Curriculum Vitae

MICHELLE C. SERMON, MS, MSW, LGSW

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EDUCATION

2016-Present

PhD Candidate, Expected Graduation May 2022
School of Social Work
University of Maryland, Baltimore
Baltimore, Maryland
Dissertation Title: *Centering Black Lives: Exploring Oral Histories of Legacy African American Women in the Black Belt to Heal the Wounds of Racialization as Justice*
Dissertation Chair: Nalini Negi, PhD
Committee: Iris Carlton-LaNey, PhD, Henry Gregory, PhD, Brenda Jones-Harden, PhD, Corey Shdaimah, PhD

2010-2012

Master of Social Work, Clinical Concentration
Department of Social Work
College of Health and Human Services
George Mason University
Fairfax, Virginia

2000-2003

Master of Science, Human Genetics
(Genetic Counseling Concentration)
Department of Genetics and Human Genetics
Graduate School
Howard University
Washington, District of Columbia
Thesis Title: *Genetics Information in the African American Community: Implications for Public Health*
Thesis Advisor: Charmaine Royal, PhD
Committee: Verle Headings, MD, PhD, Franklin Ampy, PhD

1996-1999

Bachelor of Science in Biology (Molecular Concentration)
University of North Carolina at Pembroke
Pembroke, North Carolina

CLINICAL LICENSURE

2016-Present

Licensed Graduate Social Worker, Washington, District of Columbia

RESEARCH INTERESTS

- Rural, Southern African Americans
- Racialization
- Trauma and Traumatic Stress
- Oral History Research
- Centering the Black Experience
- Mental Health Outcomes

HONORS

2021-Present	Presidential Student Leadership Institute (PSLI)
2021	The Michigan Center for African American Aging Research (MCUAAAR) and The Program for Research on Black Americans (PRBA) 2021 Summer Mentoring Program (Mentee)
2012	MSW Leadership Award in Social Work
2012	Outstanding MSW Field Student in Social Work Nominee
1999	Who's Who Among Students in American Colleges and Universities

INDEPENDENT TEACHING EXPERIENCES

School of Social Work
University of Maryland Baltimore County, Baltimore, Maryland

Spring 2022	Human Behavior in the Social Environment II (BSW Course)
Spring 2021	Human Behavior in the Social Environment II (BSW Course)

Arts and Sciences: Biological Sciences
College of Southern Maryland, LaPlata Campus

Spring 2006	Principles of Genetics Principles of Genetics Laboratory

TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIPS

School of Social Work
Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia

Spring 2021	Concentration Social Policy, Special Topic: Child and Youth

Wellbeing (MSW course)

RESEARCH EXPERIENCES

Sense of Community and Maternal Functioning Among Rural Parents
2021-Present, Research Assistant
PI: Brenda Jones-Harden, PhD
The goal of this study is to examine the relationship between sense of community, as a protective factor, and parental depression and stress, as risk factors to child outcomes, in rural southern US communities.

- Conducted literature review
- Assisted the research team with data analysis
- Co-authored results for submission to a peer-reviewed journal and conference presentations

The Ties that Bind: An Exploration of Son-in-law and Father-in-law Relationships in Black Families
2017-2018, Graduate Research Assistant
PI: Ericka Lewis, PhD
The goal of this study was to examine the relationship between Black father-in-law and son-in-law dyads to understand the impact on Black family functioning.

- Assisted research team with data management
- Conducted qualitative data analysis
- Conducted literature review
- Co-authored study findings for submission to professional conferences and peer-reviewed journals

QPI Program Evaluation
2017-2018, Graduate Research Assistant
PI: Ericka Lewis, PhD
The goal of this study was to assess and evaluate the QPI program for community effectiveness.

- Assisted research team with data management and data analysis
- Conducted literature review
- Conducted qualitative data analysis
- Provided oversight to masters' level researcher
- Reviewed and provided feedback on dissemination and implementation program processes

Tailoring an Evidence-Based Practice to Parents Raising Preschoolers with Autism: Strengths, Challenges, and Future Research Directions
2016-2017, Graduate Research Assistant
PI: Sarah Dababnah, PhD
The goal of this study was to examine the effectiveness of The Incredible Years intervention program, tailored to families of preschool children diagnosed with autism.

- Assisted research team with data management and data analysis
- Conducted quantitative and qualitative data analysis
- Conducted literature review
- Co-authored results for submission to peer-reviewed journal and conference presentations

Intersection of Race, Gender and MSW Student Experiences
2012-2014, Research Assistant
PI: Dr. Halaevalu F. Ofahengaue Vakalahi, PhD
The goal of this study was to explore the racialized, gendered experiences of female students of color enrolled in MSW programs at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs).

- Collected qualitative data
- Conducted qualitative data analysis
- Co-authored results for submission to peer-reviewed journal and conference presentations
- Presented findings at professional social work conference (working paper presentation)

Genetics Information in the African American Community: Implications for Public Health
2002-2003, Research Assistant
PI: Charmaine Royal, PhD
The goal of this study was to assess the uptake of basic genetics information in the African American community and the effectiveness of educational tools and techniques.

- Conducted literature review
- Developed study educational materials, intervention strategies and data collection tools
- Coordinated the research design and protocol
- Collaborated with local physicians to recruit participants
- Collected qualitative and quantitative data (participant interviews)
- Managed data and conducted data analysis

HEmochromatosis and IRon Overload Screening Study (HEIRS)
2000-2003, Genetic Counselor
PI: Dr. Victor Gordeuk, MD
The goal of this study was to assess the prevalence of hemochromatosis and iron overload among African Americans in Washington, DC.

- Conducted qualitative and quantitative interviews
- Assisted the research team in data management and data analysis
- Recruited and retained patient participants
- Provided genetic counseling services

Genome Sequencing
2000-2002, Laboratory Technician

PI: J. Craig Venter, PhD
The goal of this study was to complete genome sequencing of the human, mouse, and drosophila genomes.

- Collaborated with the research team to sequence and collect genome data

PEER-REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS

Vakalahi, H. F., **Sermon, M.**, Richardson, A., Dillard, V., & Moncrief, A. (2014). Do you see me? The complex experiences of women of color MSW students. *Intercultural Education*, 25(5), 418-427.

Mural, R. J., et al. (2002). A comparison of whole-genome shotgun-derived mouse chromosome 16 and the human genome. *Science*, 296(5573) 1661-1671.

MANUSCRIPTS PENDING PUBLICATION

Lewis, E. M., Thomas, A., Lemmons, B. P., Browne, D. C., & **Sermon, M. C.** (Revise & Resubmit). Longitudinal Effects of Positive Father Involvement on Child Well-Being Among Families At-Risk for Neglect.

Lewis, E. M., Murugan, V., Feely, M., Williams, K. A., **Sermon, M. C.**, & Farooq, S. (Under Review). Quality Parenting Initiative: Engaging Diverse Stakeholders as Champions for Child Welfare Systems Reform.

Sermon, M., Lee, K., Drouin, A., & Jones Harden, B. (in preparation). Sense of Community and Maternal Functioning Among Rural Parents.

BOOK CHAPTERS

Sermon, M. (2022). Managing Intersecting Identities While Dissertating in Place. In R. B. Goings, S. Cupid, M. Gardner, & A. Tomlin (Eds.), *Dissertating During a Pandemic: Narratives of Success from Scholars of Color*. Information Age Publishing.

PEER-REVIEWED PRESENTATIONS & GUEST LECTURES

Sermon, M. (2021, October). *A Scientific, Humanistic Approach Towards Race, Equity, and Inclusion* (Virtual Course). Office of State Cooperative Programs, Food and Drug Administration, October 28, 2021.

Sermon, M. (2020, February). *Racialized Traumatic Stress.* Women of Change Community Conversation. Elevation Ministries, Halethorpe, MD. February 1, 2020.

Lewis, E., **Sermon, M.**, Woolley, M. (2020, January). *The Ties That Bind: An* Exploration of Son-in-Law and Father-in-Law Relationships in Black Families. Oral presentation at the Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR) Annual Conference. Washington, DC. January 15-19, 2020.

Sermon, M. (2019, December). Reclaiming Our Truth: A Colloquy for Youth and Adults that Centers Race, Honors Difference and Strengthens Community. Community Collaborative. Wingate Community Center, Wingate, NC. December 22, 2019.

Sermon, M. (2019, June). *The Intersection of Race and Professional Ethics in Practice.* Professional Development Training, Voices for a Second Chance (VSC). Washington, DC. June 25-26, 2019.

Sermon, M. (2018, July). *The Ethics of Treating Trauma.* Professional Development Ethics Training, Voices for a Second Chance (VSC). Washington, DC. July 9, 2018.

Sermon, M. (2017, November). *Trauma and the Brain.* Professional Development Trauma Training, Voices for a Second Chance (VSC). Washington, DC. November 5-6, 2017.

Dababnah, S., Olson, E., Huntington, S., & **Sermon, M**. (2017, May). *Tailoring an Evidence-Based Practice to Parents Raising Preschoolers with Autism: Strengths, Challenges, and Future Research Directions.* Poster presentation at the International Meeting for Autism Research. San Francisco, CA. May 11, 2017.

Vakalahi, H. F., **Sermon, M.**, Richardson, A., Dillard, V., & Moncrief, A. (2012, November). *Female Students of Color: The Complexities of Lived Experience (Working paper)*. Paper presentation at the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Annual Program Meeting (APM). Washington, DC, November 9-12, 2012.

PRACTICE EXPERIENCE

2020-Present **MNCS Consulting** (Washington, District of Columbia)
Managing Director

- Evaluate DEI infrastructure and assess DEI integration within a science-based non-profit to develop a sustainable DEI framework and strategies across the organization’s services and partnerships
- Centering race, create innovative diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) workshops and/or trainings; manage training development and facilitation for government agencies

- Manage administrative processes, community engagement, and external partnerships to advance DEI initiatives and improve organizational outcomes
- Provide consultant counseling services to non-profit and corporate organizations
- Conduct market research, program data collection and analysis, and present findings to stakeholders and investors
- Collect and interpret data analytics to improve program performance and innovation

2013-Present **Voices for a Second Chance (VSC)** (Washington, District of Columbia)
Clinical Program Supervisor

- Provide expert advice to senior leadership and program staff on program development, management and innovation efforts
- Design trauma-informed, therapeutic group curriculum to serve 10-15 incarcerated women and returning citizens in weekly group sessions
- Facilitate biweekly mental health counseling and weekly trauma group sessions with 10-15 justice-involved clients, both in the community and inside DC Department of Corrections facilities, to aid in their re-entry planning
- Create and administer professional development trainings for social workers, nurses and other helping professionals with a criminal justice and corrections focus to promote racial and social equity in practice
- Weekly supervise and mentor 2-4 BSW, MSW and mental health counseling student interns, per semester, in social and racial justice advocacy for incarcerated and returning citizens

2016-2017 **Vesta, Inc.** (Forestville, Maryland)
Mental Health Therapist

- Provided individual and family mental health therapy, treatment planning and assessments to outpatient and residential adults
- Successfully collaborated with a mental health team to coordinate client care and well-being for a fluctuating caseload between 5-12 clients

SERVICE TO THE PROFESSION

2017-Present ***Social Work Field Instructor***
Voices for a Second Chance (VSC)

- Howard University
  - 3-1st year MSW students
  - 1-2nd year MSW student
- Gallaudet University
  - 1-4th year BSW student
  - 1-2nd year MSW student
- Eastern Mennonite University
  - 1-4th year BSW student
- Marymount University
  - 1-1st year Mental Health Counseling student

2012 & 2018 — ***Student Volunteer***
Society for Social Work and Research
Annual Conferences

SERVICE TO THE UNIVERSITY

University of Maryland Baltimore

2022 — ***Moderator (invited)***
DEI Research Panel: Adopting an Anti-racist and Anti-oppressive Approach to Research
School of Social Work

2022 — ***Panelist***
Critical Convos (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: Beyond the Checkboxes)
School of Social Work

2017-Present — ***Orientation Volunteer***
Doctoral Program
School of Social Work

2020-2021 — ***Search Committee Member***
Tenure Track Faculty Member with focus on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
School of Social Work

SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY

2021 — ***Transcriber***
Freedmen's Bureau Papers
Smithsonian Digital Volunteers, Transcription Center

2021 — ***Transcriber***

African American Education
TranscribeNC, State Archives of North Carolina

CONTINUING EDUCATION

2022 *Conference Attendee/Training Participant*
Social Work Science for Racial, Social, and Political Justice
Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR) 26th Annual Conference
Washington, District of Columbia

2021 *Training Participant*
Mid-Atlantic Anti-Oppression Social Work Coalition: Defining Anti-Racist Social Work
The Catholic University of America
Washington, District of Columbia

2021 *Training Participant*
COVID-19 and Field Education: The Next Phase
Howard University
Washington, District of Columbia

2021 *Training Participant*
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Workplace Certification
Muma College of Business
University of South Florida
Tampa, Florida

2021 *Training Participant*
Third Conference on Advancing Early Psychosis Care in the United States: Addressing Inequities-Race, Culture and COVID
American Psychiatric Association
Washington, District of Columbia

2020 *Training Participant*
Social Work in Virtual Spaces: COVID-19 Responses
Howard University
Washington, District of Columbia

2020 *Training Participant*
Using MI to Improve Health Outcomes during COVID
George Mason University
Fairfax, Virginia

2020 — *Training Participant*
COVID-19 Contact Tracing
Johns Hopkins University
Baltimore, Maryland

2019 — *Training Participant*
Enhancing the District's Response to Trauma: EMDR Basic Certification
Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants
Government of the District of Columbia
Washington, District of Columbia

2019 — *Training Participant*
Trauma Training Institute: Enhancing the District's Response to Trauma
Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants
Government of the District of Columbia
Washington, District of Columbia

2019 — *Training Participant and Module Presenter*
The Intersection of Race and Professional Ethics
Voices for a Second Chance (VSC)
Washington, District of Columbia

2019 — *Training Participant*
How Being Trauma-Informed Improves Criminal Justice System Responses (Train the Trainer Certification)
SAMHSA's GAINS Center for Behavioral Health and Justice Transformation
Rockville, Maryland

2018 — *Training Participant*
Deepening Cultural Awareness and Capability
Voices for a Second Chance (VSC)
Washington, District of Columbia

2017-2018 — *Training Participant*
Educators in Training Program (EDiT)
University of Maryland Baltimore
Baltimore, Maryland

2017 — *Training Participant and Module Presenter*
Infusing Trauma Informed Care Approaches for Justice-Involved Citizens
Voices for a Second Chance (VSC)
Washington, District of Columbia

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

2021-Present	African Heritage Studies Association (AHSA)
2021-Present	National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW)- Washington, DC Chapter (ABSW)
2021-Present	Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASAALH)
2012-Present	Society for Social Work Research (SSWR)
2018	International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS)
2012-2017	Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)

Abstract

Title of Dissertation: *Centering Black Lives: Exploring Oral Histories of Legacy African American Women in the Black Belt to Heal the Wounds of Racialization as Justice*

Michelle Crowder Sermon, Doctor of Philosophy, 2022

Dissertation Directed by: Nalini Negi, PhD, MSW, Associate Professor, University of Maryland, Baltimore School of Social Work

Narratives of unresolved racialized injury among Legacy African American(s) (LAA) women in the rural US south, or the Black Belt, offer meaning to observed disparities and healing to the contemporary and future lives of LAA in Black Belt communities. This dissertation study considered LAA women's layered exposures to racialized adverse live experiences (ALE)/traumas with historical, cultural, intergenerational, race-based, and complex traumas, and the impact of this multidimensional trauma perspective, on wellness outcomes for rural African Americans. Adverse mental and physical health conditions among LAA are critically disproportionate in this population yet current research and treatment protocols to address these disparities are based in a Eurocentric worldview. For example, race is often examined in research as a demographic category without fully conceptualizing the impact of racialization. By applying the Black Lives Matter Healing Justice framework, this study centers the Black experience and aims to elucidates the relationship between racialization and ALE/trauma through the voices and lived experiences of LAA women in the Black Belt, captured in archived oral histories. Employing thematic, critical constructivist, and historical discourse analysis, this study also sought to reveal the language of racialized trauma, expressed in the archived oral/life histories of LAA

women sharing their ALE of Jim Crow segregation and racial integration in the Black Belt. Findings suggest that Race-Place-Space collectively served as the foundation of the gendered and racialized experiences of this population. Relying on my personal reflective experiences as a LAA Black Belt woman and an assembled research advisory panel (RAP) as well as theory and extant literature, I discuss the meaning of Race-Place-Space, racialized trauma, and healing justice. Contributions and implications to social work practice and research are presented along with suggestions for future directions in research and practice centering the Black perspective.

Centering Black Lives: Exploring Oral Histories of Legacy African American Women in the Black Belt to Heal the Wounds of Racialization as Justice

by
Michelle Crowder Sermon

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, Baltimore in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2022

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Preface

As a little Black girl, growing up in the post-Jim Crow south, I understood that there was something different about the ways in which the Black people in my community lived and the ways the White people lived. Unsavory experiences with White children early in my schooling reminded me of those differences. I was fortunate, however, and knew that I had a greater purpose in society, because I was surrounded by Black people who instilled pride in me and demonstrated power. They owned, farmed, and hunted their lands, taught in the public schools, served in the military, attended college, assumed positions of leadership in White work environments, and created a culture of community that protected us, the Black children, from the ills of racism and injustice. This community also helped us, as Black children, navigate the treacherous and insidious ills of racialization that never ended. We were taught how to avoid trouble by maintaining excellence in our behavior, manners, and academics, in a way that eased the White people around us. Those of us who were able to successfully manage, would grow to do great things in life. Consequently, I have family and peers who have achieved excellence in their professional and personal lives on par and in greater degree, to our White counterparts.

While my community imparted their wisdom, there was little direct reflection shared on their experiences of racialization during racial segregation and overt White oppression. The elders would share stories of triumph and pain in their encounters with White people, but as children, we had limited insights and life experiences, to ask the profound questions that reveal the deeper meaning in their stories. My community was so great at concealing the most wretched horrors of racialization, that I emerged relatively

unscathed and naïve at the magnitude of racialization in my own existence. Everyone learned of slavery, emancipation, and Civil Rights, but I had no idea about the significant and direct role the people in my community played in these struggles. I learned later, after many of the elders had joined the ancestors, the significance of the Black people in my community to the resistance of White oppression. As I share in the Methods section, I was in my 3rd year of the PhD program before I knew that my uncle integrated the White high school!

Because of my upbringing in this dynamic community of people, I understood that it was always my responsibility to give back to that community. As I traversed college and career, those lessons never left me, nor did my community. When I came to UMB in pursuit of this research, I realized that the time had come for me to use my knowledge, skills, and abilities to help my rural southern community own our trauma language and experience, as these communities slowly lose the human capital and leverage that has sustained us since our ancestors arrived in the US.

The vision and long-term goals of this work are both purposeful and personal. The goal of my work is to enable my community to embrace the totality of our racialization so that we may address the harm that has been imposed to move beyond the hurt to healing. These rural southern Black communities are rich in tradition, legacy, and love and I intuitively believe that our history holds the key to our healing. While this work is very personal, this journey has never been about me or my professional mobility. It has all been for my people; to shine a light on their greatness and encourage future generations to embrace the legacy of resistance that has kept us thus far. I am privileged and honored to contribute to the liberation of my people through this research. I hope this work makes

all rural LAA peoples proud of me and empowered to elevate our greatness beyond our imaginations!

To the ancestors I know in heart, mind, and spirit and those who I will probably never know in my consciousness, who endorsed this work in your own way, through quiet, amplified whispers on my maternal grandmother's heavenly birthday… WOW! This degree is for you!

Acknowledgements

There are so many people that I must acknowledge, who have contributed to my life and this work, before and during this process. I would have to write another dissertation to name each one, so in the interest of time and space I will highlight a few by name and others by group as an acknowledgement of their love, support, and guidance, which kept me grounded and pushed me to be great.

My dissertation committee: Dr. Negi, Dr. Jones-Harden, Dr. Shdaimah, Dr. Carlton-LaNey, and Dr. Gregory. Thank you for giving me your best and validating my process. Every encounter made me stronger and a better researcher. Special thanks to Dr. Jones-Harden and her amazing lab staff for allowing me to join the Prevention and Early Adversity Research Lab (PEARL) as my accountability partners. I could not have finished this work in the time that I did without your constant support and encouragement! I must also acknowledge Jen Canapp, the knowledge keeper in the doctoral program, for keeping me on track with all of the deadlines to keep me moving forward in the program; Dr. Charlotte Bright, who encouraged and validated me and my work; and Dr. Bethany Lee, who helped me bring this dissertation to a close, for her dedication to my success and her transparency. I also acknowledge Sara Wood at the SOHP and her commitment and consistency in providing me with oral history resources that were invaluable to this project; Dr. Barry Lanman, oral historian, teacher, and mentor, thank you for introducing me to oral history and encouraging me to take my practice to the next level; and Dr. Halaevalu F. O. Vakalahi, my mentor and encourager, who planted the seeds that inspired my pursuit of a PhD in Social Work; you saw what I could not at the time!

I acknowledge my wonderful, enormous village! Although too numerous to name each one, y'all always showed up for me when I needed you the most. I was so proud to see many of you at my proposal defense, ready to ride for me! My VSC family; Paula, Margot, Diane, words can't express how you prepared me for this work by helping me own things about myself and appreciate the impact of racialization on Black people in White spaces. My UMB village, Kerry, Patrice, Shawna, Ivana; thank you for being a sounding board, sharing your creativity, helping me focus, and giving sound, honest advice everytime. My Virtual Village, Sandra (Glenn), Tyese (Aunt Jeannette and Uncle Gabe), Shafeqah (Terrance and the kids), Dr. Shanda, and Melissa; you sisters listened, encouraged, and shared your wisdom and I love you all for pouring into me! My sister circle expert, Dr. Sherella Cupid; you are the best and I am so grateful that you take my phone calls, respond to my texts, and send me positive vibes on a regular basis. Dr. Koren Goodman, my Soror and source of encouragement and uplift when I needed perspective and grounding. My lifelong friends, Amanda, Rashanda, Joy, Alvin; our friendship has stood the test of time and your confidence, words of wisdom, and encouragement were constant reminders of how far we have come from little ole Anson County, NC. I'm proud of us and I love y'all! I acknowledge my "country cousins, aunties, and uncles" in Anson, Union, Jones, and Craven counties in NC. You gave me revelation when I was stumped in my purpose and in this work. Your rural southern wisdom informed me and reminded me of who I am and where I come from. Thank you is not enough! I love all y'all!

Most important, I must acknowledge my family! I thank my ancestors for their legacy, influence, and strength; I thank my elders for sharing their wisdom and time. I

acknowledge my parents, Fulton and Judie Crowder, who never grew tired of my questions about life in rural Jim Crow NC; my mother-in-love, Dr. Norma Sermon-Boyd, who has been down this road, set the example, and shared her survival advice, encouragement, and love. My siblings and siblings-in-love, Michael "Buddy" and Dr. Shanda, Melissa and Brandon, Michelle and Rodney; you never tired of my phone calls, emails, and texts, you challenged me to be great, you encouraged me when I needed uplift, and your support has been eternal. Thank you falls short, but it's the best I've got! I love yall! My nieces and nephews, Mikey, Brianna, Natalia, Hannah, Bryson, Melanie, Fulton, and Morgan; y'all kept me laughing and encouraged! You are an amazing group of young people and I hope I make you proud! Special shout out to my cousin-in-love, Dr. Stacey, who gave me perspective and reminded me that I could finish this! Love you sis!

I acknowledge deeply my children, Laila, Rayna, Clayton, and Moriah, who endure these 6 years unlike any other children in the world! You grew up with me pursuing this degree and I hope you are proud of the work I have done to help move our people toward progress despite the ills of our racialization! This one is for you and your cousins, so that you can walk into places and spaces, proud of who you are and be appreciated for it!

My Lamonte', I have no words for what your support and sacrifice has meant to me! You have been there from the beginning of my college pursuits and saw me through a bachelors, two masters', and now a doctorate. You endured the late nights and long days with me, chauffeuring kids to school, dance, baseball, music, and other activities that required you to leave work early or arrive late without complaint. We did this and I

hope you are proud of this work! I learned to love my Black self the way I do because of you and the way you have always embraced that beautiful part of you. I love you beyond measure!

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List of Abbreviations

AA	African American
ALE	Adverse Live Event/Experience
BLM	Black Lives Matter
BLMHJ	Black Lives Matter Healing Justice
e.g.	for example
HBCU	Historically Black Colleges and Universities
HJ	Healing Justice
i.e.	that is
KKK	Ku Klux Klan
LAA	Legacy African Americans
NC	North Carolina
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
PWI	Predominantly White Institutions
RAP	Research Advisory Panel
SNCC	Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee
SOHP	Southern Oral History Program
UNC-CH	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
US	United States

Chapter 1: Introduction

Study Background and Significance

Health disparities in diagnosis, treatment, mortality, and morbidity persist in rural communities and among African Americans (Bhattacharya, 2013; Weaver et al., 2018). For African Americans in particular, disparities persist across generations, education status, socioeconomic status, gender and areas of the country in which people live (Seawell, Cutrona, & Russell, 2014). Remarkably, African Americans make up less than 15% of the total US population, while comprising more than 50% of the population living in the, largely rural, south (i.e., Black Belt and Black Rural South) (Rastogi et al., 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b). According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (2014), African American women, particularly in rural communities, experience poorer health outcomes, intensified by limited availability of and access to health promoting resources and services as well as mental illness stigma (Crumb, Mingo, & Crowe, 2019). Access and availability of physical and mental/behavioral health services is a hallmark of the challenges helping professionals encounter in addressing disparities in rural communities (Fiscella & Sanders, 2016). However, the historical racialization of African Americans' lived experiences as an adverse or traumatizing event from a Black perspective, is not well understood and warrants more attention in trauma diagnosis, research, intervention development and treatment protocols (A. Alvarez, 2020; Asnaani & Hall-Clark, 2017; Bryant-Davis, 2007). This disregard contributes to observed physical and mental health disparities, the limited availability of effective interventions, and deficiencies in treatment access for this population (Evans et al., 2016; Hemmings & Evans, 2018).

Racism and Historical Race Based Trauma

Legacy African Americans (LAA) are defined in the literature as the descendants of enslaved Africans in the United States, who embody "11 generations of legal enslavement and multigenerational bondage. [and subsequent] 5 generations of post-emancipation disenfranchisement in the Jim Crow South, where enslavement was not legal, but racism was institutionalized, and discrimination was state-sanctioned" (Jackson, Jackson & Jackson, 2018, p. 2). This history of American chattel slavery, a storied history of kidnapping, torture, cultural genocide and the persistent threat of sexual violence, physical violence and death, has been described by many scholars as traumatic (Bartholomew et al., 2018; R. Carter & Helms, 2002; Degruy, 2017; Jackson et al., 2018). Generational exposures to racism and racial discrimination are also described as traumatic (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005b; Carter & Helms, 2009; Seawell et al., 2014; Speight, 2007). Unfortunately, the trauma of racialization is obscured by customs and traditions (e.g., language, religion, education, American exceptionalism) that developed through the conditions of LAA enslavement and the myth of Black inferiority (Aird, 2008), including (a) coercive acculturation and loss of African cultural identity (i.e., African tribal ancestry, familial names, rituals, norms, institutions); (b) intergenerational trauma exposure and transmission of unresolved grief; and (c) overt, covert, and vicarious exposure to assiduous racism and racialization (i.e., racialized violence, discrimination, disenfranchisement). This history of racialization is theorized to contribute to contemporary health disparities (Jackson et al., 2018). As the complexities of trauma exposure are compounded by the realities of racism, the trauma of racialization positions LAA as a vulnerable population, at increased risk for adverse physical and mental health

outcomes (Noonan, Velasco-Mondragon, & Wagner, 2016).

The traumatic exposure of racialization has been shown to exhibit similar traumatic stress responses to those observed in victims of sexual harassment (Carter & Helms, 2002); childhood sexual abuse (Villena-Mata, 2002; Wyatt, 1990); and rape and domestic violence (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005b). Racialization, therefore, contributes significantly to stress related disparities in health, mental health, and wealth, subsequently deepening persistent psychological distress (Mays, Cochran, & Barnes, 2007; Wheeler, Brooks, & Brown, 2011). Existing treatment interventions to address disparities are inadequate and ineffective at addressing the unique circumstances of LAA complicated by racialization (Rodgers, 2006), hampering efforts to combat disparities and facilitate trauma relief and healing. To reduce or eliminate health disparities among LAA In the Black Belt region of the US, interventions must be iterative and specifically tailored to their unique needs and circumstances (Bhattacharya, 2013; Phillips & McLeroy, 2004). The experiences of racialized trauma perpetuate vulnerabilities in LAA by propagating insidious, unrelenting stress-related toxic burdens that present observable effects. This is especially true in the Black Belt region of the US, where LAA have remained relatively invisible since enduring the horrors of enslavement, Jim Crow segregation, and pervasive poverty for centuries and across generations (Probst, Moore, Glover, & Samuels, 2004).

LAA Women, Gendered Racism, Trauma, and Health

For LAA women in particular, the traumatic experience of racism is compounded by sexism, or gendered racism, placing them at greater risk for adverse health outcomes. Gendered racism is described as the “simultaneous and compounding” experiences of

racism and sexism, experienced by LAA women, causing emotional and psychological distress (M. K. Jones et al., 2022, p.1). This “double burden” stereotypes LAA women as less threatening than their LAA male counterparts and more easily exploitable (Wingfield, 2007, p. 199). The history of racialization contributes to the increased risk for trauma exposure of LAA women over their lifetime (Bartholomew et al., 2018; Cook et al., 2014) and gendered racism enables LAA women to be disempowered in their social conditions (Bond et al., 2021). While social supports, spirituality, and identity shifting (i.e., code switching) are traditional coping strategies that LAA women employ in response to their gendered and racialized positionality (L. J. Burton et al., 2020; M. S. Jones et al., 2021; Spates et al., 2020), persistent and prolonged resultant traumatic stress contributes to physical weathering (Geronimus, 1996), increasing mortality and morbidity in maternal health outcomes, HIV/AIDS, cardiovascular disease, cancer, obesity, and metabolic syndrome (Schnurr, Wachen, Green, & Kaltman, 2014), depression (Carr et al., 2014), anxiety (M. S. Jones et al., 2021), and cognitive decline/impairment leading to dementia/Alzheimer’s diagnoses (Hill-Jarrett & Jones, 2022). Further, research consistently finds that physical and mental health symptoms presenting in LAA women are often mischaracterized, underdiagnosed, and maltreated by helping professionals, who employ interventions that lack cultural relevance and are ineffective to treat traumatic stress symptoms in LAA women (Williams, Kanter, & Ching, 2018). In addition, there is little regarding how LAA women think about mental health and treatment (Ward, Clark, & Heidrich, 2009), thereby limiting the understanding of mental health professionals.

The literature also suggests that there are differences in the prevalence of

traumatic stress between urban and rural LAA women (Alim, Charney, & Mellman, 2006). However, the research on trauma, race, and coping among LAA has mainly focused on urban populations of Black women and has included all women of African ancestry regardless of their historically unique racialized experiences in the US (Bhattacharya, 2013; Lichter et al., 2007; Womack, 2007). Therefore, the distinct experiences of historical trauma exposure among LAA women are often neglected in the rural health literature and subsequently, indicators of traumatic stress, resilience, and coping among LAA women in the Black Belt are not well understood.

Adverse Life Events

Adverse life events (ALE) are "small-t (trauma)", non-life threatening, lived experiences such as humiliations, degradations, or regrets, that "evoke negative affect" and persistent stress, negatively impacting an individual's self-worth and perception of others (K. James & MacKinnon, 2012, p. 191). Although ALE are not traditionally associated with post-traumatic stress disorders, compounded, prolonged, and pervasive exposure to ALE has a wounding effect on mental and physical well-being (Seery, 2011). In particular, ALE associated with loss and grief (e.g., loss of employment or opportunity because of race) align with depressive disorder diagnoses, while defiant disorder diagnoses are associated with victimization through interpersonal (e.g., racial profiling) and witnessed violence (e.g., police shootings of unarmed Black people) (Bryant-Davis et al., 2017; Tiet et al., 2001). Although, excessive, prolonged ALE may be harmful, exposure to mild or moderate ALEs, with opportunities for recovery between stressors, may support the development of resilience to adversity (Seery, 2011). Place-making and meaningful activities through collectivism, racial socialization, and advocacy, provide

necessary respite, which the literature suggests, aids in the development of resilience beyond coping (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019; Seery, 2011).

The experience of racialization is a persistent ALE among LAA that is physically, emotionally, and psychologically injurious, with the potential to cause "big-T" trauma responses (e.g., victim of violence) and adverse health outcomes (K. James & MacKinnon, 2012, p. 191). Experienced in the context of five trauma models (i.e., historical, cultural, intergenerational, complex, and race-based), the wounding effect of ALE in LAA have a weathering effect on their health and well-being (Geronimus, 1996). This weathering effect is the result of chronic stress resulting from compounded ALE or persistent small-t traumas on their mental and physical health. Mental health conditions presenting in response to unresolved trauma exposure, persistent trauma symptoms, traumatic stress, and weathering include mood disorders such as depression, anxiety, substance use and abuse, and co-occurring disorders, in addition to anger and clinical diagnoses of bipolar disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Geronimus, 2001). Furthermore, interventions that promote healing and racial justice are either non-existent or rare in social work practice with LAA (Danzer et al., 2016; Harley & Stansbury, 2011; Woods-Giscombé & Black, 2010).

Gaps in the Literature

Although the literature suggests connections between trauma and health, it fails to explicitly examine the trauma-health relationship among LAA women in the Black Belt, particularly as it relates to historical, cultural, intergenerational, and race traumas. Contemporary trauma research approaches the trauma-health connection from a singular trauma exposure lens and neglects the impact of layered, compound trauma on health

outcomes, especially among LAA (Watson, DeBlaere, Langrehr, Zelaya, & Flores, 2016). Further, trauma, medical, and social work scholars traditionally employ a monolithic lens of urban LAA when examining trauma and health outcomes (D. Allen et al., 2019; Harris-Lacewell, 2003; Kelly, 1996; Okello, 2020; Prahlad, 2005), neglecting the diverse factors of social environment, historical influences, cultural values, and richness that exemplify the African diaspora, especially in Black Belt communities. This lens assumes that all LAA fit into one racialized identity and relate to their Blackness in the same manner (Prahlad, 2005).

The literature also fails to elevate racialized voices in defining and addressing the compounded influences of trauma/ALE exposures on health outcomes and effective treatments for LAA living in Black Belt communities. As such, effective interventions to counter adverse physical and mental health outcomes for LAA women are limited in scope and reach. Analyzing oral histories, Carlton-LaNey (1992) explains how aging LAA women farm workers in Black Belt communities, with "poor health" and "declining traditional resources" are "isolated and underserved" in part due to their rurality and the limitations of social workers to address their unique needs (p. 517). To rectify these issues with this critically vulnerable population, Carlton-Laney calls on social work professionals to honor the culture and values of LAA women and respect their effective problem-solving methods, through the development and implementation of culturally sensitive interventions (Carlton-LaNey, 1992, p. 523).

To investigate the relationship between racialization, as an adverse life experience or trauma, and mental health, this project explores how the history of race, place, and space, as an ALE, presents as trauma among LAA women in the Black Belt. This project

informs social work education and practice in addressing the diverse needs of African Americans and disrupts social work's racism and the predominant focus of social work research on individual interventions (McMahon & Allen-Meares, 1992; Corley & Young, 2018). The social work literature has marginally addressed structural and institutional racism for more than 35 years, thereby, inherently validating and preserving the status quo (Corley & Young, 2018). This focus on individual interventions and cultural sensitivity/competency training and education "is inadequate in opposing the societal and political conditions that perpetuate the racial disparities experienced by communities of color" (Corley & Young, 2018, p. 324). In centering the racial marginalization of rural LAA as an influencer on adverse wellness outcomes and disparities, this project contradicts racist paradigms and disrupts the social work status quo.

Importance and Implications of the Study

This project amplifies the voices and lived experiences of Black Belt LAA women, captured in archived oral histories, to understand the relationship between race, ALE, trauma, and wellness outcomes. These narratives of unresolved racialized injury offer meaning to observed disparities and healing to the contemporary and future lives of LAA in Black Belt communities. Specifically, this project employed qualitative analysis of archived oral/life histories of LAA women, sharing their ALE of Jim Crow segregation and racial integration in the Black Belt. This work considered the layered exposures of racialized ALE with historical (Sotero, 2006), cultural (Alexander, 2004), intergenerational (Gnazzo et al., 2016), race-based (Comas-Díaz, 2016; Comas-Díaz et al., 2019), and complex (Ford & Courtois, 2009; Herman, 1992) traumas and the impact of this multidimensional trauma perspective on wellness (SAMHSA's Trauma and

Justice Strategic Initiative, 2014; Swarbrick, 2006). Adverse mental and physical health conditions among LAA are critically disproportionate in the population (Bhattacharya, 2013; Williams & Sternthal, 2010). Current research and treatment protocols to address these disparities are based in a Eurocentric worldview and have been largely inept at altering this trend, evidenced by the continued efforts aimed at racial disparity elimination (Alegría et al., 2016). Many government research agencies, including The National Institutes of Health (NIH) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) either require or recommend that grantees collect race and ethnicity data, without fully conceptualizing what race measures (Cunningham, 2014; Yudell et al., 2020). Race is therefore interpreted in conflicting, divergent means that may be related to a biological, social or political perspective (Bhugra & Ayonrinde, 2001; Cunningham, 2014; Whaley, 2003). This introduces inherent racial biases and provides little insight into the role of race and racism in the lived experiences of racialized others. Based on the current understanding or misunderstanding of race in our society, broad assumptions of what race measures are drawn and determined by prevailing social or scientific directives.

However, there are encouraging trends in contemporary research, whereby scholars are examining the role of systemic and structural racism in disparities outcomes (Gee & Ford, 2011). Their findings suggest that racial physical and mental health disparities may be attributed to systemic racism, defined as the "the foundational, large-scale and inescapable hierarchical system of US racial oppression devised and maintained by Whites and directed at people of colour" (Feagin & Elias, 2013, p. 936). The institutions and policies that enable research agendas, methodologies, and interpretation of results, as well as the development and practical application of treatments and

interventions, fundamentally reflect these institutional racial biases. The paucity of literature and limited understanding of the trauma experiences of LAA women in the Black Belt, their exposure to compounded trauma, and the effects of traumatic stress and coping strategies is, therefore, not surprising. It is also significant because this means that contemporary measures and indicators of trauma likely do not consider the experiences of these women and thereby risk under-treating trauma and traumatic experiences.
Assuming the co-occurrence of gendered racism and racialized ALE/trauma present distinctly in Black Belt LAA women (Branch & Hanley, 2013; Durr & Harvey Wingfield, 2011; Hawthorne, 2019; Kemp, 2001; Rodrigues et al., 2021; Statz & Evers, 2020; Stevens-Watkins et al., 2014; L. B. Watson et al., 2016), this project contributes to our understanding of the complexities and nuances of their lived experiences, elucidates constructs of ALE/trauma and traumatic stress from their narratives, and reveals coping strategies employed for survival.

Specific Aim

Using thick, descriptive, in-depth, archived oral/life histories, recalling first-hand, lived experiences with Jim Crow segregation, integration, and post-integration/desegregation, the aim of this project was to utilize the BLMHJ framework to elucidate the definition and lived experiences of ALE/trauma and to investigate the relationship between racialization, as an adverse life experience or trauma among rural LAA women, living in the Black Belt and/or Black Rural South. A qualitative critical constructivist analysis was used, as it allowed for the elucidation of new narratives driven by LAA women's unique voices to document racialized historical experiences, outcomes related to trauma-induced toxic stress burdens, and inform our understanding of LAA

women's health (Alegría et al., 2016; Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

This chapter synthesizes the literature on trauma, current trauma interventions, race and health. In this chapter, I also introduce the theoretical propositions that guide this project.

What is Trauma?

> Trauma is often used interchangeably…to refer to (1) the traumatic stressor event(s)… (2) the individual's response, whether peritraumatic… or posttraumatic. We refer to the stressor events(s) as psychological or psychic trauma, the traumatic stressor, or complex trauma, and to the response or aftermath as posttraumatic reactions and disorders or complex traumatic stress disorders. (Ford & Courtois, 2009, p. 15)

Conceptually, trauma is idiosyncratic and therefore, diagnostically subjective. The preceding excerpt explains the challenges trauma scholars and practitioners encounter to define trauma universally and effectively diagnose and treat traumatic stress. Friedman (2013) describes trauma as a set of psychological symptoms that arise from exposure to distressing or dysregulating experiences that may be described as life altering. McCoyd, Walter, and Levers (2012) note that "loss, grief, and destabilization are implicit aspects of trauma across the varying circumstances that may manifest as traumatic experience" (p. 77). James and MacKinnon (2012) differentiate trauma experiences as small-t and Big-T traumas, wherein small-t traumas are described as ALE and Big-T traumas are considered life-threatening, resulting in significant emotional and psychological disruptions. The authors note that pervasive small-t traumas or ALE, compounded over time, have similar stress responses as Big-T traumas (K. James & MacKinnon, 2012).

