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Religious Leadership: Agents of Social Change

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
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Policy Studies

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Abstract

Historically, churches in the United States acquired respect as institutions that cultivated spiritual maturity and advocated for social equality in Black communities. Religious leaders represent the voice of reason for communities facing complex social problems, then and today. How educational attainment influences religious leaders' social action strategies and decisions to engage or disengage in social activism is under explored. Additionally, it is unclear what strategies religious leaders use for social advocacy in their communities. Using andragogy and social cognitive theory as theoretical frameworks, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the educational experiences of religious leaders to understand their social advocacy strategies in Black communities and what meaning they make of their experiences. Specifically, religious leaders' social advocacy strategies within Black communities in Ferguson, MO, and surrounding communities were investigated. Using thematic data analysis, four themes were identified: Leadership Development, Community Engagement, Racial Experiences, and Progressing Forward. Attributes of informal and formal education structured their plans of action. The findings from this study revealed the religious leaders' development involved training, education, and external influences. Additionally, their social advocacy decisions included congregational support and community partnerships. These findings may influence individual and collective social advocacy locally, nationally, and globally. Furthermore, understanding religious leaders' strategies may facilitate future conversations concerning social advocacy in Black communities and position religious leaders as agents for social change in the twenty-first century and beyond.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to God, family, friends, and my past and future students.

It is God who causes us to triumph. God with us and God in us.

To God be all the glory, for the things God can and will do.

My God, I thank you for choosing me to do your will.

Acknowledgements

One of life's greatest gifts is the ability to choose. Choose to learn, choose to love, choose to laugh, choose to know ~ Vinice

Humbly, I acknowledge Dr. Paulette Isaac-Savage, Dr. Kathleen M. Haywood, and Dr. Luke B. Bobo for their expertise and commitment. Thank you to Vanessa Garry for her support after Dr. Patricia Boyer's untimely departure from the earth.

This research is a testament to my parents' legacy, Thelma Lee (Whitaker) and Henry Anderson Carter, Sr. It is because of their love and tenacity that I persevered and completed this unique accomplishment and many other pursuits. Their love, like the love of God, never failed me. To my brother, Henry A. Carter, Jr., thank you for your love, sacrifice, and support. As I stated before, "We are going all the way together." As the elder and our blessing, Willie David Lewis, my big brother, I believe the best is yet to come. To my niece, Jarnisha Carter, I pray this achievement reminds you to dream, hope, and believe that all things are possible according to the will of God.

To my relatives and friends who left the earth before we could celebrate this success, I will dance with joy forever, in memory of you. To my family and friends, "I look forward to every moment possible, that we can be together." Thank you for your love and encouragement. Your love energized me to "keep going," and now we can celebrate this victory and family legacy.

Many remarkable people walked this journey with me.
You know who you are, and which season your presence enriched my life.
I love you dearly.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“I could not bear to allow my righteous indignation to remain locked inside my heart and mind, and not give voice to it through tangible acts of resistance. So, I marched, prayed, organized, held vigils, lectured, protested, and passed out supplies—all in an attempt to bear witness to this tragedy and work toward social change. And I was not alone.”

Leah Gunning-Francis

Background of the Study

Historically, churches in the United States identify as revered institutions that foster spiritual maturity and address social issues within their communities (Baer & Singer, 1992; Billingsley, 1999; Franklin, 2007; Isaac & Rowland, 2013; Wilmore, 1998). Churches are a religious system with unique characteristics that define the culture of their communities (Baer & Singer 1992; Barnes, 2005). With a history spanning through the eras of slavery, wars, the Great Depression, and the Civil Rights period, the church remains the most respected institution in the Black community (Billingsley, 1999; Cnaan, Sinah, & McGrew, 2004; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1993, Rowland, 1999).

Some scholars proposed that churches' historical and resourceful vision in Black communities had weakened (Cone, 1969; Frazier, 1963; Mukenge, 1983; Nelsen, 1988). At times, an institution viewed as one with no power and other times criticized for promoting and discouraging social advocacy in Black communities (Cone, 1969; Billingsley, 1999). Strategic alliances between churches and organizations represent a unique support system to address the basic needs of Black communities. Others view diverse collaborative efforts in Black communities as a partnership rather than a loss of focus (Billingsley, 1999; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1993, Rowland & Chappel-Aiken, 2012). Social services and educational programs offered by Black churches and partnering organizations continue to provide social and spiritual support for Black communities

(Barnes, 2005; Chaves & Eagle, 2016; Dale, 2008; Putnam, 2000). Today's contemporary church continues its legacy as a pillar in Black communities, despite transitions and challenges (Cnaan et al., 2004; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1993; Rowland & Isaac-Savage, 2014). The role of religious leaders and their churches remains the fundamental core for solutions in Black communities (Barnes, 2005; Wilmore, 1998).

Black communities embrace their history, justice, and at times their liberation in churches (Baer & Singer, 1992). Churches within Black communities represent essential locations for adult education and social advocacy (Dale, 2008; Isaac, 2005; Wilmore, 1998). Communities tend to define themselves to match associations that mirror their experiences. In their roles as pastors, church leaders have direct and exclusive control over what is expressed and embraced in their churches and Black communities (Billingsley, 1999; Lewis & Trulear, 2008). As social challenges and concerns evolve, religious leaders are confronted with opportunities to choose and change associations that reflect their current, past, and future objectives (Franklin, 2007; Hodges, Rowland & Isaac-Savage, 2016; Smith & Harris, 2005; Wilmore, 1998).

In 2013, *The African American Lectionary Project* (n.d.) reported several complex problems within Black communities. The survey of several thousand religious leaders reported issues of unemployment, poverty, education, family, health, incarceration, economic, and violence as top concerns. Equally important, religious leaders in Black communities often identify as voices of wisdom, influence, and mobilization for social justice. In partnership with other community leaders and organizations, religious leaders represent essential conduits for educational opportunities and initiatives to advance social change in Black communities (Baer & Singer, 1992;

Lewis & Trulear, 2008). One town where this became apparent is Ferguson, Missouri.

Ferguson Unrest

In response to the mass protests and civilian concerns in the St. Louis Metropolitan area, the U. S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Civil Rights Division investigated the Ferguson Police Department and revealed economic exploitation (DOJ, 2015). The local law enforcement's standard efforts and practices, including revenue generating activities, prompted police and court reform based on the findings of the DOJ (2015) report. Similar findings in surrounding municipalities revealed their practices also focused on generating revenue and constitutional violations (DOJ, 2015). The events of Ferguson, MO spotlighted inequities, disparities, and poor race relations in the St. Louis region and Black communities across the country (Spruill, 2016). An increased consciousness of economic exploitation caused a surge of mobilization in the St. Louis region and many other urban communities (Stewart, 2015). The events mirrored the historical 1960s and monstrous civil rights era (Horsey, 2014; Lang, 2015).

Although the DOJ (2015) report did not recommend any federal civil rights charges in the high-profile fatal incident between 18-year-old Michael Brown and Officer Darren Wilson, Black communities across the country continued to experience a significant number of high-profile fatalities (Gunning-Francis, 2015; Spruill, 2016), thus initiating an increased concern for officer safety and solutions to the rising tensions between Black citizens and police (DOJ, 2015). This high-profile incident in the St. Louis suburb of Ferguson ignited frustrations within the community and increased awareness of the city's social and economic disparities. In addition to the U.S. Department of Justice reports, The Ferguson Commission, a task force of volunteers selected by former

Missouri Governor Jay Nixon, issued an executive order to study the policy and systems issues of Ferguson as a response to this community's complex challenges and responsibilities (Stewart, 2015).

In the aftermath of multiple occurrences of civil disorder in Ferguson, Baltimore, and other Black communities, stress management concerns for law enforcement emerged. The Pew Research Center (2017) revealed 86% of officers across the country admitted to feeling increased job performance pressure. In "Behind the Badge" (Pew Research Center, 2017) inquiry into the experiences of officers and high-profile fatalities of Black citizens, officers expressed concern for their safety and the intensified tensions between Black citizens and police officers.

Problem Statement

In the summer of 2014, riots and public rallies in Ferguson, MO (US), protesting the death of Michael Brown, a Black male shot by Darren Wilson, a White police officer, became national news (Bosman & Fitzsimmons, 2014). Ferguson citizens and others sought answers and resolutions for the divided and frustrated community. The incident received months of national and international media coverage. Social media communications heavily contributed to the mobilization of numerous groups seeking immediate solutions (Gunning-Francis, 2015).

On November 24, 2014, the St. Louis County, Missouri, (US) prosecutor announced the grand jury's decision not to indict the police officer for the death of Michael Brown on August 9, 2014. The decision sparked ongoing protests and civil unrest in the St. Louis Metropolitan area and other cities in the US. Diverse groups of citizens and community leaders participated in demonstrations and acts of solidarity

throughout the US and internationally (Gunning-Francis, 2015; Segal, 2014). In response to the mobilization of a multitude of groups, communities demanded religious leaders provide answers, action, and leadership to Black communities experiencing social injustice. Historically, religious leaders and their churches have been involved in social advocacy (Baer & Singer, 1992; Gandy, 1945; Lewis & Trulear, 2008). And in the case of Ferguson, some religious leaders responded to the clarion call for advocacy. Despite the vast amount of research (Baer & Singer, 1992; Barnes, 2005; Billingsley, 1999; Pattillo-McCoy, 1998; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1993; Wilmore, 1998) on Black communities and churches, little is known about how educational attainment influences religious leaders' social action strategies. Additionally, we know little about religious leaders' decisions to engage or disengage in social activism. Furthermore, it is unclear what strategies religious leaders use for social advocacy in their communities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the educational experiences of religious leaders to understand their social advocacy strategies in Black communities and how they make meaning of their advocacy experiences during the time of unrest. Specifically, the study explored if educational attainment influences social advocacy engagement strategies. This is significant as reported decades ago, in a study by Lincoln and Mamiya (1990), that many of the innovative and creative ministries in churches were “being led by better-educated clergy at the large urban churches” (p. 399). Isaac (2002) also found this to be the case. This study extended research by conveying an understanding of religious leaders' formal and informal education and their role in promoting social justice in Black communities.

Research Questions

A phenomenological qualitative research design was used to examine and interpret data from the stance of inquiry into the roles and social interactions of specific groups of people (Creswell, 2012). The following overarching questions guided this study: *How do religious leaders develop their social advocacy strategies? and, How do religious leaders utilize social advocacy strategies in the Black communities?* The following sub-questions were also explored:

1. What informal and formal learning activities do religious leaders participate in to develop their understanding of social advocacy?
2. What barriers do religious leaders encounter in their social advocacy?
3. What actions do religious leaders take to promote individual and collective social advocacy?

Significance of the Study

This study investigated religious leaders' social advocacy strategies within Black communities in Ferguson, MO (US) and surrounding areas in the St. Louis Metropolitan area. Barnes (2005), Cole (2014), Pattillo-McCoy (1998), and Swidler (1995), to name a few, suggest a need for further investigation of social advocacy, cultural dynamics, religious leadership, and education attainment within Black communities. Exploring the educational experiences of religious leadership provided insights into understanding what meaning they make of their leadership roles and engagement strategies for social justice in Black communities.

This study investigated how social action commitments were decided by religious leaders. In addition, contemporary and comprehensive tactics relative to their educational

attainment, spiritual development, and its impact on social advocacy strategies were revealed. Revised social activism strategies could foster future collaborations, strengthen conversations for interested groups, and expand research (Pattillo-McCoy, 1998). This study explored cultural perspectives and social movement trends, as other researchers (Cole, 2014; Swidler, 1995) have suggested, and broaden a greater understanding of the influence of education, culture, and social action within Black communities. Ultimately, this study's findings can facilitate future conversations concerning social advocacy in Black communities and religious leadership participation.

Considering the diversity of religious culture in respect to sociopolitical and economic concerns and commitments, the findings from this research enhance our understanding of the role of religious leaders as modern agents for social change in underserved communities (Baer & Singer, 1992; Barnes, 2010; Gunning-Francis, 2015). This study proposed a robust and compulsory objective by exploring a possible interdependency of educational attainment and social advocacy strategies. Thus, identifying practical models for social activism and advancing social justice within Black communities. This study revealed educational attainment influenced religious leaders' social advocacy strategies in Black communities. The findings can enrich understandings of advocacy in communities, institutions, and organizations nationally and globally. In addition, this research added to the body of knowledge concerning religious leaders' executed decisions and strategies for social advocacy in Black communities.

Identifying the educational experiences of religious leaders shed light on religious and social capital and helped us understand the role of religious leaders' social advocacy strategies in Black communities overall. Accordingly, a broad understanding of religious

leaders' advocacy strategies tells us how to provide better opportunities for Black communities to access formal and informal learning activities. Specifically, informal learning offers learning opportunities that mirror learning activities in formal educational systems (Rogers, 2014). Informal leadership development for many religious leaders emerged in Black churches (Hodges et al., 2016). Consequently, many of the same skills gained by informal and formal education systems integrated and advanced their advocacy practices (Rogers, 2014). As a result, religious leaders' formal and informal learning experiences expand and enhances their social advocacy practices in Black communities.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework incorporated the constructs of andragogy and Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) to explore religious leaders' educational experiences and social advocacy strategies in Black communities. Adult learning, defined by Knowles and his associates (2005) as "the process of adults gaining knowledge and expertise" (p. 175), captured cognitive and social factors involved in understanding the life experiences of religious leaders. A specific point of interest for this study explored one of the six assumptions of andragogy, "self-concept" (English, 2000; Knowles, et al., 2005; MacKeracher, 1996), and how religious leaders see themselves as capable and self-directed in their efforts to develop effective and supportive advocacy strategies in Black communities. Merriam (2001) acknowledged andragogy involved a process of structuring the learning environment to ensure learning can occur. Andragogy presented a set of guidelines for understanding how to teach adults, how adults learn, and how that process differs from pedagogy (Knowles, 1973; Merriam, 2001; Ozuah, 2005). In addition, Knowles' (1973) assumptions for adult learners conceptualized the why, what, and how

for understanding learner needs. Exploring the self-concept assumption of andragogy offered a process for examining the roles and interactions of religious leaders and social advocacy in Black communities.

Observational learning, social modeling, and vicarious reinforcement described the fundamental premises of Bandura's (1977) SCT. The theory asserts people learn from their experience of watching others. Cognitive, self-regulatory, and self-reflective factors construct an interactive model of the processes for human behavior and learning (Clark & Zimmerman, 2014; Schunk, 1989; Zimmerman, 1983). According to Bandura (1986), the influence of personal factors, behavior, and environmental influences are constant, interactive, and reciprocal. In addition to the various concepts and processes of SCT, reciprocal determinism parallels Knowles' (1970) adult learning model andragogy (Bandura, 1997; Zimmerman, 1983).

Knowles (2008) maintained that adults create and select goals based on their desire for specific knowledge. Adults come to the learning environment with life experiences, a sense of confidence, and a need for affirmation and support (Brookfield, 1983; Caffarella, 1993; English, 2000; Knowles, 2008). Social learning and the andragogy framework supported the premise that people direct and choose their behavior based upon their initiated goals and expected outcomes (Bandura, 1986; Knowles, 2009). Pajares (2008) wrote, "From this perspective, people are viewed as self-organizing, proactive, self-reflecting, and self-regulating rather than reactive organisms shaped by environmental forces or driven by concealed inner impulses" (p. 112). This research explored the self-concept of andragogy, along with the influences and effects of SCT theory's factor self-efficacy. Exploring the personal, behavioral, and environmental

factors that have interrelated effects on religious leaders' social advocacy strategies and educational attainment proposes a new approach for strengthening social advocacy in Black communities.

Delimitations

The participants were identified from purposive sampling (Creswell, 2012). Because of the limited number of religious leaders studied, all in a Midwestern metropolitan area, their experiences could be specific to their region. Many of the participants may know the researcher; thus, some may alter or eliminate information when describing their experiences.

