adjust to the ongoing realities. Thus, standardized test outcomes might be useful to come up with new ideas to achieve what is expected. But the problem is that, at the same time, these tests harm some students' and schools' reputations. Scholars question if standardized tests could accurately measure students' intelligence. Delgado (2015) states that:

an exam cannot correctly measure a student's intelligence by only testing certain parts of their education. Every student is unique and cannot be treated as a whole. A standardized test made for a standard student cannot accurately determine the intelligence and performance of an individual. (p. 407)

Opinions about these tests are controversial. Some intellectuals think that these kinds of tests do not really measure what students have learned because while the educational community is super diverse, the tests are so standardized that they ignore the diverse realities in which students live.

As Sarah Theule Lubienski (2002) indicates, "one important tool for monitoring mathematics [and reading] achievement gaps is the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The NAEP also provides information from student and teacher questionnaires regarding mathematical [and reading] backgrounds, beliefs, and instructional practices" (p. 269).

Analyzing dozens of articles about the academic achievement gap at schools, it

was found that most of them use the NAEP tests, results, and statistics as the backbone of their studies. For that reason, NAEP tests are an important tool in this research study as well.

When examining lots of articles that have been written about the academic achievement gap, one can notice that usually the objects of study are students who belong to few of the multiple population groups that exist in the United States such as Black, Latino, White, and Asian communities. These studies' outcomes frequently reveal that lots of Black and Latino students do not perform very well at school and do not obtain high scores in academic tests. On the other hand, the same studies show that usually White and Asian students are the ones who perform excellently at school and obtain the best scores in academic tests. For instance, taking as a reference one of Lubienski's (2002) studies, in her final comment she describes that, "drawing from the 1990, 1996, and 2000, National Assessment of Educational Progress, ... in 4th, 8th, and 12th-grade mathematics achievement and instruction... substantial Black-White achievement gaps were identified, such as 12th-grade Black students scoring below 8th-grade White students" (p. 269). This is so problematic. Many studies about the achievement gap provide evidence that despite several programs that the government has issued to bridge the academic achievement gap, many Black students are still getting low scores in standardized tests. But what is happening? Why is it a nationwide problem even when controlling for SES (socioeconomic status)? There are many aspects that cause this problem. Researchers like Darrell Cleveland Hucks (2011) have found that it does not matter if some Black

students attend private or public schools, or if they live in low or high-class areas, some of them still underperform on standardized tests. So, what are the factors that influence Black students' low academic proficiency at school and underperformance on standardized tests? And the most important, how can we tackle those factors? These are the kinds of questions that will be addressed throughout this qualitative research study.

Some educators say that questions designed on the NAEP tests seem to be directed towards a specific demographic (namely higher SES whites) who are the ones that always get the best scores. They argue that those questions take into account the living characteristics of a specific group of students, while other groups of students have never had those experiences. Sometimes these tests ask about places Black students have not visited or studied about, historical characters they do not know about, environments they are not related to, or events in history that Black students are not totally invested in because they do not identify themselves with those events. Some Black students have stated that they wished that the NAEP tests asked questions about their ethnic history, because in that sense, NAEP would convey the message that every student's ancestral community matters. Unfortunately, so far, the message that NAEP has been delivering is that ethnic communities' knowledge does not matter as much, because the standardized tests do not assess the history and culture of these communities. Sadly, and even after lots of debate and controversial opinions about this issue that have been carried out for years, the NAEP tests are still biased. To make it worse, researchers like Linda Coats have found that implicit

bias in standardized tests is one of the main factors in Black students' underperformance on such tests. Moreover, a factor that negatively influences the perception towards Black students is when they do not demonstrate high test scores, to the point that they are perceived as inferior students.

Some studies suggest that certain factors contribute to Black students' performance, including those who show high, average, and low proficiency. Environments such as family, school, and community strongly influence the ways in which a Black student performs academically. First, regarding family, some of the factors involved are poverty, food insecurity, family background, family education, childhood experiences, failing to review or practice their schoolwork over vacations, and so on. Second, other factors take place at school such as teacher quality and quantity, unequal discipline, inequitably funded public schools, precarious resources, culturally unresponsive instructional strategies and curricula, teachers' low expectations, overrepresentation in remedial and special education programs, underrepresentation in gifted and college preparatory programs, and so on. And third, while in the community, poverty, loitering, drug abuse and dealing, among other factors, affect Black students' academic proficiency.

In the next chapters, each factor will be further broken down. Scholars have highlighted that most students' learning takes place at school, which is why school factors are the ones that affect them the most. At school, the most important person in a student's life is a teacher. For that reason, the way a



teacher perceives, or treats and connects with, a student shapes a great part of his/her academic character. Actually, researchers such as John Diamond and Ericka Fisher have concluded that teachers' perceptions and expectations might impact a student in a positive or negative way. Unfortunately, studies have revealed that some teachers do not have a positive attitude towards Black students because these teachers do not perceive them in an optimistic way. As a result, their social and academic expectations for these students are very low and they are not encouraging. A low expectation is a lethal weapon in a classroom because students tend to react with an indifferent and uncaring attitude. In other schools, Black students often report that their teachers make them feel like inferior students who cannot be challenged with advanced-level knowledge or tasks because they might not understand or be able to achieve the goals. These students manifest that they are aware that sometimes they are taught what White students learn in lower grades. One of the issues is that if in every class, these Black students do not acquire the minimal knowledge that is required to take the standardized tests, they are being condemned to fail the tests, which reduces their chances to attend college, and therefore, endangers their future.

For instance, a student needs to take honors and/or advanced placement (AP) classes in high school to have a higher possibility of being admitted when applying for college. Taking these advanced classes is seen as real proof that a student is smart enough to take college classes. Also, while taking these classes, students engage in a journey that hands them the tools and the skills they need

to boost their academic level, which will be helpful to thrive in their college classes. But, how many Black students are taking honors and advanced placement classes in high school in the whole country? That is a complex question that scholars wonder about. Sadly, its answer is more complex, disturbing, and alarming.

Some scholars report that usually less than 20% of Black students attend advanced classes, which means that the Black educational community is underrepresented in most important and life-changing classes in high school. On the other hand, Black students are overrepresented in remedial and special education programs. So, if the majority of Black students do not attend college preparatory programs, how do we expect them to pursue a career that would improve their quality of life and the quality of life of their family and their community? If more than 80% of Black students do not have the opportunity to go to a university, what does their future look like? This is a huge matter everyone should reflect on in order to figure out how to tackle this concern.

At school, students are usually segregated based on their academic level. That segregation determines each student's academic future because the classes in which each student is placed define the kind of knowledge they would acquire, the kind of teachers they would get, the kind of resources they would have available, how challenged they would be in class, the kind of college preparation they would receive, and so on. When students are divided among advanced level classes and low-level classes, they take different paths in which they would have two options. In the advanced level classes, they would be

immersed in an environment where quality tools, quality information, and mostly quality teachers would be at their disposal, which would let them run to the finish line where college opportunities would be waiting for them. Meanwhile, students who are placed in the low-level classes, like remedial and special education programs, would crawl a path where they might be exposed to less qualified teachers who might not challenge them all the time, low-quality tools, precarious resources like labs, and lack of social awareness information. Furthermore, the latter students might face additional obstacles, which may prevent them from reaching the final goal, which might only be high school graduation. When teachers and administrative staff decide to place students in segregated classes, they are responsible for those students' social, academic, economic, and political futures, because they are making those students go through different tracks. The problem is, that sometimes that decision is not made consciously and in a fair way, but on occasion, that decision is influenced by implicit racial bias. As Diana Westerberg (2016) affirms in her article, "Understanding and Dealing With Implicit Bias and Discipline in Early Care and Education":

research has found that implicit racial bias affects the way teachers in kindergarten through 12th grade see their students. Teachers were shown to be more likely to interpret multiple misbehaviors of black students as 'troublesome' and to respond with harsher punishments, compared to white students. (p. 4)

As some Black students are perceived as troublemakers, several teachers think they cannot be admitted in advanced placement classes even if they are

genius, because to be part of these programs, students need to have impeccable behavior. Westerberg (2016) also indicates that, “implicit bias may be particularly harmful in the early years when student-teacher relationships are of utmost importance, setting the stage for a cascade of developmental outcomes, affecting children’s socioemotional, academic, health, and eventual career outcomes” (p. 5). Here is where teachers’ perception plays an essential role. Sometimes, some teachers rely on their perception and not on real and solid academic evidence to decide if a student should take advanced or low-level classes. That is why many students who have discipline issues are not allowed to be in honors classes, even if they are geniuses. As a matter of fact, some parents have reported that even though their children were prepared to take advanced placement classes, their teachers did not sign the forms to allow them to enroll in those courses. In those cases, parents have gone to school to meet teachers and administrative staff to ask for an explanation about that irresponsible decision. Often, those parents even have to go through a harsh process of trying to defend and prove that their children do deserve to be placed in honors classes. Going through that fight is how parents realize how their kids are (mis)treated at school. At the end, only a few parents get their children to be placed in advanced placement programs. It is in that moment when parents visualize their kids’ forthcoming future. Parents should not have to go through the process of defending and fighting for their Black children’s good future just because they are immersed in an educational environment that negatively categorized them.

Another school factor that academically affects Black students is the hidden curriculum. Hidden curriculum refers to the fact that at schools, teachers do not include in their curricula the history, literature, and traditional practices of different ethnic cultures. Usually a curriculum is designed in a Western framework, highlighting and giving more importance to the Western knowledge, while other cultures' perspectives are ignored. For instance, if high school students were asked about the African scientist Imhotep, the African political leader Kwame Nkrumah, the African American writer Alex Haley, or the African American inventor George Carruthers, they might not know about their significant contributions to the world. But if the same students were asked about Aristoteles, Piaget, and Socrates, there is a higher possibility that the students know about these leaders' lives, works, fields, and inputs. It is very dangerous that some students do not get to learn about their racial communities' history at school. It would be great if what their families teach them at home, about their own culture, could be reinforced and complemented at school. As Paris and Alim (2017) highlight in their book, *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World*:

some students do not feel that their identities are affirmed through the curriculum taught [which] is irrelevant, impractical and exclusionary to their backgrounds, experiences, and lives. Identifying the various challenges that students of color are faced with in schools is the first step towards finding a possible solution to address those issues and concerns. (p. 35)

Educational institutions should be the places where all students' voices are heard no matter their ethnic backgrounds, and also the spaces where they reinforce their traditional customs while developing their critical cultural awareness. Paris and Alim also promote, "schooling as a process to sustain different cultural ways of being, teaching students to be resilient and to persevere, and to empower youth to accept and honor their cultural backgrounds" (p. 36). These should be some of the purposes the educational system takes into account when designing the schools' curricula.

In the United States, there are so many people from so many different countries and cultures, that it is understandable that teachers cannot know about the characteristics of each one of their students' cultures. That is why, in a classroom, it is recommended that teachers get to know where the students are from, in order to investigate more about their traditional customs. Additionally, the students can have an active role in the schoolroom because from time to time, they can be the teachers. They can carry out activities where they teach their classmates about their own culture. For instance, immigrant students can tell about the lifestyle they used to have back in their countries, the traditional customs they practiced, the relationship they had with their environments, and the way they related to their communities. Furthermore, teachers can invite their students' relatives to the class, so these relatives can tell more about the academic, social, political, economic, and cultural characteristics of their countries and cultures. Schools, parents, and communities should maintain a strong relationship in order to contribute to and put together the integral

knowledge students should learn. When families and communities are part of the school and work together, the quality of education improves to a significant level, to the extent that it might generate a positive change in the society.

To fight against hidden curriculum, there are some social movements around the world that are promoting a social studies curriculum, for example, Ethnic Studies, at schools. According to some scholars, the purpose of school social studies is to give students the proper tools that enable them to comprehend not only what has been going on in their communities but also around the world. With the information students get in these classes, they are able to have a more critical point of view, which leads them to analyze situations in a deeper way, and even to propose life-changing solutions to certain issues. Day by day, young people demonstrate that they are playing significant roles in changing the world. Nowadays, young people are the leaders of protests and different kinds of demonstrations that condemn corruption in worldwide governments, climate change, precarious education, illegitimate large-scale conflicts, and so on. They also demand immediate attention to global issues such as racism, inequality, poverty, and unemployment. Here, it is important to cite the California Ethnic Studies Bill A.B. 1460 (2020), which entails that:

this bill commencing with the 2021–22 academic year, would require the California State University to provide for courses in ethnic studies at each of its campuses. The bill, commencing with students graduating in the 2021–22 academic year, would require the California State University to

require, as an undergraduate graduation requirement, the completion of, at minimum, one 3-unit course in ethnic studies, as specified.<sup>2</sup> (p. 93)

This California bill is a very important advance to tackle hidden curriculum and hopefully, it can be implemented in all the American states, because actions like this one should contribute to the eradication of racism in the country.

Additionally, it is also fundamental to reference the *Precious Knowledge* film, directed by Ari Luis Palos (2011) and produced by Eren Isabel McGinnis, where we can explicitly find an explanation of the importance of having ethnic studies at educational institutions. The *Precious Knowledge* film is an educational and political documentary that centers on the banning of the Mexican-American Studies (MAS) Program in the Tucson Unified School District of Arizona. In 2012, Ari Luis Palos stated:

*Precious Knowledge* interweaves the stories of students in the Mexican American Studies Program at Tucson High School. While 48 percent of Mexican American students currently drop out of high school, Tucson High's Mexican American Studies Program has become a national model of educational success, with 100 percent of enrolled students graduating from high school and 85 percent going on to attend college. The filmmakers spent an entire year in the classroom filming this innovative social-justice curriculum, documenting the transformative impact on

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<sup>2</sup>[https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=201920200AB1460#:~:text=The%20bill%2C%20commencing%20with%20students,in%20ethnic%20studies%2C%20as%20specified](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201920200AB1460#:~:text=The%20bill%2C%20commencing%20with%20students,in%20ethnic%20studies%2C%20as%20specified)



students who become engaged, informed, and active in their communities.<sup>3</sup>

While proponents of the Mexican-American studies/Raza studies/Ethnic studies argue that these programs allow students from all backgrounds to feel a connection with the history and culture of the indigenous Americas, the Department of Education entails that these programs teach "anti-American" values. Hopefully in the near future, the government as well as the Board of Education understand the urgency of implementing ethnic studies in every American educational institution.

Since there are so many negative issues going on in the world, students need to be immersed in an environment where they permanently lead discussions to come up with fresh ideas on how to tackle all these problems, and that space could be social studies classes. For all those reasons, schools should implement social studies programs in their curricula, so that, day by day, students become more aware of the immediate actions they need to take to generate a change in the world. In social studies, students learn about diverse topics related to some disciplines such as history, economics, geography, law, sociology, and anthropology, and while learning it, they also become more prepared to keep actively participating in spaces where decisions are taken at a college and even a government level.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://itvs.org/films/precious-knowledge>

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Currently, there is a series of articles and books that examine the Black-White achievement gap at schools and universities. Social psychologist Claude Steele (1999) argues that a stereotype threat (the risk of confirming negative stereotypes on a person) contributes to the gap. Education researchers such as Jacqueline Jordan Irvine (2003) and Carol Lee (2004), have focused on the culture mismatch that contributes to the gap. Multicultural education researchers such as James Banks (2004) and Geneva Gay (2004) have focused on the nature of the curriculum and the school as sources of the gap. And teacher-educators such as Christine Sleeter (2001) and Marilyn Cochran-Smith (2004) have focused on the pedagogical practices of teachers as contributing to either the exacerbation or the narrowing of the gap. Some of these studies have been controversial, as many other studies that try to explain different social issues in the Black communities. Furthermore, other authors like Banks (2004) and Cook, Ludwig, and Hemenway (1997) consider that there are other factors that influence the Black-White achievement gap such as the role of teachers, hidden curriculum, schools, student motivation, and student resistance.

Numerous scholars, psychologists, researchers, and educators such as Roland Fryer (2004), Fabio Araque (2017), and Kimberly Griffin (2006) have offered a variety of explanations for the existence of the racial academic achievement gap. First of all, it is necessary to portray the conceptions some scholars have to affirm that Black communities are accountable for Black

students' underachievement. To counteract Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) acting white theory, Wade Boykin (2005) argues that African-American students might not reject high achievement but rather the specific modes of academic success available in mainstream educational institutions. He notes that pedagogy in the United States is emphatically linked to mainstream values and is designed to reward behaviors that are consistent with them. For African-heritage children, the cultural modes of the school often are distinctly different from those they learn at home and in their communities. For instance, students do not learn at school, "cultural themes that are consistent with an Afro-cultural ethos such themes as movement expressiveness, verve, affect, orality, and communalism" (Boykin, 2005, p. 34). Therefore, Boykin states that the negative attitudes toward high achievement may be the result of Black students' resistance to the mainstream cultural demands of schooling rather than a show of disdain for academic achievement in general. Additionally, Karolyn Tyson (2005) argues that:

the burden of acting white cannot be attributed specifically to Black culture. Rather, it appears to develop in some schools under certain conditions that seem to contribute to animosity between high- and low-achieving students within or between racial and socioeconomic groups. (p. 597)

School environment is essential for any student's academic performance.

Students need to feel comfortable in their educational institutions. They hope to find teachers who would challenge them to the maximum to strengthen their potential. They expect to learn with a curriculum that not only exposes them to

the world in general, but also to their own cultures in particular. Instead of having the need to acculturate to the majority culture because they are not accepted as who they are, they expect to develop within their own cultures. They look forward to being encouraged to exploit and strengthen their own abilities instead of being asked to match other students' skills. They dream about being in an educational institution that makes them feel they are worthy and loved. But unfortunately, this ideal educational world has been historically reserved for White students, while Black students have historically received a different and unfair treatment.

In his article "Still Separate and Unequal: Examining Race, Opportunity, and School Achievement in 'Integrated' Suburbs," John Diamond (2006) demonstrates that even when Black and White students attend the same schools, and come from families with similar social class characteristics, racial separation and inequality are still prevalent in such integrated schools. Diamond deduces that in the contemporary context:

this separation and equality is maintained through much more subtle processes of exclusion than in the past. In particular, in the contemporary U.S., students navigate a racialized educational terrain in which structural, institutional, and symbolic advantages and disadvantages are distributed unequally based on race. (Diamond, p. 495)

Diamond draws the concept of the racialized educational terrain from Bonilla-Silva's (2001) racialized social system framework. As Bonilla-Silva indicates:

Because all kinds of racial matters have been explained as a product of racism, I propose the more general concept of racialized social systems

as the starting point for an alternative framework. This term refers to societies in which economic, political, social, and ideological levels are partially structured by the placement of actors in racial categories or races. Races typically are identified by their phenotype, but the selection of certain human traits to designate a racial group is always socially rather than biologically based. (Bonilla-Silva, p. 469)

Diamond manifests that the racialized educational terrain focuses on the ways that multiple disadvantages accumulate within the racialized terrain specific to education. He explains that African Americans are disadvantaged in these three ways:

(a) structurally by having limited access to valued resources outside of schools, (b) institutionally by being positioned systematically in the least advantaged locations for learning inside schools, and (c) ideologically by having their intellectual capacity questioned and their cultural styles devalued both within schools and in the broader social discourse. These disadvantages are key ingredients that contribute to racial achievement disparities. (Diamond, 2006, p. 496)

Like Diamond, other theorists remark that the mechanisms that support these inequalities have increasingly become more subtle and require responses that account for the shifting racial terrain that students navigate, because in either mixed schools or in segregated schools, race continues to provide structural, institutional, and symbolic advantages to some groups, and disadvantages to others regardless of the racial composition of schools.

There are serious consequences regarding the social, academic, and racial inequalities Black students encounter at school. Studies theorize that the gap in test scores between Black and White students tends to widen over the time from kindergarten to high school. In that sense, economist Roland Fryer (2004) identifies two plausible explanations to this phenomenon:

Black children attend lower quality schools on average, [and also] something about the interaction between Black students and schools interferes with the learning process. Such factors might include discrimination or low expectations on the part of teachers toward Black students, and systematic differences in self-control or socialization across children of different races. (p. 453)

Studies that identify dynamics at school as one of the main causes of the achievement gap suggest that teachers' perceptions and expectations play an important role in Black students' over and underachievement. Sociologist Angel Harris (2006) finds that:

black children are considered dangerous and therefore face constant surveillance and greater discipline for behavioral infractions. [Also,] schools react to students based on perceptions of race and gender and use these concepts as a basis for specific patterns of regulation. (p. 805)

In addition, Beverley Pringle (2010) developed a research process in which she confirmed that students who have a low academic performance are not motivated enough by their teachers. Pringle argues that, generally speaking, the students in her study perceived that "teachers knew who was going to graduate

[from high school], but the ones that they were not sure of, they did not encourage them or did not pull them to the side to help them” (p. 32). This was a common finding in the study:

with over three-fourths of the students reporting a perception of lower expectations for them or the other students with whom they identified.

These students described having feelings of dread at attending the class, low morale, and a lack of motivation. The most outspoken students on this issue perceived a direct association between the negatively charged interpersonal relationships with certain teachers that had decreased their feelings of belongingness in the classroom setting. (Pringle, 2010, p. 37)

A feeling of belongingness is often the first step to increasing students’ interest and activity in the life of the class. Pringle states that over one-half of the African-American students that were interviewed believed that race or ethnicity was a factor in the way that their teachers viewed and treated them. Furthermore, in numerous studies, African-heritage students indicate that they perceive that some of their teachers have low expectations for them. In particular, many students report that they are either not encouraged or blatantly discouraged from taking advanced or honors classes. Also, they report that some teachers have demonstrated, by word or deed, not expecting as much in terms of high-quality work from them in comparison to what they expect from White students.

Aside from teachers’ low expectations of Black students, the level of discipline that these students experienced is disparate when compared to White students. Jason Okonofua (2015) asserts that:

there are large racial disparities in disciplinary practices in schools across the United States. In a recent national survey of more than 70,000 schools, for example, the Office for Civil Rights (2012) reports that Black students are more than three times as likely to be suspended or expelled than their White peers. Racial disparities in discipline are particularly problematic because they contribute to the racial achievement gap, increase the likelihood that Black students will drop out of school, and may then increase the probability that such youths will be incarcerated. (p. 621)

Scholars have examined whether teachers' biases or differential socialization could be causes for Black students losing ground.

Furthermore, Fryer and Levitt (2004) assert that if White teachers have lower expectations for Black children or otherwise discriminate against them in the classroom, as some have argued, then one would predict that Black students with White teachers should lose more ground than Black students with Black teachers. With this in mind, Rochelle Rowley (2011) finds that regardless of school environment characteristics, teachers can have a positive effect on students by encouraging students' perceptions that the teacher is caring and fair, and the quality of instruction is good. However:

if a teacher perceives a student to be inefficient in dominant culture due to atypical behaviors or codes of speech, or to be of average intelligence, there is a higher possibility of academic failure. Teachers' expectations become directly related to students' educational expectations. Also,



teachers' ability to address cultural diversity in the classroom has an impact on students' academic success. (Rowley, 2011, p. 97)

In that sense, Black students could have a better academic performance if their teachers show high expectations for them, and if they are not disciplined disproportionately harshly.

Some authors indicate that besides teachers' perceptions and expectations, another key cause for Black students' low academic achievement is hidden curriculum. Several sectors of society criticize that standardized tests do not improve the quality of education in the country, but what they do is standardize the knowledge acquired by students, which makes the ancestral knowledge of different ethnic and cultural groups invisible, since the Eurocentric education system in which school curricula are framed does not include in-depth knowledge of others. Regularly, African-descent students denounce that they do not learn about Black history until they get to college. Schools have the power to impact students' embracing of diversity, but instead, schools often perpetuate stereotypes and promote prejudice when they are not culturally responsive. With that being said, although test scores are improving education in some schools, they are not improving equally for all races, which means that minority students are still behind.