Trauma is not only a psychological experience, but also an embodied experience. The immediate response to trauma triggered by the adrenal system stimulates a physical rather than a cognitive response (primitive/primal response). As a result, the body remembers trauma in ways that a survivors' mind may not, disabling cognition and language that may aid others in understanding. Menakem (2017) explains "trauma is also a wordless story our body tells itself about what is safe and what is a threat" (p. 8). He suggests that the physical trauma memory stimulates "over-the-top" physical reactions in the form of compulsions, intense reactions, ostensibly irrational fears, and unexpected avoidance strategies for survival that may appear to be part of an individual's personality. Rogers (2006) agrees, noting:

> what is so terrible about trauma is not abuse itself, no matter the brutality of treatment, but the way terror marks the body and then become invisible and inarticulate. This was the case even when someone could tell a story or reconstruct a memory. There was always something unsayable, too. (p. 44)

For LAA women, the trauma of racialization has been retained across generations. Consequently, "trauma or no trauma, many Black bodies don't feel settled around White ones" and the language they use to describe their racialized experiences may be coded or non-existent (Menakem, 2017, p. 15).

For the purposes of this project, I define *trauma*, using a critical trauma lens, as an abruptly acute or prolonged and persistent, life-altering, violating ALE, or structural foundation of an individual/community lived experience, that destabilizes an individual or community's reality (psychological injury) (Ford & Courtois, 2009; Friedman, 2013; McCoyd et al., 2012; Menakem, 2017; Rogers, 2006). In contemplating

disproportionality, the critical trauma perspective provides an overarching framework for understanding the relationship between ALE, trauma, race, and disparities in health and well-being of LAA women (Lang, 2018; Matthies-Boon, 2018). The critical trauma perspective expands the application of ALE/trauma beyond the traditional Western-centric notions that center singular traumatic events and assumes a radical approach to trauma studies, situating trauma as a "structural underpinning of life itself" (Lang, 2018; Matthies-Boon, 2018, p. 160). In this project, I use the two concepts of ALE and trauma interchangeably and cooperatively.

Critical trauma perspectives are founded in critical theory and enable trauma scholars:

> to pay attention to the political power dynamics within which trauma studies is enmeshed, and argue against the reification and objectification of trauma… [which] allows for an intersubjective (re)interpretation of trauma that explicitly grounds the experiences of trauma in social and political contexts. (Matthies-Boon, 2018, p. 159)

Employing a critical trauma perspective in trauma studies is a political act, with the explicit aim of emancipating and liberating LAA, by assiduously constructing exigent queries, not providing comfortable solutions (Matthies-Boon, 2018). The social and political contexts and classifications that restrict the definitions, research, diagnoses, and treatment of trauma include race, class, gender, sexuality, and religion (Stevens, 2009). Critical trauma perspectives acknowledge the normalized ALE of race-based oppression, repudiation, and disruption for LAA as the rule; in stark contrast to Western standards of normality, characterized by freedom, prosperity, and stability, which are the exception for

LAA and other racialized ethnic minorities (Lang, 2018; Matthies-Boon, 2018).

Compounded ALE/Trauma among LAA Women

LAA women experience a compounding of ALE within the scope of five trauma models: (1) historical; (2) cultural; (3) intergenerational; (4) complex; and (5) race-based. Historical trauma theory describes the experience among groups with a shared history of oppression, marginalization, victimization, and group trauma exposure (Sotero, 2006). Historical traumas are experienced over time, and are collective and complex in nature. In addition, historical trauma occurs across generations within groups with shared identities (Mohatt, Thompson, Thai, & Tebes, 2014). Cultural trauma describes the traumatic losses experienced by groups of people with shared identity where traumatic events alter collective group consciousness and identity (Alexander, 2004; Onwuachi-Willig, 2016). Intergenerational trauma is defined by the transmission of disruptive experiences across generations following major historical traumatic events (Danieli et al., 2016; Gnazzo et al., 2016; Walkerdine, Olsvold & Rudberg, 2013). These disruptive experiences are potentially triggering emotionally, psychologically, and physically for the individual and subsequent generations (Gnazzo et al., 2016). Complex trauma is the persistent, pervasive, and cumulative trauma that occurs repeatedly over a period of time in specific relationships and contexts (Ford & Courtois, 2009). Experienced as both interpersonal and community encounters, this complex illustration of trauma/ALE, contributes to persistent emotional and psychological distress, resulting in chronic health outcomes that contribute to disparate mortality and morbidity rates for LAA women (Martz et al., 2019). Finally, race-based trauma describes the traumatic response to racist incidents that elicit traumatic stress, often unrecognized, undiagnosed, or untreated in

contemporary social work practice (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005a). Racialization as trauma/ALE is a persistent stressor, compounded by both vicarious and complex trauma exposures (Martz et al., 2019).

LAA Identity and Traumatic Stress. For many marginalized, racial and ethnic minority groups, including LAA women, intergenerational traumatization of their ancestors and the immersion of trauma historically in their present realities, have been woven into social identities (Brown, 2009; George, 2016). Brown (2009) also describes an overlap between the trauma survivor's identity and their perpetrator when group identity or loyalties are debased by the survivors' shared memberships with perpetrators in families, communities, organizations, or nationality intensifying traumatic stress. For LAA, their identity as Americans is conscripted by the insidious intergenerational and historically racialized ALE/trauma experiences that are enabled by categorical racialization and marginalization of American society (Danieli, 2009). Massive traumas, such as historical and intergenerational racialization cause "diverse and complex destruction" that impacts identity, disrupting an individual's capacity to simultaneously navigate the multidimensional aspects of their identities, necessary to effectively assess, diagnose and treat trauma (Danieli, 2009, p. 351).

Traumatic experiences produce loss and grief that compromise identity and basic trust in relationships (McCoyd et al., 2012). The trauma experience is emotionally terrifying and psychologically, physiologically, and somatically overstimulating and dysregulating. The experience of ALE/trauma results in normal *traumatic stress* experiences both during (peritraumatic) and in the days, weeks, months, or years after the event/experience (posttraumatic), that impact the functionality of the individual and

community and compromises their long-term health and well-being (Ford & Courtois, 2009; Herman, 1992). The enduring, "structural underpinnings" of trauma and impact of traumatic stress, result in persistent, unresolved adverse physical and mental health patterns of disease, defined as *PTSD* (Matthies-Boon, 2018, p. 160). Therefore, the risk of LAA women developing PTSD is increased across their lifespan (Cook et al., 2014), given the ALE/trauma experience of racialization.

Left unaddressed, this stress response could result in adverse psychological and physical outcomes (Herman, 1992; Solomon & Heide, 2005). ALE/trauma impacts both individuals and communities by affecting multiple physical and social systems (Friedman & Resick, 2014; Seery, 2011). Traumatic stressors emerge following ALE/trauma exposure as physical, psychological and/or social symptomologies (Sibrava et al., 2019; M. T. Williams et al., 2018b). Trauma responses are unpredictable, affecting individuals with varying levels and degrees of symptomology, which is predicated on multiple influential factors (e.g., previous trauma exposures, personality, culture (Ford, 2012; George, 2016).

Cultural Considerations in Trauma Symptomatology and Diagnosis

The trauma literature demonstrates that the complexity of ALE, trauma, and traumatic stress responses are incomparable to any other issue social workers encounter and scholars agree that culture is critically important to trauma experiences, clinical presentation, research, diagnoses, and treatment. (Joseph & Murphy, 2014; Kimberly & Parsons, 2017). Stevens (2009) states, "the real force of trauma flowers in disparate and unexpected places. And, like most cultural objects, trauma, too, circulates among various social contexts that give it differing meanings and co-produce its multiple social effects"

(p. 3). Consequently, trauma experiences are subjective and therefore, symptoms, assessment, and diagnosis are predicated on the uniqueness of the individual, their "strengths, resources, resilience, personalized needs, values and contexts" that must be "identified and reinforced" (Courtois et al., 2009, p. 86). Lewis-Fernandez, Hinton, and Marques (2014) suggest that salient non-Western cultural group symptoms are missing from the PTSD diagnostic criteria, as it does not include somatic symptoms, such as shortness of breath, sense of bodily heat, physical pain, gastrointestinal distress, neck soreness, tinnitus, or dizziness. The exclusion of somatic symptoms as diagnostic trauma criterion contributes to misdiagnosis and maltreatment for psychological distresses among LAA women and may be contributing to observed health disparities.

Dissociative Symptoms in LAA Women

Dissociation is traditionally understood as an unconscious, passive response to trauma exposure that segregates entire trauma memories from the survivor's conscious memories (M. F. Lynch, 2012). Clinical interpretations of dissociative symptoms are often categorized as maladaptive responses to trauma exposures (J. Fisher, 2001). Subsequent environmental triggers or sensory experiences instigate a memory wherein the trauma is re-experienced, initiating maladaptive primal behavioral responses that bypass cognitive functions (fight, flight, flee, or freeze) (M. F. Lynch, 2012). Dissociation in particular among LAA women is a prevailing symptom of racialized traumatic stress (Ford, 2012). Polanco-Roman and colleagues (2016) contend that racialized trauma experiences render LAA adults and youth more vulnerable to maladaptive, passive dissociative symptoms, although differential coping and treatment strategies may constructively impact risk.

Dissociative symptoms are common among trauma survivors and LAA women are more likely to experience trauma across their lifespan and subsequently PTSD (Friedman & Resick, 2014). However, diagnosing dissociation remains controversial in trauma work, as it is often associated with Dissociative Identity Disorders and other more severe trauma symptomology (J. Fisher, 2001). Consequently, subtle symptoms of dissociation may be overlooked or not associated with a trauma response, suggesting common misdiagnoses of traumatic stress. This is especially detrimental to LAA women as has been previously demonstrated. Scholars also note that dissociative symptoms are particularly relevant in ethnically diverse populations as these experiences are "codified into cultural syndromes, idioms of distress and cultural explanations of distress (known collectively as "cultural concepts of distress")" (Lewis-Fernandez, et al., 2014, p. 531). In short, dissociative symptoms are diagnostically minimized as traumatic stress responses by helping professionals when assessing ethnically and culturally diverse populations such LAA. This presents an obstacle to adequately diagnose traumatic stress in rural LAA women who may have experienced complex traumas related to and exacerbated by historical, intergenerational, cultural, gendered racialization.

An alternative perspective suggests that dissociation is an adaptive function occurring naturally and daily in the human experience. Fisher (2001) suggests that dissociation is a means by which to organize information and activities in order to reduce anxiety and self-consciousness to accomplish everyday tasks. The act of dissociating enables individuals to (1) divide attention; (2) compartmentalize affects and information and; (3) alter identity or create distance from themselves (J. Fisher, 2001). Multi-tasking is an everyday example of the human capacity to divide attention across various activities

and responsibilities by suspending preoccupation with other concerns to focus competing activities. Compartmentalization is the ability to separate information from affect, an activity that social workers employ in client interactions, to sit with a client's trauma history and avoid becoming overwhelmed by their affect. Altering identity and creating space from oneself acknowledges the human capacity for distancing from uncomfortable affects (e.g. fear, shame, regret) by creating one or more self-identities that exhibit mastery and confidence. In this fashion, dissociation serves an adaptive function that allow individuals to thrive by avoiding cognitive dissonance and unsettled conflicts. Fisher (2001) contends that "remembering the more adaptive uses of dissociation will also combat the tendency to pathologize dissociative symptoms and remind us that we can help the patient to turn maladaptive symptoms into adaptive capabilities" (p. 2).

In this context, the literature suggests that LAA women have developed dissociative behaviors that may be both adaptive and maladaptive (e.g. strong Black woman; angry Black woman) (Woods-Giscombé & Black, 2010). LAA women's strength of mind, body, and spirit is an example of a positive attribute that exudes confidence and mastery. However, the dissociative behaviors employed to avoid the cognitive dissonance of racialized trauma and unresolved conflicts associated with their racialized identities, have resulted in deleterious physical, social and emotional outcomes. Negative stress, coping, and health outcomes are exacerbated by the strength attribute applied in response to racialization (Woods-Giscombé & Black, 2010). The Superwoman Schema and Strong Black Woman Script have been described in the literature as phenomenon that highlight the strength and associated behaviors (e.g. extraordinary caregiving, self-care neglect/postponement, and suppressed emotions) and are steeped in

racialization and trauma (Woods-Giscombé & Black, 2010). The resulting toxic stress burden has posed deleterious, intergenerational outcomes on LAA communities (Danieli et al., 2016; Danzer et al., 2016; Geronimus et al., 2006; Menakem, 2017). Unfortunately, contemporary evidence does not address whether and in what context these adaptations are adaptive or maladaptive in Black Belt LAA women.

Defining, diagnosing and treating trauma induced stress, PTSD, and complex traumatic stress continues to evolve (Friedman, 2013; Reardon, Brief, Miller, & Keane, 2014). As trauma is an individual, holistic experience, impacting the mind, body, and spirit, effective assessment and treatment intentionally acknowledges the expanse of the individual. As previously regarded, the body remembers what the mind cannot; the unsayable, unspeakable experiences of trauma and responds in kind.

Unawareness and Avoidance Symptoms in LAA Women

Unawareness and avoidance symptoms are pervasive and deleterious to the well-being of people exposed to trauma and traumatic stress. Freedman (2006) notes that unawareness of trauma and cognitive dissonance are important symptoms of traumatic stress among trauma survivors. Goldsmith and colleagues (2004) agree, stating "when people must endure chronically traumatic environments, it may be adaptive to isolate from awareness information that would produce cognitive dissonance and threaten necessary relationships" (p. 448). For LAA women, avoidance and unawareness of racialized trauma and traumatic stress are intensified by the social secret of racism and the inability to harness concrete evidence as proof of racism's existence (Freedman, 2006). Notably, the impact of unawareness and avoidance of racialized trauma and traumatic stress is experienced on both an individual and social level, as Herman (1992)

explains "repression, dissociation, and denial, are phenomena of social as well as individual consciousness" (p. 9). Further, unawareness of racial trauma, gendered racism, and the impact of traumatic stress on behaviors may contribute to observed racial disparities by reifying traditional stereotypes, such as "Sapphire" or "the angry Black woman", ghetto, and mischaracterizations of normal behaviors as aggressive or violent (Ashley, 2014; Flores, 2020; Jones & Norwood, 2016; Motro, Evans, Ellis, & Benson, 2021; Taylor, Guy-Walls, Wilkerson, & Addae, 2019). Addressing unawareness of racialized trauma and gendered racism is essential to adapting effective interventions that alleviate traumatic stress and redress health disparities, dispelling behavioral stereotypes attributed to LAA women.

Racialized traumatic or adverse life experiences, resulting in traumatic stress, may spawn both a shattered self and shattered worldview, as both cognition and identity develop during trauma exposure (Freedman, 2006; Goldsmith et al., 2004). Gendered and racialized traumatic stress from generations of racialized trauma impact LAA women's identity and identity development and may present as cognitive dissonance, demonstrated, for example, in the sentiment that being AA is bad, but being AA is also good "*since AA is all I can be*". A shattered worldview presents as cognitive dissonance in that the oppressor is both savior and torturer, not to be trusted, but must be trusted and revered for survival. An alternative worldview or belief emerges, grounded in the "universality of the everydayness" of racialized "violence against" LAA, that suggests to LAA that the world is unsafe for people of African descent (Freedman, 2006, p. 105). This is the challenge of racialized unawareness and cognitive dissonance for LAA women: the duality of living unaware of racial trauma, in a racially hostile society that

demonstrates through covert racism (i.e., systemic, structural, and institutional) that a LAA existence is undesirable, while attempting to preserve a reality and inherent belief in an individual's humanity, dignity, and worth. This duality reinforces the cognition for LAA women of their dependence on a patriarchal, racialized society for both survival and livelihood.

As LAA women have embraced these cognitively dissonant "beliefs", as their realities, microaggressions, victim blaming, victim shaming, belittling, and outright denial of historical and contemporary racist events establishes racialized trauma as a form of persistent terror (Degruy, 2017; Hemmings & Evans, 2018). Dissonance is reinforced by the invalidation of racial trauma and increases the risk of LAA women to be victimized by racial trauma through betrayal blindness, where survivors of trauma are unaware of subsequent racial traumas (Goldsmith et al., 2004). Racialized stereotyping, systemic racism, institutional racism, racial biases, and gendered racism act to diminish the credibility of LAA women with respect to this racialized perspective (Goldsmith et al., 2004). Consequently, typical responses to stressful life events are disrupted and feelings of estrangement to their beliefs prior to racist insults develop (Comas-Díaz, 2016; Comas-Díaz et al., 2019). LAA women evolve to feel estranged from the belief in the American dream (Bryant-Davis, 2007). Further, gendered and racialized trauma or terror casts a social and individual doubt on their unique perspective of the American way of life (W. R. Allen, 1995).

Among LAA women, avoidance has been demonstrated as an adaptive strategy to maintain functionality in their lives and avoid the negative feelings associated with racialized traumatic experiences (West, Donovan, & Roemer, 2010). Societal factors that

sustain structural and institutional racism, further promote unawareness of trauma exposure among LAA women (Goldsmith et al., 2004). Avoidance of the impact of traumatic exposures are demonstrated in the everyday lived activities and interpersonal relationships of LAA women. Degruy (2017) provides an example of this avoidance behavior in her exposition that the centuries of slavery and oppression impressed distinct parenting patterns that model oppressor-oppressed dyad relationship. Those characteristics deny the emotional expressions related to traumatic events of the oppressed by both the oppressor and the oppressed as a means of survival. She explains that this is demonstrated in LAA parenting practices where parents instruct their children to avoid expressing negative emotions (i.e., cry) and deny the traumatic or adverse environment they are experiencing (Degruy, 2017; Goldsmith et al., 2004). This avoidance teaches children to deny their own feelings, needs, and desires to be loved and cared for, creating deficits in a child's ability to identify and trust their own emotional experiences (Goldsmith et al., 2004). Consequently, children grow into adulthood with patterns of behavior that communicate that they are mistaken in the evaluation of their own experiences and that their emotional responses are unacceptable. In the case of LAA and the multigenerational and intergenerational history of chattel slavery, racialized abuse, and trauma, these learned patterns of behavior render acceptance and acknowledgement of racialized adverse life events or traumas as irrelevant to their existence, agency, and capacity for healing.

Trauma researchers note that healing derives from naming and validating trauma experiences to establish new beliefs that center themes of trust and safety in relationships (Bryant-Davis, 2007; Ford & Courtois, 2009; Goldsmith et al., 2004; Rogers, 2006). For

LAA women, naming and validating trauma proves difficult as prolonged, pervasive trauma exposures significantly impacts the cognitive development of survivors. Trauma scholars agree that the traumatized brain operates from a survival, not cognitive state, as the survival centers of the brain are overstimulated and the cognitive centers are underdeveloped (Bremner, 2006; Sherin & Nemeroff, 2011; Solomon & Heide, 2005). This physiological development is the result of prolonged, persistent trauma exposures and stress (Crumb et al., 2019; Kreek, 2011). The result is an individual that responds instinctively to a real or perceived threat, to protect themselves from harm. The initiation of the survival brain stimulates a physical response, as the body remembers trauma and unconsciously responds (Herman, 1992; Menakem, 2017; Rogers, 2006). For individuals with a significant trauma history, cognitive processing follows the immediate intuitive response to assess the level of threat. In cases of a real threat, the response appears appropriate. However, in instances of a perceived threat, automatic traumatic stress responses (i.e., hyperarousal and hypervigilance) may be mistaken by observers as impulsive, irrational, and unwarranted.

For many Americans, regardless of race, accepting racism as an ALE/trauma and terror is difficult because of the horrific contradiction to American values and ideals. Accepting colorblindness as a value dishonors and diminishes the racialized trauma experienced by LAA and impedes interventions and healing (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Further, interpretations of LAA as resilient are steeped in American exceptionalism, that suggests a glorified moral connection between strength and grit (Kirchgasler, 2018). For LAA women, this enables unawareness of the traumatic impact of racialization, resulting in racial battle fatigue that exacerbates the physical, emotional, and psychological

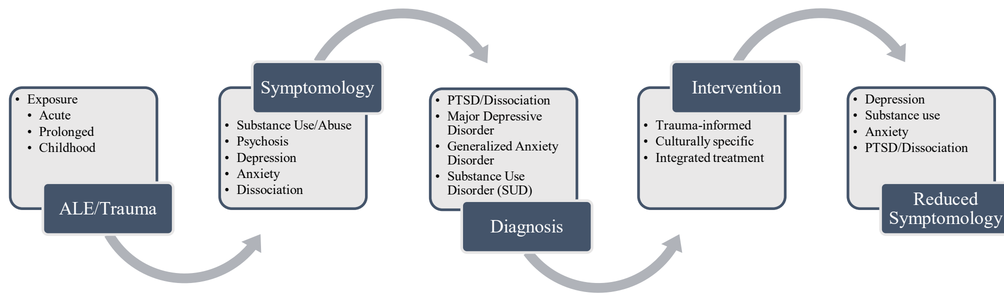
responses to traumatic, gendered, racialization (E. O. McGee & Stovall, 2015). Based on a series of studies and sobering cortisol levels among groups of Black Belt LAA adults, Jackson and colleagues (2018) suggest that resilience may only be “skin-deep resilience” implying “that it is transient, superficial, and non-substantial.” (p. 2).

Current Trauma Interventions

I developed the following impact pathway to illustrate the process of trauma treatment (Figure 1). The efficacy and effectiveness of evidence-based interventions that address the weathering effects of chronic stress on the well-being (mental and physical health) of LAA adults are unknown (Schnurr et al., 2014). Mental health conditions presenting in response to traumatic stress and weathering include mood disorders such as depression, anxiety, substance use and abuse, and co-occurring disorders, in addition to anger and clinical diagnoses of bipolar disorder and PTSD (Geronimus et al., 2006). Physical health conditions including diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and obesity are also affected by unresolved trauma exposure and persistent trauma symptoms (Geronimus et al., 2006; Jackson et al., 2018).

Figure 1

Impact Pathway of Trauma Interventions



Culturally adapted behavioral health interventions are effective for ethnic minority populations (Barrera et al., 2013; Gregory & Harper, 2001). However, current evidence-based (EB) trauma interventions lack cultural specificity and offer practitioners

limited options for addressing racially specific traumatic stress (Williams et al., 2018a). The paucity of culturally responsive, African centered trauma interventions that honor the strength and resilience of LAA women and the complexities of their trauma, poses a significant challenge for all LAA women seeking treatment for behavioral health distress (Rodgers, 2006). Scholars suggest that trauma interventions should be person-centered, culturally relevant and inclusive of racism as a traumatic lived experience (Daly et al., 1995; Williams et al., 2018a).

Further, prior research suggests that ethnic identity provides a protective factor against racism (Williams et al., 2018a). In addition, LAA women prefer trauma interventions that are comprised of social support from other LAA women (Kaslow et al., 2006) and mental health treatment provided by LAA practitioners (Townes et al., 2009). Scholars suggest that LAA have successfully incorporated Africentric based coping strategies that value a collective rather than individual worldview, across systems (micro, meso, macro) to encourage recovery from racial trauma (Daly et al., 1995; Gregory & Harper, 2001).

In addition, current mental and physical health intervention research is conducted in urban and suburban communities. Eberhardt and Pamuk (2004) contend that health and mental health disparities are reliant on an understanding of the rural and urban differences of intervention efficacy and effectiveness. In addition, mental health clinicians are concentrated in urban areas (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). The paucity of literature, limited understanding of the trauma experiences of LAA women in rural communities, and the effectiveness of trauma interventions on their trauma symptoms are not well understood among treating

clinicians. This clinical lack of understanding contributes to the pervasive health and mental health disparities currently observed.

Interventions: Cultural Challenges and Innovation with LAA Women

Research suggests that LAA women may develop PTSD at higher rates and the clinical course is poor (R. G. Davis et al., 2008; Sibrava et al., 2019). However, contemporary studies examining psychological trauma and traumatic stress, including PTSD, among ethnic and racial minorities are sparse, culminating in insufficient research and limited practical understanding of the cultural and racial nuances of trauma exposure, symptomology and treatment in these communities (Triffleman & Pole, 2010). Furthermore, conventional trauma research protocols fail to consider the effects of race as a primary or secondary contributor or outcome (Lester, Artz, Resick, & Young-Xu, 2010), which diminishes the significance and utility of race in research findings. Race is used in traditional research methodology to describe the sample population, make comparisons, pathologize ethnic minority behaviors and perpetuate disparities in the development, application and assessment of trauma interventions (A. Alvarez, 2020; Bobo & Fox, 2003; Brooks-Immel & Murray, 2017; Danzer et al., 2016; Ford, 2012; Hall, 2018; Harper, 2012; Shams, 2015). The growing need for effective, culturally relevant trauma interventions, regardless of the type of trauma exposure, reveals the inadequacy of research and practice in this area. This inadequacy must be addressed through proactive research agendas that foster “attention to diversity within trauma” with “group-specific”, culturally appropriate and/or adaptable trauma interventions (Triffleman & Pole, 2010, p. 494).

With regard to the critical trauma perspective, life course trauma exposures are

complex, multifaceted and multidimensional, with individual cultural nuances, especially in the case of LAA women with the experience of historical, intergenerational, race-based trauma of gendered oppression, exclusion and discrimination. Therefore, effective trauma interventions and treatments must address these exceptional circumstances. Rodgers (2006) notes that existing trauma treatments are inadequate and ineffective at addressing racial and oppressive contexts of the LAA trauma experience. In addition, current evidence-based trauma interventions offer practitioners limited options for addressing racially specific traumatic stress (Williams et al., 2018). Social work practitioners' skills are especially challenged when applying available evidence-based interventions to ethnically diverse clients (Marsiglia & Booth, 2015). This combination of ineffective treatment and clinical limitations of mental and behavioral health practitioners is a major challenge for LAA women seeking treatment for emotional and psychological distress and crises.

The struggle of living with untreated trauma is reflected across generations and within communities. Untreated trauma is especially injurious to LAA women, as the condition propagates a cycle of undesirable outcomes that exacerbate the symptoms of oppression (Amaro et al., 2005). Identifying and appreciating the effects of untreated trauma are critical to assessing the effectiveness of culturally adept trauma interventions. This includes an understanding regarding the cumulative burden of adversities and trauma (CBAT), such as structural racism, discrimination, sexism and poverty, and their role in the mental health and well-being of LAA women over the life course (Bhattacharya, 2013; Myers et al., 2015; Nurius, Uehara, & Zatzick, 2013).

The pervasive effects of CBAT inflict a psychological and physical "weathering"

effect on LAA women that is demonstrated through adverse mental and physical health outcomes and disparities (Geronimus, 1996; Geronimus, Hicken, Keene, & Bound, 2006; Nurius et al., 2013). However , the impact of cumulative trauma exposures (i.e., through media) on LAA women with the collective trauma of racialization is not well understood, although researchers suggest increased sensitization to subsequent exposures is possible (Garfin, Holman, & Silver, 2015). Trauma interventions that incorporate the emotional and psychological function of racism and discrimination are imperative to providing effective, culturally relevant behavioral health treatment for LAA women.

The literature provides compelling support for the adaptation of culturally proficient interventions that dignify the lived experiences and cultural history of LAA. Specifically, scholars have suggested that trauma interventions should be person-centered, culturally relevant and inclusive of racism as a traumatic lived experience (Daly, Jennings, Beckett, & Leashore, 1995; Williams et al., 2018). Daly and colleagues (1995) suggest that interventions with Africentric-based coping strategies have been effective in facilitating recovery from trauma among LAA by endorsing a collective rather than individual worldview, across systems (micro, meso, macro). Gregory and Harper (2001) agree, suggesting the Ntu (pronounced 'into') approach to psychotherapy as a pluralistic, values-oriented, lifestyle, centered in an "Africentric understanding of the world", useful in treating and empowering LAA in their healing (p. 304). Prior research also suggests that ethnic identity and racial socialization provides a protective factor against racism and race-based traumatic stress (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019; Smith & Sylva, 2011; Williams et al., 2018). The literature demonstrates the value of culture in developing effective trauma interventions for LAA, however, there remains a gap in the

literature in relation to these interventions with LAA women in rural southern communities.

The promise of effective interventions for trauma treatment with LAA women may be realized through a greater understanding of the experience of gendered racism and oppression in this population. Awareness of race trauma is the first step to diagnosing trauma and traumatic stress and developing effective interventions (Goldsmith et al., 2004). However, defining trauma is as nuanced as the traumatic experiences of individuals and communities seeking treatment, as "trauma is inherently concerned with culture, context, politics, and identity", aspects that have been "invisible components" of trauma diagnosis and treatment (Brown, 2009, p. 167). Reflecting from a critical trauma perspective, trauma is "often directly perpetrated by or at least informally tied up with the established political orders who frequently reign with a sense of impunity and unaccountability, thereby aggravating traumatic stress" (Matthies-Boon, 2018, p. 160). As the literature demonstrates, trauma experiences and traumatic stress responses are shaped by the culture in which the trauma occurs, as are the capacity to research, diagnose, and treat. This highlights the importance of exploring the historically racialized lived experiences of rural LAA women, in order to elucidate their culturally nuanced language of trauma. The following sections explore extant literature regarding the current challenges of trauma interventions in rural communities and the impression of racialization on the body, genetics, and community health among LAA women living in in Black Belt communities. This chapter concludes with the theoretical orientation and framework that guides this proposed study.

Trauma Intervention Challenges in Black Belt Communities

Neglecting rural communities in investigations of trauma intervention effectiveness unwittingly excludes large segments of the LAA population. One in five Americans live in rural areas where health disparities are greater in comparison to urban centers and LAA are "particularly vulnerable to ill health and inadequate access to quality health care" (Bhattacharya, 2013, p. 88). According to the 2000 US Census, more than fifty percent (50%) of LAA live in the southern US, in rural communities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018a), where LAA women, in general, experience poorer health, limited access to services, and epidemic HIV/AIDS exposures, diagnoses, mortality, and morbidity (American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, 2014; Wooten et al., 2018). Other sources note that nine out of ten LAA live in the rural South, where increased mortality rates are attributable to substance use, suicide, and chronic illness (Weaver et al., 2018). The literature suggests that there are differences in prevalence of traumatic stress between urban and rural LAA (Alim et al., 2006). Often neglected in the rural health literature, the experiences of trauma exposure, traumatic stress indicators, resilience, coping, and intervention effectiveness among rural LAA women are not well understood.

A hallmark of the challenges of addressing mental health services in rural communities is the limited access and availability of services (Bice-Wigington & Morgan, 2018; Fiscella & Sanders, 2016) and material hardship (e.g., wealth), resulting in an increase in rates of depression and psychological distress (Weaver et al., 2018). This limitation presents substantial challenges to researchers' ability to obtain samples in rural communities. Missed opportunities in rural communities contributes to the lack of evidence regarding trauma intervention effectiveness with rural LAA women and

subsequently, the perpetuation of the observed racial disparities in health and mental health.

Race and Mental Health

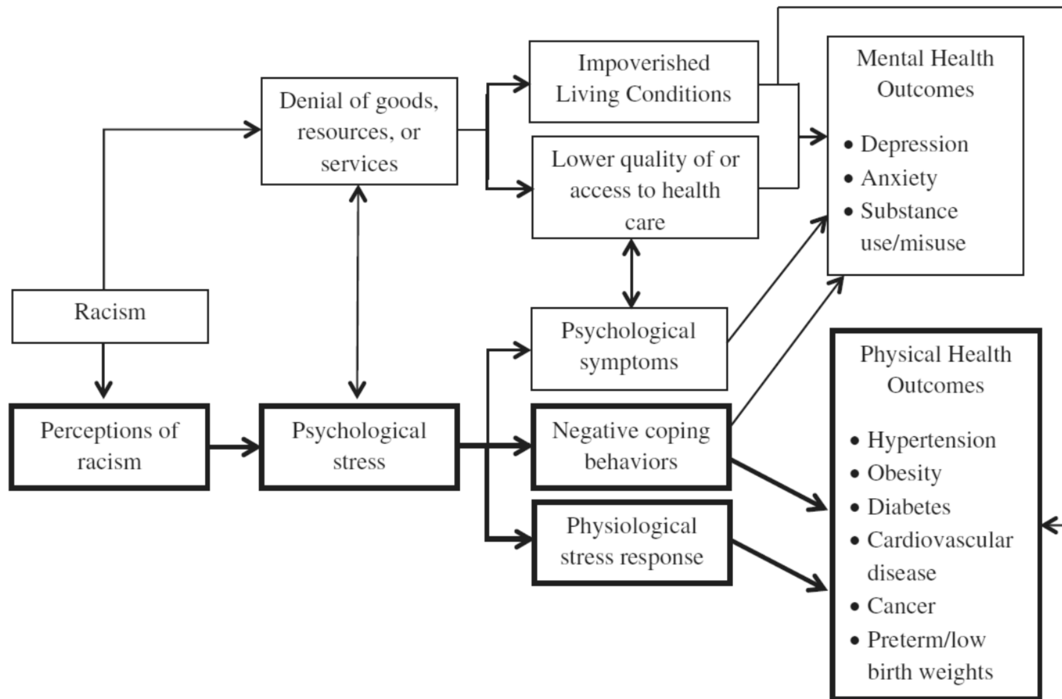
Racism, gender, and racial discrimination (i.e., racialization) in any form (e.g., structural, systemic, or interpersonal) present uniquely stressful conditions for LAA women that increase their vulnerability and risk for adverse mental health and well-being (Amaro, Larson, Gampel, Richardson, Savage, & Wagler, 2005; Kubiak & Siefert, 2008; Noonan, Velasco-Mondragon, & Wagner, 2016). LAA women experience the reality of a pervasive culture of discrimination, racialization, and gendered inequity and discrimination (ALE) (Hatcher, 2007). Carter and Helms (2009) explain that the experience of "chronic and persistent" racial and gendered injustice poses psychological harm to its victims and a failure to understand the "emotional, psychological and physical effects" of chronic racism on victims and perpetrators contributes to racial injustices (p. 113).

Kaholokula (2016) suggests a hypothesized pathway between racism and adverse mental health outcomes (Figure 2). Beginning with racism, perceived or actualized, the path ultimately leads to psychological stress. Left untreated, the psychological stress manifests in ineffectual coping behaviors and physiological stress responses that lead to adverse physical and mental health outcomes. The pathway demonstrates the influence of racialization on weathering, poor health corollaries, and underdeveloped, passive, maladaptive stress coping strategies (Polanco-Roman et al., 2016).

Figure 2

Hypothesized Pathways from Perceived Racism to Physical and Mental Health Outcomes

Figure 2 continued at the top of page 34.



Note. The bolded squares and arrows indicate the pathways (Kaholokula, 2016, p. 173).

The psychological harm or distress induced by racial discrimination, including microaggressions, results in a number of emotional, behavioral, and physical outcomes for LAA (Myers et al., 2015; Sue, et al., 2008). Examples include (1) depression, which among LAA is associated with an increased risk for hypertension; and (2) somatic symptoms (i.e., reports of physical distress that mask psychological distress), which are more common among LAA than their White counterparts and in rural communities (Weaver et al., 2018). Further, scholars agree that race, and the accompanying social isolation and inequity in access to resources, play a significant role in stress related disparities in mental health and material resources (Brondolo et al., 2009; Weaver et al., 2018; Wheeler et al., 2011). These inequities foster psychological affects such as anger, self-hatred, substance abuse, violence, and alienation among LAA (Gilbert, Harvey, & Belgrave, 2009; Hardy & Laszloffy, 1995), and left untreated, adversely impact physical

health (Kaholokula, 2016).

Toxic Stress and Weathering. As previously demonstrated, the experience of racialization is an ALE that may result in trauma and toxic stress. Lifetime exposure to trauma is greater for LAA than their White counterparts (Davis, Ressler, Schwartz, Stephens, & Bradley, 2008; Kubiak & Siefert, 2008). Trauma exposure among LAA includes and is complicated by the exposure to race-based ALE/traumas such as racial discrimination, alienation in the form of political, social, economic exclusion, and the phenomena of racial spectacle and racial gaslighting (Harris-Lacewell, 2003). The cumulative life course experiences of ALE, trauma, racial trauma, and subsequent traumatic stress assures a pervasive toxic stress burden on LAA, resulting in complex mental health distress and progressive physical deterioration among children and adults (Ashley, 2014; Evans et al., 2016; Jernigan & Daniel, 2011; Johnson-Lawrence et al., 2020; Perlow, 2018; Saleem et al., 2020).

Weathering theory explicates the phenomenon of premature physical and mental health deterioration in LAA, resulting from the toxic stress burden of racialization as an ALE (Geronimus, 2001). Weathering is the psychological and physical consequence of chronic stress caused by the structural inequities experienced by LAA over their life course (Geronimus, 1996). Weathering theory was developed to explain the disproportionality of physical health (e.g., adult mortality and morbidity, infant mortality and morbidity, maternal outcomes); however, the theory provides a compelling framework to outline the relationship between adverse mental health outcomes and the pervasive effects of racism on LAA. Weathering builds upon historical interpretations of poor LAA health outcomes during the centuries of intergenerational enslavement and

post-emancipation, described by Blyden (1908) as being “born tired” (p. 22, 26). “Born tired” suggests that the emotional, social, spiritual, intellectual, physical, vocational, financial, and environmental (i.e., the Eight Dimensions of Wellness) abuses and exploitation LAA endured during and after enslavement, particularly the gendered racism imposed on LAA women, exacerbated poor mental and physical health conditions, leading to premature disability and death (Blyden, 1908; DuBois, 1906; M. S. Jones et al., 2021; Swarbrick, 2006).

Theoretical Proposition: Black Lives Matter in Healing Justice

This study critically explored how racialization, as an adverse life experience or trauma, impacts the mental health of Black Belt LAA women. This investigation requires a theoretical proposition that radically and unapologetically honors and empowers their Black experience. The Black Lives Matter Healing Justice Framework (BLMHJ) (Bartholomew et al., 2018; Ginwright, 2015) is an empowerment approach, theorized to examine the vulnerable, yet empowered existence of racialized Black people. Envisioned by Black women as a radical response to the unrelenting violence perpetrated against Black bodies, the BLM movement joined with the HJ paradigm provides a foundation, outside of traditional White, Eurocentric models, for understanding Black people and the totality of their lived experiences.

Using the BLMHJ theoretical framework, that centers Blackness and promotes healing as justice, I employed qualitative analysis of archived oral history as a methodology, to explore and describe how rural LAA women, living in the Black Belt and/or Black Rural South, make meaning of their racialization in the context of the historical events surrounding Jim Crow segregation and racial integration. Using a

qualitative critical constructivist analysis allows for the deconstruction of common narratives regarding LAA women and health outcomes, in order to reconstruct new narratives that utilize their unique voices to document racialized historical experiences, outcomes related to trauma-induced toxic stress burdens, and inform our understanding of LAA women's health (Alegría et al., 2016; Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Black Lives Matter Healing Justice Framework (BLMHJF)

> For all families, and for Black families in particular, one expects to find societal institution effects, being mediated by community setting that, in turn, is mediated by dual levels of the family system (kinship network and family systems). Once all of the linkages expressed (and implied) in this model have been taken into account, several additional determinants of Black family experiences would need to be addressed. These additional factors particularly involve the variations one expects, and indeed finds, to be characteristic of Black family experiences across different settings represented by economic status, time, space, and value orientation. Dependent on the historical period, economic class, spatial location, and value position of the Black families in question, one should expect to see the components in the model combining in distinctive ways and producing different outcomes. (W. R. Allen, 1995), p. 586)

Allen's description of the "different outcomes" produced from the "distinctive ways" the collective LAA lived experience coalesce, provide evidence for the need to examine these lived experiences from a community-based Black lens with a healing focus, that appreciates race, place and space as significant aspects of that experience. Honing principles of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy of the oppressed (i.e.,

consciousness, codification, action, reflection, dialogue and the gift of knowledge), The Black Lives Matter Healing Justice Framework (BLMHJF) (Ginwright, 2015) encompasses the need to both relieve the outward oppressiveness of racialization with an inward focus on healing through restorative justice and action. BLMHJF is an empowerment model for the Black community and collective leadership that honors the historical and contemporary racialized experiences of Black people, while building an infrastructure that promotes healing from the trauma generated by those experiences. An amalgamation of the Black Lives Matter Movement and healing justice practices, this empowerment model holds that healing from racialized traumas is an internal process that is aided by external community and political actions that (1) restores "collective well-being, meaning, and purpose" for the Black community; (2) resists, disrupts and rejects racialized "hegemonic notions of justice" and; (3) reclaims "the capacity to… redefine and reimagine a possible future" (Ginwright, 2015, p. 39-40).

As race supersedes other intersectional identities, including gender, Bent-Goodley, Snell, and Carlton-LaNey (2017) explain that the development of social work perspectives, practices, and interventions for LAA, must be based on an "intimate understanding of the needs within the Black community, the desire to create social change and the commitment to advance social justice" (p. 27). They further note that adapting a Black lens or perspective in social work dispels stereotypes through racial pride and group solidarity, while promoting communal responsibility through self-help, mutual aid, and social debt or the awareness of paying back to the community what was given and paying forward to future generations (Bent-Goodley et al., 2017). According to the authors, harnessing a Black perspective incorporates six principles: (1) *affirmation:*

encouraging, supporting and celebrating Black culture; (2) *strengths:* honors the inherent nature of individuals and communities to problem-solve; (3) *diversity:* values and celebrates the within and between group differences of diasporic Africans; (4) *vivification:* the Black perspective is not exclusive, but honors the unique historically racialized experiences of Black people; (5) *social justice:* calls for organization and action in support of fair and just practices for Black people; (6) *internationalization:* an appreciation of the diasporic and global impact of racialization, oppression and discriminatory practices and experiences (Bent-Goodley et al., 2017).