Definitions

The following operational terms used in this study were chosen and defined by the researcher to provide clarity:

Andragogy. Andragogy refers to teaching and learning processes structured specifically for adult learners (Knowles, 1984).

Formal education. For this study, formal refers to the systematic study of theology or other higher education programs offered by a degree-granting institution.

Informal learning. For this study, informal learning is “characterized by direct observation, modeling, and mentorship” (Tough, 1971).

Religious education. The informal or formal instruction in theological and spiritual learning activities.

Religious leader. This phrase refers to a person (i.e. clergy, pastor, senior leader) with the primary authority and responsibility for the decision making of a religious group or organization (Wilmore, 1995).

Social Advocacy. Action taken on behalf of a group to ensure equity and access to resources and information.

Social Cognitive Theory. This refers to the process of learning by observing others (Bandura, 1977).

Spiritual development. This refers to primarily church-based religious educational programming, often viewed as a lifelong systematic process for developing religious and spiritual practices.

Summary

The death of Michael Brown provoked national attention on police involved shootings, policing for profit, and constitutional abuses. Since August 2014, an increasing number of religious leaders in metropolitan cities across the United States have partnered with other leaders and organizations to implement collaborative social advocacy strategies in Black communities (Gunning-Francis, 2015). These events evoked an interest to explore the educational experiences of religious leaders concerning social advocacy. This study identified their executed strategies and solutions to the overt tension and challenges in Black communities. The findings from this research strengthen the influence of individual and collective social advocacy locally, nationally, and globally.

The next chapter presents a review of relevant literature pertaining to religious social support in Black communities, a discussion on religious leaders' educational experiences, and their social advocacy strategies. Following the literature review, chapter three describes a phenomenological approach to exploring religious leaders' social advocacy and educational experiences.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In this chapter, religious social advocacy in Black communities is discoursed as a foundation for this study, followed by a discussion on religious leaders' educational experiences and social advocacy strategies. There have been numerous studies to examine Black churches' involvement in Black communities (Barnes, 2005; Cnaan et al., 2004; Harris, 1987; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1993; Mays & Nicholson, 1933; Wilmore, 1998). This study does not locate its focus on social justice theory, Black churches, or Black leadership, instead religious leaders' social advocacy strategies in their communities as interpreted by previous research is explored (Barnes, 2005; Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1993; Mays & Nicholson, 1933; Nelson & Nelson, 1975).

Next, the conceptual frameworks for andragogy and Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) were used to identify the educational experiences of religious leaders (Bandura, 1986; Knowles, 1970). Specifically, this study explores a broad approach of "self-concept" from the andragogic perspective and the "self-efficacy" component of SCT (Bandura, 1997). Consistent with hermeneutical phenomenology methodology, the researcher's role as an observer is entrenched and indispensable to the interpretive process.

Black Communities

Black communities are defined as a place where predominately Black or African American people live and work. Often described as a place with a focus on the institution of family and pride in cultural heritage (Baer & Singer, 1992; Barnes, 2005; Billingsley

& Caldwell, 1991). In the Black community, the pursuit of educational attainment and entrepreneur endeavors convey success (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1993; Landry, 2018). A community imprinted with social, political, and economic struggles and challenges (Baer & Singer, 1992; Barnes, 2010; Gandy, 1945; Lewis & Trulear, 2008; Silver & Moeser, 1999). Furthermore, religious leaders champion the resolve to contest the systemic racial inequalities that distress Black communities (Gunning-Francis, 2015; Lewis & Trulear, 2008; Wilmore, 1998). Churches directed by religious leaders within Black communities provide vital community services that support, strengthen, and correct racial inequalities (Barnes, 2010; Baer & Singer, 1992; Taylor, 1979).

The establishment of Black communities are enveloped with unique underpinnings. A historical foundation characterized by a notable emergence from American chattel slavery (Grossman, 1989; Wiese, 2004) followed by a series of migrations across the US (Berlin, 2010; Landry, 2018). These migrations extended into various metropolitan areas during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century (Landry, 2018; Wise, 2020). According to Berlin (2010), migration was the movement of individuals and families searching for a better quality of life and spanned four migration periods. Landry (2018) noted the evolution of transportation as motivation for migration into suburban areas. Despite the opportunity for suburban residency, segregation disallowed Black community formation after the post-World War II period (De Rosa, 2012; Landry, 2018). During the early twentieth century, the migration positioned both Black communities and religious leaders at the forefront of social advocacy. The first two great migrations occurred from the seventeenth through the early nineteenth century (Berlin, 2010; Landry, 2018). This transporting of over a million people from Africa to

North America transformed the demography of the United States (Berlin, 2010; Grossman, 1989; Landry, 2018; Wiese, 2004). The Southern states benefited greatly from the chattel slavery period (Landry, 2018). Landowners transitioned from producing tobacco and rice to producing cotton and sugar (Berlin, 2010).

The twentieth century migration led individuals and families to pursue employment opportunities (Berlin, 2010; Rowe, 2020). According to a Black newspaper, *The Defender*, the opportunities stimulated mass migration to the northern states (Grossman, 1989; Tolnay & Beck, 1992). Horrific violence and segregation motivated at least 6 million Blacks to escape from the terrors of the South (Berlin, 2010). Employment opportunities for Blacks increased after the eruption of World War II and the decline of immigrants to the United States (Berlin, 2010). The twenty-first century migration involved the increase of people of African descent to the United States (Berlin, 2010; Landry, 2018; Tolnay & Beck, 1992). Blacks were seeking a better life than the one they knew. They wanted to escape sharecropping and other forms of oppression that generations before them had experienced. Each of these migrations contributed to the creation of Black communities (Berlin, 2010; Landry, 2018).

A result of the Great Migration was the establishment of vibrant Black communities. In the early twentieth century, Black communities contained every type of business conceivable. For example, in Tulsa, OK, the Greenwood neighborhood, described as Black Wall Street, included a hospital, churches, restaurants, a library, clothing stores, banks, and movie theaters (Koroma, 2021). Black communities were established and rooted in perseverance and hope. Distinctive to the urban and suburb development of the Black community, the church was an urban center (Lincoln &

Mamiya, 1993; Landry, 2018). Church attendance defined status and identity in communities during the Great Migrations (Berlin, 2010). It was in the church where Blacks received the respect that was absent from society. Religious leaders were held in high esteem in Black communities. Religious leaders were significantly positioned to support communities encountering discrimination while embracing their cultural heritages and practices (Baer & Singer, 1992; Barnes, 2005; Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991).

Black Churches

Historically, churches in the United States have been revered as institutions that fostered spiritual maturity and addressed social issues in Black communities (Baer & Singer, 1992; Billingsley, 1992; Wilmore, 1998). According to Harvey (2010), “The black church accepted its role in genuine social change and community transformation” (p. 1). Black citizens have established, supported, and maintained predominant ownership and control of the churches in their communities (Bennett, 1989; Pattillo-McCoy, 1998; Taylor, 1979). A considerable amount of literature has been published on Black churches (Barnes, 2005; Cnaan et al., 2004; Lewis & Trulear, 2008; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1993; Nelsen & Nelson, 1975). These studies illustrate the interworking of churches and Black communities as an essential component to understand religious leaders’ social advocacy strategies. Religious leaders’ involvement and influence play an important role in addressing community needs. Their exclusive leadership position enables the successful implementation of programs and services, thus improving the quality of life for communities (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991; Cohall & Cooper, 2010).

This study references Black churches as a representation of Black populations within Black communities. Although this study's participants are not defined as religious leaders of Black churches, the vast amount of literature on Black religious leaders and their churches frame the conversation for their educational experiences and social advocacy strategies in Black communities (Baer & Singer, 1992; Barnes, 2005; Billingsley, 1999; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1993).

Education and Church

Since its inception in the US, education in the church played a pivotal role for enslaved Africans and subsequently became a social advocacy strategy for Black communities (Bennett, 1989; Jordan, 1968; Wade, 1964). Social advocacy in Black communities included primary goals for improving literacy, morality, and scripture knowledge (Bennett, 1989; Nelson & Nelson, 1988). Also included in their advocacy was the formation of several formal and industrial training schools, many of which are still in existence today, such as Arkansas Baptist College, Shaw University, Benedict College, Paine College, Wilberforce University, Fisk University, formerly Fisk Institute, and Spelman College, formerly Spelman Seminary (Anderson, 1988; Cantey, Bland, Mack & Joy-Davis, 2013; Nichols, 2004).

Religious educational curriculum continues to be a primary resource for churches across denominations (Franklin, 2007; Smith & Harris, 2005). Some churches viewed literacy education as a public school responsibility rather than an educational goal of the church. It is not surprising that their objectives to teach biblical content and morality have remained a primary focus in Black communities (Legg, 2012; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1993). Churches utilize various resources for education, and for many of them, printed material

remains a standard (Boylan, 1988; Franklin, 2007; Smith & Harris, 2005). This may explain why many denominations print their own materials. For instance, many denominations have publishing boards that provide numerous biblical materials: Broadman and Holman, Southern Baptist; Abingdon, Methodist; Westminster John Knox, Presbyterian; Augsburg Fortress, Evangelical Lutheran Church; Concordia, Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod; Church Publishing, Episcopal; Sadlier, Roman Catholic (Smith, 2002). Electronic media sources are available as an addition to many of their biblical educational materials (Boylan, 1988; Frye, 2012; Legg, 2012).

The complex role of positioning itself as the central institution for socially supportive programs and services for Black communities remains a constant (Barnes, 2008; Billingsley, 1992; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1993). According to Billingsley and Caldwell (1991), community outreach programs of Black churches included, “relief for the poor, recreational work, gymnasium classes, feeding the unemployed, benevolent societies, free health clinics, cooperation with YWCA and YMCA programs, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, kindergarten, and day nurseries” (p. 430). Educational experiences beyond Sunday sermons and mid-week studies persist with an unwavering consistency in Black communities (Barber, 2015; Barnes, 2011; Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991).

Furthermore, in a study with Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM) as a focus, George, Richardson, Lakes-Matyas, and Blake (1989) confirmed a continual commitment from the Black church in promoting and supporting educational programming in Black communities during the 1980s. The report revealed other programming focuses such as, tutoring, day care, field trips, educational scholarships, and

financial support for schools, demonstrating an apparent involvement with education, families, and Black communities (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991; George, et al., 1989).

In the later part of the twentieth century, Lincoln and Mamiya (1993) conducted a major study investigating educational programming strategies. The survey concentrated on several historical Black denominations. Their findings coincided with the early work of Mays and Nicholson (1933) revealing consistencies with community educational programming. Billingsley (1999) discussed these results and reported that most churches in Black communities continued educational programming as a focus, either directly from their institutions or as a combined project with organizations. Moreover, churches in Black communities partnered with government programs that included financial sponsorship for early childhood education, seniors, and Black colleges (Barnes, 2010; Chaves, 2004). Other researchers revealed evidence of health-oriented partnerships (Rowland & Chappel-Aiken, 2012).

Social Service Partners

Churches within Black communities identify as religious systems with unique characteristics that define their cultural meanings and behaviors (Baer & Singer 1992; Franklin, 2007; Rowland & Isaac-Savage, 2014). There are those who believe the Black church is disconnected from the challenges facing Black communities (Frazier, 1963; Hardy, 2012; Mukenge, 1983; Nelsen, 1988; Whelchel, 2011). However, there is evidence of churches in Black communities providing several social services to meet the needs of their communities (Barrett, 2010; Franklin, 2007; Dale, 2008; Isaac, 2010; Rowland & Chappel-Aiken, 2012; Smith & Harris, 2005). It has been suggested that partnerships between churches and other organizations strengthen Black communities

(Billingsley, 1992; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1993). In 2009, President Barak Obama established the Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships to more effectively serve Americans in need, thus supporting the role of churches in communities (<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/administration/eop/ofbnp/about>). There are several examples of partnerships between organizations and the Black church. They have addressed issues such as high blood pressure, cancer, obesity, and promoted other diseased prevention programs (Barrett, 2010; Rowland & Chappel-Aiken, 2012)

Civil War to Civil Rights

In the early 20th century, churches resolved to create strategies that would improve conditions within Black communities. The scholarship of W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington rendered similar conversations, yet their ideologies and solutions for racial inequality in Black communities varied (Horne & Young, 2001; Wright, 2006). Du Bois saw the Black experience as a framework for cultural nationalism with inclusion for every class of workers (Du Bois, 1903; Wright, 2006). His position demanded equal opportunities for Blacks and contrasted against Washington's stance for accommodating social inequalities patiently, while working towards undeniable inclusion (Bennett, 1989; Horne & Young, 2001).

Black communities experienced social inequality daily and going to church was not an exception (Frazier, 1963; Wade, 1964). In the late 1700s, two major predominately Black congregations were established (Frazier, 1963; Nelson et al., 1971). Religious' leaders Richard Allen and Absalom Jones organized segregated Black northern congregations, the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the Negro Episcopal Church (Frazier, 1963; Jordan, 1968). For some, segregated churches were one step towards

social equality in Black communities. Black and White people could now choose to attend a predominately Black, White, or a racially mixed congregation within Black communities (Frazier, 1963; Nelson et al., 1971).

Struggle, opposition, and freedom of expression characterized the growth of churches in Black communities during the twentieth century (Barnes, 2005; Berlin, 2010; Franklin, 2007). In the 1950s and 1960s, the civil rights movement was challenged with advancing the cause of social justice in communities that had been disempowered (Billingsley, 1999; Frazier, 1963). Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1968), described the struggle of Black communities against racism and white supremacy as the “day-to-day demands of our struggle for freedom and human dignity” (p.180). Churches and civil rights activists endorsed positive social change for equity and opportunities within Black communities (Billingsley, 1999; Franklin, 2007). Their fight against racial segregation and equity in housing, employment, and education advanced, yet the charge to achieve greater social justice in Black communities continued (Barnes, 2010; Berlin, 2010; De Rosa, 2012; Lincoln, 1963).

Amidst debates and concerns of how to advance civil rights for Blacks, church attendance expanded beyond services to include Sunday school, adult Bible classes, funeral and burial ceremonies, prayer meetings, and other services for Black communities (Franklin, 2007; Frazier, 1963; Gandy, 1945; Wade, 1964). Although establishing churches in Black communities was somewhat celebrated by Whites, their emerging independence caused concern (Billingsley, 1999; Frazier, 1963; Wade, 1964). The Black church and religious leadership accomplished the etchings of a social status that carved

the way for social equality in ways unknown to them and the Black community (Dale, 2008; Lewis & Trulear, 2008; Wade, 1964).

The Black church created a sense of community, identity, and hope for the future (Billingsley, 1999; Franklin, 2007; Frazier, 1963). From a place of rebellion to the place of refuge, churches shifted into an assumed free space inside and outside of their walls. When the Civil War concluded, the spoils of war for Black communities proposed freedom and equal rights as citizens (Dale, 2008; Wade, 1964). Cone (1969) summarized the Black experience from slavery to contemporary freedom moments in history as a burden. He charged churches with the responsibility of educating Black communities to compete with the institutional practices directly responsible for the new systems of oppression (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

Civil Rights and Beyond

Cone (1969) suggested an overarching cloak of racism continued to perpetuate hatred for Black communities after the Civil War period. Consequently, aspirations of Black communities for basic civil liberties and equality seemed to escalate during the Reconstruction period (Billingsley, 1992; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1993; Patillo-McCoy 1998). Black communities relied on churches as their primary resource for spiritual, social, economic, and political empowerment (Merriweather & Isaac, 2016; Rowland & Isaac, 2014; Taylor & Chatters, 1991). Religious leaders received criticism from community leaders and civil rights advocates for their unsuccessful efforts and lack of interest to advance civil liberties for Black communities (Billingsley, 1992; Franklin, 2007; Frazier, 1963; Patillo-McCoy 1998). According to Cone (1969), Black communities questioned religious leaders' accommodating position with the structural

oppressive systematic racism. Accordingly, segregation, discrimination, protests, assassinations, criticism of the Black church, and its leaders branded the era of the 1960s (Cone, 1969; Nelson & Nelson, 1975). In essence, this was a significant time that propelled America to confront racial disparities, economic inequalities, and other social injustices in Black communities.