Emerging studies conducted by researchers such as Steel, Boykin, Tyson, Cook, and Ludwig, among others, have indicated that there are relevant factors that contribute to the racial academic achievement gap that have not been taken into account in prior research. They have stated that the American society has

enormous debts with Black communities. This means that African-heritage communities have been in disadvantaged positions regarding White communities. Since African people were forcibly brought to the United States, they have not had the same rights other people have had. Consequently, African-descent communities are still suffering the consequences of slavery, Jim Crow laws, Black codes, and so on. Some authors explain how the educational, historical, sociopolitical, economic, and moral debts have affected Black students for centuries. Theorists like Ladson-Billings (2009) argue that the United States is going through a huge disparity between Black and White students' academic performance due to the precarious socioeconomic conditions Black people have lived in since they were kidnapped in Africa and brought to the United States to work as enslaved persons. To understand better, here is a discussion that is going on about these debts.

### **The Historical Debt**

Some scholars in the history of education have written about the legacy of educational inequities in the United States. Those inequities were initially formed around race, class, and gender. Gradually, some of the inequities began to recede, but clearly, they persist in the realm of race. For instance, African Americans were forbidden to learn to read and write during slavery. As a matter of fact, it was considered a crime for them to develop literacy skills. Then, after emancipation, some Black freedmen's schools were opened where African Americans were eager to learn everything they had missed for so many generations. But in that time, education for African Americans was framed by

Black codes, so it was segregated, lacking in resources and funding, reducing its quality.

Black codes, Jim Crow laws, and other kinds of segregated laws kept African Americans from receiving the quality of education White people were getting. In 1954, the Supreme Court overturned the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision of 1896, which allowed segregation in public education, with the *Brown v. Board of Education* legal case, which declared state laws establishing separate public schools for Black and White students to be unconstitutional. However, this court case did not change the educational system as it was expected. Many states did not obey the law immediately, and some White schools kept denying the entrance of African-American kids. Since then, not so much has been achieved to overcome the racial academic achievement gap, but Black communities still hope that the gap can be reduced until it is completely closed.

### **Educational Debt**

Educational debt is one of the most significant debts that still has effects on Black communities, and still affects some Black children in their academic journey. Ladson-Billings (2009) admits that what some researchers have stated as the causes of the racial academic achievement gap is meaningful but not complete. She argues that, “a focus on the gap is misplaced. Instead, we need to look at the education debt that has accumulated over time” (p. 25). Additionally, to make it clearer, Ladson-Billings compares the education debt with the U.S. national debt in which she explains how the national budget deficit affects the whole country as well as the education debt affects the African-descent

community. Ladson-Billings asserts that the academic gap reflects the persistent inequality that exists (and has always existed) in the nation's schools. She insists that schools where many Black children study do not receive the fair schooling resources that they should have. Ladson-Billings highlights that, "without the education debt we could narrow the achievement debt. The message would be that you need to reduce the education debt in order to close the achievement gap" (p. 27). I strongly agree with Ladson-Billings that it is strictly necessary that Black communities can access a quality education to be able to advance in other fields.

### **Economic Debt**

Nowadays, this is one of the most pervasively overt debts. There are some funding disparities between the schools that mostly White students attend and those schools that mostly Black students attend. Investing in Black students' education is very important, but it has not been essential for the entities in charge of assigning resources to their schools. Kozol (2005) demonstrates that separate schooling always allows for differential funding. He displays statistics that confirm the funding disparities that currently exist between schools serving White students, and those serving Black students. Kozol portrays that:

The Chicago public schools spend about \$8,482 annually per pupil, while nearby Highland Park spends \$17,291 per pupil. The Chicago public schools have an 87% Black and Latina/o population, while Highland Park has a 90% White population. Per pupil expenditures in Philadelphia are \$9,299 per pupil for the city's 79% Black and Latina/o population, while

across City Line Avenue in Lower Merion, the per pupil expenditure is \$17,261 for a 91% White population. The New York City public schools spend \$11,627 per pupil for a student population that is 72% Black and Latina/o, while suburban Manhasset spends \$22,311 for a student population that is 91% White. (p. 24)

There are other statistics that show how many of the schools that Black students attend are poorly funded, while schools where the majority of the population is White, receive a great amount of funding. This funding disparity is not a recent phenomenon. This pattern of inequitable funding has been going on for many decades. It is therefore surprising that many researchers continue to advance theories that blame only Black students for the academic gap.

On the other hand, as this qualitative research was also conducted in Colombia, this literature review also reveals how racism operates in Colombian educational institutions, and how this affects African-Colombian students. In 2008, the Observatory of Racial Discrimination (ORD) of the University of the Andes published a report on the situation of racial discrimination and human rights of Black people in Colombia. This report questions:

the myth of the so called racial democracy: the idea that in Colombia there is no racism because, unlike South Africa and the United States, all races and cultures have mixed creating a happy blend of people, and in the end, everyone dances salsa, merengue or cumbia and idolize Black Colombian soccer players. (Rodriguez, 2008, p. 8)

Rodriguez continues explaining:

the myth would be intriguing if it were not tragic. For the reality of this exclusion in a country at war includes violence against and massive displacement of Black communities. Here, again, official census statistics speak for themselves. Among Afro-Colombians the probability of being displaced is 84% because their territories have become strategic for those in the drug business, including guerrillas, paramilitaries and narco-traffickers battling each other over for them. (Rodriguez, 2008, p. 9)

Although Rodriguez focuses his analysis on the social aspects, it also applies for the educational aspects, because Black children's education is directly affected by the social problems that their communities encounter every day. For instance, lots of Black children live in rural areas where they have to walk for more than an hour to get to school. What is worse, the areas they walk through are dangerous because these places are jungles with wild animals, and also, illegal armed groups control some of those zones. These situations sometimes prevent the students from going to school when there are cross-fire confrontations with the national army. Additionally, when Black families are displaced by these illegal armed groups, their children are left without studying for long periods of time, which makes their academic level become precarious. As a result, lots of Black children who do not study in a regular time during their educational lives are more likely to be part of the statistics that show that Black populations are the poorest in the country because it becomes more difficult for them to find a quality job.

In his report, Rodriguez (2008) suggests that:

the next step is for the [Colombian] government and private sector (from firms to educational institutions) to adopt policies for Afro-Colombians to achieve real access to employment, quality education and other citizen rights. All of this must be part of a sincere, long-term commitment, and not based on quick temporary fixes or external pressures. (p. 12)

I totally agree with Rodriguez, it is time for public and private sectors to start giving back what Black communities have done for them. These sectors have the power and the resources to contribute to Black communities so that they have access to their rights including quality education for Black students.

Although Colombia does not have structural institutions that measure the academic performance among students from different races like the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in the United States, there are few studies that demonstrate that Black students are more primed to be left behind in the Colombian educational system. For instance, the report “Discrimination in the Colombian Education System” written by the Observatory on Racial Discrimination (ODR) in 2008 indicates that:

quantitative and qualitative evidence shows that there is discrimination in the access to and the quality of education. Data also reveals an achievement gap between Afro-Colombian children and the rest of the nation at all levels. Moreover, the education system is not working to combat racist stereotypes against the Afro-Colombian population. As

such, the education system contributes to the reproduction of the cycle of poverty, exclusion and discrimination against black communities. (p. 41)

Structural racism is one of the main causes of the racial academic achievement gap in Colombia because lots of Black communities live in precarious zones in the rural and urban areas. In addition:

given the lack of public resources needed to guarantee adequate infrastructure, a sufficient number of teachers, the availability of adequate educational materials, and the means needed to close the information technology gap, Afro-Colombian families—even the poorest—have had to assume the responsibility that ultimately lies with the state. (p. 41)

Especially in rural areas that are far away from the main cities, usually Black communities do not have access to a school, or they only have one small educational institution that has several issues. Among these issues, first, the place might not be fully equipped with the required resources for each student. Second, regularly, the teachers live in the cities, which means that they have to travel to the rural school to be able to teach their classes. This is a significant problem because during the scholarly year, frequently, teachers do not go to the schools because they have transportation problems. Actually, many Black students last weeks and even months without having classes because their teachers might encounter not only transportation problems but also personal problems. Third, the students might not have any means of transportation to go to a school that is very far away from home, and they might not have someone who can take them to school. Fourth, lots of Black children have to work to



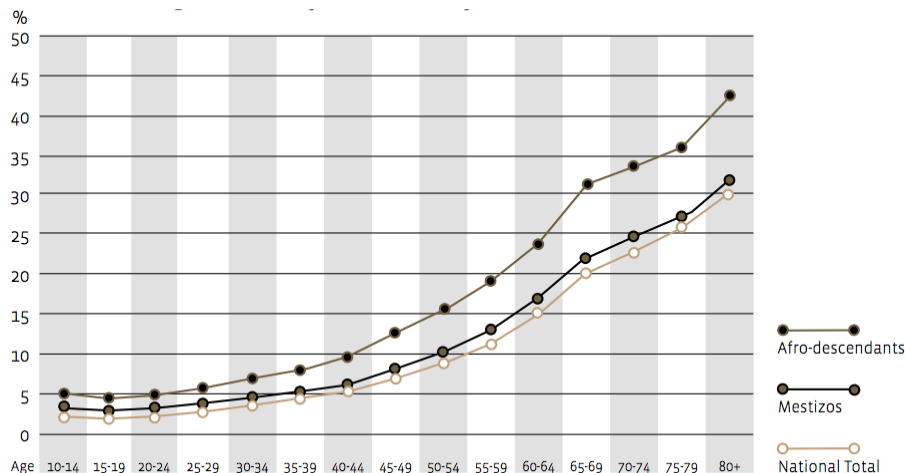
contribute to the household economy when their family's economic situation is scarce. Fifth, occasionally, older children have to take care of their younger siblings while their parents work because they do not have enough money to hire a babysitter. In that sense, it is necessary to remark that there are other social issues that prevent Black students from attending school in short or long periods of time, but the issues mentioned previously are the most known.

Besides what was stated previously:

indicators show that illiteracy, grade repetition, school overcrowding and dropout rates are higher in Afro-Colombian communities than in the white-mestizo population. Just to cite a basic but telling statistic, [Figure 1] shows that for all ages, illiteracy rates are higher for Afro-Colombians than for white-mestizos. [Figure 2] illustrates this gap even more explicitly. It shows that for most age groups, the illiteracy rate for the black population is nearly double the corresponding rate for the mestizo population. (ODR, p. 43)

**Figure 1**

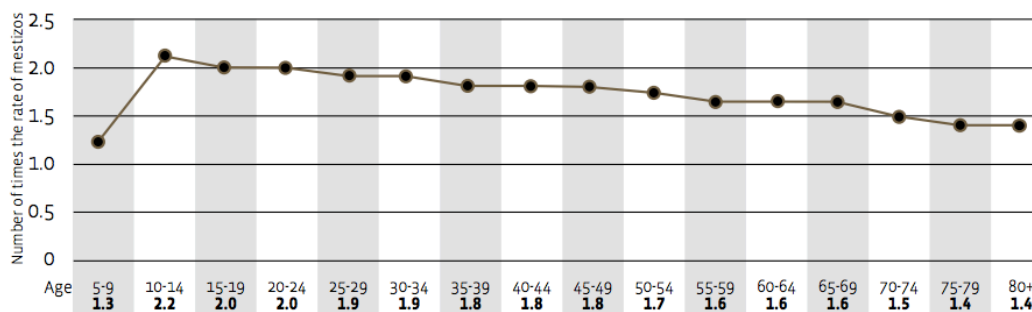
*Illiteracy Rates in Five-Year Cohorts*



Note. From ORD with data from the 2005 National Census – DANE.

**Figure 2**

*Illiteracy Rates of Afro-Descendants Compared to Mestizos*



Note. From ORD with data from the 2005 National Census – DANE.

Moreover:

test scores also demonstrate that private education increases the gap in opportunities for the rich and poor, and for white-mestizos and Afro-descendants. Private education is of high quality, while public education (the only type available to most Afro-Colombian children) is of poor quality. (ODR, p. 44).

The quality of education that Mestizo students receive at private schools is completely different to the one that Black students receive in precarious public schools in terms of integral full curricula, specialized bilingual teachers, and resources in good conditions. Furthermore:

test scores, analyzed extensively in the full-length report, indicate that departments with majority Afro-descendant population have less access to quality education. The lack of an education system that guarantees quality

education increases the odds that Afro-Colombian students repeat courses, which becomes an important factor in higher dropout rates for Afro-Colombians than for the rest of the population. (ODR, p. 44)

As a consequence, the social, academic, and economic advancement of Black populations becomes slower since quality education is the pillar of any society.

To counteract this situation that not only happens in Colombia but also in other countries in Latin America, multiple conferences have taken place to discuss the issues that concerned Black populations and to come up with possible solutions. Some of these lectures are: the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination held in 1965, the First Congress of Black Culture of the Americas (1977), the C169 ILO (Indigenous and Tribal Peoples) Convention of 1989, the Declaration of the World Decade of Indigenous Peoples (1994-2004), the Third World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (2001), among others in which several countries have participated and committed to work on their political policies to acknowledge, protect, and preserve their cultural diversity. To fulfill the commitments established in some of these conferences, the Colombian government has implemented a law to bridge the racial academic achievement gap between Black students and students from other races. This law is called ethnoeducation and it is a powerful tool that has:

the possibility of advancing in the battle against prejudice and discrimination while achieving the recognition of [cultural and traditional] expressions by the rest of society. Although these experiences have dealt

with aspects related to the curriculum, through the teaching of the language and other concrete strategies for the rescue of the customs and traditions of the ethnic groups, very few have delved in the pedagogical and didactic component. (Flores, 2018, p. 62)

In addition, the Ministry of National Education (1996)<sup>4</sup> defines the ethnoeducation as:

the permanent social process of reflection and collective construction, by means of which indigenous peoples and ethnic groups strengthen their autonomy in the framework of interculturality, bringing about the internalization and production of values and knowledge and the development of skills and abilities according to their cultural reality, as expressed in their life projects. (MNE, p. 8)

For decades, the National African-Colombian Movement has fought for the government to comply with the commitments established in the ethnoeducation law, so that it is applied not only in rural schools but also in schools located in the cities. Likewise, the UNESCO (2008):

emphasized that the most significant contribution of ethno-educational experiences lies in the recognition and appreciation of the ethnic and cultural diversity of its students and communities, as a starting point for the development of new learning and for the affirmation of its identity; also, that life in the educational centers promotes intercultural relations of

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.mineducacion.gov.co/1621/articles-85375\\_archivo\\_pdf.pdf](https://www.mineducacion.gov.co/1621/articles-85375_archivo_pdf.pdf)

respect and fraternity in a local and subregional socio-geographical context characterized by multiculturalism (p. 85).<sup>5</sup>

Although ethnoeducation is a great tool to counteract racism at schools, the Board of Education and most educational institutions are not willing to implement this law because teachers allude that they are not trained to teach about Black culture and history, and because they do not have appropriate resources to do so. This has been a long and arduous struggle that Black organizations have carried out, but the fight is not over yet. Every day, these organizations work hard designing pedagogical strategies and material so that ethnoeducation can be implemented at schools.

The Colombian sociologist Fabio Alberto Araque (2017) indicates that: although Colombian laws include several regulations about ethnic education, in reality teachers do not receive any support or concrete guidelines, neither in the curricular charts nor in the institutional educational projects. Thus, it becomes urgent to propose an educational policy that leads to creating the conditions and possibilities for ethnic education, one that recognizes the history of Afro-Colombian identity. (p. 34)

It is completely necessary and urgent that the Colombian government creates a group of specialists who are in charge of guiding and training school teachers at a national level so that the ethnoeducation law is complied with. If the national

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<sup>5</sup> Education and Cultural Diversity: Lessons from the innovative practice in Latin America, of the Regional Network of Educational Innovations of UNESCO (2008).

government and the Board of Education gives this necessary help to teachers, it will be easier for the ethnoeducation law to be implemented in all schools in Colombia. It is important to comply with this law because as Araque highlights:

an Afro-Colombian ethnic education implies developing a twofold public and educational policy: on the one hand, developing educational services in communities of African descent with quality, relevance, and leadership; and on the other hand, teaching about Afro-Colombian identity through Afro-Colombian studies in the school system, to achieve true educational development in Afro-Colombian communities and people, so that education becomes an engine for transformation and change, for the elimination of racism, and for the upward mobility of Afro-Colombian communities and people. (p. 35)

Black organizations are convinced that initiatives as the ethnoeducation law are good strategies to bridge the racial academic achievement gap in Colombia and to eradicate racism since at school, students will learn about the real history of Africa and its Diaspora, so that the students as well as the civil society might change their negative perception toward Black people. For that purpose, these organizations will continue working hand in hand with the Board of Education to implement any kind of pedagogical policies. This research study is a very significant contribution about education in Colombia because a lot of what can be found about the racial academic achievement gap comes from studies conducted in the United States. That is why a more Diasporic view about this issue is essential to understanding what is going on outside of the United States.

Although this study was conducted in Colombia, a lot of outcomes in the investigation could apply to other countries in Latin America where Black populations live in the same conditions and have the same socio-economic, cultural, and educational issues that Black people experience in Colombia. Although there are not so many studies about the racial academic achievement gap in Colombia, this research study sheds light about the causes and consequences of this gap and what should be done to bridge it. Also, this study gives notions in which ways to continue investigating this gap's nuances.

As some educational policies that the Colombian government has proposed have been left as unfulfilled promises due to the lack of political will and a budget of some of its institutions, Black organizations have been carrying out workshops in several kindergarten classes and schools where they work with teachers to fulfill certain objectives to implement the ethnoeducation law. First, Black leaders show teachers the importance and benefits of implementing Black studies in their classes. Second, they work together to modify the schools' curricula and make it more inclusive and intercultural. Third, these organizations have created groups of Black students in which they talk about how they have been racially discriminated against and which actions the school should take to prevent these racist situations. Fourth, psychologists from these organizations provide psychological assistance to Black students who have been victims of racism in their educational institutions. Fifth, members of these organizations propose strategies that teachers can use when cases of racism arise in school. They train these teachers on how to react to any type of racist encounter not only

between students but also between students and teachers. To wrap up, the objective is that in the next decade, Colombia can report on having implemented the African-Colombian studies in many schools in the country, and also report on the strategies that have been implemented to reduce racism not only in educational institutions, but also in the whole country.

To conclude, this research study will continue examining the educational, familial, and community factors that influence Black students' academic performance because it is necessary to have an integral perspective of what is going on in African-heritage kids' lives. This is essential to develop, so that each person at home, at school, and in the community would know how their actions are affecting these students, and how they can do something else to help them. People need to get aware of what they say (or do not say), what they do (or do not do), and how their behavior impacts the children in their communities. If they are aware of their actions, they might change the negative behaviors (if they have any), and they could reinforce positive attitudes.



## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### Research Questions

##### *Main Question*

How do Black organizations in Colombia and in the United States work with Black students in order to improve their academic performance and guarantee that they can have a better chance to enter and graduate from college?

##### *Sub-Questions*

1. How do Black organizations assist Black students with academic enrichment to better their chances of attending college?
2. What kind of educational, religious, community, and cultural programs do Black organizations carry out with their students to foster their life skills, and how have these programs improved the academic performance of these students?
3. How do Black organizations provide Black students a safe place to talk about racism and how to deal with it?
4. How do Black students learn in their organizations about Black histories, cultures, philosophies, ideologies, ontologies, and epistemologies?

#### Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework in the social sciences that uses critical theory to examine society and culture as they relate to race, law, education, and power. CRT proposes that White supremacy and racial power are

maintained over time, and in particular, that the law plays a role in this process. Moreover, CRT's work has investigated the possibility of transforming the relationship between law and racial power, and more broadly, pursues a project of achieving racial emancipation and anti-subordination. There are key scholars who have worked on the CRT framework such as Gloria Ladson-Billings, Derrick Bell, Patricia Williams, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Mari Matsuda.

Ladson-Billings analyzed connotations that are associated with Black communities and White communities. In her analysis, she found that:

conceptual categories like school achievement, middle classness, maleness, beauty, intelligence, and science become normative categories of whiteness, while categories like gangs, welfare recipients, basketball players, and the underclass become the marginalized and de-legitimated categories of blackness. The creation of these conceptual categories is not designed to reify a binary but rather to suggest how, in a racialized society where whiteness is positioned as normative, everyone is ranked and categorized in relation to these points of opposition. (2009, p. 9)

Ladson-Billings also highlights that it is because of the meaning and value imputed to whiteness that CRT becomes an important intellectual and social tool for deconstruction, reconstruction, and construction: deconstruction of oppressive structures and discourses, reconstruction of human agency, and construction of equitable and socially just relations of power. As she points out, if we look at the way that public education is currently configured, it is possible to see the ways that CRT can be a powerful explanatory tool for the sustained inequity that

people of color experience. In that sense, Ladson-Billings uses the areas of curriculum, instruction, assessment, school funding, and desegregation as exemplars of the relationship that can exist between CRT and education.

To feed the critical race theory discussion, some intellectuals such as Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw have originated a new analytical framework called intersectionality that entails the interconnection of gender, class, and race. Intersectionality demonstrates a multifaceted connection between race, gender, and other systems that work together to oppress while allowing privilege. This framework analyzes and understands how aspects of a person's social and political identities combine to create different modes of discrimination and privilege. Intersectionality identifies multiple factors of advantage and disadvantage such as gender, caste, sex, race, class, and sexuality. These intersecting and overlapping social identities may be both empowering and oppressing. This qualitative analytic framework developed in the late 20th century also identifies how interlocking systems of power affect the communities who are most marginalized in society, and takes these relationships into account when working to promote social and political equity. Taking into account what was stated before, during this qualitative research, all the factors framed in the critical race and intersectionality frameworks were analyzed in order to identify how they operated in the Black communities that were part of the investigation.

The outcomes revealed that Black women were victims of different kinds of discrimination concerning mainly their race, gender, and class. For instance, many of these women did not graduate high school, some of them were

unemployed or employed in lower class jobs in which they were humiliated, they had survived all kinds of violence, they and their children lived in precarious conditions, and they affirmed to be racially discriminated in different places all the time. Black women are usually oppressed in all aspects of their lives but as the interviewees highlighted, they keep fighting to demand that all their needs are satisfied, their rights respected, and to get a better quality of life.

### **Critical Race Achievement Ideology**

Another lens I will use to analyze my research is the critical race achievement ideology. Dorinda Carter (2008) came up with this concept when, during her qualitative research study, she tried to understand the adaptive behaviors that high-achieving Black students employed to maintain school success and a positive racial self-definition in a predominantly White high school. Her study focused on how Black students used the strategies they learned at home to respond to experiencing racial micro/macroaggressions in the classroom, and in social and extracurricular domains within their school. Carter realized that when parents warned their kids about the obstacles they would encounter at school and taught them strategies they could use to overcome those obstacles, they navigated and survived racism in a better way. She indicates that:

African Americans have responded to racism and discrimination in ways that promote educational attainment and school success. Many Black adolescents have been empowered to succeed academically partly because of their awareness of racist practices in education and society.

This empowerment to succeed in the face of racism is also seen as resiliency. A growing body of research suggests that despite experiencing racism in schools, many African Americans possess an achievement ethos that demands a commitment to excellence; so despite experiencing racism as a stressor, these students develop resilient strategies for resisting racism in the school context. (Carter, 2008, p. 29)

Carter (2008) has conducted numerous investigations with three specific purposes:

First, to identify how high-achieving African American students describe and understand the behaviors they employ in classroom, social and extracurricular domains; second, to analyze how these students' perceptions of values, behavioral norms, and expectations inform the behaviors they employ in these different domains within school context; and finally, how, if at all, these students view these domains as fundamentally different along racial lines. (p. 472).