Black Lives Matter Movement. The #BlackLivesMatter Movement reinvigorated the public cry against racialized injustice and persecution of Black people. According to Bartholomew and colleagues (2018), "the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement unapologetically and intentionally demands for the reverence and survival of Black lives…. [BLM movement] re-centered the devaluation and glaring disparities on the condition of Black lives", especially Black women and related disparities in health outcomes (p. 85). Multidisciplinary scholars agree that Black life necessitates new attention in our scholarship (E. Lewis, 1995; Nayak, 2011; Probst et al., 2004; Smaje, 1997) to achieve racial justice, healing, restoration, and address disparities.

The BLM approach positions activism or direct action as a means to achieve healing and restoration from the gendered and racialized trauma that LAA women experience. Bartholomew and colleagues (2018) note that healing from the "historical, spiritual, socioeconomic, and political contexts… must be embedded in their [LAA] direct action work" through "an analysis of trauma and resilience", caring for each other and organizing for liberation from oppressive and repressive racialized societies and

institutions (p. 86). As such, BLM is a lens by which to approach research solely directed as an action to address the racialized injustices observed as disparities in our societal institutions. Another aspect of BLM is to raise the critical consciousness of not only LAA, but also clinicians, researchers, and other professionals, lawmakers, and stakeholders who treat, study, and enact policies that affect Black people (Bartholomew et al., 2018). Critical consciousness necessitates that society become and remain conscious of the racialized, and for Black women, gendered, experiences of LAA.

BLM is a grassroots movement unlike any other sociopolitical movement in contemporary history. BLM is a demonstration of love and hope for the ongoing struggle of LAA to assert their human dignity. Ginwright (2015) describes the BLM movement as one of "dignity, meaning, and hope in a critical moment when race in general, and Blackness in particular, has become a third rail, and avoided in policy debates" (p. 35). BLM is a consciousness and in fact "give[s] others permission to practice courageous love and to celebrate and protect the dignity and humanity of all people" (Ginwright, 2015, p. 35). The success of the movement occurs by acknowledging that justice for all is predicated on the "dignity and humane treatment" of LAA, who, as a result of historic injustices and systemic, structural oppressions, must assume center stage in "political analysis, organizing strategies, and policy solutions" (Ginwright, 2015, p. 35) to facilitate healing.

Healing Justice. "Emancipate ourselves from mental slavery. None but ourselves can free our minds" -- Bob Marley (Marley, 1980).

> [T]o be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious, is to be in a rage almost all the time. So that the first problem is how to control that rage so that it

> won't destroy you. Part of the rage is this: it isn't only what is happening to you, but its what's happening all around you all of the time, in the face of the most extraordinary and criminal indifference, the indifference and ignorance of most White people in this country. -- James Baldwin (Baldwin, Capouya, Hansberry, Hentoff, Hughes & Kazin, 1961)

To address the racialized historic and contemporary experiences of Black people requires organization and political action that centers the Black experience, disarms rage, and promotes healing. Healing justice proposes healing as a means of political action. Because disparities, especially in health, are the result of racism in our sociopolitical institutions and Black women's health, in particular, has, historically, garnered little mainstream interest or concern, it is imperative to promote intentional research that reflects the complexities of the duality of Black women's existence and seeks healing (Bartholomew et al., 2018). As such, a focus on healing for LAA is a political act that requires a multidimensional, multidisciplinary, holistic approach from a Black perspective within and despite the White racial frame (Bartholomew et al., 2018; Ginwright, 2015; Weitekamp & Parmentier, 2016).

As such, healing justice for LAA women is a means to apply direct action to the injurious nature of racialization, using a Black lens or perspective. A healing-centered approach to justice is based on four core principles: (1) healing responds to the needs of the community; (2) healing is political; (3) healing and organizing intersect; and (4) healing is found in culture and spirituality (Nunez, Gutierrez, & Borg, 2015, p. 1). Healing justice seeks (a) collective well-being and healing and (b) change in systems that cause injury, adverse life experiences or trauma, which situates the act of healing as a

form of justice (Ginwright, 2015). The idea is an ancient, indigenous notion of healing, that begins with healing from the inside that manifests outwardly as decisive action. As the entire community participates in this process, communities are able to transform the systems that inflict harm. Ginwright (2015) expounds that "inside-out social change simply means examining both the root causes of barriers to building effective, healthy, and vibrant communities, and focusing on caring for our collective mental and physical health" (p. 38-39).

In addition to community, connection to the Earth, culture and spirituality are themes that resonate in the healing justice literature. Sawatsky (2007) agrees, noting that connection to the land or geography and spirit are critical to achieving healing justice. The author expounds that the connection between land and spirit acknowledges that healing is beyond the social control of any one entity (i.e., self or state), but is the expressed acknowledgment of the gift and fragility of all life (Sawatsky, 2007). I theorize that the collective nature of rural communities, coupled with a spiritual connection to culture, universal powers, and the land or place are significant to the lived experiences of LAA women in the Black Belt and essential components to achieving healing justice in these communities.

Healing justice is a broad method to achieve the "unconventional, messy and unclear path to justice" that is not restricted to addressing just emotional and psychological harms to victims (Ginwright, 2015). Addressing the root cause of harms and not the behaviors that result from those harms are essential to healing justice (Sawatsky, 2007). Healing justice avoids victim blaming and addresses the generational patterns of behavior, structures of injustice and interpersonal relationships that reinforce

and allow for injustices, to facilitate entire community healing and change (Sawatsky, 2007).

Ginwright (2015) expounds that sustainable community change is accomplished when organizing and healing are co-occurring. The author outlines three components of healing justice: (1) Restoration; (2) Resistance and; (3) Reclamation (Ginwright, 2015). Restoration describes the activities that restore a sense of collective well-being in a community that facilitates political action and improved health outcomes. Voice and agency of the people are restored and collectivism supplants individualism. Resistance is the act of disrupting "and rejecting hegemonic notions of justice, particularly in regards to race" (Ginwright, 2015). Well-being is then established as a function of power and control that the community retains as they collectively seek healing. Reclamation describes the community's "capacity to reclaim, redefine, and reimagine" a conceivable future, where healing is achieved and demonstrated through collective well-being and actions to sustain healing (Ginwright, 2015, p. 40).

Bartholomew and colleagues (2018b) propose three additional constructs of healing justice from a BLM perspective, that promote holistic healing: (1) culturally and politically-appropriate clinical assessments and interventions; (2) historical trauma; and (3) resilience. These constructs add dimension to the healing justice paradigm by suggesting critical consciousness to historically racialized oppression and violence as a significant aspect of healing. These constructs also emphasize a strengths perspective that acknowledges the perseverance of these communities despite overwhelming circumstances.

Race, Space, and Place Paradigm

The BLMHJ framework provides the overarching principle for this current study. However, in applying the BLMHJ framework to rural, Southern, LAA women, constructs of race, space, and place are relevant to understanding and appreciating their unique historical perspectives and lived experiences of gendered racialization, as race, space, and place operate collectively to define the lived experiences of LAA women. An individual's worldview and perceptions are shaped by the spaces and places one occupies, which in the case of racialized Americans, is determined to a large extent by race. The problem of race and racism in the United States are not the same, yet are inseparable and continue to characterize the institutions and professional disciplines that frame our understanding of human behavior (Hall, 2018).

While this project focused on the impact of race and racism without intrinsically examining the problem of race and racism, for the purposes of this discussion, I purport that these inextricable constructs are problems in social work education, practice, theory, policy, and research (Kelly, 1996). I make this assumption in alignment with Hall (2018), a social programs evaluator, who notes that race is a problem in program evaluation because of "dubious scientific meaning" that influences "perceptions and dispositions" of program administrators, staff, and evaluators (p. 2). The seminal yet illusive nature of race, existing in the shadows, establishes the premise of American life, specifically for LAA spaces and places. For LAA, the consciousness of race and resultant Black spaces and places shape identity development. As Bassey (2007) notes, Black identity cannot be separated from the centuries of slavery and oppression created and sustained by race in the Black Belt.

Finally, as the southern US has historically characterized the essence of overt

racism and racist sentiments in the US, the impact of racialization as trauma/ALE is more pronounced in the rural South because of the inherent nature of social distancing in southern rural communities and the historically prolonged legalities of racialized segregation and oppression in these communities. The history of legalized racial segregation (Jim Crow) and subsequent integration were potentially traumatizing adverse life experiences for LAA women, that have had deleterious impacts on Black Belt LAA communities (Brimmer, 1967; Horsford, 2019; Kobayashi, 2014; Lipsitz, 1995; Lynn, 2006; Murray, 1951; Ritterhouse, 2006; Willink, 2009; Womack, 2007). Womack (2016) summarizes the race, space, and place paradigm and the necessity of strategic approaches to address the relationship of these three constructs with LAA in the Black Belt, stating;

> [t]he legacy of slavery today results in over half of the Black population still residing within the Southern region highlighting ties to ancestral communities and land. In addition, the legacy of segregation and inequality has left behind a systemic disparity within the Black Belt region that requires unique approaches that are reflective of the Black population it is aimed to serve. With 55 percent of the African American population still primarily located within the Southern region, these extreme conditions in which African Americans live within the South disproportionately influences the racial group as a whole. (p. 5)

Race Defined

Disparities research has shown that racial disparities exist in health (both mental and physical) and wealth, as well as scholarly publications and research funding that establishes national research priorities (Ginther et al., 2018; Hoppe et al., 2019). To systemically and scientifically define race is an impossibility, as it holds different

meanings in context and is predicated on arbitrary, vague abstractions and differential domination (Bhugra & Ayonrinde, 2001). Therefore, in actuality, race essentially means many things while having no meaning at all.

The significance of race is ever-present, inescapable regardless of the context of our lived experiences or categorized racial groups. Feagin (2010) describes the White Racial Frame as an unconscious, hidden barrier that conceptualizes what is racially desirable and undesirable (stereotypes and values), that permeates cultural institutions (including research) and shapes our thoughts and actions to accentuate White privilege and supremacy in relation to people of color. Racial framing is supported through the construct of racial spectacles, described as:

> displays of racial dominance that publicly reassert and reinforce racial hierarchies…. rely on public representations that invoke private fears of domination by racial others… are socially constructed through public and private acts that operate at macro- and micro-levels…: they exist due to the synergistic public–private interaction of collective and individual agency. (Davis & Ernst, 2011, p. 134)

White racial framing and racial spectacles operate in concert to perpetuate a phenomenon theorized in the literature as racial gaslighting. Racial gaslighting relies on racial spectacles and explains the propagation and normalization of White supremacy by pathologizing racial minorities who resist the White racial frame (norm) and is expressed through structural, systemic and interpersonal behaviors (Davis & Ernst, 2017). Tone policing provides a practical example of racial gaslighting and describes the practice of minimizing the messages of racialized experiences expressed by racial minorities, while

unconsciously prioritizing the "comfort of privileged" power and White supremacy (Davis & Ernst, 2017, p. 3).

In research, racial gaslighting may be demonstrated in methodologies that minimize the significance of racism in trauma exposure, symptomology, and treatment; the interpretation of findings that make comparisons between races without sufficient power to detect an intervention effect among racial minorities; and the universal application or generalization of research findings in practice without respect to the racial implications of an intervention. Because race is inseparable from the larger social context, the application of the social construct of race in research is inevitable and therefore researchers must be conscious of the perpetuation of racial framing, racial spectacles, and racial gaslighting in their work with LAA and other racial minorities. Exposing these aforementioned theories in practice and research diminishes the imposed power and allows for the authenticity of the lived trauma experience of ethnic racial minorities (Davis & Ernst, 2017).

Although race is a prominent and limiting social factor in the lived experiences of LAA, in most research, race is categorized and used as a demographic characteristic to describe the sample in relation to the research findings (García Coll et al., 1996). Contemporary limitations on the use of race as a descriptor offers insight into the challenges of disparities research to provide resolution to these well described observations. Consequently, race continues to matter in the context of disparities and our inability to disrupt the paradigm or the narrative. Deer and colleagues (2018) also note that research with minorities is often "biased toward finding deficits" when research fails to appreciate both the inter-group and intra-group diversity of LAA (p. 16).

Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, and Hordge (2010) also encourages researchers to be mindful of the role race plays in the lives of LAA by integrating race theories as a factor in observations and findings. As race is consequential across systems of racialized societies (Bonilla-Silva, 2015), the understanding that race matters in the development of LAA in relation to their community, families and selves is essential as the racialization of society constitutes the premise in which people of African descent have existed in the US. In instances where race is loosely defined as a social construct or biological conjecture that lacks a common definition or meaning, racialized others most adversely affected by the impact would prefer that it not exist at all (Hall, 2018). To deny race is to contribute to an ahistorical presentation of contemporary LAA life. Race matters.

James and colleagues (2018) center race in the context of 1) historical time, where the racially motivated policies, systems and institutions systemically denied opportunity and subsequent resources to LAA; and 2) choice, where racialized societies impacted the ability of Black men and women to make task related choices that positively impact their lived experiences. Burton and colleagues (2010) agree, noting examinations that include LAA should center race to demonstrate their contextual similarities to the norms of the Eurocentric society in which they exist and how they differ as a consequence of the institution of race and their racialized history.

Further, LAA are not monolithic and color-blind ideologies do harm and prevent scholars from appreciating the realities of the Black experience (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; A. G. James et al., 2018). A homogeneous view of LAA enables pathological views of the entire population (Lynn, 2006). Therefore, using race, without specifying meaning or

context, to categorize program outcomes or make race-based determinations of fitness for intervention, treatment, or placement across disciplines, reinforces racialized stereotypes, pathologies, and deficiencies (Hall, 2018). In summary, the influence of race poses a heavy burden on the function of LAA in this racialized society. Honoring that burden in research holds the promise of presenting the LAA experience in an intentional and authentic manner that is emerging as a paradigm in social work research.

Space Defined

Space is a "relational and topological" construct, that describes the ways people interact socially and with their physical environment (Manderscheid, 2009, p. 11). As a relational construct, space denotes the stratified, hierarchical social networks created by people using their social capital. As such, this establishes, enables, and sustains social inequalities that exist among populations and communities by incentivizing hierarchical social statuses (Bourdieu, 2018; Manderscheid, 2009). This is especially relevant for Black Belt LAA women in the context of the gendered racialization and their socially diminished positionality.

The topological aspect of space refers to the geography inhabited by people in their relational spaces (Manderscheid, 2009). The geography one occupies is a reflection of the social inequities of relational space and therefore the two paradigms are inseparable (Manderscheid, 2009). At the point where relational and geographical spaces intersect, inequality may exist as people relate to one another from their respective social positions; positions that exert social power, subjugate the less powerful and incite conflict in response to the unequal social power dynamics (Manderscheid, 2009). For LAA women in the Black Belt, the gendered racialization experienced in relation to the social

spaces and geographical places they occupy, exacerbate inequalities and inequities in the lived experiences.

Place Defined

> Place and place-making, thus, is not just an accessible spatial practice for marginalized peoples and communities to interact with and claim space; it is an already existing spatial practice that all, including the marginalized, participate in every day… emphasize that space and place, respectively, are made through social interaction and are socio-politically contested; that they incorporate diverse physical elements; and, importantly, that they are shaped by processes of capitalism. (Allen et al., 2019, p. 10-11)

As space has been defined as a relational and physical occupation of populations, place describes the solely natural, material environments where people exist, how they make meaning in the places they occupy, and their social spaces. Place describes where people work, play, live and socialize. Place is often shared with people who occupy the same and different spaces, simultaneously. In the previous quote, Allen and colleagues (2019) emphasize the sociopolitical factors, such as race and economics, that influence the relationship between space, place making, and meaning for marginalized communities. Sutton and Kemp (2011) explain that "place matters to the quality of human existence", and is a dynamic aspect of social relations that encompass people and culture, requiring "cultural interpretation" (p. 1). Place connects people in particular ways that "makes social structures endure; patterns activities; embodies cultural norms, identities and memories; expresses ecological values; and plays a role in creating and sustaining people's sense of self" (Sutton & Kemp, 2011, p. 1). The authors demonstrate

that place is multidimensional, inherently influenced by and influential to the lived experiences of people.

In discussions that seek to address LAA health disparities, scholarship must apply an operational understanding of the places that people occupy, by incorporating a historical context with the social and economic promise of those places (Kemp, 2011). For LAA with the experiences of racialization and the precipitating toxic burden of traumatic stress, place embodies impassioned meaning. Kemp (2011) explains that place holds genealogical memory and significance that provide "respite and collective renewal in "homeplaces" set apart from the places and spaces of a racist society" (p. 4). Therefore, in understanding health disparities, researchers should acknowledge the historical and time significance of place by conceptualizing place as social phenomena with unique histories "and consider the ways in which the meanings people give to places and the social relationships that develop within them have emerged over time" (Mallinson et al., 2003, p. 773, as quoted in Kemp, 2011, p. 5). As every place has a special character, shaped by outside forces that uniquely join in each place, disparities researchers are encouraged to appreciate and comprehend how this character influences individual and community identity, belonging, place making, and place meanings (Saar & Palang, 2009). In considering place, the Black Belt and Black Rural South typify contradiction for LAA women, as a place of respite, genealogical memory, and powerful meaning, as well as tragedy, enduring pain, and involuntary sacrifice.

Undoing Race in Social Work and Trauma Research with LAA

"[T]he "White concept of self can exist independent of the larger community whereas the Black self is deeply entrenched in the collective experience of his race"

(Rajiv, 1992, p. 32, as quoted in Bassey, 2007, p. 918). This statement reifies the notion that for LAA women, race matters across systems, defined by social workers as micro, mezzo, and macro. However, Deer and colleagues (2018) suggest that research studies fail to discuss the complex multiple dimensions of race, beyond demographic categorizations, and the impact of race on stress and health outcomes. They expound that:

> Race/ethnicity is frequently treated as a simple demographic variable that is associated with specific experiences such as discrimination, but prior studies have shown that this factor does not fully account for the observed racial/ethnic differences in cortisol patterns. We hypothesize that conceptualizing race/ethnicity in a broader cultural framework that includes numerous cultural aspects such as norms, attitudes, media exposure, family and social networks, connections with a home country, …may shed more light on racial/ethnic differences in affect and biology than our study and previous empirical investigation. (Deer et al., 2018, p. 15)

Therefore, to expand the conceptualization of race in this work, it is necessary to deconstruct the idea of race and establish race as a significant factor in the lived experiences of LAA in the context of space and place.

The complicated struggle, among social and human scientists, to define and theorize race is exhausting, while race and subsequently, racism, continue to impact the life experiences and opportunities of racialized groups (Bobo & Fox, 2003). This notion is problematic in research that posits race as a factor or social determinant of health outcomes. Therefore, it is essential to broach race in research with sound theory and

purpose, regarding the context of race to be as valuable to the research methods as the variables of interest. Sociologists concerned with the social impact of race continue to grapple with the meaning of race and racism; however, they agree that theoretical approaches to the study of race and racism are inadequate (Golash-Boza, 2016).

The approach to examining the racialized experiences of Black Belt LAA women proposed in this work is a nuanced justice approach that requires an appreciation for methods that have been demonstrated as effective in LAA communities and other communities with histories of discrimination, violence, and oppression. As discussed in the methods section, I employ a critical constructivist qualitative analysis of archived oral histories that center a shared aspect of gendered, racialized oppression among LAA women in the Black Belt and Black Rural South. Although oral history is not new to social work research or LAA women in the Black Belt, this project intentionally centers their Blackness as a critical aspect of the research methods, design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation of their testimonies. As previously demonstrated, centering race in research is an emerging context in social work research that requires a revolutionary lens to appreciate the scope and depth of the outcomes that exist outside of traditional Eurocentric, research hegemony.

Chapter 3: Methods

> [T]he major problem with [philosophical] existentialism, phenomenology, and structuralism, for example, is that they have hedged their bets in a European worldview that is moribund when it comes to looking at the outside world. They cannot truly grasp the significance of a revolutionary idea that would change the European method itself. (Asante, 1992, p. 173, as quoted in Bassey, 2007, p. 916)

Study Purpose and Aim

Using the BLMHJ theoretical framework that centers Blackness and promotes healing as justice, I employed qualitative analysis of archived oral history to elucidate the definition and lived experiences of ALE/trauma and to investigate the relationship between racialization, as an adverse life experience or trauma among rural LAA women living in the Black Belt and/or Black Rural South. Given the history of racialization, the compounded impact of racialized spaces, places, and histories, gender, and the injurious relationships between racialization, adverse life experiences, and traumatic stress, this study explored how LAA women make meaning of these intersections in the context of the shared historical events of racial integration. Specifically, I investigated gendered racialization as an adverse life experience or trauma among rural LAA women living in the Black Belt and/or Black Rural South in the context of the historical events surrounding Jim Crow segregation and racial integration. Using a qualitative critical constructivist analysis allowed for the deconstruction of common narratives regarding LAA women and mental health outcomes, in order to reconstruct new narratives that utilize their unique voices to document racialized historical experiences, outcomes related to trauma-induced toxic stress burdens, and inform our understanding of LAA women's

mental health (Alegría et al., 2016; Baxter & Jack, 2008). The following sections describe the study site, oral history as a research tool, and outline the study procedures.

Study Setting: The Black Belt and the Black Rural South

The Black Belt was first described by Booker T. Washington as the areas of the country where enslaved Africans were first introduced to the US, where the rich Black fertile soils made this region of the country a base for agricultural prosperity (Womack, 2007). The Black Belt subregion of the Southern US is home to "greater-than-average concentrations" of LAA (Allen-Smith et al., 2000, p. 322). Consequently, the Black Belt has the most concentrated areas of poverty in the US, as both region and rurality combine with racialization to impact the socioeconomic conditions of the LAA living here (Allen-Smith et al., 2000; Womack, 2007). More than four in ten poor people in the US are in the South and the Delta region of the Black Belt is likened to the US as Third World nations are to the industrialized West (Allen-Smith et al., 2000). According to Womack (2007) "African American quality of life is affected by residing in the Black Belt. Thirty five percent of the nation's poor, 43 percent of the rural poor, and 90 percent of poor rural African Americans live in the Black Belt" (p. 42).

The eleven Black Belt states are Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia (Figure 3). Researchers have operationalized the Black Belt counties in these southern states as:

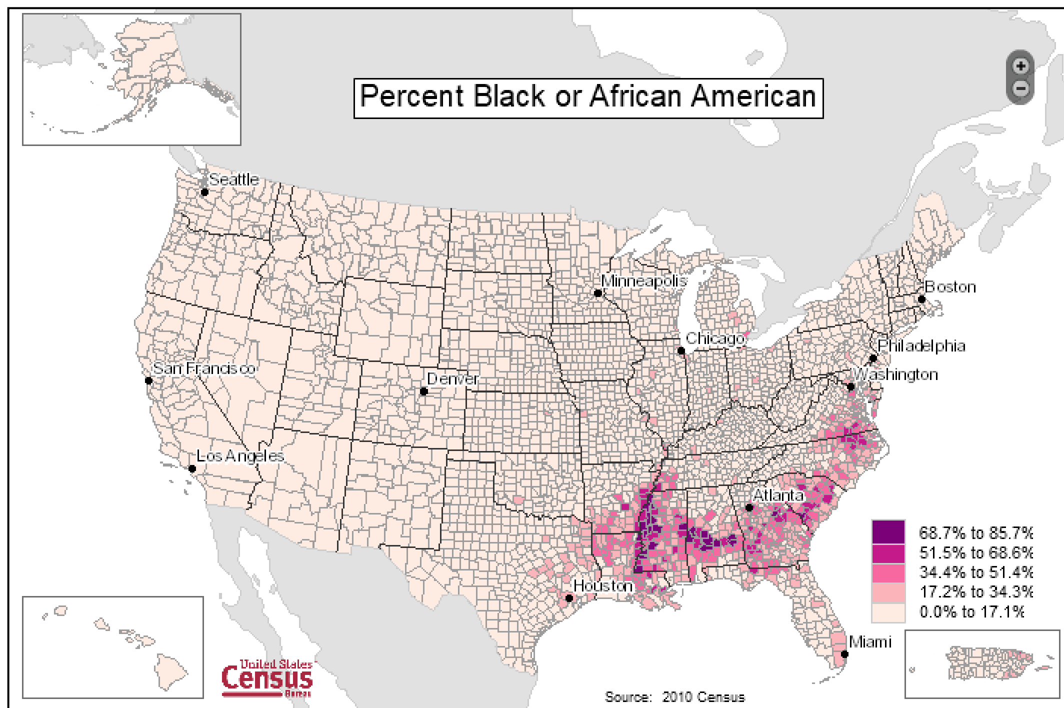
> having [a Black population in the county] at least [equivalent to] the national percentage of Black population. [For example, in 1990] the United States was 12 percent African-American. Therefore, counties where at least 12 percent of the population was Black are designated as the Black Belt counties. There are 623

such counties in the 11 Old South states, a few others in the remaining southern states, and fewer still in states outside the South. (Allen-Smith et al., 2000, p. 322)

The Black Belt region of the southern US is home to 18 percent of the US population, more than half of the South's population and almost as populated as the urbanized Northeast. Allen-Smith and colleagues (2000) compare the demographics of LAA, noting that the US population of LAA is 12%, the greater South is home to 19% of LAA, and 27% of LAA live in the Black Belt. In 2010, with one exception, all counties with 50 percent LAA populations were in the Black Belt (Green, 2014).

Figure 3

Location map of African Americans in the US (Rastogi et al., 2011a, 2011b)

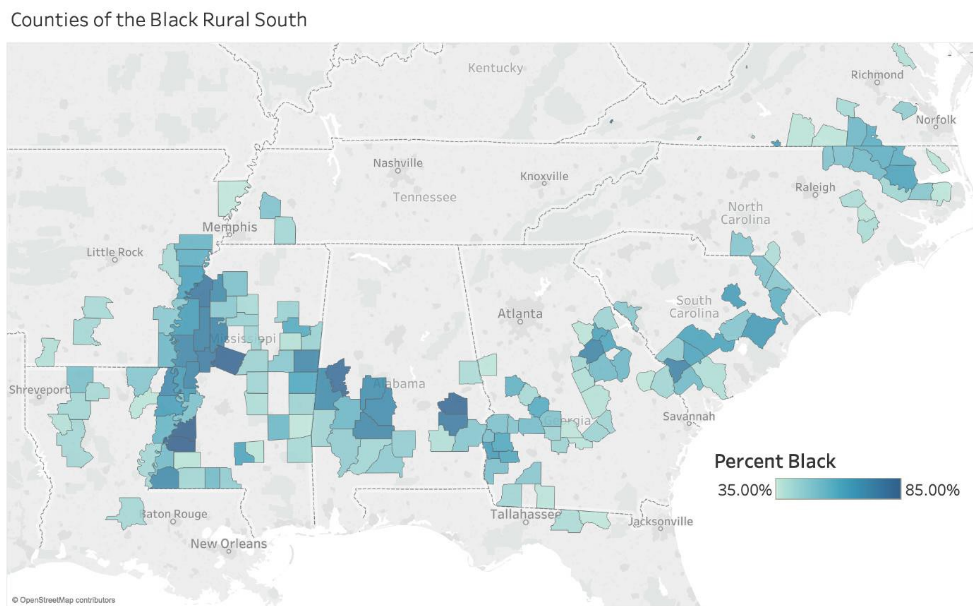


A subset of the Black Belt, described as the Black Rural South (Figure 4), are counties within the Black Belt with the largest concentrations of LAA (Contractor & Overton, 2020). The Black Rural South include 156 counties across ten states (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina,

Tennessee, and Virginia) that 1) have been designated as "rural" by the U.S. Department of Agriculture; and 2) has a population that is at least 35 percent African American (Contractor & Overton, 2020). This is an underinclusive representation of the Black Rural South, as large portions of LAA live in counties with less than 35 percent LAA populations. For comparison, consider that LAA account for approximately 12 percent of the U.S. population and 8 percent of the U.S. rural population. Therefore, the Black Rural South offers an opportunity to make meaningful comparisons between the conditions of these concentrated LAA populations to the greater population of LAA in the US.

Figure 4

156 Counties of the Black Rural South (Contractor & Overton, 2020)



Geography scholars provide some insight into the relevance of the Black Belt/Black Rural South and the racialization of LAA. Through the examination of race, space and place-making, scholars note that place-making is also tied to identity formation (D. Allen et al., 2019). The authors demonstrate the importance of approaching research in geography from a Black lens to align the significance of place to the lived experiences

of LAAs and their well-being (D. Allen et al., 2019). In addition, most social work, ALE/trauma, mental and physical health research is conducted in urban and suburban communities. Eberhardt and Pamuk (2004) contend that disparities are reliant on an understanding of the rural and urban population differences. However, rural communities vary greatly within and between communities, complicating research efforts seeking to describe health disparities and trauma. Bhattacharya (2013) notes that rural communities are both externally and internally diverse, with socio-historical influences on LAA that impact the individual utilization and access to health care resources. The paucity of literature and therefore, limited understanding of the individual and communal trauma experiences of LAA in rural communities pose considerable challenges to our social and clinical considerations of health outcomes. This lack of understanding and appreciation for experiential differences of rural people contributes to pervasive health and mental health disparities.

North Carolina: The Old North, Tarheel State

Noted North Carolina historian, William Powell (1988) describes the state as "puzzling to the uninitiated" because of the "attitudes and actions of its people" or in understanding its basic physical characteristics, "with its long span from the Atlantic Ocean to the crest of the Appalachian Mountains, level coastal plains blend into the piedmont's rolling hills, which in turn rise into the highest peaks east of the Mississippi River" (Powell, 1988, Preface, p. xi). While North Carolina has established urbanized, metropolitan areas (i.e., Charlotte, the Triad and Triangle regions), the state remains relatively rural (Figure 5, North Carolina Dept. of Transportation, 2021). Consequently, agriculture and manufacturing industries once blended, alongside the emergence of

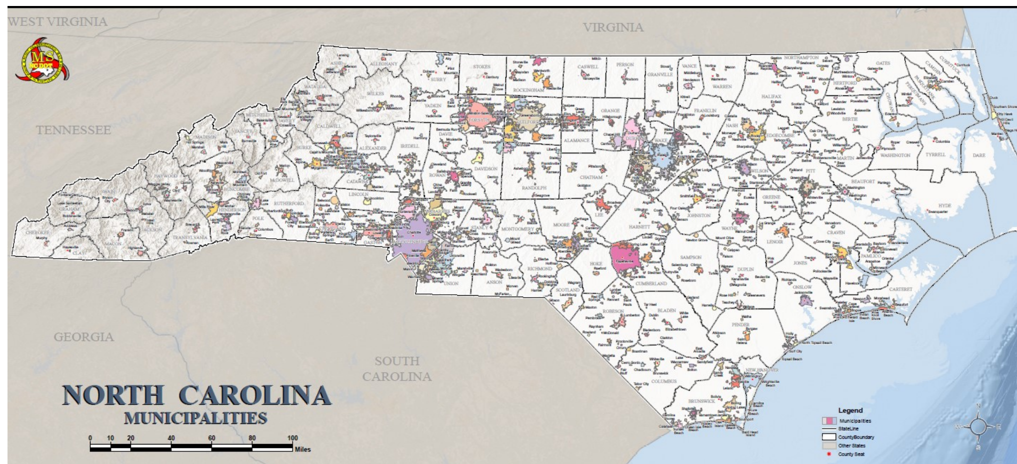
global leadership in financial, health care, and education.

Powell (1988) explains that North Carolinians “feel an exceptionally strong loyalty… placing home county and state well ahead of the nation in their affection and attachment” (Preface, p. xiii). This feeling includes a “strong attachment to church and to political party”, noting that the only reason for choosing an affiliation is because the family has always worshipped or voted that chosen persuasion (Powell, 1988, Preface, p. xiii). North Carolinians’ loyalties extend to strong allegiances to one of North Carolina’s major White universities, even though they may not have attended; however, because it belongs to North Carolina, it belongs to North Carolinians (Powell, 1988).

Powell (1988) also describes the “strong feeling of kinship” that North Carolinians, at home and abroad, possess, demonstrated in exchanges of animated question “as they seek to discover relatives in common or at least mutual friends and acquaintances” (Preface, p. xiv). Judy Richardson, a LAA woman civil rights advocate and former member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), concurs in describing her admiration for how Ella Baker, LAA Civil Rights icon and North Carolinian, noting that Mrs. Baker “always wanted to know, ‘Who are your people?’”, to understand a person’s relational connections, their community, and how they were raised (Bell, 2018, p. 112).

Figure 5

Municipalities in North Carolina



Note. Municipalities in North Carolina are represented by color. The white space are the rural, less densely populated areas. (https://connect.ncdot.gov/resources/State-Mapping/Pages/County-Outline-Map.aspx). Copyright 2022 by the North Carolina Department of Transportation.

North Carolina also owns a challenging racialized political history, exemplified in pioneering exclusion and segregationist policies. Historically, LAA in North Carolina have always resisted these policies as demonstrated in modern public history as home of the first lunch counter sit-in demonstration in Greensboro, NC, February 1, 1960 and birthplace of the SNCC, organized by Ella Baker, on the campus of Shaw University, the first historically Black College and University (HBCU) in the South, in Raleigh, NC (Cobb, n.d.). School segregation served to actualize the history of educational ideology among Whites that determined the utility of LAA in society and the workforce. Bartz and Kritsonis (2019) note that "[t]he general educational philosophy of the powers to be (Whites) toward African Americans in the slave states was that no education was critical to maintain slavery and counter any organized uprisings by slaves." (p. 2). To ensure this perspective, North Carolina enacted laws in the antebellum Black Belt outlawing the education of LAA. North Carolina's law was characteristic of state laws during this time

period:

> That any free person, who shall hereafter teach, or attempt to teach, any slave within the State to read or write, the use of figures expected, or shall give or sell to such slave or slaves any books or pamphlets, shall be liable to indictment in any court of record in this State having jurisdiction thereof, and upon conviction, shall, at the discretion of the court, if a White man or woman, be fined not less than one hundred dollars, nor more than two hundred dollars, or imprisoned; and if a free person of color, shall be fined, imprisoned, or whipped, at the discretion of the court, not exceeding thirty nine lashes, or nor less than twenty lashes (North Carolina, 1831, par. 1). (Bartz & Kritsonis, 2019, p. 2)

North Carolina in particular did not provide secondary public school facilities for LAA children until 1918, seven years after providing schools for White rural children (Ayscue et al., 2014). Laws and subsequently, public opinion, enforced the ideology that LAA were historically groomed for service to Whites. As such, education beyond basic arithmetic or reading for the purposes of an enslaved LAA's trade or vocation was discouraged. The ideology to prioritize vocational education for the purpose of service persisted throughout the postbellum Black Belt and subjected LAA to low wage, low skilled, service-oriented trades. Therefore, non-vocational training was discouraged by the White populace and myths about the inability of LAA to learn beyond vocational training was reinforced.

North Carolina has a unique history of integration when compared to other Black Belt states, with some schools integrating by 1957 with relative calm, and was considered, in context to other Jim Crow states, the leader and a model for school

integration throughout the Jim Crow south (Ayscue et al., 2014). The reality was paradoxical to the model. The “North Carolina Way” of approaching school integration took advantage of the “with all deliberate speed” clause in the 1954 Supreme Court decision and effectively used legislative policy to circumvent integration efforts across the state (Ayscue et al., 2014). Although racialized violence and intimidation by local citizens occurred, North Carolina’s state and local governments were effective at staving off large scale public school integration for more than a decade after *Brown v. The Board of Education* decision (Hines, 2016; Morrill, 2015; Scarbrough, 2017). State and local school and elected officials in North Carolina “implemented a subtle legal strategy to delay integration as long as possible”, namely the 1955 Pupil Assignment Plan and the 1956 Pearson Plan that appeared to adhere to the federal integration mandate, but placed the burden of public school integration on LAA families to initiate and achieve integration (Ayscue et al., 2014, p. 2). The Pupil Assignment Plan was a two-pronged strategy that (1) transferred student assignment, enrollment, and transportation authority from the state board of education to local boards and (2) complicated the procedure for appealing a school board’s decision in order to delay integration. The Pearson Plan legislation of 1956 facilitated the state’s “token integration” by allowing local school boards to create impediments to full integration by (1) requiring LAA parents interested in integrating their children into White schools to apply for their child’s admission through their local school boards, which were openly opposed to desegregation; (2) allowing local schools an option to close, by majority vote of the local school board, if integration occurred at an excessively high rate; and (3) permitting White parents to receive state tuition to attend private schools if their children could not be conveniently

assigned to a non-integrated public school.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964, outlawing discrimination based on race, effectively ended Jim Crow segregation in the Black Belt. Following the passage of the Civil Right Act, federal desegregation guidelines were issued and the active prosecution of non-compliant school districts encouraged North Carolina's state board of education to reconsider their subtly defiant position. North Carolina responded to the implementation of these federal policies and the potential loss of federal education funding for non-compliance with widespread, statewide integration of public schools, which included submission of a civil rights compliance pledge and desegregation plan for approval to the US Department of Education (Ayscue et al., 2014).

School desegregation in North Carolina was not a transparent and collective effort between LAA communities and their White counterparts. From the outset, North Carolina state government officials openly opposed integration and made several attempted to derail integration efforts. In the early years of school integration, LAA students and parents continued to protest their exclusion in integration planning efforts across the state, that included closing segregated LAA schools to transfer LAA students to the segregated White schools, the mass termination of LAA teachers, and the demotion of LAA administrators ("Chronicle of School Integration," 1969; Harris, 1956). Advocates contended that shared power and decision making at the state and local level would be critical to a successful integration effort, as efforts that honored the identities of the community and where each is (Harris, 1956):

> equally represented. Then, as a new identity — a truly consolidated school — emerges, popular elections can be employed because the identity and value of

> both races of students and their contributions have been firmly established.... We must plan now, else it is likely we will not have our teachers, students, and parents ready to help build the legally inevitable and morally right integrated school into an effective learning situation. ("Chronicle of School Integration," 1969, p. 14)

Although major predominantly White universities (i.e., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and North Carolina State University) and public schools in progressive metropolitan areas of the state began integration in the late 1950's, under court order and with interracial desegregation advisory councils and boards, rural communities, such as Anson County, pursued legal injunctions to disrupt the building of proposed new schools by suing to block the final sale of a school bond on the basis that voter's approval of said bond was to build segregated schools that are no longer lawful (Harris, 1956). Although local jurisdictions across the state broached desegregation differently, there was timorous adoption of this new way of life from both the LAA and White community, as many LAA families elected to continue to send their children to segregated LAA schools instead of integrating into White schools.

The threatened closure of LAA schools in lieu of White schools initiated non-violent LAA protests across the state, while the integration of White schools prompted violent responses from some in the White community who were opposed to their children attending school with LAA students. In metropolitan Charlotte, the homes, businesses, and property of prominent LAA civil rights activists were bombed, and in rural Anson County, the homes of integrating LAA families, the school superintendent (White), and White school board members were also bombed to thwart integration efforts (Hines,

2016; Morrill, 2015; Scarbrough, 2017). Although these crimes were outside of the norm and remain unsolved, they demonstrate the complexity and contentious nature of school desegregation in North Carolina and suggest lasting implications for the communities that lived these historical moments as the state's increasingly diverse population is returning to more racially segregated schools.

Oral History Defined

The OHA defines oral history as "a field of study and a method of gathering, preserving, and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events" (Oral History Association, 2018a, "Oral History: Defined" section, para. 1). Oral history predates the written word, making it the oldest type of historical inquiry. OHA notes that:

> the value of oral history lies largely in the way it helps to place people's experiences within a larger social and historical context. The interview becomes a record useful for documenting past events, individual or collective experiences, and understandings of the ways that history is constructed. Because it relies on memory, oral history captures recollections about the past filtered through the lens of a changing personal and social context. (Oral History Association, 2018a, "What is Oral History?" section, para. 3)

Oral history, as it is used in this research, is embedded in the epistemology of critical theories as a tool to enact liberatory justice for Black Belt LAA (Clifford, 1995). As a student of oral history methodology, I define oral history through the context of a critical trauma approach, upholding the theoretical framework of this project, that centers the Black experience, while holding space for the oppressed. Oral history research

methodology creates space for generating new knowledge by harnessing the past to examine the present condition of the human experience (Ritchie, 2015). For Black Belt LAA women, the past is critically important to establish context for present-day outcomes, impacted by systemic and structural experiences of racial discrimination, covert and overt racism, gendered oppression, and the obscenities of Black anguish, engrained in the mainstream psyche of our society (Yow, 2018). By generating interviews that are as unique as fingerprints, the oral history research method honors the historical significance of the racialized existence of Black Belt LAA women and the silenced voices of ancestors, who bequeathed their experiences of oppression and resilience to subsequent generations. Oral history contradicts Westernized hegemonic epistemologies by uplifting ways of knowing and understanding Black Belt LAA women. Further, oral history empowers the narrator through ownership of their stories and the ability to gift their contribution to the world for posterity. Owning the salacious burden of violence experienced through the centuries-long holocaust of countless masses of Africans and their descendants, in addition to the loss of culture, humanity, and worthiness, without the freedom to grieve, oral history opens space for Black Belt LAA women to own their history through their biographies, authentically share their impressions, and substantiate their dignity.

