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Stigmas Associated With Black American Incarceration Through an Afrocentric Lens

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Abstract

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MA, Clark Atlanta University, 2010

BA, San Francisco State University, 2006

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

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Abstract

Although extensive quantitative research has been conducted on Black American incarceration rates, to date, there has not been a study from an Afrocentric (Black American) perspective in the field of public policy. Using Dillard's conceptualization of Afrocentric theory, this study added to the field of public policy by examining how the stigmas associated with mass incarceration have reduced political and economic opportunities for Black Americans born 1965 – 1984. The purpose of this ethnographic study was to provide an Afrocentric voice by which the members of the Black American community are the center of the data collection on the stigmas associated with incarceration as a product of the new Jim Crow (mass incarceration) for those born between 1965 -1984 (the hip-hop generation where the music is the center of the culture) in the United States. Data were collected through semistructured interviews with selected informants based on their background work, experience, and cultural orientation within the Black American community; these data were analyzed via a summative content analysis, which revealed new perspectives on the stigmas associated with incarceration. The new perspective that was gained asked for the structure of the Black American church to be reexamined due to the rise in the mega-church, an improved culturally sensitive K-12 public educational system, and the overall reconnection and strengthening of the Black American family structure. These findings suggest that social change can only occur when researchers of color are allowed to provide their perspectives on issues that affect those they represent. Hence, the social change implications for this study ask that political leaders work directly with the hip-hop generation and the Black American community as a whole to make changes in legislation through political liberalism.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents who planted the seed of obtaining a doctoral degree and pride of my Black-American culture. This is also dedicated to all my brothers and sisters from urban areas like South Central Los Angeles, who was caught up and not able to find escapes to brighter paths.

Acknowledgments

I would first give thanks to my ancestors, who helped me through this process through both their struggles and triumphs to allow me to obtain this degree in hopes of helping future generations. My mother and father who helped keep me safe and push me to be better then the streets of South L.A. Many thanks to my wife, Kristin "K.B." Tidwell, who has helped motivate me throughout this process. My children, Wylie IV and Kalli, for keeping a smile on my face and continuing to push me to get done through their joy and innocence. Thank you to my Jiu-jitsu professor, James Shook, for helping me learn a new way to deal with stress while improving my health. Many thanks also to my dissertation chair Kevin Fandl, and faculty mentor Dr. Louis Milanesi who has been great mentors throughout my doctoral studies. I would also like to thank the men and women of the Walden University writing center for helping answer countless questions about the writing of my document. Lastly, I would like to thank all the members of the Black community who participated in this study and for sharing their valuable input on issues that face the Black community of the 21st century.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

iv

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

A disproportionately large percentage of Black Americans born between 1967 and 1989 are either incarcerated, on probation, or on parole, at almost six times the rate of White Americans (Kitwana, 2002). By 2002, about 12% of Black Americans in their 20s were incarcerated (Pettit & Western, 2004). These studies support Alexander's (2012) argument that mass incarceration of the 20th and 21st centuries is metaphorically the *new Jim Crow (*colorblind Jim Crow). As a result, Black Americans make up a larger percentage of the prison population than they did before the Brown v. Board of Education decision (Western, 2006). Mass incarceration today, like Jim Crow (a period from 1876 – 1965 where laws created racial segregation in the United States locally and nationally) and slavery of the past, operates in a tight network of laws, policies, customs, and institutions that operate together to help ensure the subordinate status of a group defined by race (Alexander, 2012). Thus, "While scholars have long analyzed the connection between race and America's criminal justice system, an emerging group of scholars and advocates has highlighted the issue with a provocative claim: They argue that our growing penal system, with its black tinge, constitutes nothing less than a new form of Jim Crow" (Forman Jr., 2012, p. 102).

The goal of this study was to provide an Afrocentric (Black American) perspective on the stigmas associated with incarceration as a product of the new Jim Crow. Until this study, there has been no study that places Black Americans at the center of the research question; rather, previous research has been done at a distance within a Eurocentric (White American) paradigm, where Black Americans are objectified in

relation to incarceration and associated stigmas. Research from a culturally sensitive perspective is needed on the discriminatory stigmas associated with the incarcerations of Black Americans born between 1965 and 1984 and the effects of this on their communities.

A culturally sensitive perspective allows for the sharing of knowledge and understanding of this particular phenomenon by placing Black Americans at the center of the inquiry (Tillman, 2002). Gordon (1997) stated that racially and culturally sensitive paradigms are not new to social sciences because racially and culturally sensitive research challenges the notion of neutrality of knowledge. Therefore, this study aimed to allow new perspectives on old issues that continue to keep the United States from becoming a truly culturally sensitive society. Social change can only occur when researchers of color are allowed to provide their perspectives on issues that affect those they represent. Further, as suggested by Kershaw (1992), an Afrocentric theory will focus on the cultural, historical, and contemporary experiences of Black Americans.

The focus on Black Americans and the stigmas associated with incarcerations of people born between 1965 and 1984 could lead to social change. Social change can occur through the manner in which laws are drafted and implemented in the United States to help with Black American inclusion within the American democracy.

Background

According to Hamlet (1998), viewing a non-European culture through European lenses and by European standards leads to inaccurate and biased interpretations of the problem being researched and studied. More so, many research articles and dissertations

say too little about the Afrocentric perspective toward crime and punishment, thus disguising the nature and extent of Black American support, or lack of support of the criminal justice system and policy makers (Forman, 2012). The stigmas associated with incarcerations of Black Americans have been studied using a White American model, and the negative consequences have not been truly understood due to cultural misunderstanding.

The use of Afrocentric theory, as discussed by Schreiber (2000), will allow issues facing the Black American community to be seen from a new perspective when used within the research framework. Archie (2009) demonstrated how Afrocentricity could be used within contemporary research in the social sciences and not just in the field of Black studies (or Black American studies). Afrocentricity can be used in fields such as public policy because it focuses on the use and understanding of oral traditions and does not claim hegemonic positions; as a result, Afrocentricity allows for a theoretical and philosophical approach to the phenomena being discussed (Archie, 2009). Therefore, the use of Afrocentricity will allow for a more accurate interpretation of incarcerations and the negative conditions they create within the Black American community.

The goal of this study was to use critical ethnographic interviews through an *emic* Afrocentric approach to provide an Afrocentric voice on the stigmas associated with the incarceration of Black Americans born between 1965 and 1984 and how this politically and economically affects the community. Using this emic Afrocentric approach will help to contribute to the field of public policy by exposing social conditions that become a point of departure within new research. Afrocentric theory allows Black Americans to be

the center of the research and allow ethnographic (study focused on a particular culture) interviews to focus on the cultural sharing patterns within the Black American community. This qualitative study will focus on documenting the Afrocentric perspective on factors that have contributed to the increases in the incarceration rates of Black Americans born within a specific range mentioned above and the stigmatization that results in the higher likelihood of incarceration. Thus, the goal of this research was to provide an Afrocentric voice that has otherwise been absent in past research on Black American incarcerations.

Problem Statement

Black Americans born between 1965 and 1984 (also known within Black American culture as the *hip-hop generation*) are incarcerated at abnormally disproportionately high rates compared to other populations of Americans. Today, Black Americans constitute roughly 12.8% of the U.S. population (D'Alessio, 2003). However, Black Americans of the hip-hop generation make up roughly 26% of juvenile arrests. Of these, 44% are detained, 46% are sent to criminal court, and 58% are admitted to state prisons (NAACP, 2013). As a result, Black Americans constitute almost 1 million of the 2.3 million incarcerated in the United States; thus, one in six Black Americans is incarcerated (NAACP, 2013).

The high incarceration rate of Black Americans has pervasive and chronically negative stigmas regarding the social and economic vitality of the Black American community, such as a lack of democratic participation and violence within urban communities (Burris-Kitchen & Burris, 2011). According to Forman Jr. (2012), some of

the negative affects of systemic racism of Black Americans born into the hip-hop generation who have been convicted include the ineligibility of public assistance programs such as health care, food stamps, public housing, student loans, and some employment opportunities. Additionally, many of the individuals suffering from the stigma of incarceration come from backgrounds of disadvantage such as single parent homes, low income, poor housing. These systemic disadvantages make it more likely for the convicted to become "a member of a stigmatized caste, condemned to a lifetime of second-class citizenship" (Alexander, 2012, pp. 139-140). The hip-hop generation in particular, has experienced a situation that has not previously been explored through qualitative research with an Afrocentric approach. Some social issues that result from the stigmatization of Black Americans of the hip-hop generation include, but are not limited to, felon disenfranchisement and weakness of the family (Alexander, 2012). These and other consequences will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

Therefore, this study adopted an Afrocentric perspective, where the Black American voice was the center of the data collected on the stigmas associated with Black American incarceration. Speaking directly to Black Americans will help document any problems and grievances related to incarceration that have otherwise been ignored due to the lack of an Afrocentric culturally sensitive focus. By conducting culturally sensitive critical ethnographic interviews, my goal was to provide an Afrocentric perspective of how incarcerations of Black Americans affect the Black American community. This may lead to asking for a change in current social programs that focus on the incarceration of Black Americans.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this ethnographic qualitative study was to provide an Afrocentric voice where the members of the Black American community are the center of the data collection. As stated by Forman Jr. (2012), "too many Americans refuse to acknowledge the continuing impact of race and prejudice on public policy. By documenting mass imprisonment's roots in race-baiting political appeals, [this study discussed] the notion that our prison system's origins are [not] exclusively colorblind" (p. 114). These data were used to focus on the stigmas associated with members of the Black American hip-hop generation as a result of their incarcerations and the political and economic effects on the Black American community.

While those of the *civil rights* (those born between 1927-1946) and *black power* (those born between 1946-1965) *generations* are not technically part of the hip-hop generation, they did give birth to the hip-hop movement through their agitation for social change (Kitwana, 2002). As stated by Dyson (2010), the use of words can be imperative for the upward mobility by helping a group grapple with a White supremacist society that often refuses to acknowledge Black Americans fundamental humanity. As a result, Black Americans find themselves being squeezed into economic deprivation resulting in them yearning for material ideas, icons, and rewards as a means of survival (Dyson, 2010). Hip-hop as a genre of music has done this for the generation that created it out of necessity. Thus, the term hip-hop generation is used in this particular research because, when put into proper context, hip-hop allows for understanding the link between the

Black American style of music and the politics of the Black American generations (Asante Jr., 2008).

Ahmir Questlove Thompson of the hip-hop band, *The Roots* (2015), stated "hip-hop gives its listeners sets of rules that you follow like the law, only to see them change every five years" (p. 74). Therefore, "Black music, is not an artistic creation for its own sake; rather it tells us about the feeling and thinking of an African people, and the kinds of mental adjustments they had to make in order to survive . . ." (Cone, 1972/2005, p. 98). Additionally, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. professed the importance of music to social movements and politics. King stated in his autobiography that music is more than just clever phrases; rather, it tells the life experience of the artist and the culture they represent. Hence, the artist understands that he or she "convinces only through the fascination of the images, through word magic . . . which the artist hopes to achieve through their story" (Jahn, 1961, p. 150). As a result, the audience uses the music as a means of healing, call for action, or escape from the issues of systemic racism, segregation, and prejudice. Dr. King stated that music has been at the heart of the Black American experience since slaves sang songs of sorrow, joy, battle hymns, and messages (Carson, 1998). Lastly, much like music such as *the blues* (a genre of Black American music that originated in the deep south towards the end of the 19th century that infused shouts, chants, field hollers as a form of musical expression) was for previous generations, hip-hop is about Black American life and its capacity to survive within an environment of oppression (Cone, 1972/2005).

As a result, in order to study the hip-hop generation, I must also understand the music that makes up the culture. Critical ethnography requires I become immersed into the culture to understand information gathered (Thomas, 2012). By using critical ethnographic interviews and by being a part of the culture, I will be able to ask questions that may otherwise be off-limits to other researchers, which will allow an Afrocentric perspective to be heard from within Black America.

Participants for this study were identified through the help of gatekeepers and from my personal contacts. Chapter 3 will discuss in more detail that gatekeepers are individuals who are in a position to grant the availability to participants that understand the hip-hop generation's interaction with the American legal system. Many of these gatekeepers have been gathered through past encounters and hold pivotal positions in the hierarchy of the Black community as teachers, professors, law enforcement officers, lawyers, or community organizers. These individuals granted me entry into the community and made suggestions of participants who can provide a better understanding of the possible reasons for Black American incarceration and the discriminatory stigmas it raises for Black American communities during the era of the new Jim Crow. Stigmatized groups are typically more willing to be open with members of their own culture than with those of a different culture due to considerations of protecting themselves from threatening comparisons and further stigmatization (Crocker & Major, 1989). The goal and purpose of this study was to allow the Afrocentric perspective on the effects of the stigmas of incarceration on the Black American community to be recorded by a member of the culture. Forman Jr. (2012) argued that in order to combat mass

incarceration, a multiracial movement is needed. However, as suggested by Afrocentric researchers, Blacks have been absent from this movement in the sense of sharing their perspective due to the prevalence of stigmas associated to race and incarceration. This study shared the perspective of those whom have been stigmatized because of mass incarceration policies.

Research Question

The following research question will guide this project: How have the stigmas associated with mass incarceration reduced political and economic opportunities for Black Americans born between 1965 - 1984 from an Afrocentric perspective?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is Afrocentric theory with emic validity. Afrocentric theory allows for a centering of Black American history and culture as a means to offer a new, alternative perspective to the Eurocentric one that has previously dominated. Therefore, I will offer an alternative perspective on the social conditions and historical realities that affect the Black American community (Schreiber, 2000). Furthermore, Afrocentrism is a method of scholarly inquiry that deals with the cultural qualities of the group under consideration, which in the case of this study is the Black American community.

Afrocentric theory requires that the researcher place the participants at the center of the study, which is what makes this method suitable for this project. As stated earlier, Afrocentric theory allows for culturally sensitive research. Consequently, Dillard (2000) stated Afrocentric theory could be part of the framework of research with culturally

sensitive research as a way of data collection and interpretation. Furthermore, as stated by Tilman (2002), Black American culture asks for this type of expansion of the conceptual framework in order to fully understand the full range of experiences of Black Americans in the United States. Black American culture differs from White American culture in terms of its collective value orientation, language patterns, and worldviews, all of which suggest complexity in the behaviors of both cultures (Dillard, 2000).

Ensuring emic validity will helped me use an Afrocentric perspective, since the focus is placed on understanding unique aspects that make up Black American culture, rather than an etic approach. The terms emic and etic have varying definitions in ethnography and will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Nevertheless, emic approaches allows for the researcher to understand the study host(s) from his or her own perspective and reality, which allows ethnography to be a process of discovery, inference, and continuing inquiry (Whitehead, 2005). On the other hand, etic approaches often rely on polarizing stigmas and sophisticated stereotypes, which can at times be helpful, but are often detrimental to the understanding of the complexities found within the Black American culture (Zhu & Bargiela-Chiappini, 2013). As a result, the use of an etic approach is problematic because of the tendency to overshadow the importance of culture within research, a deficiency an emic approach can ameliorate. According to W.E.B. Dubois (as cited in Ritzer & Goodman, 2004), Black Americans live with a *veil* that creates a separation between them and White Americans. This separation is not as thick as a wall, but rather a thin layer through which each culture can see the other, while still living in separate realities. Lastly, Mead Niblo and Jackson (2004) suggested that using

an emic approach allows for a clear understanding of culturally specific concepts to be explored within the culture using qualitative research. Thus, emic analysis allows the researcher to become immersed in that culture until real understanding occurs, because this is only possible when the researcher is a participant of the culture as opposed to only an observer (Mead Niblo & Jackson, 2004).

Because of slavery, the Black American community has found itself victimized due to cultural denigration, which can be seen in all areas of life, including the social sciences (Schiele, 1996). Thus, it is vital to create prototypes that reflect the cultural values and worldviews of Black Americans, such as Afrocentric theory, to combat the belief that Eurocentric values and models are the only prototypes that can explain the behaviors of Black Americans as the means of solving social ills that afflict them, such as high incarceration rates through new Jim Crow policies (Schiele, 1996). Qualitative ethnographic interviews can facilitate cultural intuition, resulting in understanding of the unique viewpoints of Black Americans and the consequences incarceration has for the Black American community (Bernal, 1982). Thus, with the use of culturally sensitive research, I will reveal, understand, and respond to the imbalanced relations that typically minimize, subjugate, and omit the Black American voice from the knowledge base collected on their incarcerations as a result of new Jim Crow policies (Dillard, 2000).

Nature of Study

The nature of this study will be qualitative with an ethnographic focus. Ethnography allows the researcher to interpret the social constructions of Black Americans during a given period through interviews as the primary form of data. While

conducting sociological research via ethnographic interviewing, the goal was to achieve a level of saturation at which the data collection and analysis are similar to and consistent with the patterns of arguments offered by the participants of the research (Young, 2007). This level of saturation was accomplished through use of the Spradley model as a way of formulating structural questions. This process, as will be described in Chapter 3, will aid in the ability to avoid the problem of making the participant feeling like he/she is being "tested" during the interview process; thus, allowing for a level of relaxation and better collection of data (Spradely, 1979). Further, as Berg (1989/2009) stated, the use of *critical ethnography* (the ability to understand racial context and culture of a political issue) will provide an orientation regarding the social conditions of the 20th and early 21st centuries as a means of moving toward positive social change through race relations policy in the United States.

Interviews allowed for better understanding of the stigmas of incarceration for the Black American community. Therefore, it was important to conduct culturally sensitive research because it attempted to reveal, understand, and respond to the unequal power relationships that prohibit the understanding of the multiple realities and knowledge base of the Black American community.

Furthermore, the use of interviews within the critical ethnographic approach helped me to understand what Black Americans know about themselves within the social world (Young, 2007). As Dr. Wade Nobles (1985) stated, "The essence of power is the ability to define someone's reality and make them live according to that definition as though it is a definition of their own choosing" (p. 57). Thus, the participants selected

were Black Americans between 30-50 years old at the time of the study. Asian Americans, White Americans, Latin Americans, or members of the African diaspora (i.e. Jamaicans, Africans, and Haitians) were not a part of the study in order to help limit the sample size and focus on the story of Black Americans who hold a connection to Jim Crow in America. More so, the participants' understanding and experience of living within the hip-hop Black American culture between the ages of 5 and 18 years is vital. This period is significant because Black Americans born from 1965 to 1984 (the hip-hop generation) may have experienced prejudice or racial discrimination as a function of the new Jim Crow. Therefore, my semistructured interviews with members of the Black American community allowed for the gathering of raw information from participants through a sequenced approach based on an interview guide that will help with the understanding of the social, political, and economic factors that affect Black Americans (Tillman, 2002).

Definitions

Hip-hop generation: consists of Black Americans born between 1965 and 1984. Conversely, this subgroup of the Black American community does not include those of the Civil Rights and Black Power generation, but did contribute to the birth or growth of the hip-hop movement through their beliefs for social change that is the essence of hip-hop music (Kitwana, 2002).

Afrocentricity: is the mode of thought and action whereby African interests, values, and perspectives predominate (Asante, 2003). When used as a theory, those of

African descent are at the center of the phenomena being analyzed, allowing for mastery of the issue from their perspective (Asante, 2003).

Systemic racism: is defined by Feagin (2001) as the anti-Black practices of White Americans to gain political and economic power and perpetuate economic inequalities that are arranged along racial boundaries. Additionally, it involves the maintenance of White American racial ideologies and attitudes that were created to maintain power over the subordinate group, creating racist realities in major parts of society, including politics, education, and economics (Feagin, 2001).

The new Jim Crow: is defined as the current racial caste system of mass incarceration used to refer to the stigmatized racial group in an inferior position under the law and by historical custom (Alexander, 2012). Mass incarcerations do not simply refer to the criminal system, but also the customs that control those labeled criminals through laws, rules, and policies typically found under the *war on drugs* announced in 1982 by President Regan in response to the rise of crack in U.S. cities (Alexander, 2012). However, the war on drugs was addressed earlier by President Nixon in 1971 through measures of mandatory sentencing and no-knock warrants (Sharp, 1994). More so, Nixon "emphasized that you have to face the fact that the whole problem is really the blacks. The key is to devise a system that recognizes this while not appearing to" (Alexander, 2012, p. 40).