In her 2008 research, Carter examined the embodiment of a critical race achievement ideology in high-achieving Black students, and the adaptive behavior that they developed and employed to navigate the process of schooling at an upper-class, predominantly White high school while maintaining school success and a positive racial self-definition. During this investigation, Carter argues that "these students' conceptions of race and how race operates in their daily lives inform their racialization and deracialization of the task of achieving at various times in the school context" (2008, p. 466). This study is very significant

because it identifies the factors that allow Black students to be successful in the educational domain. As Carter (2008) highlights, “findings from this study indicate that students with strong racial and achievement identities may develop a critical race achievement ideology and enact resilient, adaptive behaviors in racially challenging contexts” (p. 466). Ways to ensure the development of a critical race achievement ideology is by reinforcing Black students’ cultural customs at home, at school, and at the community. Furthermore, Carter (2008) concludes that her study:

has the potential to help educators better understand the nuanced relationships among race, achievement ideology, and school behaviors and see what can be done to help students develop healthy strategies to maintain school success and a positive racial identity, particularly in learning environments that are perceived as racially hostile. (p. 492)

At the end, Carter emphasizes that, “by helping Black students understand the educational persistence of their ancestors despite racism as a potential obstacle to their success and to view achievement as a human, raceless trait, we can begin to eliminate underachievement among Black students” (p. 494). To conclude, there are other studies that also affirm that Black students who know how to deal with racism at school, perform better in their classes. It is not a secret that Black students encounter racist situations at school. The ways in which they are perceived by their classmates, teachers, and administrators determine the modes in which they are treated.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research is framed in a case study method following the parameters established by Robert Yin (2014), who has indicated the best ways of conducting an investigation using the case study method. According to Yin:

as a research method, the case study is used in many situations, to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political and related phenomena...[it] arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena. In brief, a case study allows investigators to focus on a 'case' and retain a holistic and real-world perspective -such as studying individual life cycles, small group behavior, school performance.... (p. 4)

In his book, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, Yin (2014) lists five components of a research design in case study. As he asserts:

the first three components, that are defining your study's questions, propositions, and unit(s) of analysis, will lead your research design into identifying the data that are to be collected. The last two components, that are defining the logic linking data to the propositions, and the criteria for interpreting the findings, will lead the design into anticipating your case study analysis suggesting what is to be done after the data have been collected. (p. 29)

To clarify the first component, which is "defining his study's questions," Yin cites Hendrick, Bickman, and Rog (1993) to discuss the main question words that

involve a case study research. He says, “a basic categorization scheme for the types of questions is the familiar series: ‘who,’ ‘what,’ ‘where,’ ‘how,’ and ‘why’ questions” (Yin, 2014, p. 10). After analyzing every aspect that involves each question word, it was clear that this research focuses more on the “what” and “how” questions, although the other question words are implemented as well but with less emphasis.

Yin (2014) also highlights that:

the ‘what’ questions are exploratory, such as, ‘what can be learned from a study of a starts up business?’ This type of question is a justifiable rationale for conducting an exploratory study, the goal being to develop pertinent hypothesis and propositions for further inquiry. (p. 10)

As for the second component, which is “propositions,” Yin establishes that:

each proposition directs attention to something that should be examined within the scope of study... [a proposition] besides reflecting an important theoretical issue, also begins to tell where to look for relevant evidence (that is, to define and ascertain the extent of specific benefits). (p. 30)

Yin (2014) also warns us about the enormous responsibility we have when conducting a case study, because it is essential to protect the human subjects. He states, “as part of the protection, you are responsible for conducting your case study with special care and sensitivity” (p. 78). He continuously explains the relevant aspects that might assure the protection that is needed such as:

gaining inform consent from all the persons; protecting those who participate in your study from any harm; protecting the privacy and



confidentiality of those who participate; taking special precautions that might be needed to protect especially vulnerable groups; and selecting participants equitably, so that no groups of people are unfairly included or excluded from the research. (Yin, 2014,p. 78)

According to Yin, case study may come from six sources: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. Using these six sources calls for mastering different data collection procedures. Some of these sources are explained below.

First, there is a variety of documents such as, “letters, agendas, announcements, written reports of events, formal studies or evaluations, administrative documents, news clippings and other articles appearing in the mass media or community newspapers” (Yin, 2014, p. 106). Among these sources, the main documents used in this case study are the latter: news clippings and other articles appearing in the mass media or community newspapers.

Second, another data collection instrument Yin (2014) explains about is the interview. He states that, “there can be three types of case study interviews. Prolonged interviews, shorter interviews and survey interviews” (p. 110). This research bases its study in the first one. On one hand, in prolonged open-ended interviews:

you can ask interviewees about their interpretations and opinions about people and events or their insights, explanations, and meanings related to certain occurrences. You can then use such propositions as the basis for

further inquiry, and the interviewee can suggest other persons for you to interview, as well as other sources of evidence. (Yin, 2014, p. 111)

The interview is the strongest data collection instrument used in this investigation because it was very important to get the perspective from Black organizations' teachers, their Black students, and their parents. By interviewing them, it was possible to acquire a lot of essential information that shed light on the objectives stated in this research study.

After analyzing the six main data collection sources that Yin (2014) formulated, it was decided that for this research study, it was more pertinent to use three data collections instruments, which were: documents revision, interviews, and questionnaires, in order to have a complete triangulation that shed light to the research questions established in this investigation. Furthermore, this study focused more on interviewing because this instrument was a great source of information to collect the majority of data analyzed in this research.

As it was stated in the previous chapters, the main objective of this research study was to get a better understanding of the factors that influenced Black students' academic performance from kindergarten until they finish high school. For that, some of the factors that this study focused on involved these students' family, school, and community. That is why this research was carried out in social organizations that work with Black students with the purpose of providing them the tools needed to improve their academic proficiency in their schools. In that sense, the main data collection instrument used to conduct this

research was the interview. The principal objective of using this instrument was to get a better understanding of how the academic, social, cultural, and religious programs led by Black organizations influenced Black students' lives in a positive way. The interviews were conducted in three different groups: Black students, Black teachers, and Black parents.

### **Student Interviews**

There were three main targets in the interviewing section. Mainly, interviews were addressed to the Black students who were part of social organizations, their teachers in those organizations, and their parents. By interviewing the students, it was easier to understand their perspectives on how their academic life was influenced when they attended educational, cultural, recreational, and religious programs carried out by their social organizations. The students' interviews gave insights on how the students felt by being in a space where they could express themselves freely. Additionally, these interviews informed me about the kind of activities students liked the most, and the personal or educational issues that those activities addressed. For instance, while learning how to write an application to apply to college, students learned how to write more academically, how to think deeply in their strengths and weaknesses, and how to work on their goals. At the end, these interviews added information to former theories that had been created based on previous studies about Black students' under and high performance.

### **Teacher Interviews**

These interviews informed about the mission and vision of the organizations, what teachers wanted to work on with each student and why, and the results they had perceived on the students. It was evident that teachers had a wide understanding of what was going on with each student, so that teachers were the main source to answer most of the concerns established in this study because they knew the students, their parents, and the communities in which they lived.

### **Parent Interviews**

These interviews reported how parents perceived their children in an academic way, how they helped their children to get better at school every day, and why they thought it was important that their children attended these kinds of social organizations.

Furthermore, taking into account the characteristics of investigation, this research study is guided by the qualitative research method because the main purpose is to analyze the factors that influence Black students' academic performance. As Gill Ereaut (2007) states, qualitative research is all about exploring issues, understanding phenomena, and answering questions, and it has multiple focal points: what people say, what people mean, need and desire, what people do, and culture.

This research methodology has been illuminated by a main aspect that has been taken from Bogdan and Bicklen (1992) cited in Burns (1999). They provide a rich description of research as a flexible research process, which can respond rapidly to emerging political, social, and educational questions as they

impact on practice, through a systematic collection of information that is designed to encourage and bring about social change.

Burns (1999) also suggests a further purpose of research. Inherent in these statements is a critical dimension that involves reflecting on the social structures and orders that surround classrooms. A critical dimension implies going beyond investigating the immediate practices of the individual classroom to analyze critically how these practices are mediated by the unexamined assumptions of the educational system or institutions (Crookes, 1993, as cited in Burns, 1999). This view holds that educational processes are necessarily political and are based on certain, often implicit, ideological positions, beliefs, or values. A major part of the process of research within this perspective implies “denaturalizing” these values and examining the taken for granted assumptions or presuppositions that lie beneath them.

### **Researcher Position**

I, as the researcher in this investigation, am an African-Colombian woman who came to the United States in 2015 to pursue a PhD. in African American Studies. I decided to study that career because in Colombia, my home country, some African-Colombian students are performing behind their White classmates. I was concerned about that situation, so I thought it was necessary to take action to counteract that issue. I am convinced that if African-descent students learn about the real history of their ancestors at school, they would be prouder of their culture; therefore, they will feel a stronger connection to school, and what they are learning. Before coming to the United States, I worked in the Board of

Education in Colombia, where I did a closer analysis of what was happening with African-Colombian students at schools. As a result, my team and I designed some educational and public policies to improve the academic performance of students in their classes, and to improve the relationship teachers had with their African-Colombian students. I am grateful to have the opportunity to learn about the African Diaspora history, culture, and literature in my university, so I can teach it when I go back to Colombia.

### **Setting**

This investigation was carried out in different settings. The first one was in a University in Western Massachusetts, where Black undergraduate and graduate students were interviewed about their past schooling experiences and academic achievement in elementary, middle, and high school. The students were enrolled in different academic majors because what mattered was their past experiences at school. The other setting was a group of Black organizations where interviews were conducted in order to analyze how these organizations empowered Black students to exhibit excellent academic performance in their schools and prepared them to go to college. To access these settings, the University of Massachusetts Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted a permit after reviewing and ensuring that all the proposed research methods stated in the protocol were ethical.

### **Participants**

This study was conducted in order to better understand the factors that contributed to the success or underachievement of African-heritage students. The people who were part of this investigation were interviewed in two vital moments. The first moment was in 2018, where Black university students were interviewed in order to get to know which aspects facilitated their access to college. The second moment was in 2020, where primary and secondary school students were interviewed to get to know how they were getting prepared to go to college.

In the interviews, the first group of participants of this research study were Black undergraduate and graduate students. The second group were Black organizations' teachers, Black students, and their parents. From the first group, eleven participants were interviewed, nine of them were graduate students and the other two were undergraduate students. Also, five of these participants were women and the other six were men. From the second group, thirty-two participants were interviewed. Among them were twenty teachers who worked in Black organizations, nine students who attended those organizations, and three mothers who participated in some activities led by the organizations. The main purpose of these interviews was to identify how these organizations influenced not only their students' lives but also their students' families and communities. Each interview lasted around an hour, and they were conducted in safe and quite spaces where interviewees felt comfortable talking about their social and academic lives.

## CHAPTER 4

### PARTICIPANT BLACK ORGANIZATIONS

In order to give an answer to the main research question, which was how Black organizations assisted Black students with academic enrichment to better their chances of attending college, this investigation used interviews, questionnaires, and documents revision to collect suitable data. These three data collection instruments were applied in a lot of Black organizations in Colombia and the United States. The main organizations that were part of this research study are: Harlem Children's Zone, Brotherhood and Sistersol, Escuela Yemaya, Constructores de sueños, CEUNA, and Matambas. This research examines the different programs these organizations carry out in order to help Black students improve their academic performance to increase their chances to study in a university. As stated previously, familial, educational, and community factors affect Black students' efficiency in negative and positive ways. Familial factors are the first ones that influence these students at the beginning of their lives. According to some theorists, there are many familial features that might frame students' educational lives such as parents' expectations, domestic violence, family background, relationship with parents, study time with parents, praising, and punishment. Additionally, since Black students spend a lot of time at school, the educational system has a huge influence on their academic journey. Aspects related to school structure, peer relations, economic investment, levels of discipline, hidden curricula, standardized tests, unequal educational practices, and teachers' perceptions and expectations influence African-heritage students'



academic progress. Furthermore, the community is part of Black people as they are part of the community. What happens in the neighborhood, in the city, in the state, and even in the country might have a big effect on how Black kids are born and raised. The environment where Black students inhabit plays out in their development. Issues such as drug use/abuse, gangs, and poverty in some spaces might also determine these kids' future. When exploring the activities Black organizations develop with their students, it is clear that their objective is to tackle some of those family, educational, and community factors. When doing so, they are giving their students an opportunity to learn how to face and deal with difficult issues in a positive way.

Taking into account how the family environment impacts Black students' academic performance, the adverse childhood experiences (ACE) test is being taking in certain schools. This text indicates that:

there are 10 types of childhood trauma measured in the ACE Study. Five are personal—physical abuse, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, physical neglect, and emotional neglect. Five are related to other family members: a parent who's an alcoholic, a mother who's a victim of domestic violence, a family member in jail, a family member diagnosed with a mental illness, and the disappearance of a parent through divorce, death or abandonment. Each type of trauma counts as one. So a person who's been physically abused, with one alcoholic parent, and a mother who was beaten up has an ACE score of three.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> <https://acestoohigh.com/got-your-ace-score/>

By bringing attention to the powerful impact that negative childhood experiences have on future health and functioning, the ACE study demonstrates the importance of gathering information early in the lives of children and their families and designing early intervention programs that target violence, neglect, and racism

In addition, Blodgett and Lanigan, in their 2018 article called “The Association Between Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) and School Success in Elementary School Children,” discuss the effects that the situations that students live in the family context have on their academic lives. They explore “the feasibility of using school personnel as reporters to examine the relationship between the level of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) exposure in a nonclinical sample of public elementary schoolchildren and academic risk” (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2018, p. 139). In this investigation, Blodgett and Lanigan found out that:

binary logistic regression analyses revealed a dose–response effect between the number of ACEs and risk of poor school attendance, behavioral issues, and failure to meet grade-level standards in mathematics, reading, or writing... [and that] understanding and responding to a child’s ACE profile might be an important strategy for improving the academic trajectory of at-risk children. (p. 142)

It is known that there are so many issues in students’ lives that need to be tackled and require special attention and a great effort for the academic system, but also, for sure, these issues need to be addressed soon in order to improve

students' quality of life and to guarantee them a better education where they feel safe, comfortable, and useful.

Moreover, educational experts affirm that every stage of development in students' lives influences their academic progress. So, from the time children are born, they should be immersed in an environment that benefits their growth. Black organizations divide their programs according to children's stage of development. According to some psychologists, there are seven stages in which a human being moves through during his or her life span. These stages include infancy, early childhood, middle childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, middle adulthood, and old age. Consequently, Black organizations frame their educational programs taking into account their students' stages of development. Mainly, they focus on the stages such as early childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. This case study identifies the activities the organizations develop and their impact on Black students according to their stages of life. Also, this research project highlights and acknowledges some of the great Black organizations in Colombia and the United States that work with Black students with the purpose of enhancing and securing their wellbeing. Here is the description of these organizations and the academic, social, political, cultural, religious and recreational activities they carry out in which Black students reinforce their ethnic identity, embrace a leadership process, and boost their academic knowledge.

### **Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ)**

One of the biggest Black organizations in Harlem, New York City is Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ), founded in 1970. They state that:

[we have] always been driven by the belief that the success of our children and the strength of the community go hand in hand. Their needs are inseparable and must be addressed together in order to break the cycle of generational poverty and give our kids a real shot at the American dream.

(<https://hcz.org/>)

Combating poverty is one of the most essential responsibilities this organization has taken on. Their project started as a one-block pilot in the 1990s, but nowadays they are working with more than 14,000 youth and 14,000 adults.

Some of the issues they deal with in Harlem are “crumbling apartments, rampant drug use, failing schools, violent crime, and chronic health problems”

(<https://hcz.org/>). These are complicated problems, but it is necessary to work as a community to reduce and subsequently eradicate them. Additionally, HCZ’s staff states:

what has enabled us to achieve such unprecedented success is our steadfast application of five core principles:

1. Serve an entire neighborhood comprehensively and at scale to create a tipping point and definitively shift the culture of the community.
2. Create a pipeline of coordinated, best-practice programs to give our children and families seamless support from birth through college and maximize their outcomes.
3. Build community among residents, institutions, and stakeholders in order to create a healthy, positive environment where our children can thrive.

4. Evaluate program outcomes and create a feedback loop to provide managers with real-time data and strengthen services.
5. Cultivate an organizational culture of success rooted in passion, accountability, leadership, and teamwork. (<https://hcz.org/>)

As we can notice, HCZ not only focuses on their students but also on their family, school, and community environments that influence these students in positive as well as negative ways. Taking into account the students' stages of life, they have programmed their activities. As they state:

since our launch, HCZ has developed a series of groundbreaking programs designed to address the needs of our children and community. In 2000, we began offering The Baby College parenting workshops. In 2001, we introduced the Harlem Gems pre-school program and, in 2004, we opened our first Promise Academy Charter School. In 2012, we began implementing Healthy Harlem, a cross-site initiative to combat obesity and foster healthy habits throughout the Zone. (<https://hcz.org/>)

From the beginning to the end, HCZ concentrates on preparing Black students to go to college. The preparation process begins when the students are babies and goes until they are in high school when HCZ intensifies the activities by developing more challenging workshops to better prepare each student to make sure that they could attend college. In addition, these are the three main programs HCZ carries out in its facilities, which are divided in Education, Family and Community, and Health.

***Education:***

- Early Childhood: The Baby College, The Three-Year-Old Journey and Harlem Gems.
- Elementary School: Promise Academy K-12 Charter Schools and Peacemakers.
- Middle School: Promise Academy K-12 Charter Schools, and A Cut Above.
- High School: Promise Academy K-12 Charter Schools, TRUCE Media and Arts, Employment and Technology Center, and Learn to Learn.
- College: College preparatory Program, Center for Higher Education and Career Support.

***Family and Community:*** HCZ Community Centers, Community Pride, Community Benefits Support and Tax Preparation, and Preventive programs.

***Health:*** Healthy Harlem, Harlem Armory, and HCZ Food Services.

### **The Brotherhood/Sister Sol (Bro/Sis)**

Another influential Black organization in Harlem, New York City is The Brotherhood/Sister Sol (Bro/Sis). It:

is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to developing youth into empowered critical thinkers and community leaders. We offer long term, intensive involvement with our participants over the course of their secondary school careers and provide unique scaffolded and wrap-around services that support their personal development and academic achievement. Bro/Sis supports youth, ages 8-22, through multi-layered, diverse and holistic programming. Our young people face socio-economic realities that affect their lives. These disparate realities are reflected in

health, employment, early pregnancy, incarceration, schooling, and life expectancy disparities. In response, we provide comprehensive and non-traditional support. The themes of our organization are: Community, Knowledge, Positivity and Future. We are committed to helping youth develop their minds, bodies and spirits in a healthy manner, ensuring their development into strong and stable adults. (<https://brotherhood-sistersol.org/>)

They have been working with struggling youths who they have helped guide away from criminal activities and disassociated behavior, and back into school and stable lives.

The Brotherhood/Sister Sol organization was founded in 1994 and since then, it has been working with African-descendant and Latino young children from impoverished families. It was founded by Jason Warwin and Khary Lazarre-White who, “recognized the obstacles young men face growing up in poverty, and [who] believed that the creation of a strong, supportive community could help youths overcome challenges of circumstance and succeed in life” (<https://brotherhood-sistersol.org/>). I completely agree with this philosophy. It is known that the Black community in general, and particularly, Black young people, permanently deal with social difficulties that make their daily lives more difficult to bear. But being part of organizations like Bro/Sis might change the lives of their members because while attending their programs they develop a series of skills that they might use to confront difficult situations. Bro/Sis proudly proclaims its successful statistics during the two decades they have been working. They say:

over the last 20 years Bro/Sis has created an evidence-based model that is recognized throughout the country. We have been recognized due to our statistical outcomes, comprehensive programming and pedagogical approach to youth development that is modeled across the nation.

(<https://brotherhood-sistersol.org/>)

Here are some statistics in which Bro/Sis has documented outcomes that far surpass city numbers:

- Harlem's teenaged pregnancy rate is 15%—our members have a rate of less than 2%.
- In NYC, the general high school graduation rate is 70%, while the Schott Foundation found that the graduation rate of Black and Latino boys is 34%. Ninety percent of Bro/Sis alumni have graduated from high school, 95% either graduated from high school or earned their GED and 95% are working full time or enrolled in college whereas the similarly situated population in West Harlem, 18-25, has a 40% rate of either working full time or being enrolled in college.
- With regards to issues of criminality and morality, after 20 years, none of our members or alumni members are incarcerated, and less than 1% have a felony conviction.

Working with Black children and young people is a mission that many organizations have undertaken, not only in the United States but around the world. As Malcolm X stated, "education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today." These organizations focus



mainly in developing academic activities to prepare their students for a promising future, but also, they combine these activities with sports, arts, politics, and science. Their objective is to shape integral students who are able to overcome any difficult situation they may face at home, at school, and in their communities.

To achieve that goal:

Bro/Sis offers wrap around evidence-based programming. The organization focuses on issues such as leadership development and educational achievement, sexual responsibility, sexism and misogyny, political education and social justice, Pan-African and Latinx history, and global awareness. Bro/Sis provides four-six year rites of passage programming, thorough five day a week after school care, school and home counseling, summer camps, job training and employment, college preparation, community organizing training, and international study programs to Africa, the Caribbean and South America.

(<https://brotherhood-sistersol.org/>)

Furthermore, Bro/Sis offers a four-to-six-year Rites of Passage program where their members define what it means to be men/women, brothers/sisters, and leaders. They provide five days a week after-school care, counseling, summer camps, college preparation, employment opportunities, activist training, community gardening, and intensive arts programming. They expose their young people to new opportunities through wilderness retreats, cultural performances, college tours, and month-long intensive international study programs to Africa and Latin America. As they indicate, “for our recent alumni members, we provide

support to ensure they remain in college or employed and that they continue to make healthy and productive choices in their lives – fully developing emotional intelligence and critical decision-making skills” (<https://brotherhood-sistersol.org/>). Bro/Sis serves 350 youth at its Harlem site and serves another 700 youth via its work in three schools in the Bronx and Harlem, to provide anti-violence and conflict resolution services and its partnership with NYC’s Department of Education to administer youth development services throughout three schools in Brooklyn and Queens.

### **Changing Destinations: Journey to Excellence**

Another powerful Black organization in the United States is Changing Destinations: Journey to Excellence.<sup>7</sup> The mission of this organization is to prepare youth locally and globally to thrive as leaders and global citizens, equipped to positively impact their communities and the world. Its vision is to envision a world where youth are prepared to lead with confidence in diverse communities; motivated to actively seek innovative solutions to improve the world around them; and have the skills and knowledge needed to be highly effective global citizens. The inspiration for Changing Destinations came eight years ago from Mrs. Jameelah’s desire to further enhance students’ opportunities for success. While serving as the Director of Multicultural Student Affairs at Johns Hopkins University, Mrs. Jameelah met with several colleagues to discuss strategies for better preparing high school students for the academic, social, and cultural challenges of college life. She reached out to middle and high school

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.changingdestinationsite.org/>

principals and community-based organizations to ascertain the needs of their students. She also attended community board meetings in Anne Arundel and Howard Counties to advocate on behalf of middle and high school students.

Furthermore, Mrs. Jameelah served as a volunteer for Black Student Family Community Network (BSFCN). BSFCN facilitated the involvement of Black students, their families, and the community in positive collaboration with the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS), community individuals, institutions, and organizations that assisted in equipping Black students to be successful and excel in their education and in life. They also promoted and facilitated educational, financial, and other programs that supported the success and development of Black students, their families, and the community.

Additionally, Mrs. Jameelah observed meetings and attended events for the Black Student Achievement Program (BSAP). BSAP assisted the Howard County Public School System in closing the achievement gap evident in the patterns of data between Black students and the student population at large. While these organizations provided great services, the underlying concern of BSFCN and BSAP was that there were not enough organizations available to meet the overwhelming needs of students in their communities.