The interview is the essence of the oral historian's work and therefore requires special considerations especially with vulnerable and historically oppressed communities that have experienced both individual and collective adverse life events. An oral history interview is both a research tool and a space for narrative expression from "whole and complex" individuals "who are more than a mere collection of stories" (Sheftel, 2018, p.

291). Although oral history interviewers make attempts to mitigate bias, there are inherent factors in the interview process that challenges those efforts. Oral history interviewing is not an extraction of data, but rather a reopening of “dialogue between two… worlds which long ago ceased to speak to each other” based on some commonality, such as language or a willingness to talk, as “similarity makes the interview possible; difference makes it meaningful” (Portelli, 2018, p. 241-242). The oral history interview is an intersection of multiple agendas. Ultimately, the interviewee controls the oral history interview in the stories they choose to tell, as determined by their agenda (Portelli, 2018). Because many interviewees have never been asked about their historical experiences, many use the oral history interview as an opportunity to answer questions, but also share unsolicited experiences. Therefore, oral history interviewers must be willing to open the narrative space, allowing flexibility to accept the interviewees’ agenda and make modifications to their own.

For LAA collectively, and LAA women particularly, given the history of oppressive gendered racialization, the oral history interview is about relationship. The living voices that speak to us in the present through an oral history interview share the events of the past and reveal the contemporary meaning of those past events. The manner in which they recall and tell their experiences expose the social anxieties associated with racialization within the oral history interview relationship and influences how racialized LAA women tell their stories to interviewers. Oral history is “dynamic and creative”, respects the witness as an expert in their own experience, and retains importance in LAA communities (Ritchie, 2015, p. 1). Oral history methodology is a skillful process that begins with research of historical facts that serve as background for interviews and

elevates the neglected unknowns of historical understanding (Tuchman, 1996). Using oral history research methods, “incorporating the less powerful into the historical narrative”, ensures that the historical accounts of those who have been “left out” of history may be revealed, as these voices are in fact history (Ritchie, 2015, pp. 5-7). Oral history research methodology allows researchers to examine the present condition of the human experience by harnessing the past.

The Oral History Process

Oral history is an interview process that culminates in recorded spoken interviews (i.e., audio, video, or other formats). These recorded interviews are intended to collect and preserve (1) meaningful historical information that focus on an interviewee’s life history; or (2) topical interviews with interviewees selected for their knowledge or experience with a particular historical subject or event. The oral history interview is characterized by a well-prepared interviewer questioning an interviewee while recording their exchange in audio or video format. The interview recordings are transcribed, summarized, or indexed and then situated in a library or archives to be used for research and/or other form of public presentation (e.g., documentary, publication, museum artifact).

The OHA explains, “[w]hile interviewers pose questions based on research and careful preparation, narrators shape the interview based on what they deem to be relevant, meaningful, or appropriate to share” (Oral History Association, 2018a, "What is Oral History?" section, para. 4). Consequently, the oral history research method employs a systematic process to capture not only historical events through oral tradition, but also cultural, spiritual, social, and familial nuances that influence decision making, belief

systems and perspectives of historical events, with the intent to create something new.

Oral History in Social Work Research. Oral history provides a valuable tool to integrate Black content into social work research, practice and education (R. R. Martin, 1995). This integration of "left out" Black voices strengthens social work by expanding the capacity of practitioners to facilitate healing for LAA with persistent compounded traumas. According to Andrews (2014), "oral history can honor, inform, raise consciousness, and motivate action" and is "particularly relevant for historically excluded populations and those with oral traditions" such as LAA in the Black Belt (p. 1). Oral history in social work provides a method of inquiry that enables: (1) an understanding of how the past recurs within individuals; (2) an appreciation for how unraveling the past through oral history can have favorable outcomes for marginalized individuals and communities; and (3) a means by which to promote social change (Andrews, 2014; Clifford, 1995). It is, therefore, critical to oral history methodology, that verbatim transcription and voluntary interviewee participation, without monetary compensation, define the process.

Oral historians apply a big picture lens, elevating the importance of what people did or thought into the historical narrative (Ritchie, 2015). This "big picture" lens models the holistic and critical social work perspective of person in environment. Social work as a science, profession, and practice is grounded in human behavior and psychosocial, emotional interactions between systems (individuals and communities) and the environments in which they exist. Fundamental similarities between social work and oral history in practice include a need for prior training; rapport and relationship building; interviewing skills; non-judgmental and engaging approaches; and grounding in social

justice that elevates voices of those who have not been heard.

In addition, both social work and oral history are governed by a code of ethics that ensures a culture of respect, dedication, and commitment to marginalized communities. Oral history ethics states that “everyone involved in oral history work, from interviewers and narrators to archivists and researchers, becomes part of a web of mutual responsibility working to ensure that the narrator’s perspective, dignity, privacy, and safety are respected” (Oral History Association, 2018, "OHA Statement on Ethics" section, para. 1). Social work researchers employing oral history as a methodology also adhere to ethical standards that ensure the protection of human subjects, as well as the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Social Work Code of Ethics. These dual ethical standards uniquely guides social work researchers as oral historians, honoring the dignity of research participants or interviewees, and safeguarding their well-being before, during, and after an oral history interview (R. R. Martin, 1995; Yow, 1995).

Critical Constructivism in Qualitative Research

A constructivist qualitative paradigm posits “that truth is relative and that it is dependent on one’s perspective” recognizing “the importance of the subjective human creation of meaning” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 545). The constructivist paradigm or constructivism in a qualitative research design is founded on the notion of a social construction of reality (Searle, 1995). Creswell and Miller (2000) note that “[c]onstructivists believe in pluralistic, interpretive, open-ended, and contextualized (e.g., sensitive to place and situation) perspectives toward reality” (p. 125). An advantage of applying the constructivist approach is the proximal partnership between the inquirer and the interviewee, wherein the research participant is enabled to share their accounts and

perspectives on reality such that the researcher is better able to appreciate their related actions and behaviors.

Creswell and Miller (2000) also describe a critical approach in qualitative research, noting that:

> the critical perspective holds that researchers should uncover the hidden assumptions about how narrative accounts are constructed, read, and interpreted. What governs our perspective about narratives is our historical situatedness of inquiry, a situatedness based on social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender antecedents of the studied situations. (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126)

Employing a critical qualitative perspective directs research decisions, including theory development or selection, sampling selection, data collection, and analysis in a manner that reflects a social justice and transformation orientation. A critical alignment in qualitative research investigates broader social, political, and economic structures and historical contributions. Critical qualitative researchers are concerned with the perceptions, behaviors, and attitudes of oppressed and marginalized populations and their revolutionary capacity to achieve justice, not simply the rejection of the institutions that enable their marginalization.

In this study, I employ a critical constructivist bricolage comprised of four basic tenets (Kincheloe, 2005, Steinberg 2014): (1) the world is socially constructed and our realities are based on how what we know has been constructed by the dominant culture; (2) individuals in society are historical and social subjects who are situated in the context of place, space, and historical time that shape our consciousness and reality; (3) people and their knowledge are socially and historically constructed such that realities are

created and operated using contemporary cultural tools that are based on a unique social, cultural, and historical perspective; and (4) critical constructivist research honors the multidimensional nature of reality creation and ways of knowing. Critical constructivist researchers attempt to maximize research findings to render a naturalistic, richly detailed, complex understanding of the collective human experiences in context to their environment (i.e., social, political, economic, cultural, psychological, and pedagogical world) and the ways that the construction and validation process of research privileges certain populations and marginalizes others. By acknowledging that research examines the intersection of personal experiences, learned and lived knowledges, critical constructivist researchers value the complexity of combining different perspectives to reveal how people make meaning of experiences and perspectives that are systemically disregarded by conventional academics and culture.

Critical constructivism rejects a neutral perspective and asserts that “[t]he world is what dominant groups of humans perceive it to be”, as “people are often unable to discern the ways their environments shape their perception” (Steinberg, 2014, p. 206). In addition, a person’s knowledge is an interpretation that is inseparable from that individual’s understanding of historical, indigenous, social, cultural, economic, and political contexts that establishes their reality. Finally, critical constructivism derives from critical theory that is concerned “with extending a human’s consciousness” of themselves socially and in relation to history, by promoting “self-reflection in relation to social power, and its ability to align our self- perceptions and world views with the interests of power blocs” (Steinberg, 2014, p. 206). A critical constructivist perspective is employed by researchers intentionally to guide research design, data collection, data

analysis, interpretation, validity, and reliability that is collaborative and participatory within the community of interest.

Experiential Knowledge of this Researcher

Given the critical constructivist approach to this project, I assumed an active, collaborative, and participatory presence in the research design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation of findings. I am deeply connected to the Black Belt and the Black Rural South, as my elders and ancestors, including my parents, grandparents and generations of great-grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, neighbors, church members, and generations of family friends, experienced the legacy of enslavement and the apartheid of Jim Crow segregation in the Black Belt.

As a LAA child growing up in a Black Belt, Black Rural South community, I experienced personally the cultural nuances that shape the generations of people who live there. The rich traditions of faith, family, and community are deeply rooted in historical, intergenerational, cultural, and racial adverse life experiences or traumas that are disregarded, unresolved, pervasive, and persistent. As a former member of this community, it is apparent that the targets and purveyors of racialization live and work collectively in these isolated communities.

My connection to the history of segregation is best understood in the context of my public school experience. Legalized segregation ended in my local North Carolina public schools approximately nine years before I entered Kindergarten, an indication that many of the teachers and administrators, Black and White, were the products of segregated schools, like my father. These public school leaders had likely attended segregated schools and universities, and taught in segregated schools. In addition, just as

my ancestors and communities were the racialized component of segregation, the parents, extended families, and communities of the White students that attended school alongside me from 1981 to 1994, represented the oppositional aspect of that system.

Although segregation ended, not a decade had passed and the remnants of more than eighty years of social, political, and economic segregation were ubiquitous and challenging. My LAA peers and I were not completely shielded from the after effects of decades of segregation, although, we had the privilege of teachers and principals who made great attempts to do so. The struggles of my community are my struggles and I am a direct product of those who endured, resisted, reclaimed, and restored their humanity for me and subsequent generations. This is the lens that prompted the following pilot oral history interview with my paternal uncle, who was a member of the first class of LAA students to integrate a local White high school.

Pilot Oral History Interview

Using oral history methodology, I conducted a pilot interview with my uncle who grew up and currently lives in a Black Rural South community in NC. Our interview focused on his experiences as a young adolescent forced to racially integrate the local White high school. The intervention of the Federal government brought an end the racial segregation in the public schools in 1971, forcing school districts to integrate their student bodies. My uncle was a member of the integrating freshman (ninth grade) class, that was forced, (*"I didn't have a choice"*), to attend the White high school. His innocence of the world outside of his immediate community presented as a stark contrast to the racialized violence and bewildering experiences that he would encounter that first day. He described the experiences of being forced to attend without any involvement in

the decision making or foreknowledge of what to expect on his first day of school, along with the disappointment and grief of not completing his secondary education at the legendary Black high school. He explained and the literature supports, that his parents, my grandparents, were not invited to contribute to the decisions around school integration and the impact that those actions may have on him and the other LAA students left with no choice (Willink, 2009). In his account, he expressed his feelings of trepidation as a young boy and the experience of having to *"just take it"*, when his White peers would identify the Ku Klux Klan meeting house on the bus ride to school, of which he was the only LAA student on board or when a White student exclaimed in the school hall, *"there [are] so many niggers [in] here, we can't turn [around]"*.

During the interview, my uncle described how he did not have prior experiences with White people in his community that were not physically, verbally, or emotionally violent and understood that direct confrontation was *"mak[e]ing trouble"*. He elaborated that when he was a child, he witnessed an impressionable incident in town where a Black man was accosted and beaten by White police officers, seemingly without cause. That experience, along with the training in *"manners"* that he received at home, in the community and his segregated Black schools, reinforced the tenets of racialized oppression and segregation, that the action or inaction of LAA could be perceived by White society as *"trouble"*.

His rich descriptions of the conspicuous differences between his old school environment (Black) and the new school environment (White) demonstrated how Jim Crow apartheid had created two very different societies or *"culture[s]"* in one shared community space and place. His depiction of acts of resistance, reclamation, and

restoration demonstrated by the LAA students who occupied those racially hostile spaces and places in the school environment was both remarkable and insightful, setting the stage for the establishment of this current project.

This interview revealed the inherent challenges of the oral history interview, as previously mentioned. Naming or reluctance to naming racialization as an adverse life event or trauma, identifying as a victim, and acknowledging perpetrators of trauma emerged as themes from the interview. The interview also brought into question the established constructs of resilience, coping, and dissociation in response to racialized adverse life experiences or traumas. The interview also established the importance of women and trauma in this community and provided context to how I understood Jim Crow segregation and integration in the rural South as presented in the archived oral history interviews.

Finally, I garnered a deep appreciation for the breadth and depth of the oral history process and interview, as well as the emotional labor expended by both the narrator and interviewer to recall/relive the experience of Jim Crow segregation and integration. In reflecting on this aspect of the experience, I realized the value of the archived voices, unheard and waiting to be revealed. Within critical constructivism, archived oral histories offer me a window into the lived experiences of Black Belt LAA women and the intersection of their personal experiences and ways of knowing; thus, revealing the complexities of how they make meaning of their racialization through their own words, thoughts, experiences, and emotions. The cross-section of oral histories available to me through the archives, in combination with my own experiential knowledge, enables the combining of multiple perspectives, offering richness and depth

to the findings.

The Current Study

This qualitative study used publicly available archived oral history datasets to explore racialization in the Black Belt and Black Rural South among LAA women that experienced Jim Crow desegregation as teens or adults (Creswell et al., 2007). I approached this study with a critical constructivist lens that situated focus on the influence of racialized ALE and/or trauma in the Black Belt and Black Rural South as an essential element in addressing disparities (Stake, 1995). Given the history of racialization, the compounded impact of racialized spaces, places, and histories, gendered oppression, and the injurious relationships between racialization, adverse life experiences, and traumatic stress, this study aimed to elucidate the definition and lived experiences of ALE/trauma and to investigate the relationship between racialization, as an adverse life experience or trauma, and mental health among rural LAA women, living in the Black Belt and/or Black Rural South.

The BLMHJ framework guided this study by highlighting the critical role of internal meaning making and healing from racialized, gendered oppression of LAA women, through the oral history or life history interview, while outwardly focusing on social change that permeated the historical time of desegregation. Further, the archived oral history interviews, allowed for the examination of inside out social change and the root cause of barriers to collective healing and healing justice through restoration, resistance, and reclamation. Centering Black lives in Black geographies, recognized that "[B]lack matters are spatial matters" and a focus on "[B]lack life and agency within and despite White supremacy" and oppression, promoted scholarship that evolves beyond

social ills to focus on the Black experience that has been "invisiblized" by society and the academy (D. Allen et al., 2019, p. 4).

Propositions

This exploratory qualitative study was guided by the proposition that experiences of racialization, demonstrated through the historical events surrounding Jim Crow segregation and racial integration, are pervasively traumatic and adverse, contributing to a toxic stress burden that influences disparities among LAA in the Black Belt and Black Rural South subset. This proposition, guided by the BLMHJ framework, was based on a number of assumptions from the literature, pilot interview, and my reflective experiences. Those assumptions were:

1. The experience of racialization is an adverse life experience that may be traumatic.
2. Trauma and adverse life experiences lead to multidimensional stress responses, including physiological, psychological, social, and spiritual.
3. Prolonged and pervasive toxic stress burdens cause disease and poor mental health outcomes.
4. History of racialization and traumatic/toxic stress is shared across generations and within communities.
5. Historical racial segregation and the process of integration is an adverse racialized life experience or racialized trauma.
6. A deeper understanding of racialization as trauma informs healing in LAA.
7. Healing from racialized trauma is justice and empowers oppressed

communities.

8. Centering the Black experience in the context of history is essential, as the only way to understand the intricacies and nuances of LAA experiences in racialized societies is through their histories.
9. Barriers to healing from racialized trauma are the recantation of trauma and fear-motivated silencing of LAA in response to persistent racial intimidation and racial violence.
10. The oral history (also referred to as life history) method facilitates healing justice among LAA as a direct action to resist the act of racialization, reclaim their truth, and restore the dignity of their community.

Procedures

Guided by the BLMHJ framework, this project explored how Black Belt/Black Rural South LAA women recall and describe their lived experiences of racialization in the context of historical events such as Jim Crow segregation and racial integration.

Data: Archived Oral Histories

This explorative and descriptive qualitative study analyzed oral histories archived in the Southern Oral History Program (SOHP) database, an affiliate of the Center for the Study of the American South (CSAS) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) and stored in the Louis Round Wilson Library (LRWL) Special Collections. The SOHP database is available online and free of charge, as a digital, publicly accessible database. The SOHP has preserved over six thousand oral history interviews from people living the American South since 1973 (Southern Oral History Program, 2019). The archived oral histories are made available to the public through the SOHP database and

the Southern Historical Collection in the LRWL at UNC-CH.

Digitized transcripts and audio for several oral histories are available in the SOHP database and through links in the database (Southern Oral History Program Interview Database, 2021a). The database is searchable by keywords although some of the interview records may be incomplete. For example, abstracts, transcripts, and demographic data, such as occupation, ethnicity, birth date, and gender, may not be available for every interview. Keyword searches of the database are considered "imperfect", as searches extend to 128,000 characters (approximately 60 transcript pages) and technology used to aid transcription is "imprecise" leading to misreading characters (e.g. "wife" misread as "wise") (Southern Oral History Program Interview Database, 2021a). In addition, transcripts may contain errors and may not have undergone review by the interviewee for accuracy and revision. Given the nuances of the SOHP database search capabilities, I manually selected each record within the three selected projects to assess each interview for inclusion in this current study, based on the inclusion criteria. To manually select records for inclusion, I opened each record in the selected projects to determine the gender and age of each interviewee and to determine the availability of audio recordings and transcripts. This process also required that I listen to audio introductions and/or read transcripts to determine age and gender of the interviewees (i.e., referred titles (e.g., Mr. Mrs.) and pronouns).

Centering the Black experience and history, the purpose of the current study is to explore how LAA women in the post-Jim Crow Black Belt make meaning of their racialization, as an adverse life experience, that leads to stress in the context of the gendered spaces and historically racialized, rural, southern places where they live.

Applying the BLMHJ framework to data analysis, I explored the experience of gendered racialization through archived oral history interviews (SOHP) with 15 Black Belt LAA women, living in three different rural North Carolina counties: (1) Robeson County, NC (Long Civil Rights Movement: School Desegregation); (2) Pamlico County, NC (Long Civil Rights Movement: Preserving the African American Experience); and (3) Orange County, NC (Rural Back Ways).

Long Civil Rights Movement: School Desegregation in Robeson County, NC. This archived collection of oral histories contains seventeen separate interviews, each including an interview number, description, and date; interviewee demographic data (i.e., name, date of birth, ethnicity, and occupation); interviewer name; audio recordings for some interviews and corresponding transcripts for most. The interviews in this project were collected from 2003 to 2004 and focus broadly on school desegregation in Robeson County, NC. The archive includes interviews with sixteen men and two women, including a male-female dyad. The content of the interviews present various aspects of the civil rights movement in the county from 1954 to 1988, focusing on the "process and challenges of tri-racial school desegregation" and race relations between Native American (Lumbee and Tuscarora), LAA, and White peoples (Southern Oral History Program Interview Database, 2021d). The thirty minute to one-hour interviews were conducted with a cross-section of the population, including an interview with a LAA woman. Given the close proximity to the community, a member of the Lumbee peoples, seasoned researcher, oral historian, and director of the CSAS at UNC-CH, served as the primary interviewer for this collection. The interview protocol consists of open ended, probing questions and prompts, intended to elicit a free-flow of ideas from the

interviewees, to tell the stories they believed to be most important in the context of "the mechanics of segregation and desegregation, interviewees' experiences in a tri-racial community, and present-day attitudes" (Southern Oral History Program Interview Database, 2021d).

Long Civil Rights Movement: Preserving the African American Experience in Pamlico County, NC. This archived oral history project documents and preserves the recollections of the period from 1930 to 1965, of the segregation experiences of twenty LAA older adults from rural Pamlico County, NC. The archive includes oral histories, collected in 2007, of eleven LAA women and nine LAA men, from across the county, broadly capturing the "history and heritage" of the LAA experience (Southern Oral History Program Interview Database, 2021b). Each interview record includes an interview number, date, and description, as well the interviewer's name and interviewee demographics (i.e., name, date of birth, ethnicity, and occupation). This oral history project was funded externally by the community and coordinated by a member of the community. Various interviewers, including the project coordinator, conducted thirty to forty-five minute oral history interviews for this project. The archive includes both audio recordings and corresponding transcripts for most of the interviews conducted. The interview protocol included questions about demographics, early life in Pamlico County (NC), education, religion, history, and community life (Finch, 2007).

Rural South: Back Ways: Understanding Segregation in the Rural South. This collection of oral history interviews was conducted with LAA adults from the rural Piedmont and Eastern areas of North Carolina, from 2014 to 2016. The project archive includes seventeen, thirty minute to one hour interviews with ten women (three dyad

interviews) and ten men. Included in the archive are audio recordings of each interview and the corresponding transcripts, as well as an interview number, description, and date. Each interview archive includes the interviewer's name and interviewee demographics (i.e., name, date of birth, ethnicity, and occupation).

This oral history project is described as "an interdisciplinary, collaborative research project designed to unearth, describe, and map the often hidden forces of structural and institutional discrimination that have outlasted the victories of the Civil Rights Movement" (Southern Oral History Program Interview Database, 2021c). This project was directed and managed by UNC-CH faculty in American Studies with SOHP field scholars as interviewers. The primary interviewer has a PhD in geography and positions a geographic focus on the interviews that supports "a growing body of scholarship around space, place, and identity" in areas of the state burdened by poverty, high crime rates, low academic performance, and negative perceptions (i.e., menacing and incompetent) of minority residents persist, including LAA (Southern Oral History Program Interview Database, 2021c). The goal of the project is to hold space for community conversations about how LAA shape their space in relation to their racialization and active resistance against oppression and discrimination. As is typical with archived oral histories, the interviews include identifying information for each interviewee. Each of these women discuss their lived experiences with Jim Crow segregation and integration and the impact of these experiences on the various aspects of their wellness: (1) emotional/mental; (2) environmental; (3) financial; (4) intellectual/education; (5) occupational/career; (6) Physical; (7) Social; and (8) Spiritual.

The interviews captured in these three (3) separate oral history projects were

conducted by various interviewers. The Robeson County, NC interview (n=1) was conducted by an indigenous (Lumbee) woman, who was also a senior researcher and seasoned oral historian. The Pamlico County, NC interviews (n=8) were conducted by LAA women from the community and familiar with the interviewees' lived experiences. Although the oral history training received by the Pamlico County interviewers is not recorded, each oral history collected followed an established interview protocol. Finally, the Orange County, NC interviews were conducted by geography graduate students at UNC-CH, in partnership with the SOHP (UNC-CH). Five of the oral histories were collected by a LAA man, from a neighboring rural community and one interview was conducted by a White woman, with local ties and a lived experience in an adjacent rural community as the interviewee. Each interviewer had previous experiential knowledge of the communities in which the interviewees lived (i.e., current/former resident; derived from rural southern neighboring counties/communities). My analysis of the data was also aided by the research advisory panel (RAP) of LAA community elders that I assembled, representing Black Belt communities in North Carolina (detailed in a later section). They provided consultation based on their lived experiences with Jim Crow segregation and racialization. They also shared the oral traditions from the community related to the emerging themes. These projects only included the audio and edited (not verbatim) transcripts and did not include photos or other artifacts.

Inclusion Criteria

I purposely chose the archived interviews included in this critical constructivist, exploratory qualitative analysis, centering Black lives and healing as justice from the aforementioned collections. Using the demographic data available in the archived record,

as well as geographic (e.g., country, rural, farm) and gendered racialized (e.g., Black, girl, woman, female pronouns) language from the interviews, LAA women in rural North Carolina communities were considered for inclusion in the analysis. Based on the available demographic data in the interview description, transcript, and/or recording, LAA women aged 57 to 99 years old, who have first-hand experience with Jim Crow segregation and racial integration in North Carolina, from 1954 to 1972, as a teen or adult in the community, were selected for inclusion, as they were best suited to the aim of this study. This collection of LAA women represented an embedded Black lived experience (historical, political, socioeconomic, and spiritual) in Black geographies and their varied perspectives of Black life during the historical period in question, as a consequence of their age, station in life, exposure, and proximity to events during that time, shaped their consciousness and lived realities. These life stories provided in-depth accounts of the issue of racialization as an adverse life experience for LAA in the Black Belt.

In addition to meeting inclusion criteria, the screening criterion for archived interviews included in the analysis contained both audio recordings and completed transcripts available for download, as well as interviews without use restrictions (e.g., permission from interviewee or interviewer required for quotation or use in research). This information was included in the interview description. Interviews with restrictions are noted in the interview description as well and include either the audio or written transcript, but not both. Given the noted challenges of the SOHP database and oral history collections, this interview inclusion criteria targeted the most precise and accurate interviews available for this analysis. Based upon the established inclusion criteria, I included fifteen archived oral history interviews and seventeen rural North Carolina LAA

women in the analysis (two of the fifteen interviews included a mother-daughter dyad).

Study Demographics

The demographics of the LAA women selected for this study are listed below (Table 1). The average age of the interviewees at the time of the interview was 75.6 years old (age range 57-99 years old). Interviewees reported occupations such as agricultural laborer, cleaning personnel, homemaker, teacher, business owner, health care worker, veteran, and a Town Mayor. Interviews were conducted in various communities in NC: Maxton, Bayboro, Grantsboro, Maribel, Chapel Hill, Hillsborough, and Mebane, NC. To honor the LAA women, who openly shared their named oral histories for posterity, their last names are used as identifiers and a detailed description of North Carolina and their local communities are introduced.

Table 1

Interviewee Demographics

Table 1 continued at the top of page 87.

Case number	Name	Database	Date of interview	Place of interview	Date of birth	Age at interview	Occupation
1	Robinson	Robeson County	2004	Maxton, NC	1930	74	Consultant/ program coordinator
2	Bell*	Pamlico County	2007	Bayboro, NC			Cleaning personnel/ program coordinator
3	Finch	Pamlico County	2007	Grantsboro, NC	1919	87	Homemaker/ domestic worker
4	Gibbs	Pamlico County	2007	Maribel, NC	1935	72	Agricultural laborer, childcare worker, textile worker
5	McGlone	Pamlico County	2007	Bayboro, NC	1924	83	Laborer (military base, city government),

							homemaker
6	Monk	Pamlico County	2007	Bayboro, NC	1934	73	Teacher
7	Ollison	Pamlico County	2007	Bayboro, NC	1927	80	Teacher, Town Mayor
8	JAJ Squires	Pamlico County	2007	Bayboro, NC	1949	58	Teacher, business owner
9	AR Squires	Pamlico County	2007	Maribel, NC/Case Corner, NC	1908	99	Agricultural laborer, cleaning personnel
10	Nunn (mother)	Rural South Back Ways	2014	Chapel Hill, NC	1921	93	Homemaker/
	Snipes (daughter)				1953	61	teacher
11	Torain*	Rural South Back Ways	2015	Mebane, NC			computer programmer
12	Meritt (daughter)	Rural South Back Ways	2014	rural Chapel Hill, NC	1957	57	Administrative assistant/
	Cole* (mother)				*	*	homemaker
13	Connally	Rural South Back Ways	2015	White Level Community, Mebane, NC	1958	57	Clerk/health care worker
14	McCauley	Rural South Back Ways	2014	rural Chapel Hill, NC	1933	82	Seamstress/ business owner
15	Breeze	Rural South Back Ways	2016	Hillsborough, NC	1948	68	Nurse/Veteran

Note. **Undisclosed year/age*

Study Sample Settings

North Carolina consists of 100 counties and is bordered by Tennessee on the West, Virginia to the North, South Carolina to the South, and the Atlantic Ocean on the East. The home counties of the interviewees represented in this current study are circled in red in Figure 6 (North Carolina Dept. of Transportation, 2021). Robeson County, NC is located north of the South Carolina border, Pamlico County, NC is situated in the coastal region, west of the Atlantic Ocean, and Orange County, NC is located in the center of the state in the Triangle region. Detailed descriptions of each county are presented below.

Figure 6

State of North Carolina and the Counties Included in the Study

Note. Counties included in the study are circled in red (Robeson, Pamlico, and Orange Counties). (https://connect.ncdot.gov/resources/State-Mapping/Pages/County-Outline-Map.aspx). Copyright 2022 by the North Carolina Department of Transportation.

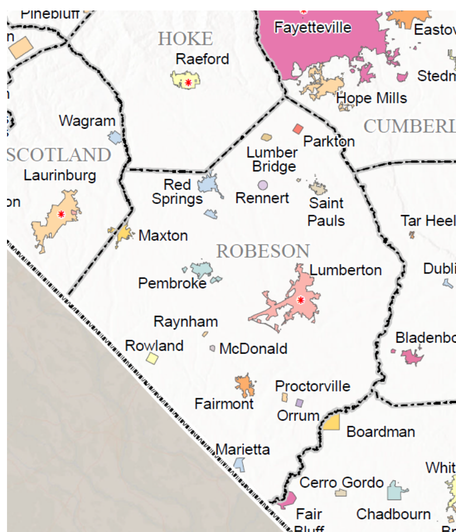
Robeson County, NC (Maxton, NC)

Robeson County, NC is situated in the Coastal Plains region of southeastern NC, on the South Carolina border (Figure 6). Robeson County is home to the Lumbee people, the largest indigenous tribe east of the Mississippi River (Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina, 2021). The Lumbee Tribe has been recognized by the State of North Carolina since 1885. However, the United States government has only recognized the Lumbee Tribe as Indian since 1956 and withheld full federal benefits of tribal recognition (Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina, 2021). English, Scottish, Welsh and French immigrants settled in the area in the 16th and 17th century and engaged in the practice of chattel slavery of stolen Africans, creating a Robeson County today that boasts an "equally balanced tri-racial population"; White (31%), Black (24%), and Native American (42%) (Tyner, n.d.; U.S. Census Bureau, 2022a). During Jim Crow segregation, schools were segregated along racial lines, with each racial group having

their own separate, yet unequal schools, all governed by the White power structure in the county (Coffey & Agan, 2020; Thuesen, 2013). Robeson County is also home to my *alma mater*, the University of North Carolina at Pembroke, designated as "North Carolina's Historically American Indian University" and the only state-supported four-year college for Native Americans from 1939 to 1953 (The University of North Carolina at Pembroke, 2022b).

Figure 7

Robeson County, NC and the Town of Maxton, NC



Note. (https://connect.ncdot.gov/resources/State-Mapping/Pages/County-Outline-Map.aspx).
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Maxton, NC is a small town in the southwest portion of Robeson County, bordering Scotland County, NC (Figure 7; North Carolina Dept. of Transportation, 2021). A significant event in the history of Maxton was the Battle of Hayes Pond, also known as the Battle of Maxton Field or the Maxton Riot (Oakley, 2008). In response to federal civil rights laws that opened the door for desegregation of schools and public facilities, leaders of area Ku Klux Klan (KKK) planned a rally in Maxton to intimidate the people of Robeson County to "put the Natives in their place and end race mixing" and control the

town's LAA residents (North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, 2019; Thomas, 2015). Prior to the rally, the KKK burned a cross in the lawn of a Lumbee family that moved into a White neighborhood and a Lumbee woman rumored to be in a romantic relationship with a White man (North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, 2019; Thomas, 2015). The Lumbee and LAA communities worked together to disrupt the 1958 rally (The University of North Carolina at Pembroke, 2022a). The Lumbee community emerged during the rally, under the cover of darkness, with hundreds of counter-protestors, forcing the much smaller group of KKK members to retreat into the swamp, successfully forcing overt KKK activity out of Robeson County (Powell, 1988; Thomas, 2015).

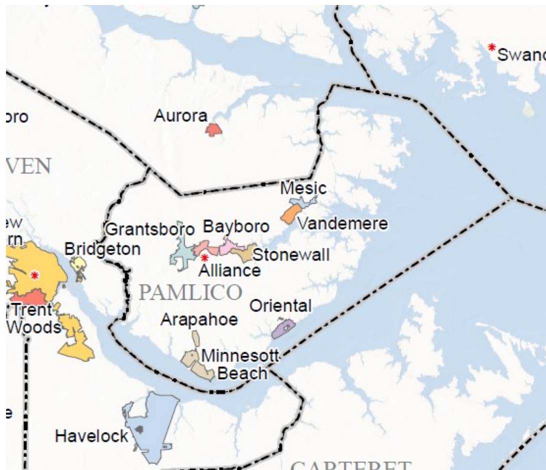
Pamlico County, NC

Pamlico County, NC, located in the Coastal Plains region, also referred to as Eastern NC or "Down East" by locals, is part of the New Bern, NC metropolitan area (Figure 6). Pamlico County is described as a peninsula, bordered by the Pamlico Sound and the Neuse River (Figure 8; North Carolina Dept. of Transportation, 2021) (Mazzocchi, 2006). A rural county, the access to water for recreation and livelihood are embedded traditions of this community (Mobley, 1991). According to the US Census Bureau, majority of the population in Pamlico County identify as White, non-Hispanic (74%) with 19% of the population identifying as Black or African American (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022a). With a population density of 39.1 people per square mile and 16% of the population living in poverty, the majority of families own their homes (78%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022a). There are nine (9) towns in Pamlico County, including, Vandemere, Mesic, Bayboro (county seat), Stonewall, Grantsboro, Alliance, Arapahoe,

Oriental, and Minnesott Beach (US Census Bureau, 2012). LAA reside mostly in the towns of Vandemere (71.6%), Mesic (66.2%), Bayboro (62.9%), Stonewall (45.5%), and Grantsboro (27.1%) (StatisticalAtlas, 2018b).

Figure 8

Pamlico County, NC and Municipalities



Note. (https://connect.ncdot.gov/resources/State-Mapping/Pages/County-Outline-Map.aspx).
Copyright 2022 by the North Carolina Department of Transportation.

LAA parents in Pamlico County introduced the first court challenge to the Jim Crow segregation in the public schools in North Carolina and the second such case in the South (Thuesen, 2013). The Pamlico County case was unique, in that the families were advocating for integrated schools, instead of equal schools, at least until equality in schools could be realized in the county (Thuesen, 2013). LAA families had toiled for years with large class sizes, dilapidated buildings, very limited supplies, and no school buses, such that LAA communities were compelled to scrape resources together so that children would have access to education (Thuesen, 2013). When the county decided to use school bond funds to build a new White school in 1951, LAA parents filed a lawsuit demanding that their children be allowed to attend the White schools if there were no

equal facilities that their children could attend (Thuesen, 2013). In response, the county leadership raised funds to build a new LAA school for 1st-12th grades and improved efforts to adequately fund LAA schools (Thuesen, 2013).

Orange County, NC

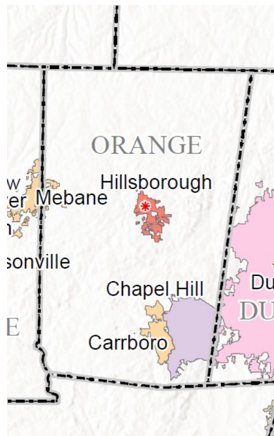
Orange County, NC, located in the piedmont region of the state, is one of the three corners of the Research Triangle and situated directly adjacent to the Triad (Figure 6). Orange County is most notably home to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH), the first public university in the country (Powell, 1988; The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2022). In addition to Chapel Hill, Hillsborough (county seat), Carrboro, and Mebane are towns located in Orange County (Figure 9). Included in the Durham metropolitan statistical area, LAA residents of Orange County make of 30% of the population, with a LAA population of 61% in neighboring Durham, 43% in Hillsborough, 35% in Carrboro, 34% in Mebane, and 32% in Chapel Hill (StatisticalAtlas, 2018a). Part of the historic Tobacco Road, Orange County, NC has a rich agricultural history and a modern trend toward urbanization (Powell, 2006).

Despite the shift toward urbanization, Orange County, NC maintains relative rurality and a history of racial exclusion. UNC-CH, the state's flagship university, refused entry of qualified LAA undergraduates until 1955, four years after integrating the law and medical schools (Nixon, 2018; Slater, 1996; University Archives, 2006). Progress remained slow, as only 18 freshmen LAA students were enrolled by 1963 and the first LAA faculty in the School of Social Work, Hortense King McClinton, was welcomed in 1966 (Carlton-LaNey, 2015; University Archives, 2006). Pauli Murray, noted civil rights attorney and architect of the legal strategy to combat Jim Crow

segregation, was denied admission to UNC-CH graduate school in the 1930's on the grounds of race (Gilmore, 2002; Mayeri, 2013). The irony is that Murray's maternal White lineage, due to the enslavement and sexual exploitation of her LAA maternal ancestor, provided financial endowment to the University (Murray, 1999). Murray's grandfather, Robert Fitzgerald, born free, also advocated for the education of LAAs in Orange County following the Civil War, as a teacher and administrator, under the constant threat of violence and death (Mattson, 1996; Murray, 1999).

Figure 9

Orange County, NC and Municipalities



Note. (https://connect.ncdot.gov/resources/State-Mapping/Pages/County-Outline-Map.aspx). Copyright 2022 by the North Carolina Department of Transportation.

Qualitative Thematic Analysis and Critical Historical Discourse Qualitative Analysis

Archived oral history transcripts included in the study were analyzed using thematic and discourse analysis. These methods align with the critical constructivist paradigm by using my experiential knowledge, the BLMHJ theoretical framework, and the literature to systematically inform codes and themes that best describe the interviewee realities, lived experiences, and the language of those realities and experiences (V. Clarke & Braun, 2017; Mogashoa, 2014). These methods relied heavily on my reflexivity in the

analysis, that also revealed additional codes and subsequent themes. Oral histories selected from the SOHP database for inclusion in this study were organized for ease of study and to ensure completeness. NVivo was used to organize and aid in managing the volume of data, codes, and themes (Ruona, 2005).

To become familiar with the data, I read each transcript to gain a general appreciation for the interviewee and interviewer perspectives and overall content. After completing an initial read of the transcripts, I listened to the corresponding audio recordings of each oral history. Next, I read each transcript while listening to the corresponding audio recording to ensure accuracy of the transcript. Finally, I engaged in a iterative/recursive process of reading, listening, and memoing/journaling/notetaking of my analytical choices, values, thoughts, ideas, questions, and feelings that arose (Ruona, 2005; Saldaña, 2021).

Aligning with the critical constructivist paradigm, I used the BLMHJ theory and a priori/sensitizing codes to connect and analyze each interview to increase my consciousness and awareness of the nuanced lived experiences of the interviewees. I connected with the data by using a reflexive approach to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2020, 2021; Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021). Reflexive thematic analysis relied heavily on my reflections, regarding my assumptions and research choices related to those assumptions and my deepening understanding of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

I used thematic analysis to explore the experiences of gendered racialization among Black Belt LAA women in the sample and describe how racialization among Black Belt LAA women relates to trauma, stress, and mental health outcomes (Kennedy,

2018). Abductive reasoning was used to critically and practically deepen my understanding of the relationship between racialization and stress among LAA women in the Black Rural South that experienced Jim Crow segregation and integration. In addition to the development of initial codes from the data, a priori/sensitizing themes derived from the literature and theory include race, place, space, restoration, reclamation, resistance, and the Eight Dimensions of Wellness (social, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, physical, environmental, financial, and occupational).

Finally, using reflexive thematic analysis, I reviewed, revised, and combined the codes generated from the data into recurring themes, language, opinions, and beliefs (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The review of codes was facilitated in collaboration with the research advisory panel (RAP), as a form of member checking (see detailed description below), to assess theme accuracy and relevancy to the interviewees' lived experiences with Jim Crow segregation and integration. The integrated timelines created during data analysis supported the review of codes and aided in the revision and combining of recurring codes into themes.

Interpretation of Results. Themes generated from the codes, literature, theory, and my reflexivity were abductively matched to the propositions/assumptions for interpretation and presented cohesively. In further interpretation of the data, I applied the themes generated in historical and critical discourse analysis, to elucidate the definitions and language that explain the racialized lived experiences of Black Belt LAA women, how these experiences impact mental health outcomes. As Mogashoa (2014) states, "[P]people construct meaning on the basis of their prior experiences with language and texts, their available stock of discourse resources" (p. 108). Therefore, historical and

critical discourse analysis helped reveal the tension between individual perspectives ("legitimizing principles") and the sociopolitical aspects of Jim Crow segregation, as both components are part of the discourse of racialization and the lived experiences of Black Belt LAA (Jóhannesson, 2010, p. 256). In analyzing the historical discourse critically, I analyzed the content of the selected archived oral histories for themes and patterns, wording and statements, that related to racialization, gender, trauma, stress, and oppression. I was informed in this analysis by reflecting on the question "What is the silence?" (Jóhannesson, 2010, p. 258).