Assumptions

The following assumptions inform this study:

1. Some participants may be reluctant to share some personal information.

2. Study participants will be from predominantly Black American communities.

3. Participants will understand the hip-hop culture as part of the larger Black American culture.

Scope and Delimitations

The participants for this study were limited to members of the Black American community who had experience with or have worked or lived in urban centers where Black Americans have been adversely affected by the new Jim Crow. This allowed for an Afrocentric voice to be the center of the data collected. The participants were recruited from specific urban areas that will allow easy access and travel. The minimum age of the participants was 18 years old, but there was no maximum age because such a limitation may potentially exclude valuable members.

Limitations

An obvious limitation of this research was the lack of inclusion of the entire Black American community in the United States. The goal of the study was to gain an Afrocentric perspective; therefore, interviewing Asian Americans, White Americans, Latin Americans, or members of the African diaspora (i.e. Jamaicans, Africans, and Haitians) would move away from giving voice to the American born (Black Americans) that has otherwise been lost in past research. The selection of particular members of the Black American community as a focus of this research was based on their various backgrounds and experiences within the community and society as a whole.

Significance

The high incarceration rates of Black Americans have lasting effects on the nation as a whole. As Gaynes (1992) stated, the high rates of crime and arrest of Black Americans for drug offenses and violent crimes can help explain the country's high incarceration rates. Thus, a discussion from an Afrocentric perspective is needed in the field of public policy to help increase the rate of the incorporation of the Black American voice in developing policies affecting social change in their communities. As stated by Alexander (2012), during a time of color-blindness, it is no longer socially acceptable to use race as a justification for discrimination, exclusion, or other forms of social contempt. Therefore, using critical ethnography, I explored and documented the Afrocentric perspective on those factors that have contributed to increases in the incarceration of Black Americans in recent decades.

Summary

Alexander (2012) suggested that the United States has always had institutions that have controlled Black Americans, such as slavery, that seem to die off but then are reborn in a form that is socially acceptable for the given time. This rebirth is now the new Jim Crow through the American prison system, where Black Americans are the most highly represented population (Alexander, 2012). W.E.B. Dubois (1901) suggested that the criminal system was originally designed to keep track of Black Americans because every White American male was a member of the United States; thus, contributing to an idea of double justice where one side favored leniency and the other excessive severity and injustice under the law. These circumstances could contribute to the negative

discriminatory stigmas of the Black American community because of the high incarceration of the generation born between 1965 and 1984.

Chapter 2 will provide a review of the literature that will be organized by tracing the legal history of Black Americans in the United States, stigmas of incarcerations, and the current state of the Black American community during the era of the new Jim Crow. As stated earlier, the use of Afrocentric theory requires an analysis of not only current but also historical conditions. Chapter 3 will then provide a justification of Afrocentricity and the use of critical ethnography to provide culturally sensitive research on the discriminatory stigmas of Black American incarcerations. It is important to note that critical ethnography is meant to help understand the relations of power, in this case forging an Afrocentric stance through complex and dynamic qualitative interviews (Vandenberg & Hall, 2011). This will then help support the guiding principle of Afrocentric theory by enhancing understanding of the structure of African reality (history, philosophy, culture, etc.) (Baldwin, 1981). The study aspires to influence the political participation of Black Americans by vocalizing their perspective on things that can be done to curb incarcerations and their political and economic effects within the Black American community.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

As stated in the previous chapter, the purpose of this ethnographic qualitative study was to provide an Afrocentric voice, where Black Americans are the center of the data collection on the political and economic effect of incarceration on their communities. Thus, the foundation of this particular study was rooted in Afrocentric theory. However, incarcerations occur due to violation of the law; therefore, the literature for this study began with a discussion of Black Americans' legal history within the United States. The literature was organized by tracing the stigmas associated with Black American incarcerations, and the current state of the Black American community in terms of incarcerations and the new Jim Crow. The discussion was also arranged in this manner to show the struggles of Black Americans in America from the ratification of the United States Constitution to the 21st century. After tracing the history of Black Americans within the American judicial system, I then focused on the effects of this history on the Black American community and, finally, reviewed literature that discussed the current discriminatory state of the Black American community in light of its incarceration rate and legal history in the United States. However, I first discussed the method by which I explored and selected relevant literature – my literature search strategy.

Literature Search Strategy

This project differs from others in the field of public policy due to the use of Afrocentric theory, which is commonly used in the field of Black or African Studies.

Thus, the search strategy was a little different from most studies in the field of public policy. Research was focused on first understanding the legal analysis of incarcerations as a means of understanding how Black Americans are affected; which may help understand the stigmas associated with incarcerations of the hip-hop generation from an Afrocentric perspective.

Online search strategies vary, especially when researching court cases. Understanding how the courts (both state and federal) have viewed Black American incarceration is vital to this research in understanding the stigmas of incarceration. Therefore, by using online search strategies by title, case citation, and key word searching, I was able to find much useful information on not specifically Black American incarceration, but the laws that allow for incarcerations, which to some degree allows for understanding of the stigmas associated with incarceration that will be discussed. Online sources used include Legal Trac (a keyword search) and the combination of Findlaw and Lexis (searching by case citations). The legal-based resources were very helpful. While I was conducting research on the stigmas associated with the incarceration of the Black American, a discussion of the constitution and the legal history of Black Americans were necessary to fill some of the gaps. Hence, having court documents is vital in the process, but also warrants further collection of text data that may not always be published by other authors in the field of public policy (Cohen, 2007).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was Afrocentric theory. Afrocentric theory will allow for the Black American voice to be the center of the research on the

discriminatory stigmas of incarceration and allow ethnographic interviews to focus on the cultural sharing patterns within the Black American community. However, the high incarceration rate of Black Americans is not a new phenomenon; rather, it is an evolving one. This particular section will start with the definition of Afrocentric theory, a review of literature by key theorists and definitions from their work, and finally a demonstration of how Afrocentric theory has been used in previous research.

Afrocentric theory was created by two well-known Black American theorists, Asante and Karenga (2006), who offered an Afrocentric point of view to conduct research and literature reviews that will be used in this chapter and study. The authors asserted that by systemic and conscious adoption of *Afrocentricity*, Black American researchers can foster the creation of theories, the articulation of specific research questions, and the use of certain methods of inquiry to give a voice to Black Americans that has otherwise been lost through Eurocentric thought. Thus, the use of Afrocentricity is used in this study to build on the literature in public policy by conducting research in an African-centered mindset. Having an African-centered mindset will help uncover and fill gaps in the understanding of the discriminatory stigmas of the Black American community as an effect of incarceration.

Definition of Afrocentric Theory and Key Theorists

The leading theorist in Afrocentric thought is Molife Kete Asante. Asante (2003) defined Afrocentric theory as the mode of thought and action whereby African interests, values, and perspectives predominate. Consequently, research that focuses on the Black American experience in the United States and the world is Afrocentric. When

Afrocentrism is used as a theory, those of African descent are at the center of the phenomena being evaluated, allowing for the mastery of the issue from their perspective (Asante, 2003). The center that is suggested by Asante is the focus of my research, because, as I will show in subsequent sections, no research has focused on or given a voice to the Black American community on the discriminatory stigmas resulting from the high incarceration rates of Black Americans. Further, a qualitative study that focuses on exposing how White Americans have maintained racial domination over Black Americans can help move Black Americans toward a more culturally centered transformation of social issues, convert Black Americans to an ideology that focuses on values, spirituality, and rituals, and analyze literature, history, politics, etc., from an Afrocentric perspective (Asante, 2006). Therefore, as stated by Pellebon (2007), the primary goal of Afrocentric theory research is to free the studies and research of Black Americans from the hegemony that is often found in Eurocentric studies.

Pellebon (2007) further elaborated on the definition of Afrocentric theory when he explained its second goal, which is to return Black American researchers to their cultural centers. He refers to this centering as the understanding that African culture is based on elements of African symbolism, language, and spirituality as a means of evaluating Black American participants (Pellebon, 2007). By understanding African culture, I will be able to better interpret the data collected, which may have been lost using a Eurocentric theory. As stated by Azibo (1989), only by fully accepting African culture will I begin to understand literature from an Afrocentric perspective, which then allows me to enter the interview process with cultural assertiveness. As a result,

Afrocentricity allows me to be part of the culture, which can aid in the cultural sharing pattern while conducting ethnographic qualitative research.

The next goal of Afrocentric theory is to then convert Black American researchers to an ideology that is focused on values, spirituality, and ritual (Pellebon, 2007). Changing the focus of the researcher allows Black Americans to be seen as more than an object in the research. The fourth goal of Afrocentric theory is to demonstrate that the Eurocentric method of analyzing Black Americans as objects is not a sound practice in understanding the Black American voice (Pellebon, 2007). Thus, centering the research on Black Americans as subjects allows for an analysis that focuses on the African tradition, history, and culture (Turner, 2002). Other theorists in Afrocentric thought also shared the belief in the need for the centering of research on Black Americans.

One of the primary theorists to help develop Afrocentric theory was W.E.B. DuBois. DuBois (1929) discussed how Black Americans and the American public assumed that the end of slavery would mark the beginning of prosperity; however, this was not the case, and Black Americans were met with a political and social undercurrent of apprehension and fear. DuBois used an Afrocentric perspective as a means to interpret the data collected.

In the legal arena, former Chief Justice Thurgood Marshall also contributed to Afrocentric theory. Marshall (1987) spoke at the constitutional bicentennial celebration in Maui, Hawaii, and expressed his beliefs concerning the constitution and its effects on the Black American community. This particular speech provided an Afrocentric perspective of the criminal justice system and the Black American community, because Justice

Marshall was a Black American and was thus speaking on the basis of his own experiences in America.

Past Research Using Afrocentric Theory

Numerous prior research studies have used Afrocentric theory but not focused on the Black American voice. For example, Brewer and Heitzeg (2008) provided a qualitative Afrocentric perspective on the current state of the prison industrial complex through Supreme Court decisions and conversations with inmates. Furthermore, they also evaluated the issue of mass incarcerations, the historical roots of U.S. law, the economy, and color-blind racism. The only thing lacking from this study was conversations with other members of the Black American community (i.e., law enforcement representatives, teachers, parents, etc.).

Gallagher (2003) continued the discussion of a *color-blind* society. A color-blind society is one that does not see race as a issue; rather, everyone is equal in all aspects of society. In this study, Gallagher conducted qualitative interviews and focus groups with primarily White Americans on whether the notion of a color-blind society actually maintains White privilege. The research tries to focus on the notion that a post-racial society, or color-blind society, allows many White Americans to imagine that color (Black or brown) has no effect on an individual's or cultural group's place in the American discriminatory hierarchy (Gallagher, 2003). Furthermore, the notion of a color-blind society allows for the removal of the discussion that White supremacy and White guilt exist and that many White Americans define themselves as politically progressive and racially tolerant because skin color does not matter (Gallagher, 2003). However, the

research gathered by Gallagher through focus groups and interviews in colleges in the Rocky Mountains and urban colleges in the Northeast shows that the notion of a color-blind society is not true. Actually, results showed that a color-blind perspective implies that culture and class, and not systemic racism, are the reasons for discriminatory inequality (Gallagher, 2003).

Burris-Kitchen and Burris (2011), using a mixed method approach leaning heavily on quantitative data, showed the historical significance of Black Americans being criminalized, from slavery to prison, through an Afrocentric perspective. Their research is focused on the idea expressed by DuBois (1901) that the African slaves gained freedom and enjoyed it for a moment, but then found that they were enslaved again, suggesting that many of the advancements of Black Americans after slavery were short lived and resulted in the re-establishment of forms of previously abolished slavery.

Graham (1980) examined the riots of the 1960s and how they were a result of Black Americans' annoyance with legal issues occurring during the Civil Rights movement, which resulted in several urban uprisings. The mixed data that was collected used an Afrocentric perspective as a means for interpretation, but not the collection of the data itself. Mason (2012) provided a line-by-line breakdown of the second verse of Jay-Z's song, *99 Problems* as it relates to the Fourth Amendment and criminal procedure and as a picture into to how Black Americans see the legal system of the United States. This breakdown provides insight into the way many Black Americans view the criminal system and the *driving while black* (DWB) phenomenon. DWB is typically associated with racial discrimination experienced by Black-Americans while driving. Russell-Brown

(2004) defined racial profiling as any actions that result in a heightened scrutiny of minorities. Racial profiling was found not to be limited to just incidents of DWB, but also included other forms such as walking and shopping while Black, which has much to do with perceptions of the Black American community (Gabbidon, 2003). It is important to note "mass imprisonment encourages the larger society to see a subset of the [Black American community –those of the hip-hop generation] in low-income communities as potential threats. This stigma increases their social and economic marginalization and encourages the routine violation of their rights" (Forman Jr., 2012, p. 111). As a result, society allows for the intense police surveillance of these individuals, any misbehavior in schools is often reported to the police leading to juvenile court, and even those who are part of the culture but who have never been arrested endures the same consequences of the stigmas associated with their race (Forman Jr., 2012). Studies have shown that dark skin is often devalued in society and the lighter-skinned often receive greater opportunities than the darker-skinned (Jones, 1996), which suggests that racial profiling should be analyzed from an Afrocentric perspective, so that all Black Americans will be part of the study, regardless of skin complexion. The U.S. Supreme Court intensified the DWB problem by granting police officers the power to stop persons suspected of drug crimes under the notion of probable cause for a traffic violation (*Whren v. United States*, 1996). Specifically, the court stated that any time an officer stops a vehicle after observing a traffic violation, it is considered probable cause and motivation would not matter (*Whren v. United States*, 1996). The defense cautioned that the decision would give the police unlimited discretionary power to stop any driver at any time, especially

Black Americans. However, Justice Scalia speaking on behalf of the court, reiterated that the court understood the racial argument, but stated it had nothing to do with the Fourth Amendment (*Whren v. United States*, 1996). The Fourth Amendment states,

> The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized. (U.S. Const. amend. IV)

This statement reiterates the idea that the decision had nothing to do with race. However, Afrocentric theory tells us that race always has a bearing on application within society. Thus, although not legal, the decision did give law enforcement the ability to stop any driver without fear of a lawsuit over racial discrimination. This was a result of the protection of the Fourth Amendment as was feared by the defense by allowing unlimited discretionary power to stop drivers at any time.

Solutions are also offered using an Afrocentric perspective. For example, Roberts (2004) evaluated the long-term effects of high incarceration rates on the Black American community. This quantitative study opens up an Afrocentric perspective on how the incarcerations of members of the community negatively affect the health and future of other members of the community in terms of family growth, safety, and economics. Whaley and McQueen (2004) offered some solutions to the issues raised by Roberts' research. Whaley and McQueen suggested that many theoretical models do not take into consideration the cultural aspects of Black American communities. Thus, there are two

ways to fix the gap between science and practice in the prevention of behavioral issues that lead to incarcerations of Black Americans: (a) cultural sensitivity should be used in prevention strategies such as substance abuse prevention programs, and (b) cultural models that are indigenous within the Black American community should be evaluated. Providing a more Afrocentric study will allow the gap between the primary prevention and currently existing service programs to be bridged, and hence lead to more positive social change.

Cokley (2005) argued that, in research, racial identity and ethnic identity should be viewed and treated separately due to their places within American society. Thus, in order to understand the Black American identity a methodological and conceptual examination is needed rooted in an Afrocentric worldview in order to examine and affirm the African cultural values within the research to ensure clarity of the data collected. Cokley then provided quantitative data to support how this will work by conducting a survey of students in both a historically Black university and a historically White Midwestern institution.

Alexander (2012) argued that the new Jim Crow has a very strong similarity of Jim Crow of the late 19th and 20th centuries because of the need of cheap labor. The loss of slaves after the Civil War left many White American farm owners in peril; further, Black Americans were the experts in cotton production, and the demand for wages from the ex-slaves created an economic disaster for the country (Blackmon, 2008). Some farmers tried to intimidate Black Americans into lifetime contracts; however, the convict leasing system adopted after the end of Reconstruction was more successful (Blackmon,

2008). As society changed post the Jim Crow and Civil rights eras of the 20th century, there was a change in many state and federal laws targeting criminals during the 1980s' war on drugs, resulting in Black Americans being relegated to an inferior and diminished category that continues into the 21st century – that of criminals (Feagin, 2001). Due to large numbers of Black Americans being arrested and labeled criminals, the war on drugs of the 1980s resulted in Black Americans being subjected to a network of laws, policies, and institutions meant to ensure a subordinate status of a group, defined by race (Alexander, 2012).

Adding to Alexander's research is that of Mendieta (2012) mapping the social inequalities that make up the United States. Critical social theory is defined as the analysis of institutional practices facing groups around central questions characterized by injustices specific to political, social, and historical contexts of the group being studied (Mendieta, 2012). Using this theory offers a clear picture of the incarceration of African Americans. By surveying the geography of social injustice in our society, with the basis of critical social theory, Mendieta research has found two very interesting facts. First, the 2010 census data shows that Latinos is now the largest minority group in the United States accounting for 16% of the population primarily in the Southwest, West Coast, and the historic South (Mendieta, 2012). This is primarily due to a shift in the African American population from the north to the southeast reversing the great migration during the early 1900's following the civil war where African-American moved north. This is important because change in demographics can account for some changes in incarcerations due to change in laws depending on the new area of residency.

The demographic changes are taking place in accordance with two societal trends. First, even though the FBI has reported a decline in violent crimes, Black Americans and Latinos are still experiencing some of the highest rates of incarceration, accounting for roughly 60% of the prison population in the United States (Mendieta, 2012). This is important because this high incarceration rate has occurred during the last three decades, during which there was a steep increase in the incarceration of racial minorities in the United States with a background of economic decline and political disenfranchisement, similar to that discussed by Alexander (cited in Mendieta, 2012). As a result, Medieta claimed that, "I would not hesitate to endorse Angela Davis' racial cartography of the United States, one in which there is continuity among the slave population, Jim Crow marginality, and the radicalized prison of today" (p. 461), where prison is used as a mechanism to transfer social wealth from racialized communities to privileged classes. Thus, the impressment of Black Americans is just as much a political as it is an economic matter, and a new perspective from an Afrocentric lens is needed to see how incarceration affects the Black American community in the field of public policy.

As seen through the research discussed, the Afrocentric voice that centered on the thoughts and feeling of direct members of the Black community has so far been absent. Rather, the research spoke about the Black Community through quantitative means, but lacking the direct voice of the Black community. Kerwin and Furlong (2011) stated that rulemaking is a very complex activity that has a variety of legal, political, and bureaucratic constraints. More so, agency heads might influence policy in a number of ways; including through law and politics which is often influenced by studies like this

one. Therefore, the use of Afrocentric theory would help fill the gap within the literature where Black Americans are not the center of the research study. Rather that are viewed as the object where the participants are talked about, but not talked to; thus lacking the Afrocentric voice which I will add with this study. Thus, Afrocentricity will be used this study due to its focus on the use and understanding of oral traditions and does not claim hegemonic positions which has been absent in the literature of public policy to this point

Historical Background

As stated earlier, Afrocentric theory requires a historical analysis of the Black American incarceration in the U.S. in order to understand contemporary issues and stigmas (Kershaw, 1992). Thus, understanding the history of the Black American community is as essential to the background of this study as the methodology and framework. The very first stigma placed on Black Americans was that they should be enslaved. Williams (1944) and Allen (1990/1992) discussed the impact that the institution of slavery had on the capitalist economic structure of the United States. The study suggested that each colony passed a series of comprehensive laws that allowed the colonists to control the enslaved Black American population that served as the source of economic prosperity in both the Northern "free" states and the Southern "slave" states. Thus, many delegates southern American colonies argued that, without indentured labor, both the North and South would suffer economically due to the reliance on indentured labor to produce raw goods. Further, this study allows for a historical perspective on how Black Americans have been used in the past and even today, as a foundation of the U.S. economic structure.

In order to understand the role of Black Americans' contributions to capitalism, we must discuss the structure of the American government. Work completed by Easton (1965) and Smith (1996) analyzed the ways political structures are both created and utilized. Specifically, Easton developed what is now known as the Easton model, about which Smith provides more detail. Professor Robert Smith analyzed this model as a way to understand how the American government handled various aspects of the 1960s Civil Rights movement. The basis for this argument is Easton's political systems theory, which is based on two concepts: persistence and maintenance. Persistence is the means of any political system to maintain equilibrium; maintenance is when political systems attempt to maintain the values and relationships that characterize the society and economy through neglect, co-optation, political repression, or substantive policy (Smith, 1996). This is often in reaction to stress on or disturbances of the political system. As stated by Easton, stress involves conditions that challenge the ability of a system to persist in its current state due to social systemic or nonsystemic demands resulting in outputs that will ensure maintenance (neglect, co-optation, political repression, or substantive policy), while disturbances are simply events that attempt to dislodge the political system from its current course. Thus, in this particular case, the political system is the United States government and the stress/disturbance is the need for a cheap workforce.