In *Changing Destinations*, teachers' collaborative approach inspires individuals to create positive change in their personal and professional lives. They equip organizations with innovative strategies and best practices for building strong teams and sustainable programs. Through their international partnerships, they support access to quality education and skills development

opportunities for women, youth, and other marginalized groups. They also conduct spiritual, social, and emotional empowerment workshops. Their passion for bridging the gap between racial and cultural groups locally and internationally has created numerous opportunities for cross-cultural collaboration. Moreover, they provide leadership training and resources to help women develop their business and marketplace ministry, as well as they enjoy mentoring youth and young adults to help them develop healthy habits for success. Moreover, a teacher, by studying nearly 3,000 programs, policies, and products from around the world, helped develop a theoretical framework for making nonlinear progress in educational development. He recently co-authored a book on the topic, *Leapfrogging Inequality*, in which researchers chart a new path for global education by examining the possibility of leapfrogging—harnessing innovation to rapidly accelerate educational progress—to ensure that all young people develop the skills they need for a fast-changing world.

Changing Destinations carries out the following programs:

- **Global Citizens Academy:** Its mission is to prepare youth locally and globally to thrive as leaders and global citizens, equipped to positively impact their communities and the world. Their leaders extend beyond traditional leadership training by preparing youth to lead with confidence in diverse communities. The Academy challenges youth to consider their beliefs and actions through a sociocultural lens and facilitates the development of the broad suite of skills and knowledge needed to become powerful global citizens. Programming is designed and

continually redefined in partnership with students, teachers, parents, and the wider community. Schools, after-school programs, churches, and other community-based organizations that provide services to youth participate in this program. Their teachers state that youth excel as influential leaders and global citizens when they are socially and emotionally prepared to serve within their community and around the world. The YELD Global Citizens Academy utilizes research and the SCORE BIG approach to equip students with the knowledge and tool essential for success in school, the workplace and life.

- **United Nations Commission on the Status of Women:** The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is instrumental in promoting women's rights, documenting the reality of women's lives throughout the world, and shaping global standards on gender equality and the empowerment of women. Across the world, young women continue to face gender-based discrimination, marginalization, and violence, including unequal access to education and opportunities for leadership and participation. The new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development must deliver equal gains for youth. The force and inspiration of our youngest leaders are critical drivers for accelerating progress on sustainable development and gender equality.
- **Global Citizens Summit:** It brings together 20 youth from diverse racial, cultural, geographic, and economic backgrounds who are making a difference in their communities. Youth from Maryland collaborate with their

peers from New York, Washington, DC, and Virginia to learn about and engage in discussion around equity, diversity, and inclusion. Youth also visit cultural sites, local businesses, social change organizations, and government agencies. Training workshops focus on global competence, advocacy, and innovation as it relates to the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Utilizing technology, youth return home and continue working collaboratively with their peers to complete a year-long project addressing a solution to a real-world issue within their communities.

- **Bridging the Gap - Pen Pals:** The objective is to partner with schools, after-school programs and other community organizations to prepare students for the academic, social, and cultural challenges of college life and beyond. Also, the pen pal program works collaboratively to enhance interest in cultures from around the world, develop cultural and social competencies through the pen pal program, and they collaborate with their partners to set up a pen pal program with youth organizations nationally and internationally.

### **FUCISPAC Organization/La Escuela Yemaya**

Another powerful Black organization in Colombia is FUCISPAC (Fundacion Centro de Estudio y de Investigacion Sociocultural del Pacifico Colombiano). FUCISPAC was founded by a group of Black women in 2009. The main objective of this organization is “to research and study about the ethnic groups in the Colombian Pacific Coast and to carry out social work in order to

improve the quality of life of the Black communities in Bogota” (Murillo et al., 2020, p. 4). The other objectives that FUCISPAC has are:

- “To learn deeply about the Afrocolombian culture
- To promote traditional music and dance from the Pacific Coast
- To Learn about Black native games and ancestral beliefs
- To rescue and strengthen Black ancient knowledge
- To empower Black women and their families” (Murillo et al., p. 4)

In addition, La Escuela Yemaya is one of the programs led by FUCISPAC where Black students attend on Saturdays in Bogota, Colombia. This institution is led by a group of voluntary Black teachers that carry out a variety of activities framed in an ethnoeducative parameter. This means that all the activities have Black content by which students learn about Africa and its Diaspora. No matter if students are in regular classes like math, science, arts, or English, they are always learning about Black history, cultures, leaders and so on. Although Indigenous and Mestizo students participate in the different activities, the majority of students who are part of La Escuela Yemaya are Afrocolombian. La Escuela Yemaya does not have its own space to teach its classes, but they borrow the facilities of a public school in their neighborhood. However, they can only use this school on Saturdays, which is why they use one of their members’ houses to carry out other activities during the rest of the week. While learning about their own true history, kids become prouder of being Black since in their regular schools, they are victims of racism because of the particular way they speak and behave. Every year, the Board of Education receives complaints about how

Afrocolombian primary and secondary school students are discriminated against by their classmates and teachers. Actually, sometimes, Black students manifest that they want to be White so their lives would not be so hard. As a consequence, some of them have applied bleach on their skin to whiten it. These are the kinds of thoughts Black organizations want to eradicate by showing Black kids the millions of reasons for being proud of being of African descent.

An interesting fact about this organization is that they do not only work with children but also with their parents, especially Black women. Some of these women have been displaced from their traditional territories due to the armed conflict in Colombia. Other women are single mothers who are heads of their families. The majority of these women are in vulnerable states not only because they are Black women but also because they are young, impoverished, without stable employment, and living in very poor conditions where their basic needs are unmet. La Escuela Yemaya develops workshops where these women learn about leadership, empowerment, prevention of domestic violence, defense of human rights, and promotion of well-being. Also, in the workshops, these women share their knowledge about the traditional practices they had in their territories before being displaced, holidays that commemorate their religious practices, folklore, and ancestral medicine, among others. In each workshop, women develop different activities in which they come up with ideas on how to improve their lives and their relationship with their children. Although everyone is invited to attend the workshops, usually, Black women are the only ones who participate. These are the main workshops carried out with parents:



- **Pautas de Crianza (Parenting Guidelines):** In this workshop, Black women participate with their kids. One of the leaders explains that “in small groups, families identify some of the ways in which grandparents used to raise their kids and which of those parenting practices still prevail” (Murillo et al, 6). In this conversation, families discuss how throughout generations, some ways of punishing kids have evolved, and which ones should be changed now that they live in a different city where certain behaviors are punished by the law. Additionally, they examine which behavioral practices should be reinforced in order to promote a better relationship among siblings and parents.
- **Prevention of Domestic Violence:** During this workshop:

different types of domestic violence come to light such as physical, economical, psychological, and sexual. [Also, some] women mention how families can be victims of violence in their homes and the strategies they have used to defend themselves. Also, they suggest creating a committee in charge of monitoring, mediating and advising families who are suffering violence at home. (Murillo et al., p. 6)
- **Empowerment/Self-esteem:** “In order to assess women and children’s self-esteem, each one recognizes the strengths in each other playing a game where they mention the skills, abilities, virtues and talents of their game partners” (Murillo et al., p. 8). Empowerment workshops usually include activities that stimulate a better communication, concentration,

teamwork, and leadership. Also, participants identify the characteristics they should have to be better leaders in their communities.

- **Afrocolombian Traditional Medicine:** The organization FUCISPAC has a small herb garden where women grow plants that they use to heal diseases. They cultivate the same plants their parents and grandparents used to in their traditional territories before they were displaced. In the workshops, “they recall the herbs their ancestors used every time someone was sick. Similarly, they argue that the traditional medicine is more effective because conventional medicine has a lot of side effects harmful to the body's organisms” (Murillo et al., p. 10). In Colombia, Black communities report that when they are displaced to other cities, they cannot practice their traditional customs anymore because their neighbors that do not understand about their traditions usually call the police to try to stop their practices because they believe it is witchcraft.
- **Black Aesthetic:** Hairstyles have a very deep historical connotation. In Black slavery times, women used to braid their hair designing map routes, which would guide the slaves when they ran away from their enslavers. Additionally, they hid seeds in their braids, which they would sow in their new Palenques, which were communities they established far away. Lots of people do not know this story. That is why in the workshops, “women get to know about the meaning of the different hairstyles, braids, headwraps, accessories, and colorful African clothing” (Murillo et al., p. 11). Moreover, “they discussed on how they have become proud of their

natural hair because before many of these women used strong harmful chemicals to straighten their hair” (Murillo et al., p. 11). It is gratifying to observe how many of the women who participated in those workshops stopped straightening their hair, and now they use different styles in their natural hair.

To conclude, this is how we accomplished describing the characteristics of some of the Black organizations participating in this research study. As it was previously illustrated, academic, social, cultural, recreational, and religious programs are led in these organizations with African-heritage children where they learn more about Black history, culture, and philosophies. Moreover, while conducting interviews with Black organizations’ teachers, leaders, parents, and students, they highlighted the important role that these organizations play in their lives. Some of the interviewees even talked about how their lives had changed since the moment they became members of their organizations. On the other hand, sometimes, Black families have difficulties helping their children do their homework because on occasions, they do not have the academic knowledge required to do so, or because they do not have enough time. In that sense, social organizations are doing a great job because some of their programs are aimed to guide students in both doing their school homework and reinforcing the academic topics they are studying in their classes. In their outcomes, social organizations report that when their students enroll in their programs, some of them have a low academic performance, but while developing different activities, these students get better and better, which is reflected in their school grades.

When interviewing some parents, they affirmed that their children and family's lives had changed when they enrolled in their social organizations. They indicated that they not only improved their educational proficiency but also, they felt better socially. Also, parents affirmed that their children had been victims of racial discrimination in their schools, which made them reduce their participation in their classrooms because their classmates made them feel like dumb students. Also, when it is required to make groups in class to make presentations, usually Black students are the last ones to be picked because their classmates looked at them as lazy students who will not do a good job in the presentation, or as not intelligent enough to give useful ideas for the research topic. Taking into account the racial microaggressions Black students experience every day at school, social and cultural institutions have worked on activities that help Black students feel proud of being Black. Besides working on academic workshops, social leaders teach the real history about Africa and its Diaspora because usually, students do not learn about it at school. These classes are called Black studies. Some of these classes consist of teaching about Black leaders, natural hair, Black Movements, and so on. When students get to know about the great contributions Black people have made to the world in science, literature, politics, academia, and other fields, they unlearn the negative stereotypes that society has imposed on Black communities.

In the interviews and questionnaires, the organizations' leaders also gave their opinions about this issue. They said that when attending Black organizations, and by being surrounded by other Black students who have

experienced the same harsh situations they have had at school, some Black students feel that finally someone understands what they have been going through. These organizations' teachers lead workshops where they gather Black students to talk about how they experience racism in their daily lives. Some of the students have revealed that they thought that they were the only ones who were experiencing that kind of discrimination. When they hear the other Black children expressing the pain they feel in their schools due to racist microaggressions, they comprehend that it is not their fault, but that racism is a structure immersed in society, and that racism not only affects them but also the ethnic communities in general. After listening to the students' testimonies, in a dynamic way, leaders explain to them how racism operates in the United States and in the world. With games, performances, and cartoons, Black children also learn how to deal with racist microaggressions, so they do not get affected by them. Usually, teachers who work with these students dedicate all their effort to guide them in the process of reaching their potential through a series of activities that motivate the students to enrich their strengths and work on their weaknesses. While developing some workshops, students reflect on the knowledge, skills, and talents they have. Teachers indicate that they have noticed that for some Black students, it is easier to enumerate their weaknesses and faults than their strengths and skills. On occasions, these students are immersed in environments where their negative aspects are highlighted, and their positive qualities are not stressed. These kinds of workshops are essential

because these help students reduce the negative misconceptions society has imposed on them and on the Black community.

## CHAPTER 5

### TRIANGULATION: DATA COLLECTION ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Conducting this research was a great challenge since there were a lot of expectations. One of the purposes was to analyze the impact that Black organizations had on Black communities, because it was fundamental that especially Black children could have access to community spaces that assisted them with academic enrichment, cultural identity development, and life skills strengthening. When conducting this case study, three premises were established. The first one aimed to get to know how Black organizations helped Black students deal with racism. During the phase of analyzing what multiple authors have written about Black children's academic performance, it was evident that racism played a significant role in the underachievement of some students. For that reason, it was important to know how Black organizations helped their students to overcome racist situations. The second premise looked for an answer on how Black students developed their cultural identity by learning about Black histories, cultures, philosophies, ideologies, ontologies, and epistemologies in their organizations, since hidden curriculum is very evident in their regular schools. Some scholars had revealed that several Black children dealt with racial identity issues since they thought that African and African-descendant people had not contributed to the world in a meaningful way. This happened because historically, Black people had been portrayed in the worst ways. They have been represented as criminals, illiterate, and uneducated. As well as Black communities have been depicted as poor, sick, dirty, and

corrupted. Since the most negative characteristics have been assigned to Black people, too many Black students do not want to be associated with those destructing characteristics. Consequently, many of them wished they were not part of the Black community, and several of them wished they belonged to the White community that seemed to be “the best one in the world.” To finish, the third premise was to identify the educational, religious, community, and cultural programs that Black organizations carried out with their students to foster their life skills, and how these programs have improved the school academic performance of these students. To affirm or deny these three premises, a lot of data was collected and analyzed in which Black organizations’ teachers, students, and parents participated by talking about the role that each one has played in these organizations.

In that sense, this research study was conducted to give thanks and commemorate all the Black organizations around the world that every day work with Black students in order to ensure that they perform well academically in primary and high school, enroll and graduate college, obtain a great job, and contribute to the betterment of their families, communities, and countries. Not so many studies have been dedicated to highlighting the great work that Black organizations do with students, so in this dissertation, it was decided that it was absolutely essential to celebrate and commemorate this great work that these organizations carry out with boys, girls, and young people in order to guarantee that each of them has a better future and a better quality of life. To highlight this significant work, the case study’s instruments used to collect all the data were



interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis. During this investigation, thirty-two people were interviewed in Colombia and the United States. Among them were twenty teachers who worked in Black organizations, nine students who attended those organizations, and three mothers who participated in some activities led by the organizations. In addition, six questionnaires were answered, and many documents from different organizations were analyzed. The main purpose of this data collection was to identify how these organizations influenced not only their students' lives but also their students' families and communities. All the outcomes were surprising because the impact these organizations have on the society was more meaningful than expected when making the study's hypothesis at the beginning of the investigation.

To fulfill these research objectives, the interviews were divided in three groups: teachers, students, and mothers. For that, three different interview formats were designed because each interviewed group was assigned a purpose. The first and biggest group was the Black organizations' teachers. The goal was that the twenty teachers interviewed talked about their organizations' objectives, the motivation they had for creating their organizations, the importance for Black kids to be part of those kinds of organizations, and the activities that they conducted with the students and how those activities influenced the students directly and their families and communities indirectly. The second and most important group was the Black students. Even though this research is to commemorate Black organizations' work, Black students were the core of this study because it was necessary to get to know what was being done

to improve their social, academic, cultural, and personal lives, and to know how these students were taking advantage of all the opportunities they were getting. Finally, the third group was the parents. Unfortunately, in the recruiting email sent to the parents who had participated in some of the activities led by these organizations, only mothers manifested their interest in being interviewed by the researcher, so that they were the ones who testified how happy they were since their children started attending the organizations because they have witnessed their kids' great change. By the way, "change" was the most mentioned word during the interviews because the interviewees were aware that organizational processes changed people in multiple ways.

After analyzing the documents, the thirty-two interviews conducted, and the six questionnaires answered, some categories came up as the most relevant topics mentioned in these three data collection instruments. As the categories were so big and complex, each one was divided into subcategories to further specify the deep analysis that was made. The main categories were:

1. Structural/institutional racism
2. Black identity and academic performance
3. Attending/graduating college
4. Black organizations as a Black family

### **Category 1: Structural and Institutional Racism**

Racism was the most predominant issue stated in the interviews and the questionnaires. Most of the teachers, students, and parents determined that they had been victims of racism in their schools, jobs, and some other institutions in

their neighborhoods and cities. For that reason, racism was selected as the main category because racism permeates all aspects of life in Black people and Black communities. For instance, talking about problems that the interviewed teachers had evidenced while working with Black kids in their organizations, they mentioned different issues. For example, teacher Latrice alluded how her students were negatively affected due to the structural racism that generated repression, oppression, and exclusion in Black communities. She depicted that her teamwork had found students who usually had one meal a day:

this lack of food of course had specific effects on Black students' cognitive processes. The lack of good nutrition due to systematic impoverishment in Black families meant that kids did not have the level of concentration needed to acquire the learning processes at school because sometimes the kids were just thinking on how hungry they were. This also affected their self-esteem because they felt less than the other children who were not experiencing that situation. (Latrice's interview)

Most of the teachers also talked about how racism was manifested in a precarious learning process when impoverished Black families did not have access to the educational material their sons and daughters needed to accomplish their school academic goals in a satisfactory and complete way.

Then, teacher Latrice indicated that for some Black parents:

buying pedagogical material such as textbooks was very difficult because these materials had a cost in addition to what they had already had to pay for their kids' tuition, school supplies, uniform, daily food, and so on. All

this was already a cost, an economic resource, of course, that was weighing on an impoverished family, who every day looked for a way to generate access to other types of pedagogical materials that could complement their kids' educational process as it might not happen with other children of other racial groups, or other social and economic classes.

(Latrice's interview)

In Colombia and in the United States, this is a common problem, and Black kids feel ashamed asking their classmates to lend them some textbooks to do their homework. In addition, in the interviews conducted with kids, they expressed that when borrowing their partners' books or other material, some classmates made fun of them and they were mean to them. For that reason, these Black students frequently preferred to fail their tasks because they did not want to be humiliated. As a consequence, habitually, they underperformed academically in their educational institutions, which later on had repercussions not only in their studies but also in their social lives. This is one of the missions that Black organizations carry out. Some of them raise money in order to provide Black children educational resources so that they can perform better in their schools.

But unfortunately, providing pedagogical material is not enough for some Black students to enjoy great academic process because the schools they attend in their low-income areas are not equipped with the basic infrastructure, labs, libraries, and so on. That lack of appropriate infrastructures in certain areas generates a huge inequality gap between the students that live there and the students who live in high-income areas. Regularly, Black boys and girls who live

in low-income areas do not finish their educational cycles in primary or secondary school, and for the ones who graduate high school, it is very challenging to attend college because when applying to higher education, they have to compete for admission against White students who have had the best quality education at school and at home. That is why, in Colombia and in the United States, we find lots of White students in the universities and just a few Black students.

Black students suffer everyday cultural racism in primary, secondary, and higher education in countries like Colombia and the United States. This racism touches all spheres of socialization of children in the school environment and even in the university environment. Racism runs naturally through all the spaces of the educational community where Black boys and girls are physically and verbally mistreated with racist insults based on racial hatred against the Black community. As student Elvis defined it in his interview, “racism is when a White person insults mocks, beats and spits on a Black person” (Elvis’s interview). Additionally, student Kalifa depicted the different ways in which his classmates mistreated him and the several problems he had at school:

once we were playing soccer and we had an argument and he [a Mestizo classmate] started saying nigger and other rude things, and I responded with violence and they [teachers] took me to the principal office, they summoned us, they talked to our parents and they expelled us both for two days. (Kalifa’s interview)

When dealing with racism at school, some teachers and directors have confessed that they have no clue on how to address it with the students. When a

racist situation happens, teachers just opt to send the students home, but that is not a significant response because the root of the problem persists there. Black kids keep being racially discriminated against, and what is worse, in some occasions when these students react violently, they are the only ones punished without reprimanding the real aggressors who are the other students who permanently assault Black students for their skin color and cultural characteristics. In the questionnaire, teacher Alex recommends that the objective should be to focus on values:

I would say that each of the ethical and moral values are strength and resistance to the generations that until today have passed in a racial struggle for the rights and duties that are granted to them by their parents, ancestors, grandparents and relatives. (Alex's questionnaire)

It is necessary that parents hand-in-hand with teachers highlight the importance of teaching their children and students good values, so they learn how to respect others regardless of their skin color, religion, nationality, gender, or sexual orientation.

Moreover, talking to Kwame, one of the kids interviewed in Colombia, was very painful and frustrating. I have to confess that after his interview, I had to take two weeks off before continuing to interview more people, because his testimony was so heartbreaking that my body, soul, and heart were in shock and totally broken. In that moment, I realized that reading a lot about racism and experiencing racism myself in my school did not armor-plate me against the cruel suffering caused by the evil of racism. All those read books and all my bad past

experiences are not a strong shield to bear racism in this moment and to not to feel heartbroken every time I hear what Black kids tell me in the interviews about their racist experiences at school and their bad relationships with their classmates and teachers. While I was interviewing Kwame, I just wanted to cry and run away, but I could not do so. In front of him, I had to be strong and to show a happy or neutral face.

Although Kwame was seven years old, thanks to his participation in his Black organization “La Escuela Yemaya,” he already understood what racism meant, and he identified the ways in which his classmates and teachers racially discriminated against him. When asking him about his school, he stated, “my classmates tell me things about being Black. They tell me that I do not know to do things, that I am the ugliest and that I do not know how to write” (Kwame’s interview). When asking him about his reaction and his teachers’ reactions, he told me that in those situations, “I get away to avoid problems because my teachers scold me and send me to the principal’s office” (Kwame’s interview). Like Kwame, his 13-year-old brother, Ekon, also experienced racism in his school. Ekon indicated in his interview that:

they [his classmates] treated me badly, they gave me nicknames that had nothing to do with my name. They called me chocolate, nigger, charcoal and they told me that they did not know how I could be seen in the dark and they insulted me. (Ekon’s interview)

When asking Ekon how he reacted before those insults, he argued that:

sometimes I behaved aggressively, and I hit those students and the teachers took the side of the children who committed the aggression. They [the teachers] said that I did not have to hit them [Ekon's classmates] because that was nonsense, or it was just a children's thing; and the teachers told the kids not to do it again, but they [the teachers] did not call their parents. (Ekon's interview)

Ekon is one of thousands of students who has poor academic performance because the racist moments that he suffered at school affected him physically, mentally, socially, and academically. Additionally, Black students not only feel offended with their classmates' insults but also with their teachers' passive reactions. These students indicate that their teachers should take serious and radical actions before racist acts that occur at school, because otherwise, that problem will never end but will continue to torment Black children. Dorinda Carter (2008), the chairperson in the Department of Teacher Education at Michigan State University, indicates that:

African Americans have responded to racism and discrimination in ways that promote educational attainment and school success. Many Black adolescents have been empowered to succeed academically partly because of their awareness of racist practices in education and society. This empowerment to succeed in the face of racism is also seen as resiliency. A growing body of research including Annette Hemmings suggests that despite experiencing racism in schools, many African Americans possess an achievement ethos that demands a commitment to



excellence; so despite experiencing racism as a stressor, these students develop resilient strategies for resisting racism in the school context. (p. 29)

Usually, lots of Black students are victims of racism at school, which is why teachers should be trained on how to deal with these situations in their classes, and how to educate their students in cultural diversity to stop these situations.