To conduct the discourse analysis, I analyzed the relationship between the interviewees' experiences of racialization and related discourse. For example, the theme "unawareness" presented in the discourse as ambivalence for naming racism as an adverse experience (e.g., "we always got along with White people" while on the other hand "we couldn't sit down and eat in the restaurant downtown"). This example demonstrated some reluctance in the discourse about race and the impact of racialization on an interviewees' lived experiences as a LAA woman in the Black Belt, suggesting that race relations were not a problem, as long as LAA followed the racialized societal rules (i.e., "stay in your racialized space and place"). With the support of RAP, I interpreted the findings in relation to the established assumptions as demonstrated in the example (Flynn et al., 2020; Monico et al., 2020).

Research Advisory Panel. Given my proximity to rural LAA communities and the critical constructivist lens that suggests substantive community involvement in research, I composed a research advisory panel (RAP) of rural NC LAA as a form of member checking to support data organization, accuracy in data interpretation, alignment

of codes and themes, and to strengthen research quality and acceptability (Maiter et al., 2013; Mlambo et al., 2019; Pinto et al., 2015). The RAP was comprised of two to three Black Belt LAA community members, reflective of the population understudy (i.e., rural NC LAA, aged sixty years and older, lived experience with Jim Crow segregation) (Flynn et al., 2020). Members of the RAP were selected based on their knowledge of the issue and the population to aid me in contextualizing the data and offer wisdom to navigate the historical space. Recruitment of the RAP preceded data analysis and members were selected from my personal connection to community members and community gatekeepers. For example, I elicited feedback and insights from former teachers, school administrators, church, community, and family members, who matched the characteristics of the interviewees. As this group is strictly reliant on volunteer participation, the group membership fluctuated over the course of data analysis, depending on the availability of members. Consequently, I maintained a list of ten to fifteen eligible members to consult throughout the data analysis and interpretation processes.

RAP members involvement in the data analysis phase of this study provided interpretations of the data that complimented my interpretations of the data, using oral traditions and storytelling. I met with RAP member individually by phone. During each meeting, I presented codes, themes, and portions of the transcript and audio, to elicit input regarding the relevancy, adequacy, and completeness of the codes and themes in the context of the interviews. The RAP assessment and insights determined "whether the appropriate meaning had been accurately captured and whether the emerging themes were plausible" (Ruona, 2005, p. 249). For example, members were asked if a code or

theme that I identified was meaningful to the context of Jim Crow segregation in schools and if the code or theme aligned with the meaning suggested by the interviewee in the interview audio or transcript.

The contributions of the RAP are presented in the findings as oral traditions and storytelling. Oral traditions predate written history and describes the method of passing information from one generation to the next and elevate marginalized voices in history (Cruikshank, 1994). Storytelling through oral traditions is relevant in rural LAA communities who value this form of historical recordkeeping as much as written recollections to inform and improve health outcomes (Banks-Wallace, 2002; Hamilton, 2020, 2021).

Data Management Plan and Protection of Human Subjects

The audio recordings and transcripts of the selected archived oral histories were downloaded and saved to a personal computer with the capacity to store large data files. The data was also saved in NVivo to assist my management and organization of the data during analysis.

Rigor: Validity and Reliability in Descriptive Exploratory Qualitative Research Study

This present qualitative study acknowledged the complexity of the human experiences and the social, cultural, and historical forces that shaped my approach to this research topic and design, and subsequent interpretations. Considering the influence of the researcher in qualitative research rigor, I assumed a critical constructivist perspective to ensure that rigor was maintained throughout the design and implementation of this project (Morse et al., 2002). As such, I was reflexive and transparent, clearly acknowledging the inseparability of my relationship to the research design, study

participants, data collection, and analysis, in addition to assuming a respectful approach to the oral history interviewees and the places and spaces they occupy.

To ensure rigor, I employed a number of verification strategies. Firstly, clarity and transparency regarding the influence of my experiential knowledge and assumptions on my choice of qualitative study design, the archived oral history interviews, theory selection, sampling strategies, propositions, data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations. In addition to professional training and practice as a trauma-informed social worker with extremely marginalized LAA communities, I am a former member of the community under investigation in the project, with first-hand knowledge of the Black Belt LAA women. Furthermore, using a critical lens, my reflections were built into the data analysis strategy through reflective journaling and oral history interpretations.

Data analysis strategies that ensure rigor include the iteration between data collection and analysis. I iteratively analyzed the data, moving between the aims, theory, and reflective journaling. In addition, my dissertation committee served systematically as auditors and critical peer-reviewers. I maintained a research log of activities, chronology, and research decisions during the analysis process. With an impressive team of esteemed qualitative researchers, with subject matter and population expertise, my dissertation committee retained the capacity as auditors and peer reviewers, to critically hold me accountable in all aspects of the research process. The addition of a committee member with an established and rigorous quantitative research practice, provided a critical lens that lends an additional level of trustworthiness and authenticity to my qualitative study research strategy.

Further, the RAP served as a form of member checking. As the RAP was drawn

from the population understudy (i.e., Black Belt LAA women, aged sixty and older, first-hand experience with Jim Crow segregation), their lived experiences reflected that of the interviewees in the oral history archives. Therefore, RAP members advanced the rigor of this research by enhancing the validity and credibility of the research findings.

Rigor in this qualitative research project considered the validity (trustworthiness) and reliability (authenticity) from my perspective (disconfirming, reflexivity) and those external to the research process (dissertation committee audit and peer-review of research design; my log of research activities; RAP member checking; readers' interpretation of thick, rich descriptive details). Offering transparency throughout the research process was the key to ensuring rigor, given the sensitive nature of the topic and the racially and socially marginalized condition of the population.

Protection of Human Subjects and Ethical Considerations

The data collected for this project are publicly available, archived oral histories, wherein the interviewee and interviewer are both named with other identifying information, including residential information. Interviewees also provided written permission for the use of their interviews for research purposes. Therefore, I did not anticipate any privacy or confidentiality issues with respect to the data collected. This project received the approval of the University of Maryland Baltimore Institutional Review Board (IRB) as non-human subject research.

Chapter 4: Findings

Using the BLMHJ framework, centering the Black experience of racialization in the context of the past, the aim of this project was to elucidate the definition and lived experiences of ALE/trauma and to investigate the relationship between racialization, as an adverse life experience or trauma among rural LAA women, living in the Black Belt and/or Black Rural South. From a critical constructivist perspective, I used a priori or sensitizing codes, identified in Table 2, derived from the relevant theoretical frameworks and literature, to analyze each interview. The results of this analysis are framed using the BLMHJ framework as an overarching theoretical approach. The analysis considered the separate aspects of the framework, BLM and HJ, as independent constructs, with corresponding a priori codes (Table 2). As previously discussed, constructs of race, place, and space also inform the lived experiences of LAA women in the Black Belt and were used as sensitizing codes in this analysis to provide chronological and spatial context to BLMHJ framework (Table 2). The results are explained beginning with the emergent theme, Race-Place-Space, as it presented in the everyday lived experiences and social environment of the interviewees. These areas include work, school, landownership, community, and church.

Table 2

A priori/Sensitizing Codes

Table 2 continued at the top of page 102.

Theory/Construct	Code
Black Lives Matter	Centering Blackness as Activism Inward reflections Outward actions
Healing Justice	Resist Reclaim Restore

Race, Place, Space Paradigm	Race Place Space
Eight Dimensions of Wellness	Environmental Financial Intellectual Occupational Physical Social Spiritual
Racialized ALE/Trauma (symptoms)	Unawareness Acknowledgement

In elucidating the lived experiences of LAA women in the Black Belt, one major theme emerged from the sensitizing codes: Race-Place-Space. In the context of LAA women living in Black Belt communities, with a well-documented sociopolitical history of racialized oppression, discrimination, violence and subjugation of LAA people, the Race-Place-Space theme emerged across the interviewees' life course, in their: (1) work choices and opportunities; (2) school experiences; (3) land ownership; (4) importance of and advocacy in the community; and (5) church. In elucidating the experiences of racialization as trauma and the relationship between these experiences from the BLMHJ framework, aspects of Race and Healing Justice emerged in the discourse and informed the language of racialized trauma, symptoms, and outcomes. Secondary to the theme of Race-Place-Space, Race, independent of place and space, informed the interpretation of the discourse, as: (1) unawareness of Blackness; (2) racialized violence; and (3) Black Lives Matter, including instances where Black lives are decentered. Healing justice emerged in the discourse to inform the language of racialized trauma, as interviewees described the actions of LAA people in: (1) resisting racialization; (2) reclaiming a future of healing and justice; (3) restoring their community despite the experiences of racialization; and (4) addressing challenges that impede healing justice.

Race-Place-Space Theme

For LAA, race, place, and space were intrinsically connected for the interviewees. The result of centuries of LAA enslavement, race in the rural south imposes specific racialized norms on the people, the places, and their spaces. For the interviewees, the coalescing of race, place, and space were examined from the Black perspective. The history of enslavement of LAA in the rural South was accomplished by White denial of the humanity of African descended peoples (Hannah-Jones et al., 2021; C. Smith, 2021). Emancipation did not equate to freedom nor liberation for LAA in the Black Belt and did not restore their humanity in the perceptions of White people, as simple privileges afforded to human beings were continually denied to LAA under the threat of violence. Mrs. Ollison recalled from her childhood how the privilege of traveling at night while Black was an act met with violence. She explained:

> Black men didn't do too much going out, especially walking at night. They had to walk because there weren't too many in my community that had a car. So, wherever they went they would go and be back because the Klu Klux Klan rode their horses at night and when they would catch them by themselves they would whip them. So, most of them stayed at home so they didn't have to run into that.

The history of racialization in the Black Belt resulted in a systemic denial of the humanity of the entire population. Each of the interviewees described experiences of treatment as a non-human as a result of their racialization. Mrs. Cole described her experiences of being treated as a non-human by White people during Jim Crow segregation and the early days of integration. She recalled:

> It took a long time for Chapel Hill to adjust [to integration] and for [White] people to start allowing Blacks to come into the restaurants to eat and stuff like

> that. It was awful…. I always said this: You [LAA] take care of their [White people] kids. You clean their house. You can put anything in their food. But they didn't want you to come in their front door. Oh, no, you couldn't come in their front door! You had to go to the backdoor. You had to come in the backdoor. But I never could understand why it was so bad to come in a person's front door. I mean, we was kids, but I just never could—I couldn't see that. You [LAA] can't sit at their [White people] table when you're eating. Even if you worked for them, you couldn't sit at their table. You had to sit somewhere over there… to eat. Or you couldn't use their bathroom. You know? It was amazing to me what it took for people to know that we was human, too. But they didn't see us as human.

Mrs. Finch described a different experience of non-human, animalistic perceptions and treatment from White people because of racialization. One day while working with her grandmother and cousins, harvesting potatoes for a local White farmer, Mrs. Finch explained:

> We went in the house and bought some food from the [White] lady that owned the potato patch, and when we [LAA children] were playing, we broke the plate, and we knew we'd better go tell her. If we didn't, we'd know what would happen when we got home if we didn't tell her. So, we were playing and broke the plate. So, we went up to the house and said, 'Miss Sanie, we broke the plate.' And she said, 'Oh, that's all right; it was the cat's plate', that's what the White woman told us. We laugh about it now because we just were always that type people, where everything didn't make us mad, and we get together and laugh about it right now. That's what she said to us.

The group laughed about the incident because they understood the nature of LAA-White relationships in the Black Belt, especially that of children and to ensure that White attempts to continue their non-human perceptions and treatment of LAA were not internalized by LAA. While the dehumanization was not internalized, it remained hurtful, especially as the children grew older. Another interviewee described the feelings LAA displayed, given their positionality to the White people in their community, stating "it really was a time of feeling hopeless. I wouldn't say hopeless, helpless to a certain extent."

For other interviewees, the dehumanization was less evident and presented outside of their local community. Mrs. Robinson recalled her experiences living in a tri-racial community, and when asked if she recognized racial differences between her community and her school, she answered:

> No, it just seemed the way things were, that you played together, and you helped each other as far as what you needed in the home, or if someone got sick you went to their house and you'd sit with them, and like that, but when it came to school and church, you went to your church, and I went to mine. You went to your school, and I went to mine.

As many interviewees recalled, as they grew older, they learned more about racial differences and the dehumanization of their Blackness. Mrs. Robinson recalled the heartbreaking moment when she learned that difference. Growing up, she had a White best friend, and they shared everything as best friends. They had sleepovers at each other's homes, they played with dolls, and spent many days in the company of each other's families. When Mrs. Robinson began high school, her friend told her that they

had to end their friendship on the grounds that her father did not want her to be friends with "Black people". Mrs. Robinson explained that her friend asked her not to be angry, but appreciate that she had "to do what my father says." Mrs. Robinson sadly recalls, "I says, "Fine with me," but it broke my heart. …So that's when I realized that I was Black, and she was White, and we could not be friends any longer because her parents wouldn't allow it." She further described how the incident deeply affected her and "put a stigma on me [pained], really, it did."

Race, place, and space directly influenced the mobility of LAA in the Black Belt. One interviewee recalled riding the city bus, that "When we got on, we knew, no need to sit up front. We just go on and get in the back.". Mrs. McCauley recalled a difference in the treatment of LAA between "country [White] people" and White people in the city. She explained:

> Country White people are always a little different than the city [White] people. The city people [pause] …could be very ugly. But, you see, the country [White people]—your next-door neighbor might be White. Like our next-door neighbor, right across over there… they were White. That never made any difference, as far as we could see. They were friends to Mama and …they shared. They shared their garden. They shared—whatever they had, they shared it. But you couldn't do that with the [White] people in Carrboro [city]. So, my daddy would hire them [White neighbors] to help us and work in the field. Now, I'm sure when they got behind our backs, they probably called us some ugly names, because we called them ugly names, too, but didn't nobody hear it but us. [Laughs]

She further explained that following integration, interactions with city White people

worsened. She recalled, “I had worse experience after integration than I had before”, as integration allowed LAA access to White places and spaces that were previously restricted. Resenting this new normal and LAA access in places they “wasn’t supposed to be”, she described White people, “after integration, if you were [in] certain places, they [White people],… look up at you [with contempt].”

While the promise of integration was slow to reveal, LAA continued to endure racialized hardships, painful encounters, and losses. LAA businesses crumbled under the weight of competition with White businesses and in some communities, LAA institutions were physically destroyed. In Maxton, the LAA high school was burned down just prior to integration. Oral traditions recall similar occurrences in other parts of the state and most of these crimes remain unresolved. Mrs. Robinson explained that this loss “devastated” the LAA community and their hopes to repurpose these buildings for other uses in the community.

As the decades passed, the children and grandchildren of this generation of LAA elders are unable to recall experiences of dehumanization, in part due to the sociopolitical evolution of race relations and the protection provided to children within LAA communities. Mrs. Merritt, Mrs. Cole’s daughter, remarked that as a little girl, she didn’t remember experiences where she was treated as less than human by White people, because her interactions were limited to her LAA community. She acknowledged, “I didn’t remember all that, because we stayed over in this area, and all we knew were Black people. So, we didn’t feel that.” As the memories of these experiences and the sacrifices of this generation fade from our present appreciation of LAA racialization in the Black Belt, younger generations of LAA inquire of these elders, “Well, what’s wrong

with White folks?". Mrs. Cole laughed and acknowledged that these children have:

> Never really experienced… the bad [being racialized]… When they went to school, they went to school together [LAA and White children]. And they said, "White people is okay." But that's what you [grandchildren] know. Although White people are good and White people are nice, you still have to be careful.

These are the lessons of the elders: proceed with caution, in your dealings with White people, as the surface may appear benign and calm, a storm of racial animus may be brewing underneath that could adversely upset your life. Stay vigilant.

Race-Place-Space in LAA Work

Farm Work

In rural NC communities, LAA families farmed as a livelihood, working on their own farms as well as neighboring farms. The largest number of independent, landowning LAA farmers were recorded in the first quarter of the 20th century, the vast majority in the rural South (J. Gilbert et al., 2002; Green, 2014). While many of the interviewees were raised in landowning families, two interviewees from Pamlico County, Mrs. Bell and Mrs. Finch, fondly recalled that their families owned and operated their own farm, as farming was a way of life.

In the absence of land ownership and other work opportunities, LAA farmers became renters, sharecroppers, or laborers (i.e., field hands) (Allen-Smith et al., 2000; Carlton-LaNey & Hodges, 2004; Mattson, 1996). Renters could afford to pay fixed rates for a small farm with livestock and equipment and retained the associated profits or losses. Sharecroppers could not afford these resources and therefore received either "one-half to two-thirds of the harvest on a piece of land, with the owner providing the land,

housing, animals, tools, and, depending on the arrangements, seeds, and fertilizers" (Mattson, 1996; Roback, 1984, p. 37). LAA laborers or field hands, a term carried over from the period of enslavement, worked for daily wages. Subsequently, many LAA farmers, with and without land, worked as field hands on, large, primarily White, local farms. For LAA in the rural South, renting, sharecropping, and working as field laborers were, in some instances, a continuation of the system of enslavement through debt peonage (i.e., due to perpetual indebtedness caused by these systems, labor was forced on workers to satisfy the insurmountable debt) (Contractor & Overton, 2020; Coombs, 1972; Kelly, 1996; Roback, 1984; A. Smith, 2016).

Farm work for LAA families, both on and off farm, was difficult, the hours were long, and the pay was incommensurate. Mrs. Nunn recalled that the men in her community were hardworking and very strict because they were "raised back in slave time" and described her father's behavior, work ethic, and determination as "drive, drive, drive, drive!" In the absence of modern agricultural technologies (i.e., commercial pesticides, fertilizers, and equipment), farm work was tedious and accomplished by hand, with a mule, plow, and hand tools. The unrelenting schedule required timely Spring preparation and planting duties and Summer crop tending tasks to encourage a profitable yield in the Fall (Contractor & Overton, 2020). Working sunup to sundown in "the fields", under the hot Southern sun for White farmers, Mrs. A.R. Squires remarked how her family's farming activities included the menial task of picking "bugs off of stuff [crops]" on large plots of farmland (20-100+ acres) (United States. Bureau of the Census & Pettet, 1942). Neighboring LAA farm owners would also hire farm hands. Working off-farm for neighboring LAA farm owners "was like working with family" and less

oppressive than working for White owners, according to Mrs. Torain.

Sharecropping, in particular, proved to be a difficult life for LAA families in these communities. Mrs. Connally explained how her father would “move to the next one [farm]” in the event that “things didn’t go well” at the current farm. She also recalled the living conditions of the sharecropping homes, noting:

> We had, … an older home, older houses, snakes. I remember Mom beating a snake off the tree, and at that time they would take the broom out in the yard and sweep. Like you sweep your floors inside, they would sweep the yard. There wasn’t a lot of grass to rake or mow. It was just trees, older community, older areas. Other people had lived in the houses and we followed in. We never really owned them. We were passing through basically.

In Orange County, Mrs. Connally shared her family’s experience as a sharecropping family, recalling how her father “after several years of sharing his crop with others”, he decided, ‘I’m not making anything here.’” He eventually stopped farming, became a skilled brick mason, and worked for local contractors. Mrs. Ollison also recalled the challenges of sharecropping in rural Pamlico County and her family’s experiences with debt peonage, stating:

> We lived on the farm; my father was a sharecropper so we had to work year-round. Always working without pay on the weekend. He received his pay at the end of the year when the crop was finished and ended. Most of the time he didn't clear any money but he owed for the next year when it came time for buying the seed and whatnot for the crop. He was a very smart person…. We lived in a wooden house with 5 rooms a hall and a long porch and that hall was our resting

place when we come out of the field. There was a door on each end of the hall and we stretch out in the hall to get the breeze while we were resting. We would go to work early in the morning because my father promised us when it got hot we would come out and rest but it never got hot, we worked right on until 12:00 (noon) every day and when we come out we would eat a big dinner.

Mrs. Ollison's reflection of her father's intelligence was demonstrated in his determination to provide an education for his children, as well as his capacity for circumventing the perceptions of White people regarding education for LAA. Despite the oppressive nature of sharecropping and forced labor of debt peonage in the sharecropping system, Mrs. Ollison explained how her father managed to send his children to college:

> His [White] landlord said we had to stay out [of school] and pick [cotton] too. I learned later in life that it was because he [White landlord] didn't want us to go to school. But we did. I remember when I finished college. He didn't know it, our [White] landlord didn't know it but when he found it out he told my dad 'You'll never send another one'. But that turned out to be not true because there were others [siblings] that went to college also.

Public Work

While farming was a primary occupation for many in these rural communities, families also worked outside of the home to sustain the family. LAA landowners were better able to seek public work and farm as a secondary income, because of the stability and safety that property ownership provided (Zabawa, 1995). Mrs. Breeze recalled how her father:

> …wanted to get back into farming, because that's kind of what he was brought up

> with. But it was very difficult, and it [farming] really didn't make enough money to take care of five children, particularly when our [White] neighbors had major farms…. Anyway, he went out away from home to "public work," it was called, because there wasn't enough income to run the farm.

Doing "public work" enabled her father to "…get food on credit" at the local store, and "pay whenever he paid". Mrs. Squires recalled that her father and grandfather were employed off-farm by the railroad and Mrs. McCauley explained how her father worked as "…a farmer by day" and during World War II, he worked "as a janitor from twelve [AM] to eight [AM]" at the ammunition factory in the county. After working all night at the factory, he would "come home, eat his breakfast and go straight to the field" until the factory permanently closed.

Most LAA farms were described as small farms, with small incomes and therefore, off-farm or public work was necessary, and often required the entire family to work off-farm, including children, youth, and elders (J. Gilbert et al., 2002). Oral traditions in LAA rural south communities are filled with stories of children picking cotton or tobacco alongside their parents and grandparents. Mrs. Finch's family worked off-farm as field and general laborers for White farmers, picking potatoes with her grandmother and cousins and canning string beans, while her father also worked at the sawmill. Although these off-farm working activities provided a needed income for LAA families, their consummate desire was to maintain their own farms and independence from White interference.

LAA Women's Work

Work for LAA women was multifaceted, with their work often beginning and

ending in the home (Carlton-LaNey, 1992). While LAA women may not have worked regularly as farm laborers, they occupied very important spaces to sustain the family and create a home, "a safe place" for their families to affirm their humanity and nurture their spirits (hooks, 2015, p. 42). Mrs. Ollison recalls:

> My mother never went out to work [in the field] with us because there was a baby every year and she had to take care of the family plus she had to always have dinner for us at 12:00 [noon] when it was time to eat dinner before we go back to the field. A lot of times my mother would have those good old collard greens and pork for dinner with Irish potatoes and dumplings and baked potatoes and whatnot and a real good dinner to keep you working the rest of the day.

Mrs. Finch also noted that her mother primarily stayed at home to care for the "the babies" while the other adults and older children went out to work. When asked, Mrs. McCauley recalled that her mother did not work much on the farm either, stating, "she didn't have time because, …she cooked three meals a day, I mean meals, not snacks." Mrs. Merritt suggested that this lifestyle of caring for children, preparing meals consistently every day and keeping house (i.e., social reproductive labor and "production for home consumption") (Carlton-LaNey, 1992, p. 518; Glenn, 1992) contributed to her grandmother's death, stating; "I believe to my soul that's what killed my grandmother"; although her mother, Mrs. Cole, disagreed. Mrs. Cole contended that her mother's desire to maintain the home was to provide respite from the White world and was an act of love that she shared with the entire community. Mrs. Cole remarked, "I don't think so, because my mother, she always cooked [for everybody]".

As children grew older, LAA women also sought work outside of the home to

support the family, although the prospects were limited, hours were long, jobs were menial, and wages were meager. As opportunities for LAA men to participate in public work improved over the decades, LAA women's opportunities remained depressed (Brimmer, 1967). Mrs. McCauley recalled that there:

> …was no work for Black women, other than housekeeping [for White families]. She [my mother] had a couple of little jobs a week, where she would go and clean their [White people] house, probably for like a dollar. They didn't get paid anything. And she would take in washings. People would bring her their dirty clothes, she would wash them and iron them, and they'd come back and pick them up. See, because there was no work for Black women.

While work as housekeepers and laundresses for White families enabled LAA women to support their families, LAA women also worked in local factories for wages. Black Belt LAA oral traditions from the RAP described a hierarchy for factory wages that were traditionally set based on gender and race. The elders in the RAP explained that wage hierarchies existed in the following order from highest to lowest wage: (1) White man's wage; (2) Black man's wage; (3) White woman's wage; and (4) Black woman's wage. While there is no written evidence of this wage hierarchy, there is evidence that (1) occupations traditionally employing mostly LAA are plagued with a wage penalty or pay the lowest wages (i.e., custodian, maid, laborer), a custom influenced by Southern political racism; and (2) historical, pervasive wage theft and work exploitation persists (Green Coleman, 2016; Huffman, 2004).

Factory work was repetitive and potentially dangerous, for low pay. In Pamlico County, Mrs. Finch and Mrs. Squires recalled women working off the farm in the oyster

factory and crab houses. At the oyster factory in Oriental, NC, women would open the steamed oysters and be “paid by the gallon”. Women working at the crab house as laborers would process or “pick” crabs for canning. Mrs. Connally recalled that her mother worked in the local textile factory. She described the aching repetition and tediousness of the job and how working there, as her first job, gave her career perspective:

> That was my first job, turning socks. I said, ‘Mom, this is not going to work. It’s too rough for me.’ Picking the socks up, pulling them on your arm, throwing them over your shoulder, get a dozen, batch them up. Picking the--, over and over. So, it was too repetitive for me. That was my first job, doing that. And I realized that’s not what I wanted to [do]--.

LAA Children and Work

LAA girls and boys began working early in their childhood while continuing to attend school. As previously mentioned, the school calendar for LAA children was determined by the farm cycle to allow children the opportunity to both work and attend school, as both were critically important in LAA communities in the rural south. Mrs. Robinson described a day in her life as a LAA child in the Black Belt with the duties of work and school:

> We always had chores. When I was growing up you had chores. When you come from school you had to get in wood. You had to get in coal, water, maybe even sweep the yards or whatever. Feed the chickens. Feed the hogs, but there was something that you had to do. Once it got dark you come inside. You ate your dinner. We called it supper at that time. You got out your homework, and you

went to bed. That was your day.

Mrs. Monk also recalled her early work as a child as a field hand and domestic laborer. She subsequently attended college and returned to Pamlico County after graduation as a teacher in the segregated schools.

Young girls in the Black Belt also worked in domestic capacities for White families, often caring for young children. Oral traditions in LAA Black Belt communities are ripe with stories of LAA women and young girls being sexually exploited, attacked, and raped while working in the fields and in the homes of White people. These behaviors on the part of White men, are holdover "privileges" of White Supremacy, that stem from the peculiar institution of chattel enslavement of LAA people (Lerner, 1992). Mrs. McCauley shared her first work experiences outside of the home and alluded to the dangers faced by LAA women working in White homes (Anonymous, 1904):

> I started working—I started babysitting [for White families] probably when I was about fourteen. …Mama would let us babysit like on Saturday evening and Sunday evening, but you couldn't babysit at night. She wouldn't let us babysit at night. We could babysit on Sunday after church, but my mother was very protective of us.

Her mother, carrying the burden of knowledge and acknowledging the threats faced by LAA women, assumed her role as protector and keeper of the safe place, to shield her children from harm.

Military Service as Work and Opportunity

Military service provided opportunities for LAA advancements in employment, education, and homeownership. Although upward social, political, and economic

mobility were explicitly cited by the interviewees as factors for enlisting in the military, choosing to serve may also reflect the anticipation within the LAA community that service to country would ensure their civil rights and status as full US citizens (Hannah-Jones et al., 2021). While that reality continued to evolve with time, military service was well received by the interviewees overall. While some LAA joined the military for a short time and returned to farming, others built careers, gained employable skills, and enabled their families to survive financially. Mrs. Monk recalled:

> With there being hard times, when young men went into the military, all of my brothers made an allotment and money came home every month; and also, there was no money to go to college and those young men who went into the military, when they got out of service, could go to college on the G.I. Bill.

Mrs. Finch recalled similar circumstances, noting:

> It's really been a help because in World War II, boys would go in service and they got a little money and they sent it back to their parents and a lot of parents didn't have a decent place to live and they would get homes, because the boys felt that they owed it to the parents and they didn't mind sending a little allotment to the parents.

Although some respondents reported mixed feeling about military service today and the necessity of war, most felt that military service benefited LAA families and their communities by providing opportunities for education, skill development, and employment, to advance the family's economic mobility. Most of the interviewees acknowledged that the benefits of military service outweighed the deficits. When asked if she believed military service helped the community, Mrs. McGlone stated, "I think so,

because we didn't lose anyone. Because my son served overseas and my two grandsons served overseas. And I have a great grandson in the service now.” She further explained that her son made a career out of his military service and attended law school.

Since 1980, LAA women’s enlistment in the armed services began to rapidly increase and currently, they are enlisting into military service at higher rates than men or women in any racial/ethnic minority groups (Melin, 2016). However, LAA women continue to report higher rates of distressing incidents of unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion than their White contemporaries (Buchanan et al., 2008). Mrs. Breeze is the only interviewee who served in the US military, making the decision to enlist in the early 1970’s to pay her college expenses. She explained:

> I started at the college at, like I said, then called North Carolina College, it’s now North Carolina Central [HBCU], but working and going to school, it was really tough to do. At some point in my second year, I think I decided that I would go in the Army. I went the active-duty Army in [19]71. And that was an experience, too. I’m telling you, when I think about my life, man, I guess I was a trailblazer all along.

“A trailblazer”, Mrs. Breeze found military service to be rewarding, fulfilling her desires to attend college and establish a successful career in nursing. Although she never explicitly shared her experiences in detail, she alluded to experiences of gendered racism and harassment, without protections or recourse to hold those responsible accountable. With “few females in the Army in 19[71]” and attending basic training in Alabama, a southern state still managing tensions stemming from racial integration and establishing new norms, women were treated:

> …like, 'You ain't supposed to be here, you're supposed to be at home.' If a man did something that hurt you, it was your fault. The male soldiers were not held accountable for whatever things they did. It was a difficult experience, at the time, you don't know what you're planning and preparing for.

Mrs. Breeze served approximately 20 years in the Army, as both an active duty and reserve soldier. She credits God for keeping her through those challenging times.

Race-Place-Space in LAA Schooling

Historically, legal segregation in the US south impacted public facilities, (i.e., schools, public transportation, retail stores, hotels, restaurants, public park amenities, amusements etc.) (Murray, 1951). The decree of segregation was based on skin color or the perception of race and universally enforced by White Americans through fines, incarceration, violence and death in some cases (by custom, i.e., White mob violence), as physical, emotional, and psychological cruelty toward LAA was a historical hallmark of racialized terror (Murray, 1951). This system of forced segregation persisted in southern states until the early 1970's, when the Federal government enforced school integration by restricting federal education funds to states that refused to comply with integration orders during the 1970-1971 school year (Coombs, 1972).

When denied access to post-secondary educational opportunities at White institutions of higher learning, African American communities created Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), to educate and advance generations of Black scholarship (W. R. Allen et al., 2007). Many of these institutions were established in the southern US beginning in 1865, where Black Codes and Jim Crow era laws ruled the social and political climate that shaped LAA places and place-making (W. R. Allen et al.,

2007). Established in large part by religious affiliations (e.g., Baptist, African Methodist Episcopal, Methodist) and the 1890 land-grant (Second Morrill Act of 1890) in the Black Belt, HBCUs continue to promote the legacy of resistance and perseverance of LAA (W. R. Allen et al., 2007).

Segregation served not only as a means to alienate LAA from White society, but also served to elevate Whiteness and ensure unequal racial power dynamics by perpetuating the myth of Black inferiority. Reinforcing this myth worked to elevate the White psyche, identity, and supremacy while simultaneously diminishing the relevancy of Blackness, that subjected LAA to exploitation. This was especially detrimental to children, as identity formation through racial socialization begins early in child development, especially for LAA children in the Black Belt, where legalized Jim Crow segregation in public schools persisted into the 20th century, when the final throes of school integration were federally enforced and implemented (Ritterhouse, 2006).

LAA demands for equality were not holistically pleas for integration and assimilation into White culture, but rather a mandate for full citizenship and human dignity as Americans. The history of segregation begins as an answer to the question that perplexed White society before and after emancipation; what was to be done with emancipated Blacks? Frederick Douglass (1862), formerly enslaved LAA from Maryland, famed orator, and noted abolitionist responded:

> Our answer is, do nothing with them; mind your own business, and let them mind theirs. Your doing with them is their greatest misfortune. They have been undone by your doings, and all they now ask, and really have need of at your hands, is just to let them alone. They suffer by every interference, and succeed best by

being let alone. (column 2, para. 2)

LAA Racially Segregated School Experiences

The reality of segregated schools, created on the premise of separate, but equal, failed to live up to that ideal in many cases. Oral tradition in the LAA community recalls that LAA children attended segregated schools, based on the farming season, during the hot summer months after spring planting and the cold winter months after fall harvest. Despite the demands of farm life, some families were able to prioritize education, as Mrs. Torain noted, “We didn’t do any farming then because we were in school. Then we all started to get jobs, doing different things [other than farming].” For most, achieving higher education was a privilege, not afforded to everyone, but it was expected that children gained as much education as possible. Mrs. Bell recalled:

> my dad told us early on ‘I won't be able to send all nine of you to college’ He said ‘But what I do expect is for everyone of you to graduate from twelfth grade. And every one of us did.

Among LAA families and communities represented in the interviews, education was very important and that importance was instilled in the children, who were encouraged to achieve more than their parents and previous generations. Mrs. Breeze admired her mother and described a frequent exchange that they shared. In this exchange, Mrs. Breeze’s mother demonstrated her faith in the ability of her children to be successful despite their racialization:

> my mom, she was very interested in us doing our best in terms of education. I would say to her sometimes, “Mom, when I grow up, I’m going to be like you.” And she said, “No. You use what I’ve taught you and you put it together with

> what you know, and you'll be better than me." So she was always very encouraging to all of us to do our best work.

LAA parents stressed education in their children, regardless of their education background. Mrs. Robinson expressed her regret leaving school in the 11th grade to get married. She explained that during those times, female students who were married or pregnant, had to drop out of school and were no longer eligible to graduate with their high school diploma. My advisory panel of community elders concurred, describing their failed attempts to "hide" a pregnant classmate from the school principal, so that she could finish the school year. As a result of Mrs. Robinson's decision to leave school for marriage, she developed a no-nonsense approach to education for her children, stating: "I learned a saying, 'You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink.' Well, my motto was, 'If you hold his head under water long enough, he'll either drink it or drown.'"

Each interviewee was provided an overall positive school experience, as school offered a break from work and the opportunity to learn. However, in most cases, the segregated schools they attended were problematic and often lacked necessary resources. Although schools were racially segregated, with LAA and White children attending separate schools, administration, funding, and curricula were distributed and managed by Whites and their interests at all levels of government (federal, state, and local). Mrs. Finch described the conditions she encountered attending segregated LAA public schools:

> We were walking and they [White children] were riding the school bus. We had that old potbellied stove, and an old wooden school. We'd get their [White school/children] books when they were finished with them. Mama would have to

> buy their [White school/children] books. And when they [White school/children] got through with their benches, we would get them…. we had those potbellied stoves and we'd be up around it, all the children in the room would be up around the stove keeping warm. And the boys would have to leave the classroom to go out in the woods to bring wood back to put in the stove to keep us warm. Whenever we had a wind in March, we would get the tin blowing on the school. And we had outdoor toilets. And I don't even remember where we got water to drink. We went next door to get water. We could only drink water.

Mrs. McCauley recalled:

> ...school was fine, because we didn't know any different, as far as segregation was concerned. We really didn't realize until we got in high school, as you got older, where you could see the difference and feel the difference. And then, you began to think, "Why this? Why do we have to have these books where some of the pages are torn out?" Because we had to use books, say, if you were in the seventh grade, books was always year[s] old when we got them. And that's when you began to realize what's going on here, used desks that was partly torn, carved on it, where they [White children] had carved.

In addition to limited and low-quality resources in segregated school buildings, most of the LAA interviewees walked to school because buses were not provided for them by the state. Mrs. Monk recalls walking to school for 12 years and then in her senior year of high school "we would ride the bus when it rained". Consequently, Black Belt LAA communities invested in the educational success of the LAA children in their community. Parents and the community in Pamlico County "assembled a makeshift

school bus" out of old vehicle parts, to transport the children to school is one example (Thuesen, 2013, p. 195). Mrs. Finch shared her reflections of segregated schools and how the LAA community worked together to fill gaps and provide for the children:

> We had to walk in the rain and the parents would come to get us if it was raining too much. Then they had cars, but only one or two of them had cars. People that had horses and carts,…. They'd come and pick up their children. But some children were walking 3 or 4 miles to get to school. But the Whites would [be] riding on the school bus then. When I got in high school, we didn't have a lunchroom. When we did get one, we had to sell dinners to raise money to get utilities for the lunchroom, so we did finally get one. Before that, when I was in high school too, I don't know where they were getting the beans from, but Miss Ina Davis would cook the beans and would sell them for $.05 a cup and some time we didn't have money to buy it. We would get one slice of bread with it. And some of the children would take the food, in a like, we were going on the farm to work, in a bucket, we called it a dinner bucket and we would just be hungry until we got back home, sometimes.

For LAA in the Black Belt, even festive, entertaining activities served a greater purpose. Mrs. Monk explained how the annual May Day celebration "wasn't just a good time" but was also a school fundraiser to buy necessary supplies for the school.

Textbooks were essential resources for school children, however, LAA children and teachers struggled with outdated textbooks. Although these textbooks were reported to be upwards of 10 years old, LAA parents were required to pay book fees to the State of NC for children to receive textbooks. While these fees were reportedly refundable, LAA

families rarely received refunds when the books were returned to the school by the students. Mrs. Monk explained how Jim Crow segregation impacted the availability of resources to teach and learn, noting:

> I recall also that most of our [outdated] books had White children's names in them when we got them. Yes, and it was the state law that that should not happen. But see the law was not followed much during that time. It was not enforced. I also recall that we had one record player, one film strip projector, and we had one movie projector for the 12 grades and if I had to use it, I had to check that out of the library. You couldn't use it while I was using it. And what do they say ... 'separate but equal'? Not so. Not so. Because I found out that when we integrated, I had my own filmstrip projector, my own record player, and my own movie projector. So that says right there, separate but not equal.

Although these textbooks were reported to be upwards of 10 years old, LAA parents were required to pay book fees to the State of NC for children to receive textbooks. While these fees were reportedly refundable, LAA families rarely received refunds when the books were returned to the school by the students.

Despite the racialized challenges imposed by Jim Crow segregation on LAA teachers and children in segregated LAA schools, the LAA community, parents, teachers and children were committed to exhausting all of their personal and community resources, doing "everything you could to make sure that our children learned" as stated by Mrs. Monk. Mrs. Monk further reflected on her own personal school experiences and the lifelong influence on her personal, professional, and spiritual life, stating:

> I have to say "yes" in spite of... but do you know, the shortness of opportunities

and resources, I'd have to say I received an education that fitted me for life because I am now at the age that I am, I'm 73 years old and I taught and I'm doing a little bit right now. And, with God on my side, see God knew how much I wanted, you know, to be better in life or have better, a better way of life than my parents had. So, I strived and God kept me, as I said a few minutes ago, we were short on so many things that we needed; but in spite of that, God gave us the knowledge and the desire to work hard so that we could have a better life. I'm not saying that I could not have learned more. I could have. But in spite of it, I believe I ... you know, and I believe I have helped children, helped mold the minds of our children [LAA children].

Mrs. McCauley agreed and expressed how the racialization of her school experience impacted her life, noting:

> We had very good teachers, I think. They did their very best with the situation. It wasn't bad when you were younger, but you didn't know the difference. As you got older, you began to resent some things.
>
> Interviewer: Was that because you started to see how it was for other people?
>
> Mrs. McCauley: Uh-huh, and see how it was for the White people.
>
> Interviewer: How did you come to see that?
>
> Mrs. McCauley: as I say, as you get older—like, we couldn't go to the University [UNC-CH] when we graduated. We had to go to Durham, to North Carolina College [HBCU], at that time. But a lot of us couldn't go, because we had to catch the bus, and the bus station was on the other side of town, and you had to walk from the bus station to the college, which was about four miles. So, it was so

> many things that you saw that you realized was a block for you. And that’s the way it was. Some of the kids, when we graduated, had relatives up north, and they were able to go up there and go to school. But here, see, it was nothing nearby.

Mrs. Robinson explained how her son was accepted to a Predominantly White Institution after graduating as an honor student from his segregated high school. However, Mrs. Robinson’s son’s acceptance was rescinded shortly before the start of the Fall semester because of his race. With the aid of their LAA community, Mrs. Robinson’s son was accepted and attended Howard University instead. While a student at Howard University, Mrs. Robinson explained that her son, the honor student, felt less prepared than his peers for college as a consequence of the limited resources available to his segregated school. She recalled:

> He said he went to Howard University and it was like he was the dumbest thing in the world because a lot of things that those children that was there with him had already done in high school, they didn't even give it to him when he was in high school. They didn't have, I guess, the tools or the financial facilities.