Across America's history of slavery, wars, the Reconstruction period, and the Civil Rights era, churches continued to remain the most reverent institution in Black communities (Barnes, 2010; Billingsley & Caldwell, 1999; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1993). The evolution of historically Black churches in Black communities revealed class divisions within their communities. Other developments, such as the rejection of the typical Black Protestant church, and the emergence of alternatives associations such as, Black theology, Black Power, Black Nationalists, the Black Muslim movement, and Roman Catholicism also emerged (Cone, 1970; Harris, 1987; Franklin, 2007; Nelson, Morris, 1984; Yokley, & Nelson, 1971). During the twentieth century, amid the evolutions and challenges in Black communities, religious leaders at times were perceived as possessing limited power and influence (Billingsley, 1992; Franklin, 2007; Lewis & Trulear, 2008). Furthermore, many were criticized for either promoting or discouraging social action in Black communities (Billingsley, 1992; Cone, 1970; Lewis & Trulear, 2008). Nevertheless, in the twenty-first century, religious leaders and churches unequivocally persevered as the fundamental core for social advocacy solutions to develop in Black communities (Barnes, 2010; Berlin, 2010; Capeci, 1977; Cohall & Cooper, 2010; Franklin, 2007).

Social Advocacy

For the purpose of this study, social advocacy refers to the interactive role of religious leaders and their churches as a resource to safeguard justice and equality in Black communities (Billingsley, 1999; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). The term advocacy describes actions that address social issues and policy reform (Carlton-LaNey, 2006). Justice involves leveling disparities and providing access to equitable opportunities (Novak, 2009). Therefore, social justice initiatives should be the results of social advocacy. This intentionality of creating community empowerment for disadvantaged, disempowered, or discriminated individuals by influencing social policy characterizes the focus of the social work profession (Canda & Furman, 1999; Day & Schiele, 2012; Withorn, 1984). Globally, social work is defined as, “Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities” <https://www.ifsw.org/what-is-social-work/global-definition-of-social-work/>. The role and relationship of social workers with social justice issues predate the Progressive Era (Gordon, 1991; Schiele, 1997). Structured social services for orphans and foster care emerged by the early 19th century (Dupper & Evans, 1996). These early acts of volunteerism and social services catalyzed the involvement and commitment of private organizations and churches to provide food and shelter for urban communities (Glick, 2011).

Religious leaders represent social change agents who participate in “any action that speaks in favor of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports or defends, or pleads on behalf of others” (Alliance for Justice, 2008). Individual human rights, political action, public education, unemployment, housing affordability are some of the issues advocated by religious leaders for disadvantaged groups (Kerr Chandler, 2001; Franklin & Lincoln,

1974). Literature on Black churches supports a framework for understanding the cultural, social, and political impact within Black communities. Prior research has extensively explored the historical presence and importance of Black churches, their varied denominational status, and the intersection of religion and social advocacy (Barnes, 2010; Du Bois, 1903; Frazier, 1963; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1993; Wilmore, 1998). Regarding activism activities, churches and their leaders played a vital role before and after the civil rights movement (Frazier, 1963; Barnes 2010). The pursuit of justice and equality remains a prevalent focus for religious leaders within Black communities today.

Addressing social and economic well-being through the lens of religious leadership contributes significantly to the promotion, development, and strength of achieving racial parity in Black communities (Barnes, 2006; Billingsley, 1999; Frazier, 1964). Failure to support or question injustice, oppression, or other community needs underlines this study. Churches are powerful social institutions, and as a direct or indirect resource, their presence and religious leadership within Black communities represent a strong network of social support (Barnes 2010; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1993; Wilmore, 1998).

Religious leaders and their churches in Black communities are symbolic representations of social advocacy agents (Barnes, 2010; Billingsley, 1999; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). Many religious leaders guide communities towards acts of upholding, maintaining, and endorsing justice in Black communities (Billingsley, 1999; Frazier, 1964; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). Generally speaking, religious leaders exemplify a vital role as mobilizers of events that address oppressive societal conditions in disenfranchised communities (Barnes, 2010; Frazier, 1964; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). Educating

members and the community was an important strategy to address injustices heaved upon Blacks (Barnes, 2010; Billingsley, 1999; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

Social Advocacy and the Church

The church's mission was to function as an “oasis for all issues affecting the community” (Harvey, 2010, p. 1). Churches in their social, economic, and political roles are expected to implement strategies of individual or collaborative actions that address issues of concern in Black communities. Historically, churches have been actively involved in social advocacy (Billingsley, 1999; Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991; Wilmore, 1998). For example, the historical church held clandestine or open meetings to discuss how to address inequalities (Barnes, 2011; Cnaan & Bodie, 2001; Frazier, 1964; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990)

Many churches remain focused on family support services, counseling, intervention, basic-needs assistance, and educational and awareness programs (Barnes, 2011; Billingsley, 1999; Cnaan & Bodie, 2001). Although the scope of these support services persists as a standard for churches in Black communities, contemporary churches incorporate a holistic family focus with their advocacy strategies (Barnes, 2008; Billingsley, 1999).

Successful programming reflects the collaborative efforts of those with expertise, education, and skill (Brookfield, 1983; Caffarella, 1993; English, 2000; Knowles, 1973; Ozuah, 2005). Researchers (Barrett, 2010; Isaac, Rowland, & Blackwell, 2007; Rowland & Isaac-Savage, 2013) have also suggested that educational programs, specifically for adults, in churches combine informational and practical support for Black communities. To explain further, churches in Black communities offer various formal and informal

educational programs that provide various services and information (Franklin, 2007; Isaac, 2002; Livingston, 1999). For example, food and clothing pantries, employment and financial resources, home health care and hospice care, pregnancy prevention and parenting skills, health education and screenings, transportation and adult day care, couples and singles ministry, youth mentoring, primary education, after-school support, college preparatory and other support programs (Billingsley, 1999; Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991; Colvin & Garner, 2010).

Adult education scholars suggest that adult educators must develop specific competencies to help facilitate discourse in educational settings (Knowles, 1973; MacKeracher, 1996; Merriam, 2001; Ozuah, 2005). Moreover, implementing a range of techniques that consider the learner's experiences and their ability to transfer new concepts to those experiences enhances adult learning. If educators intentionally address complex social issues, and endeavor to increase their cognitive and emotive capacities, they create discussions that could broaden students' understanding of the ramifications of social problems within their communities (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Brookfield, 2004; Holford, 2017). When adult educators initiate these complex conversations, they administer effective strategies for combating the challenging social, economic, and cultural issues affecting communities locally and globally (Dale, 2008; Manglitz, Guy, & Merriweather, 2014; Smith & Harris, 2005).

Religious Leaders

Educational and spiritual support of congregations is the primary focus of religious leaders (Legg, 2012; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1993; Smith & Harris, 2005). In Black communities, religious leaders symbolize a vital solution to most social ills in their

communities (Billingsley, 1992; Franklin, 2007; Lewis & Trulear, 2008; Lincoln & Mamiya; Taylor, 1979). More often than not, their preparation for religious leadership includes educational attainment (Finke & Dougherty, 2002). To understand the educational experiences of religious leaders and social advocacy strategies in Black communities, an overview of their role as leaders and their educational attainment is essential. Additionally, religious leaders' participation in formal education and informal learning pertaining to religious education, practices, or ceremonies will be discussed.

Roles of Religious Leaders

The early settlers in America heavily influenced America's national identity, democratic origins, and citizens' religious principles and values (Huntington, 2004). Religious leaders preached American history in their sermons as metaphors to encourage and empower American communities on contemporary social issues (Barnes, 2010; Cone, 1969; Wilmore, 1998). Preaching and teaching relevant information remains a significant responsibility for religious leaders. For contemporary religious leaders, their roles can be a hired or appointed position in religious groups or organizations. Their accepted leadership position and voice symbolizes protector and advocate for Black communities (Du Bois, 1903; Colvin & Garner, 2010; Lewis & Trulear, 2008). Going far beyond routine religious responsibilities, religious leaders participate in various civic activities within their communities, such as helping to establish schools, supporting fair housing accommodations, and voter registration programs (Barrett, 2010; Franklin, 2007; Gates, 2021; Lewis & Trulear, 2008).

Beginning in the late 1800s church leaders were participants in the much needed political and social reform (Morris, 1984; Nelson & Nelson, 1975; Harris, 1987; English,

2005). Activist religious leaders openly supported political and social inequities and their efforts continued endlessly onward through the 1960s (Billingsley, 1992; Wilmore, 1998). Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., a Baptist preacher in New York, epitomized such a leader (Pollock, 1974). In addition to leading one of the largest Black Baptist Churches in New York, he also served as a US congressman (Pollock, 1974). He was described as the “premier black agitator” (Pollock, 1974, p. 458). As leaders of communities, religious leaders’ pursuit of political and social freedoms was never devoid of controversy regarding loyalty, skepticism, and strife (Franklin, 2007; Lewis & Trulear, 2008; Wilmore, 1998). Thus, many of their decisions created discord and factions between congregations and leadership. For example, Eligon (2018) noted that many Black church leaders “stayed on the sidelines” regarding social justice and equal rights during Martin Luther King, Jr.’s era. They “worried about attracting violent backlash” (para. 15). Overall, religious leaders’ collaborative social advocacy strategies, along with their congregations and other community organizations attribute to the effectiveness of social, economic, and political advancement for Black communities (Lewis & Trulear, 2008; Wilmore, 1998).

Religious leaders in Black communities are expected to communicate effectively and act responsibly concerning social, economic, and politically controversial issues (Franklin, 2007; Gates, 2021; Harris, 1987; Wilmore, 1998). Baer and Singer (1992) discussed collaboration between religious leaders and other organizations that educate communities regarding religious empowerment and participative democracy. Moreover, participative democracy remains a critical focal point in Black communities (Franklin, 2007; Wilmore, 1998). The role of a religious leader can be a hired or appointed position

in religious groups or organizations. Social issues surrounding race and the Black experience in the US continue to be a challenge for religious leaders. Despite adversity, religious leaders continue to work at dispelling repetitive historical traumatic experiences by working towards a more excellent vision for future generations (Landry, 2018).

As Black communities embrace their history, justice, and at times their liberation, religious leaders represent an important component for advancing social advocacy (Baer & Singer, 1992; Du Bois, 1903; Franklin, 2007; Smith & Harris, 2005). Black communities tend to define and associate themselves with leaders and organizations that reflect and relate to their life experiences (Cone, 1970; Nelson & Nelson, 1975; Tisdell, 2008). Religious leaders influence and often exercise exclusive control over information expressed and embraced in Black communities (Billingley, 1992; Franklin, 2007; Lewis & Trulear, 2008). These possibilities provide opportunities for religious leaders to choose or change associations and educational experiences to reflect their current, past, and future objectives for Black communities (Barber, 2015; Barnes, 2011; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1993; Smith & Harris, 2005).

Among other things, preparations for religious leadership involve educational attainment for teaching in communities. Preparatory instructions for strengthening communities include topics such as Practical Theology, Christian Education, and Church Leadership (Finke & Dougherty, 2002). The Ferguson Unrest and mobilization of groups in Black communities throughout the US and internationally prompted citizens to seek answers and resolutions for their varied perceptions of injustice (Gunning-Francis, 2015). Whether injustices are regarded as personal or collective, marginalized groups who acknowledge and understand similar struggles or challenges unite against injustice

(Huntington, 2004). In some instances, they rely on religious leaders to provide guidance and direction. When striving for social change, religious leaders and other community organizations exhibit excellent examples of collaboration in Black communities (Baer & Singer, 1992; Barnes, 2010). These collaborations are the model of religious leadership development within Black communities (Barber, 2015; Barnes, 2011; Finke & Dougherty, 2002; Pattillo-McCoy, 1998). Notably known as forerunners in Black communities, religious leaders provide resources that empower communities. Yet, frustrations and struggles concerning social justice and civil rights continue in their communities (Barber, 2015; Barnes, 2005; Harris, 1994; Legg, 2012; Lewis & Trulear, 2008; Pattillo-McCoy, 1998).

Social and Religious Capital

Similarities exist across denominations, among formally educated leaders and those who are not. Many formally educated leaders build relationships with other leaders who share their experience or educational training, thus expanding their support network outside of their congregation (Starke & Finke, 2000). However, an informally educated religious leader's network of support is generally limited to his congregation.

Furthermore, informally educated religious leaders may experience better relational bonding with congregants (Miller, 1997; Finke & Dougherty, 2002; Starke & Finke, 2000).

Formally educated leaders may possess extensive social capital in closed networks but limited interpersonal connections to their congregations. Whereas, informally educated religious leaders experience distinct and personal connections to their congregations (Starke & Finke, 2000). The concept of social capital refers to

significant and influential resources religious leadership gains through these relationships (Coleman, 1988; Ebstyn, 2003; Loury, 1977). Stark and Finke (2000) defined religious capital as acquired knowledge and skills an individual experiences as part of a religious community. Exploring specific educational experiences and the influences of social and religious capital may clarify an understanding of the social advocacy strategies of religious leaders in Black communities.

Informally educated religious leaders depend on their congregations exclusively for most of their resources and support (Starke & Finke, 2000). Likewise, certain formal educated religious leaders within specific denominations receive substantial support from their hierarchical structure (Mosher, 2006; Senter, 2014; Whelchel, 2011). According to Ammerman's (1990) study of *Baptist Battles*, formally educated religious leaders receive privileges, such as employment endeavors and program support from those in their social network. Also noted, if formally educated religious leaders or informally educated religious leaders move outside of their denominations, the resources they once possessed within their denominations generally diminishes (Finke & Dougherty, 2002).

Regardless of educational attainment or denominational affiliations, religious leaders share similar educational experiences and social capital influences (Ammerman, 1994; Ebstyn, 2003; Starke & Finke, 2000). Likewise, the acquisition of religious capital varies from leader to leader (Finke & Dougherty, 2002). In particular, religious capital describes more than a mastery of knowledge, but an emotional attachment and regular engagement with a religious community (Finke & Dougherty 2002; McBride, 2015; Stark & Finke, 2000). Maselko, Hughes, and Cheney (2011) define religious social capital in a similar manner, "the social resources available to individuals and groups through their

social connections with a religious community.” (p. 760). Religious leaders often share general knowledge and religious experiences within the relationships they share with those of similar backgrounds (Ammerman, 1994; McBride, 2015; Stark & Finke, 2000). These cultural connections demonstrate the attainment of religious capital (Cone, 2018; Corcoran, 2019; Finke & Dougherty, 2002; Park & Smith, 2000). Informally educated leaders who build social connections and emotional attachments to their members also represent an example of social capital (Finke & Dougherty, 2002; Iannaccone, 1990). Religious leaders' social and religious capital can directly influence their professional associations within their churches (Corcoran, 2019; Finke & Dougherty, 2002; Park & Smith, 2000; Roberts, 2004).