Additionally, Black students are offended in multiple ways. For instance, some of the insults these students get from their White classmates are allusive to African slaves. Currently, Black students are called slaves when in class, after all the students learn about the Transatlantic period. It is good to teach about this part of the history, but it is unacceptable that teachers do not teach about other aspects of African culture and history, as if Africans only existed during slavery, but it seems that they disappeared before and after slavery. When analyzing some schools' curricula, it is evident that some schools only teach about how Black people were enslaved, but they do not teach about African kingdoms, philosophies, ideologies, ontologies, and epistemologies. For that reason, Black organizations have dialogued with educational institutions about how dangerous it is to teach only about African slavery and the Transatlantic slave trade without delving into the different African cultures before and after slavery. The danger of this misinformation or distorted information about Africa and its Diaspora is that it shapes negative stereotypes about Black people. Shani, a fourth-grade Black girl, told in her interview the situation she and Geronimo, her Black classmate,

experienced when her teacher, in an irresponsible way, taught about how African people were enslaved. She attested:

when he [the teacher] was talking about Christopher Columbus and when they were taking them [African people] into slavery, they [Shani's Mestizo classmates] sometimes made fun of us [Black students] and called Geronimo nigger and that he was too dark. (Shani's interview)

Lots of Black students usually reveal that one of the worst and most embarrassing academic moments they experience during their lives is when learning about slavery, because their White/Mestizo classmates tease them by calling them niggers, you are a slave, come here my slave, bring me something my slave. In these classes, Black students are associated with the awful images that represent slaves in textbooks in which Black people are naked, shackled, beaten up, and abused. Also, Black students report that after those classes, their classmates tend to play games mocking how Black people were enslaved, how Europeans beat up Africans, and how Black people who were enslaved worked hard.

In addition, the Board of Education and African-Colombian organizations have carried out pedagogical campaigns conveying the message that calling Black students "nigger" is a racist expression, since that is the name that Europeans assigned to the African slaves when they thought these slaves worth less than an animal, that they did not have a soul, and that they were not rational beings. Even though the concept "nigger" has a wicked connotation, using that

word has been naturalized, so lots of people use it to refer to a Black person. As Shani explained:

when they [her Mestizo classmates tell me something I tell them to respect me because I don't like that; and when they mistreat someone, I tell them not to do so. Sometimes they call me nigger and I tell them I have a name; my name is Shani not nigger. They also advise me not to lay in the sun because I would get darker, and so I ask them to respect me. (Shani's interview)

It is unfair that Black kids have to demand respect from their classmates and teachers all the time. If educational institutions reflected on racism and how it hurts and damages Black people, then African-descendant students would not have to deal with daily racist situations; therefore, their academic lives would be easier. The historian Maria Isabel Mena has led many conferences and has written many books with the slogan "Yo no me llamo negrito," where she has highlighted the trauma that racism causes on little Black kids, and why the concept "nigger" should not be used, especially to refer to Black children.

Unfortunately, mistreatment toward Black kids not only occurs in Colombia but also in other countries. For instance, the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie gave a speech in the American talk media TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design), where she warned the world about the danger of a single story. She asked everyone to think deeply about the stereotypes that everyone has on some people, communities, and countries. She illustrated that when we have a single story of others, we could embed them in a

negative idea that most of the time is completely wrong. For instance, she mentioned that Africa is usually portrayed as a continent that is considered poor, unhealthy, corrupt, and multiple other negative ideas, so that makes the world assume that every single African person has all those negative characteristics.

Another writer, who highlights the danger of teaching only about African slavery at school, is the Colombian professor and historian Maria Isabel Mena. On the conferences on teaching about Africa at school that she hosts every year, she always alludes to Chimamanda Adichie's speech and to the "Doll Test," which is a psychological experiment designed in the United States in 1940 to test the degree of marginalization felt by African-American children caused by prejudice, discrimination, and racial segregation. This series of experiments was designed and conducted by psychologists Mamie and Kenneth Clark in Arkansas and Massachusetts to study the psychological effects of segregation on African-American children. As the American Defend Educate Empower organization explains it in its article:

Drs. Clark used four dolls, identical except for color, to test children's racial perceptions. Their subjects, children between the ages of three to seven, were asked to identify both the race of the dolls and which color doll they preferred. A majority of the children preferred the white doll and assigned positive characteristics to it. The Clarks concluded that

prejudice, discrimination, and segregation created a feeling of inferiority among African-American children and damaged their self-esteem.<sup>8</sup>

Racist prejudices are acquired by children from a very young age due to the way they realize their relatives perceive Black people. In an interview on the award-winning PBS documentary of the Civil Rights Movement, *Eyes on the Prize*, Dr. Kenneth Clark recalled:

The Dolls Test was an attempt on the part of my wife and me to study the development of the sense of self-esteem in children. We worked with black children to see the extent to which their color, their sense of their own race and status, influenced their judgment about themselves, self-esteem.<sup>9</sup>

Although they are little kids, they also start shaping an idea of their context. Consequently, when their relatives think, speak, or act in a negative way toward Black people, these little kids get the same detrimental perceptions that grow as time goes on.

Additionally, young children are permeated by negative stereotypes toward Black people when they attend their school, when they watch TV and even when they read some books where African-descendant people are misportrayed as criminals, lazy, dumb, and bad people. So, it is not surprising that in the multiple “doll tests” that Dr. Clark and many other psychologists, teachers, and social workers have conducted around the world, White little kids

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.naacpldf.org/ldf-celebrates-60th-anniversary-brown-v-board-education/significance-doll-test/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.naacpldf.org/ldf-celebrates-60th-anniversary-brown-v-board-education/significance-doll-test/>

expressed how they feel afraid of Black people while Black little kids preferred to be identified with the “white doll” because it was the beautiful, the smart, and the good doll. This is part of the struggle Black communities around the world carry out every day while fighting against the harmful stereotypes the rest of the world has of them. Although, it looks like an impossible mission because it is very difficult to eliminate the prejudicial adjectives that were assigned to African people during and after slavery. Affirming and certifying that African people were beasts, ignorant, and bad, and that they were not humans because they did not have a soul was the strongest argument that fed the source of what people thought about African communities during slavery. And what is worse is that nowadays, that same source is implanted in little kids’ minds, who grow up thinking that Black people are inferior to White people. That is why it is essential to teach about the real history of Africa and its Diaspora, so that young Black and White kids can learn that Black ancestors were not only slaves, but also, they were scientists, inventors, mathematicians, philosophers, and so on. It is necessary to learn that Black people in Africa were the creators of many philosophical theories and math theories that we practice nowadays, the inventors of multiple objects that we use every day, and the authors of several influential books that have changed the way we read the world today.

According to teacher Latrice, another issue that affects Black students at school is the institutional racism, since:

usually teachers and directors are not committed to identifying what the shortcomings are, the scarcity of black boys and girls because they

believe that because all boys and girls believe that they all belong to impoverished families, then everything is in the conditions, but it turns out not and here I am going to go into what I consider and is the most complex of the shortcomings that boys and girls have in the school education system and is the issue of racism. (Latrice's interview)

Institutional racism is permanently present in the educational lives of Black kids. For instance, letting their prejudices and stereotypes be activated in order to diminish Black boys and also attack Black girls with things like they cannot have their natural hair loose or wear their afro at school because the teacher, the coordinator, or even the principal feel the power to tell them that it looks bad, and that it goes against the school rulebook, since for them it is a bad presentation and it is ugly. This kind of racist burden has a significant impact on Black girls' and boys' safety and self-esteem, but in addition to that, their disposition toward learning processes is impacted and their levels of willingness to learn can be affected. This is a problem that will be beyond what we can normally measure against the impacts of racism.

Especially at school ages, when Black girls and boys are victims of racism at school by their classmates, teachers, coordinators, principals, and maintenance staff, it has a significant impact for the rest of their lives. Unluckily, educational institutions do not provide safe anti-racism spaces where African-descendent students can attend to talk about how racial discrimination negatively interferes in their academic and social lives. And they do not offer a psychosocial support center where professionals could help these students deal with and heal

the long-term physical and psychological damages caused by racist acts. Furthermore, most of the Black organizations' teachers who were interviewed in this investigation and answered the questionnaires stated that epistemic racism distresses Black students because they do not feel connected nor identified in the Western hidden curriculum their regular schools' teachers follow in their classes. But in addition to that, Black students feel mistreated by the racist school contents, which are already in school textbooks, where Africa and its peoples are portrayed as the worst they could be, such as beaten slaves, dumb, irrational, and clowns who used to entertain White slave owners. Habitually, the school curricula's racist content does not show the history of the contribution of the African-descendant communities to the world and to the entire civilization of the global world system. This means that Black boys and girls do not have in their academic institutions important references that generate pride, and that achieve a positive impact on their identity, so these harsh, dense, and negative environments disturb the cognitive processes of any Black student in schools and colleges.

Another product of institutional racism that Black students have to deal with at school is the bad relationship with their teachers (who mostly are White or Mestizo), who perceive some of them as not good students. In Colombia and in the United States, social leaders, parents, and Black students have reported that some teachers have different attitudes when they interact with Black students than with White students. Many of them affirm that some teachers have a negative or mean way of relating with Black students. As student Kalifa



established, “I had a problem with my computer science teacher because I did the same tasks as my classmates, but they got better grades than me” (Kalifa’s interview). Like Kalifa, many Black students have revealed that no matter the effort they make in their classes, some teachers do not value that effort. Consequently, some of these Black students opt to not complete all their activities or homework because they feel that it is not worthy to work hard if they do not receive the proper recognition from their teachers.

As if that was not enough, additional evidence of institutional racism is the lack of Black teachers, coordinators, and principals in the educational system. Most of the Black students who participated in this research manifested that they would like to have at least one or more Black teachers in their schools because they felt that their relationship could be better with these teachers, that they could learn more about Black culture, and that they could feel more confident when expressing their issues to Black teachers because they do not feel the same with White teachers. When discussing this aspect, nine-year-old student Elvis revealed he felt better with Black teachers than with Mestizo teachers because “Black teachers speak to us normally, while the mestizos yelled at us. I feel more confident with the Black teachers because they would never do anything bad to us” (Elvis’ interview). Moreover, student Kalifa is one of the Black students who wishes to have many or at least one Black teacher in his school. As he indicates, “there are many White teachers and I would like a change, let’s say a Black principal, a Black coordinator, to see a change, for Black students to succeed, not only Mestizos can succeed” (Kalifa’s interview). Furthermore, student Shani

manifests in her interview that she would love to have African-descendant teachers in her school because she considers that a Black teacher could understand better the harsh situations Black students go through every day not only in their educational institutions but also at home and in their neighborhoods. As she states, “I think that teacher [a black teacher] will be able to understand how we feel about that [racism]” (Shani’s interview). Additionally, Ekon affirms that in his school there is only one female Black teacher with whom he feels protected because she has been the only teacher who has seriously defended him from the other students. As Ekon states:

our relationship is good because sometimes when she sees me sad, she tries to console me to feel better and she develops workshops with many students of the school to teach them about respect, so that they do not offend other people. I feel that this teacher takes these actions because she is Black, and she knows what it feels like when you are discriminated against because of your skin color or physical characteristics. (Ekon’s interview)

Furthermore, Kiara, an 11-year-old student, prays to God to have at least one Black teacher in her school because she believes that she would have a better relationship with a Black teacher than with all her White/Mestizo teachers. As she states, “with a Black teacher, I would talk about our community and our history, but unfortunately, I cannot do that with my White teachers” (Kiara’s interview). Some Black students feel that during their academic life they lose valuable information because at school, they do not have access to pedagogical material

that explains who they are as well as who their ancestors were. This lack of information makes them feel incomplete and unable to identify with their school curricula.

On the other hand, when Black students participate in activities that are in concordance with their culture and interests, they participate actively, not only because they are learning something new, but also because they are putting into practice what they already know. For instance, when in class, Black students are asked to talk about their parents and grandparents' cultural traditions. In these kinds of activities, students become teachers because they can teach their classmates what they already know about their own culture. Carrying out these tasks strengthens Black students' self-esteem because they become aware that their knowledge is as important as what they learn from their teachers every day. Some students interviewed in this investigation stated that sometimes they feel that their knowledge, history, and culture are not valid in their schools because they are not included in their curricula. But when the school has any kind of celebration, the teachers usually ask Black students to dance in the event. Black leaders report that this is part of the stereotypes that society has on Black people, thinking that the Black population's strongest skills are dancing, cooking, and playing sports. On the other hand, these Black leaders also report that African descendants are not usually taken into account to carry out intellectual tasks. Consequently, one of the solutions these leaders propose is to create an articulation between schools and Black people in their communities in order to learn more and better understand Africa and its Diaspora. Also, another

recommendation is that learning about this culture is not only for Black students but also for all students, no matter their cultures.

## **Category 2: Black Identity and Academic Performance**

The Black students interviewed confessed that school is a place where they lose their identity and where their self-esteem is attacked all the time, to the point that these students start to reject their own culture. The Board of Education has designed a document and an antiracism route explaining several steps that schools need to follow in order to report cases of racism in their schools. The problem is that even though Black students are victims of racism all the time, these schools do not report all the racist episodes that are manifested in their institutions, because they consider that some of those episodes are a cause of the daily bullying and not a cause of racism. What these schools have not realized is that racism affects Black students considerably to the point that a couple of them have looked for ways to be less Black and become Whiter. Actually, some parents have reported that their children have applied bleach and other products on their skin because they wanted to whiten it. When asking these kids why they did that, they replied that White people's lives are easier because their skin is light, they have "good" hair, and they are more beautiful. They have this perception that being White is better than being Black because at school, Black students' self-identity is threatened because their Black characteristics are usually mocked by their classmates, so these students resent being Black people and repudiate having African features. During this qualitative study, getting to know about this grudge that a lot of African-descendant students hold against

their own culture and their own community, was the most painful thing I found out among other painful aspects that came out, especially in the students' interviews. Actually, this has been the most painful research I have conducted during my whole life, because listening to these kids telling me their stories about how they are racially discriminated against at schools and how that negatively affects them, has been very heartbreaking, especially when other people have the gall to say that racism does not exist, that racism is a thing of the past.

But overcoming the multiple painful moments I had while conducting the interviews and reading the answered questionnaires, I also felt super happy because all the Black organizations implement numerous strategies to teach Black students how to deal with racist situations. Some of the students interviewed confessed that years ago, they reacted aggressively when their White classmates made fun of them or insulted them, saying that they were ugly, that they smelled bad, and that they were stupid. But these students also revealed that after attending their organizations' workshops, they stopped fighting with their classmates because they were the ones who always got into trouble. Now, they have learned to shut their classmates up by telling them many stories about how Black ancestors were kings, queens, philosophers, scientists, mathematicians, social leaders, inventors, and so on. For instance, teacher Viviana indicates:

a very impressive activity is to show the lives of Black people who have made great contributions to humanity and who have fought for the rights of their people. When students see and know these stories, they realize that

they are made for great things and they are very motivated to continue studying and make their dreams and goals come true. (Viviana's questionnaires)

As many students have learned many things about Black studies, every time these Black kids are called slaves, or dumb, or ugly, they talk about Kwame Nkrumah, who helped free many African countries, Nelson Mandela, who was the first Black president in South Africa, the queen Nzinga, who led an army to fight against slave trade and European colonization, among other leaders that have been studied in their Black organizations.

That is why I also felt so happy during my investigation, because all the Black students I interviewed were super empowered and talked to me as the big leaders they have become. In fact, the students who have been part of their organization for a long time, are currently part of the governmental participation spaces at a local, district, and national levels. In these spaces, the students help council members and even the mayor to make decisions about the young people's well-being and the different problems the youth go through such as unemployment, lack of higher education, and drug abuse. Their organizations' teachers feel super proud every time these Black students participate in government meetings.

Another important government space in which Black students have participated is the meetings they hold with police officers. As student Darnell stated, "I liked the workshop when we had a talk with the police" (Darnell's interview). In Colombia as well as in the United States, Black communities have

a precarious relationship with police officers. This happens because young Black men are often racially profiled,<sup>10</sup> stopped, questioned, and even arrested by police because of their race. This is a huge deplorable problem that has been happening in Bogota, Colombia, where some Black organizations have had to take action on the matter. These organizations have been carrying out several workshops with both the police officers and young Black students in order to reduce the conflicts and the attacks from both sides. In these workshops, the students usually talk about how they feel when they are racially profiled by the police, while on the other hand, the police officers state that they are just doing their job. Additionally, in these workshops, Black leaders make presentations about how structural, institutional and daily racism operates in every city. One of these presentations' objective is to come up with meaningful strategies on how the police should interact with the Black community in a harmonious way, and how the Black community could work along with the police in order to do community work in the neighborhoods where there is more violence. Student Darnell expresses a good conclusion he got from these workshops is, "a good leader must recognize every problem that comes his way and know how to face it not with violence but with words" (Darnell's interview). This is one of the greatest messages I got from my interviews with the students. I am really proud of how they think and act as excellent leaders.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.observatoriodeseguranca.org/files/334.pdf>

In order to train excellent leaders, it is essential to be immersed in a warming environment where they can learn about values, principles, and ethics. In their organizations, these students become aware that being great leaders carries very important responsibilities with their communities, as well as they must behave well because they are role models. For that, as teacher Nia reveals:

starting from the upbringing, we instill guidelines, principles, and ethnic values in all the children who are part of our foundation through the fact that we are all equal, that we all have to treat each other as a family, as brothers and sisters, and from that environment we make those teaching guidelines and principles to adapt to the children's lives. [To achieve that goal], we rescue our ancestral knowledge, songs and instruments, because through songs we can express everything that is lived, what is lived together, what is liked, and what is not liked in our ancestral territory.

(Nia's interview)

Besides instilling ethnic values, helping Black students deal with racism and improve their academic performance at school are two other major missions that Black organizations have expressed in this research study. Additionally, they have indicated that while they fulfil those missions, they also train their students to be excellent citizens who follow the rules and become outstanding leaders who contribute to a positive change in their communities.

Another important mission is that some Black organizations also work with some schools because:



in the end, students spend most of their time in educational institutions where racist models are being replicated. And then, this implies talking to teachers about what other types of tasks they could implement to promote a racism-free environment. In addition, it is also understood that this process must be accompanied and guided by the Ministry of Education in a clear way that they change their school curricula and their academic theories in some subjects where hidden curriculum about Black people's history is very visible. (Teacher Shanice's interview)

Teacher Shanice also revealed that in the workshops she has conducted with teachers in some schools, she has realized that they did not know a lot about Black history and culture, so these teachers did not have a clear idea on what to teach about Black communities. Sadly, one of the negative outcomes from this research study is that it is very complicated for Black students to learn about their own culture because some of their teachers do not have this kind of knowledge. Therefore, this institutional racism has negatively affected Black students in their educational institutions.

Some Black organizations have also worked hand in hand with some schools in order to improve Black students' academic performance and therefore their grades. Actually, in terms of the academic level, a lot of changes have occurred, and it is evident from the beginning to the end of the year, after having gone through an academic, social, and cultural process in the organizations these students attend. As teacher Zuri indicates:

every time an academic period ends at school, we ask the children to bring their school report cards, then we often realize that in the first period of the year, some children do not do so well academically in some subjects such as math, English and philosophy. Then we get voluntary teachers who focus more than everything on knowing why the children do not understand those subjects and they dedicate a lot of time to explain the students the topics they do not understand very well. Then at the end of the school year, these students bring the last school grades bulletin, and it is satisfactory, because they improve a lot in their grades, and they feel very happy because they realize that they can be outstanding students in their schools. (Zuri's interview)

Sometimes, few Black kids believe they are not good students because they do not perform well at school, but these Black organizations have demonstrated that these students need more teachers who can understand their social and academic conditions to offer them the adequate academic and even psychological help they need. Fortunately, the help these students receive in their organizations is not only academic. They are also raised in:

political consciousness. Here we also talk about many political issues in a language that the girls and boys can understand everything. Here we talk openly about race, gender, sexuality and even class and we have had very interesting debates with them about many dynamics that revolve around these theories, and well I would say that I would hope that they [the students] will appropriate those discourses and that this can be useful

for their relationships in their schools or for their family, social, academic and personal lives. (Teacher Semira's interview)

Debating about complex and polemic categories such as racism, patriarchy, gender, and class allows students to read and understand the world in a better way. Getting to know about these issues will empower these students more because they will be aware of why the world works in certain ways.

In addition, another way to empower Black kids is throughout ethnoeducation. As teacher Latrice explains:

ethnoeducation is a very interesting tool proposed by ethnic groups promoted by indigenous peoples initially and subsequently adjusted to African-descendant populations. It is an education that has to do specifically with recognizing the own practices of transmission of knowledge that ethnic peoples have historically carried out, as we know in Colombia, the constitutional political system recognizes the ethnic and cultural diversity of the country and when it recognizes this, then it makes adjustments to the laws, in this case the education law, so that ethnoeducation can be applied mainly in Black and Indigenous territories.

(Latrice's Interview)

Also, teacher Latrice continues explaining:

ethnoeducation is the weapon, the tool, the instrument that ethnic groups have to preserve their history and to generate the contents that are not taught in the educational institutions of the formal system, the contents that have to do with history and resistance, yes, with the history of the

production of knowledge, what they call traditional knowledge, which has to do with the cultural, political, social and economic values of Indigenous and Black communities. (Latrice's Interview)

Even though ethnoeducation is a significant tool to preserve ethnic groups' cultural traditions, it is not enough, for several reasons. First, Black and indigenous leaders have stated that not only ethnic communities should learn about Black and indigenous history and culture at school, but also every single student should be taught it as they are taught western history and culture.

The second issue is stated by teacher Latrice, who says that:  
ethnoeducation does not speak about the problem of racism.

Ethnoeducation is designed to teach about ethnic identity and cultural heritage, that is important, of course, because this aims to inspire a better self-esteem in our children and adolescents, and also that will allow them to recognize their own history, recognize their traditional cultural practices, recognize their own forms of knowledge production, recognize their territoriality, recognize collective thought and the form of collective relationship that occurs in these contexts. (Latrice's Interview)

It is very important to take into account the series of cultural, political, and social assets that are required for the ethnoeducation process. But lots of ethnic leaders ask themselves when the educational system is going to teach Black and indigenous children about their own culture and the distinctions with the western white knowledge. Additionally, ethnic leaders reclaim that lots of information attributed to Western cultures have been generated by Black communities in

Africa, but it has been stolen by White people who took advantage that in the past, Black people were not allowed to be part of the community of philosophers and intellectuals, and Black people could not publish their own theories, philosophies, ideologies, or the knowledge they were producing under their own names.

Even though some of the knowledge produced by Africans was stolen, they kept reading and interpreting the world in order to keep producing new theories that could help societies work better. In that sense, it is important that people get to know about this African knowledge so they can change the negative perception established toward Africa and its peoples, and it could help reduce racism toward Black communities. Teacher Latrice also indicates that:

ethnoeducation should be a tool used to eradicate racism not only in the educational system but also in the whole society; as well as to raise awareness that racial inequalities exist and that racial inequality must be eliminated, it must be combated, so let's say that ethnoeducation does not necessarily prepare boys and girls for the challenge of ending the racial inequality and that is already a limitation that interfere in the real purpose that ethnoeducation should have. (Latrice's Interview)

I totally agree with teacher Latrice. Ethnoeducation's objective should not only be to teach ethnic communities about their own history and culture, but also it should be taught in every single classroom in the country, so that the negative stereotypes about Black and indigenous people can be eliminated and racism eradicated.

In addition, teacher Ebony denotes that in Colombia, ethnoeducation is essential in ethnic territories but in the rest of the country, the purpose should be to implement the African-Colombian studies in primary, secondary, and higher education. She says:

from my perspective, I think that you have to teach them [students] what racial differences are, talk about racism, especially because boys and girls are being victims of racism, although racism is experienced in a different way depending on the city where they live. For instance, in mostly White cities, Black people are treated as inferior and dumb by White people who consider themselves as superior and genius. (Ebony's Interview)

On the other hand, in mostly black cities, racism is manifested in other structural ways, where most of the Black population live in hazardous conditions:

There is no infrastructure that allows them to guarantee their basic fundamental rights, there is no water and boys and girls should understand it from a very young age and because that happens, why they have to be born in these precarious conditions in their Black territories, that is the explanation of structural racism that neither the school nor ethnoeducation give to students. (Ebony's Interview)

African-Colombian studies are designed for the whole of society in order to show how to make visible the history that all Colombian society lived from the colony to today, but in addition to that, speaking of that history allows us to speak of racism, because when you talk about the colonial era, you have to explain why Black people were enslaved, why and what generated this enslavement, why

Black people were the target of that level of dehumanization, and why nowadays, lots of Black people live in the worst precarious conditions. Society needs to understand that it has to do with what happened in slavery, the colonial era, and the existence of racism. So, these analytical things, that African-Colombian studies propose, have to be studied by the whole world, Whites, Indigenous, Black, Gypsy Migrants, and so on.