Although Mrs. Robinson’s son felt educationally disadvantaged, he was determined to be successful. He recognized the sacrifice of his family and community to help him attend Howard University, after his original plans to attend a PWI were thwarted. She recalled:

> He said he really had to work his butt off just to stay even. He says, ‘Not ahead of the class, mama, just even.’ He said when the other kids had time to go out and party and enjoy themselves on the weekend, he says, “I was burning the midnight oil. I was catching up to make sure because I had promised you if you got me there, I wasn't going to get throwed out.”

Mrs. Robinson expressed her disappointment in the limited resources available to the segregated LAA schools “because that's a devastating thing for a child to feel like, ‘Hey, I'm smart. I'm getting all A's,’ and you go to the next level, and they say, ‘All A's for what?’.

Racially Segregated LAA Teachers and Administrators

As a result of scarce physical resources in segregated LAA schools, teachers assumed multiple duties and served as role models and influencers for impressionable LAA children, especially girls. Mrs. Bell reflected on her teacher, who also drove the school bus. She described her experience catching the school bus in the early morning hours:

> “She [bus driver/teacher] use to teach school. My mother use to walk out to the end of the road with a lantern cause we lived back up a path and she was so afraid she didn't know if we would get on a snake or what might happen. She would come out every morning with this lantern and she would lead the way for us to walk down this path. It was dark when they came because they had to come early because they had to make more rounds than one. So, she had to leave early because she picked up kids in Pamlico, Florence, Merritt and all the way round then she went and taught school. My mother, she wouldn't wait for us. Sometimes we might be lucky enough to get on that bus. If that bus was crowded when she got around to us we had to walk to school. If it wasn't loaded she would pick us up if we got out there early enough and sometimes it look like she came real, real early just for the devil. We would get almost to that bus and she would close the bus door and I would be so upset.”

Teachers also taught multiple grades at the same time, in small, over capacity schools, as Mrs. Bell continued:

> We went to a little schoolhouse down in Florence, there was about six grades in that school this one teacher taught… I don't know how she did it but we sat in a row at that school there was about six rows there. Your classmate sat in this row the other classmates in that one. While one class was doing one thing another class was doing something else.

Teachers were also role models, "loved and respected" by their students according to Mrs. Monk. Mrs. Monk also remarked, "Teachers were an important part of the community…. especially Black teachers." She credits these teachers with helping them learn and grow in order to be successful as adults. Mrs. Bell reflected on her teacher role model, explaining:

> [Afterschool] I would slow behind to carry her briefcase and I wanted to be like her. She could play the piano. She taught us very well because I learned all of my basic skills from her, drawing, confidence, writing, reading, she taught us how to read.

Despite the scarcity of resources in segregated LAA schools, these community schools instilled a sense of belonging. Mrs. Connally recalled "close knit" schools and teachers that made children feel as if they were "with a parent" because teachers assume that type of adult leadership role. Administrators also played an active role in the welfare of LAA students in segregated schools. LAA administrators, such as principals and superintendents worked alongside teachers, parents and the community, to ensure the success of the children in their care. Mrs. Breeze recalled how teachers and principals

were intimately involved with her success in school:

> The teachers, if you were not doing well, your parents was going to get a phone call. The principal, Mr. Stanbeck he knew everybody. He said, 'Breeze, I'm gonna call your mama. You got to do so-and-so. I'm gonna call your mama.' And he would do it, you know? [Laughter] And so it was, like, we were a family and the teachers cared about what happened to us. And if we were struggling, they did something to help us.

Both teachers and principals made phone calls or home visits to parents when children were falling short of community expectations. Mrs. Robinson lauded: "the teacher came to your house. The principal came to your house, bar none. And if you did something wrong in school, you know who brought you home? The principal."

LAA Children and Racialized Violence

Despite segregated school experiences, racism and race-based violence were never far away from the lives of LAA children. Mrs. McCauley described how she locally attended "a little two-room" segregated primary school until she reached seventh grade, at which point she would attend the segregated middle/high school in a more centralized location and in closer proximity to the White middle/high school. As other interviewees have shared, it was in these moments when LAA children realized the inequalities of their racially segregated schools. Mrs. McCauley described LAA resistance to the inequalities and the White community's response:

> This lawyer out of Durham—I don't know how he got into it. But, you see, they [White community] had a nice White school right up the road here, a nice brick White school. Anyway, he brought a lawsuit against the Orange County School

> Board, because they didn't have [equal school facilities for the LAA community]… they either had to admit us to their school, or they had to close. And before they would admit us, they closed.

Interviewees also recalled experiences walking home from school and experiencing racialized harassment and violence from White students riding the school buses. White children would "call us ugly names and they would throw things out of the bus at us while we were walking to school." These incidents made lasting impressions on the LAA children as "those things you don't forget very easily." Other interviewees recalled White children "throwing spit balls at us", noting that "It [racialized experience] was tough. It was really bad".

LAA children also experienced racialized violence and discrimination from White adults in education. While LAA teachers and administrators provided support and nurture, White administrators sought to maintain the social and racial hierarchy of segregation. Oral traditions among the RAP retold stories of White county or state school leadership's administration of career placement or directional tests for LAA high school students. According to the RAP, these tests were designed to assess LAA student's abilities and capacity to be successful in the workforce. Invariably, the LAA community assessment results directed students toward domestic work, manufacturing, or other unskilled, manual labor jobs, instead of college or skilled trades. Reflecting back, members of the RAP acknowledge that White representatives administering the test to LAA students was a form of psychological conditioning to racial conformity, although they were unaware of this strategy at the time and deeply affected by the assessment results (i.e., anger, disappointment, frozen, disheartened). Members of the RAP

determine that this strategy was effective in aligning with racial hierarchical norms of the time, substantiating the dispiriting message that "if Mr. Charlie/Ms. Ann [White man/woman] tell you that you can't do it, then you can't do it."

Mrs. Finch described how her desire to become a nurse was derailed by these career tests and White test administrators:

> I was really going for a nurse and take nursing training and I had to take this test. This was before integration. And so, we took the test and when it came back, they said that all you are capable of doing is maid work. We had to go to New Bern to take the test and they wouldn't let but so many of us take it. And Annie Fulcher went; we went and Annie said "Finch was right. Yeah, the White ones passed, but we [LAA] didn't". She said, 'I tell you, they had a way of knowing Black from White even if they just put a little mark or something' and I believe that, too. Because the White ones, they took them… But they didn't accept us.

Mrs. Finch believed that integration improved access and opportunity for LAA children later on, as these tests no longer served a purpose in maintaining segregation. Most of the interviewees agreed that integration was necessary, however, some expressed a sense of loss.

Racial School Integration

Social, legal, and political challenges to racial segregation persisted in the decades following Reconstruction. Early legal challenges to school segregation focused on higher education, on the premise that there was less concern from the White community regarding racial integration at this level (Coombs, 1972). Supreme Court victories regarding higher education paved the way for challenges to public school integration, the

most notable case being Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1954 and 1955 (Bartz & Kritsonis, 2019b). This legal decision was instrumental in desegregating schools across the country "with all deliberate speed", which allowed states and local jurisdiction the autonomy to integrate schools with an indeterminate timeframe, based on the needs of their respective school systems. In Black Belt states, this allowed a loophole for states to continue to retain segregated schools by allowing a limited number of Black students' entry into White schools or the construction of new schools for Black students of equal, if not better quality than their White counterparts. However, Black resistance persisted through legal and political demonstrations and in 1969, the Federal government enforced the Supreme Court ruling by restricting federal education funding for segregated school districts (Ayscue et al., 2014). Widespread desegregation did not begin until the 1970's and by 1972, segregated schools were essentially abolished and White interests adjusted with the times (Horsford, 2019; Lynn, 2006). Legal challenges persisted however, well into the late 1970s and 1980s, challenging busing policies and other work-arounds that White policy interests implemented in response to federal enforcement of public school integration (Ayscue et al., 2014; Bartz & Kritsonis, 2019b, 2019a; Willink, 2009).

The end of segregation marked a new and uncertain time for LAA in the Black Belt. However, interviewees expressed mixed feelings about integration. During segregation, Mrs. Monk believed that integration would mean change for LAA progress in that they would have access to different types of career paths beyond teaching. While many favored the end of Jim Crow and racial subjugation, integration did not always live up to the promise of equality and full citizenship, leaving some interviewees with a sense of loss with regard to schools. Mrs. Monk further commented that "teaching has been

lost; we've lost right much [in teaching LAA children]" since integration. Mrs. Connally expressed concern about the teacher-student relationships, which are more friendly, allowing children to be "more verbal and opinionated" and lacking discipline. Other interviewees expressed concern about teacher quality and attitudes. Mrs. Robinson remarked:

> I feel like integration is a success, but I feel like our educational system has deteriorated because during my time teachers were dedicated. I mean they were dedicated. They would go to all kinds of lengths to make sure that that child succeeded, and I'm sure that we still have some with that same frame of mind, but the majority is, it's a job.

As previously mentioned, school integration in many North Carolina communities was not a transparent, collective, or inclusive process. White communities developed integration plans in silos, integrating and assimilating LAA children into the White system of education, disregarding decades of culturally effective teaching strategies that acknowledged and honored the racialized lived experiences of LAA children and families. In the early stages of integration, LAA children could elect to attend the local White school through an application process. Mrs. Breeze was one of those students. She describes how she was encouraged by her LAA teachers and administrators as one of fifteen students from her segregated high school to integrate Orange High School. She recalled "the teachers were very smart in that they encouraged people to go who were not struggling academically, so that you wouldn't have to struggle with prejudice and academia." She went on to describe the experience as "a very difficult situation" and "rough" as "Most of the [White] kids, they tried to not even touch against us, like the skin

was going to rub off on them. And even some of the teachers gave us a hard time." Graduating number eight in her class of 200 from Orange High School, Mrs. Breeze recalled that she was not offered any scholarships to attend college, although she believes she should have given her academic record, because "they [White school leadership] didn't help any of the Black kids to get any kind of help. Matter of fact, one girl, she was real smart. They told her, 'You should just be a housekeeper.'"

While Mrs. Breeze found her experience integrating high school in the early 1960's difficult, she found that her experience attending UNC-CH nursing school in the late 1970's was worse. She had long aspired to attend UNC-CH, the flagship university, "belonging to all North Carolinians", but completed her undergraduate degree at North Carolina Central University, the local HBCU. She applied to UNC-CH's nursing program and was accepted, one of eight LAA accepted to that class of approximately 300 students. She recalled again, that her experiences there were "very, very difficult" because:

> The teachers gave you heck and the students gave you heck. I remember [LAA] students who had experiments going in the science hall,… and [White] people would go in and turn over their experiment, and they would have to start all over again. [Pause]. Anyway, so it was very difficult.

Surviving her nursing school experience, Mrs. Breeze explained why she is not pictured in the class graduation photograph:

> [When] we took the graduation pictures for nursing, I should have just ran down in the middle. But they [White students] kind of pushed you out to the side as far as they could so that no brown skins would be in the picture. At the time I didn't realize what was going on, but anyway, if you see the graduates of 1980…, the

> group picture, you won't see me in it because I was so far over here [on the side] that you couldn't see me.

Her desire to attend UNC-CH fulfilled, Mrs. Breeze went back to North Carolina Central University and earned a Master's degree in Education Administration, qualifying her to work as a school principal.

Interviewees recalled how integrating into White schools and spaces provided them access to the necessary resources they lacked in the segregated LAA schools. Mrs. Monk recalled:

> When you got to the White school, you found out that teachers did not have to work or spend all their time having events or having fundraisers; that the state had supplied all of these things, and you found that they didn't work hard like you did in order to raise funds in order to buy supplies.

Left out of the integration decision-making process, many LAA students, teachers, administrators, parents, and communities lost a great deal of autonomy, power, ownership, and influence over the educational needs of LAA children. Therefore, the experiences of LAA children in both segregated and integrated schools were challenging and tested their commitment to education, commitment to themselves, and commitment to their community. In turn, the community encouraged the children to forgo outward expressions of anger and resentment, while unintentionally, reinforcing feelings of helplessness. Mrs. McCauley explained:

> We were taught not to be angry [about our racialized experiences], because there was nothing we could do about it. And parents was well aware that it was a big, big difference, but they didn't—what's the word to say? They didn't use it as a

way of being mean and angry.

However, decades removed from the experiences of racial segregation, Mrs. McCauley expressed the lasting emotional impact of those missed educational opportunities, while acknowledging the racial progress that has been achieved. She shared her sentiments with her young LAA interviewer, who was also a student at UNC-CH:

> I don't reckon I should say it, because you're there, but I'm not in love with Carolina [UNC-CH] now because of that. [Laughs] After all these years, I'm not. Because I would have loved to have gone to college, but it wasn't there.

Education remains an important aspect of these LAA communities. Many interviewees remained life-long learners, constantly seeking to learn and continuing the community legacy of encouraging younger generations of LAA to obtain their education and connect to their spirituality.

Race-Place-Space in LAA Landownership and Loss

The journey to landownership and farming for LAA in the Black Belt, post-emancipation, was very difficult and many LAA families were not able to purchase land and operate their own farms (Schweninger, 1989). For LAA, landownership was important for both wealth and identity that is tied to the ancestral communities that once occupied the land and intimately understood the intrinsic value of owning property, as they were once property (Green, 2014; Schweninger, 1989; Womack, 2016). LAA community and personal stability, autonomy and social independence, safety, and residence security came with landownership, enabling LAA landowners to mediate with the White community and serve the LAA community in leadership roles in churches, schools, and business and also seek employment off the farm to gain additional income

(Christian et al., 2013; L. McGee et al., 1976; Zabawa, 1995). LAA landownership instilled dignity, pride, and optimism in the people and communities, increased civic participation and the likelihood of higher education attainment for children, and overall personal and community well-being (Bertrand et al., 1980; J. Gilbert et al., 2002).

Interviewees demonstrated the pride, dignity, optimism and self-sufficiency benefits of landownership. Mrs. Bell recalled that her family “had our own farm. We had our land. We owned our own land and our own house and we had about forty something acres.” While much of the family’s land has been sold (approximately 90 acres remain), with pride, Mrs. Bell shared how her grandfather “was a slave owner's son” with his story featured in the local newspaper, highlighting his lifelong contributions to the community, as he “owned a tremendous amount of land”. Other interviewees described the acquisition of LAA land as a result of inheritance from familial relationships with former slave owning families. Mrs. Nunn describes how her great-grandfather, the son of an enslaved mother and slave owning father, “was allowed to purchase two hundred acres with crops and timber”, as “his birthright”. Subsequently, his children and grandchildren inherited his property, some of which remains in the family today.

Mrs. Merritt exemplifies the perspective of LAA landowners, stating “This [land] is very sentimental to me. And property—you can’t get property any way. You just can’t get it. Once the land is gone, it’s gone.” She explained that her grandfather gave her the land she owns and left her with explicit instructions that she has passed on to her children:

> We walked out there on the side of the land, and my grandfather told me, he said, ‘Ann’, he said, ‘now, you take care of this property.’ I said, ‘Grandpa, don’t

> worry. I will.' So, I told my children I've already got my will done. I said, 'If I die, this land is not to be sold. I don't care what. I'm leaving enough insurance money where y'all don't have to worry about trying to take care of my property. I don't care if they offer you a million dollars. I don't care if they offer you two million dollars. Don't sell my property. … [Speaking with emotion] This is very sentimental to me. And property—you can't get property any way. You just can't get it. Once the land is gone, it's gone.

The RAP affirmed that land loss was an important theme as participants' emphasis on land ownership seemed to reflect on the need for a sense of safety in a racially hostile world, as "places of refuge" where LAA "always have a place to go". Land loss expressed in the interviews, therefore, according to the RAP, underscored the deep sense of loss and hopelessness when land is sold, lost, or transferred outside of the family, because it is very difficult to impossible to reclaim again.

LAA Land Loss: Tragedy and Heartbreak

Oral traditions of the RAP affirm land theft by White farmers and caution constant vigilance to avert the threat. "Pay your taxes on time and keep all of your receipts" is the advice passed down by the RAP. Mrs. McGlone explained how after 50 years of paying her taxes on time, the county threatened to take her land, requiring her to secure the services of an attorney to "fight" for her property. She reluctantly began paying the taxes while living in New York, at the behest of her father. Reminded of the value of landownership, Mrs. McGlone continued to make payments and retain her receipts. At the time of her interview, Mrs. McGlone lived on her family land and planned to will the property to her children to maintain for the next generation.

Other interviewees shared the pressures placed on them by Whites to sell their land. Mrs. Merritt shared the story of her neighbor, who was being pressured to sell her land. Mrs. Merritt suggested to her that she should tell the man that she "wanted a million dollars". When she told the interested buyer that she wanted a million dollars to sell her land to him, "he ain't bothered her since. [Laughs]." In addition to pressures from the White community to sell their land, The RAP explained that Whites are not willing to pay premium prices for LAA land. RAP members describe the sentimental value of land as invaluable to LAA in the Black Belt, as it is representative of the intimacy and connection of LAA land to their ancestral past, their history of survival in those places, and the tumultuous relationship with White people in those places. LAA land ownership is empowering to the collective of LAA in those communities, because of the collective possession and access, especially in rural places. Collective possession is the idea that land owned by one person in a LAA rural community means that everyone in that community owns and has access to the land, has accountability to the land, and benefits from the collective responsibility of that landownership. With this knowledge, Mrs. Merritt understood that one million dollars was considerably more money than any White buyer would be willing to pay for LAA land, but far less than the sentimental value the land held for her neighbor.

Mrs. Merritt also recalled an incident while visiting her attorney regarding her battle to reclaim lost family land. She shared that she encountered a White man, who told her "if y'all don't get that house, I'm going to get it and I'm going to put section 8 housing out there." Mrs. Merritt quickly responded with authority, "Not if I've got anything to do with it, you won't." She added with passion, "I mean it. They've [White

people] taken too much of our property. They'll [White people] never get mine if I've got anything to do with it." Members of the RAP regarded the struggle to maintain property in the Black Belt as a fight for survival that extends beyond the present generation. It is an intergenerational struggle to pay honor to the ancestors for their sacrifice and keep them alive in the memories of present and future generations.

With time comes change. Mrs. J. A. J. Squires explained that as opportunities for LAA mobility outside of the Black Belt expanded, many educated LAA left their home communities in the Black Belt, resulting in a "brain drain" of LAA talent, leaving a void of skilled workers, political power, and a population capable of sustaining and prospering the community. In addition to this loss of talent, many of the interviewees and members of the RAP acknowledged that change has evolved as community elders join the ancestors, leaving their land to their children and grandchildren as "heir property". Many interviewees described that over time and across generations, the sentimental attachments to the land have severed, and the heirs are willing to sell the land or neglect to pay the taxes. As shifts in landownership gradually change the racial and ethnic makeup of once thriving LAA communities, the people who remain, must adjust to rural gentrification. Mrs. Bell explained:

> All the land practically in Florence had been sold to White people. There are not very many Black people that live in Florence and over the years to come I think that when those that's there now are deceased there are not going to be hardly any there because there are no young people coming back to do anything.

For Mrs. Bell, the loss of land means losing a of way of life. She recalled that her grandfather maintained apple and plum trees, grape vines, and strawberries, that they

would pick and enjoy as children. With the selling of that land, nearly eighty acres, she expresses a great sense of personal loss as the legacy of her grandfather remains only in her memories.

Like much of the LAA farmland, recreational places like beaches, have been sold and are no longer accessible. LAA beaches existed during Jim Crow segregation because LAA were not allowed to visit White beaches. These areas thrived, as LAA used their time at the beach for recreation, fishing, and crabbing. These activities were most evident for the interviewees living in Pamlico County "Down East". Interviewees recalled a number of LAA beaches, that unfortunately, "do not exist anymore." Mrs. Bell explained that "White people went in and bought… mostly all that land and they have developed it and these houses… big fine houses and stuff there now." In addition to losing access to these formerly thriving LAA places, the "million dollar" homes that line the beach have caused an increase in property taxes for all of the county residents. According to Mrs. Nunn, similar changes are occurring as LAA elders join the ancestors. She explained how the city of Chapel Hill was "buying up the property, scooping it up, and probably they didn't pay the people very much money." With enthusiasm, Mrs. Nunn summed up the sentiment of many LAA landowners in the Black Belt and their heirs in expressing the pride of her family and their love of the land that enabled them to raise "their families" and contribute "to the economy by what they did [farming]".

Race-Place-Space in LAA Community

Racial segregation and the struggle for citizenship, demanded that LAA in the Black Belt rely on their community and organize their efforts. Members of the RAP confirm that community often included extended family. Mrs. Connally explained "There

is truth to the statement there is no place like home… It feels better to me to be in an environment with family. I mean neighbors are good. But it's nothing like family to me." Many of these LAA Black Belt communities included White neighbors and racially complex relationships, where trust and mutual respect were questionable and convenient. Interviewees recalled relationships with White neighbors or "friends", who helped their families purchase land, as long as their other White friends were not aware of the relationship. Interviewees explained that there were "some [White people] that cared, but they didn't want their friends to know. They'd be kicked out of their circle." Although she could not recall any problems with White people, Mrs. Squires remembered that:

> Most of them White folks didn't like Black folks so we didn't bother [with] them much. There was some that liked Colored [LAA] people so that's who we went around with but the others we didn't bother them. [because] They weren't studying us. They were not studying Black people.

As a result of racial conflict, LAA built community with the intent to provide support, protection, resources, and strengthen resistance. Mrs. Monk remembered her family's involvement in the community "as we were one family that was part of the community family". She explained that "everybody worked together" and "looked out for each other". She continued:

> I remember there were times when ...my mom said "go tell Miss Young to send me a cup of sugar." I don't ever remember my mama sending that cup of sugar back. And there were times someone would come to us and ask for a tablespoon of lard and it was never sent back. So, that's what families do.

Sharing in LAA communities is a hallmark that is well understood in the oral traditions

and enabled LAA families and their communities to survive the ravages of racialization and segregation. Mrs. Breeze recalled how her mother connected with an agent in Washington, DC to secure an FHA loan to build a home. When her family secured the loan, her mother "went to church and started telling everybody. And, I mean, then a lot of Black people started getting FHA loans and building houses."

The community also took responsibility for "raising" all of the community's children by setting and enforcing behavioral expectations. Mrs. Monk noted:

> If one of us got out of order, and an adult had to speak to us, we were very respectful; we didn't get attitudes because we knew, if we got an attitude and Miss Em told or Cousin Booker told [our parents], we were in trouble at home. …the community was a big family. We did things together.

Interviewees recalled how their communities rallied together to help each other during harvest time. Mrs. Breeze recalled her family helping their LAA neighbors with their tobacco crop. After they hand tied the tobacco and hung the bundles in the barn to cure, they would have lunch, primarily vegetables, with the family. She recalled, how the family matriarch "would be at the house, and she would have lunch for us. Then everybody [would] go up to the house and have lunch, and go back and work some more". There were also recollections of families as caregivers for less fortunate families in their community. Mrs. McGlone explained that her "father gave the piece of land" to a disadvantaged LAA grandmother and her grandchildren and "the community built them a house" while her mother "always cooked for everybody [in the community]", a family legacy she continues in her extended family and community. Automobiles were a rarity among LAA families in Black Belt communities, however, families who owned cars

would transport members of the community to doctors' appointments.

The tight-knit protective characteristics of LAA communities enable children to develop without understanding the intense pressures of racism and poverty. Mrs. Finch recalled playing with the other children in the neighborhood as "happy as we could be, all of us out there, all Black but we were happy playing." Others recalled having a "good life" and realized later the extent of their poverty and racialization. Mrs. Robinson recalled:

> I didn't realize until in later years how bad off we were for at that time it was great. Everyone had their own garden. They had their own chickens. A few had a cow, and everybody had hogs. You didn't buy a lot of things from the store, so that's why I say we were poor, but we didn't realize it. As a matter of fact, I didn't even know that I was Black and I was poor until it was told to me in high school.

Interviewees also recalled sharing May Day fun with their communities. May Day served as both an opportunity for children and adults alike to enjoy a day of leisure and a fundraising event for segregated LAA schools. Interviewees who shared their May Day memories recalled the tradition of wrapping the May pole with ribbons and enjoying treats and snacks like ice cream. Mrs. Bell recalled May Day as "a big day at the school". Mrs. Connally recalled May Day as a day of "dressing up and having fun, playing" with "activity[ies] outside all day". Mrs. Monk recalled how "May Day was a fundraiser" for school supplies and schools from neighboring communities would celebrate May Day together, competing in spelling bees, baseball games, three-legged races and wheelbarrow racing. Members of the RAP affirmed the May Day recollections of the interviewees as an annual community event, filled with fun and activities, centered

around LAA children and the schools. However, the RAP nor the interviewees recalled the origins or significance of May Day celebrations in their communities.

LAA women made major contributions to the safety and well-being of everyone in the community, especially the other women and mothers. Members of the RAP affirmed the history of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) funded cooperative extension offices, using LAA women agents in rural communities to teach women innovative ways to manage their households (Carlton-LaNey, 1993). For example, LAA women would gather periodically to discuss topics such as food preservation, food preparation for "quick meals" during the week, and household money management strategies. To this end, cooperative extension agents working on behalf of the USDA provided a framework to LAA women in the Black Belt that was especially beneficial to young mothers and grandmothers raising their grandchildren. These opportunities to gather also enabled LAA women to find their collective voices and normalize their experiences. In addition to these activities, LAA women also protected the social and emotional well-being of their children from racialization. Mrs. McCauley recalled how her mother would protect them from the ills of Jim Crow segregation, when they would travel to town and:

> she always held our hand. She always carried us some water in a food jar, you know, they had "White" and "Colored" water, side by side. And we always wanted to drink out of the "White" water, and she wouldn't let us drink out of either one of them. She always carried us some water if we wanted some. So, there were little ways that they protected you—because they could feel what we didn't feel as far as race was concerned.

Mrs. Bell recounted when babies were born in the community, LAA women, grandmothers, mothers, aunts, sisters, and friends, would:

> come to the house. They would help out. They would take care of us [older children] until my mother got strong enough to be back on her feet. …[they] would cook for her and my mother would do the same thing …when she [other community women] had a baby. They would bathe the baby until my mother got strong enough to bathe the baby herself. That always happen.

Ongoing Efforts to Disrupt LAA Life Despite LAA Resistance

To respond to racially discriminatory behaviors and laws, LAA organized and established social, economic, and political organization that center the Black experience and resistance to racialized oppression. Out of systemic and pervasive denial of political and economic opportunity, especially in the southern US, LAA communities organized around economic and political activism and empowerment through organizations such as the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), the Black Panther Party (BPP), the National Association of Colored Women (Clubs; 1959) (NACW), Black Greek Letter Organizations (e.g., The Divine Nine), national secret societies (i.e., Freemasons, Eastern Star) and a myriad of social, benevolence, and mutual aid societies within communities to fill the voids created by racial discrimination (Parr, 2016).

LAA communities are systematically excluded, as Mrs. Connally described, "for some reason they [county officials] decided to doughnut hole us [LAA community] in this little subdivision" without easy access to major highways and amenities and multiple

dead-end streets. In response to environmental assaults on historically and predominantly LAA communities, LAA in Orange County, NC created an advocacy organization to help LAA understand their “basic rights”. Without this advocacy, interviewees living in these communities, would not have been aware of the “creative extractions” occurring in their communities. Mrs. Torain explained how living life on life’s terms, with work and home responsibilities, she was not able to attend county planning meetings. While effective at increasing awareness of environmental issues in LAA communities, community advocacy groups have had little impact on gentrification. Mrs. Connally explained how her community is becoming:

> more diverse… [there are] seven houses here and out of the seven there would be two Black and five White. As seniors have died off… the land got sold to different ones [Whites]… there’s a lot of Whites on that end… we [LAA] don’t really stand out so much as a historically Black [area] anymore, but predominantly.

The advocacy to prevent creative extractions in LAA communities is challenging. Many LAA are mistrusting of government leadership and fear an increase in their taxes if they accept county services. Recognizing that tax hikes have been used to “take” LAA property, these communities would rather live with failing septic systems that pollute air, land, and water and unimproved road surfaces than “annex” their property to the local government for services. Mrs. Connally acknowledged that the evolution of these communities, with the influx of White newcomers, lifelong LAA members of the community experience “shame” in acknowledging the deteriorating conditions of their homes and community. Mrs. Connally contends that the “shame” is exacerbated by the

erosion of safety LAA community members enjoyed before gentrification.

Mrs. Nunn described her experiences with the creative extraction of her family property that led to an environmental catastrophe. As her daughter, explained:

> This land has always been probably some of the prettiest land in the county… we had the most pristine, fresh water, because we basically got our water from springs before we got wells. The land was so pretty out here and untouched.

Until the county chose their community to develop a landfill. Mrs. Nunn described how she "hosted a landfill" that was "unlined" and caused contamination of the groundwater, as well as air pollution. She discussed how having a landfill in her backyard was "extremely difficult" as birds would "roost on those towers" along with rats, wild dogs, and an unbearable odor. The community had tested their water regularly for contamination and eventually found the water to be "really toxic". Mrs. Nunn contacted "Washington, DC [federal agency] and the lady said if she had anything to do with it, there would never be a landfill put in nobody's backdoor." She also described how, in addition to the landfill, the family of her deceased LAA neighbor sold his land to the electric company, who "raped the earth" by removing dirt to cover the landfill and created a "big hole". After long battles with the county, Mrs. Nunn and her community finally witnessed the closure of the landfill. As a symbol of the hardships she endured hosting the landfill in her backyard, Mrs. Nunn locked the landfill gate for the last time, closing the facility permanently.

For these LAA Black Belt communities, change signaled a new way of life. Mrs. Connally described how Latinx families moved next door to her mother. She explained that they are "excellent neighbors" and continue the tradition of sharing, noting

“whenever they garden, they’ll always take mom something. So, they fit in very well.” On the contrary, Mrs. Gibbs found that her community has begun to deteriorate. She explained that she feels her community has been abandoned, stating “we don't have anybody that's concern; they just don't care any more.” She remarked that she has never seen her community in it’s current condition, where LAA are not as visible as they once were and LAA people seem to have lost their purpose, which is having an adverse impact on LAA children.

Race-Place-Space in LAA Churches

The LAA church has its origin in the legacy of enslavement and resistance. Serving double duty as places for worship (spiritual) and refuge (political), LAA churches in the Black Belt provided an opportunity for respite and freedom to worship outside of the White power structure, resulting in the development of Black places of worship and autonomous religious leadership (Jabir, 2017). Whether in the tradition of resistance, refuge, or fear, church was an essential activity in LAA Black Belt communities. Interviewees recalled attending church every Sunday since they were children, and Mrs. Monk remarked that church was a “big part” of their lives and the “focal point of this community family”. Mrs. McCauley remarked that “religion had a great influence” on her. Church attendance was not optional and Mrs. Finch recalled not being allowed to play outside on Sunday afternoon if she did not attend church. Mrs. Torain explained that her family did not attend church every Sunday:

> but we went enough to know that there was something that--, it was instilled in us that that was a part of our life. That was something we needed to survive, that that was something that would keep us going. And a lot of that came from my

> grandmother. My grandmother was really into her faith. So, she instilled a lot of that into us. And my parents, … they carried us to church, but I think we got our really strong Christian wisdom from my grandmother, and then my mother in her later years.

Family elders established and enforced the religious norms of the family. Interviewees recalled the fathers in the community, escorting the children to Sunday school. Others recalled their mothers holding prayer meetings in the home while the children were young, assigning each child a "Bible verse" or scripture to learn and recite on Sunday mornings along with a prayer before Sunday breakfast.

Sundays in Black Belt LAA communities were busy days. Interviewees recalled their church activities, serving in church leadership roles and auxiliaries, such as church clerk, church missionaries, ushers, working with the children, and Sunday school teachers. Others played piano and sang in the choir. Mrs. Bell recalled that Sunday dinner "was a big affair", as her mother would cook Sunday dinner on Saturday evening and dinner "was already prepared [and the] house already cleaned up" when they left for church that morning.

As children reached the age of spiritual maturity, which some interviewees recalled was 12 years old, they decided to "join" the church. As Mrs. Nunn described, sitting on the mourner's bench when you decided to join the church was a "custom" in the LAA church and the first step towards baptism and the full rights of membership in the Baptist church. The mourner's bench custom derives out of the tradition of humbling oneself, as a sinner, in repentance of sin. Traditionally, the mourner's bench is the first pew in front of the church, to the left or right, facing the pulpit. As Mrs. Nunn recalled,

"the minister came down [from the pulpit] and took my name." Other interviewees recalled making their confession of belief in Jesus Christ to the minister at that time as well. While the origins of the mourner's bench are not well understood among the interviewees, the tradition was a rite of passage in their religious experiences.

Many of the interviewees expressed their dedication and lifelong membership to their childhood church demonstrated through their active church participation and involvement. Mrs. Connally explained her family membership traditions, noting "my grandmother was [a member], my grandfather, great grandfather, then my grandmother and my mom". Lifelong membership in their childhood churches also meant that the interviewees were very active and engaged members. In addition to her family legacy, Mrs. Connally's involvement informed a strong sense of duty to the church, such that she would not consider leaving. She explained, "I've got a lot of stakes in the church. So, I couldn't just pull up, pull out and I wouldn't. I wouldn't." Over the course of the interviewees' lives in their childhood churches, they have experienced the ups and downs of membership that occur in any organization, especially those that come with leadership changes. Mrs. Nunn explained such an experience with the introduction of a new pastor and his proposed changes to church operations, stating, "I'm not going to let no devil run me out of my church where I was born and raised. And I'm still there, probably one of the oldest."

Interviewees also shared how religion and spirituality are intricately tied, but different. Mrs. Monk remarked:

> Religious means just to do something over and over, all the time. I go to the store religiously. At 10:00 every day, I get up and go to the store. And like, I pray

mornings and I pray at night, and I go to church.

Interviewees discussed their spirituality both inside and outside the context of their religious observations. Mrs. McGlone shared how she religiously reads her bible and missionary quarterly every morning upon waking and listens to “religious programs on TV” when she is not able to attend church, as attending church has become more physically challenging. Spirituality presented in a number of different ways in the interviews. Many of the interviewees would “thank God” for being in “charge of my life”, their families, safety, professions, perseverance, and survival in a racially hostile environment.

Spirituality also presented as belief in traditions, intuition, and indigenous healing ways. Mrs. Nunn described how she learned to use “folks medicine” from her grandmother. She described an incident where her uncle was badly injured and her grandmother healed his wound by packing with mud and wrapping the wound in a white sheet. She expressed her amazement at her grandmother’s ways of knowing how to heal such a serious wound and prevent infection. She also shared experiences of “intuition” regarding her deceased son. Her son, Stu, had been killed as a young man. His girlfriend at the time of his death, married someone else and gave birth to a child. Mrs. Nunn remarked, “I said some intuition told me that that child was born to replace Stu. I do believe it!”.

Mrs. Robinson explained her belief in the power of spoken words. She shared a recollection of a White teacher in Maxton, who was opposed to school integration. In his adamant opposition, he remarked publicly that he would “rather see his kids dead than to see them in school with a nigger”. During the Christmas school break, the teacher and his

children were involved an automobile accident and both of his children died from their injuries. Mrs. Robinson remarked:

> but you have to be real careful what you say out your mouth, because I wouldn't have wished that on him in no kind of way even though he was saying it against my people [LAA]. I wouldn't have wished that on him. But he said it, and this happened, and then people say there's no God. There is a God. There is a God.

While church has played a significant role in the lived experiences of LAA in the Black Belt, many interviewees expressed their concerns that church attendance has declined. Oral traditions in LAA Black Belt communities confirm the decline, however, there is little agreement on the cause of the decline. Mrs. Connally remarked that:

> We're losing members for some reason or another. Most of them are family, I can probably tell you seven or eight main families that started the church and then their children and friends are still there. But we've had some new members to come, …the attendance is not as good as it used to be. So, there's a falling away from the church. I'm not sure if it's work because I mean even with my job [as a nurse] I worked, a hospital never closes. …some of it is work, and some of it is they're going to other churches, bigger churches. And then the least little falling out now people don't want to work it out. They want to walk out. So, we're experiencing that.

Other interviewees agree that church attendance is declining because young people are seeking opportunities outside of their communities and are no longer as interested or connected to the church and religion as their elders. Members of the RAP contended that the rural southern churches have "fallen away" from their originating purposes of

worship, resistance, and refuge, and have shifted the political and spiritual focus away from the LAA communities they serve. Today's churches are less centered on the racialized existence of their congregants and align with mainstream, White religious ideology and practice, despite the resurgence of civil rights movements in the form of #BlackLivesMatter. Although she believed that her pastor was actively attending to the spiritual needs of his congregants, Mrs. Connally acknowledged that "We're [the church] not as out in the community as much as I'd like to be." Mrs. Bell agreed that her pastor was doing a good job, but wishes that her church would grow. She acknowledged that she "would still love to see the young people become more involved. It [church] needs to grow more spiritually and more toward their [young people] needs. The needs of the young people have changed."

Consequently, emerging generations of LAA in the Black Belt are less concerned with religious doctrine and church attendance. Children involved in the church from birth, are choosing to forgo the tradition of church every Sunday. However, the elders hold out hope and encourage young people to develop a religious foundation. Mrs. A. R. Squires advised young people to "get right with God and stay with him", establish personal integrity, and a strong moral foundation. Other interviewees agree, encouraging youth to establish "a good religious background" and "to be grounded the Word [Bible], because in the Word there is a lot of wisdom and that wisdom can carry you through life."

Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, Conclusion

> Black Americans, because of our particular experience in this land, because we have borne the brunt of this forgetting, are less given to mythologizing America's past than White Americans. …White Americans desire to be free of a past they do not want to remember, while Black Americans remain bound to a past they can never forget. … Eight in ten Black people would not be in the United States were it not for the institution of slavery in a society founded on ideals of freedom. (Hannah-Jones et al., 2021)

For LAA, the past is critically important to establish the context for present-day experiences of racial discrimination, covert and overt racism and the obscenity of Black pain engrained in the mainstream psyche of our society. The historical denial of education in the LAA community elevated the value of transferring knowledge, culture, history, social contributions, spirituality, self-help and pride using oral tradition (R. Martin, 1987). The oral history research method honors the historical significance of the racialized existence of LAA and the silenced voices of ancestors, who bequeathed their experiences of oppression and resilience to subsequent generations. The inconceivable burden of violence experienced through the holocaust of countless masses of Africans and their descendants, in addition to the loss of culture, humanity, and worthiness, without the freedom or dignity to grieve, produces a significant challenge to how we perceive, interpret and revere the historical significance and contributions of this entire group of human beings. The interviewees' responses demonstrated the pervasive nature of racialization from a critical trauma lens and the desires within the community to achieve healing justice.

The oral traditions maintained in this community are as reliable as other written sources of history, as “history is always an interpretation” (Vansina, 1996, p. 124). Remarkable scholar and LAA rural folklorist, Zora Neale Hurston, believed that Black Belt LAA storytellers were the “tradition-bearers for an Afro-American world view" (Garfield & Hurston, 1991, p. 148). Despite the sustained injuries to person, culture and humanity, oral traditions in LAA communities continue to thrive, especially in southern rural communities where the connection to the land tolled by the ancestors remain a present reminder of the struggle. Intergenerationally, oral traditions continue to influence our evolving culture, spirituality, and history.

What is clear in the oral history interviews analyzed for this project, is that these histories do not and cannot exist outside of the imposition of Whiteness on their Black lived experiences. If Whiteness were not a factor, these interviews would simply reflect a human experience of triumph, tragedy, love, and heartbreak. The “routine” in LAA Black Belt communities has been sustained by racialization of LAA, systemic oppression, and racialized exclusion by Whites, operated in direct and intentional opposition to LAA security and comfort (Onwuachi-Willig, 2016, p. 347). Therefore, “the promise of the continued norm does not reassure or soothe the people who are disadvantaged by that norm; instead, it disconcerts” and harms them (Onwuachi-Willig, 2016, p. 347). The routine of racialization experienced by LAA in the Black Belt produces increased stress, anxiety, and intense feelings of social, political, legal, financial, educational, and occupational exclusion.

Each of the interviews used in this analysis are expressed from a Black perspective, as a result of the historical, social, and political Whiteness imposed on the

lived experiences of LAA in the Black Belt. Applying a BLMHJ framework, from my lens as a LAA Black Belt researcher, provided a depth of analysis and interpretation that advances the narrative beyond the surface of mainstream understanding of trauma in the lived experiences of this population. Although issues of race emerged in the various aspects of the interviewees' lived experiences, race only became a topic in the interviews when the interviewer asked specific questions related to interviewees' racialized experiences. In this analysis, I considered whether the experiences of the interviewees could exist without the racial, pervasive, intrusive, and patriarchal structure of Whiteness. I found that without Whiteness, the Black experience is merely a human experience, wrought with the same challenges that any other human being would face. I am sure that it is difficult for the interviewees to imagine their existence inside of Whiteness as a human existence, given that their humanity, not just their citizenship, remains at the core of their racialization.

The findings in this project revealed the historical and contemporary challenges of racialization for LAA women and their communities in the Black Belt. Applying the BLMHJ framework to the oral history interviews, the perceptions of racialized experiences of LAA women in the Black Belt emerged and informed the meaning of Race-Place-Space and their language/discourse regarding their racialization as trauma and healing justice. The contributions of these findings to Social Work practice and research are presented along with implication for LAA wellness and policy. Future directions for this work are also presented in the context of gendered racism and trauma interventions for LAA women in the Black Belt. Limitations of this project including the use of oral histories are also presented.