One could argue that the basis of the political structure discussed by Easton (1965) and Smith (1996) is racism. Feagin (2001) described the American structure of government, as seen through the constitution, as a process meant to separate and oppress. Feagin also stated that the constitution is an inherently racist document that was created

with the intention of maintaining the status quo of slavery. He outlines this need to maintain the status quo as the way America has continued to deal with racial issues that include representation within the government and education. This valuable research provided an excellent definition of systemic racism (provided earlier in the key terms), which this research relies on. Systemic racism allows for a further understanding of Black Americans' experience in the United States.

Negative stigmas exist due to labeling, negative stereotyping, acts of exclusion, discrimination, and low status due to a power dynamic between one group and another (Link & Phelan, 2001). When power dynamics such as stereotyping, discrimination, exclusion, or low status are not active, intuitional practices such as laws act in their place. Thus, the primary question is: what is the Black American place in the American democratic system? An answer to this begins with the definition of democracy. The term democracy has various meanings, which can be grouped into two categories according to whether they are based on scholarship that regards democracy as a form of government or as a social system (Ranney & Kendall, 1951). Therefore, democracy is the cornerstone of the American system of government, which is commonly referred to as either majority rule (for the people, by the people) or limited majority rule as a way of government. In 1913, Charles Beard argued that the United States Constitution was created in order to protect the delegates' interest in economic stability (Beard, 2004), which brings into question whether the United States democracy is based on a majority rule or minority rule. I would argue that contemporary governance is a combination of both, depending on society at the time. Majority rule is based on the idea that human beings have certain

33

inalienable rights, which can neither be given nor taken away (Ranney & Kendall, 1951), whereas minority rule is based on the idea that government should protect what the majority of the community wants (Ranney & Kendall, 1951, p. 439).

Then the best way to understand the influence of democratic theory and how it has impacted contemporary governance depends on the political atmosphere at the time. Majority and minority rule is then better understood by explaining the "new federalism." As stated by Kahan and Meares (1998), Reconstruction marked the start of a period in which law enforcement had played an important role in the harassment of minorities, in particular Black Americans. The movement gained more support during the 1960s as a means to "expand constitutional protections for the criminally accused by utilizing state constitutional provisions" (Harris, 2001, p. 368). As the legacy of the *Michigan v. Long* (1983) decision shows that the Supreme Court has long been part of the debate limiting new federalism by stating that state decisions will only be constitutional if they are based on independent state grounds. This suggests that there was a move away from federal authority over issues of race similar to that following the Reconstruction era.

Moving forward, in 1951, the Boggs Act introduced mandatory minimum sentences for drug crimes, and was furthered in 1956 with the Boggs Act enhancements (Kitwana, 2002). Congress threw out the mandatory minimum sentences during the 1970s because small-time dealers and addicts were receiving sentences that were better suited for more serious crimes; however, some state legislators began to create their own mandatory minimum sentences, such as New York State's 1973 Rockefeller drug laws (RDL) (Kitwana, 2002). New York required that if anyone convicted of selling more than

two ounces of cocaine or other controlled substance be sentenced to a minimum of 15 years in prison (Drucker, 2002). As a result, New York saw 94% of Black Americans of the hip-hop generation (aged 21–44) in jail because of RDL, while only making up 33% of the entire state's population by 2000 (Drucker, 2002). The rate of incarceration per 100,000 under RDL by age by the end of 2002 demonstrates a direct assault on the Black American community, which only added to negative stigmas associated with incarceration and the hip-hop generation (see Table 1). The racial disparities are seen at every age group; however, the hip-hop generation demographic (ages 21–44) is most striking, as it constitutes roughly 80% of the total RDL prison population. More states followed New York's lead, thus furthering the rise in incarceration across the United States that saw members of the Black American hip-hop generation being dealt the harshest blow.

Table 1

Rates of Incarceration Per 1000,000 Under RDL Ending January 1, 2002

Age Group	White American males	Black American males	Black American females	White American females
Under 21	1.37	57.52	1.94	1.94
21 - 44	34.50	1516.45	190.61	109.61
Above 44	9.65	329.32	19.60	19.60
Total	16.03	659.89	47.26	47.26

Note: From "Population impacts of mass incarceration under New York's Rockefeller drug laws: An Analysis of years of life lost," by E. Drucker, 2002, *Journal of Urban Health Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*, *79*(3), p. 4.

The statistical data outlined in Table 1 suggest that Black Americans of the hip-hop generation are incarcerated at higher rates than other cultural groups in the United States. This may be due in part to cases like Michigan v. Long, Boggs Act, New York State's 1973 Rockefeller drug laws, and Americas war on drugs. Based on Joe Fegin's definition of systemic racism discussed in chapter 1, I would argue that based on the historical treatment of Blacks by the law over the course of U.S. history that are now being seen through incarceration stigmas. For example, The U.S. Department of Justice (2012) found that roughly 61% of the 2011 prison population was younger than 39 years old. Of that 61%, men accounted for 93% of those sentenced, and 63% of those males

were Black Americans. The rates of incarceration are higher among younger groups. Between 6.6% and 7.5% of Black Americans between the ages of 25 and 39 were also imprisoned (U.S. Department of Justice, 2012). These statistics suggest an issue of imprisonment within the Black American community, and specifically within the hip-hop generation.

Current State of Incarcerations, Stigmas, and the Black American Community

DuBois (1935) and Carlton and Coclanis (2003) discussed the economic effects of slavery on the Southern economy and that of the nation as a whole. It is important to note that neither of these authors focused on any one colony, but both demonstrated that slavery was a central theme of the nation's development and suggested that it still plays a major role today. As such, these works demonstrate that without slavery as a central theme of the South, the Southern economy would have suffered drastically. Finkelman (1949/2001) then suggested that the reliance on slavery was rooted in Southern views on race. He stated that racism was necessary to counteract the fact that slavery contradicted the free labor basis of society and the basis for slavery; otherwise, slavery would have applied to poor Whites and immigrants (Finkelman, 1949/2001). Thus, for the South, defending slavery was key to their economic growth, thereby supporting the importance of race in the creation of the constitution. I argue, and research shows, that this continues to be an undercurrent for the incarceration of Black Americans today.

Continuing with the discussion of the origins of modern racism, Fredrickson (2003) tends to focus on contemporary times but does offer some discussion of America related to its independence from England. In this particular chapter, Fredrickson

discussed the rise of modern racism and the outcome of racial attitudes in colonial America:

> Black Americans … spent most of their first three hundred years on the North American continent as a servile labor force. Slave masters or landlords with sharecroppers have a stake in the preservation of the subordinated group because its labor is essential to their prosperity. So long as members of the group stay "in their place," they may be treated with the paternalism that is often associated with vast power differentials. But if they seek to rise out of their place and demand equal rights with members of the dominant group, they are likely to be exposed to a furious and violent form of racist reprisal. (p. 39)

Fanon (1952/2008) argued that Black Americans live within two dimensions, one that is of their own culture and the other of European culture, thus suggesting that there is a constant psychological identity battle within the Black American community. This leaves many Black Americans with the belief that White Americans would accept them as one of their own (Fanon, 1967). Fanon is here describing White privilege – the idea that White Americans live within only one culture while Black Americans live in dual cultures and, as such, are not privileged to live a single reality. This psychological effect is due to the experience of slavery.

While enslaved, Black Americans were pitted against their White American enslavers from the beginning and racial differences were defined very early by the colonists of America (Bay, 2000). For example, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, racial ideology provided a rationalization for the enslavement of Black

Americans and after the Civil War this idea advanced to the point that racial proscription continued to govern the discriminatory relations between White Americans and Black Americans; thus, the foundation of what is known today as *White privilege*.

According to McIntosh (cited in Tatum, 2003), White privilege is best described as an invisible package of unearned assets that can only be of benefit to White Americans. For example, "When Blacks pull carjackings and rob convenience stores in the ghetto, it is deemed normal to Black ghetto culture. However, when White corporate executives embezzle millions of dollars from savings and loan institutions, it is looked at as an aberration. According to Jones (1996), "It must be understood that crime and violence are not monopolized by Blacks, but are American traditions" (p. 52). This suggests that Black Americans spend much of their lives living at a distance from White Americans and not enjoying many of their benefits, in part because of Black Americans' comfort with their segregated situation and in part due to force exerted through the American criminal justice system (Hacker, 1992/1995). Therefore, White privilege is, as stated by Saxton (1990, 2003), a form of racism that allows for the historical explanation of humanity, which created the duality of the existing social reality that we live in today.

With an understanding of White privilege, Jordan (1974) provided a definition of slavery through the concept of White privilege as a concept that is embodied in the terms of servitude, service, and servant; however, a servant was not the same as a slave, but suggested a measure of precision within the concept of slavery itself, suggesting that the concept of "slavery" as we know it is fairly new and corresponds with Snowden's (1991) background of racism prior to colonial America. Here he broadens the background of

events occurring in colonial America while discussing how early European civilizations (such as Rome and Greece) interacted with the continent of Africa and the role this interaction played in the formation of America. Snowden (1991) provided support for the argument that many of the colonists believed that all great societies used an enslaved labor force to handle day-to-day duties so that the men of power and wealth could focus on the development of the society. The use of an enslaved labor force may also explain the rationale of incarcerations of minorities today.

Burris-Kitchen and Burris (2011) showed that the high rate of incarceration of Black Americans has pervasive and chronic negative consequences for the social, economic, and political vitality of the Black American community, including aspects such as democratic participation and violence within urban communities. For example, a very racially charged climate existed before and following the Rodney King beating in South Central Los Angeles. The racially charged climate was due to the volatile relationship between the Black American community and the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). Following the King incident, an investigation into law enforcement practices was conducted, with some very interesting results. Specifically, the investigation found that the Los Angeles Police had a tendency to resort to excessive force, which sometimes led to torture or other cruel treatment; further, Black Americans were subjected to higher discriminatory treatment and were typical victims of police abuse (Gaynes, 1993). As I will discuss in Chapter 2, institutional racism is not only a problem in Los Angeles, California, but in the United States as a whole.

Research conducted by Kakade et al. (2012) has shown that the incarceration of Black Americans in the 21st century is a product of racial disparities in the criminal justice system. Their quantitative research focused primarily on the incarcerations of Black American youth compared to White American youth. Specifically, using the results from a multinomial logistic regression, focusing on a younger age group, controlled by age and gender, results showed that Black Americans were 2.5 times as likely as White Americans to have multiple arrests, and 1.6 times as likely to have been arrested at least once (Kakade et al., 2012). These findings suggest that the criminal justice system is racially biased, because "the magnitude of the race effect diminished after [the researchers] adjusted for some discriminatory factors" (Kakade et al., 2012, p. 1309). Thus, poorer Black Americans are more likely to be incarcerated than middle class or less educated White Americans.

As noted earlier, there is prior research on Black Americans and the new era in criminal justice research. Meares and Harcourt (as cited in Roberts, 2004) stated that many social scientists are currently applying empirical methods to help understand the impacts of crime and policies on the incarceration of Black Americans. Roberts (2004) found that one in eight Black adult males in urban areas is sent to prison and one in four is currently behind bars on any given day of the year. This may be a result of policies within urban public schools. Hatt (2011) conducted qualitative interviews with inmates and suggested that school socialization, discipline policies, and low educational attainment help explain why many low-income youth, especially Black Americans, end up in jail rather than college. For example, the zero tolerance policies during the 1990s as

part of the Gun-free Schools Act of 1994 led to numerous students being suspended from school and facing a mandatory one-year expulsion for possession of firearms (Hatt, 2011). Some states have even passed legislation that punishes juveniles as adults which then also increases the Black American incarceration of those hip-hop generation even higher.

One example of this type of legislation is California's Proposition 21 also know as the "Juvenile Justice Initiative". The legislation that was passed by 62% of state voters on March 7, 2000 allows prosecutors power to decide whether juveniles as young as fourteen would be tried as adults (Taylor, 2002). Many prosecutors are elected officials; thus, their campaigns are based on their record on crime and their prosecutions. As a result, an issue of justice becomes personal for many prosecutors issues while having a child life being in the middle. The results of this type of legislation directly impacts Black American incarceration rates. The Center on Juvenile and Criminal justice's (2011) studied the affects of California's Proposition 21 using data retrieved from California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR). Their conclusions showed an increase in the prison population over a ten-year period, specifically in counties that had high minority populations. Consequently, as stated by Wald and Losen (2003), adult prisons and juvenile halls are now filled with individuals who have traveled through what is known as the school-to-prison pipeline. As a result, Black American youth, who make up roughly 16% of the country's total, account for 28% of juvenile arrests and 58% of youth later admitted to state adult prisons (National Council on Crime and Delinquency, 2007). Adding to the incarceration problem are mandatory Ms. Judge Bennett admitted

that he has sent 1,092 convicts to federal prisons for mandatory minimum sentencing, ranging from six months to life, and many of those sentenced are poor Black Americans who are apprehended through common traffic stops for minor infractions such as nonfunctioning taillights (Bennett, 2013).

W.E.B. DuBois (1945) stated that, in order to participate positively in a democracy, Black Americans must know the world that they are living in, and injustices and cruelty have been the history of the United States when dealing with Black Americans. Browne (2010) stated that before the 13th Amendment there was never a need for prisons; however, after the Civil War, the need for prisons grew as a means to provide a cheap labor force. Thus, during the 19th century an extensive prison system developed in the Southern regions of the United States with the goal of meeting the racial and economic need for cheap labor formerly satisfied through slavery (Browne, 2010). This is supported by data provided by the FBI under their Uniform Crime Report. In 1939, for example, they reported that Black Americans made of 22% of all arrests but only 9.8% of the general population at the end of 1940 (US Department of Commerce, 1943). More recently, in 2009, the FBI reported that Black Americans accounted for 28% of all arrests but only 13% of the entire population, whereas White Americans account for 79% of the population (FBI, 2009).

The U.S. Department of Justice 2012 report allows for an understanding of the current situation regarding incarcerations and their continued need in America. According to the U.S. Department of Justice (2012), the overall number of prisoners under both state and federal control declined by .9% in 2011; however, the largest drop

was in the state population (down 1.5%), while the federal population actually increased (up 3.1%). These statistics may be explained by many states facing budgeting issues due to the weak post-recession economy. In fact, California lowered its prison population by 15,493, accounting for more than half the country's overall decrease in 2011 (U.S. Department of Justice, 2012). However, just because the number of inmates in state prison was lowered did not mean they were released. In California, under the Public Safety Realignment policy, or PSR, the goal was to reduce prison populations through normal attrition and placing nonviolent offenders in local facilities (U.S. Department of Justice, 2012). For example, in Bayview-Hunters Point, San Francisco, a predominantly poor Black American community, there is an estimated 50% unemployment rate because of the downshift in the U.S. economy (Browne, 2010). As a result, the community is now facing a rise in crime, incarceration, displacement as a result of gentrification, and the future loss of the San Francisco 49ers, which supply the few jobs in the area that do still exist. To combat the issues of crime, San Francisco has implemented gang injunctions, curfews, and anti-loitering and anti-association laws that work very much like the old Black codes of the Jim Crow era, but now under the pretense of gang prevention efforts (Browne, 2010). Nevertheless, these new "Black codes" are an example of the lineage of slavery in today's criminal justice system. This supports past research done by Venkatesh (as cited in Browne, 2010) that many within the Black American community do not feel as if the courts or police represent them and thus have no respect for their authority or purpose within the community.

One aspect of incarceration that must also be discussed is the deaths due to some of the same crimes that led to incarcerations of Black Americans. From January 1, 2012 to June 30, 2012, at least 120 Black Americans were killed because of excessive force by police and, to a smaller extent, security guards (Malcolm X Grassroots, 2012). Additional data from the Malcolm X Grassroots movement, or MXGM, also suggest that of the 120 killed, 48 of the accounts stem from what is cited as suspicious behavior or appearance and traffic violations as reasons for death (Malcolm X Grassroots, 2012). The data within this report suggest that Black Americans living in the 21st century share some of the same issues faced by their ancestors of earlier centuries in the United States. After all, during Jim Crow, many Black Americans were severely stigmatized and segregated based on race, but today in a colorblind society, support within their own community is hard to come by (Alexander, 2012).

Some of the stigmas that result from incarceration also threaten the very strength of the Black American community. For example, even individuals who are released from prison suffer from the exacerbation of the stigma associated with incarceration. As stated by Hagan and Dinovitver (1999), incarceration produces shame and anger toward the released inmate's family and community, and destroys trust between even the closest of friends or family members. Further, as Langan and Levin (2002) described, there is evidence that prison programs fail to prepare inmates for release and allow many to harbor characteristics that may predispose them to repeat cycles of crime and arrest. Thus, it is no surprise or anything abnormal that the stigmatized group begins to embrace

their stigma of criminality, which hurts not only their community, but also the nation as a whole (Alexander, 2012)

        Stigmas have been linked to many social psychological issues. According to Major and O'Brien (2005), incarceration stigmas of Black Americans of the hip-hop generation have been linked to low social status and poverty, which affects the Black American community as a whole. For example, in *Richardson v. Ramirez* (1974), the Supreme Court ruled upon felon disenfranchisement: the US Supreme Court found that section 2 of the 14th Amendment exempted felony disenfranchisement laws and distinguished them from other forms of voting restrictions, which can be tailored to serve the state's compelling interests in order to remain constitutional. With the shift away from overtly discriminatory laws, felony disenfranchisement laws are now justified on race-neutral grounds (Behrens, Uggen, & Manza, 2003). As a result, in states like California, one in four Black American males is not allowed to vote, due to past felony charges (Human Rights Watch, 1998). Further, in 2002, during a debate over a measure in the Senate that would restore the ballot to ex-felons in federal elections, Senator Mitch McConnell stated, "We are talking about rapists, murderers, robbers, and even terrorists or spies … those who break our laws should not dilute the vote of law-abiding citizens" (U.S. Congress, 2002, p. S803). Statements like those of Senator McConnell and Jeff Sessions, who stated "each state has different standards based on their moral evaluation, their legal evaluation, and their public interest" lead to the idea that systemic racism is ongoing due to the apparent acceptance of historical discrimination as mentioned earlier as a new form of Jim Crow legislation. (U.S. Congress, 2002, p. S803). Consequently,

many groups who are stigmatized have a negative social attribute that identifies them as altered and that results in a feeling of being devalued in the eyes of society (Major & O'Brien, 2005). "Psychologist have long observed that when people feel hopelessly stigmatized, a powerful coping strategy –often the only apparent rout to self-esteem –is embracing one's stigmatized identity" (Alexander, 2012, p. 152).

Felony disenfranchisement is a stigma that has negative discriminatory outcomes for the Black American community. Incarcerations are typically compounded when state and local governments impose legal restrictions beyond the institutional supervision that is the typical penalty for felony convictions, which is also known as felony disenfranchisement (King, 2006). For example, during the 2000 election, approximately 611,000 Black Americans were barred for life from voting due to past criminal convictions (Chin, 2004). This thus leads to less political voice for the Black American community in our representative democracy due to felony disenfranchisement because one out of nine Black American males between the ages of 20 and 34 were either in custody in federal penitentiaries or state prisons and county jails by the 2000 election (Wacquant, 2001).

As a result, unlike in some other democratic societies, the stigma of penal conviction is prolonged and reframed in a manner that produces an ethno-racial attitude toward Black Americans in general, but specifically those of the hip-hop generation (Wacquant, 2001). More so, as stated by Alexander (2012), release from prison does not represent freedom, but the start of a new phase of stigmatization and control. In other democratic societies, the dishonor and civic disabilities of imprisonment are short lived

and are typically not evident upon re-entry into society due to legislation that limits the use and dissemination of criminal records (Wacquant, 2001). This is not the case in the United States. Convicts' files are readily available for public viewing and convicts are placed under parole, a form of social control that often leads to the committing of more crimes and has only operated as a means to extend the social and symbolic incapacities of imprisonment after release. Thus, the stigma of criminality works with systemic racism the same way the stigma of race did in the past (Alexander, 2012). Consequently, as stated by Fields (1982), the conception of race that has uniquely lived in America due to its inelasticity and consequentiality, is due to the collision of slavery and democracy, as stated earlier, as a means of organization of social life after bondage that has established a form of labor and control within an economy that has a pre-capitalist system of labor.