Formal educated religious leaders experience opportunities for networking, inter-denominational appointments, and professional credentialing (Finke & Dougherty, 2002). However, informally educated religious leaders are suitably revered for their ability to demonstrate emotional bonds and connections with their specific congregational culture (Ammerman, 1994; McMickle, 2002; Park & Sharma, 2016; Starke & Finke, 2000). Depending on their educational (formally educated or informally educated) backgrounds, religious leaders have different expectations and requirements (Finke & Dougherty, 2002; Maselko et al., 2011). The ability to connect to communities is an essential asset for both types of leaders. If congregations choose informally educated religious leaders for vocational ministry, commitment and emotional attachment are coveted over educational attainment (Ammerman, 1994; Finke & Dougherty, 2002). However, often the expectation for formally educated religious leaders presupposes educational expertise above emotional allegiance to the congregation (Finke & Dougherty, 2002; Maselko et

al., 2011). Many formally educated religious leaders build relationships with other leaders who share their experience or educational training, thus expanding their network of support outside of their congregation (Cone, 2018; Corcoran, 2019; Starke & Finke, 2000).

This study discusses the emotional attachment of religious leaders, a component of religious capital, through the lens of self-efficacy, a concept of social cognitive learning that relates to the process of learning by observing others (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy suggests personal characteristics, such as thoughts, emotions, expectations, beliefs, and goals influence individual behavior (Bandura, 2009). Moreover, educational attainment, emotional attachment, and social influences play significant roles in describing religious leaders' experiences with other religious leaders and individuals in their communities. Thus, their leadership positions encapsulate their role as guardians and advocates (Colvin & Garner, 2010). Religious leaders rely on supportive relationships that build trust and provide information to aid in accomplishing their objectives (Portes, 1998; Stark & Finke, 2000).

Formal and Informal Education of Religious Leaders

Since the beginning of organized religion, religious leadership has persevered through various requirements and restrictions within church denominations and traditions (McMickle, 2002; Mays & Nicholason, 1933; Whelchel, 2011). One of the many discourses across denominations deals with the educational experiences of religious leadership (Barnes, 2010; Tisdell, 2003; Isaac, et al., 2007). Prestigious and educated professionals once dominated religious leadership positions before the nineteenth century (Franklin, 2007; Baer & Singer, 1992; Mosher, 2006; Senter, 2014). Although this first

group of religious leaders possessing political and social influence diminished, esteemed positions for religious leadership continued to flourish and included those without formal training or education (Finke & Dougherty, 2002).

During the colonial period of the US, different denominations debated issues concerning the priority of discourse and principles versus practices and assisting people (Dubois, 1903; McMickle, 2002; Whelchel, 2011). Furthermore, as the establishment of denominations increased, an unceasing conversation regarding educated leaders in contrast to uneducated leaders added to the discussion (Mosher, 2006; Senter, 2014). Religious leaders of that era deemed formal education an essential requirement; on the other hand, aspiration for educational attainment conveyed a sense of piety (Mosher, 2006; Senter, 2014). Another suggested thought proposed educational attainment constituted a valid desire over uneducated emotionalism (Finke & Dougherty, 2002). This idea attributes to the religious experiences of upper and lower-class churches. Religious leaders' different educational and economic backgrounds reflected extreme opposites in their style of worship (Finke & Dougherty, 2002; Strayhorn, 2018).

Religious leaders' educational experience matures in either one or two directions, an informal or formal education path. It is not unusual for some leaders to have both. To clarify terminology concerning educational experiences of religious leaders, formal education denotes the systematic study of theology or other higher education programs offered by a degree granting institution (Isaac, 2009; King, 2010; Mosher, 2006). However, Tough's (1971) notion that informal learning is characterized by direct observation, modeling, and mentorship illuminates the educational experiences of leaders without formal education. Many church denominations require formal education, yet

most religious leaders attain distinctive skills and talents through formal and informal education (Finke & Dougherty, 2002; Miller, 1997; Mosher, 2006). Religious education refers to informal or formal instruction in theological and spiritual practices. An overview of educational attainment will be discussed to understand the educational experiences of religious leaders and social advocacy strategies in Black communities. Specifically, concepts of formal education and informal learning as it pertains to religious education or spiritual practices.

The effects of informal learning or non-seminary training reveal an important concept regarding the decisions and relationships of religious leaders in Black communities. Although formally educated leaders may possess extensive social capital in closed networks, likewise informally trained leaders experience distinct connections to their congregations (Starke & Finke, 2000). Moreover, non-seminary trained leaders may experience better relational bonding with congregants (Cohall & Cooper, 2010; Jeynes, 2012; Miller, 1997). It is unlikely that seminary trained leaders and non-seminary trained leaders can move to other denominations and experience or employ the same social capital and resources they once possessed (Finke & Dougherty, 2002). Non-seminary trained leaders are revered for their ability to demonstrate emotional bonds and connections with their specific congregational culture (Miller, 1997; Starke & Finke, 2000). Furthermore, the non-seminary trained leaders' cultural connection and demonstrated religious engagement with their congregation is not contingent on educational attainment (Cohall & Cooper, 2010; Jeynes, 2012; Miller, 1997). Overall, as formal or informal education continues to be a debate, other elements accompany the discourse of education for religious leaders.

Formal education

The adoption of formal education as a requirement for religious leaders began in the middle 1800s. Religious leaders may have received formal religious training in higher education institutions, but by no means exclusively were they stewards of religious training and education (Du Bois, 1903; McMickle, 2002; Welchel, 2011). An emerging desire for trained youth leaders created a collaborative effort with higher education institutions, both private and public (Colvin & Garner, 2010; Welchel, 2011).

The advancement of formal religious education can be traced to the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the Southern Baptist Convention (Mosher, 2006; Senter, 2014; Welchel, 2011). Specifically, the development of youth ministry evolved from non-formal education, which involved conferences, workshops, non-credit training schools, and training manuals (Mosher, 2006; Senter, 2014). Consequentially, the interest and enthusiasm for youth ministry emerged into the recruitment for formally educated leadership (Mosher, 2006; Senter, 2014). These two organizations substantiated the advancement of formal religious education and represented important components contributing to the process of professionalization of the occupation (Senter, 2014).

Institutions that offer an academic study of religion, may also offer certificate degrees, non-degree courses, college credit courses, and online studies with a practical and theological emphasis (Mosher, 2006; Senter, 2014). Many degree programs include a range of workshops, public lectures, revivals, weekend seminars, and week-long conferences (Mosher, 2006; Senter, 2014). Also, degree granting institutions provide theological courses from different worldviews to equip religious leaders of varied denominations with required training. In addition, Methodists and Baptists, two major

denominations, embraced formal education as a standard requirement for leadership (Ammerman, 1990; McMickle, 2002; Welchel, 2011). In the early A.M.E. Church, clergy advocated for education and participated in math and grammar courses regularly (Lakey, 1996). Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and other religious groups either waived requiring formal education or utilize curriculum-based training within their churches (Miller, 1997; Mosher, 2006).

The emergence of successful contemporary educational strategies unequivocally transitioned the professional vocation of religious education (Mosher, 2006; Senter, 2014; Welchel, 2011). Traditionally, formal education for religious leaders has been facilitated through a theological framework, employing various theological curricula and other educational resources for instruction (Mosher, 2006). Today, many seminary trained religious leaders may possess a Master of Divinity degree (M.Div.) and a Doctor of Ministry degree (D.Min.). These degrees may further enhance their effectiveness in the communities they serve. For example, Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, offers a Master of Community Leadership. The degree is for individuals “who want to make a difference through a career in civic engagement, community organizing, and public policy and/or advocacy” (Eden, 2019, para 3.). Among other things, its D.Min. provides an opportunity for learners to reflect on the practice of ministry. Fulfillment of degree programs offers practicums and in-depth explorations of real-life ministry challenges that religious leaders regularly present (Covenant, 2020). Formally educated religious leaders conduct a continuum of ministerial functions and responsibilities, including sermon preparations, community affairs, and other religious programs and activities (Senter, 2014).

Informal education

In addition to formal education, religious leaders accomplish self-directed goals through informal education (English, 2005; Tisdell, 2003). Informal education or training for this study relates to non-seminary education or training. Historically, many religious leaders' education and training developed during their adolescent years. Before the twentieth century, youths were trained in Sunday school, revivals, and prayer meetings (Senter, 2014; Whelchel, 2011). In the twentieth century, liberal theology and progressive education became an option for youth ministry training. Traces of nineteenth-century evangelicalism and piety remained widely acceptable, according to Senter (2014). Popularized in the early nineteenth century, this esteemed process of utilizing meetings and publications for ministry training remains a model for informal religious education (Senter, 2014; Whelchel, 2011).

Generally, several learning opportunities are available during many regular church denominational meetings. For instance, The National Baptist Convention of America, Inc., Southern Baptist Convention, Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, Church of God in Christ, and others host annual conferences for leaders and members (Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2015). Religious leaders may use specific denominational publications for their informal learning activities (Colvin & Garner, 2010; English, 2005; Senter, 2014). Whether the training takes place inside or outside of their communities, the scope of informal education for religious leaders varies. Advanced ministry training consists of various theological focused topics. For example, pastoral responsibilities in Christian ministry, church history, theology, community building, cross-cultural discourse, stewardship, and evangelism (Mosher, 2006; Senter, 2014).

Religious leaders' informal educational experiences may strengthen their theological perspectives and enhance their strategies for serving Black communities in line with Biblical scripture, traditions, and diversified learning opportunities (Barnes, 2008; Isaac, et al., 2007; King, 2010).

Throughout the twentieth century, class and culture continue to define the identity of religious leaders. As religious education flourishes, religious leaders without formal education represent the minority (Finke & Dougherty, 2002). Education can play an important role for religious leaders. Isaac (2002) found more educated pastors supported and encouraged adult education in the church. Although many denominations today require formal training of their leaders, informal trained religious leaders do serve (Colvin & Garner, 2010; English, 2005; Senter, 2014). Overall, numerous formal and informal educational opportunities exist for religious leaders to strengthen their decision-making and relationships (Finke & Dougherty, 2002; Isaac, et al., 2007; King, 2010).

Andragogy

Malcom Knowles (1980) described adult education as andragogy, "the art and science of helping adults learn" (p. 43). Merriam (2001) suggested the adult model, andragogy involves a process of structuring the learning environment to ensure learning can occur. Adults come to the learning environment in different stages of their life (English, 2000; Ozuah, 2005). Moreover, religious leaders' reasons for learning are relevant to their experiences and their perception of their ability for success (Bandura, 1997). This study explores andragogy and self-efficacy as it relates to religious leaders' educational experiences. Andragogy contends that information should be conducive and

applicable immediately to learners' life experiences or situations (English, 2000; Holton, et al., 2001). Therefore, to understand religious leaders' social advocacy strategies, this study seeks to understand their educational experiences, their active involvement in social justice issues, along with their varied abilities, and their influences through the lens of andragogy.

Introduced in the US over 50 years ago, the term "andragogy" originated in Germany and was later introduced to Knowles by Dusan Savicevic (Merriam, 2001). Knowles popularized the term in the late 1960s and introduced the principles and assumptions as a framework for teaching adult learners (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). The adult education model, andragogy, presents a set of guidelines for understanding how to teach adults, how adults learn, and how that process differs from pedagogy (Holton, et al., 2001; Merriam, 2001). Brookfield (1986) noted that the learning processes of andragogy adapt anywhere the exchange of information takes place.

One of the core assumptions suggests learners can be self-directing when motivated to learn (Brookfield, 1983; Caffarella, 1993; English, 2000). To aid our understanding of religious leaders' attitudes, beliefs, and commitments concerning social advocacy strategies, their self-directed learning experiences will be explored. For successful learning to occur, andragogy proposes teaching strategies must demonstrate clear and relevant meaning for adult learners (Brookfield, 1983; Knowles, et al., 2005). Likewise, self-efficacy implies individuals excel in conjunction with expectation and a sense of control over how they will accomplish goals (Bandura, 1997; Brookfield, 1983; Merriam, 2001).

Furthermore, andragogy asserts that when adults experience situations that require additional knowledge or skills, they come to the learning environment with an eagerness and commitment to learning (Ozuah, 2005; English, 2000). Many religious leaders exclusively control the dissemination of information embraced by their congregation (Billingley, 1992). Much of this information relates to educational experiences and opportunities that focus on family support services, counseling and intervention, basic-needs assistance, and awareness programs (Billingsley, 1999; Cnaan & Bodie, 2001). According to Wilmore (1998), religious leaders choose and change associations that reflect their past, current, and future objectives for themselves and those they lead. The principles of andragogy suggest learners' internal motivation for self-improvement and desire for knowledge prompt their participation in educational experiences (Holton, et al., 2001; Knowles, et al., 2005). Equally important, the learners' social and cultural experiences contribute to establishing a successful learning environment (Knowles, et al., 2005). Similarly, to Bandura's (1986) definition of reciprocal determinism, andragogy also implies learning environments and individual influences elevate learning experiences (Holton, et al., 2001; English, 2000). Religious leaders' learning experiences described through the andragogical lens of self-concept and self-directed learning provide a framework for understanding how environments and individual influences enhance learning experiences.

Self-Concept/Self-Directed Learning

Andragogy's strategic learning processes facilitate adult learning anywhere the exchange of information occurs (Brookfield, 1986; Knowles, 1975; Merriam, 2001). This study will discuss the andragogic assumption "self-concept" through a basic

definition of self-directed learning, *learners can be self-directing when motivated to learn* (Brookfield, 1983; Caffarella, 1993). In the early 1960s, Allen Tough investigated what kind of subjects or tasks adult learners wanted to learn outside of classroom or professional learning environments (Knowles, et al., 2005; Merriam, 2001). Tough (1979) demonstrated that adults want to obtain knowledge based on their interests and desire to participate in the design of their learning process. Furthermore, Tough (1979) affirms that adults' learning interests vary, their learning transpires outside of the traditional classroom instruction, and learners desire to have input into how they learn. These three elements of adult learning influence our inquiry into the self-directed learning of religious leaders and their social advocacy strategies.

Tough's (1979) research captured Malcolm Knowles (1975) interest which further developed the concept of self-directed learning. Knowles (1975) concurred with Tough's (1979) assumption that adults regularly self-directed their learning in numerous ways. Before Tough (1979) and Knowles (1975), there was Cyril Houle's (1984) research from the 1950s and his perspective of three learners. Houle (1984) classifies learners as goal, activity, and learning oriented (Knowles, et al., 2005). In addition, Houle (1984) addressed interest in their motivation for learning new projects. The instructional strategies for the facilitation of self-directed learning include independent study, discussions, and opportunities for learners to use prior knowledge and experiences to help with scaffolding new information (Knowles, 1975). Self-directed learning can be autonomous in one learning experience, but utterly void of direction in another experience. Thus, the fit for self-directed learning varies for the learner and the learning goal (Husmann, Hoffman, & Schaefer, 2018; Merriam, 2001).

Merriam (2001) summarized self-directed learning goals from three perspectives. She discussed Knowles (1975) and Tough (1979) views of self-directed learning, as a learning experience in control by the learner and their ability to learn. Secondly, the culture of the adult learner and their motives for learning are significant components for the successful attainment of knowledge. A third assumption places the learner in a context beyond an individual learning experience and situates them in collaboration with a more significant social or political focus (Merriam, 2001). Self-directed learning, an essential component in this study, presents a perspective of self-efficacy in the context of culture and social influences. The social issues of the twenty-first century exhibit a measure of complexity that presents religious' leaders with a plethora of decisions that emit immediate and future consequences (Billingsley, 1999; Cnaan & Bodie, 2001; Wilmore, 1998). Religious leaders' interpretation of social issues may be subjective, but their self-directed learning experiences may allow new interpretations of critical societal issues (Brookfield, 1983; Caffarella, 1993; Merriam, 2001).