Summary of Main Findings

The routines of racialized life in these three different rural North Carolina, Black Belt communities bear many similarities. Overwhelmingly, these communities uphold principles of family, community, landownership, respect for elders, life-long church affiliations, Christianity (protestant Missionary Baptist and African Methodist Episcopal), despite historical racial segregation, most notably characterized by intentional and systemic racial exclusion in commerce, occupations, religion and education. These themes resonate as each interviewee made meaning of their racialization, centering their Black experience, seeking justice through healing. These values provided interviewees with safety from the cruelty of racialization, while military service and education offered a means to fulfill the rights of citizenship and promise of a future free from the negative impact of racialization.

Interviewees regarded community as an extension of familial relationships, with grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins living nearby. Respect for the community elders and their wisdom was also consistently acknowledged among the interviewees. Cultural and oral traditions around caregiving remain strong in LAA communities in the Black Belt. The value placed on caring for the most vulnerable in the community, including the elders, children, postpartum mothers, and the "sick and shut-in", are consistent trademarks of these communities in the present day. Each interviewee expressed familial and communal dedication to education for all of the community's children and committed resources to fundraise for their underfunded neighborhood schools. Military service and education as an option to advance in the social hierarchy of overwhelming Whiteness, required sacrifice from LAA individuals, their families, and communities. LAA

racialization in the Black Belt by the White power structure, attempted to interfere with LAA achievement and upward social, political, and economic mobility. From sharecropping landlords' attempts to keep LAA children from attending school, to work in the fields, to children attending school during the hottest and coldest months of the year, education did not come easy in Black Belt. These remote rural areas shielded interviewees from their impoverished existence, as families and the community rallied to ensure that basic needs were always met. While the interviewees did not relate their communal tendencies to their African ancestral traditions, these and other ancestral cultural predispositions often emerged, especially when survival was a factor. Land ownership translated to autonomy and safety from Whiteness as well as social and political mobility for LAA. The struggle to maintain land ownership in LAA Black Belt communities persists and burdens these communities, financially, politically, communally, and personally.

In Black Belt communities, where historically, the disenfranchisement of LAA through extremist violence and tremendous social, economic, educational, and political suppression has been authenticated, the reliance on community for relief, identity, sustainability, safety, and social support was a matter of survival. As a result, LAA employed various strategies to make meaning of the places they were forced to occupy. Community leaders and activists often relied on collectivism to alleviate conditions in their places brought on by racial segregation. Collectivism, as a means of place-making, in LAA communities countered the lack of resources, opportunity and choice imposed by race-based social spaces in the places they were required to remain. The contributing factor of LAA land ownership to collectivist movements, political mobilization, and

concerted community action in the Black Belt, enabled LAA advancement, racial socialization, and place-making in the face of oppression, suppression, and discrimination.

Race-Place-Space: An Explanation of Meaning

In the US, people of African descent, because of their appearance, are the only race category regarded as a "racial group" (Fields, 1990; U.S. Census Bureau, 2022b). Therefore, race, operationalized for this study, considers the adverse experiences of African descended people that functioned to dehumanize their existence in order to validate their inhumane treatment by their White traffickers, enslavers, political and government officials, clergy, and neighbors. Place, for the purpose of this study, is operationalized as an acknowledgement of the experiences of LAA people living in Black Belt communities. Space considers the roles people occupy in the context of race and the places they live. This includes the experiences of Jim Crow apartheid.

Invasive Whiteness

The loss of connection to African ancestral traditions and adaptation to White cultural norms, presented throughout the interviews. Celebrating May Day was an example of this phenomenon. Many interviewees recalled annual May Day celebrations in school as a highlight of their childhood experiences. Often a community event and school fundraiser, interviewees described activities such as wrapping the May pole, enjoying sweet treats, and competing in games. None of the interviewees expressed an awareness of the intent and purpose of May Day in their segregated schools, an unawareness shared among the member of the RAP. Out of curiosity, I researched the origins of May Day and learned that the tradition derived from European celebrations

marking the coming of Spring and more recently, May Day marked the European labor movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Grant, 2016).

Motivated by added curiosity with these facts, I recalled my own experience as a child in the LAA Black Belt. I conducted an informal poll of my siblings and school peer group about these May Day celebrations, as I did not recall participating. To my surprise, most remembered participating in this celebration, describing the activities in familiar detail to that of the interviewees, without any recollection of the purpose of the celebration. From my probing, I realized that these May Day celebrations are a representative example of the obscurity of Whiteness in the Black Belt LAA experience. The invasion of Scotch-Irish settlers and enslavers in NC during the 1700-1800's, including former US Presidents with connections to North Carolina (i.e., James K. Polk and Andrew Jackson), influenced the reverence of May Day in the North Carolina Black Belt and acculturation by LAA (Coulter, 1936). With an examination of the history of places, especially for LAA in the Black Belt, a deeper appreciation for their racialized experiences emerged.

As the interviewees affirmed, Black Belt communities are unique in that there is a universal awareness of shared existence between LAA and White communities, where each operates in relation to the other, within the context of their racialized self, in a manner that actualizes their racial status and the lie of Black inferiority (Aird, 2008; Ritterhouse, 2006; Willink, 2009). Within Black Belt communities, established racial boundaries are clear and reinforced through community memory and storytelling (Banks-Wallace, 2002; Hamilton, 2021; Willink, 2009). For Black Belt LAA societies, the community memory is closely tied to the White community and the tragic, traumatic

experiences of racialization, sustained through the storytelling of LAA community elders who affirm racial boundaries to protect the LAA communities (Ritterhouse, 2006). Often, storytelling resembles the fables of their African ancestry, where people and animals are personified as haunts or *haints (ha'nts)* (H. C. Davis, 1914; Jimenez, 2002; Redding, 2001). Hauntology is a method of storytelling that shrouds unresolved, unspeakable traumatizing experiences in the form of folk-like tales of supernatural occurrences where humans or animals take on the form of spirits, good and evil (C. W. Bailey & Bledsoe, 2001; LaCapra, 2016). Fisher (2012) expounds that hauntology describes "confrontation with a cultural impasse: the failure of the future" (p. 16). My personal experiences and those of the RAP verify that this storytelling strategy is a method by which a community remembers the horrors of their experiences while also shaping community identity. This method of storytelling demonstrates how Black Belt LAA experience trauma as racialization and attribute meaning and express language despite silencing.

Contrarily, the southern rural community memory of the White community bears little if any consideration for the experience of their LAA neighbors (Willink, 2009). Acts of fear and violence perpetrated toward LAA are retold as community norms and racialized behavioral expectations. Using "strategic ambiguity", Whites in the Black Belt have dominated the narrative of the Black Belt in a way that upholds the myth of Black inferiority and subjugates LAA retelling of their historical truths to the margins of history (Willink, 2009, p. 42). The demoralizing, enduring lie of Black inferiority enabled the dehumanizing treatment of LAA for centuries and disruption of this misrepresentation is central to healing from the trauma of racialization (Aird, 2008). Restoring LAA identity by centering the Black experience contradicts White hegemony and creates space for

LAA to find healing through their lived experiences.

Black Belt LAA Create Place in Resistance to Racialized Spaces

The interviewees verified and history has demonstrated that the places LAA occupied were based solely on their race, resulting in segregated communities, housing, schools, and places of worship. Racialization also impacted LAA access to specific employment and educational opportunities. In the case of place, choice is often not granted to the subjugated members of a society and thus place becomes a necessity rather than a desire. An individual's racial identity formation and biography is also related to the history of racialization in the place where they live (Liebler & Zacher, 2016).

Historical and social work literature provides many reasons why LAA migrated out of the Black Belt, including violence, better employment opportunities, and the promise of a new way of life in the form of freedom from repression (Tolnay, 2003; Wilkerson, 2011). However, much of the common understanding of the Great Migration of LAA from the Black Belt to the urban north, fails to explicate why many chose to stay and resist the political, social, mental and physically repressive and oppressive conditions in the Black Belt. The interviewees revealed how LAA in the Black Belt managed to shape their world through place-making. Although the landscape of the south in history was wrought with oppression and ubiquitous potential for physical harm and death for LAA, the interviewees affirmed safety in their ability to establish place and meaning in the spaces they occupied, physically, socially, spiritually and philosophically. Womack (2016) summarizes that race, space and place paradigm and the necessity of strategic approaches to address the relationship of these three constructs with LAA in the Black Belt, stating:

> [t]he legacy of slavery today results in over half of the Black population still residing within the Southern region highlighting ties to ancestral communities and land. In addition, the legacy of segregation and inequality has left behind a systemic disparity within the Black Belt region that requires unique approaches that are reflective of the Black population it is aimed to serve. With 55 percent of the LAA population still primarily located within the Southern region, these extreme conditions in which LAA live within the South disproportionately influences the racial group as a whole. (p. 5)

For the purposes of this discussion, space is unique to place in that geographical space is inclusive of the relational spaces that people occupy. As the interviewees affirmed, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are an example of the interaction between relational and topological spaces, as HBCUs honor and uphold the relational spaces of being an LAA in racialized educational settings, such that the HBCU experience provides a safe, racially friendly learning and social environment that is conducive to the learning needs of racialized Black people (W. R. Allen et al., 2007; Darrell et al., 2016). Black students at HBCUs occupy different relational spaces that provide them sovereignty from social life as a racial other outside of these spaces. The same may be said for other historically Black institutions such as churches and familial spaces, where LAA may engage outside of the racial spaces they must occupy in shared White spaces. Allen and colleagues (2019) agree, noting:

> the desire for and expression of affirmative Black identities in part stems from oppressive regimes that negatively stereotype and at times invisibilize Blackness. Instead, Black geographies provide an opportunity for a focus on affirmative

> Black identities and affirmative Black geographies that celebrate Black life even as Black communities resist a racist society. (p. 1004)

Impact of Racial Segregation on LAA Children

Limited understanding of the Black experience, the impressionable developmental stages of youth, the culture of White superiority through segregation, and the loss of Black identity as a result of integration, presents a unique opportunity to explore the influences of racialization and racialized trauma on LAA populations. Willink (2009) demonstrates how in the case of school segregation, separate but equal was a double standard to sustain White superiority that remains obscured by the community memory of Black Belt Whites. According to the interviewees, experiencing racialized violence was very difficult for LAA children and their testimony authenticates the denigrating positionality of LAA children in a racialized society (Ritterhouse, 2006). As the interviewees affirmed, segregated LAA schools were deliberately impacted by the White power structure to demonstrate the Black inferiority narrative. White school leadership, forced to integrate by the Federal government, systematically undermined LAA schools by discarding what Whites perceived to be an inferior "Black curriculum" (i.e., the Black experience) (Willink, 2009).

Efforts to disregard the Black experience in education circumscribed LAA students, teachers, administrators, parents and the community at large to assimilate to the White culture of education, thus fortifying White culture and institutional dominance in the education of LAA children (Lynn, 2006; Willink, 2009). Through their continued activism and demands for full citizenship, LAA in the Black Belt dismantled segregation, but at an unimaginable cost. The forced cultural assimilation to Whiteness in education

resulted in demonstrable adverse consequences for LAA students and their communities, namely achievement disparities, limited parental involvement, and loss of social identity (Willink, 2009).

The Influence of Religion and Spirituality

The interviewees demonstrated the importance of church in the LAA Black Belt as a non-negotiable transaction, as church served as a place of refuge and symbol of the spiritual connection of LAA to God (spirituality). Interviewees lamented that with the post-Jim Crow, integrated evolution of their communities, churches no longer serve the same purpose for younger generations. The purpose of the church has been compromised and the history obscured since the end of legal segregation.

The history of LAA churches in the Black Belt are a demonstration of resistance to racialization and oppression. Although heavily predicated on Eurocentrism and White racial framing (C. C. Jones, 1842; Mather, 1706), LAA infused religious choices with elements of their lived experiences, relating the experiences of racialized oppression to the lived stories of Jesus and the innovation of Gospel music (Abu-Jamal, 2003). As such, LAA churches and religious organizations became the hub of civil rights activities in the mid-20th century Black Belt. Indoctrinated in Christianity by Europeans as a condition of enslavement, Christianity served as a means to (1) use fear of harm, death, and eternal damnation to control behaviors of enslaved LAA, that reinforced submission to their enslavers and (2) spread Christianity, bringing salvation to the unsaved (Casares & Delaigue, 2013). According to Gamsakhurdia (2014), the experiences of “church” for the enslaved was strictly regulated, if allowed by White enslavers. For enslaved LAA, church ranged from the enslaver gathering the enslaved to offer a prayer and scripture, to

attending the enslaver's church with White preachers conveying messages that reinforce the traffickers' and enslavers' role in relation to the oppression and subordination of the enslaved, while rarely discussing Jesus (National Humanities Center Resource Toolbox, 2007). Attending church with their enslavers, the enslaved would be seated either in the balcony, on the floor in the back of the church, or outside of the church (National Humanities Center Resource Toolbox, 2007). Some enslaved LAA were prohibited from religious observances altogether because of enslaver fear that the enslaved becoming a Christian would entitle them to freedom (National Humanities Center Resource Toolbox, 2007).

Narratives of enslaved African Americans in the southern US also highlight the laws (i.e., slave codes) that arose in response to slave rebellions that prohibited LAA from congregating in groups (National Humanities Center Resource Toolbox, 2007). As an act of silent rebellion, enslaved LAA, who expressed a "knowing" of a Higher Power, would gather in secret in the "brush/hush arbor" to observe religious and spiritual rituals (Chandler, 2017). Following emancipation, LAA moved out of the brush arbors and established churches of various Christian denominations. Modeling the religious traditions of their enslavers, LAA infused their indigenous spiritual beliefs with their observance of Christian traditions to reimagine a Christian religion, in the context of LAA historical memory, to create a theology steeped in Black liberation (Cannon, 2008). Therefore, church became an essential institution in the LAA Black Belt as both a place of worship, resistance, and refuge.

However, as the interviewees explained, LAA churches have evolved since integration and aligned more closely with White evangelical traditions, philosophies, and

language that alienate these institutions from their origins. During legal segregation and in addition to acts of resistance, LAA churches in the Black Belt centered around family, purpose, and the farming traditions of LAA rural communities. RAP members recalled that church services were held monthly and Fall harvest was a time of celebration and homecoming for LAA migrants who left the Black Belt for better opportunities in the North. From my experiences as a Black Belt LAA, homecoming marked the beginning of revival season, with neighboring LAA churches alternating their events on specified weeks between August and October, a tradition that continues today. Although families "belong" or are members of one church, it is common for them to "fellowship" and support other community churches during revival season and throughout the year. These traditions in LAA Black Belt churches have waned in the decades since integration, as the message and philosophies have aligned more with traditions outside of the community.

The fusion of Christianity and African spirituality is complicated by the invasion of Whiteness and therefore, not readily accepted by many staunch LAA Christian believers today. Spirituality blends in the LAA church, modeling African spiritual ways such as "catching the Holy Spirit", dancing, chanting, shouting, and Gospel music (National Humanities Center Resource Toolbox, 2007; Opokuwaa, 2005). LAA oral traditions in the Black Belt recall that enslavers, fearful of African spirituality and ways of knowing, forced many enslaved LAA to mask their indigenous spiritual traditions and adapt similar perceptions of their enslavers (National Humanities Center Resource Toolbox, 2007). Oral traditions of RAP members recall the spiritual role of healers and readers in LAA communities, who acknowledge the forces of the universe (e.g., phases

of the moon) that informed farming techniques and other ways of knowing (Rucker, 2001). The systematic loss of African traditions over generations has made recognizing indigenous ways of knowing difficult for LAA in the Black Belt. Interviewee experiences with “folk medicine” are credited to Native American traditions, with no consideration for the influence of indigenous African ways that survived the centuries of enslavement.

The evolution of LAA Black Belt churches’ philosophy, traditions, and language have had contemporary implications for the longevity of the church today. The interviewees expressed their concerns for the loss of members for various reasons including work obligations that compete with church attendance and participation or church members electing to “move their membership” to larger, progressive churches or members engaging in irreconcilable conflicts with other church members that cause them to leave the church. Further, as the church has aligned more closely with White evangelical language, traditions, and philosophies, the purpose of the church has evolved as a place of resistance and respite from racialization, advocacy for the well-being of LAA people, community centered, and revolutionary spiritual action to a place that is centered outside the needs of the LAA community and positions the institution and business of the church as primary to the original purpose. As the interviewees and the RAP affirm, the regression of the LAA church in the Black Belt is contributing to its demise and inability to attract and retain young people, further distancing LAA in the Black Belt from opportunities to connect with their indigenous spiritual ways of knowing and heal from the trauma of their racialization.

Failed Promises of Integration

In retrospect, the interviewees’ perspectives on integration were mixed. Some

interviewees contended that integration opened doors of progress that were once inaccessible, allowing LAA more opportunities for education, employment, home ownership, and political power. However, other interviewees noted that integration did not come without a cost. Findings from the oral history interviews and RAP members revealed that integrated education upset the dynamics of the teacher-student relationship and community-school-parent relationship. While inciting White backlash, fear, and violent resistance, integration also ushered in the decline of LAA businesses, as a result of LAA expanded access to facilities (i.e., restaurants, hotels, retail stores), employment, higher education, and financial opportunities in White spaces (Brimmer, 1967). As LAA moved into the competitive job market with Whites, disparities in career and financial upward mobility emerged and deepened the wealth gap within the LAA community (Contractor & Overton, 2020). Furthermore, while employment opportunities for LAA improved, the historical wage disparities persisted in White spaces (i.e., race-based wage system), deepening the racial wealth gap (Darity & Mullen, 2020).

As the interviewees recalled, advancements in education and employment and inclusion into the benefits of military service, once denied to LAA, increased homeownership. Further, limitations in employment opportunities and career advancement in these rural southern NC communities led to, as one interviewer identified, the “brain drain”. This was a reference to how young LAA, afforded post-secondary educational opportunities, could not return to their communities of origin because of limited opportunities. This “brain drain” resulted in the loss of financial, political, and educational resources and caused deeper isolation, political disempowerment, and persistent land loss in LAA communities and their institutions

(Womack, 2007). Those left behind are less likely to have resources to leave the community, own land and homes, or engage in the political process to effect change (Allen-Smith et al., 2000).

According to the interviewees and perspectives from the literature, in many ways, racial integration was a failed attempt toward healing justice. Although intended to address the inequities of LAA citizenship, integration was a one-sided solution, imposed by White interests, that for LAA was a holistically destabilizing experience, with ramifications present today in the form of universal disparities. The Black middle class, consisting mostly of teachers, preachers, doctors, lawyers, and entrepreneurs, were critical service providers to the segregated Black community and also served as community leaders and role models. Brimmer (1967) notes the:

> paradoxical position of the Negro middle class: it was almost wholly the product of segregation. [as]… segregation in the society at large greatly restricted the access of the Negro to the market for many types of services (especially public accommodations and personal services). (p. 17)

This created "a protective tariff" that shielded the segregated Black market, allowing the Black middle class to prosper and grow (Brimmer, 1967). With the dismantling of Jim Crow segregation and strides toward racial integration, the protective tariff of segregation eroded and ushered in a different type of competition within the White sector that disadvantaged the Black community and Black community leadership by relegating the Black middle class into "a class of clerks and middle grade technicians" (Brimmer, 1967, p. 17). Interviewees and members of the RAP recalled thriving LAA business and professionals during segregation, that gradually dissolved following integration.

Deepening the controversial impact of racial integration on LAA in the Black Belt, as a result of increased labor competition in White spaces, wages remained disparate between LAA and White workers. Brimmer (1967) found that, although LAA and White professionals achieved the same levels of education, pay disparities in 1960 ranged at ratios between 68 and 104 percent. The practice of racial wage disparity appears to be a holdover from the tradition of racialized wages described by the RAP and interviewee testimonies.

The protection that segregation provided to the LAA middle class and the LAA community as a whole was a painful loss, as LAA professionals competed in White markets that were inherently biased and racially discriminatory, despite policy efforts and narratives to the contrary. Brimmer (1967) further illustrates the depth of those losses as a result of integration, noting the following examples (p. 22):

- *Desegregation of schools in the Black Belt meant the desegregation of students only.* As LAA students were integrated into White schools, pedagogy, and epistemology, LAA teachers were frequently left behind and administrators demoted to less influential positions (e.g., LAA principals becoming assistant principals in charge of transportation).
- *Desegregation dismantled LAA business and economic stability.*
    - *Hotels.* As previously segregated lodging accommodations became open to LAA, annual conferences and professional meetings moved from the segregated hotels in predominantly LAA communities to more convenient locations in predominantly White, downtown areas.
    - *Restaurants.* As once segregated White restaurants became open to LAA

patrons, LAA restaurants, cafes, and banquet halls, unable to compete for both LAA and White dollars, were forced to close.

- *Insurance agencies.* Large nationwide life insurance companies became increasingly competitive in writing coverage for LAA families, resulting in less business for traditional LAA companies, mutual aid and local benevolent societies.

Further, the movement and dismantling of these LAA institutions outside of the protection of the segregated Black community left major voids in the availability of influential community leaders and advocates for subsequent generations. Black children no longer had direct access to Black professionals on a regular basis, to inform their identities, dreams, goals, and aspirations.

The Unimaginable Cost of LAA Land Loss

As the interviewees affirm, LAA in the Black Belt have a unique attachment to the land. Displaced from their homeland, culture, and direct ancestry in West Africa, the land of their known foremothers and forefathers in the Black Belt is the only connection many have to their identity. Interviewees acknowledged that this legacy has remained across generations, a sentimental source of pride and purpose. Therefore, LAA land loss is a sensitive and critical sociopolitical issue in the Black Belt and closely tied to the history of racialization and compromises the integrity, political power, and stability of LAA communities in the Black Belt.

To date, millions of acres of LAA land has transferred from Black communities to White communities (Christian et al., 2013). According to Zabawa (1995), LAA farm ownership nationally reached a peak of 925,708 farms (16 million acres) in 1920 with the

majority operating in the Black Belt. By 1992, the number of operating LAA farms had declined by 98 percent to 18,816 farms (one million acres), while White landownership and farm operations increased. Racialized discrimination, repression, and oppression are the underlying causes, as Christian and colleagues (2013) explained that the decline in LAA landownership is not just the result of selling or relocation:

> but also because many were driven from it by violence and through legal subterfuge… tax sales, partition sales, mortgage foreclosures, failure to write wills, landownership limitations on welfare recipients, eminent domain, and voluntary sales …cheated out of, or driven off their land through intimidation, discrimination, violence, and even murder. (p. 3-4)

The evolutionary upending of LAA Black Belt communities through land loss has intensified environmental assaults that serve White interests and compromise the environmental safety of LAA places. As interviewees acknowledged in their descriptions of dead-end streets in their communities or landfills in their backyards, creative extraction describes the "racially predatory governance and resource extraction, often by nearby White places, under the guise of following mundane rules of legal jurisdiction, standard economic planning, and development" that devalues LAA places (Purifoy & Seamster, 2021, p. 47). The devaluation of LAA property for the benefit of White places is not new and is steeped in racism and racial discrimination. Other factors contributing to LAA farm and land loss include "forced sales due to 'heir property', lack of access to government programs, and continuing racial discrimination by lenders and government agencies." (J. Gilbert et al., 2002, p.1).

As interviewees describes, LAA land loss in the Black Belt goads a sense of

hopelessness, increases the likelihood of intergenerational poverty, reduces political engagement and active citizenship, diminishes higher education attainment, lessens social independence, and compromises overall safety and well-being for LAA. Oral traditions from members of the RAP acknowledged the visceral, enduring pain LAA suffer following the loss of their familial land. This loss is detrimental to LAA in the Black Belt where land, critical to place-making and meaning, has served as a source of pride, wealth, and sustenance as well as a spiritual connection to ancestry and the history of survival in extreme adversity.

Racialization as Trauma in the Black Belt

How Gendered Racialized Trauma Shows Up in Black Belt LAA Women

Interviewees affirmed that historically, LAA women have worked outside of their own homes, both as a result of enslavement and later, out of necessity to sustain family survival (Sanchez-Hucles, 1997). LAA women have traditionally shared the provider responsibility with both White and LAA men, throughout their lifetime, until death (Jimenez, 2002). Sojourner Truth, a formerly enslaved LAA woman, famously explained her lived experiences of invisibility, work, loss, and grief, when asked to speak on behalf of women's suffrage in 1851:

> That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place. And ain't I a woman? Look at me. Look at my arm. I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me. And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man – when I could get it – and bear the lash as well. And

> ain’t I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard me. And ain’t I a woman? –Sojourner Truth (1797–1883): Ain’t I A Woman? Delivered 1851. Women’s Rights Convention, Akron, Ohio. (Vakalahi et al., 2014)

This sentiment has not been lost on LAA women in the Black Belt and marks the genesis of the dissociative strength attribute applied to LAA women. Evolved out of necessity, this strength attribute enabled LAA women to endure the racialized marginalization, exploitation and vulnerability associated in their work spaces. The Superwoman Schema and Strong Black Woman Script have been described in the literature as phenomena that demonstrate the incongruence with strength and associated behaviors (e.g., extraordinary caregiving, self-care neglect/postponement and suppressed emotions) as a positive attribute and the reality of LAA women’s historically racialized and gendered dehumanization in work spaces (Woods-Giscombé & Black, 2010). Using strength as a dissociative attribute, LAA women in the Black Belt have been enabled to divide their attentions between family and survival, compartmentalize their racialized trauma exposures, and distance from self by developing alternative identities that highlight confidence and mastery of their respective occupations and home life. LAA women have developed identity-shifting strategies (e.g., code-switching, colorism) as adaptations to the trauma of their gendered racialization and invisibility (M. S. Jones et al., 2021).

Awareness of Racialization as Trauma

A major barrier to addressing trauma regardless of the intervention is an awareness and acknowledgement of the trauma (R. G. Davis et al., 2008). Awareness of

trauma is the first step to developing trauma treatment interventions and encourage help-seeking behaviors of trauma survivors. Possessing an awareness of trauma is complex as trauma is witnessed from a paradigm of awareness and empowerment (Goldsmith et al., 2004). In this paradigm, "unawareness can assuage feelings of helplessness but that becoming aware of trauma can facilitate empowerment" (Goldsmith et al., 2004, p. 451). However, among the Black Belt LAA women interviewees with the pervasive and persistent experiences of racialized trauma, an unawareness or lack of acknowledgement of trauma may be a necessity to their survival and the survival of subsequent generations. Degruy (2017) explained in an analysis of LAA parenting behaviors that parents encouraged children to deny their feelings and emotions for their protection in a racially hostile environment. In the interviewees' reflections, feelings of helplessness emerged in relation to their racialization, as did emotional and cognitive dissonance that forced the interviewees to reconcile their racialization in context to their emergent needs. However, interviewees were unaware of the relation of these feelings to a trauma response. For example, when describing the inequities of segregated schools, interviewees explained that their communities taught them not to be angry because there was little to no hope of improvement in the racialized, White dominated, power structure that allocated school resources. The trauma of racial injustice was therefore denied and suppressed to survive.

In environments where racialized trauma is taboo, stigmatized, or ignored, awareness of trauma is more complicated (Goldsmith et al., 2004). As previously indicated, societal factors in the US south may promote posttraumatic unawareness. The US south is lauded for displays of southern hospitality and the external perception as a gentile, aristocratic society (Ritterhouse, 2006). In this environment, discussion of racial

tension and violence become stigmatizing, unfathomable, ephemeral events that are historic in nature and are of no contemporary consequence, regardless of racial identity. This societal stigma perpetuates unawareness among southern LAA and their White counterparts, generating adaptive beliefs and behaviors that help to sustain the beneficent image of the US south and reinforce racialized behaviors (Goldsmith et al., 2004). As interviewees described how they were not treated as human, the White perpetrators of their dehumanization were unaware of the impact of their racialized behaviors on their LAA neighbors, as they all live in the context of the racial status quo.

Consequently, the long-term accommodations and adaptations to racialized traumatic stress among southern LAA are challenging to reverse (Goldsmith et al., 2004). As LAA develop adaptive strategies, such as community engagement, spiritual enlightenment, and quiet acts of resistance, to manage the traumatic stress of racialized trauma, these coping skills served as instruments of both comfort and survival to mitigate risk and avoid re-traumatization. These coping strategies also contribute to the observed disparities noted in the literature. However, individual and societal unawareness of racialized trauma, traumatic stress and the resulting adaptive strategies enable pathological beliefs that redefine typical, trauma-influenced responses as atypical, pathological overreactions.

Consequently, characteristic traumatic stress responses such as hyperarousal and hypervigilance may result in misrepresentations of LAA behaviors that generate and perpetuate negative social narratives and stereotypes (e.g., the angry Black woman). For LAA that have experienced compounded, racialized, intergenerational, historical and cultural traumas, cognition may be disrupted when faced with threats. Unaware of

racialized trauma exposure and the symptoms of racialized traumatic stress, individual, societal, and clinical characterizations of LAA instinctual responses to racialized threats as impulsive or irrational (e.g., Baltimore uprising in response to police violence), may be perceived by LAA as another form of racism (Freedman, 2006; Goldsmith et al., 2004). As the interviewees affirmed, they were taught not to publicly demonstrate their anger despite the egregious nature of their racialization, aligning with the gentility of Southern culture, the helplessness of their racialized circumstances, and the life-threatening White reactions they may encounter. However, their anger and disappointment remained. Therefore, for Black Belt LAA, it is important to center themes of trust and safety from racialization in trauma interventions that also facilitate community connection, racial socialization, and collectivism.

Racialization as Trauma and Healing Justice in the Discourse

The language of trauma and relationship with mental health outcomes were elucidated from the data guided by the overarching constructs of the BLMHJ framework along with sensitizing codes related to the Eight Dimensions of Wellness and aspects of racialized trauma from the literature (Table 2). Resembling a typical trauma response, where trust has been eroded and unestablished, dismantling segregation was entered with trepidation among LAA, especially in the Black Belt. Acts of resistance to racialized oppression were viewed by the White community as a threat that prompted White responses that were often inconsiderate of the needs and desires of the Black Community. The actualization of desegregation meant the integration of White spaces and places by LAA, but not the inverse. This lack of cooperation left an integrated Black community scrambling to restore identity, create opportunity, and prosperity for themselves and

subsequent generations within a racially hostile environment. As evidenced by the continued racial disparities, especially in the Black Belt, the cost-benefit of integration has yet to be realized for many LAA, deepening the impact of racialization and the trauma experience. The trauma experience produces loss and grief, extinguishes trust, and informs identity.

Historical Sources of Racialization that Inform LAA Trauma Language

As the end of the emotionally terrifying and psychologically destructive institution of legalized slavery did not signal the end of racism, neither did the end of legalized Jim Crow segregation. In a discussion of race relations in the US in the 1980s, Bowser (1985) contends "[r]acism has a more dynamic motivation that changes with time and challenge, and has at each new period taken on a new expression." (p. 308). For example, in the decades following Reconstruction, White policy interests regarding the education of LAA shifted to serve as a means by which to control how and what LAA children learned and to uphold White, American ideals, which systematically ignored racialized others including Indigenous peoples, while deliberately rewarding assimilation and acculturation to White interests. Lynn (2006) writes:

> this principle [LAA progress must serve White interests] could be used to examine the rhetoric regarding how and why public schools were instituted in this country in the first place. Jeffersonian [referring to Thomas Jefferson] arguments, for example, about the need for a unifying political belief system, or Horace Mann's passionate manifesto regarding the necessity for inculcating children with American culture and values, might be construed as a pre-postbellum response to the ensuing Negro problem. (p. 117)

Contemporary experiences of Jim Crow school segregation demonstrate the intergenerational, unrelenting history of racialization that informs trauma in LAA discourse. The interviewees affirmed that although schools were racially segregated, with Black and White children attending separate schools, administration, funding, and curricula were distributed and managed by Whites and their interests at all levels of government (federal, state, and local). Consequently, LAA children in the Black Belt were not spared from the damage of racialization and subsequent trauma. As the interviewees explained, with the enforcement of school integration, White resistance took many forms. White flight began to occur within the public schools, as White parents with economic means opened private schools as an option for White families to avoid sending their children to school with their Black peers. Willink (2009) describes how Black parent participation in the PTA was undermined by White parents, who held White only PTA meetings hours before the official meeting, making all of the decisions and essentially excluding Black parent participation. Centering Blackness within segregated schools was now replaced with White Eurocentric foci in integrated schools, where mostly White teachers and administrators were retained, replacing former Black educators who were terminated. Horsford (2019) explains:

> Having the right to attend schools that lacked access to caring and demanding teachers, institutional and interpersonal caring, and the communal bonds that existed in exclusively Black schools under segregation illustrated the false choice made available to Black students and families… they acknowledged a distinct "Black culture" and "Black experience" in America and the fact that "Black educators should ensure that efforts to reclaim, restore, and recognize Black

history are respected as priorities that are equal in importance to all other educational priorities" "integration is not only racial but cultural" and that "pluralism based on respect for differences is preferable to assimilation and amalgamation. (p. 264-265)

Conventional wisdom holds that the challenge to the old order was due to the civil rights movement, the 1954 Supreme Court decision outlawing segregated schools, and the 1964 Civil Rights Act forbidding discrimination and segregation based on race. However, the reality was much different, as those acts brought about legal and social inclusion, but still the fullness of citizenship had yet to be realized. As Black children occupy the public spaces in education, White interests have evolved to find ways that their presence in these public spaces serve those White interests. Noting racial achievement disparities in education, school choice has been promoted as a means by which to close the racial gap (Ayscue et al., 2014).

Today, White policy interests continue to serve the purpose of monetizing and privatizing education through charter schools and over regulating, through harsh punishments and suspensions, Black education and behaviors around education. Narratives persist that blame LAA for the disparities in education, suggesting that Black children are years behind their White counterparts because parents are disinterested or that children perceive excellence in education as "acting White" (Bartz & Kritsonis, 2019a). So pervasive the message that Black educational leadership repeats the narratives and underrepresents racialization as a relevant concern (Bartz & Kritsonis, 2019a). Colorblind narratives, where urban or rural poor is a proxy for Black, has served to Whitewash the actual impact of racialization. Schools are increasingly reverting to

segregation once again, especially in the increasingly diverse state of North Carolina (Ayscue et al., 2014). The evolution of racialization of LAA children and communities in schools demonstrates how LAA in the Black Belt have not experienced a period of trauma recovery from racialization since the institution and dissolution of LAA chattel slavery. Consequently, respite from the trauma of racialization continues to evade LAA in the Black Belt.

Racialized Trauma in LAA Discourse from a LAA Women's Perspective

The interviewees offered their perspectives on racialization from the worldview of LAA rural Black Belt women. From this perspective, acknowledging the discomfort and emotional pain of racialization is complicated and often reflected in what is not said as much as in their spoken words. Interviewees only expressed their feelings about their racialization when asked directly. Across the interviewees' discourse, they expressed emotion through long pauses, short phrases full of meaning, and inaudible expressions that suggested emotion without words. Attempting to exact calculated responses to their racialization, these verbalizations and expressions suggest that interviewees were searching for the "right" words to state. Interviewees also redirected uncomfortable conversations in an attempt to "soften" their responses regarding their racialization. Interviewees provided direct and intentional statements regarding their racialization as a demonstration of their confidence in the fidelity of their experience, which could not be disputed.

The unspoken words in the discourse are indicative of the trauma factors in the experiences of racialized populations that are unsayable or where there is no existing language to describe the trauma. In the analysis, I noticed a pattern in the discourse where

interviewees avoided using the term “White” when referencing their racialized experiences, related to their White employers, neighbors, or peers. This behavior is observed throughout the Black Belt, as affirmed by my own experience and the RAP, and aligns with the trauma response. George (2016) explains that freedom from racialization offers a respite to the racialized that allows for the development of language to express trauma and the humanity of the oppressed. However, LAA in the Black Belt have never experienced respite from racialization and therefore, the language of trauma is complex, requiring those with “an understanding of that suffering” to “fill the gaps” or “holes” in the narrative of racialized LAA in the Black Belt (George, 2016, p. 85).

Using coded language by avoiding the term “White” is directly related to trauma responses that is not indicative of fear, but rather, avoidance of confrontation that leads to no resolution and interference by Whites. The “unsayable”, as Rogers (2006) describes, are those traumas that are embedded in the identity and are disconnected from feeling in order for the traumatized to survive. Therefore, traumatized individuals and communities operate in the present, with varying degrees of positive regard for the future, and an active forgetting of the past. For LAA in the Black Belt, naming the source of their racialization is futile and wrought with consequences. Using the term “White”, referring to their tormenter, opens LAA in the Black Belt up to “gaslighting”, ridicule, isolation, and silencing. Historically, using the word “White” in protest and resistance to their racialization or speaking out against racial injustice posed a life and death situation for Black Belt LAA. Therefore, racialization as terror “marks the body and then becomes invisible and inarticulate”, allowing LAA in the Black Belt to “tell a story or reconstruct a memory” yet “there was always something unsayable, too.” (Rogers, 2006, p. 44). For

LAA in the Black Belt, dissociating from the trauma is learned and aided by a lack of acknowledgement or awareness of the depth of their racialized traumatization that only emerges when allowed respite from the terror.

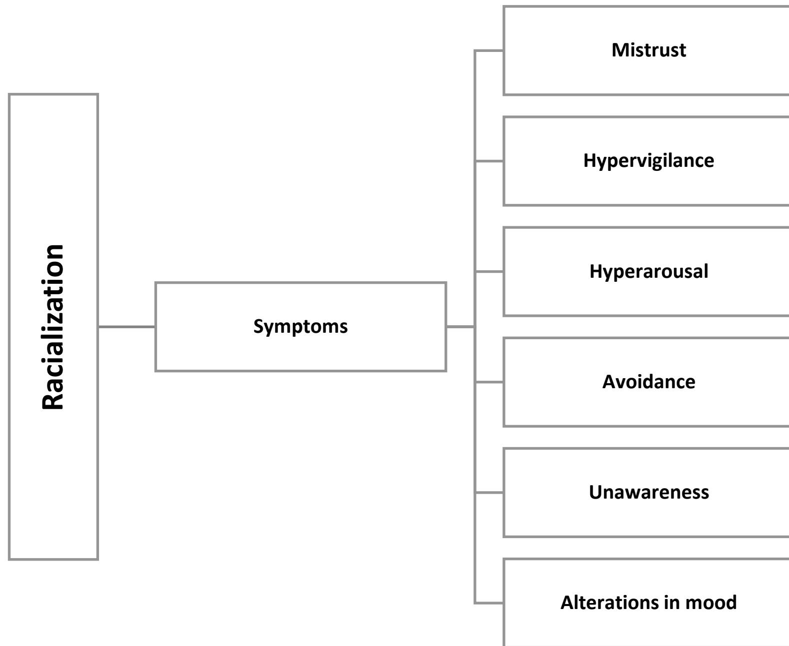
Trauma was revealed in the discourse as a symptom of racialization. The findings in this current study suggest that experiences of racialization model trauma symptoms including (Figure 10):

- *Mistrust* presented in the discourse when interviewees chose not to engage with White people unless absolutely necessary.
- *Hypervigilance* presented in the discourse when interviewees described attempts to protect community children from the harms of racialization.
- *Hyperarousal* presented in the discourse when interviewees acknowledged anger following experiences of racialization.
- *Avoidance* presented in the discourse as interviewees elected to avoid using the word "White" when describing the racialized actions of White people toward them and their communities.
- *Unawareness* presented in the discourse as cognitive dissonance between the interviewees racialized experience when encountering White people in the larger community and making attempts to explain the racialized actions away.
- *Alterations in mood* presented in the discourse as incongruence in situational mood in relation to their experiences of racialization, where their mood did not match the malevolence of a racialized encounter.

Figure 10

Figure 10 continued at the top of page 187.

Impact of Racialization on LAA Women in the Black Belt as Revealed in the Discourse



The interviewees and oral traditions affirmed many of these trauma symptoms. For example, Black Belt LAA women disclosed mistrust of established health resources, lack of access to clinicians and health insurance, and modest help-seeking behaviors (Murray, 1951; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001; Wooten et al., 2018). Mistrust is exacerbated in this community as a result of historic incidence of violence perpetrated by helping professionals, informed by White value systems that traditionally dehumanize LAA. Examples in history include, gynecological surgeries on enslaved women without anesthesia, development of mental illnesses, such as Drapetomania (applied to runaway slaves), and the forced sterilization among LAA women in the Black Belt (Suite et al., 2007). Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer, mentioned earlier as an activist and leader in the Black Belt, was sterilized without prior consent or post-operative knowledge, while undergoing surgery for a uterine tumor (Rosenthal & Lobel,

2011). Mrs. Hamer coined the euphemism "Mississippi appendectomy" to describe the routine, systematic, surreptitious medical violence against poor, LAA women in the Black Belt (Nelson, 2016; Suite et al., 2007). Incidents of involuntary sterilization of LAA women occurred in Eastern NC as recently as the 1970s, with rates of sterilization increasing exponentially following integration, when LAA women gained access to White medical facilities (Alonso, 2020; Stern, 2021).