For instance, in La Escuela Yemaya, Black students learn about specific traditions that Black communities have on the Pacific and the Caribbean coasts, which are the places where the majority of African-descendent people live in Colombia. These students have confessed that even though some of their parents and grandparents were born and raised in those places, they do not convey their traditions to their children because sometimes, they do not have time or because they have left their territories a long time ago, so they do not remember nor practice their ancestors' customs. Fortunately, the students who are part of La Escuela Yemaya learn every week about specific rituals and customs that represent their parents and grandparents' practices. As teacher Ramla explains:

we have carried out activities in which bring food from their parents' territories. For example, the chontaduro and other kinds of food from the Pacific Coast, so many children who came from those territories were encouraged to tell the story behind those types of food, as they also have the power to tell and we give value to those stories, so they begin to recognize why gastronomy is so important in their ancestral towns. There

is a process of learning, almost all the activities are interconnected with absolutely everything. For instance in arts, we teach with historical content, we play the drums, we explain to them [the students] what the sounds of the drum meant in the times of slavery, how the drums were used to communicate with other people, how they were played in funeral ceremonies, as well as the importance of some songs which are played in rituals, ceremonies, carnivals, parties and so on. (Ramla's interview)

Getting to know about their parents and grandparents' culture makes Black students feel prouder because they understand the rich culture Black communities have.

Additionally, teacher Alex indicates that they develop lots of activities in the same organization, and that "the most important thing is that each of these activities carries as an education the principles and values that are what we are trying to instill in each student" (Alex's questionnaire). While learning about Black cultures, students also learn about African philosophies. For instance, many Black organizations practice the African Ubuntu philosophy that professes, "I am because you are and you are because I am." That means that we all are part of an entity where although everyone has a role, everyone is the complement of the other ones. Also, it implies that:

humans cannot exist in isolation. We depend on connection, community, and caring — simply, we cannot be without each other. This philosophy requires a conscious shift in how we think about ourselves and others,



especially at a time when our nation is more divided than ever. (Trive Global website)<sup>11</sup>

That is completely true. African philosophies have taught the world how to act collectively, thinking on the common good of the whole community so that everyone can have an excellent quality of life. As Carly Robb indicates in her article:

as individuals, we are equipped with particular talents and strengths. Though it is natural for us to want to use these for our own self-progression and success, if we use these qualities to better our community, we reap both personal and societal benefits. We do not have to sacrifice personal success for the community's success, but we must strike a balance between the two. (Trive Global website)

If at school teachers profess more African philosophies, coexistence between students who are very different in various aspects would be more cordial, friendly, and respectful among them, because the students would understand that the differences that each one develops contributes to their cultural learning. As Carly Robb conveys, "a massive changing of minds is what will be required if humanity is to weather the challenges we now face" (Trive Global website). Every adult in a community should work together to educate children in a way that in the future they will be the ones who build a better world.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://medium.com/thrive-global/ubuntu-i-am-because-you-are-66efa03f2682>

On the other hand, it is great that Black organizations bring into their classrooms the history of their students' ancestors and sacred territories. But, this kind of historical content should also be taught in the academic world. Even though a group of Black organizations has advised the Board of Education on how schools and universities should teach Black studies, these recommendations have not been put into practice or implemented. For decades, Black organizations have struggled against the Board of Education and its public and private educational institutions regarding the implementation of Black studies so not only African-Colombian students learn about their culture but also the other students get to access to this knowledge, which hopefully will help promote more respect toward the ethnic cultures in Colombia that are represented by the ethnic students who are in each school.

This struggle has been hard and not much has been accomplished. In 2001, the Colombian government issued the Law 725, which promotes the commemoration of the African-Colombian day on May 21<sup>st</sup> as a tribute to the 150 years of abolition of slavery in Colombia. The objective was to take the opportunity to recognize the importance of the African peoples and the African-Colombian population in the process of construction and development of the Colombian Nation and the various spheres of Colombian society. In that order of idea, when asking some schools about how they implement Black studies in all their classes and subjects, their response is heartbreaking and unbelievable because the Black movement has been working hard to make sure that schools implement Black studies, but it seems that schools do not want to. Usually,

schools in Colombia do not implement Black studies in all their subjects as the Law 70 of 1993 and the Decree 1122 of 1998 established its mandatory nature in all state and private educational establishments that offer preschool levels, basic, and medium. But instead of obeying the law, most schools argue that on May 21<sup>st</sup>, they carry out an event where Black students dance, tell poetry, and perform Black characters.

It is incredible that some schools think that a one-day event is everything they can do regarding promoting cultural consciousness. This action is wrong in so many ways. First, some people attest that it is the only day in which some Black students play a main role in their schools. Second, in some performances, students are encouraged to paint their faces with black paint. This act offends the Black community since it is known that blackface alludes to negative stereotypes in which Black people are comically depicted with exaggerated costumes and makeup by distorting Black features and culture including their looks, language, dance, and behavior. In the United States and other countries, blackface is prohibited, especially in television, but in Colombia, blackface is still used in social, educational, political, and cultural institutions, and it is even showed in some comedy programs in television. Some Colombians have not understood the negative connotation that blackface conveys, especially to little kids, and how it feeds racism. When blackface is performed in some shows, their presenters make fun of African-descendent people while their audience laughs hard, assuming that those Black characteristics are true. Black face started in the

United States when comedians pretended to depict African Americans in a wrong way. As the Smithsonian museum explains in the history of its collections:

the first minstrel shows were performed in 1830s New York by White performers with blackened faces (most used burnt cork or shoe polish) and tattered clothing who imitated and mimicked enslaved Africans on Southern plantations. These performances characterized Blacks as lazy, ignorant, superstitious, hypersexual, and prone to thievery and cowardice. Thomas Dartmouth Rice, known as the 'Father of Minstrelsy,' developed the first popularly known blackface character, 'Jim Crow,' in 1830. By 1845, the popularity of the minstrel had spawned an entertainment subindustry, manufacturing songs and sheet music, makeup, costumes, as well as a ready-set of stereotypes upon which to build new performances. (Smithsonian museum)<sup>12</sup>

Blackface performers allude that they do not pretend to offend the Black community, but they just want to entertain their audience. The issue is that these performers do not realize the damage they cause to the African-descendent population. For instance, when schools carry out events where their students perform blackface, supposedly to commemorate Black culture, Black students report that they feel insulted, and that during that week their classmates tell them jokes making fun of them. Although these schools pretend to honor African history, what they are doing is ridiculing their Black students.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://nmaahc.si.edu/blog-post/blackface-birth-american-stereotype>

The Smithsonian museum also argue that:

Blackface and the codifying of blackness— language, movement, deportment, and character—as caricature persists through mass media and in public performances today. In addition to the increased popularity of ‘black’ Halloween costumes; colleges and universities across the country continue to battle against student and professor blackface performances. In each instance, those facing scrutiny for blackface performances insist that no malice or racial hatred was intended.

(Smithsonian museum).<sup>13</sup>

In Colombia as well as in the United States, Black leaders have struggled against TV shows that continue performing blackface. For instance, in Colombia, on October 8, 2015, a group of African-Colombian young people “protested against Soldado Micolta (Private Micolta), a blackface television character seen on the *Sabados Felices (Happy Saturdays)* show, broadcast by the television network called Caracol TV. Protesters went to the Caracol studios to speak out against the “racist content” found in several of Caracol’s programs. The protesters went to the government’s cultural offices as well. They were asking for a real dialogue and action about what they saw was an inherent and long-standing problem not only in Colombia, but all over Latin America”<sup>14</sup>. In this protest, young Black leaders indicated that:

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<sup>13</sup> <https://nmaahc.si.edu/blog-post/blackface-birth-american-stereotype>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.latinorebels.com/2015/10/15/afro-colombians-condemn-blackface-soldier-tv-character/>

Colombian TV has a dreadful history of discrimination against Afro-Colombians, saying that it won't even give actors opportunities. They cited the ABC's American series *Grey's Anatomy* as a good example of giving opportunities to African Americans because of show creator Shonda Rhimes, but when Colombia's television Network called RCN bought the Spanish-language rights to that show, RCN did not cast any Afro-Colombian actor. Jesus Karabalí writes about RCN's decision: 'Esta es la muestra más clara y frontal de racismo de la cual se tenga evidencia en la historia de la televisión colombiana' (in English: 'This is the clearest and most in-your-face example of racism in the history of Colombian television').<sup>15</sup>

It is necessary that blackface performers understand that what they are doing is not artistic but harmful. They need to realize how they hurt Black kids with their shows. For instance, at school, lots of African-Colombian kids were told the same ridiculous jokes that the blackface performer Private Micolta told in his television shows, to such extent that some of these Black students wanted to drop out of school. Fighting against racism is an arduous struggle, and that is why this research study honors the Black organizations that are committed to this significant mission and purpose. The organizations that are part of this study combat racism through education because they are convinced that education is a powerful means to eradicate racism.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.latinorebels.com/2015/10/15/afro-colombians-condemn-blackface-soldier-tv-character/>

Since at school students do not learn about the real history of Africa and its Diaspora, some Black organizations have the objective of meeting this need. Before continuing this analysis, I would like to emphasize the idea that learning about Black history and culture is not only for the Black community but also for everyone, because it is a great way to build a new world where nobody would be racially discriminated against. All the organizations that are part of this research study have the mission to promote Black studies among their students and their families. Actually, some of these organizations also carry out workshops with students and teachers in some state and private schools, emphasizing Black studies in order to help educational institutions design an intercultural curriculum with a new approach to reassess and reimagine the rules, policies, and narratives that uphold racial oppression and economic exclusion. As student Harry reveals:

at La Escuela Yemaya we are taught that Africans were enslaved, that's why we are African-Colombians, that Nelson Mandela was the first Black president in South Africa and Benkos Bioho was the one who helped us out of slavery [in Colombia]. (Harry's Interview)

Learning about Black leaders and the wonderful discovering they have done in the world, is one of the favorite things Black students in the organizations love. When these kids learn about how great Black leaders have contributed to the world, they feel happy and proud because these leaders become their role models. They admire them to the extent that they wish to be like them and to do more than these leaders have done.

### **Category 3: Attending/Graduating College**

Attending and graduating college is one of the purposes Black organizations have for their African-descendant students. They already know how important it is that Black populations have access to higher education. That is why, in their multiple classes, teachers usually emphasize acquiring the appropriate tools to get ready to go to college. In that sense, while conducting interviews and reading the answered questionnaires, I got to know essential pieces of advice that teachers give to Black students to encourage them to go to the university. As Amare, one of the teachers in La Escuela Yemaya, states:

first I would tell them that they should not give up, that they should not pay attention when people tell them that they cannot do so, that college is not for them, but rather that they should be clear about what they want, and based on those desires to pursue them, that they agree on that and that they ask, that they insist, that they find out, that they do not feel sorry for them, that they do not give up and that they do not feel sorry when someone dismays them for what they do. [Also] I would recommend being very persistent, never giving up, although they will always find difficulties.

(Amare's interview)

I strongly agree with teacher Amare. In this study, it was found that students' parents were working as housemaids, sanitation workers, house builders, and kitchen assistants because they did not have the opportunity to go to college, and some of them had not even attended primary or secondary school. When talking to these students, they told me that before being part of their social



organizations, they were convinced that they would have the same precarious jobs their parents had. But after attending the workshops in their organizations, they have learned that thanks to Affirmative Action and laws issued by the National government in the last decade, Black students had more opportunities to access higher education because some universities in Colombia had established a quota system in their admission policy to allow African-descendent students to study for free. Additionally, in Colombia, there is a federal program where members of the Black communities can access some money that they can use to pay for a public or private university, or they can even use it to pay their academic expenses. This program has been working since 1996 and it has been administered by the forgivable credit fund for African-Colombian, Raizales, and Palenqueros students with low economic resources and good academic performance. It is a mechanism that facilitates the access, permanence, and graduation of students from Black communities to the higher education system. This fund offers fully forgivable credits for undergraduate or postgraduate studies in Colombia. In addition, the credit is subject to cancellation if the beneficiaries complete their study programs, obtain their degree, and present a final report of a Community Work Project that they have developed during their careers. That means that if the students fulfilled all these final requirements, it is not necessary for them to pay the money that was granted on the forgivable credit fund. Thanks to federal programs like this one, the rate of access to higher education has increased significantly in African-Colombian communities. Besides supporting

Black students with money to pay college, it is also vital to support them psychologically. As teacher Luisa illustrates:

I believe that training in cultural appropriation, identifying and strengthening their abilities, and recognizing oneself as an individual capable of generating changes, makes the perspective of young people broaden. That they are aware that they are able to achieve what they propose and prepare them psychologically for the university environment, that they understand that in that world they can have shortcomings and perhaps encounter situations of racism, but therein lies the importance of appropriating their identity and do not bow their head if they do not enforce their rights. (Luisa's questionnaire)

Preparing Black students to deal with any situation they might encounter in college is essential because in that way, they will overcome any obstacle in an easier and smarter way, and they will be able to perform better academically.

Furthermore, when asking teacher Amare if going to and graduating college improved the quality of life for the students and their families, she answered:

Totally, I believe a lot in education. When you know and have quality information, you are able to break stereotypes and myths that are put in your head. Having a degree from a higher education institution not only benefits the family economically but also allows the students to have other kinds of relationships in a different intellectual and social way, to interact with other people, and to learn other things that ultimately benefit them. One can open

those borders, those ideas, and not lock oneself with a single idea, not stay only with what they gave them in school since that is not enough. The earth moves every day and that is how we must be, we must update ourselves, we must learn other things, interact with other people, and attending the university allows one to know something and develop in it and be able to contribute to society. (Amare's interview)

Black organizations are convinced that accessing higher education is a powerful tool to help improve Black communities' quality of life. Every time members of these communities graduate and put into practice their knowledge and service in favor of their communities, a great change occurs because these communities need great doctors, teachers, psychologists, lawyers, architects, accountants, scientists, researchers, and, of course, governors who can contribute to the long awaited social change that the society needs.

While in Colombia, Teacher Amare is forming her students to ensure that long awaited social change; in the United States, Teacher Mandisa is doing the same with his students. In his organization, he has chosen to implement a technological approach to prepare Black high school students to succeed in college. As he illustrates:

There is a large disparity of African-Americans and other minorities in the technology industry, so we decided to put together programs to help more kids develop skills around coding, computer science, and graphic design to help them develop skills that are necessary for the jobs of tomorrow.  
(Mandisa's interview)

I loved the technological program Teacher Mandisa conducts because in the United States as well as in Colombia, Black students have a low rate of access to internet and technological resources. That is why, when some of them manage to enter university, it is very difficult for them to do their research, papers, and presentations because they were not previously trained to do so. Actually, some Black students drop out of college because almost everything has to be done with technological resources that they do not know how to use well. Essentially, many times, that issue makes them hand in their homework late, and a few times their tasks are not complete or well done. Training Black students in how to use technological resources has been a tough challenge for Black organizations because they do not have enough money to acquire these resources that could help all their students. Despite this, they keep looking for ways to guarantee that these students can have the required technological skills to succeed when they go to college.

Furthermore, I gladly interviewed Professor Kasim Johnson, who is a great leader from an African-American organization and the dean of the Center for Student Success in Washington Adventist University. When asking him about the issues that some of his Black students have reported to him in academic counseling sessions, he revealed that:

Well, we have a large number of students that come to us that are Pell eligible. Meaning that they are eligible for that component of financial aid. Without stereotyping, that typically means that they are usually coming from economically challenged communities, or they themselves have a

high need. As much financial aid is concerned, generally, a number of those students are not as prepared, as many of them have experienced some real difficulties in their high schools. Either the schools they are coming from were not equipped or they were in communities where educating the students might have been a bit more challenging, so they come to us quite often not quite prepared to do college-level work. They just need additional help and assistance in performing at their maximum potential student success. (Kasim's interview)

As I have mentioned before, having more professional people in Black communities is beneficial because they put their skills at the service of their community and help others to get ahead. This is what Professor Kasim has been doing in his university while he aids Black students to enroll his university as well as helps them deal with the multiple difficulties they find every day. For instance, Professor Kasim mentions the different programs he leads to ensure that Black students perform very well in their classes. As he depicts:

We have a program that I actually personally called the Adventist University bridge program, which is designed to promote new students who do not meet our enrollment or admissions criteria to come to the institution to be regularly admitted to point 5 and certain scores on standardized tests. But for those students who may have below 2.45, we will allow them to come to the university for the bridge program themselves. While they participate in the bridge program, they have to meet an academic coach. So, those students are given a personal

academic coach who meets with them at least once a week for about an hour to make sure that they get on track, and this helps them with their success. (Kasim's interview)

I personally appreciate Professor Kasim for his benevolent work, because it is necessary to promote Black students to succeed by any means necessary.

Also, in my investigation, I found out that in the United States as well as in Colombia, some Black students' organizations have decided to establish programs in their universities where they help other students to improve their academic performance in their classes in order to reduce the high rates of university dropouts. These universities' Black organizations carry out a lot of academic, social, political, community, cultural, and recreational activities. Among the academic component, they divide their members so each one can help other students better understand difficult subjects such as math, chemistry, literature, and so on. The leaders of these organizations usually have a physical space in the university where they give advice to other students according to the complexity of the topic they are studying. Thanks to these advisory sessions, lots of Black students have improved significantly in their academic performance because they have better understood what they did not understand in their classes. It should be noted that many of these students, who have founded a Black organization in their universities, had already participated in other organizations when they were growing up, and since then, they became aware of the importance of implementing academic services to help Black students do

better in all their classes and prevent them from dropping out of their educational institutions.

While interviewing Black organizations, their leaders confessed that educating Black students is not only their responsibility but this huge task has to be shared with their families and their schools because it will not be completely useful if they learn good values in the organizations but at home and at school, these values are jeopardized. That is why they have worked together with families and some schools in order to ensure that Black boys and girls get the best integral education from childhood to adulthood. As Teacher Serena highlights:

From childhood, we educate African-descendent boys and girls to ensure that they go to university and have a quality future job. [But to achieve that] first they [the students] must be responsible and respectful because if they are not, they are not going to do anything. Then they have to do their primary school and their high school with all the responsibility in the world. But if they do not have a computer, or they do not have internet to do homework, they should ask their mothers for permission to go to a neighbor to borrow a computer. All these responsibilities they have to do from home. (Serena's interview)

Teacher Serena is very strict with the students in her organization because she said that she loves them as if they were her own children. And for that, she does everything to ensure that these students obtain the best opportunities they can have to have a decent life.

Then she continues her testimony, saying, “I tell the parents to give their children some responsibilities and to teach them how to respect the elderly and everyone. We can do better in life by being responsible and respectful with everything we do” (Serena’s interview). Most of the organizations that are part of this investigation have carried out workshops with parents in order to reinforce what the students are learning in these organizations, and also to give advice and tools that allow these families to improve their quality of life. Actually, Teacher Falala explains some of the activities they have developed:

We work with grandparents, with women, we involve men, we have a process where older people can finish primary school and high school. There are parents who do not know how to read or write, so they cannot help their children do their homework. [For this reason] we help them [the students] do their homework. [Additionally], we have a program where there are several parents finishing their primary and secondary studies. [So far], fifteen parents have graduated high school. (Falala’s interview)

This was another issue I found in my research. There are so many Black parents who are illiterate because they could not study in their small towns or because since they were kids, they had to work to help their parents with the household income. Actually, Black organizations have demanded the government to implement strategies to increase the education rate in Black communities, because it is very sad to see how too many young people become adults and cannot even get a quality job because they are illiterate.



Teacher Falala also reveals that due to the multiple issues her organization identified among her students' families, she decided to carry out other workshops to mitigate the negative impact that poverty has caused in her neighborhood. She indicates, "we do workshops with mothers on leadership, human talent, how to interact with other people and parenting guidelines. We get volunteers as well to work on the psychological issues they have because it is necessary to face them" (Falala's interview). Falala also informed that working with Black women had been a tough and painful task because they had a lot of problems in their families. For instance:

Many of them allowed themselves to be mistreated and humiliated by their partners, simply because they [the women's husbands] were the ones who worked and brought food to the house, so they [the husbands] could do whatever they wanted to do with their wives such as getting jealous and beating them up. (Falala's interview)

Domestic violence was a heartbreaking issue that I identify throughout my research. Lots of Black kids were mistreated at home and also, they often witnessed violence between their parents.

Something very noteworthy that I learned from Teacher Falala is that we must not cry over spilled milk; rather, we must find a solution to every problem we encounter in life, and we must overcome every obstacle that comes our way.

Falala also adds:

In our workshops, many women have learned to respect themselves, to take care of themselves, and to value themselves because we tell them

that if we do not value ourselves, who will value us? Who will respect us? For us [teachers in the organization], it is an impressive joy to see that some of our women already stand with respect to demand their rights before their husbands. [Also] they already learned that there are some government institutions where they can report their husbands, if they are mistreated. (Falala's interview)

Additionally, Teacher Daliah also told me that she has worked with a lot with Black mothers in order to empower them:

When I carried out workshops with these women [her students' mothers], I noticed that their self-esteem was very low. They did not feel confident when participating aloud in front of the group, they did not like to give an opinion because they felt ashamed or because they thought their opinions were not valid. Or when they participated, they talked in a low voice looking towards the floor. I also noticed that some of my students had the same attitude that their mothers had. They felt nervous and embarrassed when I asked them to participate in class. At the end of the process, I felt satisfied because after leading lots of workshops, some of these mothers changed their attitude. They participated more actively, they organized presentations about women's rights, and they felt more confident when talking about how they were mistreated by their husbands. (Daliah's interview)

Daliah as well as Falala realized that conducting leadership workshops with Black mothers was beneficial not only for them but for their children as well,

because these kids felt prouder of their mothers. When Black mothers' self-esteem is established, Black children's self-esteem is affirmed as well. Moreover, Falala also told me that empowering Black mothers had not been an easy process, but she was super happy to teach them to do many things such as how to claim respect from others, help them finish primary and secondary school, and support them to find a good job that could guarantee a good household income.

Moreover, when Black parents have a great education, and when they finish their primary and secondary school, they can contribute more to their children's education. Subsequently, they can help their kids do homework, read a lot of interesting books, and research stimulating topics. Additionally, these parents' self-esteem gets stronger because thanks to the academic education they have, they can use new tools to defend themselves and they will not allow others to humiliate them for being illiterate. In that sense, it is also important to increase Black kids' determination, so they can deal with any harsh circumstance at any moment without giving up. As Teacher Winnie recommended about the coexistence of these children at home, school, university, and social organization:

Boys and girls need to feel welcomed and have a place of political strengthening, but also of identity. They do not need to feel alone, that participating in a Black organization allows them to have more identity, more empowerment in the university and in higher education spaces; and when they already have their political training, that they understand the situation of the university, and to be encouraged to have the intention of

also being multipliers of their knowledge, of their training, in the place where they were trained or in other spaces, so that the educational and political training they received when they were kids, can be reciprocal when they get to the university. (Winnie's interview)

I strongly agree with Teacher Winnie. It is imperative to uplift Black kids in their family and in educational and social spaces, because if they have a strong character, they will avoid being involved in bad actions.