Indispensable to the success of andragogy and self-directed learning is the preparedness of adults to assist the educational endeavors of other adults (Henschke, 2011). For example, St. Louis Public Schools' mission statement is to provide quality educational services to adults as they pursue a better life for themselves, their families, and their community (<https://www.slps.org/Page/43289>). Critics of andragogy primarily focus on the limited empirical research and the absence of a measurable instrument, therefore discounting andragogy as a proven comprehensive learning theory (Hartree, 1984; Jarvis, 1984; Pratt, 1993; Rachal, 2002). Moreover, Ralf St. Clair (2002) statement, "continual debates about whether andragogy is an adult learning theory, a teaching

method, a philosophical statement, or all the above” (p. 3) summarizes the criticism. Furthermore, even the definition of andragogy as “the art and science of helping adults learn in contrast to the definition of pedagogy as “the art and science of teaching children” (Knowles, 1980, p. 43) is challenged. Others viewed andragogy as an approach or as guidelines for practice, rather than a valid description of an adult learning theory (Chan, 2010; Pratt, 1993; Roberson, 2002). Although andragogy is criticized for its limitations, the opportunities to engage and empower adult learners using andragogy’s learner-centered educational system of practice presents opportunities for learner success in the 21st century (Clair, 2002; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007; Tisdell, 1998).

Social Cognitive Theory

Previous research documented the significant role of religious leaders, their direct influence in communities, and their engagement in the lives of those they lead (Franklin, 2007; Lewis & Trulear, 2008; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1993). An inquiry into human development from a social cognitive perspective considers social interactions to understand educational processes. This study concentrates on religious leaders’ educational experiences and the various connections, associations, and relationships within their communities. Understanding how adults learn through the lens of an andragogic assumption, self-concept (Knowles, 2004) and self-efficacy, a key factor in Bandura’s (1986, 1997) SCT, might determine how motivation and behavior provide instructional ideas that can advance social advocacy strategies.

Psychological theories inform our understanding and perspective on how learning takes place. This study explores religious leaders’ social and educational experiences

through two key SCT concepts, self-efficacy and reciprocal determinism. Furthermore, we examine how religious leaders learn from their social experiences, related to self-efficacy, a fundamental concept of Albert Bandura's (1986) approach to learning.

Bandura explored the suggestion that people direct and choose their behavior according to their expected outcomes. The consequence of a behavior, specifically for this study will be the social advocacy strategies of religious leaders in Black communities.

According to Bandura (1986), learning occurs through observation. Thus, the behavior of religious leaders may be influenced by their educational experiences. How these experiences occur in informal or formal environments is a focus of the study.

Originating as a social learning theory in the 1960s, SCT contributes to various learning processes across a range of disciplines (Jenkins & Raeside, 2018). This study assesses the behavior changes of religious leaders concerning their social advocacy practices in Black communities. According to SCT, other religious leaders, family members, and friends in their social environments may influence their behavior and decisions (Bandura, 2006). A significant criticism of SCT suggests its key concepts, environment, behavior, and personal factors are not related or interdependent (Eastman & Marzillier, 1984; Garvis & Pendergast, 2016; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Also, there is an argument that the theory is limited in predicting behavior based on intentions (Eastman & Marzillier, 1984; Garvis & Pendergast, 2016; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). As religious leaders expand their networks and interactions within communities, SCT may offer an understanding of the decisions and avenues for advancing social advocacy in the Black communities.

Reciprocal Determinism

This study explores the social advocacy strategies of religious leaders and their educational experiences from a basic premise of Bandura's (1986) SCT processes, reciprocal determinism. Fundamental human capabilities capture one of the focal points of SCT. Specifically, this study focuses on influences from the environment, individuals, and behaviors. Bandura's reciprocal determinism theory (1986) discussed human functioning and how these components influenced behavior and learning. This study examines the environmental influences of religious leaders, to explore any educational or social impacts the leaders bring into the communities they serve.

Previously, this study discussed the informal and formal educational experiences of religious leaders. Reciprocal determinism positions religious leaders as products and producers of their environments (Bandura, 1986). According to Bandura's (1986) theory, we can propose religious leaders' social advocacy strategies and educational experiences are intentional. This intentional behavior may provide understanding for religious leaders' self-motivated personal development processes and social advocacy strategies. This study explores Bandura's (1986) perspective on human behavior as it relates to religious leaders. This research aims to convey an understanding of their intentional behavior and its effect on learning, while discussing the interactive theory of reciprocal determinism and its related concept, self-efficacy.

Self-Efficacy

If religious leaders intentionally address social inequities and seek to increase their cognitive abilities, they may be able to share, advance, or create new spaces for understanding complex social issues in their positions of authority (Billingsley, 1992; Franklin, 2007; Lewis & Trulear, 2008). These conversations can initiate effective

strategies for combating the challenging social, economic, and cultural issues affecting citizens locally and globally (Manglitz, et al., 2014). This study highlights SCT's concept of self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy conceptualizes a person's belief in their abilities. In other words, as religious leaders are prepared to execute social advocacy strategies, they may experience feelings of incompetence or inadequacies (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 2008; Plante, 2012). Alternatively, some religious leaders believe the outcome of their implemented strategies will be successful (Leak & Reid, 2010; Oman, Park, Shaver, Hood & Plante, 2012). An inquiry into the perceptions of religious leaders' beliefs of their competencies could advance the understanding of social advocacy strategies in Black communities (Bandura, 1986; Oman et al., 2012; Pajares, 2008).

This chapter established the background of this study by presenting a review of the relevant literature. This study draws from the literature that examines the involvement of the Black church in Black communities and the educational experiences of religious leaders. Additionally, the literature of andragogy and SCT inform this study, with a focus on "self-concept" from the andragogic perspective and the "self-efficacy" component of SCT. This next chapter presents phenomenology as a research method, specifically hermeneutic phenomenology, to communicate an understanding of religious leaders' social advocacy strategies.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Presented in this chapter are the methodology, research questions, and design of the study. Participant selection, data collection, and analysis procedures were described, followed by a review of the study's trustworthiness. This chapter concluded with a discussion of the researcher's perspective.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study explored the educational experiences of religious leaders of Ferguson, MO (US) and surrounding areas in the St. Louis Metropolitan area before 2014 to understand their social advocacy strategies in Black communities. Specifically, the study explored if religious leaders' formal or informal educational experiences influence their social advocacy strategies. To best explore the educational experiences of religious leaders and social activism in Black communities, the following question guided the study: *How do religious leaders develop their social advocacy strategies? and, How do religious leaders utilize social advocacy strategies in the Black communities?* The following sub-questions were also explored:

1. What informal and formal learning activities do religious leaders participate in to develop their understanding of social advocacy?
2. What barriers do religious leaders encounter in their social advocacy?
3. What action do religious leaders take to promote individual and collaborative social advocacy?

The investigative process of qualitative research provided the tools for examining and interpreting data from the stance of inquiry into specific groups of people's roles and

social interactions (Creswell, 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 1999). Phenomenology as a qualitative research methodology enabled the researcher to examine participants' lived experiences interpreted from first-person narratives (Heidegger, 1996; Klenke, 2016). This research explored the educational experiences of religious leaders to understand their social advocacy strategies in Black communities and what meaning they make of their advocacy experiences.

Qualitative Research Design

Merriam (2009) described qualitative research as an interpretive process focused on meaning and understanding. Qualitative research was an appropriate approach for understanding and exploring the educational experiences of religious leaders and social activism in Black communities. Qualitative research provided tools for examining and interpreting data from the stance of inquiry into specific groups of people's roles and social interactions (Creswell, 2013). This investigative process provided an understanding of religious leaders' roles and engagement strategies for social advocacy and how educational attainment influenced their social advocacy strategies. Although the researcher was the primary instrument for data collection, the inductive approach was selected to develop the participants' perspective (Merriam, 2009). A qualitative design allowed for rich descriptions and vivid interpretations of religious leaders' educational experiences, interactions, and perceptions surrounding social advocacy in Black communities (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009).

Phenomenological Methodology

The selected approach for this qualitative inquiry was phenomenology.

Phenomenology is both a philosophical movement and a qualitative research method to understand better lived experiences and the essence of those experiences (Klenke, 2016; Lavery, 2003). For this study, phenomenology as a research method and specifically hermeneutic phenomenology was appropriate for communicating an understanding of religious leaders' social advocacy strategies. Understanding the meaning of a specific experience from the perspective of the one experiencing the phenomena describes the study of phenomenology (Klenke, 2016; van Manen, 1997). The intent of this study focused on the "structure of conscious experience as interpreted from the first-person point-of-view" (Klenke, 2016, p. 208).

The work of philosophers Husserl (1962), Heidegger (1962), and Gadamar (1976) represents the historical perspectives and influences of phenomenology (Gill, 2014). Phenomenological studies describe lived experiences through a descriptive or interpretive approach (Klenke, 2016; van Manen, 1997). Acknowledged as the father of phenomenology (Koch, 1995; Polkinghorne, 1983), Husserl's (1962) descriptive approach asserts that to discover the truth of an experience, a researcher's beliefs and judgments must be removed. Husserl (1962) described this removing process as reduction or bracketing. After reviewing the various bracketing processes for possible use with this study (Ashworth, 2003; Giorgi, 2009; Polkinghorne, 1983), the pivotal decision to not choose Husserl's descriptive phenomenology occurred. Although Husserl's perspective for grasping structures of consciousness as a means for revealing the purest meanings of a lived experience, several authors have recognized that complete bracketing is impossible and unnecessary (Colaizzi, 1973; Finlay, 2009; Gadamer, 1975).

Although the descriptive approach would be appropriate for this research, Husserl's (1962) description of lived experiences as subjective experiences happening before reflecting on the experience or before we understand what we are experiencing disallowed inquiry into the educational experience of religious leaders as it pertains to social advocacy for this study. Husserl's (1962) notion of intentionality does support the premise of this study. According to Husserl (1962), intentionality implies that conscious awareness, how we connect to our world meaningfully, is where reality begins. However, this study reconstructed participants' life history for context, explored the details of specific lived experiences, gathered meanings, and reflected upon the elements that constructed the phenomena under study (Seidman, 2003). While Husserl's (1962) view of subjective experience and intentionality as a satisfactory framework for a phenomenological inquiry was acknowledged, researchers (Colaizzi, 1973; Hertz, 1997; Polkinghorne, 1983) negate the need or the possibility of reduction of experiences. Moreover, discussing my role as a researcher supported the premise set forth by Heidegger's (1962) belief that researchers can't separate prior understandings and experiences (Kafle, 2013). Naming assumptions and influences in the hermeneutical approach involve a process of reflection and interpretation that is indispensable and entrenched in the research process (Colaizzi, 1973; Hertz, 1997; Polkinghorne, 1983).

Heidegger's (1962) interpretive approach proposes that individuals construct meaning based on backgrounds and experiences. His perspective supported this study's inquiry for understanding religious leaders' educational experiences and social advocacy strategies in Black communities. Heidegger (1962) declares much of what we experience in the world is instinctive, particularly what we are doing and being. Furthermore,

meaningful life experiences have social significance connected to how we participate in the social circles in the world around us (Gadamar, 1975). This study employed an interpretive phenomenological approach to explore the culture, history, practice, and language of religious leaders in Black communities (Gadamar, 1975; Heidegger, 1962; Lavery, 2003). Hermeneutical phenomenology offered an effective way to illustrate how religious leaders' awareness and response to community issues were constructed from their previous lived experiences, thus supporting Heidegger's (1962) view that understanding is who we are, not what we know (Polkinghorne, 1983; van Manen, 2014).

It is Gadamer's (1976) continued work of Heidegger that further reinforced the selection of the hermeneutical phenomenological approach for this study. Gadamer's (1962) views on prejudgments and universality affirmed the decision to implement his concepts of reflection and interpretation for this study. Our prejudgments should be acknowledged and noted, yet meaning and linguistics are connected to understanding and awareness (Husserl, 1962). Therefore, hermeneutic phenomenology advanced the understanding of religious leaders' social advocacy strategies in Black communities, according to Gadamer's (1966) view on understanding and the impact of past experiences. Universality supports the position of reflection and interpretation proposed for this study by acknowledging the connection and interdependence between the researcher and participants (Colaizzi, 1973; Finlay, 2009; Polkinghorne, 1983). According to Gadamer (1976), understanding is an individual experience and a prolific expression from the discourse and interaction between the researcher and participants. Language, participant history, and interpretive conditions created a foundation for

exploring and understanding the social advocacy strategies of religious leaders in this study (Gadamer, 1996). After careful consideration of the two schools of thought, the hermeneutical phenomenological approach best accommodated the methodology design and analysis for the context of this study.

Participants

The participants and location for this study were selected based on the nationally publicized Ferguson Unrest, after the death of Michael Brown Jr. Religious leaders, who are the primary decision makers of their religious organizations, in Ferguson, MO (US) and surrounding areas in the St. Louis Metropolitan area was the population selected for this study. According to the United States Census Bureau (2010), the city of Ferguson is 6.2 square miles with a population of 21, 203. The official website for Ferguson, MO, lists 21 churches within its Community Resource Directory. Also, of interest to this study were five additional churches located in the surrounding area of Ferguson and reported by several media sources as community spaces for activism during the Ferguson Unrest

Purposive sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to recruit participants for this study. The strength and goal of the sampling procedure was the selection of participants that provided relevant information to the phenomenon of the study (Creswell, 1994; Patton, 2002). Moreover, purposive sampling provided significant first-person narratives and secondary information (Merriam, 2013). Although there are different strategies used in qualitative research, this study used a criterion sampling strategy (Gall, Borg & Joyce, 2007; Patton, 2002). The following criteria for participants were used:

- 1) Participants were the primary decision makers for their church located in the Ferguson community and surrounding area for at least two years

prior to August 2014.

2) Individuals participated in social activism during the Ferguson

Unrest or those who might have withdrawn from participating.

The religious leaders were identified from the Ferguson, MO, government website and online newspapers (i.e., stlouisamerican.com, STLtoday.com, nytimes.com, newslab.org) that cited churches involved in activism during the Ferguson Unrest. Once the churches were identified, the religious leaders were contacted. Initially, the researcher sent emails requesting a meeting to discuss the research. If there were no responses to the emails after three days, the researcher initiated a telephone call each day for three days. If the researcher could not reach the religious leader by email or phone, an invitation requesting a response within seven days was mailed to churches.

Participants received an Invitation Packet containing, Participant Invitation Letter (see Appendix A), Informed Consent Form (see Appendix B), and Demographic Information Form (see Appendix C). I acknowledged a strong sense of confidence and rapport with many of the prospective religious leaders. As a leader and congregant for over 30 years in the St. Louis Metropolitan area, gaining access and acquiring the trust of the Ferguson religious leaders might have been an advantage (Creswell, 2012). Both Creswell (2012) and Merriam (2009) suggest using a Pre-Interview Questionnaire (PIQ) (Appendix D) to identify participants to be invited for interviews. The PIQ was used to identify twelve qualified participants representing diversity in age, gender, ethnicity, and religious affiliation. Appendix F provides brief demographics of the participants. This study's small number of participants negated a generalization of the findings (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009).

Data Collection Method

Data collection for this study was completed using in-depth, one-on-one Zoom conference video interviews. More details about how they were used follow.

In-depth interviewing.

In-depth, phenomenological interviewing created a platform to develop the narratives of the religious leaders, their educational experiences, and social activism in Black communities. Seidman's (1998) approach to phenomenological interviewing suggests that "preparation, planning, and structure are crucial" to the data gathering process (p. 39). Seidman (2006) describes a three-phase, in-depth phenomenology interview approach as a tactic to increase a study's credibility and trustworthiness. The three-phases of inquiry questions were designed to gain perspectives on the participants' life-history, and reconstructed experiences using open-ended questions (Seidman, 2013).

An Interview Guide (see Appendix E) was designed and structured to create a friendly conversation (Seidman, 2013). Following Seidman's (1998) phenomenological interviewing approach, this study used open-ended questions to guide the discourse. The three-phase interviews were 60 to 90 minutes each and established a focal point for participants' life history, present lived experiences, and a reflection on the meaning of their experiences (Seidman, 2006).