Finally, *Calhoun v. United States* is further proof of research needed from a culturally sensitive approach on Black American incarceration. The Supreme Court did not take this particular case in 2013, due to Calhoun not raising his argument during the appeals process as required under the law (*Calhoun v. United States*, 2013). Calhoun (a Black American male) argued that although he was present when federal agents arrested him and several other men, he was unaware of the illegal activity that was occurring (*Calhoun v. United States*, 2013). However, the questioning by the Assistant U.S. Attorney Sam Ponder was heavily rooted in prejudices and stereotypes that Black Americans are incarcerated at high numbers. Justice Sotomayor wrote that Ponder was out of line when he asked, "You've got Black Americans, you've got Hispanics, you've got a bag full of money. Does that tell you – a light bulb doesn't go off in your head and

say, 'This is a drug deal?'" (*Calhoun v. United States*, 2013). Thus, the stigma of criminality lingers and aided by the high number of Black Americans whom suffer from the stigma of a criminal record by association.

Summary and Conclusions

The focus on community-level research suggests a move in sociological analysis to help explain how racial hierarchies are part of social institutions and practices, as seen in the Calhoun case. Thus, new research should motivate similar change in the legal analysis of mass imprisonment from a culturally sensitive perspective. Hence, research that will examine the process by which incarceration affects communities, conducted by members of the community, will further add to the field of knowledge on felony disenfranchisement and Black American incarcerations. In addition, chapter 3 will discuss the research design and rationale, my role as the researcher, critical ethnography, and issues of trustworthiness for my proposed research project.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this ethnographic qualitative study was to provide an Afrocentric voice by which the members of the Black American community are the center of the data collection. The primarily goal of qualitative research, as suggested by Mason (2002), is to better interpret and explain how a set of individuals experience their social and cultural environments through the collection of data in the form of written texts from both formal and informal observations, informal and semi-structured interviews, and accounts written by other observers (Mason, 2002). In this Chapter, I will define and discuss critical ethnography, my role as the researcher, and the logic behind participant selection, instrumentation, procedures for a pilot study, procedures for recruitment, data analysis plan, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question in this study examines how the stigmas associated with mass incarceration have reduced political and economic opportunities for Black Americans born between 1965 - 1984 from an Afrocentric perspective. Broadly, stated, qualitative research examines answering questions of what, how, when, and where about the phenomenon being studied. Moreover, the qualitative approach deliberately seeks a deeper understanding of the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of, in this case, how incarceration rates among young Black Americans translate into negative political and economic effects within their communities (Dabbs, 1982). Ethnography is a specific qualitative tradition that encompasses the study

of human behavior within a cultural context, which is a way of describing a culture's or a certain cultural group's way of life.

Ethnography is the process which researchers attempt to better understand and interpret the social expressions of a culture through participant focused structured or semi structured interviews and document analysis in order to present findings that represent the lives of those whom were part of the study (Wilson, 2006). More so, ethnography is focused on the description of a culture while studying within their natural setting. Past research has had a reliance on a "universal" cultural definition when studying Black American incarcerations and lacking cultural specific dimensions on the phenomena (Zhu and Bargiela-Chippini, 2013). Thus, the goal of the interviews within this study is to better understand the Afrocentric view of the incarceration's impact on the discriminatory vitality of the Black American community, by focusing on a particular culture through an emic view.

As mentioned earlier, etic and emic are alternative approaches to qualitative research in ethnographic studies. An etic approach follows more of a functionalist approach that relies on logic using surveys in order to compare cultures (Zhu and Bargiela-Chippini, 2013). An etic approach has a purpose as a starting point for analysis, but needs an in-depth emic approach in order to provide the detail insiders understanding and perspective (Zhu and Bargiela-Chippini, 2013). Whereas, an emic approach mainly depends on the findings through ethnographic engagement and focuses on the detailed descriptions the method provides (Zhu and Bargiela-Chippini, 2013). Thus, the emic method can contribute to exposing social conditions that become a point of departure

within new research. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, an emic approach was

employed to focus on the Afrocentric perspective to provide a contrast with past research

conducted from an etic view or European prospective. Furthermore, the use of critical

ethnography helped in the exploration of my research question by focusing on the issue

of Black American incarcerations and direct efforts toward positive social change by

better informing prevention programs and policies that focus on the deterrence of

incarcerations within the Black American community.

In order to fully understand the value of critical ethnography, the role of *critical*

theory and *critical race theory* as part of critical ethnography provide useful foundations.

The aim of critical theory is to seek human liberation through descriptive social inquiry

aimed at lowering domination of one social group and increasing freedom for all social

groups in various forms (Bohman, 2005). Critical theory is accomplished by explaining

what is biased within the currently shared view of social reality, and identifying the

individuals or systems that are needed to instigate change and impact social issues

(Bohman, 2005). With that being said, critical race theory (CRT) argues for change to

occur based on the social condition of a particular group, in this study case Black

American's of the hip-hop generation and their communities.

Critical race theorists, like W.E.B. DuBois, asserted the notion that where a sector

(racial group) of the American population gains certain rights at the expense of another

(racial group), it is primarily a function of racism and racial subordination (Crenshaw,

Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). Therefore, the purpose of CRT, based on critical

theory, and used within Critical Ethnography is to reassess positions that deal with race

and racism within contemporary American culture. Moreover, critical race theory seeks to revitalize the institution of race-consciousness for Black Americans whom were rejected through integration, resulting in an impression of colorblindness that became the custom inside the Black American population (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995).

Therefore, if CRT starts with the notion that race does not solely exist biologically and is then less of a product of nature and more of a product of social classification and identification, then critical ethnography is a logical choice for exploring whether social, political, and cultural processes of classification and identification are what constitutes race or racialization, along with studying "whiteness" (Madison, 2012). As discussed earlier, white privilege has been an issue in society dating back to the colonial period. Critical race theorists feel that whiteness is perceived as non-racialized; however, as stated by Madison (2012), whiteness is a construction of race and forms a position of racial privilege. More so, positivists believe that genuine knowledge is gathered through direct documentation of experiences that lack the distortion from the ethnographer (Madison, 2012). Thus, data is collect through the key informants and not about them.

Critical ethnography, according to Kinchole and McLaren (cited in Madison, 2012), most compelling aspect is its use of critical theory. As McIntosh (as cited in Tatum, 2003) stated, many whites are taught to recognize white privilege. Thus, when research is conducted on Black Americans, they are seen as the object of the study. Critical ethnography allows for the understanding of the racial context due to its incorporation of CRT, thus allowing culturally sensitive research to occur. Critical

ethnography, then, allows me to position myself, as a member of the cultural group being studied to ensure Black Americans and their perspective are the center of the study and not simply the object, as in past research. Thus, understanding the culture being discussed is key to understanding how qualitative research, and critical ethnography will use and evaluate data collected from an Afrocentric perspective to answer the research question. In a sense, ethnography becomes the doing of critical theory, because critical theory finds its method in critical ethnography (Madison, 2012)

Due to this research being written in the field of public policy, which is a political field of study, critical ethnography aligns perfects because it is conventional ethnography but with a political purpose (Thomas, 1993). Critical ethnography allows for advocacy and a value-laden approach that helps to empower the participants by challenging the status quo and addressing concerns of the current power structure and control structure in the United States (Thomas, 1993). Thus, through this reflective approach, critical ethnography will allow me to focus on a particular subculture of the Black American community and make value-laden judgments challenging past research, policy, and other forms of human activities that have led to the weakening of the Black American community through incarcerations. After all, one cannot fully study or evaluate policy without understanding the circumstances that created them, and only then can positive social change occur (Salkind, 2008/2009).

Role of the Researcher

My goal as the researcher was to interview Black Americans about their life experiences and how incarceration of their hip-hop generation and associated stigmas has

affected their community in order to gain some idea on their understanding of how such

stigmatization affects them politically and economically. The process of representing

others is always difficult and complicated because there are consequences if the research

misrepresents those whom he/she is allowing to speak through (Madison, 2012). Thus, I

felt an ethical obligation to contribute toward changing the current conditions facing the

Black American community because of high incarceration rates, moving toward freedom

and equity by bringing a perspective that otherwise has been lost due to prevailing

cultural differences.

Participatory research (PR), allowed me to conduct cultural sensitive research,

because it is in direct opposition to researchers establishing and guiding the research

agenda (Thomas, 1999). Thus, as a PR practitioner, I understood that through reflection

and action the social condition of Black America will be transformed through policy

makers becoming aware of their voice on the incarceration and their community.

Additionally, as stated by Tandon (1981), the "Re-awakening the weakest sections of our

society" (p.23) found in urban areas in a manner that empowers literacy while producing

research that stimulates political action (Thomas, 1999). As the researcher, my hope was

that even though I no longer reside within the community, I still share the culture and as

such can ensure the Black American voice is at the center of the data collected and a

voice is recorded that has been otherwise ignored or misinterpreted in past research. As

stated by Young (2007), ethnographic interviews allowed me to understand how the

individuals I interviewed make meanings of themselves as a function of a larger cultural

community. More so, the goal of these interviews was then to understand what my key

informants know about themselves and their community, how knowledge is socially composed and circulated through the community, and lastly, how once information is circulated, what behaviors are enacted by the community as it relates to the incarceration of Black Americans of the hip-hop generation (Young, 2007). Thus, the Black American perspective served as the interpretive lens of this research such that the voices of the Black American participants are understood in keeping with their understanding and organization of their experience.

Thus, one way to avoid bias was to remain objective and not to impose my own feelings on the topic of Black American incarcerations. As stated by Thomas (1999), subjective ethnography data does not mean I will simply state what I think, but to remain objective in the interpretation of the data collected. Objectivity is only possible by maintaining a value-neutral stance to the research. That is to say that as the researcher, I had to remain neutral while conducting my research and not to prejudge or impose my meanings on to the participants (Thomas, 1999). The goal was to let the data speak through me and not to prejudge or impose my own feelings or meanings to the data which will not only create bias, but also tarnish the goal of having culturally sensitive research.

Participants were be selected purposely from my own list of contacts and through gatekeepers. Gatekeepers were individuals who were in a position to grant access to possible participants with familiarity with the hip-hop generation interactions with the legal system (Tewksbury and Gagne, 1997). Many potential gatekeepers were already identified through past encounters through professional conferences, colleagues, or professional associates who hold pivotal positions in the hierarchy of the Black American

community as teachers, law enforcement officers (past and present), community and political leaders, and active members of the criminal justice system (lawyers, judges, etc). On the whole, these key informants were used to illuminate a representative experience of Black American culture in that they share both individual and collective thinking due to their shared experiences, values, and sometimes behaviors, showing both the commonalities and differences among Black Americans that, through the use of qualitative research, will help facilitate cultural intuition (Tillman, 2002). Therefore, I depended on my key informants perspectives and cultural understanding of incarcerations to make connections between fact and theory in order to make suggestions for positive social change. Finally, as a critical ethnographer, I empowered my participants' voices to speak to an audience that may otherwise not give my participants the authority to speak on the subject but to only answer questions about them without their personal and cultural considerations (Thomas, 1993).

Methodology

Critical ethnography is the process by which the method was completed for this project (Madison, 2012). Critical ethnography is a type of reflection that evaluates culture, knowledge, and action by deepening and sharpening the ethical commitments and by developing and acting upon commitments within the context of political agendas (Thomas, 1993). Ethnography requires the recordings of lived experiences in the social setting of the participants in order to explore and present cultural questions on the subjects' beliefs, practices, and actions related to a particular phenomenon (Willis & Trondman, 2000). However, critical ethnography is more than just the study of the

oppressed or socially marginalized. Critical ethnography allows for the study of mundane events and discusses them in a way that exposes broader social processes of control and power imbalance that impose a set of meanings or behaviors over others (Thomas, 1993). This is possible due to critical ethnography understanding or race through critical race theory (CRT), reason and worth, and performance ethnography.

Participant selection

The population for my study was best identified as Black Americans of the hip-hop generation, born between 1965 and 1984 (Kitwana, 2002) between the ages of 30 and 50. This particular sub-culture of the Black American community is the focus because, as past research has mentioned, this group is the highest incarcerated sector of the Black American community. Therefore, I focused on the perspectives of members of this generation to gain an understanding of the stigmatizing results of incarcerations of Black Americans of the hip-hop generation and how these stigmas impact the discriminatory conditions of their communities (Tilman, 2002). Thus, for this study, participants were American-born Black Americans born Black Americans in order to focus on the cultural and historical nature of their struggle within the American legal system.

Selection of key informants, those individuals who have specialist knowledge about other members of the community within the research setting (Payne and Payne, 2004), will be conducted via purposeful sampling for key criteria related to experience relevant to the research question paralleling an approach outlined by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007). The informants were selected based on their background work experience, cultural orientation within the Black American community, and familiarity

with members of the Black American community's interaction within the criminal justice system. The informants' understanding and experience of living within the hip-hop Black American culture between the ages of 5 and 18 is vital, because these are the ages during which Black Americans may experience prejudice or racial discrimination as a function of the American criminal system. Further, selected informants either will currently, or previously reside in an urban environment within the last decade. Participant interviews was focused on their personal experience within the Black American community and interactions with other members of the community, through their dealings with them as teachers, parents, police officers, friends, lawyers or other professional roles that lead to experiences that inform the research question. I continued interviews and recruitment until saturation occurred within a data collection; which occurred around 20 informants (Mason, 2010).

Obviously, there was some Black Americans excluded from the study as well as some other ethnic groups in America. The whole Black American community was not interviewed for this project in order to help use the ethnographic interviews as a tool to help broaden the parameters of cultural analysis of the urban poor that have been otherwise absent in other studies (Young, 2007). For example, Black Americans that are not from an urban background will not be part of the study due to cultural difference of those in urban Black American communities. Lastly, some ethnic groups will also be left out of this study. The goal of the study was to gain an Afrocentric perspective; thus, speaking to Asian Americans, White Americans, or Latin Americans, or members of the

African diaspora (i.e. Jamaicans, Africans, Haitians, etc) will move away from giving a voice the American born (Black Americans) that has otherwise been lost in past research.

Instrumentation

The goal of this study was to use interviews as a means to the voice of the participants (language) toward transforming ways of knowing and producing knowledge (Dillard, 2000). Thus, semi-structured interviews with members of the Black American community allowed for the gathering of raw information from participants through a sequenced approach based on an interview guide that presents questions aligned to explore the multiple dimensions of the overarching research question (Whitehead, 2005). These researcher-produced semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A) helped facilitate cultural intuition and provide the unique viewpoints of Black Americans by adding to what is already known about American incarceration, but from an Afrocentric perspective. However, it is important to understand that critical ethnography must be responsive to the need to be flexible when creating interview instruments because the questions that are the most interesting may not begin until considerable background interviews have taken place (Thomas, 1999). As a result, I prepared the initial base of interview questions in advance based on the stigmas of Black American incarcerations mentioned in the literature through the Spradely (1979) model (see Appendix A).

As stated by Madison (2012), interviews need a form of a checklist of guidelines and best practices that can be referred to occasionally to help reduce the interview becoming artificial and fixed in a set of rules. The Spradley (1979) model helped avoid these concerns by following three steps. The first step in the Spradley model is to ask

descriptive questions. These descriptive questions will ask my informants to recount their views of incarcerations and how the stigmas associated with incarceration has affected them and their community (Thomas, 1999). "We are concerned here with delineating or rendering a picture or image of real or actual circumstances" of the affects stigmas have on the Black community (Thomas, 1999, p.31). Descriptive questions can be accomplished by asking tour questions. Tour questions help provide a verbal breakdown of significant features of the Afrocentric view as told by an informant (Spradley, 1979). More so, experience question will be equally useful after being asked tour questions (Spradley, 1979). In this case, experience question helps authenticate how the participant was able to experience what was described in response to the tour question(s).

Next, structural questions were asked as part of the Spradely model. Structural questions need for an explanation that compliments descriptive questions that are to be asked during the interview. These set of questions needed contextual information that, as stated by Spradley (1979), "aids greatly in recall and will avoid the problem of making an informant feel he [or she] is being tested with a series of short questions" (p.125). Thus, relaxing the informant and allowing more quality data to be collected through the course of the interview.

Lastly, contrast questions were asked. Contrast questions use three principles – (a) *use principle*, (b) *similarity principle*, and (c) *contrast principle* (Spradley, 1979). *Use principle* helps contrast questions by understanding the meaning of what the informant describes through asking how what is being described is unique and not only asking the informant what he or she meant by their initial response (Spradley, 1979). The *similarity*

principle allows me to ask how the information gathered through the interviews are

similar for both the literature and what other informants are describing are the outcomes

of incarcerations and the negative discriminatory stigmas (Spradley, 1979). Finally,

contrast principle follows up the *similarity principle* by allowing me to see what is

different in the information provided and how it may be important to answering my

central research question (Spradley, 1979). Although contrast question may take on

various forms, they will help me illuminate the Afrocentric view the Afrocentric voice on

the discriminatory stigmas of incarcerations, and how Black Americans manage

incarcerations within their culture (Thomas, 1999).

Due to the wide geographic range of many of my participants, interviews were

conducted in person and via the phone. Interviews were only conducted after obtaining

informed consent either in person or via email. Informed consent is the understanding of

the participants that their involvement is by their choice, free from any fraud, deceit,

duress, or any other unfair inducement or manipulation (Thomas, 1999). The informed

consent document that I used (See Appendix B) was a written statement of potential risks

and benefits of the study as mandated by federal regulations. The consent form disclosed:

1. Statement that the study involves research.

2. Statement of why subject was selected.

3. Disclosure of the identity and all relevant roles of researcher as a doctoral student.

4. An understandable explanation of research purpose.

5. An understandable description of procedures.

6. Expected duration of subject's participation.

7. Statement that participation is voluntary.

8. Statement that refusing or discontinuing participation involves no penalty.

9. Description of reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts.

10. Description of anticipated benefits to subjects or others.

11. Information on compensation for participation.

12. Description of how confidentiality will be maintained.

13. Whom to contact with questions about the research (i.e. researcher's contact information).

14. Whom to contact with questions about their rights as participants (Walden University representative).

15. Statement that subject may keep a copy of the informed consent form.

16. All potential conflicts of interest are disclosed.

17. Consent process and documentation are in language understandable to the participant.

18. There is no language that asks the subject to waive his/her legal rights.

19. If appropriate, indicates that a procedure is experimental

20. If appropriate, disclosure of alternative procedures and treatment.

21. If appropriate, additional costs to subject resulting from research participation.

The consent forms were signed and dated by both the potential subject and me, completed either in person or electronically (by responding via email by "I consent") and will be maintained by me on a password-protected hard drive for three years before being destroyed (Wilson, 2006). Thus, by obtaining informed consent either in person or via

email, I was able to interact with my participant in real time via secure phone calls or in person. This makes researching potential participants easier for me and makes it more convenient for them to participate.

Lastly, to help ensure clarity and there are no gaps in the interview questions, I had the interview instrument previewed by a panel of experts to ensure sufficiency. Sometimes critical ethnographers find that during the data collection process that the questions are not inclusive and valuable information is not gathered (Thomas, 1999). As a result, I had have my instrument reviewed by a small panel of ethnographic research methodologist, community leaders, and other members of the Black American community to ensure the initial base instrument is as inclusive as possible.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

In order to explore the proposed research question through culturally sensitive ethnographic interviews, the data source must had be clarified. It is very important that I identify key informants whom are most likely to possess *insider knowledge* of my research domain (Black American incarcerations) (Thomas, 1999). Therefore, the data source for the study was the members of the Black American community who can share the cultural meaning of incarceration and the discriminatory conditions that result (Thomas, 1993). Past research has made Black Americans the object of the research based on a Eurocentric perspective; this study will have Black Americans and their voice as the center of the data collected. Thus, the interviews conducted and their results will be the data for this study once fruitful sources have been identified.

Key informants (gatekeepers) were also used as a proxy for his or her associates within the Black American community to gain access that I may not otherwise be able to obtain. These members, as stated earlier in chapter 1, were be selected purposefully based on the work experience, familiarity with members of the Black American community, and cultural orientation. I made contact with these gatekeepers via professional conventions that focus on the study and improvement of the Black American community (i.e. A.S.A.L.H. [Association for the Study of African American Life and History] annual convention) and based on their interest and expertise within the subject matter during panel discussions and paper sessions. Based on the information gathered from gatekeepers, recommendations was gathered of potential participants selected based their understanding of life from 1965 to today within urban Black American communities where the hip-hop generation will be the focus. Potential participants was then contacted by the gatekeeper and asked if they would want to be interviewed for this study covertly. After confirmation of interest by the gatekeeper, I then contacted the potential participant and forwarded the consent form, asked the preferred method of communication (phone, face-to-face, or video chat), and when would be a good time to start a conversation. The participant was then be reminded all information gathered during the study will be held in strict confidence.