There is a saying that professes that we must educate the child to avoid punishing the man. This saying refers to the fact that in several countries, the people of the African-descendant communities are the ones who most occupy the prisons of their countries, and many times, this happens because African-descendent children do not receive a good education in their homes and in their schools. Consequently, this saying acknowledges that we, as adults, must invest good, quality time in educating Black boys and girls so that later on, they will have a better future because they will be able to go to university, and they will have less risk of being involved in situations that lead them to being arrested or taken to prison. As Teacher Winnie continues stating:

So that allows that when a boy or a girl already reaches the university, they can already graduate, they can access another type of job, and they can have a better type of place to live. Then that allows them to be more visionary, dream big, and begin to see that their dreams can be fulfilled. And to understand that it is not only their own dream but it is their ancestors' dream that responds to the needs from the past, and knowing

that these Black students are fulfilling their ancestors and community's dream is very significant because that is also a big contribution to the infinite struggles that Black communities battle every day. (Winnie's interview)

Teacher Winnie also mentioned that when Black high school students manage to go to the university:

it improves their families' quality of life, because it allows their mothers to have relief because usually these mothers raise their children with a minimum wage, so that now that their university kids can economically contribute in something, they can dedicate more time to themselves because they do not need to have so many jobs anymore to support their family. Now, these women can have more time to spend with their children, and they can dedicate more time to their education, their recreation, and a better lifestyle. (Winnie's interview)

Some of the organizations interviewed during this study revealed that they had evidenced a significant change in their students and their families' lives thanks to the long process they have had in these organizations.

Moreover, talking to Teacher Nzinga was very meaningful because she has worked in lots of organizations that attend to Black and Indigenous children. Additionally, she has been part of government institutions that work with children who have been recruited by illegal armed groups in Colombia and who have had a harsh childhood because they have been forced into the national armed conflict. In these institutions, voluntary leaders work hard to rescue these kids

from the war, and they implement delicate psychologist strategies to help them recover their happy childhood. But while talking about the times she volunteered in some Black organizations, Teacher Nzinga highlighted that she always recommended her students to study hard in primary and secondary school, and to prepare themselves well to go to college. She indicated that:

when one has a university diploma, one can already earn a dignified salary. But when one does not even have a college diploma, life might be more difficult because you cannot access to a decent work, even though you have the required knowledge. Getting a great job and earning a lot of money might help you pay the university for your siblings, your cousins, and some members of your family. As well as it might ensure you to get your own house, so you and your family do not have to suffer to pay rent anymore. (Nzinga's interview)

Teacher Nzinga also told me that when giving advice to her students, they replied that they would be very happy to help their mothers to have a better life, and that even though it was difficult for them to go to college, they would do everything to achieve that goal.

#### **Category 4: Black Organizations as a Black Family**

Students, parents, and teachers usually consider their Black organizations as their family because by participating in them, they feel at home. Most of the teachers and leaders interviewed acknowledged that they founded their organizations because when they were kids or teenagers, they had already been part of an organization that changed their lives forever. They understood

perfectly that participating in a Black organization improves not only Black students' academic performance but also their social lives. In that sense, they wanted to promote that positive change in other kids who lived in their communities. As Teacher Daliah emphasizes:

being already an African-descendant woman with certain knowledge acquired in the process of university academic training and, in addition, the knowledge acquired in the organizational spaces in the African-Colombian Social Movement, one feels the need to be able to generate a process of transfer in transmission of knowledge because normally our Black children and adolescents do not have the opportunity to access spaces that allow them to acquire certain information, that allow them to acquire didactic tools, and that allow them to acquire high-quality training which might let them satisfy their social needs and manage to meet the academic and educational commitments that are made in each of the experiences in educational institutions. (Daliah's interview)

Transferring everything each person knows will reinforce and consolidate intellectual theories among them.

In addition, in all the interviews, the children acknowledged that they felt great when they had other Black partners in their schools and in their social organizations. For instance, in Kwame's interview he confessed that he only had a Black classmate in his school, and that he had a better relationship with him than with the other students. "He always calls me to play. He is like my brother because he treats me well, he loves me, he never tells me that we are no longer

friends. He always buys snacks for me and I to him” (Kwame’s interview).

Kwame also told me that some of his White-mestizo friends reject him. “Once I told one to play with me and he told me to go to play with another child, so I went to play with my Black friend because I feel more confident with him” (Kwame’s interview). Sharing the same experiences make Black students feel more in camaraderie among them because they understand each other and because they act as if they had a family relationship.

As a great example, Kalifa is one of the students who loves going to La Escuela Yemaya because, as he indicates, “you entertain yourself, you make friends, you get to know good teachers, you felt like family there, Black men understand each other better than a Black man with a Mestizo man” (Kalifa’s interview). As Kalifa happily explained in his interview, being part of a Black organization is like having a second family. At La Escuela Yemaya, students as well as teachers treat each other with so much familiarity that some teachers are called “aunts” and “uncles” and some students are called “nieces” and “nephews.” For some people, this familiar connection might seem bizarre but for Black communities, it is very normal and common because that is the ideology African cultures have implemented and have transmitted from generation to generation.

Moreover, student Kwame also loves going to La Escuela Yemaya because there, he enjoys all the activities and games he plays with his teachers. In this Black organization, kids learn about Black history and culture and they carry out identity workshops where kids are encouraged to feel proud of being



Black. Additionally, they learn math, English, arts, and science. Kwame illustrates:

I like to be in this organization because it is the most wonderful because all my cousins are there and they play with me, we share things and we have a good time. When I was five years old, I didn't know how to add or subtract, nor the alphabet, nor the vowels, but I learned them at La Escuela Yemaya. (Kwame's interview)

When asking Kwame about his favorite activities in La Escuela Yemaya, he answered, "arts, drawing, making masks, making and inventing games, and the one that I like the most is art because in this one, you can create things. I have created people, cars and masks" (Kwame's interview). Some of the teachers of La Escuela Yemaya told me that at the beginning, Kwame had a low academic level but after some months in this organization, he understood better what he did not learn at his regular school regarding math and reading. These teachers also told me that Kwame felt very comfortable learning with them because Kwame felt that the organization was his second family, not only because his teachers and classmates were Black but also because he was treated in a better way than in his regular school.

According to these teachers, Kwame's behavior and academic performance have changed significantly. Spending time in La Escuela Yemaya, which has an environment that is not hostile like his regular school and with partners and teachers who are friendly, Kwame has learned to have a better relationship with the others because he does not feel the necessity to be

defensive and to protect himself from racist situations like the ones he experiences in his regular school. I asked him if he considered that his behavior had changed during the time he attended La Escuela Yemaya, and he answered:

yes ma'am, because before I did not pay attention in my classes, I would leave my classroom, I would climb on the tables, I would take away the food from the children and hit them, I did that because I was little, and thanks to La Escuela Yemaya I have changed and now I behave. Well, I no longer leave the room, I do not hit or take food from the children.

(Kwame's interview)

In this organization, children learn about African philosophies such as the Ubuntu. For instance, in a workshop they discussed the African concept "SAWABONA," which means "I respect you and you respect me." With the implications that these kinds of workshops have, lots of Black kids have learned to establish a better relationship with their environment and with the people around them.

Furthermore, teachers at La Escuela Yemaya carry out workshops to talk about structural, institutional, and daily racism in which students learn to identify, counter, and understand racism and antiracism practices. Also, kids discuss strategies to counteract racist practices and design ways to build a culture free of racism. For instance, teachers teach that "el color piel" should not exist. In Colombia, in the color box that students use at school, there is a color that is called "color piel" or "skin color" in English. This color is similar to a light pink

color. Also, this color is similar to the White-mestizo people's skin color. That was another action taken during the colonial era when White-mestizo people were considered superior to the rest of the people. Nowadays, that action still persists, and this erroneous ideology is still taught at schools when in kindergarten, teachers ask students to color the representation of their body drawing with "el color piel." Professor Maria Isabel Mena has denounced in her books and in several conferences that some teachers scold young Black kids when they color their drawings with a black or chocolate color because they assume that all students need to learn to identify "el color piel." This situation has created confusion among little Black children who are in a stage of their lives where they are shaping their social and cultural identity. Also, this is an ethnocidal way where cultural and ethnic diversity is hidden or erased in Colombia. For centuries, Colombia has denied the rich cultural diversity the country has. In the same way, schools do not teach enough about Black and Indigenous history and culture. Following and developing a hidden curriculum, schools usually focus their academic lessons on a Western-centered curriculum that has too much emphasis on Europe.

On the other hand, attending a Black organization has changed the lives of lots of Black students who have found a welcoming family there, and a kind of transportation that takes them in a journey to the past where they explore everything their ancestors did. For that reason, all the interviewed students emphasized that they have had a better life since they became members of their organizations or foundations. They argue that in these organizations they have

found brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, cousins, uncles, and aunts because each one of their classmates and teachers plays an important role in their existence, sometimes, more significant than their own family. As Student Ekon highlights:

I felt happy knowing that my environment was going to change and I was going to be closer to people who feel the same as me. Since we are all Black, we usually have the same tastes, we like dancing, we are intelligent, we think the same way to draw and to create things. (Ekon's interview)

Black students who are part of these organizations have created a camaraderie framed, followed by African philosophies that promote Umoja (unity), Ujima (collective work), Imani (faith), Nachami (love), and so on. This loving comradeship has given a different perspective to the experience these students have lived. They have learned that they must love, respect, and help each other in order to build a better world free of injustice, racism, and violence. As Student Ekon indicates:

when we are together, we talk about situations of racism and try to help each other and help others, so they do not feel bad, and we learn from our history to understand why it is so important to be different and then we explain it to our White/Mestizo classmates, so that they no longer disrespect us and our culture. (Ekon's interview)

Black organizations promote a team spirit among their students through different activities, because they are convinced that education is the means by which

these students would improve their quality of life and would contribute to building a better world. Among these activities, the one that Ekon enjoys the most is the photography, because:

in photography, they teach us to use the camera, what its functions are.

They also make us take photos, record videos, they explain to us how the Afrodance was born, they tell us about our ancestors who created this [Afrodance] as a way of expressing themselves, and also the importance of dancing among us Blacks and teaching others. (Ekon's interview)

Another significant aspect Ekon points out is how in his Black organization he has learned to deal with the racist situations he lives at school. In La Escuela Yemaya, Ekon's teachers:

proposed activities in which we told our anecdotes, how we suffered racism in our schools and the way we solved those problems. Our teachers taught us that when we were victims of racism, we could not react or behave aggressive, they told us that we should explain to our classmates that our name is not 'nigger,' and to tell them what our name is and to let them learn more about us. (Ekon's interview)

In Colombia and in the United States, lots of Black students are punished and even expelled by their teachers and principals because they get involved in fights with their classmates. Unfortunately, some of these teachers do not realize nor recognize that the causes that usually detonate these conflicts are expressions of racial discrimination of which Black children are victims. Consequently, some Black students have opted to defend themselves by any means necessary

because they do not find support in their teachers, and because they feel the necessity to stop those racist attacks against them that affect them psychologically and academically.

In fact, some organizations have accompanied some parents in the process of defending Black students to avoid being expelled from their schools. Sometimes, parents do not have the tools to defend their children, but usually Black organizations have a group of lawyers who knows perfectly how to act in those cases. The issue is that, while dealing with these kinds of issues, Black students get very affected because often they believe that they are a problem for their schools and that they will be a problem for their communities. The work that Black organizations develop with them is a little hard because they have to demonstrate to these students that they are not the problem but the society in general is the problem because society perceives them in a wrong way. In these organizations, Black students learn about history and why, since centuries ago, Black people have been perceived as the “negro problem,” as the African-American writer James Baldwin and other writers used to quote this situation in their books. But besides learning history of the world, these students learn also about their own history and culture. And while exploring their own identities and diversities during the activities they develop, “we learn about where we came from, our roots, how to identify ourselves, how to defend ourselves before racist situations, and how to feel proud of our Black culture” (Kalifa’s Interview). For Afrocolombian children, when living in big cities like Bogota, Cali, and Medellin, being part of a Black organization is essential because usually these students

are surrounded by White-Mestizo people who impose their Eurocentric culture by deducing that other cultures are inferior. This deduction is one of the problems Black organizations deal with because some of their students feel ashamed of being Black because at school, their Mestizo classmates insult them with hurtful messages that state that they are ugly, lazy, dumb, and dirty. Additionally, as it has been detailed before, many African-descendant boys and girls are racially discriminated against at school because of their natural hair. For centuries, Eurocentric ideologies have conveyed the message that to be a beautiful woman you need to be White, tall, thin, blond, and have blue eyes and long, straight hair. This is an image that has permeated educational environments where some primary and secondary school students often tend to reject and even bully the other students who do not follow those Eurocentric beauty patterns. In Colombia, the Board of Education has examined some cases where Black families have reported that their Black children are prohibited to go to school with their natural hair with styles as braided, Afro, or dreadlocks. Some of these educational institutions affirm that some hairstyles their Black students wear are not permitted because these styles are against their school's rulebooks that determine that students are the school's image, therefore the students' appearance have to be impeccable. Only few Black parents have reported this racist attitude before the government institutions, because they attest that even though Colombia has law 1482 of 2011 (anti-discrimination law), government authorities do not file their complaints against racist circumstances because they do not consider these circumstances as a crime.

In addition, some of the Black parents, who were interviewed during this investigation, affirmed that they were aware that not only their children's schools were responsible for teaching the students about their own history and culture but also, they had the responsibility to do so. For instance, in the past, parents and grandparents used to sit children together in the living room to teach them about their traditional culture, but nowadays, that habit has disappeared in grand part. As Sabra, one of the Black mothers, told me:

I am glad that my children attend a Black organization because we as parents do not have enough time to teach our children about Black culture, but in the organization they learn about it, what makes them feel proud of their own culture. (Sabra's interview)

What I observed in my research process is that Black organizations have assumed a great and huge task in Black kids' lives. These organizations are playing the role that both schools and parents should play. Thanks to Black organizations, African-descendent children are learning to love themselves even though social media and television tell them every day to hate themselves when these media usually portray Black men and women as bad people, criminals, and any society's scum. When Black kids perceive that their own people are represented in such a vile way, some of them tend to reject their own culture, their own community, and even themselves. It is in those cases when some Black people look for products and strategies to whiten themselves in both their interior and exterior. For instance, they opt to straighten their hair, to use whitening cream, and even to get surgeries to eliminate their Black features.



Additionally, there are some Black people who prefer not to hang out with other Black people, not to practice their Black community's traditions, not to wear their traditional clothes, and not to speak in the way their Black community does. In that order of ideas, it is necessary to clarify that this whitening phenomenon not only happens in the Americas but also it is happening in African, Asian, and European countries where Black communities are victims of an eternal evil, structural racism.

While conducting the interviews, I heard a lot about whitening strategies from children, parents, and the organizations' teachers. Keisha, a Black student, narrated how for many years at school, she felt very ashamed of some parts of her body. She explained:

in La Escuela Yemaya I have learned that I do not have to hide my real self, but that I have to show who I really am and feel proud of me, of how I dance and my hairstyle. Before, I did not like to wear my natural hair, but I usually wore extensions; but now I have learned to enjoy my natural hair.

(Keisha's interview)

In my investigation, I happily realized that parents are very grateful for the job Black organizations are carrying out because they have noticed a positive change not only in their kids' academic performance but also in their personality and behavior. In these organizations, Black students have acquired tools to defend themselves before racist situations, and they have learned the positive history about their ancestors, which has made them feel pleased to be Black. These organizations' teachers love working with their students because their

purpose is to give them all the possible tools that these students will eventually use to contribute to building a better world. As Professor Jameelah attests:

one of the things I wanted to accomplish was to support Black students, and I am understanding through the greater population of how that support should come and what all we should be doing as a community to address the lack of prior support to Black students. (Jameelah's interview)

All the teachers, who lead the students in these organizations, are committed to form their students, to make them the best leaders of their communities and their countries, as well as to make sure that they can access higher education so they can be part of the change that our world needs.

Additionally, Teacher Keandra also highlights the significant roles Black organizations play in the advancement of Black communities. She reveals that it is essential for Black students to be part of social organizations from childhood. She highlights that:

these spaces are super important because these are spaces where Black people strengthen each other, take care of each other and encourage each other. These are spaces to empower themselves and to promote knowledge of Black people to generate pride about identity and personal experiences. These organizations are spaces for learning history, a history that is not taught elsewhere. (Keandra's interview)

What Teacher Keandra said is completely true. In most schools, Black history and culture is not taught, so Black organizations are teaching it because they

understand how important it is for Black kids to learn about their own past. Then Teacher Keandra continued explaining:

I think these spaces are very important because people learn their true history and feel proud of that history and that identity. It is what seems most important to me, that is what gives strength to exist and to deal against racism even though it is very painful and for children it is the worst, because racism destroys a person's life, but I think that in those spaces boys and girls feel proud of their history and have more tools to face racist situations and teach other people about their culture. So that is why, I think these spaces are important, in addition to all the care that sometimes we minimize but the care in those spaces, in collective care, meeting people who love one is very important, the political, history, pride, identity, acceptance, solidarity, love, it is also very important for one to grow as a strong person and I think those spaces give that strength. (Keandra's interview)

The message Teacher Keandra conveys here is very clear and it is the same message I got from all the Black organizations I interviewed. These spaces are designed to be part of the student's family. In these organizations, students feel at home because, as Teacher Keandra said, these places are full of love, solidarity, comprehension, commitment, encouragement, and all those things Black students need to grow up in a lovely environment and to feel proud of what they are and what they have.

To complement Teacher Keandra's statement, Teacher Ebony also emphasized the changes she had seen in their Black students since they enrolled her organization. She denoted:

There were multiple changes. One of the concrete things was that the children who participated in our organization spaces were not expelled from the school, that is, they were prevented from being expelled by the school system because they began to behave better in their regular schools, because they began to find ways to integrate with their classmates in harmonious ways, and defend their rights and they felt more secure and could express themselves better. (Ebony's interview)

According to some studies, Black students are more likely to be expelled than White students. For that reason, some organizations work hard to contribute to the reduction of the high rates of Black students' expulsion from primary and secondary schools. Then, Teacher Ebony continued attesting to her students' social and academic changes:

Secondly, they began to organize among themselves, they began to have support, creation, and life groups among them. Families also began to organize, because they realized that there were things that could also be done from their neighborhoods to try to help solve some problems that were going on in their communities. Third, what was happening as well as with this process is that moms and aunts organized themselves to work, in a manner from which we learned a lot because as adults, we also have a role and we have a self-responsibility and we need to support each other

to know how to do it because sometimes we do not know how to do it, and we have to try and make it visible and take actions in our neighborhoods.

(Ebony's interview)

To empower women is to empower the whole community because they are the backbone that supports and holds not only their families but also their communities. Teacher Ebony concludes, illustrating that she feels super fulfilled because in the last decades, she has educated so many children who enrolled in her organization when they were kids but now, they are adults who are in a university and they are contributing to improving this world. She also feels proud of seeing some of her former students as professional people who have excellent jobs where they work as teachers, doctors, lawyers, and psychologists. As she indicates:

The process carried out in my organization proved to be important because afterwards, several of these children eventually entered college. So many times I have thought that I really enjoy seeing cases like Ramla's that I met her as a little girl in school in the process that we were doing, I think she was seven years old when I met her there at school, and see how much that process has meant, which meant later seeing those boys and girls began to enter university, they began to get involved in political processes at university and then as several of them, they also created their own social organizations, that is, for me that has been like a whole process of the outcomes of all this little work that we have done in so

many years in which we have contributed with something from what we could, from what we knew, from what we also intuited. (Ebony's interview)

Talking to Ebony was exciting because she had a lot of magnificent anecdotes with her organization's students and their families. This interview as well as the others was stimulating because it demonstrated that when a group of people get together to carry out strategies to work with children, it generates an immense transformation in neighborhoods, cities, and even countries.

To support what Teachers Keandra and Ebony stated, Teacher Aliyah also indicated that it is essential for Black kids to be part of any Black organization because:

When one comes from another place and arrives in a city, such as Bogotá [Colombia], that a place so racist, it is very important to build community, so that the children can feel supported by someone because it feels that you are not going alone against the world that is very tough. So, it is very vital that they have some kind of support even if there are not spaces with strong political content. I believe that this sense of collectivity can start in the family even when families begin and you have this support, and this political training more as something of conscience as these issues are discussed at home and there this type of racial awareness seems to me that it is super critical because this allows children to be more aware of their being and who they are in the world and also how they are read the society. (Aliyah's interview)

This kind of family community that Teacher Aliyah talks about is the kind of space that Black organizations offer Black kids because sometimes, some of these kids even live in dysfunctional families where they are not raised appropriately and where they do not receive all the love they need. As Teacher Aliyah continued saying:

When belonging to a Black organization, students feel that, they have a backup, that is fundamental. It is like when someone bothers you at school, if you are alone, you feel defenseless and you cannot do much. But if you have friends, then you feel more emboldened and confront bullying. I feel that it happens, strong tools and support are needed to confront society and to confront structural racism, which is such a strong pod and so explicit in a big city like Bogota. (Aliyah's interview)

In the interview, Teacher Aliyah mentioned something crucial, she said:

I think that it is super meaningful that children from an early age become part of organizational processes and find themselves in participative spaces where they can talk about their realities and realize that they are not the only ones who are living racist moments, and realize that it is not a personal attack against them, but rather, that this is part of a racist system that is very difficult to understand. (Aliyah's interview)

Then, Teacher Aliyah told me something interesting that was also stated by other interviewees. She said:

The first time that I realized that I was a black person, and that was why I was going to have different conditions than other people, or they were

going to read me differently, that is something that impacts a lot and is hard. So it is very important to have the support and to have people with whom to talk about those realities that are lived because historically it has also been a way for Black people to stay afloat to heal and survive all these historical barbarities that we have had to live and then utter it.

Talking with others, listening to others about the different realities, says that it is super important and I think that there is the first training that we should receive in life as Black people and that is to know our realities, also to know our strengths and to know what tools we have as Black people to cope with all these racist situations. (Aliyah's interview)

In Colombia as well as in the United States, some Black organizations conduct healing spaces where children, women, and men get divided in groups in which they share about how they deal with racism, why they encounter harsh circumstances, and which strategies they might use to overcome so many obstacles. Additionally, it is mandatory for Black families to have "The Talk" when children are 10 years old or more. In this conversation, parents explain to their kids that for being Black, they will experience some situations different from the ones their White classmates experience. One of the most important pieces of advice parents give to their Black children is how they should behave when they are stopped by the police to avoid being sent to jail or to avoid being killed. In conclusion, I strongly agree with Teacher Aliyah when recommending that Black students should have safe spaces where they feel confident while talking about every good and bad moment they are going through.



Moreover, all the Black organizations who were part of this research study carry out workshops with their students in order to guide them in developing their life projects, mainly emphasizing the career they would like to have. The student Kalifa states that he attended many life project workshops at La Escuela Yemaya, and he learned that, "it is not a matter of overpassing others, but if we are going to do something we must do it well and when it is achieved, never forget where it came from" (Kalifa's interview). Some of the parents interviewed in this study revealed that in previous generations, their relatives could only aspire to be farmers, fishers, houses cleaners, and building builders, but fortunately with their children, those aspirations have changed a lot. Now they want to be doctors, lawyers, engineers, and even presidents. Specifically, after these Black kids attend the life project workshops in their organizations, they usually change the perceptions they have about the academic, professional, and work opportunities they could get when they graduate high school. A curious data is that after Barack Obama became the first Black president of the United States, Black kids around the world got the message that there were not limitations as they had believed before. On the contrary, Barack Obama had managed to tear down a huge glass ceiling to climb to a political position that decades ago would have been unbelievable for Black communities in a powerful country like the United States of America. Some of the parents also revealed that they felt super pleased because now their children could dream big. Thanks to the life project workshops, Black kids have access to a lot of information about governmental affirmative action projects such as scholarships that allow Black kids to enter and

graduate universities. Making use of these affirmative action programs and other resources, Black students have managed to access higher education institutions and therefore, they have improved not only their quality of life but also their families and their communities' quality of life.