In Phase I - Life History, the initial focus of the interview centered on the participants' life history (Seidman, 1998). Participants were asked to reconstruct their life experiences until the time they became religious leaders. For Phase II - Detail of Experiences, the focus was on the participants' social advocacy experiences in Black

communities, and specifically asked them to discuss and describe their strategies before the Ferguson Unrest. In the last phase, Phase III - Reflection on the Meaning, participants were asked to reflect on the meanings of their educational and social advocacy experiences. In addition, the participants were asked to share any past or current stories, thoughts, or reactions about Ferguson, MO (US) and the future of the church and Black communities.

Data Analysis Methods

To obtain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, a structured data analysis approach was employed. The procedures followed Creswell's (2007, 2012) six steps for qualitative data analysis and interpretation. Creswell's (2007) steps simplify Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method:

- (1) researcher describes her/his experience with the phenomenon
- (2) significant statements are listed
- (3) significant statements are then grouped into themes or "meaning units"
- (4) textual descriptions (what they experienced) including verbatim statements are written
- (5) structural descriptions (how the experience happened) are written
- (6) textual and structural statements are composed

First, the data was organized and prepared for transcription. Zoom audio recordings included a transcript that was edited by the researcher. Each transcript was assigned a code consisting of letters and numbers. The computer software, ATLAS.ti was used for storage and data analysis. Following Creswell's (2007) method and concluding

with the results from ATLAS.ti, significant statements were identified and listed. Then, the significant statements were examined and final codes and themes were created. Next, the textual and structural descriptions, including verbatim statements were organized. Lastly, a written composition of the essence for the themes was developed.

This process illuminated an understanding of religious leaders' educational experiences and social advocacy practices in Black communities.

Trustworthiness

For this study, the following concepts described by Klenke (2016) as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were employed to establish trustworthiness, therefore ensuring the study's quality and rigor (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The first strategy was to disclose my participation as a leader and member of the faith community for over 30 years in St. Louis, Missouri, Metropolitan area. According to Klenke (2016), prolonged engagement with participants develops credibility. The notion of prolonged engagement was established by employing Seidman's (1999) three-phase interviewing process. Additionally, transferability was created as trusting relationships were established with participants, and increased their awareness and perspective that the data is believable and authentic of their experiences (Klenke, 2016; Leech, Onwuegbuzie & O'Conner, 2011; Seidman, 2013).

Member checks, rich and thick descriptions, along with external audits supported the reliability and validity of the data (Creswell, 2012). I established a peer review process that included feedback from my advisor, committee members, and colleagues. During the data collection and analysis process, I conferred with my advisor frequently.

I engaged with two colleagues who were available for me to consult with at various times during my study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1999), dependability involves developing a systematic process to strengthen qualitative research. Maintaining these strategies was pertinent to achieving the trustworthiness of the data (Klenke, 2016).

Researcher's Perspective

According to Creswell (2012), the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, therefore their background and experiences are relevant and could influence data interpretation and results. Therefore, the process of bracketing one's perspective and bias allowed the illustration of the described phenomenon to emerge forward. Bracketing supported the validity "appropriateness" of the data collection and analysis processes (Moustakas, 1994). My role was to allow participants' perspectives to emerge by applying deliberate and consistent bracketing throughout the data collection and analysis process. Although several authors have recognized that complete bracketing is impossible and unnecessary (Colaizzi, 1973; Finlay, 2009; Gadamer, 1975), bracketing my biases, experiences, understandings, and observations placed my preexisting beliefs in the forefront with an intentional focus on amplification of participants' descriptions (Gadamar, 1975; Husserl, 1962; van Manen, 2014). The following epoche presented a disclosure of my perspective and experiences to avoid biases in the analysis and interpretation of the research.

In 2014, I was employed at the Missouri History Museum Exhibition and Research Center as a research assistant. My contribution to the research for the exhibit, #1 in Civil Rights: The African American Freedom Struggle in St. Louis remains as one of my most memorable and valuable professional experiences. That August, a series of

protests initiated by Michael Brown's death, Jr. in Ferguson, Missouri, became the inspiration for my research topic. The racial tension was very high in the St. Louis Metropolitan area and the tension seemed to spread like wildfire nationally and globally. I decided to end an association with a predominately White church. I also ended an evening teaching assignment with a predominate White higher education institution. The racial tension created confusion and fear for me. I lived near an area where protests occurred nightly. At that time, I thought it would be best not to travel at night to my teaching assignment.

Moreover, I did not participate in the uprisings due to what I considered “my priority.” I believed negative consequences could occur if I chose to participate in the protest. I thought it was best to focus my attention on completing my university program. My worldview influenced this research topic as a theologically trained and spiritually experienced woman. I acknowledge that my educational attainment and spiritual development have grounded my views on leadership styles and skills.

I am a native of the metropolitan area of study with degrees in theology and adult education. As an advocate for adult education, teaching in religious organizations and various community settings for over thirty years, my passion is to empower others to achieve greater personal and professional success. I have been a leader in various religious organizations and denominations that fostered multiple social and professional networking opportunities, in addition to lifelong relationships. My volunteer and teaching experience in religious and non-profit organizations spans over 30 years. Therefore, as the human instrument of this phenomenological study, it was intentional and essential to let the data speak without any interpretation from my experiences or perspective.

Achieving academic success after the age of forty, I understand the importance of creating safe and engaging learning environments. Intentionally, I created virtual conversational experiences that encouraged participants' self-expression and knowledge exchange as they candidly shared their experiences. This was possible by actively listening devoid of preconceptions, bias from my personal experiences, my prior knowledge concerning religious leadership, or Black communities. Moreover, this was not a challenge because I considered the participants to be "elders and senior leaders" worthy of respect and an unbiased listening ear. My various experiences within different spaces as a leader, employee, and volunteer are valuable resources. Yet, I understood the significance of continuous personal reflection and the importance of positioning myself to understand and learn from the data. This dominant strategy of bracketing my experiences and perspective allowed me to focus on the participants' lived experiences. As a community educator with religious knowledge and spiritual experience, my role was to support and encourage participant voices and report their story from their perspective (Seidman, 2013).

CHAPTER 4: REVIEW OF THE FINDINGS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the educational experiences of religious leaders to understand their social advocacy strategies in Black communities and what meaning they make of their experiences. This chapter unveils the data collected and presents the findings of the qualitative analysis process to answer two research questions and three sub-research questions: *How do religious leaders develop social advocacy strategies? and, How do they use those strategies in Black communities? What informal and formal learning activities do religious leaders participate in to develop their understanding of social advocacy? What barriers do religious leaders encounter in their social advocacy? and, What actions do religious leaders take to promote individual and collective social advocacy?*

Research Questions and Related Themes

This section includes an overview of the participant responses based on the research questions. The interview questions directly correlate with the research questions to better understand the phenomenon under study. The data collection tables display relevant shared lived experiences and expressions from religious leaders. These sections highlight the religious leaders unique lived experiences, while illustrating their common experiences. The research revealed the following themes (a) Leadership Development, (b) Community Engagement, (c) Racial Experiences, and (d) Progressing Forward (see Table 4.1). Categories were created based upon Seidman's (2013) three-phases of inquiry process. The three structured categories designed to gain perspective on participants' experiences were (i) Life History, (ii) Detail of Experience, (iii) Reflection of Meaning.

Phase one, Life History, aligned with the first theme Leadership Development. There were four interview questions associated with this phase (see Appendix E). Phase two, Detail of Experience, confirmed the themes Community Engagement and Racial Experiences and consisted of six interview questions (see Appendix E). The final phase, Refection of Meaning, established the theme Progressing Forward and was underpinned by three interview questions (see Appendix E). Participants were assigned ID numbers (see Appendix F), comprised of letters and numbers, to ensure confidentiality and were omitted from the tables to protect their identity (Saunders, Kitzinger, & Kitzinger, 2015).

Table 4.1

Theme Descriptions and Categories

Theme	Description	Phase
Theme I: Leadership Development	Leadership development for religious leaders involves training, education, engagement, and influences from others.	Life History
Theme II: Community Engagement	Religious leaders' community engagement includes congregational support and partnerships.	Detail of Experience
Theme III: Racial Experiences	Religious leaders experience resistance to their vision.	Detail of Experience
Theme IV: Progressing Forward	Religious leaders embrace an undaunted commitment to the advancement of communities and churches.	Refection of Meaning

Research Question 1: How do religious leaders develop social advocacy strategies?

Themes Related to Religious Leaders Development of Social Advocacy Strategies:

Leadership Development Theme

In response to research question 1, the theme Leadership Development emerged (see Table 4.2). Five subthemes supported the theme: Effective Leadership Requires Training, Education is Important for Leadership Success, More than Education, Learning from Leaders, and Learning by Observing. Beginning with Phase I - Life History, participants were asked about their family and hometown. All participants spoke positively about their upbringing. Nine of the 12 participants were natives of St. Louis, Missouri. The participants born in other states, also expressed an affirmative connection and identity regarding their hometown. For example, RL4 said he was a "son of the South, one of five children" and "grew up in the midst of racial tension." RL6 also reported being a southern boy. And, while he was from the south, RL10 stated, "The setting is ranch, oil...and I was not a cowboy."

The participants shared biographical information of their life experiences, while discussing their hometown and family. For example, RL12 indicated he knew at age 16, while watching television, that he would attend a particular university. He stated, "I just felt like that's where I was supposed to be." RL2, obtained an education degree and "wanted to become a reading specialist." The participant continues, "You have to have a masters...in order to be ordained, I would have had to have a master's degree." RL9, an experienced leader in ministry when he went to school commented, "My upbringing in the church, afforded me the opportunity to quickly apply the lessons that I learned, or that I was learning." Another participant, RL6 majored in electronics

while in college. He stated, “I did not really know my destiny, my purpose...and all of a sudden my focused changed to ministry.”

Table 4.2

Leadership Development Theme

Subtheme	Illustrative Quotes
i. Effective Leadership Requires Training	"If you want to be an effective leader, you need some training"; "I believe that there should be some level of training."
ii. Education is Important for Leadership Success	"We love your teaching, preaching, would you be willing to go back to school?"; "I think Bible College is very important."
iii. More than Education	"Degree or not, I don't know that that's a necessity...I think knowledge of the Bible and relationship with God is absolutely important."; "I think learning comes in many ways, whether you need a certificate or not."
iv. Learning from Leaders	"People who learned whether formally or informally, they look for people who they can learn from."; "I learned from him that when you learn how to share the gospel, then you're willing to share it."
v. Learning by Observing	"He said y'all pray just like I pray...they set that example for us."; "So I've learned book learning, and I've learned by watching others."

Informal and Formal Learning Activities

Participants were asked about their involvement in religious programs or activities, in addition to regular Sunday school, where they gained knowledge or facilitated learning. The development of this interview question aligns with the research sub-question, “What informal and formal learning activities do religious leaders participate in to develop their understanding of social advocacy?” The participants were involved with teaching and learning in both formal and informal activities.

“I have been on the conference team...I taught mission studies, probably eight years or more...I taught mission study on the Bible and human sexuality.”
(RL2)

“Trying to learn, I went to this school...I took this class, I went to seminary...I went to this conference...I learned so much when I went to the conventions.”
(RL7)

“I went to about three different classes...not online...correspondence...various conventions. At one time, I was going to a lot of conventions...all of them.”
(RL11)

Career Paths

Phase I - Life History detailed participants' careers before or during their religious leadership appointments. They spoke of careers in education, public service, military, management, and entrepreneurship, before or during their religious leadership appointments. When asked to share their thoughts regarding acquired certificates or degrees from correspondence programs, Bible college or seminary, they were more than willing to elaborate. For example, RL8 explained, “The acquired degrees I believe, are a good start.” RL1 stated that he believes “very strongly for any group to be successful... their road to success is education. Whatever you do in life, master that trade, that profession, is my understanding. So, in ministry, we need more education.” RL5 also commented on “education being a good thing.” He explained, “There are others who may acquire some education, especially like Biblical Studies, and they may not be officially serving in that capacity. Some just want to have that knowledge, so education can serve multiple purposes. But all in all, I'm for it.”

Participants in this study expressed commitment and support for informal and formal education. Phase I - Life History interview questions defined the research theme Leadership Development, yet participants' specific expressions concerning training, the importance of education and more, along with learning from others, and by observing others supported the development of this theme.

Effective Leadership Requires Training

Participants stated that effective leadership requires training, "I believe that there should be some level of training...connect with some type of formal training...training conferences" (RL12). The required training was defined as participation and experience in conferences, small groups, Bible studies, national conventions, seminars, and revivals. Education for participants provided a foundation for leadership responsibilities. Participant RL8 stated, "In ministry, we need more education." Educational training was a consensus from participants. For example, RL7 believes, "If you're called into the ministry, discipline yourself...there are a number of Bible schools that you can get involved with." Participants discussed various training experiences within their churches. RL4 shared, "We've had him and his team come in and train people." All participants discussed the attainment of formal degrees as a critical function of leadership development. For example, when discussing other religious leaders, RL1 indicated that the ones he knows "have multiple degrees."

Education is Important for Leadership Success

Participants considered education to be a measure for success and elaborated on formal and informal training effectiveness. Many agreed with RL6 who stated, "Education is very important...you want to be able to reach every people, every person."

Furthermore, participants described education in terms of purpose and accomplishments. For example, RL9 states, "I do believe that the formal is important...people with degrees might get in the door quicker in certain venues, but you still have to apply and achieve to be successful." Overall, the findings revealed a consensus among participants' beliefs regarding education and success. For RL1, "Success is birthed out of education, education, education." Participants identified various resources and support for formal education and training, while noting their importance for successful leadership. Yet, their conversations included another perspective of leadership development, reiterating leadership development includes more than education.

More than Education

Four of the participants made direct references concerning ordination within their denomination. Ordination is a dedication ceremony to commission ministers (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/ordination>) and requires formal education. Yet, some of the participants believed that although education is important, there are other factors to consider beyond education. RL12 mentioned, "There is no requirement for the training." Interestingly, RL1 added, "I think being able to interact with people is more important than whether I have a degree" and RL12 made a similar comment, "I have to tell myself, that my experience was my experience alone...and that education comes in different ways." RL9 concurred when he stated, "Influence comes in many ways, you don't have to have a degree to have talent." RL1 and RL10 discussed additional avenues for leadership growth and development. RL1 stated, "It's in a small group where people can learn more."

On the other hand, RL10 commented, "I learned to preach...on my own...I continued to be sort of self-disciplined in the sense that I tried to master certain areas." Participants expressed concern and criticism of their associates. For example, RL4 commented, "they are failing in their discipleship responsibilities to educate and equip...that's the job of the pastor...what is their vision for educating their people?" The broad range of responses from participants expressing the necessity for training, the importance of education, and other means of development generated the subthemes, learning from leaders and learning from others.

Learning from Leaders

Participants discussed their education and denominational training, recounting specific experiences of learning from other religious leaders. RL12 stated, "I learned how to minister from the church...how to expound on gifts in me from the church." Participants also expounded on their collaborations. For example, RL1 commented, "We're learning with somebody, from somebody's traditions, somebody's personal experience." The participant responses indicated the importance of personal engagement. Summarized by RL3, "I learned simply from being with people, being with the people who believe the same as I believe, reasserted and reinforced those beliefs in me." Overall, participants attributed their close association with others as significant. "I mean, you can learn from others, and that's what we do...I was trying to learn from these people" (RL7). Their responses illuminated their diverse educational experiences of learning with others, including what they learned from simply observing others.

Learning by Observing

The participants in this study shared various experiences of their educational development, including learning by observing others. In particular, RL3 expressed, “I really did see a lot of what they were doing, it attracted me.” When participants recalled observational experiences, RL11 shared, “We end up mimicking them.” Others said, “I would watch these preachers, I would watch these pastors trying to learn something and better lead people” (RL7); “I saw a lot of people who were very committed to the church, so that sort of got me thinking, that's something I would enjoy being involved with” (RL3). The findings demonstrate the influence of others on religious leaders’ education, training, and commitment to lead. The participant responses revealed an overall commitment to educational training and leadership development. RL8’s statement, “You have to be willing to learn from your experiences and from the experiences of your ancestors and learn from the experience of your today,” summarizes religious leaders’ relational influences and other social connections during their leadership journeys.