The impact of racialization on Black Belt LAA women was especially detrimental as post-bellum emancipation brought minimal change to their lives (Ritterhouse, 2006). Black Belt LAA women continued to serve White families domestically at the expense of their own families while facing the continuing threat of sexual and physical abuse, racialized exploitation, and interpersonal violence in White homes (Lerner, 1992). Consequently, LAA children were inadvertently rendered physically, emotionally, and psychologically vulnerable and developed a racialized identity closely tied to the seeming neglect or abandonment by their mothers (Moody, 1968). Neglect and abandonment are the most common forms of child abuse and childhood trauma addressed by contemporary social work practitioners (Fairbank et al., 2007; Golden et al., 2003). For generations of LAA who endured what is considered child abuse today, both children and adults were acutely aware that these conditions were the direct result of the racialized customs of the society in which they exist. The conditions of racialization imposed on LAA women in the Black Belt, placed LAA children at greater risk of trauma exposure and adverse social factors, such as poverty. However, research suggests and the interviewees and oral traditions affirm, that strong social supports and community collectivism offer protective advantages to both Black Belt LAA women and their children (Vogt et al., 2007).

As is the case with repressed and oppressed people around the world, recordings of historical events are shaped from the understanding of the majority, which presents a stark contrast to those populating the spaces and places of the minority. This public understanding and appreciation for the history of the US often neglects the historical contributions of LAA (E. Lewis, 1995). LAA history, written primarily from a slavery perspective by White scholars, has traditionally reflected the inferiority premise of race and has failed to study their lived experiences (King, 1992). Therefore, LAA history is told and retold by those with the power to recollect the story from their perspectives, prejudiced by their understanding of the world around them. When considering the derogatory historical narratives, disparate statistics, and an uninformed majority consciousness, LAA are positioned to understand their truth as "knowing what you know", where knowing are the emotional beliefs "that are at the core of one's being and that precede or subvert education and other formal ways of knowing." (Butler, 1996, p. 143).

Healing Justice in LAA Discourse

Interviewees demonstrated aspects of healing justice through their perceptions and attitudes in response to adverse impositions of Whiteness. Active resistance toward environmental, academic, occupational, and property assaults were common among the interviewees, underscoring the willingness of Black Belt LAA communities to take the necessary actions to resist their racialization, restore their collective well-being and reclaim a future where their racialization no longer presents a barrier to their wellness. Ensuring a reclaimed future for the posterity of the LAA community emerged in conversations about educational opportunities, land preservation, home ownership and

community development to ensure that the youth had access to constructive, character-building activities.

Through the interviews, these elder LAA women expressed their desires for the advancement of the community while acknowledging that the struggle of racialization remains present. In their acknowledgements of racialization, they suggested that the community find commonality around preserving the youth to restore collective well-being for the whole. Across the interviews, interviewees demonstrated the utility of restoration through communal action, as their lives were the testament of the collective wellbeing. Narratives explaining the collectivist perspective of community (e.g., working on neighboring LAA farms to help with timely planting and harvesting, using resources to protect and provide for children in the community, creating advocacy organizations to address the environmental and subsequent health threats directed at LAA communities) were examples of past successes to alleviate the harms of racialization.

Although Black Belt LAA have the capacity to exemplify healing justice from a Black lived perspective, their beliefs and actions have not yet arrived at liberation. Historically, many Black theorists prescribe to liberatory philosophies of Garveyism, Pan-Africanism, Afrocentrism and Kawaida theories, grounded in African philosophies and Ways of Knowing. Central to these philosophies is a return to appreciating, understanding, relating, and embracing: (1) the authentic and unfiltered African history; (2) foundational African ways of communalism, spirituality, and purpose; and (3) elevating the holistic Ways of Knowing that undergird the universal Black experience (Bent-Goodley et al., 2017; J. H. Clarke, 1979, 1985; Kalonji, 2014; Karenga, 2017; C. A. Palmer, 2000). For LAA women in particular, foundational appreciations for African

centered thoughts elevate their humanity, divinity, dignity, and purpose beyond patriarchy, in fulfilling the purpose of all humans to bring good to the world for future generations (Karenga, 2012). While various paradigms of African centered philosophy have emerged and diverged, the prevailing themes have suggested that LAA collectivism around the idea of liberation requires concerted efforts, intentionality, and a centering of Blackness outside of the context of Whiteness. Liberation from racialization in the Black Belt must also appreciate the unique, embeddedness of Whiteness in both White and Black residents and consider the ramifications and symptomology of racialized trauma on LAA as a factor. As oral traditions explain, rural people in general and LAA in particular, struggle with issues of trust, regardless of race, from within and outside their communities, commonly believing that good intentions have hidden costs motivated by nefarious White interests.

Liberation theology nurtures liberatory actions (Bartholomew et al., 2018; Ginwright, 2015). Within the Black Belt, liberatory actions have sustained LAA communities in the face of dire circumstances, such as the sharing work, food, and other resources, as well as insulating children from racialization, to improve the lives of LAA community members. The following is a historical example that models the interviewees' testimonies. As White interests and attempts to control LAA Black Belt communities prevailed, Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer organized community feeding cooperatives in rural Mississippi (Green, 2014). These farm cooperatives provided a sustainable food source for LAA and protected thousands of children and adults from economic deprivation and subsequent starvation. This act of LAA collectivism in the 1960s was a response to the White power structure's retaliatory, terroristic, racialized control of capital in an attempt

to intimidate and disrupt advocacy around voting rights. This cooperative also countered discriminatory practices in agriculture funding and support by local, state, and national agencies, that were legally challenged in the late 1990s (J. Gilbert et al., 2002; Green, 2014). Extending her liberatory actions, Mrs. Hamer also entered the political arena with the creation of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) and challenged the sitting delegation of segregationist Democratic leadership from Mississippi during the 1964 National Democratic Convention (Dennis, 2013). As Mrs. Hamer's actions and the collectivism in the actions of the interviewees demonstrated, liberatory movements led from within Black Belt LAA communities are ideal. As members of their communities, Mrs. Hamer and the interviewees garnered the trust necessary from within to motivate their communities to collectively act in opposition to outside racialized terror.

Challenges to Achieving Healing Justice

As the interviewees demonstrated in their testimonies, collective well-being and purpose in Black Belt LAA communities persisted through community institutions such as churches, fraternal organizations, and family relationships. However, resistance and disruption of racialized justice continue to challenge these communities, as does reimagining a future without racialization. These characterizations of the theory of BLMHJ are realized through healing outside of racialized conditioning. Resistance in this sense is not to be confused with the ever-present resistance by LAA of the myth of Black inferiority in the context of Whiteness.

Historically, Black resistance to White supremacy has motivated the legal restrictions of LAA and the doubling down of inferiority narratives among White people in the Black Belt (Ritterhouse, 2006). Resistance of racialized justice implies that the

dominant narratives continue to prevail despite LAA efforts to disrupt these narratives and occurrences. The findings of this work assumed that westernized, White hegemony grips much of the real and imagined capacity of Black Belt LAA communities to initiate healing from racialization and the "…deeply entrenched issues of region, race relations, and historical interpretation." (Mpofu et al., 2011; Willink, 2009, p. 43). While this study sheds light on the nuances that characterize LAA Black Belt experiences, their historical and intergenerational racialization is an institution of their lived experience, constitutes their identities and traditions, and inextricably ties race to place and space. Therefore, dismantling race, place, and space is a monumental undertaking that will force Black Belt LAA to embrace discomfort and upset tradition on their path to healing justice from racialization.

In addition, the lived experiences of LAA in the Black Belt are unique and scholarship has failed to universally incorporate race as a social factor in disparate racial outcomes. Historically, people of African descent "have unique social experiences characterized by their disproportionate risk for social harassment and other experiences with racism" (Doyle et al., 2016, p. 310) and therefore are socialized in "response to the challenges associated with the sociohistorical landscape, the persistence of racism, and living in a racialized society that has historically not valued their existence." (A. G. James et al., 2018, p. 420). Positioned in the context of a White racial frame, the positive aspects of LAA life have been mistakenly portrayed as negative or "patterned as chaotic, and the normative as deviant", while extolling sentiments of pathology in LAA social, political, economic, educational, communal and familial exchanges and behaviors (W. R. Allen, 1995, p. 579; Johnson & Young, 2016). The racialized lived experiences of LAA,

against the backdrop of western ideals of Eurocentric, White, middle-class norms, has contributed to common misconceptions and misrepresentations of LAA rural life, detracting from the liberatory efforts of the people living in these communities (L. M. Burton et al., 2010; Hunter, 2017). The findings of this study demonstrate that centering the Black rural experience to understand racialization as trauma and connecting the behaviors and unsayable in the discourse to established trauma paradigms upsets these norms, misconceptions, and misrepresentations of LAA people and rural life.

However, the interviewees noted how land loss, waning religious interest, and the struggle of Black institutions of higher learning were all reflective of the halted growth in the Black Belt. Fueled by generations of racialized discrimination and repression, this shift signals a decline rather than progress. Although political and economic advocacy persist around these very issues, the intrinsic, systemic nature of racialization of LAA in the Black Belt constrains progress and instigates contention, deepening the impact of racialized trauma. Institutional racialization undergirds US cultural norms and the Black Belt, in particular, has maintained the overt, violent, legal institution of racialized spaces and places for decades after the constitutional end of slavery and Jim Crow apartheid.

Contributions to Social Work

Social work education, practice, and research has failed to meet the challenge to eliminate racial disparities and inequity, especially in the Black Belt. This is in part due to the White Racial Framing of the profession, focus on urbanity, and a narrow perspective of LAA communities. This current work contributes to the social work and trauma literature in addressing the social work values of justice, competence, and honoring the dignity and worth of marginalized, racialized, and vulnerable people and

dismantling the roots of oppression and anti-Black racism. This work also challenges traditional paradigms of trauma language, diagnosis, and intervention, acknowledging the inadequacies of this paradigm in addressing trauma from a critical perspective, as experienced by LAA in the Black Belt. It encourages the disruption of social work hegemony and introduces new foundational perspectives in understanding the complexities of social work in upsetting the racialized experiences of LAA in the Black Belt. Further, it empowers the racialized lived experiences of this population, to own their voices, challenge contemporary knowledge, anti-racism, anti-oppressive, and trauma pedagogies.

Community building and sustainability, self-sufficiency, education, and intergenerational collaboration and support are core values of Black Belt LAA, borne out of necessity, as a result of their racialization. Each of these values are in direct response and in direct conflict with White power interests and the inhumane racialization of LAA (Grim, 1998; C. B. Lewis, 1984; Marable, 1979; Quisumbing King et al., 2018). Models of success within these racially hostile spaces and places have been demonstrated in the literature and provide a precedent for social work practice in these communities, respecting the autonomy and dignity of the people (Grim & Effland, 1997). The Strong African American Families Program (SAAF) is an example of an effective preventative intervention that is based on the experiences and protective factors unique to LAA Black Belt families (Brody et al., 2004). The SAAF intervention is designed to prevent youth and adolescents (age 10-14) from engaging in risky behaviors such as alcohol use or sexual activities (Brody et al., 1997, 2008, 2010). The SAAF is the first preventative, adolescent intervention that is specifically designed for the unique experiences of rural

African American families (Brody et al., 2004). Theoretically grounded in intergenerational communication (i.e., Regulated, Communicative Parenting) that informs youth protective factors, the SAAF is culturally relevant and empirically effective (Brody et al., 2004). By encouraging parents to engage in courageous conversations with their children that set expectations about sexual behaviors and substance use, the SAAF demonstrates that Black Belt LAA are inclined to confront discomfort to reclaim a viable future. These conversations also include elements of racial socialization, as racism has been shown to influence substance use and psychological distress (Murry et al., 2014). Racial socialization or helping children to cope with experiences of racialization, disables feelings of helplessness and enable adolescents to be goal and future oriented (Berkel et al., 2009; Brody et al., 2004; Murry et al., 2016).

While the SAAF is an evidence-based, intergenerational, Black-centered prevention intervention for rural youth and families, this intervention does not critically address the trauma of racialization revealed in my findings. There are other notable race-based trauma interventions in the literature that are specific to PTSD including the Strong Black Woman phenomenon and binge eating (Harrington et al., 2010); positive youth development (Ortega-Williams & Harden, 2021); cognitive processing therapy (CPT), prolonged exposure (PE), and trauma-focused cognitive-behavioral therapy (TF-CBT) (with cultural adaptations) (Dixon et al., 2016); racial socialization integrated into TF-CBT (Metzger et al., 2021); mindfulness practices (Waldron & Burnett-Zeigler, 2022); holistic coping with racialization as trauma (Ogorchukwu, 2020); anti-Black critical consciousness to prevent and resist racial trauma (Mosley et al., 2021); and conceptual models to operationalize the ways Whiteness contributes to race-based traumatic stress

(Tyler et al., 2022). These interventions are important as they may be part of a larger understanding regarding the critical need to center Blackness (Hargons et al., 2017; M. F. Watson et al., 2020); however, they lack empirical efficacy with rural LAA communities. Further, a vast majority of these interventions approach trauma treatment post-exposure instead of applying a critical trauma perspective, and are limited in their integration and application of history and community, which are shown in my current dissertation work, to be important factors in shaping LAA trauma experiences.

Addressing trauma in Black communities is complex. The findings of my project suggest that the challenges of rurality (i.e., limited resource availability and accessibility, transportation limitations) and the particular experiences of LAA women, may benefit from trauma interventions that are implemented within the community by community members or through partnerships with HBCUs, often located in close proximity to rural Black Belt communities (Mance et al., 2020). The findings of my work also suggest that trauma interventions in this population should hold space for history and community to allow Black Belt LAA women to unveil their language of trauma, hear the unsayable, and define healing for themselves and their communities. This work also implies that trauma interventions for Black Belt LAA uphold ancestral legacies, honor purpose of traditions, rituals, and intergenerational relationships, while also acknowledging both spirituality and the evolution of the church, the ways in which racialization continues to manifest in school and work experiences, and the historical and present threat of land loss to reveal the obscured intrusion of Whiteness. Based on my findings, the goal of trauma interventions that address the racialization of Black Belt LAA should be based on empowering this community to embrace and define their liberation through healing that

starts within and moves out. The findings of this work expand on the currently available, evidence-based trauma interventions, and theoretical propositions and suggests a radical approach that combines the various elements of those interventions, such as mindfulness practices, intergenerational racial socialization, positive youth development, traditional trauma treatment modalities (e.g., TF-CBT), trauma and mental health education, collectivism, and historical appreciation, through a Black/African centered perspective (French et al., 2020).

While each community is unique, with its own strengths and challenges, justice oriented, competent, and ethical efforts on the part of social work practice and research to engage these communities, must abandon patriarchal approaches and empower these communities to self-determine in their path to healing justice (resistance, reclamation, restoration) from racialization. Interventions and research should embody the foundational truths of these racialized people and their communities, grounding approaches in the Black Belt LAA experience, community, and liberation from White-centered interests. The findings of this study align with empirical and theoretical trauma interventions in the literature (Berkel et al., 2009; Brody et al., 2004; Hargons et al., 2017; Metzger et al., 2021; Mosley et al., 2021; Tyler et al., 2022) and highlight the importance of centering history and the Black experience to restore community well-being and dismantle the emotional and psychological influence of racialization. Further, the findings in this project advance the social work literature by affirming the value of the rural Black experience and the historical implications of racialization on LAA Black Belt women, their families, and communities and how these experiences expand the definition, symptomology, and treatment paradigms of trauma.

Implications

The eight dimensions of wellness provide a holistic framework by which to understand the impact of racialization on LAA in the Black Belt and a means by which to approach healing interventions and advocacy. The findings in this study revealed particular dimensions of wellness that would benefit from this work, as areas for future inquiry.

Occupational and Financial Implications

The historical deprivation of wage earning for LAA has been well documented (Glenn, 1992; Huffman & Cohen, 2004; Perea, 2011). While perspectives on the "why" these depravities have existed vary (e.g., unskilled, discrimination, undeserving), the fact remains that the earning potential for LAA families continue to trail their contemporaries, regardless of education advancement (Dettling et al., 2017). While direct evidence of the historical origins of racialized wage differentials are elusive in the literature, the oral traditions in Black Belt and Black Rural South communities confirm the historical existence of a White man's wage (highest), Black man's wage, White women's wage and Black women's wage (lowest). The literature does support discrepancies in wage earning gaps, noting gradual improvements, but consistent gaps over time (Huffman, 2004). Attempts at organizing tobacco workers in Winston Salem, NC in the 1940's found that White women earned $0.57 per hour and LAA women earned $0.44 per hour, as well as racial discrimination that excluded LAA from hire for long-term, sustainable positions (Lerner, 1992). Over time, these conditions have served to widen the racial wage gap with impunity. While much of the literature frames wage disparities as a LAA problem and mostly ignores wage theft as a factor among Black women, the findings in this work

contribute a distinct perspective that validates the significance of the racialized history that consume rural south LAA women lived experiences (Green Coleman, 2016, 2018). This work informs current and future examinations in social work that seek to uncover causes and offer solutions to observed racial wealth and occupational disparities, especially related to Black Belt LAA women.

Impact of Racialization on Health

For many years, the elimination of racial health disparities has garnered much attention from in the social work literature and research, exposing the social determinants of health and informing the Social Work Grand Challenges (R. C. Palmer et al., 2019; Rine, 2016; Thornton et al., 2016). However, little progress has been made to explain and alleviate these disparities, especially for LAA in the Black Belt. The research has failed to address the issue of health disparities due to a lack of focus on the historical role of racialization as a traumatic experience that leads to poor health outcomes. The research is also positioned from a White racial frame, which tends to pathologize observations outside of the expected norms of Whiteness. Assuming this deficit perspective that ignores the inherent strengths of the community, the expended efforts and resources to better understand the social determinants of health continue to fall short of viable solutions. The findings of this research revealed that for LAA in the Black Belt, race is omnipresent and influential across social systems (Degruy, 2017). Blyden, (1908) suggests that LAA are “born tired”, a term he coined to describe the lived experience of centuries of physical, emotional, social, and spiritual abuse and exploitation. Similar to weathering (Geronimus et al., 2006), born tired suggests that LAA are vulnerable as a result of their racialized history, placing them at greater risk of neglect and adverse

outcomes as a result of racialization. Neglecting the historical impact of racialization on LAA in the Black Belt is disadvantageous to the community.

Social work practitioners, researchers, and educators understand well the significant impact of neglect and abandonment on children as they develop and into adulthood. Recent findings in the literature demonstrate the relationship between childhood trauma experiences and adverse health outcomes in adulthood (Fairbank et al., 2007). Researchers suggest that childhood trauma contributes significantly to increased mortality rates, adverse somatic symptoms and chronic health outcomes, such as autoimmune diseases (i.e., lupus, multiple sclerosis, diabetes, thyroid conditions), addictive behaviors (e.g. alcohol, illicit substances, sex), metabolic syndrome (i.e., high blood pressure, abnormal cholesterol, obesity/overweight), leading to heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, liver disease, kidney disease and cancers, as well as premarital pregnancies (Martz et al., 2019; Schnurr et al., 2014; K. Williams & Finch, 2019). Early motherhood for childhood trauma survivors is considered a direct response to trauma. R. Lynch and colleagues (2020) agree that young women who experience childhood traumas

> wait less time to reproduce, have shorter inter-birth intervals, and have more children than their non-serving peers or sisters. These results support the hypothesis that exposure to elevated mortality rates during development can result in accelerated reproductive schedules and adds to our understanding of how participation in warfare affects women. (Abstract, p. 1)

These factors in childhood contribute to the cycle of trauma that is exacerbated by racialization across generations of LAA and must be considered when examining and intervening with LAA in the Black Belt.

Implications for Shared Social Connection

The findings of this project revealed the inherent value of community in the process of healing for LAA in the Black Belt, community that centers the Black experiences and is motivated by purpose. The manner in which Blackness is centered in rural southern places operates contrary to traditional hegemonic White ideals of community building. Community in the LAA Black Belt is built around leveraging resources from the community to fill gaps and meet emergent needs, as traditional urban institutions such as community centers are inaccessible. Historically, in rural southern communities where community institutions and resources existed (i.e., community pools, libraries, centers), LAA were not allowed access to them due to legal segregation. In instances where these institutions remain, LAA remain hesitant to access these resources.

Therefore, the LAA Black Belt community's ability to establish community, with a purpose, that meets specific needs, is critically important. Based on the findings in this work, the model that appears to be most effective in LAA rural southern communities is one where the community relies on the resources from within the community. The establishment of HBCUs during segregation is a previously referenced example. Another historic example is the establishment of Book Mobiles in rural LAA communities by Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., a Black sorority, to provide LAA communities with books when they were denied access to public libraries (White & Glaudé, 2017). Mrs. Septima Clark, Black Belt LAA educator and activist, established the Citizenship School curriculum in the rural South to prepare adults for leadership through literacy (*Septima Clark*, 2022). Additionally, LAA churches served as meeting places and hubs of activity for both spiritual and political activism.

Integration ushered in a new era of "inclusion" that expanded access for Black Belt LAA and dismantled their traditional ways of communing and building community. Interviewees acknowledged the deterioration of community and the adverse impact on the community's children. These interviews reveal how LAA adaptation to White ways of understanding community after integration has undermined LAA institutions and community ways of uplifting despite racialization.

Resilience or Not?

My analysis revealed that racialization of Black Belt LAA impacts individuals in one of two ways: (1) racialization forces one to ignore, forget, or not acknowledge their racialization; and/or (2) racialization forces one to become hypersensitive to racialization, encouraging avoidance of situations that require engagement with White people. In the Black Belt, LAA humanity lies at the core of their racialization. While LAA struggle to maintain and establish their humanity, their White counterparts fail to acknowledge that fact. LAA humanity was never established in the consciousness of White Black Belt people, therefore empathy and compassion for the LAA racialization and its deleterious impact are not considerations.

However, resilience permeates the trauma literature and is steeped in ideas of American exceptionalism, White supremacy, and LAA overcoming their inhumanity. The idea of resilience implies some level of healing, coping, and thriving and is lauded as an achievement worthy of celebration. In my analysis, I intentionally avoid the implication of resilience in LAA Black Belt communities and contend that resilience has not yet earned a place in the rhetoric of racialized trauma, as there has yet to be an end to the exposure. Given the fact that traumatizing racialization has never ended for LAA in the

Black Belt, resilience is an inaccurate and misleading conclusion for the racialized trauma experiences in these communities, as trauma that endures does not allow space for healing and resilience. Resilience also implies that traumatized people and communities are thriving, flourishing, and growing after trauma. Given the evidence presented in this work, LAA communities continue to struggle with the ramifications of their racialization and are "living" by accepting their positionality, working cautiously and methodically, to create community change. The inadequacy of resilience as a construct in the racialized trauma experiences of Black Belt LAA presents an opportunity for future exploration to better understand and define the trauma healing course of this population (McCleary & Figley, 2017).

The Black Perspective

The findings in this project reflect the value of leading and centering a Black perspective when conducting research with LAA in the Black Belt. While the ancestral connections to familial African tribal affiliations have been lost for centuries, many traditions remain, although their origins are unrecognized. Consequently, there are African ways of knowing that are not reliant upon spoken reflections, but are understood nonetheless. African philosophies such as Ubuntu ("I am because we are") are observed in the ways community is established and maintained. The Nguzo Saba, based on the theory of Kawaida, reflects seven core principles of African ways of knowing that empower LAA identity and resistance to racialization.

The BLM lens allowed me to be critically conscious in the development of methods and interventions in my research of the racialized Black experiences in the Black Belt by centering "the healing of Black women…rooted within a multidimensional

ecological context while framing Black women as activists who work daily to resist racism, sexism, and other systems of oppression." (Bartholomew et al., 2018b, p. 86). The theoretical premise of BLM prioritizes the impact of interventions and methodologies for Black people while holding individuals and systems who provide those intervention accountable to how the social dynamics they reproduce affect "the mind, body, and spirit of Black women" (Bartholomew et al., 2018, p. 86). Grounded in spirituality and honoring the voices of LAA, BLM frames the unpacking of intergenerational traumas and offers a lens to assess the totality of the sociopolitical and racialized trauma experiences of Black people in the context of their community and history. In this work, centering Blackness in the context of the historical period of school desegregation marks a pivotal point in history that is not well appreciated from the LAA perspective.

As others have proposed and I have shown, the injuries to LAA well-being are persistent and pervasive, in both a historical and contemporary context (Degruy, 2017) and the BLM framework provides a unifying perspective to the Black community around healing (Bartholomew et al., 2018; Bent-Goodley et al., 2017; Ginwright, 2015). The intentionality built into the BLMHJ framework critically draws from past ancestral pain to bring about collective, holistic modern-day healing. By centering Blackness and internal, spiritual, soul-focused transformation, justice is realized through symptomology change and liberating political action, as community healing sustains individual healing. The ultimate goal of BLMHJ framework is to facilitate healing as political action and justice that disrupts racialized, traumatic structural systems (e.g., political, health, education).

Clinical Implications

As previously established, contemporary research fails to elucidate how place factors into disparity outcomes in the Black Belt, as more than 50% of the US population of LAA reside in the Black Belt communities (Womack, 2007). However, emerging disparities research is renewing a focus on the impact of health disparities in relation to geographic place, with an emphasis on tailoring programs that address the specific history and needs of rural Americans (Phillips & McLeroy, 2004). Tailoring an approach that centers liberation theology, racialization, and the "forgotten population" of LAA in the Black Belt is especially relevant to empower the communities to take direct action and address the enduring Black-White disparities in the Black Belt (Probst et al., 2004, Abstract, p. 1695).

The findings of this project affirm that acknowledgement of racialization as a trauma is a critical first step in the therapeutic relationship with LAA and interventions to treat racialization as a trauma should ensure safety and self-care, strategies to manage grief, shame, and anger, and reduce shame, self-blame or internalized racism, while also incorporating successful, day to day coping and resistance strategies that LAA employ (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2006). Building on these intervention themes and in alignment with other scholars and clinicians, the findings from this project supports the development, implementation, and evaluation of interventions grounded in Black liberation theology and engage Black centered, African inspired approaches to address LAA racialization as trauma (e.g., Ntu, Kawaida, *Nguzo Saba*) (Gregory & Harper, 2001; Kalonji, 2014; Karenga, 2012; Woods-Giscombé & Black, 2010).

The findings of this study also inform clinical practice that acknowledges the

mediating effects of racial socialization on racialization as a trauma in LAA communities (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019). These findings affirm my own clinical experience in developing and implemented an intergenerational community conversation, facilitated to build bridges of understanding between LAA youth and elders and strengthen community connections. These conversations centered the racialized experiences of all generations and created safe spaces for community members to discuss subjects that are normalized for the youth and taboo for the elders and vice versa. Through these courageous conversations, elders and youth found commonalities in their racialized experiences, that acknowledged the importance of racial socialization to healing and encouraged intergenerational community collaboration and support. The youth gained respect for the perspective of the elders and their racialization and the elders realized that their racialized struggles remained struggles for contemporary generations.

Policy Implications

Today, many of the places historically occupied by LAA out of necessity and not choice, are endangered and becoming extinct. These place and place-making losses threaten the visibility of Blackness and identity affirmation in an environment of persisting racialization. LAA land loss is an issue of urgent concern. As the interviewees revealed, the experiences of LAA land loss to Whites in the Black Belt produces profound stress, physical, emotional, and psychological pain, that is deeply tied to the racialized trauma experiences of their past. In addition, land loss has contributed considerably to intergenerational, institutional poverty observed in this region (Higgs, 1984; Margo, 1984). Scholars agree noting that “most of the land in the region is owned in large acreage by people or companies that reside outside of the counties. This

economic arrangement results in low property taxes for large land owners but underfunded public education and a lack of accumulation of wealth for LAA residents" (Womack, 2007, p. 42). Social, economic, and political progress is also hampered in the Black Belt by the "unique sociopolitical culture", historically characterized by racially motivated acts of suppression, repression, marginalization, and oppression, including (Womack, 2007, p. 42):

- the repression of LAA political participation until the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965;
- racially segregated, separate and unequal schools and neighborhoods;
- authoritarian racial and class power structure in local government;
- changes in government that weaken elected mayoral leadership and increasing dependence on non-elected, unrepresentative special district groups in local economic development.

Therefore, findings highlight the importance of policies that must include protections for voting rights and advocacy against voter suppression, equity in school resources and inclusion of LAA voices in curriculum development, economic development that upends racial inequities and LAA women wage disparities, and retains LAA talent in the Black Belt, as well as more robust mechanisms to assert human, social, and civil rights for LAA in the Black Belt.

The longevity of higher education opportunities, that center the Black perspective, must also be considered. HBCUs have been experiencing declining enrollment and many have closed since the 1980s due to lack of funding, which, unlike predominantly White institutions (PWI) that have large endowments to fund operations, is heavily reliant on

enrollment (W. R. Allen et al., 2007). Although riddled with funding limitations, negative mainstream media imaging, “a history of marginalization, fewer faculty members and inadequate facilities”, HBCUs are “incubators for young minority talent and often produce positive academic outcomes” (Campbell et al., 2020, p. 2). Although controversial among some LAA scholars of the time, HBCUs created rival programs during segregation in medicine, law, and doctoral studies, that ended with integration (Gershenhorn, 2005). An investigation of the impact of HBCU closures on professional development of LAA projected a 29 percent increase in the number of graduating physicians in 2019, if the thirteen Black Belt HBCU medical schools, closed in the early 1900s, were operating today (Campbell et al., 2020). Further, increasing federal and foundation research funding to HBCUs to address racialization as trauma in LAA communities should be a policy priority, as these institutions “can serve as a catalyst to engage members of marginalized communities in discussions about and/or action plans” to address trauma outcomes (Mance et al., 2020, p. 264). These findings suggest that HBCUs are indispensable assets that must be retained, providing contemporary investments aimed at diversifying the workforce, especially in health care and subsequently improving outcomes in LAA Black Belt communities.

Community Implications

Church attendance among Christians is in decline as well (Pew Research Center, 2019). As the interviewees affirmed, declining attendance in LAA churches particularly has been attributed to the shifting priorities of churches from havens of refuge from oppressive societies and symbolic sources of resistance to an alignment with White Christian church theology and ideology that abandons the originating foundation of the

Black Christian church (Jabir, 2017). The waning presence of the Black Church as a prevailing symbol of LAA resilience and resistance is the “canary in the mine” that suggests LAA communities in the Black Belt are in distress. Efforts to preserve the Black church in the Black Belt must be community-based, from the Black perspective, and purposeful, relying on the historical significance of the church for the well-being of LAA rural Southern people and the longevity of LAA Black Belt communities.

The interviewees affirmed that the uncanny perseverance of LAA belies the systemic, intergenerational injuries sustained from centuries of unrelenting, racialized terror (G. W. Williams, 1883). Although the perception of violence that accompanied legal racialization was difficult, the interviewees alluded that the emotional and psychological impact of racialization was equally disconcerting, posing a persistent threat to their safety and well-being. The legal sanctioning of race no longer prevails, however racialized sentiments, biases, and ignorance of the harm imposed by the racialized lived experiences of LAA persist in the Black Belt. Acknowledgement and awareness of racial traumatization remain a challenge for both LAA and their White counterparts in the Black Belt, posing an obscure hindrance to trauma intervention effectiveness in these communities.

Future Directions

This work demonstrates the necessity of culturally adept trauma interventions for LAA in the Black Belt, contributes to research examining racial health disparities and questions how we use resilience in trauma work, as resilience implies healing from past traumas, that for LAA in Black Belt, racialized trauma has never ended. As this work demonstrates, community self-sufficiency and intergenerational collaboration in LAA

Black Belt are critically important and policies that support the retention of LAA landownership in these communities are vital, as well as our understanding of the historical origins of wage inequity of LAA women in the Black Belt, to encourage policies that address occupational and wage disparities. This work also demonstrates how to use the Black perspective in research, to center Black experiences and decenter Whiteness and White interests that fall short of serving the interests' of LAA Black Belt people and exacerbate racial disparities.

Gendered Racism

While LAA women experience the double bind of their racialization and gender, this work considered the intersection of gender and race as ancillary to the experiences of racialization as an adverse life experience in the Black Belt (Gay & Tate, 1998). Researchers have explained the impact of internalizing gendered racialization on the political leanings, physical, and mental health of LAA women, however, future research should address the perspectives and lived experiences of LAA women in the Black Belt (Bond et al., 2021; Gay & Tate, 1998; Spates et al., 2020). This work lays a foundation for understanding how LAA women in the Black Belt express their racialization through a gendered lens in the context of historical and systemic racial segregation and isolation and the intersection of their experiences within their social environment.

Trauma Interventions

With respect to the complex history of racialized trauma of LAA, the complex nature of trauma and the limitations in effective, culturally relevant trauma interventions and clinicians, healing strategies remain inadequate and health disparities persist. This is especially relevant in Black Belt communities, where the impact of racialization is more

pronounced because of the inherent nature of social isolation in southern rural communities and the historically prolonged legalities of racialized segregation and oppression in these communities. Further, Bice-Wigington and Morgan (2018) explain that rural women serve as their own and their family's health care providers, gatekeepers of health care in their communities, and key influencers in understanding health care disparities in rural communities. LAA women in Black Belt communities define, validate, and transfer trauma-based survival strategies that attempt to keep subsequent generations safe from racialized adverse life events. As such, LAA women demonstrate trauma dissociation as a normalized response that has maintained individual and community stability over time. Regardless of this perceived strength of person and community, the resultant compounded unresolved traumatic stress response critically damages physical and mental health resulting in higher mortality and morbidity among LAA women. In addition to addressing disparate resources, facilitating an awareness and self-acknowledgement of the traumatizing experiences of racialization among Black Belt LAA is the key to developing and implementing impactful interventions that address the unique needs of this population.

The paucity of adequate trauma research, intervention, and measurements that specifically address the exceptional trauma experiences of LAA has been documented (Lester et al., 2010; Rodgers, 2006; Triffleman & Pole, 2010; M. T. Williams et al., 2018b). In concert with the global unawareness of the impact of racialization on traumas, the social, physical and psychological influences of trauma on adverse health outcomes and observed racial disparities in LAA, the need for specificity in understanding the in-group diversity of LAA trauma experiences is essential. Based on the evidence, rural

LAA living in the southern US are the least understood with respect to the impact of trauma and the influence of race. Garnering an appreciation for the racialized trauma proficiencies, symptoms, and unmet treatment needs of this segment of the LAA population lends great insights for the development of effective research methods, clinical interventions, and provincial measurements to close disparity gaps, center humanity, and honor the expertise of LAA in their history.

This work makes the case that we must continue to critically examine, evaluate, create, and revise trauma interventions that are culturally relevant and effective with LAA in the Black Belt. These interventions should attempt to hear the unsayable in their discourse, appreciate the history of their racialization beyond demographic categories, and value the nuances of rural places, as well as the cultural values of the LAA people there. Further trauma interventions for LAA women in the Black Belt should address the unique gendered spaces of LAA women and how they define their healing from trauma. This work and future research should expose disregarded aspects of racialization as trauma on Black Belt LAA experiences and outcomes that impede progress in the development of effective, culturally relevant and specific trauma interventions that facilitate healing.

Limitations

There are a few limitations to consider in this project. The use of archived oral history presented an important limitation. First, I had no access to the interview protocol, questionnaire, or capacity of the interviewee to conduct oral history interviews. However, it may be assumed that the oral history interviews selected for inclusion followed a distinct protocol and was implemented by oral historians familiar with conducting oral

history interviews. Second, I had no access to the interviewees to ask follow-up questions or conduct member checking. Consequently, I relied on LAA living in the Black Belt as a Research Advisory Panel (RAP) as a form of member checking. Third, I was limited in using archived oral histories which did not provide the depth of information that primary oral histories could have provided to delineate the unique racialized experiences of rural LAA women. Therefore, I was limited in my ability to make comparative analysis between the racialized lived experiences of rural Southern LAA women and the racialized lived experiences of LAA in other parts of the country (i.e., Northeast, Midwest) and different communities (i.e., urban, suburban). Finally, to alleviate potential biases in the analysis and interpretation of the data, I applied a critical constructivist perspective, using my personal experiences as a member of a LAA Black Belt community, to inform the analysis and interpretation.

Limitations were also evident in my analysis. While I attempted to mitigate bias in the analysis, and interpretation of the data by acknowledging my positionality, as well as seeking advice from community elders (RAP) and research experts, bias cannot be completely avoided. Ambiguities in the discourse may have been misinterpreted by my positionality as a post-Jim Crow LAA woman, without similar context as that of the interviewees in the study. Further, interpretations of the experience of racialization as a trauma are not generalizable to the population and lack an explicit branding of the experiences of racialization as trauma from the interviewees, as experts in their own experiences.

Limitations of Oral History

Oral histories within communities that have experienced collective trauma may be

challenging. Because conducting an oral history interview is a collaboration, the interviewer is as much a part of the experience as the interviewee and must not neglect their influence, known and unknown. People who have experienced collective traumas may not want to be seen as traumatized or have their trauma experience dictate the direction of the interview. Or the opposite may be true. If the interviewer is unaware of the ways in which they frame the interview and the interview questions, they may inadvertently influence the interviewee such that the history is more reflective of the interviewers desired outcomes. Interviewees may also have memories that appear to divert from the historical archives (e.g., newspapers, history books). This is attributable to the evolution of public history which is a reflection of selective voices that serve to complement political priorities and vested interests (Rowat, 1993), causing people to "cling to a wrong narrative suggests that what actually happened…was so absurd that it literally cannot be believed" (Portelli, 2018, p. 248).

Mistrust as a symptom of trauma may contribute to interviewee apprehension in sharing aspects of their racialization in oral history interviews. Sheftel (2018) reminds oral historians that "no matter how loose, how flexible, and how sensitive one's approach, an interview is a particular space that plays into certain social anxieties and puts values on people's experiences in subtle ways" (p. 291). Oral historians describe experiences with interviewees where the stutters or hesitations regarding certain topics are more revealing than the words they use to describe their experiences, especially among traumatized communities. Portelli (2018) offers an example in an interview with a LAA woman during an interview about her ancestry. Portelli (2018) found that asking such questions about her ancestors were important, but equally important and revealing

was “how does she speak about them, and how does she speak about them to me?” (p.248). All of these factors (i.e., competing agendas, social anxieties, racialization, relationship development, and commonalities within the interview relationship) are important considerations for oral historians in the development of questions, interpretation of results, and archival choices.

Response to Challenges

This project attempted to address the challenges and limitations using the suggestions from the literature. However, qualitative research is iterative and occur in context of human complexity in the natural environment. Thus, I anticipated the challenge of predicting and strictly following proposed research design. Consequently, utilization of a research log and reflective journal were essential tools to demonstrate transparency and attempts to remedy challenges and limitations in the implementation of this study as they emerged during research design implementation. In addition, using archived data posed a limitation in data analysis, as the intended purpose of the initial oral histories did not directly address or align with the issue or aims of this study. Further, using archived data challenged my ability to make causal inferences between the variables of interest and the data.

Conclusion

For LAA in the Black Belt, and LAA women in particular, race has determined the contemporaneous spaces and places they occupy. As previously demonstrated, LAA place in the Black Belt is related to the history of chattel slavery and subsequent impact on their lived experiences. The failure of Reconstruction and the implementation of racially motivated laws and policies such as the Black Codes and Jim Crow laws,

determined the living conditions of LAA in the South, where systemic and structural disparities persist (Coombs, 1972; Kobayashi, 2014). Subsequently, racialized spaces historically contributed to disadvantaged, substandard living conditions in the Black Belt, characterized by LAA life spans that average six years less than their White counterparts, and health disparities attributable to racial and environmental factors. Intersectionalities place LAA women at greater risk for poor health outcomes and chronic exposure to stress, and discrimination leads to the amplification of allostatic load, which if not abated, leads to disease (Bartholomew et al., 2018). Recent findings suggest quality of life improvements among LAA, however, LAA in the Black Belt continue to lag their urban contemporaries (Green, 2014). They continue to occupy spaces and places of poverty, poor health, and adverse life experiences or trauma accompanied by unresolved grief. Because I am a LAA woman from the Black Belt, with an ancestral legacy that extends from enslavement to land and farm ownership and loss, higher education attainment at an HBCU, and I bear witness to the declining conditions of LAA communities in the Black Belt and Black Rural South, I deeply understand, intimately appreciate, and enthusiastically laud the beauty and tragedy of racialization among this population.

The nuanced experiences of LAA are framed in the societal cost benefit of the racialization of Blackness. To improve efforts to eliminate health disparities, the social work profession must do a better job at appreciating the intrinsic role of racialization in the lived experiences of LAA across the lifespan and within varying regions of the country. For this work, I begin with LAA women in the Black Belt, for the reasons demonstrated previously. This work is an attempt to reveal the unspoken, self-defined truth, vibrancy, and perseverance of LAA and particularly, LAA women, in the Black

Belt, despite entrenched racialization and racialized trauma, to empower their understanding of self and inform their healing. Black Belt LAA Lives and Black Belt LAA Women's Lives Matter.

LAA women in the Black Belt are dynamic. Although these women represent different parts of the state of North Carolina, their racialized lived experiences have had profound influence on their perceptions, value systems, purpose, and spirituality. Oral traditions in Black Belt communities suggest that people within and outside of LAA communities are not interested in learning LAA history through their racialized lived experience or in appreciating the contributions of everyday LAA to the life and culture of the Black Belt. Yet, the legacy of LAA women's gendered racialization provides a window into the ways in which we understand, digest, internalize, ignore, and process race and racialization as a society and appreciate (or not) the enduring toll on LAA women's well-being, as a society.

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