All the Black students interviewed in this research study appreciate what their organizations' teachers have done for them and what they have learned. Regarding the future, these students love the workshops developed in their organizations where they visualize their personal, academic, and work future. As Student Ekon explains:

We do life project activities because they [his teachers] want us to be great professionals and not to believe when other people say that Black people are lazy, useless, and dumb. They want us to change that and they help us change it. (Ekon's interview)

Students as well as teachers recognize that the life project workshops are an excellent tool used to make Black students visualize a significant future for them. In these activities, students are pushed to dream big, to project their best ideal job, and to plan a successful life for them and their family. Thanks to these projections, Black students realize that they can become whatever they want, that they can study any career, and that they can obtain any job because they have all the required skills and potential to do so. During these activities, students receive information regarding college registration, attendance, permanence, and graduation. These teachers make emphasis on the strategies that students should implement not only to attend college successfully but also to

graduate, because the college dropout rate is high among the Black community. Additionally, the life project workshops are complemented by academic classes in which students reinforce what they are learning at school and that sometimes they do not understand so well. Thanks to the academic classes Black students have in their organizations, they have improved academically in their regular schools, dropout rates in their communities have dropped, and Black students' university attendance rates have increased.

In that order of ideas, Teacher Jada entails:

Black children's potentialities must be cultivated and used for personal, family, and community growth. We [the teachers] must open more opportunities for Black boys and girls. They need access to higher education. There are many ideas that when developed make our young people safer and more secure and allow them to achieve their dreams. Life is a beautiful gift that must be made more enjoyable. When you achieve your goals in life, it allows you to be happy and make people happy. It also makes people more prosperous and thus we have a better prosperous world, and we have a more unbiased and fraternal world.

(Jada's interview)

Teacher Jada's dream is the same wish many people have. It is essential to build a harmonious world in which boys and girls from any kind of race, nationality, gender and age can be completely happy. As the African-American leader Martin Luther King Jr. stated in his famous speech, "I Have a Dream," delivered on August 28, 1963 at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C., we all have the

dream that our children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. In that sense,

Teacher Makeeba conveys a touching message:

Education is the way and is the tool that can help transform the lives of many people, and in this case, of Black people. Their own traditional education above all is and will be the tool that can always help continue building community as long as we all work together. For instance, we can organize ourselves either in a small school or in a community process where the goal is to educate and continue educating Black children and Black youth not only to change in economic terms their life condition but also their social condition and that it will be an individual construction that will lead to a collective transformation. (Makeeba's interview)

I strongly agree with Teacher Makeeba. In my opinion, education is the most powerful tool that Black communities can use to fight against all the systems of oppression: racism, sexism, capitalism, and classism.

As the African-American leader Malcolm X stated in his emotive speech on June 28, 1964, "Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today." Also, just before his death in 1965, Malcolm X maintained that one of the things he most regretted in his life was his lack of an academic education. He stated that he would be quite willing to go back to school and continue where he had left off and go on to take a degree. In my opinion, Black leaders have to make sure that no Black boy or girl regrets this kind of

thing in their lifetime. Black leaders should implement multiple strategies to ensure that every single child goes to school, because education gives us a knowledge of the world around us and changes it into something better. It develops in us a perspective of looking at life. It helps us build opinions and have points of view on things in life. As some teachers have uttered, education is the most important tool you can receive, that can bring you much success in society today. Education lessens the challenges you will face in life. The more knowledge you gain the more opportunities will open up to allow individuals to achieve better possibilities in career and personal growth. For instance, the work that the Brotherhood/Sister Sol develops in New York City with Black children and young people is indispensable because the principles the leaders teach these students, are essential for their good physical, psychological, and emotional development. As Harry Belafonte, Artist and Humanitarian in NYC, states:

The Brotherhood/Sister Sol is one of the most unique youth development organizations in the country. I know their work well and they teach young people to become social change makers, activist/artists and to succeed in life. Their work is transformational and their new building in Harlem will allow for the further development of an essential organization that works every day for equity, equality and opportunity. It will represent the solidifying of an institution. (<https://brotherhood-sistersol.org/>)

Moreover, Brotherhood/Sister Sol seeks to help young people to break cycles of poverty and to create stable lives. As they affirm:

46% of people in our great city live in poverty or near poverty. We are also working to help young people understand the conditions they have been born into, the poverty they face and the unequal education they receive, so that they can become leaders who work to seek change so that others will not have to face such inequity. We guide young people to redefine masculinity and femininity and the destructive norms and expectations so often placed upon our young people. Our youth are taught to confront sexism and misogyny, to reject homophobia, to work to build bridges with other communities and become global citizens. (<https://brotherhood-sistersol.org/>)

It is very fundamental to educate Black children with all these principals to make them grow in an environment free of racism, sexism, misogyny, and homophobia.

In addition, in her interview, Teacher Ebony also mentioned the importance of education and how Malcolm X encouraged everyone to study. She indicates:

As Malcolm X said, education is access to the future, it is the possibility of transforming. I believe that access to higher education for African-Colombian students will transform the living conditions of their families because they can earn a better salary. But in addition to that, the possibility that those people who go through higher education have of transforming all the scenarios and of being included in research, allows their family to begin to have more possibilities to know or access to more

essential information because access to information that people have depends on their level of study. (Ebony's interview)

Access to any kind of information is fundamental, because information is a powerful weapon that can be used to build a better world. For instance, thanks to the information that we acquire, we can have active participation in government political spaces where radical decisions are made in favor of the wellbeing of the country. So that if Black leaders acquire the correct information and participate in these government political spaces, they can demand from the federal government more economic investment in their towns to fix their roads, their schools, their hospitals, their parks, their libraries, and so on. But if these leaders do not have access to the convenient information, and a quality education, the federal government, which is full of White politicians, will not assign government money to improve the conditions of Black towns. This was just a simple example of the negative consequences of not being able to access a quality education. But, of course, there are other consequences that imply the deterioration of human quality in the Black community.

For that purpose, we need to work together in favor of Black communities' well-being. And we need to do that work with children, since they are very young, to guide them through their whole academic life. In fact, while conducting this research study, I realized that Black students who attend a social, educational, cultural, or political organization since they are little kids, their lives change in multiple and beneficial ways. Additionally, most of these students enter college, where they gather with other students and create their own university

organizations in order to assist their communities' unmet needs. In these university organizations, Black students carry out a series of programs where they put into practice everything they learned in the organizations they attended when they were growing up. One of the programs they conduct in the university is political formation. They consider that it is necessary to continue studying about Black history, but what I found out is that the political ideology studied in university is much deeper and it is more focused on analyzing the structural racism that exists in the world. These university organizations dig into the multiple problems that cause Black communities to usually live in peripheral areas, among other issues such as lack of quality education, precarious housing, terrible health care, or even unemployment and malnutrition. These university students are aware that social issues that affect Black communities have a historical background that is rooted in all societies and that it will not be easy to uproot, but they are committed to work hard to help improve the quality of life in their communities. To achieve that heroic mission, these students carry out multiple activities in Black neighborhoods where they meet with children, young people, adults, and the elderly. With every group, they develop several workshops taking into account the characteristics of every member of the group and their needs that should be met. For instance, they help kids do their homework and teach them about their own culture. Also, they carry out workshops with women in which they talk about their stories and teach about women's rights. In a park, they have recreational activities with the elderly to make them work out to improve their health. In addition, they lead health



campaigns in which doctors go to Black neighborhoods to do health checks and to give them medicines because many of them do not have health insurance. Moreover, these university students lead meetings with the whole community in order to hear their social problems such as criminality in the area and find out their solutions.

Sarama is one of the interviewed students who as a kid participated in an organization and when she entered the university, she joined a university group called CEUNA in which she could help the members of her neighborhood in a more significant way. She told me that she had lots of racist encounters when she was at school because she was the only Black student in her classes. But when she joined CEUNA, her life changed completely:

When I entered the university, I participated in the CEUNA student group, and there, I saw that the relationship between Black people, between Black students, was different. I liked it because it was very familiar. When I was at school, the Black students, I felt that we did not integrate because there was a rejection on our part, yes, but already in the university I saw that we had a very family relationship and I was during all my university participating in that process, and that was when I learned to accept myself, to recognize from where I came from, to know my story, to know that I had rights and to understand all that process that I had gone through during school, and to overcome all that issue that obviously one is already an adult and yet continues to experience racism, but then one become aware of all that, but there are people who obviously not, who you find are

Black, but who still have those childhood complexes that are the result of racism. (Sarama's interview)

Talking to Sarama was very satisfactory because she is proof of resistance and survival of racism. Her story is very tough. She struggled during her childhood and adolescence at school. But thanks to the motivation she got every time she attended her Black organization, she continued fighting to finish school and then attend the university. Stories like this one inspired the main objective of this research, which is to give great recognition to multiple Black organizations for the great work they have developed with the African-descendent children, helping them move on with their lives and teaching them how to overcome despite all the racism they suffer on a daily basis.

Teacher Amber strongly agrees with Sarama and she also highlights how vital it is that Black students enroll in a social organization when they go to college, as a way of surviving in this new space that could offer great moments as well as harsh ones. Teacher Amber indicates:

It is an option, in the university many blows are also received, the university also hits, the university is also immersed in these racist, classist and sexist structures. So being part of an organizational process can alleviate this situation and can help withstand the blow while dealing with it, not in an individual way but in a collective way in which students can think about possibilities of joint action. It is good because when I face patriarchy or racism only as my individual problem, it is very difficult for me

to advance to fight, whereas when I face it collectively, it is easier to find solutions and overcome. (Amber's interview)

Teacher Amber also emphasized that when Black children are small, it would be good if they enrolled in a Black organization in order to reinforce their roots, culture, and identity. But after having undergone a long process in these former organizations, and when they manage to enter university, the most important thing is that these students become part of any type of social organization in which a good social, political, or cultural community organizing process is carried out. The goal is that in this new organization, they put into practice all the knowledge they have acquired in their former organizations, and together with their colleagues, they can work so that they can contribute to the betterment of society.

Furthermore, Teacher Amber reveals:

I believe that the university organizational processes give it back a sense of community, of collectivity and it gives fire, it gives oxygen to the social struggle and the possibility of also solving those pains and those blows, and those day-to-day problems. I also believe that a university socialization space strengthens training because the university is not only a space to go to study but also to think about what actions we are going to take and how, as well as it becomes a space for deepening information, and you know, because it is a dialogue again between peers in which I can feel calmer, because if I dialogue with my peers, there I also have a different possibility of solving problems. Then, I definitely believe that

these university processes are very important, they are necessary, and they are also giving other dimensions and other meanings to university life. (Amber's interview)

As teacher Amber mentions, since Black kids are very young, they should become part of an organizational process where they will strengthen their customs, develop a cultural identity, and raise their community consciousness.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

To conclude, this investigation was very satisfactory because all the objectives were fulfilled since all the documents, questionnaires, and interviews conducted confirmed that for Black students, it is essential to attend Black organizations where they are assisted with academic enrichment to better their chances of attending college. Also, they find a safe space to talk about some racist situations they might encounter at school, and collectively, they come up with strategies to deal with these circumstances. Additionally, it was very pleasing to observe how these organizations teach their students about Black histories, cultures, philosophies, ideologies, ontologies, and epistemologies. Learning about their own culture makes Black students embrace their own identity more while participating in the academic, religious, community, and cultural programs that their teachers offer. Best of all, most of the Black students, who participate in the organizations that were part of this research, significantly improve their academic performance at school, and some of them have already attended and graduated college. To highlight the great job that Black organizations carry out with Black students, this research study was conducted to illustrate how these organizations' programs influence multiple people and aim to improve the quality of life of their students, their families, and their communities.

One of the best outcomes obtained in this research were the sources that contradict some studies that affirmed that Black students and their families were accounted for the racial disparity in the educational achievement gap in which

some Black children have low academic success. This research's outcomes refute the theory that the anthropologist John Ogbu had about Black students underperforming at school because supposedly, they do not want to be perceived as "acting White." After conducting several studies, Ogbu (2003) concluded that:

in some cases dominant cultural attitudes can oppress or alienate particular students to the point where they feel they have no choice but to put themselves on the margins of mainstream activity. Such students may develop an oppositional cultural identity, meaning that they define themselves not by who they are, but by how they differ from or oppose mainstream culture. Instead of aspiring to do well in school, for example, or to get along well with teachers, the students may aspire not to do well and not to be liked by teachers. (p. 32)

Although Ogbu's theory affirms that sometimes Black students underachieve intentionally in school and in standardized testing due to a fear of being stereotyped as acting White, this investigation found out that Black students' underperformance is not related to the theory of oppositional culture or the burden of acting White. On the contrary, this study demonstrated that several Black students underperform at school because they are immersed in a racist social and academic system that makes it very difficult to perform well in their educational institutions. Issues such as racism, poverty, school conflicts, segregated classes, hidden curriculum, teachers' low expectations, and

inequitably funded public schools are more the real causes of Black students' underachievement.

Moreover, there were many studies analyzed that showed that the big racial academic achievement gap among Black students and other students still persists in the education system not only in the United States but also in Colombia. Even though the governments have implemented multiple strategies to reduce this gap, the efforts have not been enough. Furthermore, many authors think that rather than focusing solely on test scores, studies show that administrators and teachers need to consider schools in a much broader context. For that reason, school officials are also investigating Black and White differences in discipline referrals, dropout rates, educational aspirations, and perceptions of the school climate in addition to identifying and applying successful instructional methods. Moreover, the racial academic gap is also found in course level enrollment, performance in specific courses, rates of participation in gifted programs, and in special education placement. Notwithstanding, when designing strategies to improve the academic achievement level students have, it is necessary to take into account their voices because they are the ones who know what is happening in their lives, so they should be the main advisors in those strategies. If students feel that they play a main role in the proposals that reform their education, they would know they are accountable for the success of those laws or strategies. Moreover, it will be convenient for teachers to know about the reasons why some Black students do not do well at schools, so the relationship between Black students and teachers

will be better because teachers would understand what is going on with their students. Finally, teachers should reflect on how essential it is to evaluate their classes and the learning materials they use to teach students, since some of them create and reinforce the negative stereotypes some students have on African-descent communities.

In addition, there were three main aspects found in the interviews and questionnaires that, according to the participants, would make a big difference in Black students' academic performance. The aspects were school conflicts, segregated classes, and hidden curriculum.

### **School Conflicts**

From all my interviewees, Valentine was the one who faced more hostile encounters with people in her school. She mentioned how she was publicly assaulted by classmates and teachers. She also remarked how her mother defended and supported her while she was learning to navigate White supremacy in her institution. Valentine indicated:

Being Black in a public school, she (her mother) always took my side when it came to conflicts with the teachers and administrators, she always had my back, and there were a lot of moments while I was learning how to navigate in White supremacy in my school, where I got in trouble and she could punish me, but when she didn't think I was wrong, she would always defend me, which prevented them, the administrators at my school, from being able to label me as a troublemaker. (Valentine's interview)



Valentine knew she was not alone, that her mother had her back. That allowed her to continue being a high achiever despite the harsh moments she was having. Sometimes Black students are labeled as trouble-makers because they fight racism in the same harsh way. When someone discriminates against them, sometimes they respond by arguing or fighting with that person. As a consequence, some of them are punished with retention in a grade, suspension, or expulsion. For all these reasons, parents' support is essential in the lives of Black students. Analyzing Valentine's interview, it was evident that if her mother had not defended and supported her, she might have dropped out of school, or she might have been expelled. Subsequently, Valentine would not have been the successful PhD student she is today.

### **Segregated Classes**

There are some theorists who affirm that the kind of classes a student is placed in since his/her first day of school will determine if s/he will go to college or not (and everything that decision implies). In countries like the United States, students cannot decide what kind of "segregated" classes they want to take because it is assigned by teachers who certify both if they are smart enough to take advanced classes, or if they are not so smart, which means that they would have to take vocational classes. This kind of placement is one of the academic gear levers that will determine a student's academic progress or regression. What this means is that teachers have the power to change a student's future in a positive as well as in a negative way. When this change takes a negative track,

it is necessary that parents intervene and demand that the school place their kids in a track that will assure their children's college entrance.

Patricia, one of my participants, told me the story about how her mother took action when she found out that she was not taking college prep courses in her new school:

I remember her coming up to the school and she sat with me in every class that day, and I remember her talking to the principal, and then I got moved to the "excel gate program" classes. But I realized if not having my mom as my advocate, I would've probably had a different path. (Patricia's interview)

In my opinion, when the school denies Black students the chance to excel in classes, they are failing them, and therefore, parents have to advocate for them. If more Black students in schools were placed in AP classes, that would have a big impact not only on them and their families but also in their communities. We need more Black students going to college, we need more Black students getting the knowledge and tools to contribute to their communities, and we need more Black students playing an active and influential role in the institutions that rule their countries. To achieve this mission, Black kids need advocacy and support from everyone involved in their lives, especially their parents.

### **Hidden Curriculum**

Usually academic curriculum is designed in a Western framework, giving priority to Western history and knowledge. Meanwhile, other cultures' history,

literature, contributions, and knowledge are diminished, ignored, erased, or hidden. Usually, thousands of Black students do not learn about their ancestors' epistemologies, traditional customs, religions, political practices, languages, philosophies, or histories in their schools. Charlie, one of my participants, revealed, "in English, we never read African-American authors, or Afro-Caribbean authors, or anything like that, so it was very white washed" (Charlie's interview). In every educational institution, students should learn about Black communities' worldwide throughout history. I am not only talking about slavery and the Civil Rights Movements, but also about Black people's ways of thinking, their relationship with the world, their perceptions about society, and their contributions to humanity. Black kids deserve to grow up learning about their real and complete history not only at home but also at school. Moreover, the rest of society should also acquire knowledge about Africans and their descendants. It is important to be clear that not only Black students should learn about Black history and cultures, but also every single student should learn about it. This means that, not only predominantly Black schools should include topics about Black people in their curricula, but also every other school. Fortunately, nowadays, some schools are implementing an ethnic studies-based curriculum in which they are diversifying the contents of their lessons in order to teach their diverse students about their history and cultures.

On the other hand, as stated at the beginning of this paper, there are several familial factors that also influence Black students during their lives. These factors were not explored deeply in this investigation because the main focus

was on Black organizations, but the three data collection instruments used throughout the research shed light on how few familial factors impacted the students' academic lives. The most evident factors were family academic background, lack of study time with parents, and domestic violence. In the interviews and questionnaires, children, parents, and teachers demonstrated that many of the families that were part of the Black organizations did not have an advanced academic level that could contribute to the educational lives of the children. In fact, numerous mothers and especially fathers never finished their primary or secondary studies. However, the good news was that some of the participant organizations had an alliance with the Board of Education, which certified them to conduct academic programs where parents could finish their studies. This significant act was very beneficial for some families because then parents could help better their children with school work, and children were proud of how their parents fought for achieving one of their dreams. The second familial factor was lack of study time with parents. The data demonstrated that this factor was caused by several reasons. The first one was related with the previous factor. Sometimes, parents could not help their children do school work because they did not know about the topics that the children were studying. And the second reason was that parents worked pretty hard and for long periods of time, so they did not have enough time to spend with their children. Actually, on some occasions, some children stayed home alone because their parents did not have money to hire a babysitter. To avoid that situation, some Black organizations had after-school programs where students developed many activities and also did

their homework. The third familial factor that came up in the data collection was domestic violence. From time to time, children as well as mothers were mistreated by the man of the house, who regularly reminded them that because he was the head of the family, he could do whatever he wanted to, and that everyone in the house had to do what he commanded because he was in charge of the household. In this study, some children confessed that when they were mistreated by their parents, or when they observed how their mothers were abused by their fathers, it caused them significant trauma that affected their academic performance at school. For that reason, some Black organizations had psychologists who assisted these children and mothers by talking to them about ways of dealing with domestic violence.

In conclusion, there are several family, school, and community factors that impact Black students' academic performance in negative ways, to the extent that many of these students do not graduate high school and do not get admitted to college. To counteract these unfortunate situations, several Black organizations work with these students to help them overcome these obstacles. In addition, racism was a relevant issue throughout the investigation. Most of the Black students were victims of racial discrimination by the way they were mistreated at school as well as they were victims of structural racism by the precarious conditions in which they lived including poverty, unequal education, terrible health systems, dreadful housing, and malnutrition, among others. In fact, in the workshops that some organizations carried out about racism, it was evident that many Black students did not understand the causes and effects of

racism in the world. They did not have a clear explanation on why they and their relatives went through harsh situations at school and in their communities.

Actually, some of these students blamed themselves because they thought they were responsible for their bad fate. But in these workshops, teachers explained that historical and external factors were the real causes of the structural racism they were immersed in.

During this qualitative research, the first difference identified between the American educational system and the Colombian educational system is that the United States schools are funded based on property taxes, whereas in Colombia, schools' funding is assigned according to the budget the local government has. What is paradoxical is both in Colombia and in the United States, the educational institutions where the majority of students are Black are poorly funded, while schools where the majority of the population is White, receive a great amount of funding. Most of the interviews, questionnaires, and documents reviewed demonstrated that the funding disparity is a consequence of structural racism, because this inequality is not only part of the educational system but also of the health, economic, and social system. As one teacher stated in her interview, racism permeates all aspects of life in Black people and Black communities. The second difference is that in American schools, students learn more about Black history and culture because the United States has academic careers in the universities that train people to teach about Africa and its Diaspora. On the other hand, the Black movement in Colombia has struggled for decades, demanding the Board of Education to implement Black studies at schools and in the

universities, but it has been almost impossible because institutional racism obstructs the entry of other types of knowledge that are not European whites. The third difference is that Black organizations in the United States receive more funding from the government or philanthropists, who have a better economic status, but in Colombia, Black organizations cannot admit a lot of students because it is very difficult for them to raise the money to support all the programs they want to carry out.

Moreover, during this qualitative research, all the factors framed in the critical race and intersectionality frameworks were examined in order to recognize how they operated in the lives of the Black students, parents, and teachers who were part of this significant study. First of all, it was revealed that Black children were affected by what happened in their homes, schools, and neighborhoods. What happened to their families, teachers, and even people in their communities impacted them significantly, especially in economic and social aspects. Additionally, the outcomes exposed that Black women were victims of different kinds of discrimination concerning mainly their race, gender, and class. For instance, many of these women did not graduate high school, some of them were unemployed or employed in lower class jobs in which they were humiliated, they had survived all kind of violence, they and their children lived in precarious conditions, and they affirmed to be racially discriminated against in different places all the time. Black women are usually oppressed in all aspects of their lives but as the interviewees highlighted, they keep fighting to demand that all their needs are satisfied, their rights respected, and to get a better quality of life.

To end, I would like to acknowledge all the Black organizations around the world that permanently work with Black students by assisting them with academic enrichment in order to improve their academic performance and guarantee that they can have a better chance to enter and graduate college. Also, thanks for all the educational, religious, community, and cultural programs developed with these students that foster their life skills and promote cultural enrichment by teaching them about Black histories, cultures, philosophies, ideologies, ontologies, and epistemologies. Last but not least, thanks for all the academic, social, political, cultural, and recreational activities in which Black students reinforce their ethnic identity, embrace a leadership process, and boost their academic knowledge with the purpose of enhancing their self-esteem and securing their wellbeing. But although Black organizations play a significant role in the Black community, some leaders are concerned because there are not enough organizations available to prepare more Black students to deal with their academic and social situations, and to help them meet the overwhelming needs they have in their communities. For that reason, the existing organizations are preparing more and more children and youth so that in the future they can create their own social, academic, or cultural education where they will help more people in their communities, as a way of giving back to their people what they obtained while participating in their Black organizations.



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