As stated by Spradley (2003), "until you know the question that someone in the culture is responding to you can't know many things about the responses" (p. 48). Thus, semi-structured interviews will be conducted based on the preferred method of the participant to ensure a level of comfort via either phone, video chat, or in person as

methods of conducting the interview. During the rapport process, I worked with the informant to begin to seek what each of us like and come to consensus of what we want from the relationship centered on this study. Thus, the hope was to move away from apprehension and into a level of exploration where we both become familiar of our roles in this process, which lead to quality data. In addition, one of the goals of ethnographic interviews was to establish intimate or sustained interaction with my participants in their natural surroundings, which will help obtain the level of comfort needed to obtain valuable data (Young, 2007). Sharing membership in the same social categories, as my participants made it easier to acquire their trust and confidence, which may not be the case for someone outside the Black American community. More so, it is important that as a critical thinker, I was alert for the informant's answer that may seem contradictory because they defy the observed reality that can be made easier due to me being part of the culture being studied (Thomas, 1999). Thus, it is important for me to recognize when the data given seems to be different from what has been observed by studies, which may be overlooked by another researcher that does not share the same cultural background.

Collection methods for my semi-structured interviews included in-person conversations, online video and chats (i.e., Skype, Facetime, ooVoo, Tango, and Google hangouts), and the telephone (or mobile device). The data was collected based on the availability of the participants. Additional interviews were also set until a sense of theoretical saturation, or the moment is reached where similar or consistent patterns or arguments have been offered by my participants (Young, 2007). Field notes and raw data from my participants was be collected through the use video and face-to-face

interviews/audio recordings. The goal was to ensure no information is lost or misunderstood during the coding process, and the ability to go back, hear, and watch the interviews will help ensure reliable data is collected and interpreted.

Finally, debriefing my subjects was very important. It is not uncommon during an interview for subjects to become upset or unsettled. I lucky had no issues here, but to ensure no harm was done to my participants, I will debrief the subjects and determine if any assistance, counseling, or further explanations of questions that were asked is needed during the course of the interview (Berg, 2009). This is even more important due to the potential use of the Internet, because of involuntary disconnections or even lost phone calls due to wireless connectivity. Thus, precautions will be put in place to improve the likelihood subjects are debriefed. First, I will be sure to have an alternate phone number and email address for each subject. All participants were be given contact information of a Therapist-healer that has a strong understanding of Black American mental health related issues via a contact sheet (See Appendix C). Next, I ensured my subjects had my contact information (cell phone numbers and email address) at the beginning of the interview (in the consent form), should the subject feel the need to contact me. These debriefing procedures will ensure an open line of communication is always present.

Procedures for Pilot Study

The purpose of a pilot study was to test the interview plan. The primary advantage of conducting a pilot study was to test where the main research project could have issues, where research protocols may not be work or may be flawed, or whether proposed instruments are inappropriate (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). Recruitment and the

manner in which I recruited were also vital to the success of my study. Key informant's were be selected through gateways provided by professionals within the Black American community. I spoke to community organizers, members of the criminal justice system, and educators and ask for suggestions of key informants that meet my criteria (contact with or members of the hip-hop generation).

Recruitment was based on contacts gained through work, word-of-mouth, and volunteers. The one concern here was that the participants chosen might also be included in the main study. For example, participants that have already been exposed to the goals of the study may respond differently from those who have not previously been exposed (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). However, this was actually a positive because the participants were more adept and comfortable with the procedures, which was the goal of my pilot study. Contamination was less of a concern due to my study being qualitative, in which it is typical for data collected in the pilot to be part of the main study (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001). This was due to the progressive nature of qualitative research in that interviews are conducted to a point of saturation of data. I was able to gain insight from each interview, but did not have to make improvements on the interview schedule and nature of the questions asked, because they were successful during the pilot study. Lastly, the goal was also to obtain a level of rapport with my participants to ensure the data collected focused on the affects of mass incarceration on the Black community and not my own demeanor and attitudes on the topic. Thus, as stated by Madison (2012), "in critical ethnography the rigid back-and-forth replay of question-answer-question is replaced by a more fluid and reciprocal dynamic" where the

interviewee and me become involved into a conversation. In this case, I listened with a

open mind and heart of what is being expressed by my informant and I am not motivated

by pre judgment based on my experience or research; rather, understanding of what was

being explained to me. Overall, as you will see in chapter 4, the pilot study was a success

and the data collected was included.

Data Analysis Plan

The data for this project were collected using ethnographic interviews. Having

the requisite technical skills as an ethnographer requires that I be as precise and

systematic as possible when interpreting the lives of others (Madison, 2012). Therefore,

with a study focusing on the question: Does the stigma of incarceration of Black

Americans result in negative discriminatory impacts on Black communities? Interviews

allowed me to better understand the culture-sharing patterns of Black Americans

interacting within the American experience.

Using key informants that have been previous discussed, the data collected were

through interviews and reflexively considered to understand the discriminatory

consequences of Black American incarcerations and subsequent felony

disenfranchisement. Through "summative content analysis" I used existing words or

phrases that were obtained as raw data from the interviews to extend my exploration to

include latent meanings and themes that seem to be apparent within the data collected

(Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). According to Holsti (1969), latent meaning will extended the

analysis to an interpretive reading of the symbolism of the physical data collected.

Furthermore, I applied three-dimensionality where I categorize participants in the study

by their interaction, continuity, and situation as it relates to their involvement within the Black American community and their interactions with the American criminal justice system (Holsti, 1969). Therefore, due to the text being analyzed being from interviews, I indicated features or characteristics of the speaker; for example, "Brother Knight, a 30-year-old Black American male who works as a Criminal Justice instructor, stated . . ." The inclusion of these elements will then help the reader to have a better sense of who is saying what (Holsti, 1969).

Open coding was used through interpretations, questions, and possible answers that will emerge through the coding process, but the result will remain tentative (Strauss, 1987). Tentatively was considered because contradiction may occur while coding the next interview; as a result, through analysis of the various concepts and categories was best accomplished after all the material was coded (Strauss, 1987). I found my themes by following fours steps suggested by Strauss (1987):

1. Ask my informants a specific and consistent set of questions (See Appendix A).

2. Analyze the data gathered through a funnel where I start with a wide opening to a tightly stated conclusion based on the interview.

3. Take notes while coding that trigger ideas for further research and where interviews have similar comments, concepts, or categories.

4. I will never assume the analytic importance of any traditional variables like age, sex, social class, etc. unless the data proves it relevant.

Open coding and following the four steps listed encouraged me to look closely at the data and think about the meaning of each sentence and idea, which allowed for the noticing of convergence of thoughts from my participants. More so, any discrepant cases required a follow-up interview to ensure clarity of the data being coded.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Waller (2010) stated that social contracts address policy questions about justice as fairness, which is also the goal of my interviews and helped with reaching saturation through prolonged contact with my participants. This is due to the very clear nature of a social contract: the notion that every society will raise a group of individuals who do well, but due to the mediation of society for equality and understanding of the veil of ignorance, least well-off members of society are assured a minimum standard of living based on the original contract (Rawls, 2009). Thus, the goal of this research was to speak to members of the Black American community that may be least off by societal standards due to the effects of incarcerations and allow their voices to be documented to help move toward equality, which is also the basis of culturally sensitive research, as described earlier.

The use of triangulation also helped with the dependability and conformability of the data collected through saturation and peer review. To achieve conformability, I had to demonstrate that the findings were not of my own predispositions (Shenton, 2004); which was be made possible through triangulation of data collected through interviews with my participants, field notes, and previous literature on my topic. According to Denzin (1978) and Patton (1999), triangulation of sources is the examination of the variety of opinions

concerning how stigmas associated with incarcerations affect the discriminatory condition of the Black American community by comparing people with different viewpoints. Moreover, triangulation helps reduce the effect of investigator bias due to sharing the same culture as the participants by talking to different members and comparing their viewpoints. As stated by Begley (1996), the strength of data can change depending on the informants involved and the setting in which the data is collected. Therefore, triangulation allows for the viewpoints and experiences to be verified against each participant to provide a picture of the attitudes toward incarceration within the Black American community due to the diversity of the participants (Shenton, 2004).

Saturation typically determines the qualitative sample size, but there are other factors that are to be considered too. For example, Charmaz (2006) suggested that the study is the ultimate guide for the project design and therefore the sample size, because smaller studies may achieve saturation quicker due to the studies modest claims, while others that are aiming to describe the process across disciplines like my own will take longer. However, Bowen (2008) suggested that saturation is often claimed in qualitative studies without any description of what it means or how saturation was achieved. As a result, with the use of peer review, I followed the suggestion of Corbin and Strauss (2008) when they stated that saturation is a "matter of degree". The longer I examined the data there was always the potential for new issues to emerge, but with peer review I was able to find guidance to where saturation occurred as a result of the data becomes counter-productive to my study and does not add anything to the model being used or framework used (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Thus, understanding when the point is

reached when developing the conclusion us complicated because of too many data and not the lack of data.

Ethical Procedures

Past research has not always had the most positive outcomes for Black Americans because typically humanity, goodness, and justice were reserved for those who were seen as capable of reason (Madison, 2012). Reason is the measure of human value and becomes the justification for designating some humans as more valuable than others (Madison, 2012). For example, G.W.F. Hegal was an example of the Western system of thinking. Hegal suggested a system of thinking that was a blend of ideas that defended human freedom but also degraded the notion of freedom for other human seen as less superior (Madison, 2012). The use of critical ethnography through an emic Afrocentric approach ensures that Black Americans will be the center of the data collected and treated as equals.

For recruitment, informed consent forms was distributed in person and electronically via email. The ethical concern was the saving of the documents and the distribution. All signed consent forms was scanned and saved onto a password-protected electronic database and saved on a password-protected external hard drive and saved for up to three years; furthermore, the hard copies were immediately destroyed upon successful upload to the password protected hard drive. Distribution via electronic means allows informed consent to be transmitted through the participant's email. All participants were debriefed and reminded of the signed consent and statement of confidentiality which indicated the sensitive nature of the research conducted and that I

would not to talk to anyone about the information obtained during the study (Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002). The IRB approval for my consent forms was 12-09-14-0244415 and it expired on December 8, 2015.

More so, having a value-neutral position allowed me to understand the culture around me while still being an external investigator (Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002). I could not impose my own views or take any stands on the social/political issues that arise from the interviews. I simply answered questions and recorded the participant's thoughts on the subject being discussed –the high incarceration rate of Black Americans impacts their discriminatory condition. Finally, the use of this strategy of listening more and talking less prohibited a conflict of interest; thus, I was able to humanize the research process and insist that I became involved with the subjects and be reflexive about my own thoughts (Punch, 2005).

The data collected was protected and remained anonymous after completion of the interviews. To ensure triangulation of sources occurs, each participant was given an alias at the start of the process; thus, the data will be anonymous to help with revealing complementarity and convergence within the data set collected through critical ethnographic interviews (Erzerberger & Prein, 1997). Further, as stated earlier, to ensure confidentiality the data collected will be maintained on a password-protected hard drive for at least three years before being destroyed (Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002). Protecting the confidentiality of the data required that no information be disclosed unless permission was given by my informant to do so outside of this study. Thus, no

information will be distributed outside this study unless written consist was granted by my informant(s).

Summary

The goal of this research was to use qualitative research through a critical ethnographic approach, by making a call to action on the discriminatory effects of Black American incarcerations and using the data collected to enact social change (Thomas, 1993). As Kwame Ture (aka Stokely Carmichael) once said, "The first need of a free people is to define their own terms" (Cleaver, 1968, p. 89) Through the use of critical ethnographic interviews, I was able to document the Afrocentric emic view of how incarcerations affect the Black American community and add to the field new terms that to date have not been fully documented. Chapter 4 will now discuss the results of the pilot study, the setting of the interviews, the demographics of the participants, the data collected and its analysis, evidence of trustworthiness that was described in Chapter 3, and finally the result of the culturally sensitive ethnography interviews.

Chapter 4: Results

The aim of this study was to provide an Afrocentric voice, whereby the members of the Black American community were placed at the center of the data collection on incarceration and the socioeconomic stigmas it creates. The research question that guided this study was: "How have the stigmas associated with mass incarceration reduced political and economic opportunities for Black Americans born between 1965 and 1984 from an Afrocentric perspective?"

In this chapter, I will present a detailed description of the data collected and describe how the Black community views incarcerations and the stigmas associated with them. Furthermore, the following sections discussed – (a) *the outcome of the pilot study*, (b) *the demographics of the participants*, (c) *the data collection process*, (d) *data organization*, (e) *data analysis*, (f) *evidence of quality*, (g) *the primary research question and findings*, and finally (h) *the summary*.

Pilot Study Results

The results of the pilot study were extremely helpful, positive, and made the gathering of information a more efficient process. I interviewed three participants—one in person in a restaurant, one by phone, and one via Google Hangouts video chat to test the effectiveness of each method at examine if one worked better than the other approaches. All three methods proved equally useful and no significant problems were encountered in any of the methods. I was able to voice record all three interviews using my mobile phone as the primary recording device and my computer as a backup. Two of the three participants were emailed their consent forms, while the other was able to sign

the form and upload it to and saved it on my external drive. Both methods worked without any problems, and the participants informed me that the consent forms were very accurate and unambiguous. During the questioning, I received positive feedback regarding the structure and order of the interview protocol, which lasted anywhere from 45 minutes to 2 hours depending on the engagement of the participant in explaining their responses. The questioning remained semistructured, and I allowed the participant to respond to my questions and feel free to elaborate, as they felt comfortable, with no pressure to from me to complete the interview within a particular period. Regardless of the length of the interview, the outcomes were very positive and no changes were judged to be needed to commence full interview protocol for the study. Thus, the next goal was to gather participants.

Participants

Due to the success of the pilot study, I was able to identify that my data collection plan would provide fruitful sources of data and offer the opportunity for critical analysis and insight (Thomas, 1993). Given the focus of the study, the demographics of the participants was clearly important. All of my 20 participants (12 males and 8 females) were Black Americans between the ages of 30 and 50 years old, with quite varied backgrounds and occupations. Table 2 breaks down the demographics of my participants by gender, age, educational background, residential area, and current occupation.

Table 2

Participant Demographic Breakdown

Participant	Age	Educational Background	Residential Area	Occupation
Ms. A	33	MA	Los Angeles, CA	Retired county sheriff
Ms. C	32	BA	San Jose, CA	Communication director
Ms. Ch	43	MA	Atlanta, GA	Paralegal
Ms. CS	46	BA	Norfolk, VA	Program director for non-profit
Ms. LT	33	MA	Atlanta, GA	Government contractor
Ms. P	43	PhD (ABD)	Chicago (South side), IL	Registered nurse / quality manager
Ms. TK	40	Some college	Atlanta, GA	Background screening

Table continues

Participant	Age	Educational Background	Residential Area	Occupation
Ms. K	33	BA	Atlanta, GA	Employment verifications
Mr. A	49	MLS	Detroit, MI	Information Analyst
Mr. DA	36	MA	Chattanooga, TN	Criminal justice school chair
Mr. C	32	PhD	Atlanta, GA and NY, NY	Professor
Mr. D	38	Some college	Atlanta, GA	Barber
Mr. E	47	MA	Bronx, New York	Professor / writer
Mr. AS	34	MA (2)	Compton, CA	Upward bond worker
Mr. B	30	MA	Douglasville, GA (suburb of Atlanta)	Retired Air Force

Table continues

Participant	Age	Educational Background	Residential Area	Occupation
Mr. LA	32	Some college	South West Los Angeles, CA	Air Force
Mr. R	32	High school diploma	Inglewood, CA	Sales
Mr. T	46	PhD (ABD)	South Central Los Angeles, CA	Student / father
Mr. M	45	BA	Los Angeles, CA	Political office candidate
Mr. L	48	BA	East Los Angeles, CA	Musician

As seen in Table 1, there was a broad range of participants from the Black community. Participant ages varied just as much as education or current occupation. Yet, as stated earlier, the intent of my project was to gain an Afrocentric perspective; thus, I did not include any individuals not of African dissent. I also did not speak to members of the African diaspora (i.e. Jamaicans, Africans, Haitians, etc.) as it would have implied a shift in focus from the American-born Black Americans. Many of the participants in the study came from similar regional locations, because of where my gatekeepers were

located and also where participants I knew and who wanted to participate were located to provide access.

Data Collection

Participants were selected either through gatekeepers or from among my personal contacts. Participants L, B, TK, A, C, CH, and LT were all referred to me by gatekeepers. I had two gatekeepers, who shall remain anonymous. The male participants and Ms. CH was introduced to me by an elder church member who works as a motivational speaker in the city of Atlanta. Participants TK, A, C, and LT were all introduced to me by a young woman I met during a conference, who is currently an associate professor at Albany State in Albany, GA. The gatekeepers were provided with the background of my study and asked if they knew any individuals who fit the demographic requirements of the study and may have wanted to be part of my participant pool. The rest of my participants came from my personal contact list, and all had previously asked to be part of my study during conversations or presentations. Before interviews started, all participants were given consent forms, which were either emailed back to me or signed and uploaded to my password-protected hard drive.

The data for this study was collected using an Afrocentric approach. My goal was, as Grills (2002) stated, to "be willing to make a shift in the lens through which the world is seen, how reality is defined, and how [Black American] behavior is understood" (p.11). Therefore, the setting of the interviews depended on my participant's preference to ensure an appropriate level of comfort. My semistructured interviews were completed either in person, via mobile phone or online video chats using FaceTime or Google

Hangouts. In-person interviews were audio recorded using the Android "voice recorder" application, while mobile phone and video chat interviews were recorded using QuickTime. Ms. A and K participated in the only video chat interviews who used FaceTime and Google handouts respectively.

There were no problems with bandwidth as I was able to test the connection with the ladies before the interview started. The in-person interviews were completed at the participant's home, their place of work, or in a restaurant, as decided by the participant. In interviewed Ms.   C and Mr. M in their homes. C was 6 months pregnant at the time of the interview and felt most comfortable being at home. Mr. M is currently running for elected office for the city of Los Angeles, and his schedule dictated that his free time was when he was home and not in the office. The interview with Mr. DA was completed at work and we were able to go to a conference room in order to maintain confidentiality and avoid interruptions. Lastly, Mr. E chose to do his interview at a restaurant during his lunch break, and Participants. T and L completed their interviews together at a restaurant, as it was a central location for everyone to meet. These methods of communication allowed for an intimate and sustained interaction with my participants in surroundings they were familiar with, which was hence helpful in allowing me to ensure the level of comfort needed to obtain valuable data, which is the goal of ethnographic interviewing (Young, 2007).

Each participant decided the method (in person or video chat) of his or her interview and how long the interview lasted. I made sure that each participant understood that there was no rush to complete the interview. They were also asked to pick a method,

time, and a day that would ensure the least disruptions, an ability to focus on the questions, and the most honest answers. Largely due to the pilot study, I did not encounter any problems with participants answering my questions. Thomas (1993) warned that, during the data collection process, the questions may not be incisive and the responses may not follow cultural idiom. However, with my study, many of the answers not only repeated what was discussed in the review of the literature, but also provided corroboration among participants.

Lastly, each interview was saved either as an MP3, MP4 or a QT movie file on a password-protected hard drive. The QT movie files were extremely helpful because I was able to play back the interview and check my notes to ensure that I understood and expressed my participants' thoughts accurately. Moreover, to help ensure a measure of quality, all interviews used the same protocol of questions (Appendix A).

Data Organization

The data collected through ethnographic interviews was initially organized through journaling. Journaling has many different purposes, but the primary objective for my project was to allow me to get thoughts on paper as an aid to reflection. The process of journaling while conducting qualitative research methods is relatively new. Janesick (2011) described journaling as a reflection process that often leads to new questions about the research project and helps with the analysis of data. This was highly evident after spending four weeks journaling the data collected from my interviews.

During the first two weeks, I focused on the people involved and their culture. Because I share the culture of some of my participants I noticed that focusing on the

culturally embedded cues of the participants came quite naturally for me. For example, participants R, L, T, L, LA, and AS, and MS are from the Los Angeles area and share many of the same experiences. Thus, they were called the "South Los Angeles group." Then, through the journaling process I was reminded of Asante's location theory (Asante, 2003) and how location can change perceptions of and cogitations about reality from place to place. This provides evidence of Janesick's (2011) assertion that reflective journaling enables the researcher to become more aware of the connections between the research participants' perceptions, feelings, and behaviors. Therefore, I began to group my participants on the basis of cultural background, as determined by their residential location. The *Atl-alien group* was then formed of participants CH, LT, TK and K, and participants. C, B and D. Next, I formed the Southern Group, because Atlanta was in the south, and I wanted to remain in the same geographic area. Thus, the *Southern Group* was formed of participants DA, MS, and CS, as they were the only Southerners left. The *Northern Group* was formed next, for those from the northern states (geographically speaking), and comprised Ms.   P and participants. A and E. The only remaining participant was Ms. C, and she made the "Bay" group. All of the groups were created through journaling, and in turn allowed me to reflect and dig deeper into the words, ideas, and behaviors described by my participants, thus allowing me to see their similarities and points of contrast (Janesick, 2011).