Research Question 2: How do they use those strategies in Black communities?

Themes Related to Community Engagement, Racial Experiences and Progressing

Forward

Community Engagement Theme

Community Engagement, Theme II, (see Table 4.3) emerged in response to research question two. In addition, Table 4.4 presents coded data segments used to define the themes. The number of code occurrences represents the frequencies of responses to the code, the number of documents representing the interview transcribed documents

included is also illustrative quotes. In Phase II - Details of Experience, participants were asked, “Do you encourage your congregation to work for social justice?” This question was followed by, “How does your church determine the types of community outreach programs to sponsor?” One participant, RL2 stated, “They didn't do a whole lot” in response to the inquiry regarding encouraging participation with social advocacy. The other religious leaders unanimously responded, “yes” and several participants, RL3, RL12, and RL9 elaborated, “We encourage involvement in the city politics”; “We talked about it, we stress the importance; “There's just so many ways, and it is pervasive within what we think and what we teach,” respectively. As participants expounded on their experiences concerning community engagement, their responses included answers to the research sub-question, “What barriers do religious leaders encounter in their social advocacy?” Moreover, their shared experiences illuminated racial challenges and strategies for progressing forward in Black communities and are summarized in the forthcoming subthemes Community Centered, Church Teams, and Church Partners.

Table 4.3

Community Engagement Theme

Subtheme	Illustrative Quotes
i. Community Centered	"We're trying to create a community neighborhood"; "Giving back to our community where your people in church come from."
ii. Church Teams	"The formal outreach is done here by the staff of the church"; "We have an outreach ministry with a food pantry church."
iii. Church Partners	"Making sure we connect with other agencies that can offer the assistance when we can't"; "My biggest thing is always trying to get people to understand that there are resources in the community."

Community Centered

Religious leaders talked about the connection to communities as their central focus. "I'm trying to move us to being community centered," said RL2. Their responses reflected intentionality and purpose. "If we not structured about our own community, we're not structured" (RL1). All the participants expressed ambitious large-scale visions for programs and services. For example, "It's about empowering people, not just in the name of Christ, but in life period... helping in the community...we have to keep doing what we've been doing" (RL12). Participants attributed the success of their services and visions to community collaborations and partnerships.

Church Teams

Participants revealed their commitments and passions for communities included support from their congregations. For instance, RL9 stated, "you can partner with others, but that's still the call of the church to do the work." Furthermore, another participant discussed the community engagement of their congregants, expounding on their willingness and commitment to communities, "We have a leadership team...we do a lot with the kids from this community area" (RL2). Participants shared their teams' efforts towards community engagement, social justice, and other community outreach activities. RL3 expressed, "They reach out to the disenfranchised, the poor... help with food...help with both kinds of daily needs that people experience." The collaborative success of the participants and their church teams included partnerships.

Table 4.4*Coded Segments Used to Defined Theme 2 (Community Engagement)*

Code	# of Code Occurrences	# of Documents	Illustrative Quotes
Community Experiences	72	12	"Focus point had to be socially connected with the community"; "Whenever we have outdoor events, it's always about the neighborhood"; "I was determined...as a congregation, we were going to become community involved."
Church Activism	63	12	"Our biggest part of the vision is always connecting and partnering"; "We partner with the American Heart Association...the American Red Cross"; Partnership with Christian hospital."
Social Justice	38	12	"I tried to bring up social justice issues...make us aware...to make us sensitive"; "I wanted to be...where I am now...one of the main reasons why, because of their emphasis on social justice"; "Social justice as a larger umbrella, which has, you know, expressed itself through civil rights for African Americans, for women, for LGBTQ community."
Community Outreach Activities	37	12	"They do a lot of visiting with the elderly, which includes both African American and White"; "We have a committee system and one of our committees is sort of an outreach mission."

Church Partners

Participants revealed by name several successful partnerships, The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, American Heart Association, American Red Cross, Christian Hospital, Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis, and Habitat for Humanity, which have extended their successful social advocacy strategies. Participants identified these and other unnamed partnerships to describe their activism and community engagements. For instance, RL4 reported, "We adopted two schools."

In contrast to off-site outreach activities, RL10 revealed, our church is “an outreach site...like a summer day camp.” Participants mentioned specific personal activities regarding their connection with individuals and organizations. Notably, RL8 stated, “I’ve got a list of people that I’m trying to help get employed, and so I meet with business owners to do that.” Participants’ responses to the question of how they use social advocacy strategies in Black communities also revealed barriers to those strategies.

Racial Experiences Theme

Racial Experiences, Theme III (see Table 4.5), represents a significant finding in understanding the barriers to social advocacy for religious leaders. Table 4.6 displays code occurrences, number of documents, and illustrative quotes. Participants unexpectedly elaborated on racial impediments, which underpinned the research sub-question, “What barriers do religious leaders encounter in their social advocacy?” before they were asked the question. Participants expounded on their various experiences of racism. Many participants recounted experiences of racism at every stage of their educational development and while leading and supporting social advocacy in communities.

Racial Realities

Participants discussed their opinions and concerns about the reality of racism in the context of their leadership experiences. "There was a double system...the harsh reality of this country", expressed RL1. Another participant, RL10, articulated, "Not that they're all overtly racist." This remark elaborated on a description of the actions of others, not as a defense of their action. Participant RL2 revealed their unique reality. "I can tell

Table 4.5*Racial Experiences Theme*

Subtheme	Illustrative Quotes
i. Racial Realities	"I found out later...some African Americans who came to visit did not come back"; "I didn't have to tell my children, they couldn't drive down X, Y or Z street."
ii. Advancing Racial Equity	"I'm talking about color, race and mixed marriages in my pulpit"; "When we turn from this anger...this prejudice, this sin of pride of who I am."
iii. Leveling Racial Barriers	"We all want the same thing...we want peace...we want stability in our neighborhoods"; "He's doing everything he can to integrate that church."

you, there was racial profiling going...I didn't have to tell my children they couldn't go to the local department store after seven o'clock on Tuesdays, because they would be followed around." Most of the participants shared stories of racial encounters during their childhood, their employment spaces, and while leading in communities. RL8 expressed, "I'm thinking...the struggles and challenges encountered were always about racial issues." The responses from participants revealed their commitment to advancing and leveling racial barriers, despite their past and current challenges.

Advancing Racial Equity

As racial barriers linked to participants' social advocacy strategies emerged, their commitment to advancing equity also surfaced. Participants were united and dedicated to the cause of racial equity. Overall, as stated by RL9, "The Church must be spokespersons for justice and speak against racial discrimination." For example, one participant spoke candidly concerning uncomfortable opposition to their efforts, "Why do you want to get mixed up in that mess" (RL3). Another discussed their negative experiences as a source of encouragement, "If you have a church body that's fired up about seeing souls the same,

they aren't going to see color just like Jesus doesn't" (RL8). The participants in the study related specific experiences of family members and others who taught and influenced them towards racial equity. For example, RL4 said, "Dad would never let us use the N word, and he encouraged us to work to unite our community."

Table 4.6

Coded Segments Used to Defined Theme 3 (Racial Experiences)

Code	# of Code Occurrences	# of Documents	Illustrative Quotes
Racism Experiences	75	12	"In my life, I have been subject to all types of attacks by white people"; "I'm the only black face in the crowd...it's not gonna go well"; "We don't want all the black kids mixing with our kids."
Barrier	12	12	"There are things that have been brewing for a long time, and they are still there"; "We can begin to break down some of these barriers, we can break down some of the fear."
Integration	11	11	"We even played football on Sunday afternoons Black and Whites"; "Doing a lot together...it just bonded us greater together"; "Blacks and Whites... community coming together coming."

Leveling Racial Barriers

Participants expressed hopeful strategies for dismantling racial barriers within their communities. Several participants recalled experiences with individuals that are dedicated to racial justice. For instance, RL5 talked about a minister he admired, "He did a lot to break down some of the racial barriers that were...within the churches, and just all sorts of things." Most participants considered leveling racial barriers as a vital component towards many community solutions. RL10 commented, "But that's the real ministry, when you really have to do the hard things." Participants shared numerous accounts of intergenerational and integrated efforts. For example, "We do the same thing, integrate together from time to time...there's no problem of interaction between the churches here" (RL2). In essence, participants shared extensive details of their social

advocacy strategies in Black communities, which included various community partnerships and racial barriers. Their reflections were positive and forthright, offering solutions for existing problems and foresight about future challenges.

Progressing Forward Theme

Progressing Forward, Theme IV, (see Table 4.7) emerged in response to one of the three sub-questions. In Phase III – Reflection on Meaning, participants were asked, “What actions do religious leaders take to promote individual and collective social advocacy? Table 4.8 presents coded segments and frequencies used to define the theme. One major code emerged as participants discussed preparing the next generation to lead, their motivation to move forward as leaders, and community solutions for the future. Participant responses revered their visions, responsibilities, and strategies for their churches and communities now and going forward.

Preparing the Next Generations

Participants shared objectives for preparing the next generations to lead Black communities. Moreover, RL9 stated, "It's not my generation, it's a generation to come...position them to take this movement forward." Participants regarded the younger generation as a vital factor for community progression and success. Many of the participants discussed their commitment to "help the younger ones to advance" (RL1). Participants embraced the younger generations as their responsibility. A statement from RL8 summarizes their responses, “We have to mentor people...new Christians...stabilize them...teach them...to survive...to be fruitful”, asserting the validity of developing and supporting younger generations as an eminent factor for succession.

Table 4.7*Progressing Forward Theme*

Subtheme	Illustrative Quote
i. Preparing the Next Generations	"The younger generation... have to be interactive, you have to be engaging, to even get their attention"; "What the generation today want to see is action."
ii. Motivated to Move Forward	"As leaders, we should advocate for at the very least civic duty"; "Pastors should...because we carry the influence...we carry the weight of our congregation."
iii. Community Solutions	"Putting resources in the community": "Control your neighborhoods."

Motivated to Move Forward

Participants reflected on their leadership experiences as key factors for their intrinsic motivation to move forward. Although participants spoke of preparing the next generations, their vision and strategies spoke directly to inclusivity and commitment. For example, "We're trying to bring...those of different backgrounds and races together" (RL3). Participants continued to reiterate their dedication and hope for others

Table 4.8*Coded Segments Used to Defined Theme 4 (Progressing Forward)*

Code	# of Code Occurrences	# of Documents	Exemplary Quotes
Black Church Future	87	12	"We have to prepare the generations that are coming to succeed and position them to achieve far beyond where we are"; "You can not be motivated to move forward, unless you believe you have value"; "We need resources we need ownership."

to follow their example. RL7 expressed confidently, “There’s always those...like me, that’s going to stand up and speak out.” Participants articulated with conviction the purpose of the church and the work necessary in Black communities. RL5 summarized a consensus of their expressed hope, “As we go forward, I hope that we...all sides, begin to do a better job of viewing...the church as body” (RL5).

Community Solutions

Participants provided optimistic examples of community solutions for the future of the church and Black communities. Many participants expressed this concern in relation to community empowerment, "The church has to get back to basics" (RL6). Participants understood community participation as an essential driving force towards change. As stated clearly by RL12, "Let's connect with people." Their responses provided a panoramic view of the future. Conceptualized by RL10 comment, "The future survival of this congregation, with them being a part of it, is to integrate with the community...what I do see happening eventually is sort of a changing of the guard." The participants' unanimous vision communicates an inclusive and participatory trajectory as a prominent solution for the future of Black communities and churches.

Summary

Chapter 4 included a summary of the findings from semi-structured Zoom video interviews with 12 pastors leading churches in Black communities within Ferguson, MO, and surrounding populaces of the St. Louis Metropolitan area. Data analysis involved presenting tables constructed from significant statements lists, which revealed four major themes and 14 sub-themes, describing the religious leaders’ educational experiences and their social advocacy practices in Black communities. This study explored the

experiences of religious leaders using Seidman's (2003) three-phase interview process.

The four themes identified from the analysis were, Leadership Development, Community Engagement, Racial Experiences, and Progressing Forward. Quotations from participants were presented in support of themes and sub-themes. Chapter 5 will address interpretations of the findings, implications, and conclude with recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, and RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of religious leaders. The study yielded 12 participants from Ferguson, MO, and surrounding areas in the St. Louis Metropolitan area. They participated in recorded one-on-one Zoom video conferencing interviews that were recorded for accuracy of data transcription. This study explored religious leaders lived experiences using a three-phase interview process. The phases of inquiry were Life History, Details of the Experience, and Reflection of Meaning.

Participants received an ID number ranging from RL01 to RL12 to maintain confidentiality. All participants actively lead congregations and come from various denominational backgrounds, educational and professional experiences. Participants shared information outside the scope of this study and will be listed under recommendations for future research. As such, this chapter presents an interpretation of the findings discussed in Chapter 4, highlights the implications of the study, and presents recommendations for further study.

Discussion and Interpretation of the Findings

Four themes emerged from the study: Leadership Development, Community Engagement, Racial Experiences, and Progressing Forward. Leadership development for religious leaders involves training and education, yet engagement and influences from others add to their development. Religious leaders' social advocacy strategies incorporate partnerships and commitments. Social advocacy refers to the interactive role of religious leaders and their churches as a resource in Black communities. Their commitments include support from within and outside of their congregations. Religious leaders can

experience resistance to their vision for social advocacy in Black communities, however, they have an undaunted commitment to the advancement of communities and leadership. Progressing forward would necessitate the intentional efforts of religious leaders, communities and churches. These endeavors include positioning the next generation to lead and enact viable community solutions. This challenge includes a noted decline in involvement and participation with organized religion among Millennials and Gen Z (Bart, 2018). The perspectives of these generations born after 1999 differ concerning the significance of the church and its leadership (Moss, 2020). Yet, religious leaders expressed commitment and responsibility to embrace the next generation of leadership.

Theme 1

Leadership development for religious leaders involves training, education, engagement, and influences from others. The study findings suggest that as religious leaders progress through different learning stages, informal or formal, their engagements express a commitment to communities (Barnes, 2005; Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991; Gates, 2021). The religious leaders spoke of their educational attainment as a natural progression for religious leadership. Previous research supports examples of successful professions, career paths, and the entrepreneurial endeavors of individuals who attained education (Finke & Dougherty, 2002; Landry, 2018; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1993). The participants' occupational experiences, such as work in public service, the military, and management positions, suggest that they too were searching for a better quality of life as they prepared to provide vital community services.

Religious leaders' responses also support andragogy's core assumption that suggests learners can be self-directed when motivated to learn (Brookfield, 1983;

Caffarella, 1993; English, 2000; Lemmetty & Collin, 2020). Participants discussed their willingness and commitment to participate in educational endeavors, and all expressed the necessity of education (English, 2000; Ozuah, 2005). Two of the participants revealed they were encouraged to pursue formal education. In accordance with the literature, the other religious leaders' internal motivation for self-improvement and desire for knowledge prompted their participation in educational activities (Holton, et al., 2001; Knowles, et al., 2005). Although many of the religious leaders' learning interests varied and transpired outside of traditional classroom instruction, their responses revealed their adherence to regularly self-directed learning in numerous ways (Husmann, Hoffman, & Schaefer, 2018; Tough, 1979). For example, several participants shared book recommendations and others shared devotional material they authored. In addition, the data findings exposed how adults learn distinct from formal or informal experiences. Furthermore, the data revealed that religious leaders engaged in social learning by modeling others.