Weeks 3 through 4 were then taken up with examining these groups and focusing on their shared views of society. I started with the responses to descriptive questions, which helped clarify participant views on hip-hop. The question, "*Please describe your*

knowledge of the hip-hop *generation as a subculture of the Black community? In other*

words, can you describe what the term hip-hop *generation means to you?*" yielded

responses that showed how the participants saw the impact of hip-hop on society. The

responses differed not so much on the basis of age, but according to their geographical

locations. Many of the participants spoke about how hip-hop has changed over time. I

was then able to change some of the data organization in that Ms. C was moved to South

Los Angeles group. This was not an easy change due to the geographical difference

between the Los Angeles area and northern California; however, as will be discussed in

the next section, C shared many of the thoughts of the Los Angeles group.

Data Analysis

The data analysis plan discussed in Chapter 3 was applied with good outcomes.

For this study, information was gathered through ethnographic interviews. Thus, I used

summative content analysis to highlight existing words or phrases that were obtained as

raw data from the interviews to help my exploration to include latent meanings and

themes that seemed to be apparent within the data that was collected (Hsieh & Shannon,

2005). In this case, latent meaning extended the analysis from interpreting interview

notes and participant recordings to the movement of symbolism of the physical data

collected (Holsti, 1969). Additionally, as stated above in the data organization section, I

applied a three-dimensional rubric to categorize participants on the basis of their situation

in relation to, interactions with, and duration of their involvement within the Black

American community and the American criminal justice system (Holsti, 1969).

Open coding was also used for interpretations, questions, and responses that emerged through the coding process (Strauss, 1987). I then grouped my themes by following an amended version of the fours steps suggested by Strauss (1987):

1. Reviewed the participant response to an accurate and consistent set of questions (see Appendix A).

2. Analyzed the data gathered through a funnel-type process, whereby I started with a broad opening and moved to a tightly stated conclusion based on the interview responses.

3. Took notes while coding that helped identify where other participants had made similar comments or expressed similar concepts or categories.

4. Did not assume the analytic importance of any "traditional" variables, such as age, sex, social class, etc.

Open coding and following the four steps listed allowed me to look closely at the data and think about the meaning of each sentence, word spoken, and idea, thus allowing for the identification of similarities in the thoughts shared by my participants. In order to carry out a rational and logical analysis of the data, a discussion of which of the participants' responses to the interview questions had similarities with those of other members, as well as those that did not, is helpful.

Breakdown of Critical Ethnography Interview Questions

As stated earlier, the interview questions for this project were influenced by the Spradley (2003) model to help prevent the conversation from becoming artificial and fixed within a set of rules, which runs contrary to the goal of critical ethnographic

interviews. As such, the participants were asked a series of descriptive, structural, and contrast questions. The goal of the descriptive questions was to establish, as a foundation, what the participants understood about hip-hop culture and its role in the Black American community. Participants are identified by their aliases (see Table 2), and responses are organized on the basis of the primary interview question, using the words of the participants in quotes, and provided the highest frequency of those who shared similar responses.

Please describe your knowledge of the hip-hop generation as a subculture of the Black Community? In other words, can you describe what the term hip-hop generation means to you? The term hip-hop has a range of meanings, depending on the era in which one was born. This particular study looked at individuals born between 1965 and 1984, and explored their thoughts on hip-hop. There were many similarities among the responses. For example, many of the participants agreed that hip-hop is a way of life and that, when put in proper context, it is a link between music and politics. Mr. B, a younger member of the hip-hop Generation, stated,

> The hip-hop generation had a Black community as a negative thing, but over time, it became a life style or culture. It's more then just the music but also a lifestyle. It brought the community together with activates and charities. Hip-hop means a movement and platform for Black Americans to get their voice across. There is a difference between hip-hop, Rap, or even pop. The words and lyrics is what make it hip-hop. hHip-hop was made to give Black Americans a voice through fun. Rap is people putting lyrics together and lacks a clear message like hip-hop.

Mr. B's sentiments were repeated by many of the participants who were born between 1980 and 1984. These participants saw hip-hop as a way of life and something positive. For example, Mr. LA stated,

> Hip-hop is a way of life, but those who are not part of the community may feel it threatened and misunderstood us … I remember when Ken Griffey Jr. wore his hat backwards. We loved it, but White America saw him as being a thug and disrespectful.

As Ms. K put it,

> it is important to understand that hip-hop is not solely a Black thing, but a way of life. You can be yellow and green but still be part of the hip-hop generation. As long as you understand the culture and respect it.

How do you think that the hip-hop culture was influenced by the civil rights movement or the Black Power movements of the 20th century? Responses varied, but were consistent insofar as the participants' belief or non-belief in the existence of a connection between hip-hop culture, on the one hand, and the civil rights movement or the Black Power movements of the 20th century, one the other, appeared to be grouped by, and able to be accounted for on the basis of, age. Mr. L stated that hip-hop "was born out the urban areas as a way to communicate … Telling a story through the music just like Marvin Gaye did it for the Civil Rights movement." Mr. AS, in contrast, stated that hip-hop,

became a spin-off of the funk generation. This is when spoken word becomes the

basis of rap (hip-hop). Artist like James Brown, Marvin Gaye, and others

provided the voice. Sonya Sanchez and Maya Angelo were also examples of how

Spoken Word also influenced hip-hop.

These two gentlemen were examples of those who believed that hip-hop was influenced

by the earlier generations of the Civil Rights movement in a broader sense. As Ms. TK

stated, "The hip-hop generation are the kids of the civil rights movement and the Black

Power movements by continuing the message, but through music." In this respect, they

shared the view of other of the younger (those in their 30's) participants: the belief that

hip-hop represents a progression of the events, attitudes and strategies of the civil rights

movement. However, the older participants interviewed did not share the same feelings.

Ms. CS appeared to express the thoughts of many of the older participants when

she stated, "In my day, the culture was very strongly influenced by it [the Civil Rights

movement]. Today, people don't have the same amount of ownership and protecting the

rights. No one talks about where we came from." Ms. CS's words are emblematic of the

feeling, among many of the participants aged between 40 and 48 years, that modern-day

hip-hop has moved away from the original intent and to something that tends to be more

negative and unrealistic. Mr. D, who is a barber and falls between the older and younger

age groups, similarly said, "Yes hip-hop has somewhat been influenced by earlier events,

but it has changed and doesn't provoke positive change as the music back then did." Ms.

CH, who 43 years old, said, "The earlier era was influenced by the earlier movements,

but the later not so much and has moved away. The music earlier was more social

conscious, and the later half is more materialistic." Ms. CH sums up the thoughts of the older members of the hip-hop generation. They believed that early hip-hop was much more socially conscious and reflected the goals of the civil rights and Black Power movements, but today the music is more materialistic and, as Mr. DA puts it, "not real hip-hop but mainstream rap that gets confused with what we started after the struggles of the '60s and '70s."

The hip-hop *generation is typically associated with its genre of music. Much like Marvin Gaye spoke to previous generations with his song "Inner City Blues" (we can listen to it if needed),* hip-hop *has allowed its generation to voice their views of society. For example, Tupac had a song named "Breathin'" (we can listen to it if needed). To what extent do you think these lyrics speak for the average member of the* hip-hop *community?* This question elicited the most unusual responses because it asked the participants actually to disclose their view of hip-hop as a genre of music, and a voice of the generation of Black Americans born between 1965 and 1984. The responses provided some very interesting results when coded; they focused on the theme of "war." Many of the participants believed that Tupac's lyrics referred to how many of their generation exist in a constant state of war with the American legal system (again, depending on their age). Mr. R asked to hear the song and stated, "It was a war mentality. For us in LA, it was us against the police. Always fit the description as a Black male and cops not from the community did not understand the people they were protecting." The feelings expressed by Mr. R were shared by the majority participants between the ages of 30 and 40, who generally believed that the lyrics of Tupac's "Breathin'" reflected the

experiences of the average member of their generation in respect of the belief that there was a war between them and the police. The war, according to Ms. TK, was about how "certain powers that don't want us to get ahead with the prison-industrial complex being developed and we [Black Americans] are judged harder than any other people and could be killed for running a stop light." Ms. K discussed the "Driving While Black" (DWB) phenomenon as one example of the fight against the American Justice system. She stated,

> I was in the car with my husband, who was driving at the speed limit, but because his car [stood] out he was stopped by the police. The first thing we did was put on our phone recorder. When everything was over, and he was pulled out of the car and placed on the street while I guess they were trying to find something, we were given a warning and told to be safe. This is what I think Tupac was getting at in his song in that every day is a struggle to just breathe.

She also discussed how skin color plays a role. Dark skin is often devalued, while light-skinned people receive better and more extensive opportunities, and this racial profiling is believed to be the most profound result of the stigmas associated with incarceration. Ms. P said "that the lyrics of the hip-hop artist [like Tupac] were the voice of the average person that may be afraid to speak at the time," and that the average person was often and, unfortunately, those of darker completion. Ms. P and others believed that one of the reasons that Tupac came to be perceived so negatively was due to his skin complexion, with this effect only being heightened by his lyrics. The lyrics by Tupac and the message that was felt by many of the Black community has a direct correlation to the stigmas associated with incarceration for those of the hip-hop generation.

Can you describe how the hip-hop *generation is affected by the stigmas associated with incarceration?* In responses to this question, the primary themes regarding how the hip-hop generation has been affected by the stigmas associated with incarcerations were the rise in the sale and use of crack, the credibility that comes with incarceration, and voting rights within the Black American communities. Participants like Ms. P, Ms. A, Mr. L, Mr. LA, Mr. AS and Ms. TK believed that the arrival of crack in the Black communities during the 1970s and '80s was the start of the decline. Crack is an adulterated, free-base version of cocaine that has harsh effects. Today, possession of crack also carries a more severe legal penalty than does cocaine. Thus, as stated by Ms. TK, "when crack started coming into the neighborhood in the '80's is also when mass incarcerations started … the target was the hip-hop generation and everyone was making money off the crack but also was tearing down the neighborhood." More so, as stated by Ms. LT, "many times we [the community as a whole] like to blame hip-hop for why Black kids act negatively because they glorify a particular negative lifestyle."

With respect to voting rights, Mr. L stated, "the biggest effect has been on the decrease in voters due to many being felons and not being able to vote." Mr. L has done a great deal of voter registration in the Crenshaw district of South Los Angeles. He states,

> many of the men that I came across could not register to vote due to prior conviction or misdemeanors. And when I say "many" I mean most could not vote and this was very depressing to see the stigma of criminality that we discussed earlier really is hurting the hip-hop generation's ability to be part of our democratic process.

However, not all the participants believe this is due to the adverse side effect of incarceration. For example, as another effect of the stigmas associated with incarceration, Mr. D claimed that, "A lot of people are given street credibility due to being incarcerated. 'Made you real' and it was ok to go to jail." Ms. A stated the other perspective shared by many of the participants:

Moving from the civil rights movement, where going to jail was positive because it was a fight for freedom, today going to jail is what is expected, and [it] went from fighting for a cause to just being part of life or a badge of honor, even if some laws are biased towards members of the hip-hop generation.

Here, while Ms. A agrees with the other participants that the laws are biased, there is also a sense of hopelessness, common among member of the hip-hop generation, in light of the idea that going to jail and coming out is considered a badge of honor. This has obvious implications for the voting statistics, if many are in prison and not able to vote.

In what ways, if at all, do you feel that many of the stigmas that the hip-hop generation face in regards to incarcerations stem back to earlier events in the overall civil rights movement? This question sparked some of the most in-depth conversations between with my participants and I. However, the conclusion was always very similar: the stigmas have always been around, from the civil rights era and even earlier. Mr. M stated, "The stigmas have always been there, from slavery, but only what is emphasized changes. Today, the war on drugs was a way of the government to target Black Americans." As Ms. P stated,

> There was a connection to the civil rights movement, because people were tired of how they were being treated and seen on TV. Today that is considered through the lyrics of the hip-hop generation music … but is often filled with anger and negativity that changes the dynamic of the two movements.

During the civil rights movement, the Black community was fighting for equality under a system that was unequal, which is similar to today but the message is taken differently.

Mr. LA took the conversation a step further, suggesting that stigmas are in place to help maintain the status quo. He argued:

> The only difference between the civil rights movement and the hip-hop generation movement is the media and perception by the community. Today, if you're not part of the generation you are typically seen as a troublemaker, which used to be a thought dominated by White America during the civil rights movement. Now, your carry the stigma of criminality just like those who were arrested during the civil rights movement, but not with the same level of positivity as civil rights leaders now have. Maybe this will change over time …

Mr. LA makes this suggestion because, "We [Black Americans] were the problem and the government had to find a way to deal with us and placing stigmas on us seems to be the way that worked." For example, Mr. C stated, "Those of the civil rights movement were getting arrested to change the status of Blacks and [were] socially inspired and not harmful." In contrast, as Ms. K put it, "many members of the hip-hop generation are getting arrested just like those of the civil rights movement, but due to the music that is associated with them it is seen as different or adverse." These conflicting statements get

to the crux of one of the current issues: a greater proportion of Black Americans are now in better positions than was the case during the civil rights movement. Ms. K referenced Carter G. Woodson, saying, "some Blacks Americans become more incorporated into the American system and will do anything to protect it." Thus, as stated by Mr. LA, "there are some in the Black community that do not share the culture and understand the fight of the hip-hop generation and see it as being different from the civil rights movement, when in actuality it is the same." Ms. CH summed up the question excellently:

> the stigmas of criminality and 'guilty until proven innocent' are the same. Yet, today sagging is an example of a fashion statement for members of the hip-hop generation and a uniform of trouble for those who are not. Nevertheless, back during the civil rights movement marching was seen as causing trouble too.

This may explain why the hip-hop generation may face the same stigmas as those of the civil rights movement, yet still be treated differently.

Mr. E furthered the idea that the American courts typically impose barriers to anyone who challenges the status quo. Furthermore, very few lawsuits make it to the courts, which make it almost impossible for the Black voice to be heard. As Mr. E put it,

> Every generation has had to deal with the stigma of incarceration due to the legacy of slavery where Black males have always been a target and often killed legally. Eric Garner and Mike Brown are today's examples of how the justice system just does not work for Black America and precisely the hip-hop generation.

Historically, as Mr. L stated, "stigmas … existed before the civil rights movement regardless if a person has been formally branded a criminal or not, and was very common during the Jim Crow period that seem to become a reality again." Thus, as Mr. L asked, "how can a Black man trust a system that has already labeled [him] a threat?" This issue has persuasive affects on the Black American community as a whole.

How would you describe the effects of incarcerations and the stigmas associated with incarcerations of the hip-hop generation on the Black community? There was one primary response to this question—the family. Many of the participants believed that the Black family has been eroded because of the stigmas associated with incarcerations of the hip-hop generation. Mr. E stated:

> The family is no longer the same as most of the men are in jail or caught up in the judicial system. Thus, the physical connection is no longer there and opportunities for going to college are even harder for them and as a result the community. I say 'the community' because everyone is grouped as one; thus, opportunities in crime like selling drugs are more accessible and easier in order to provide.

Mr. E reminded me to read Marable. Mr. E said that the book "*How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America* really described the stigmas associated with incarcerations of the Hip-Hip generation is due to oppression, which turns into violence that White America does not understand." He referred me to page 107 of the text where Marable writes, "the [historical] target of brutality within a racist culture and society, occupying an inferior racial position which has remained unaffected since the demise of slavery" (Marable, 1983/2000, p. 107). Thus, as many of the participants said, the Black

community and the hip-hop generation feel like there are limited options outside of criminal activity because, as Mr. E put it, "this country was never open to us, because we were a workforce and not part of society."

Ms. CS, a single mother of three, stated, "Many parents are incarcerated, and now people [the families who are products of incarcerations] are numb to it. Thus, you care less because you just see it as something that will happen." Ms. TK, a single mother, also stated,

> It's a big downfall. If you take the men away, you leave the women with the kids, and the kids need both parents. As a result, the children are taking care of themselves because the mother is out working multiple jobs and maybe going to school to provide for the child.

Continuing with the perspective of my female participants, Ms. LT provides a slightly different point of view. She stated, "I'm not sure if it is that important anymore because the men are always in jail." These ladies suggest that there is a ripple effect, whereby higher numbers of Black men being in prison now will lead to similar disproportions in future generations. However, some participants differ on this. Mr. DA, a formal officer and current professor of criminal justice, stated:

> If you work in law enforcement, you are viewed differently. Law enforcement has a stereotype or "good profiling" of which the person is coming out of jail as often assumed to be the prime suspect, but it is not always the case. More so, if they have felonies it's hard to get jobs, but with programs now where businesses get

tax breaks for hiring past felons it is a little better, but the stigmas still persist and

make things difficult for those trying to be better.

Therefore, even though there are some programs available to help, the stigmas associated

with incarceration still hurt the hip-hop generation and the Black community by

weakening the family structure that once was the backbone of the Black community.

Can you help me understand how your community deals, or dealt, with the high

incarceration of Black men and women of the hip-hop generation? This question picked

up where the last question left off by looking at how the community has dealt with

incarcerations. The common theme noticed while coding was the strength of the Black

American community. Ms. A, a retired LA County sheriff, stated,

many in the community are getting away from the notion [that] if you do wrong it

is your fault and [you] should be in jail. Now the community supports all

criminals regardless of the crime. One inmate said that they will be back because

when [they] come back it is a family reunion.

Ms. A stated,

The Black community was stronger before the civil rights movement and after the

community was kinda broken and spread out. Thus, the community is not really a

base and more focused on those who can go out and work. As a result, success in

the form of integration has made the hip-hop generation see life as fun and as the

culture becomes further removed from segregation, slavery, lynching, and the

civil rights movement a sense of entitlement has developed.

Ms. A's feelings were not idiosyncratic, but echoed by all participants who had master's degrees or higher. The idea that the hip-hop generation has a sense of entitlement can be taken back to the earlier comments in that many live in single-parent homes and are forced to raise themselves, which may result in the idea that they can provide for themselves. Ms. C suggested that, as many of them are brought up in such, many of the hip-hop generation can relate to the sort of environments depicted in the film *New Jack City*, which tells the story of the rise and fall of an illegal drug organization rise and fall in a Black community of New York, or *Menace II Society*, which horrific young Black-on-Black violence. As Mr. R stated, in response to the question, "the community is responding with violence and a hand reaching out for help."

The films mentioned by Ms. C and Mr. R shows some of the harsh realities of growing up as a member of the hip-hop generation. When you are growing up in a situation like Mr. A's, whose father was in jail and whose mother was in an psychiatric hospital, violence becomes a norm, and if you are able to survive, you are likely, as Mr. A states, to "grow up with entitlement because they survived something worse than their parents … [by] not being killed by people that look like them." Mr. A claimed that the lives portrayed in *New Jack City* are similar to life in a housing project. He states that the main character in the film, Nino Brown, was on to something when he said, "If the tenants cooperate, they become loyal customers. If they don't they become live in hostages" (Van Peebles, 1991). Mr. A continued, "thus, if you live in a community where there is a high incarceration of members of the hip-hop generation your choices are to

live with it, move, or become a hostage to the reality of the stigmas associated with incarcerations.

Living in a housing project is difficult, and in many cases, it fosters more violence and independence, as is the case in many communities where there is a high incarceration of Black Americans. Nevertheless, these types of living environments, as stated by Mr. M said, "create a further need of a police state," which results in even more incarcerations and, as Mr. AS put it, instigates a process that "develops even stronger stereotypes that then impact how the community embraces the stigmas associated with incarcerations."

Ms. CH stated, "the community is mostly young, and they feel a sense of hopelessness and thus no sense of fear where they do not see a tomorrow." I stated earlier that a generation that has no future is dangerous, and the feelings described by Ms. CH and others only drive home that point. A generation with no sense of a tomorrow can only produce a community with no sense of hope; if one lives in a community like those of the South Side and West Side of Chicago, Harlem, the North Side of Philadelphia, and South Central Los Angeles, where there is dilapidated housing, gutted buildings, potholed streets, and little legal economic activity, and the city looks like it recently emerged from war, the social consequences we see make perfect sense.