This study revealed religious leaders' expectations and sense of control over how they will accomplish their educational goals (Bandura, 1997; Brookfield, 1983; Merriam, 2001). As participants in the study conveyed their educational experiences, their responses indicated a relevance to perception and the ability for success (Bandura, 1997). For instance, many of the participants expressed their regard and respect for the leadership of others as a foundational component to their leadership development and sought to model their example. The findings suggest that religious leaders direct and choose their behavior or actions according to their expected outcomes (Bandura, 1997).

In addition, the study revealed that the behaviors of religious leaders, in relation to their educational decisions, influenced their social advocacy practices in Black communities.

As stated above, the 12 religious leaders' environmental, educational, and societal concerns influenced their social advocacy strategies in the communities they serve. Moreover, this finding is directly related to Bandura's (1986) concept of reciprocal determinism, suggesting that religious leaders' behaviors influence and are influenced by the communities they serve. All participants expressed confidence in their abilities and educational aspirations, whether the experiences occurred in informal or formal environments. Participants eagerly shared examples of educational and career accomplishments, along with stories of their progression to becoming religious leaders. Furthermore, this research conveyed an understanding of their intentional behavior and its effect on their educational experiences, thus revealing their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). The findings exposed intentional behavior and provided an understanding of the self-motivation and personal development of religious leaders. Additionally, these findings suggested that religious leaders' learning environments and individual influences elevate learning experiences. Whether the learning environments were traditional institutions, self-study, from the mentorship or modeling of others, participants' educational attainment and social advocacy strategies in Black communities attest to their leadership success.

According to Social Cognitive Theory, the study's data concluded that other religious leaders' family members and friends in their social environments also influenced their behavior and decisions (Bandura, 2006). Training, education, along with learning and observing from others constituted a leadership development strategy for

religious leaders. Leadership development consists of self-directed educational goals through formal and informal education. Religious leaders' educational experiences strengthen their theological perspective and enhance their strategies for serving Black communities (Barnes, 2008; Isaac, et al, 2007; King, 2010).

Theme 2

Religious leaders' *community engagement* includes congregational support and partnerships. The findings in this study suggest participants and their congregations play an important role in addressing community needs (Barnes, 2005; Billingsley, 1999; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1993). The participants in the study often used stories to describe social advocacy programs and events hosted by the church. Outreach services included basic programs for improving literacy and scripture knowledge, voter education and registration, food and clothing pantries, along with various support services for children and seniors, which are services that churches are known to provide (Barnes, 2010; Bennett, 1989; Nelson & Nelson, 1988). Several participants mentioned community gardens, counseling services, back to school and health related events. Most participants perceived their engagement with communities as relational and supportive. One participant regarded his church's social advocacy efforts as "hands on support." Another participant proudly described supporting schools in the community, while others indicated their churches provide an overwhelming variety of supportive programs and services. Surprisingly one participant's social advocacy strategies were extremely limited due to the demographics of the congregation. Indicating, most of the congregation was over sixty years of age and physically unable to participate in activities outside regular services. Religious leaders demonstrated apparent involvement with education, families,

and Black communities. Participants and their churches in this study embraced the responsibility and complex role as a central hub for community programs and services (Barnes, 2014; Gates, 2021; Johnson, 2019; Tisby, 2019).

Religious leaders regard social advocacy as their primary responsibility to communities. With the support of their congregations, they provide community support based on the needs of their communities and available resources. The participant responses revealed that religious leaders mostly rely on internal support to provide social advocacy in their communities. All participants spoke positively of their churches' volunteer efforts in supporting the community. Many gave specific examples of the various types of services executed solely by their volunteers. They emphasized church staff and volunteers as the main component to successful community-centered programming and services.

The data results revealed religious leaders' commitment to community engagement with the help of their congregation (church teams) and community partnerships, such as the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis, BJC Healthcare, and the American Heart Association. Participants shared experiences of social advocacy that addressed specific issues concerning individual human rights, political action, education, unemployment, and housing accommodations (Bobo, 2019; Gates, 2021; Kerr Chandler, 2001; Franklin & Lincoln, 1974). Interestingly, many participants expressed the need for increased youth development and activities. The participants in this study expressed positive community engagement and adequate support from their churches and community partners. This study suggests that partnerships between churches and other organizations strengthen Black communities (Billingsley, 1992; Lincoln & Mamiya,

1993). Rowland and Chappel-Aiken (2012) have pointed out the critical role of the African American church and its partnerships, particularly health promotion.

Theme 3

Religious leaders can experience resistance from internal and external antagonists to their vision. The participants' involvement and direct influence with organizations play an important role in addressing community needs. In addition, they face various *racial experiences* and continue to persevere. The religious leaders champion the resolve to contest the systemic racial inequalities that distress Black communities (Gunning-Francis, 2015; Lewis & Trulear, 2008; Wilmore, 1998). Participants shared numerous stories about the *barriers* they encounter in their social advocacy. This included experiences varying from their childhood, academic development, professional occupations, and church communities and neighborhoods. Cone (1969) critically questioned religious leaders' accommodating position with the structural oppressive systematic racism. Thus, suggesting that religious leaders aligned with those who induce racial inequalities without regard or allegiances to Black communities. Participants expressed experiences completely opposite of that thought. Their responses described their racial realities and staunch determination to challenge racial barriers in Black communities. This finding suggests religious leaders intentionally created and participated in spaces to combat racial inequalities.

Several participants shared stories of opposition and perseverance concerning their church presence in their community. The religious leaders engaged in efforts to support community integration and education. Several participants mentioned preaching and teaching social justice in their churches. Participant responses parallel Bobo's (2019)

statement, “Justice demands action” (p.41). Thus, indicating their commitment to creating strategies and preaching that would promote unity and improve conditions within Black communities. All participants shared racial experiences and concerns. To illustrate, one participant commented on the importance of teaching and demanding justice within the scope of scriptures and addressing the racial challenges within Christian denominations. Yet, religious leaders articulated a sense of obligation and responsibility to create unity within their communities and promote hope for the future (Franklin, 2007; Frazier, 1963; Gates, 2021).

Theme 4

Religious leaders embrace an undaunted commitment to the advancement of communities and churches. In other words, they espoused *progressing forward*. The study participants described their personal vision for Black communities and churches. Many discussed this theme as a general responsibility, but with a collaborative focus. The general response positioned the church as the catalyst for moving the community forward. Religious leaders recognized their responsibility to prepare the next generation to lead communities and churches and accepted that role to work towards a more excellent vision for future generations (Gates, 2021; Landry, 2018). Several participants communicated strategies on how to enact plans toward economic and political advancement for Black communities (Bobo, 2019; Lewis & Trulear, 2008; Wilmore, 1998). For example, one religious leader elicited community partnerships as a strategy. Religious leaders shared perspectives that support participative democracy as an important focal point for moving Black communities forward (Gates, 2021; Tisby, 2019). The participants believed in acts of upholding, maintaining, and endorsing justice in

Black communities (Barnes, 2014; Billingsley, 1999; Frazier, 1964; Gates, 2021; Tisby, 2019). Religious leaders shared how they could continue to encourage and empower communities on contemporary social issues. For the participants, the ability to connect to communities is an important focus for community solutions. In the Black community, the church and its leadership are embodied as protector and advocate by some and out of touch by others (Frazier, 1963; Hardy, 2012; Mukenge, 1983; Whelchel, 2011).

According to the participants in this study, strategizing with the goal of advancing vital social services in Black communities is a way to increase racial equity and level racial barriers.

Implications

This phenomenological study provides insights into the lived experiences of religious leaders who influence Black communities. This study's themes of Leadership Development, Community Engagement, Racial Experiences, and Progressing Forward describes the advancement and practices of religious leaders' educational experiences and social advocacy practices in Black communities. Moreover, previous theoretical models such as, Knowles (1976) adult learning theory and Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory support this study's conceptual model. A study of religious leaders' social advocacy strategies is important for future empowerment in Black communities. First, it adds to the body of knowledge concerning religion, social advocacy, and Black communities. In addition, the findings of this study advance knowledge regarding religious leadership and education. All the participants expressed the importance of education. They engaged in both formal and informal learning activities. Also, this study shows support for an increasing interest in how to engage, empower, and improve Black

communities. Thus, this study creates a foundation to increase conversations and initiate future inquiry concerning social advocacy in Black communities.

This study contributes to the understudied area of the social advocacy strategies of religious leadership in Black communities. Considering the relevance of religious leaders and their churches empowering and engaging Black communities, this study fills an important gap in the literature. This study also provides a conceptual model that can be applied to the practice of social advocacy in Black communities locally and globally. Religious leaders can use this conceptual model to guide their social advocacy decisions and partnerships. Organizations and educators can use this model to inform their efforts for community and leadership development. This study suggests the importance of providing various education platforms to support leadership development. Specifically, platforms that offer formal and informal learning opportunities and mentorship for religious leaders in Black communities.

Recommendations for Future Research

The exploration of the lived experiences of religious leaders revealed a diversity of topics for further study. As the study unfolded, it became apparent that an array of topics related to religious leadership and social advocacy in Black communities could be more fully explored. The ideas provoke a sense of responsibility to replicate this research to understand social advocacy strategies and solutions in Black communities.

Consequently, the following recommendations are proposed for future exploration:

1. A study for a broader audience to include religious leaders within the state, nationally, and globally.
2. A repeat of this study with a sample of female religious leadership.

3. An assessment of religious congregation's perceptions regarding social advocacy, religious leadership, educational attainment.
4. A study that explores the racial barriers to social advocacy in Black communities.
5. A study that explores the relationship between religious leaders of different denominations in Black communities.
6. An assessment of religious leadership and community partnerships.

Conclusion

This research contributes to the knowledge about social advocacy in Black communities. Experienced religious leaders provided insight into their educational commitments and community practices, thus providing a springboard for future investigations and resolutions for Black communities. The literature is abundant with studies on urban communities, leadership, and religion, yet less information on social advocacy and religious leadership. Specifically, there is limited evidence on how religious leaders engage and develop social advocacy strategies in Black communities. The influence of religious leaders and their partnerships in Black communities are important factors to consider in its citizens' empowerment, development, and sustainability. Thus, more research is an imperative catalyst for creating and supporting effective social justice in Black communities. Furthermore, additional research may improve and enhance the social advocacy strategies of religious leaders as they continue to influence and serve Black communities.

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Appendix A – Participation Invitation Letter

Greetings,

My name is Jacqueline Carter, and I am a doctoral student in the Education Sciences and Professional Programs at the University of Missouri St. Louis. I am conducting a research study entitled, Religious Leadership: Agents of Social Change. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore the educational experiences of religious leaders to understand their social advocacy strategies in Black communities and what meaning they make of their experiences. Your expertise as a leader within the community should provide valuable insights to how religious leaders promote social justice in Black communities.

Participation will be a semi-structured interview that will take approximately 60-90 minutes of your time. Interview questions, with potential follow-up queries, will relate to experiences, interactions, and management of the Black community's perspectives on social justice issues. Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed into written records to account for details in all discussions. Your identity will remain anonymous in any research reporting. The research study may be published, but no names will be used. You may choose to withdraw at any time without penalty. Please respond back to me via e-mail at jacquelinecarter@umsl.edu if you are interested in becoming part of the study. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at 314-503-4440. I thank you in advance for your consideration to participate in this study

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Carter, MEd
Doctoral Candidate
University of Missouri St. Louis

Appendix B – Informed Consent Form

Dear Participant,

My name is Jacqueline Carter, and I am a doctoral student in the Education Sciences and Professional Programs at the University of Missouri.

I am conducting qualitative research on the educational experiences of religious leaders to understand their social advocacy strategies in Black communities and what meaning they make of their experiences. You have been asked to participate in this research because of your self-disclosed status as a religious leader.

Please read this form and ask any questions before agreeing to be in the research.

Your participation in this research is involuntary. By signing in the space provided below, you give your consent for me to use the information from the interview in my study.

You are free to end the interview at any time or to not answer any particular questions. The interview will occur at your convenience and will take 60-90 minutes, depending on the amount of time that you agree to provide.

The interview will be audio taped in order to be transcribed for study purposes. You will be allowed to view transcript of your audio taped interview for content accuracy.

Upon completion of this research study, you will be contacted and asked to verify potential themes from the data. The use of pseudonyms in the study will conceal your identity. I plan to interview a minimum of five other subjects for this research.

There are no anticipated physical or psychological risks to participation or any direct benefits.

The only persons who will know your identity as a research subject are you and I; no identifying information will be disclosed about you without your written permission.

When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will reveal your identity. Research data will be stored in a locked file in my home office. Audio tapes from this interview will be destroyed within twelve months.

Please ask any questions you have now.

If you may have any questions later, you may contact me at (314) 503-4440 or Dr. Paulette Isaac-Savage, Dissertation Chair, at (314) 516-5303.

I believe I understand the purpose of the study, as well as the potential benefits and risks that are involved. I give my permission to participate in the research described above.

_____ Date _____

_____ Date _____

Appendix C – Demographic Information Form

Instructions:

Please complete this demographic form to the best of your ability. Answers will be used to generally describe the range of research participants' backgrounds and will not be attributed to the individual. In accordance with Institutional Review Board protocol, demographic information will remain confidential and private.

Last Name: _____ ***First Name:*** _____

Church Name: _____

Denomination Affiliation: _____

Address: _____

Years of experience at this location: _____

Email Address: _____ ***Phone:*** _____

Gender: _____ ***Age:*** _____

Level of Education: _____

Race/Ethnicity: _____

Best days/times for 60-90 Minute Interview:

<p>Notes:</p>

Appendix D – Pre-Interview Questionnaire

<i>Participant Identification Number:</i>
<i>Denomination Affiliation:</i>
<i>Years of experience as Religious Leader:</i>
<i>Race/Ethnicity:</i>
<i>Gender:</i>
<i>Education:</i>
<i>Contact Information:</i> Telephone _____ Email _____ Mailing Address _____
<i>Notes:</i>

Appendix E – Interview Guide

Phase One Interview (focused life history)

1. Tell me a little bit about your hometown
2. Tell me about your family
3. What are your thoughts concerning acquired certificates or degrees from participation in public or private universities correspondence programs, bible college or seminar courses covering civil disobedience?
4. Tell me more about any participation in any religious programs or activities in addition to your regular Sunday school? For example, spiritual retreats, conferences, or any other theological study group meetings.

Phase Two Interview (details of the experience)

5. Think back to 2014, was your church involved in community outreach activities and programs?
6. Do you provide or cooperate in providing for any of these services or community outreach programs: food pantry, cash assistance, thrift store, elder housing, or affordable jousting, counseling/hot lines, substance abuse, youth programs, tutoring/literacy programs for youth and teens, voter registration or voter education, social issue advocacy, employment counseling/placement or training, health programs/clinics or health education, senior citizens programs other than housing, prison or jail ministry, credit unions, computer training?
7. Do you encourage your congregation to work for social justice?
8. How does your church determine the types of community outreach programs to sponsor? Explain
9. Do you take part in protest marches on civil rights issues? Why or why not.
10. Express your views on day-to-day social and political issues.

Phase Three Interview (reflection on the experience)

11. How do you see Black communities in the next 5 years, 10 years from now?
12. How do you think churches will impact Black communities in the coming years?
13. What have we not talked about that is important to you?

Appendix F – Participant Demographic

Religious Leaders	Education	Race	Gender
RL1A	Bachelors	Black	M
RL2B	Masters	White	F
RL3C	Bachelors	White	M
RL4D	Masters	White	M
RL5E	Bachelors	White	M
RL6F	Masters	Black	M
RL7G	Hon. Doctorate	Black	M
RL8H	Masters	White	M
RL9I	Masters	Black	M
RL10J	Doctorate	White	M
RL11K	Bachelors	Black	M
RL12L	Masters	Black	M

Note. To maintain participants confidentiality specific demographic information required omission.