Ms. TK was able to provide details on life in these poor communities, and specifically in housing projects. During our interview, Ms. TK brought to my attention the Pruitt-Igoe housing project in St. Louis. This housing project is among the most notorious projects built in the United States during the 1950s. The initial goal of these projects was to help the city of St. Louis to rebuild after WWII, and to build upward

similar to Manhattan. However, a few years after its construction, the area was ravaged by vandalism and crime, which Ms. TK attributes to the absence of males in the home. However, unlike previously discussed statements, where the focus was on men being in jail, Ms. TK added that the issue in this case was that men were not allowed to live in the community. She knew this from personal experience, and although I was unable to find any documentation about such policies, other participants shared similar stories about the lack of men in many of the housing projects. They were however not able to specify why, other than crime and death, this was the case. It appears that the community was able to deal with the harsh realities of life was through music.

Mr. E stated, "the music was their only way to not only hope for better but also express their reality. … the music was the only productive way for the community to deal with the hell they were living in. Many may have found the music as being vulgar, but so was they life the artist was living". Ms. K loosely quoted the Notorious B.I.G. and his song, "Things Done Changed." She said, "there was a time when we looked for our parents to take care of us, but now they scared of us and called the city for help because things have changed." Thus, the artist is also aware of how much things have changed, but, as Mr. L asked, what can anyone do about it when such things have come to be so widely accepted? Thus, it appears that the way the community dealt with things was, as suggested by Mr. LA, Mr. M, Mr. L, and Mr. T, is by looking either for help or ignoring it, which leads to the next question that was asked.

Upon release from jail or holding, how does the community help integrate the individual back into the community? This question was designed to admit the Afrocentric

voice based on both qualitative and quantitative research that has previously been done. The participants' viewpoints were very unusual. One common theme from the participants was the political and economic roots of incarceration. For example, some participants discussed the differences in how Democrats and Republicans viewed incarcerations. Ms. K mentioned that Bill Clinton "while president passed the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act in 1994 that did just as much bad as what Republicans were doing." President Clinton stated that the reason he supported the measure was because "[g]angs and drugs have taken over our streets and undermined our schools … Every day, we read about somebody else who has gotten away with murder," showing that the law was primarily driven and passed by public sentiments about crime.

To make things worse, the Black community was in a downward spiral. Mr. LA stated, "There were no jobs or resources in the hood and for those coming home, the jail looked a lot better than the neighborhood that they came from." Thus, as stated by participants. B, E, AS, L, and T, the community handles each situation differently, but most are handled with negativity because they are seen as the reason for the neighborhood being in bad shape. Indeed, Ms. A also shed light on another side of the story for incarcerations. She stated,

> Those incarcerated are labeled as a felony and have limited opportunities that
> include not even being able to be a licensed barber or beautician in some
> instances. Drug programs are offered, but not always to the right people, so
> people start to pick what crimes they will do based the punishment. Some
> programs do occur in jail, but there is not a good system to integrate them back

into the community; thus, they just come back. Some also commit crimes just to get medical treatment or health care that includes birth, tooth issues, or just [to] have a place to live, which make incarcerations a science.

Thus, due to the lack of support some get on return from prison, they choose to go back for reasons of comfort and resources. These resources could also, as stated by, Mr. T, be the gangs and friends made in jail, which make gang alliances even stronger in the neighborhoods and jails.

Gang culture is driven by the need to obtain income, and many of the hip-hop generation follow this lifestyle due to the lack of role models, socioeconomic options, and policy within the neighborhood. Specifically, Mr. R stated, "those without support become what the neighborhood fears and hates the most, and that is a criminal." Mr. E reminded me of a report by Elijah Anderson (1999) that found that many in these urban areas are surrounded by so much violence they find it more and more difficult to maintain a sense of community; violence then becomes the means of regulating life in drug- and gang-infested neighborhoods. Another aspect is the lack of political power, which many of the participants mentioned. Ms. CS stated,

While in jail there should be more of a focus on rehabilitation; rather, there is not, and when they come home they find that they have been stripped of most their rights like voting, and it's nothing the community can do to help them and they become a lost or forgotten population.

Ms. LT stated that this was a huge issue. She said,

They need to know they have help and not to be looked down upon because many go to jail not for crimes but for the ways the laws are written for things like window tints, tail lights, etc. Thus, more resources need to be provided and inclusion into the community through various forms of rehabilitation.

For some, this can be done in a form of a party. In fact, many of those who return from jail are celebrated as a hero. Mr. AS reminded me of and discussed the film *Boyz-n-the-Hood*. As shown in the film, upon release from prison, the neighborhood welcomes many back with open arms and prospects of improvement. In one scene, Doughboy (played by Ice Cube) is welcomed home with a barbeque and friends, or what Mr. C described as being welcomed home as a war hero. Mr. AS took the idea further when he stated, "members of the hip-hop community typically embrace them, and so does some of the families … You made a mistake, and let's get you back on track." As a result of the lack of economic opportunities and political pressures placed on many Black American communities, the families is left broken due to the stigmas associated with incarceration, which then has long term effects on future generations of the Black American community.

How effective is the method of integration of those that have experienced the American judicial system working in the Black community? Is the community helpful on their release? What could be changed or added for a more effective assimilation into the Black community? This marks the start of the set of contrast question where I asked my participants questions to confirm earlier statements and to look for remedies for the incarceration and stigmas associated with incarcerations of the hip-hop generation. The

Spradley (1979) model uses these contrast questions to see if the participant may have changed opinions through the interview process and to also gain understanding of their perspective of dealing with the issues being discussed. With that being said, most of these questions were answered in the earlier portions and were simply confirmed by my participants; however, the question "Is the community helpful on their release and what could be changed or added for a more effective assimilation into the Black community?" did foster some opposing viewpoints. The most common theme was the need for a stronger community structure, political involvement, and better relationships with law enforcement.

Ms. A's sentiments about what can be done to improve the absorption of those who have been incarcerated were shared by the majority of my participants. She said,

Stronger communities with more community service would be a great place to start. This will help setting value within, not only the community as a place of structure, but also the residents that make it up. More so, the exposure of community residents, and newly released inmates in particular, to law enforcement will help bridge the relationship that not all officers are the enemy and more can be done when we work together. Thus, an overall change in mindset where everyone is a team and more confidence in self-worth and believing they can do things, because they see them come from their communities.

Many participants from both sides of the hip-hop generation felt there was a need to bridge the gap between law enforcement and the community as a way to help the community assimilate those released from jail. Ms. Ch said,

More people need to be involved because it takes a village to help those being

released to be assimilated back into society. If the Black community comes

together like some others within the Chinese, Japanese, or the Latinos

[communities], it will be a better outcome ending with fewer incarcerations of our

generation. However, we just don't do it, which can be seen in the way we vote.

Ms. Ch echoed what many other felt about the community coming together, but also

corroborated the idea of being more civilly involved. Voter turnout for the 2014 mid-term

election was down, which is typical of non-presidential elections. Nevertheless, the

numbers still show a grim picture when considering the racial unrest of 2014 between the

Black American community and law enforcement.

According to my participants, there is a strong belief that Black Americans,

especially younger members of the hip-hop generation, do not vote because they feel

their voice is not heard. Ms. K, who is a 33-year-old information analyst, said,

I vote religiously, but many of my friends refuse to because they feel the system is

broken. Therefore, our community is often forgotten when it comes to funding

and facilities that could help integrate those released because so many of us do not

stand up and vote like our parents do.

In contrast, Mr. A, who is a 49-year-old information analyst for the U.S. Air Force, said,

I and people my age are part of the hip-hop generation and share the culture and

much of the lifestyle, but we also vote. However, this may be due to us being

closer to the civil rights movement and see[ing] voting as not an entitlement, but a

right that people have died for.

Voting was a topic of much discussion with this question. Mr. D said that assimilation back into the community from prison has to start from the top down, and the government has to set something up to help integrate those from jail. It's a lot for the Black community to do alone and will need help, and we can show that by voting and demanding changes are made of the system currently in place.

Staying on the same page as Mr. D, Mr. C suggested, "more federal programs or funded programs be implemented to help with the transition. More, programs that can pay and make a better alternative that has value to non-illegal activities." Overall, there is a call for more government involvement in helping to bring the previously incarcerated back into the community as an active force. However, this may only occur with stronger civic involvement, which seems to be difficult due, first, to the lack of trust in the American democratic system, and second many others simply not having the right to vote due to the stigma of incarceration.

How useful are programs within the Black community in curbing the incarceration? What could be changed or improved? By far the most important question I asked is this one as it focuses on what is currently being done and what can be done to make the situation of incarcerations of the hip-hop generation better. Given the responses to the previous question asked, it was no surprise that all the participants agreed that more needs to be done by both the community and government officials. However, the region in which the participant lived appeared to dictate certain differences in what they felt should be done. As stated earlier, all my participants were grouped on the basis of geographical locations. These locations were, the "Atl-alien group" (Participants CH, LT,

TK, K, C, B, and D) from Atlanta, and the "Southern Group" for those in the southern United States but not in Atlanta (of Mr. DA and Ms. CS). However, for this discussion, the Atl-alien and Southern groups will be placed together to form the "Southeast group." The "Northern group" comprised those living in the northern United States (Ms. P and Participants. A and E). The "South Los Angeles" group (Participants. R, L, T, L, LA and AS, and Ms. A) and lastly the "Bay group" (Ms. C) make up the "West Coast group" for this particular discussion.

The Southeast group either felt that there was not much that can be done or that the problem would have to be fixed through the Black churches. The role of the Black church in the community is very interesting. Mr. C, who is both an educator and also a very active member in his own church in Atlanta, said, "The church has ministries and programs that help, but churches need to work together. Many of them are just trying to survive with the rise of the mega churches that does not really follow the old traditional way." The old traditional way is where all the churches worked together to address the overarching issues facing the Black community. Mr. D, who is currently attending seminary school, asked that I look into the African American registry, which is a non-profit educational organization that focuses on brining the Black community together through education. Mr. D and I reviewed their website during our interview to assess how much the church has changed over time. Mr. D stated,

the church used to be the only place the community could go for refuge, but now

the dynamics of the church has changed. There are still some small churches, but

most, especially here in the south, are mega churches where very few members

know each other or let alone come from the same communities.

The popularity of these churches have to some extent obscured the tradition of a time

when the church was a place of community and more of a social scene, as Participants D,

B, L, CH and TK say. This element is what Mr. C suggests must change if there is to be

any hope of curbing the incarcerations of the hip-hop generation.

Mr. B, who is part of the younger portion of the hip-hop generation that was

interviewed, believed that a possible reason for the church not working goes back to the

end of the civil rights movement. Mr. B stated, "my parents used to always talk to me

about how, after the movements of the '60s and '70s, that Black people moved to

different parts of the country with the hope of better economic opportunities." Thus,

many in the church may not have roots in the community or be aware of issues plaguing

their communities, such as incarcerations, until it hits closer to home. However, there are

other options given by my participants from the south. Mr. B, a retired airman from the

Air Force, said,

> Things can be changed by individuals stepping up to make change like what you
>
> are doing with your study. More so, hip-hop can help through the music because
>
> everyone listens to it, and has the power to enact change in mindset and style.
>
> However, this can only happen if the artists change their mindset and that is
>
> where it all starts. To change the mindset will require better programs in the
>
> schools and more founding from after school programs like that of The Boys and
>
> Girls clubs.

Thus, other than the church, the biggest programs that can enact change are through education. However, the way education is funded may also cause issues. American public education is typically underfunded in the areas where many of those incarcerated come from due to lack of home ownership and community wealth. Yet not all believe that the only way education will get better is through better funding.

The "Westcoast group" believes there are other options. Mr. LA states, "if the schools were better funded and we felt like we were not given the leftovers of the rich, some of us may have taken education more serious." Mr. LA recalled his time in high school as a learning experience. He spoke about how his school was a war zone: "Bathrooms with blood stains, tiles from the celling falling or open areas, books that looked horrible, but brand new metal detectors." He said that this high school was in the heart of South Central Los Angeles and was highly typical of the schools in the area during the '90s. He said, "the school was not a place to learn from books, because we typically had outdated ones. Yet, we learned how to survive and understand no one cared about us." Mr. L confirms these sentiments: "Why would you go to school if you are treated so badly and like a criminal? Now, if they schools were fun and fostered education maybe then we would be more in colleges then in prisons." Mr. T stated,

> Without the churches being strong as they were in the '60s, and the schools being week and fostering more of a gang mentality then one valuing education, there is a need for change. This change can come with changing the way schools are funded to who needs help the most and not just who has the most money in the community.

Thus, a stronger church and educational system are believed to be the two most effective ways to help curb incarcerations, but there was one other possibility mentioned too.

The "Northern group" agreed with both the Southern and West Coast group, but also believed such would only be possible if good leadership is evident in the Black community. Now, this response goes with the next contrast question that was asked, but before I close this question, I must end with the words of Mr. DA who has been in the field of criminal justice for over 10 years and currently teaches at a local college in the Atlanta Metro area. He said,

> Not all programs work for everyone because everyone handles issues differently. There are cases where you can't help, but you have to not just push them through the system and look deeper to understand what happened. This takes a lot of time and resources, and the criminal system just doesn't make time to really help …

Being a former parole officer, his views are informed by experience, but also care. To think that there can be just one program created that will solve all the issues for everyone is illogical, because not everyone shares the same background and experiences that helped mold their situation that may have led to their ultimate incarcerations. Yet, as Mr. A suggested, "the music can be their way out and be used as a healing mechanism the way the old spirituals did it for our ancestors."

How can the Black community help eliminate the stigmas associated with incarcerations and the high incarceration rate of its hip-hop generation? What changes should be considered by policy makers to help eliminate the stigmas associated with Black incarcerations? How would these changes help the Black community? Many of my

participants answered elements of this question in their responses to the previous one, and I will pick up on the Northern group's claim that the way that better funding in school to create programs that could alter incarceration and help build the church base starts with the Black leaders. The common themes were the need for political responsibility. Ms. P said,

> The political activist like Jesse Jackson or Al Sharpton is not doing a good job dealing with incarcerations or helping them with the transition. I do think they know about this issue and have been involved dating back to the '60s, but there is a selection process of what they will handle, and incarceration is not on the table.

Ms. P believed that incarcerations are the most profound issue the Black community is facing, and if more members of the community would come to this conclusion and hold both policy makers and community leaders responsible, changes could actually begin. However, Ms. LT wonders if Black America would trust any Black leaders, even in the age of Obama. She states,

> Obama is the president, but he is not the 'Black' president, but everyone. Thus, I'm not sure what policymakers could do to help eliminate the stigmas associated with incarcerations because many do not share the issues of their constituents or the public lacks faith in them overall.

Mr. LA believes that many policy makers have no clue, or do not care, about what goes on in the urban communities, which many of them serve. "If you call their office to get help, you get a clerk, but when it's election time you will see them every day wanting to shake your hand to garner votes." Mr. B stated, "Policy makers are part of the community

and the issue. They can put more resources and money into the community to generate income to help keep folks from committing crimes, but that rarely happens."

Mr. M offers a good suggestion as a candidate for political office:

the public has to make more educated votes based on the candidate's background and how they plan to help the community. Also, those in office that are not doing their job in the eyes of the communities must be held accountable and then fired.

Mr. DA said,

Policy makers can do more than write the laws, but make sure they are followed. They can't trust all the judges to follow through on the rules as they are written. Additionally, there is a need for more minorities to run for office that come from the communities that deal with incarcerations the most to help write policies that can push for change within the communities. Thus, have a resident and not outsiders make decisions.

The suggestion that many policymakers do not have the communities' best interests at heart was a common theme found while coding. Mr. E and Ms. CH suggested that,

Policy makers are part of the community and have to have a level of respect for their communities. More so, within in a representative democracy, policymakers must have the communities' they serve best interests in mind and not that of corporations. They have to understand the culture, which they serve, and push an agenda that comes from the homes and not the offices downtown.

Mr. M quoted Che Guevara when he said,

One of your duties is to create the people to replace us, but if the politicians are

the issues as suggested by my participants, they will first have to change before

they can be replaced, and the issues around incarcerations are final solved.

Therefore, policy makers do have a role in making things better, but many of my

participants proposed other ways to help the Black community deal with the stigmas

associated with incarcerations.

Moving away from what policymakers could do, many of my participants went

back to how the church, stronger families, and education could help eliminate the stigmas

associated with incarcerations and the high incarceration rate of its hip-hop generation.

The previous question offered the most elaborate conversation by my participants about

how the church can help elevate the stigmas associated with incarceration, but some

added to their previous conversations. Mr. A suggested that churches could help if they

changed their formula.

The church cannot act like it did during the civil rights era; rather, they have to

look into the streets and reach the people there. Maybe the church can take place

in the local park where someone may have been murdered, on the corners where

many of us already are hanging out, or if need be, in front of the liquor stores, all

to regain confidence of the hip-hop community in the church.

Mr. LA stated,

Many of us view the church as the place we went with our parents as kids, but it's not for us now. It is boring and to structured. If the church loosened, the model more of us may go to church, and the spiritual aspect of the church might save a lot of us from crimes and ultimately incarcerations.

Ms. CS indicated that she believed that the church could also help rebuild the family, saying, "the church could help build the community with more role models and give Black men of the hip-hop generation role models that have been otherwise absent." As stated earlier, many Black men find themselves in jails, which separate them from the Black community, which is then left with no male role models, and the two-parent nuclear family unit is then destroyed. Ms. K said, "my biggest memories were when my stepfather left, and I spent a large portion of my adult life searching for what a man was and I can only imagine how that affects men that are in the streets." Ms. C said,

Building the community starts with making the families where the mother and father have gone to school and now have a career that allows for the child to see working parents and understand there are other options outside of illegal activities.

Thus, education is also an important element in building the Black community. Ms. K said, "if more graduate from good high schools, more will go to college, and likely the numbers in prison will also decrease." This may sound easy, but a whole change in mindset may be needed. Ms. A said,

there is a need for better schools, but there is also a need for more self-confidence and support. If the school is wrong, we have to start supplying our kids with other options, because right now the only other option is illegal activities; activities that in many cases require a lot of skill that we can use in other areas.

Mr. A said that.

When I was on the street I had to be smart to not get caught and not get robbed and to think that those in the street life are stupid is just wrong. They just decided to be educated in another way, typically because they saw the public school as a joke.

Thus, education comes in various forms, but if the Black community wants to help eliminate the stigmas associated with the incarceration of the hip-hop generation, policy makers and the family structure will have to become stronger and more focused on community love and involvement.

How can the Black community become more organized politically to become more of a factor in the policy-making process? How would these suggestions curb the current incarceration rate of Black Americans of the hip-hop generation? The answers to this question were unanimous: Black Americans must vote. Ms. C said, "we must vote for not only the president, but also congressional leaders." Participants TK, K, LA, L, AS, D and DA took it further and said that we must make informed and logical voting decision for individuals who align with the thoughts and feelings of our community. However, as suggested by Mr. L, we must understand that hip-hop has its identity and value system, which is very different from American culture. Thus, in order to understand

how the hip-hop community votes, Mr. R suggests that we see hip-hop as more than just music, but "as a political mindset … [for] part of the culture."

Mr. A said, "hip-hop started as a response to what the children of the Black Power movement was feeling … but has grown larger than just being a Black mindset." As Mr. L said,

> hip-hop culture has changed due to the influence of social media and, as a result, the hip-hop generation we are speaking about in this interview has been grouped with other elements of the larger American society. Thus, the way we vote has somewhat also been marginalized.

Ms. K said "what changed the way we vote, and can be used as an example of how if we decided to vote we could change things, like the incarceration rate of our hip-hop generation, was the 'vote or die' movement." She explained, "The vote or die movement was loosely based on the Rock the vote which was established in the late 1990s to help motivate our generation to vote, and it worked to some degree." The vote or die movement achieved a similar result, but focused solely on the hip-hop generation, understanding that the culture crosses cultural, racial, and geographic backgrounds.

The vote or die movement was led by Sean "Diddy" Combs and Russell Simmons, and focused on the 18- to 29-year-old voting bloc for the 2004 election. The campaign used all of the main elements of hip-hop culture, including music and fashion. Mr. A recalled the change and its impact very vividly. He stated, "I remember buying the t-shirt and wearing it with pride, and asking all my co-workers to get one and also to be sure to vote. This was the most I ever talked about voting for people within our

generation." Ms. B recalled, "the movement was 'in style' for me and made voting cool, and we need something like that now to try to get this incarceration thing under control and maybe even the way the laws are written." Ms. K said,

> if we have a movement like the vote or die today it will be even more impactful because the hip-hop generation is not just a Black population, but crosses to all parts of American society, which will lead to more change.

Thus, to summarize the thoughts of my participants: if we voted we would show more political power and force policy makers to listen to us about issues that face the community, such as incarcerations.

Ultimately, we need not only to vote but also to make informed decisions. Mr. AS said that we have to show our political power by not being so predictable and voting on the bass of what we need, rather than the political party. There was a belief among many of my participants that neither the Democratic nor Republican parties really value their voice. Mr. LA said, "why would the parties pay us any attention when we always vote the same or not vote at all." Mr. L believed

> this is due to our lack of wealth and political power, which doesn't allow us to exert any influence in politics, because many of us are incarcerated, carry the criminal labels, or have lost the right to vote all together.

Thus, Mr. M offers the suggestion of "hold[ing] current political leaders responsible and if they are not doing the job, get them out of office." However, the problem of voting persists, and according to my participants,

the only way to get us [the hip-hop generation] to vote [is to show] us how it

affects our lives. With everything going on with Eric Garner and Travon Martin

we may see a change during the next election period.

Time will tell, but one thing is sure: many of the participant, who are speaking on behalf

of the hip-hop generation within the Black American community, feel that voting is the

way to achieve social change.

Evidence of Quality

The goal of this Afrocentric research is to place the participants at the center of

the study and speak for them, rather than to them or about them. Evidence of

trustworthiness, as described in Chapter 3, focused on social contracts and triangulation

to help ensure Afrocentric reach was conducted. Thomas (1993) stated that the most

important task in critical ethnography is to identify the types of informants who are likely

to provide "insider's knowledge" on the topic being discussed. I was able to accomplish

this through the suggestions of gatekeepers who identified individuals who fit the

demographic and knowledge requirements for participation, which allowed me to speak

to people who were not close to me and thus helped avoid personal biases. After all,

critical ethnography is more than merely studying the apparently oppressed and socially

marginalized Black American of the hip-hop generation; rather, my role as the critical

ethnographer within an Afrocentric paradigm was to understand that every society has

some forms of repression in order to survive. However, not all constraints are equal or

beneficial for social harmony; some constraints give some groups an absolute advantage

over the disadvantaged or exclude some people from participation in society (Thomas,

1993). Therefore, my goal is to allow those that are disadvantaged to have a voice that is not influenced by my background and biases.

Social contracts helped with credibility (internal validity) and transferability (external validity) by creating trust between my participants and me. At the start of the interview, each participant was given a copy of the informed consent form. The informed consent form notified the participant that the data for this study would comprise their own words; thus, I asked them to be candid in their response to the critical ethnographic questions asked. I also reviewed the consent form to ensure there were no remaining questions and reminded the participants that, to avoid biasing their responses or the interview as a whole, I would not be interjecting my thoughts or feeling. I judged credibility by asking my participants to review my notation of their thoughts and opinions to be the best way to ensure that quality data was obtained for analysis. I created a "member written verification" form (see Appendix D) that I sent electronically, asking my participants to verify my data notes before I attempted to reach findings (Janesick, 2011). This also helped with the conformability of the data collected.

Triangulation Analysis

Triangulation for this study was achieved through interviews completed with my participants, in addition to field notes where I documented their personal experiences, feelings, and thoughts. Through the process, I made every effort to be disciplined in taking good notes to ensure the Afrocentric perspective. To that end, all participants were also given the opportunity to review their field notes in the form of a "participant check electronic form" (see Appendix D) and to approve that I was telling their story correctly. The triangulation process allowed me to remain aware of any irregularities, biases, and

discrepancies. Another form of triangulation was in the form of a wide range of informants. In this particular case, I verified the viewpoints and experiences of each participant against others to formulate a picture of the attitudes of the participants based on the contributions of all of them (Shenton, 2004). This level of triangulation was completed during the open coding process and based on the responses from the critical ethnographic questions asked during the interviews. Furthermore, I also compared participant notes to the data that was outlined in Chapter 2 in order to carry out a comparison of what past research and current Afrocentric viewpoints has said about the incarceration of the hip-hop generation and the stigmas associated with this.

Primary Research Question and Findings

The results of my culturally sensitive ethnographic interviews helped answer the primary research question of: how have the stigmas associated with mass incarceration reduced political and economic opportunities for Black Americans born between 1965 and 1984 from an Afrocentric perspective? The stigmas associated with incarceration of the hip-hop generation include the stigma of incarceration, penal conviction, criminality, and a criminal record. Thus, the core question that this study sought to address was: what is the Afrocentric perspective of the incarceration of the hip-hop generation? Critical ethnographic interviews were the data source. This allowed for members of the hip-hop generation to share their thoughts and suggestions on how to make things better. The interviews verified that the stigmas associated with incarcerations have a very long history in the United States and, based on the responses from my participants, it is an issue that is not getting any better. One participant characterized the population in

question as "the permanent Black underclass, uneducated, no skills, no purpose in life. They have nothing else to do and no direction." Therefore, the stigmas associated with mass incarceration have reduced political and economic opportunities for Black Americans born between 1965 and 1984 by making it harder to obtain employment and be active within the American representative democracy.

James Baldwin (1966) once said, "the law is meant to be my servant and not my master, still less my torturer and my murderer," (p. 34) which is the sentiment shared by many of my participants. In 2015, there has been a great deal of civil unrest. My participants all spoke to some degree about the issues surrounding Travon Martin, Eric Garner, and the riots in Baltimore. These events all involved the beating and death of a Black American male who was a child of a parent from the hip-hop generation. As one of my participants said, "there are very few opportunities for members of the hip-hop generation, and as a result they look for other means to survive." Some do this by engaging in criminal activities as a way to support their families due to limited opportunities, due to either poverty or the stigmas associated with criminality.

Participants suggested a variety of ways to improve how the stigmas associated with incarceration degrade the political and economic condition of the Black community and specifically its hip-hop generation. First, more involvement from the Black church could help with the spiritual base that seems to be lacking within the community. Before the end of the 1960s civil rights movement, the Black church was the center of the community, and both helped to maintain the family and served as a place for the community youth to go. Now, the church is often seen as something only for the elders,

and many of the hip-hop generation do not feel the church is for them. According to my participants, this has to change, and so does the family structure. Many of my participants believed that the family has to become stronger, but this may be difficult. We currently live in a society where we are very fast paced, and the idea of sitting down to dinner is a lost family activity, with TV, social media, and other forms of technology to distract. Furthermore, with the high rate of incarceration of Blacks, it is even harder to have both parents in the home; thus, this option will take more time, but will also need help with way the community views family and places more importance on the family structure. Lastly, Black Americans of the hip-hop generation must be better represented within the policy-making process. Policies are currently being implemented that affect them, but they are rarely part of the policy-crafting process. This can occur by placing further importance on education and obtaining support from all members of the Black American community.

Summary

The results gathered using the Spradley Model provided an Afrocentric perspective on how the stigmas associated with mass incarceration have reduced political and economic opportunities for Black Americans born between 1965 and 1984. The end of 2014 and the start of 2015 have seen a great deal of political upheaval, from the death of Travon Martin and the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO (a predominately poor suburban community of St. Louis), to the Baltimore Riots that occurred as a result of the death of 25-year-old Freddie Gray only a few days before the 23rd anniversary of the Los Angeles Riots. I remember the LA Riots vividly, as I was 10 years old at the time

and living in the middle of South Los Angeles. Just like Los Angeles in the early 1990s, the Baltimore Riots were a result of a long history of a particular relationship of the community with the police. In short, the Black American community felt like they were a policed population, not a protected one. The mass incarceration of Black American men fed into this perception. As my participants discussed, incarcerations have a huge effect on the Black community in terms of, most prominently, the family structure and political power. Today, according to the National Institute of Corrections (NIC), the home town of Michael Brown ranks 10th in the nation in terms of incarceration rate, while Baltimore has one of the highest incarceration rates in any major city in the United States (NIC, 2015). Thus, as my participants suggested, there are some changes needed from within the community and the nation as a whole. Chapter 5 will discuss some notable options and suggestions for further research on the topic of Black American incarceration and the effects that the stigmas of incarceration have on the hip-hop generation.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

My study was initiated to help give a voice to Black Americans, specifically those of the hip-hop generation, regarding their thoughts on how incarcerations and the stigmas associated with incarceration have reduced their political and economic opportunities. Culturally sensitive, critical ethnographic interviews were conducted and gave a direct voice to members of the Black American community. The goal of this was to make a contribution to changing conditions that were discussed by my participants. The central question that drove the study was: how have the stigmas associated with mass incarceration reduced political and economic opportunities for Black Americans born between 1965 and 1984 from an Afrocentric perspective? The Spradley Model was used to examine the hip-hop generation using descriptive, tour, structural, and contrast aspects, as discussed in Appendix A. The key findings were the need for more political participation by members of the hip-hop generation and building stronger families.

Interpretation of the Findings

My interpretation of the data collected is based on the belief that all knowledge gained through my interviews is a resource as powerful as any other tool in social research (Thomas, 1992). As such, a new way of thinking can be implemented, and this research project can act on social conditions facing the hip-hop generation of the Black American community instead of passively acting on issues due to the lack of cultural understanding (Thomas, 1992). As a result, my interpretation was based on establishing close relationships with my participants, which allowed me to listen carefully to what was being said, and notice facial expressions and hand gestures, even when these may have

had to do with something I did not like. Thus, the goal of my interviews was not to share my thoughts but to hear my participants and report their feelings and opinions.

The first aspect about the data collected that it is important to understand is that the term hip-hop is bigger than just a genre of music. During the interview process, many of the participants agreed that "the rebellious 'don't-give-a-fuck' self-portrait of many young Blacks in popular culture has been consumed as definitive and authentic" for those within the culture, but as a threat to those outside of the hip-hop Black culture (Asante Jr., 2008, p. 5). Thus, for example, my participants generally agreed that the Tupac song "Breathin" spoke for many of the hip-hop generation and how society sees them as a threat.

In chapter 2, I discussed and highlighted the DWB phenomenon and also stated that studies have shown that dark skin is often devalued where light-skinned people received greater opportunities, and that this racial profiling should be analyzed from an Afrocentric perspective. The question connected to this raised important issues of skin complexions and racial profiling. As stated earlier, the new Jim Crow is the prison-industrial complex: in 1979, Congress created the Prison Industry Enhancement Certification program, which gave private companies access to prison laborers (Kitwana, 2002). Douglas Blackmon claimed that European Americans understood that, after the emancipation of Black Americans, ta combination of trumped-up legal charges and forced labor as punishment made for both a good business proposition, and efficient tool of intimidation of Black Americans (Blackmon, 2008). Therefore, the stigmas of incarceration and criminality have had, and continue to have, pervasive and lasting

adverse effects on members of the hip-hop generation. For example, in the 2012 presidential election, roughly 66.2% of eligible Black American voters cast ballots; however, there was only an increase among those aged 45 years and older, but a decline in the younger section of the generation (Yen, 2013). As stated by Alexander (2012), once labeled a felon, stigmas associated with incarcerations become perfectly legal, and privileges such as voting are suspended if one has spent time in prison. Thus, the biggest side-effect of the stigmas associated with incarceration is the lack of democratic participation due to imprisonment or being labeled a felon.

When I asked my participants if they thought that stigmas the hip-hop generation faces in regards to incarceration connects to earlier events in the civil rights movement, some referenced the war on drugs started during the Nixon presidency. Mr. M's comments correspond with Street's (2002) claim that, in the main cities that were wrecked by the war on drugs, roughly 80% of young Black American men currently have criminal records and will this be subjected to legalized discrimination for the rest of their lives. However, there are some who become outstanding citizens and, as some participants suggest, look down on everyone else. This may be a product of what the Easton Model calls incorporation, which is when the government incorporates the problem into their ranks to limit issues felt later. For example, Mr. C stated, "Those of the civil rights movement were getting arrested to change the status of Blacks and was socially inspired and not harmful." Ms. K stated, "many members of the hip-hop generation are getting arrested just like those of the civil rights movement, but due to the music that is associated with them it is seen as different or negative." These conflicting

statements get to the issue of today: a larger number of Black American are now in better

positions than was the case during the civil rights movement.

Thus, as stated by Carter G. Woodson (1933/1990),

With mis-educated Negroes in control themselves, however, it is doubtful that the

system would be very much different from what it is or that it would rapidly

undergo change. The Negroes thus placed in charge would be the products of the

same system and would show no more conception of the task at hand than do the

whites who have educated them and shaped their minds as they would have them

function. (p. 23)

Woodson believed that once a member of a discriminated-against group becomes

incorporated into the system, they would do anything possible to maintain their status,

even at the cost of their community. A good example of this can be seen in the American

political arena.

When I asked participants how the community helps the individual reintegrate on

release from jail or holding, the common theme was based on the political and economic

roots behind incarcerations. Politically, Ms. K discussed the difference between

Democrats and Republicans when it comes to incarcerations. Western (2006) provided

quantitative data that showed that incarcerations grew faster under Republican governors

and state legislators, but Democrats also supported criminal justice policies that favored

imprisonment. Thus, as Windelsham (1998) stated, the 1994 Violent Crime Control and

Las Enforcement Act signed by Bill Clinton allocated roughly $9.9 billion for the

construction of more prisons and also made third-time felons serve life terms. Western and Wildeman (2009) stated that urban de-industrialization started to erode the labor market during the 1970s and 1980s, and this was coupled with the exodus of working-class Blacks from the inner cities that helped cause severe unemployment in poor urban areas. Furthermore, for members of the hip-hop generation, employment rates fell below 30% for high school dropouts and 20% for those who did graduate (Bound and Holzer, 1991). In addition, according to a study completed by Western, Kleykamp, and Rosenfeld (2003), if wages and employment had not declined as they did, the growth in prison admissions would possibly have dropped by as much as 25% by 2001. However, due to the continued rise of prison admissions, the family is greatly affected. As stated by Anderson (1990), many return home without any family caretakers or role models, and with the rise in unemployment and poverty, many return to jail due to the lack of support. Thus, the cycle of imprisonment and the stigmas associated with imprisonment continue, and the one in jail replaces the family at home, typically in the form of gangs.

Ethnographers Venkatesh and Levitt (2000) discussed gang culture in their study. They stated that gang affiliation and drive to earn income was a path left for many of the hip-hop generation due either to a lack of role models, violence, or a desire for socioeconomic mobility (Venkatesh and Levitt, 2000). Many of my participants suggested that the revival of the Black American church could be a remedy, and I agree. The Black church has undergone change since the civil rights movement. The hip-hop generation is one of the first Black American generations to feel the results of a global market and technology. Both have helped dispersed the Black community in terms of

domicile, which to a degree has hurt the community and use of the church. As a result, the Black church is now seen through the rise of mega-churches that typically lack the community connection as the church once had during the civil rights movement. According to Gikes (1998), the Black American population is roughly 12% of the US population, but makes up they roughly 25% of its mega church congregations. Of these, the majority are Black baby boomers, or the so-called "buppies," who have "come home" to church. Gilkes (1998) stated that the civil rights and Black power movements changed the Black communities through a rise in consciousness that shook the role of the Black church within the community. These changes, along with better economic conditions, resulted in a significant number of churchgoers with graduate and professional degrees, which changed the dynamic of what was being said in the church, as well as the likelihood that members would be in constant flux (Gilkes, 1998). As a result, the church may not be the option it once was, but it is still a good place to start organizing. Education, however, involves its own challenges.

Currently, the American educational system is one of the worst in the developed world. Some participants blame this on how public schools are funded. For example, all states except Michigan depend on property taxes to fund public schools. As a result, not all school districts spend the same on each child, creating an imbalance in public education. In fact, the California Supreme Court found that their state finance system discriminates against the poor, resulting in a violation of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment (Bell, 2004). They argued that it was not fair to base access to a quality education on the wealth of the child's parents and neighbors, and that

education is a fundamental right that should not depend on money (*Serrano v. Priest*,

1971). However, *San Antonio School District v. Rodrigues* (1973) upheld the Texas

financial scheme that inequitably allocated educational resources across the state on the

basis of local property taxes. This demonstrates that the courts do not see a connection

between unequal funding and race. Poor schools in segregated communities based on

socioeconomic conditions have been marginalized for decades will not suddenly achieve

high-quality education (Bell, 2004); however, there is hope.

Participants such as Ms. K and L suggest that we reconnect our families and make

a strong community within our current society. This is important because, as stated by

Hanson and Stipek (2014), in the period 2011–2012, Black American youth comprised

16% of the juvenile population and made up 34% of the students expelled from school,

while 68% of all male prisoners do not have a high school diploma, thus suggesting that,

if you do not go to school, typically you will find your way to jail. Many of my

participants suggest that one way to make the family better (as a whole) is to vote. The

topic of voting was critical for my participants, and many felt that voting is the one way

to change the current stigmas associated with incarcerations. The hip-hop generation

differs from other generations when it comes to voting. To truly understand the hip-hop

voting block requires us to know that the hip-hop generation culture started as an

influential force within the Black community but is now larger than just the Black

community and captures the imagination of youth of various cultural, racial, and

geographic backgrounds (Kitwana, 2005). Therefore, the hip-hop generation views

politics differently, and it could be argued that if more had the right to vote or exercised their right to vote, things may be different.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study were somewhat obvious. First, as I noted in Chapter 1, the largest limitation was the exclusion of all but the Black American community in the United States. My focus was to gain an Afrocentric perspective and, as a result, I excluded Asian Americans, Latino Americans, and Black non-Americans. I made this exclusion because I felt that not doing so would move me away from the Afrocentric perspective that I was seeking and not add to the field, as I believe this study has done. Thus, the largest limitation of this study was the exclusion of all members of the American society and all age groups of the Black American community. More so, the lack of a larger sample size also was a limitation to this study. The use of quantitative research in the form of survey would have allowed for a more cohesive voice of the Black-American members of the hip-hop generation. However, it would have also hurt the personal nature that was provided through culturally sensitive critical ethnographic interviews.

Recommendation for Action

I stated earlier that Black music is not done just for its own sake. Rather, Black music is typically an artistic form of expression that shows the feelings and thinking of those of the genre and helps the listener heal as a means of survival (Cone, 1972/2005). With that being said, members of the hip-hop generation have been asking for change since the start of hip-hop in the early 1980s, and have also used the music as a way to deal with social issues such as incarceration. However, mainstream society has often

ignored their cry for help and categorized it as solely music (Kitwana, 2002). As articulated by Questlove of the hip-hop band The Roots, "The greatest hip-hop songs have had the power to pull energy and questions and self-doubt and raw emotion out of you. It could be a song that sets your neighborhood on fire [like 'Rebel Without a Pause']" (Thompson, 2015). So, looking more deeply into the lyrics of many hip-hop songs, both problems and recommendations for action can be seen, which align with many of the thoughts of the participants of this study. Thus, I will use the lyrics of hip-hop to help explore the recommendations for action based on the critical ethnographic interviews conducted for this study. These include building confidence in the Black American family, better relationships with law enforcement, and more civic participation.

The first recommendation for action would be to strengthen the family through love and understanding, which is depicted in the lyrics of Talib Kweli. He said,

> We keeping it gangster say 'fo shizzle', 'fo sheezy' and 'stayin crunk'; Its easy to pull a, breezy, smoke trees, and we stay drunk; Yo, our activism attackin the system, the blacks and, latins in prison; Numbers of prison they victim Black in the vision; Shit and all they got is rappin, to listen to; I let them know we missin you, the love is unconditional, Even when the condition is, critical, when the livin is miserable; Your position is pivotal, I ain't bullshittin you. (Kweli, 2002, Track 3)

In this verse, Talib discuss how members of the hip-hop community deal with not only the stigmas associated with incarceration, but also their incarceration itself. During my interview with Mr. R, he said,

> There are times where we just feel like there is no hope for things to get better because we all have be broken down by the legal system or become victim to it. So, the only thing we can do is try to have fun while we can, bring our families closer, and hope for the best for our kids.

This gloomy outlook on life is not isolated to any particular region, but affects the country as a whole. Ms. P does much work in the community, and she said, "Many members of the hip-hop generation feel like there are not many options for them, and it has to start at home by installing confidence and self-worth." Thus, just as was done throughout Black American history, the Black community, and the hip-hop generation specifically, has to find a way to bring back the importance of the family. This must begin with how the public sees the Black family.

> As stated by Mr. E,

> Not all of us Black men are in jail, but that's what the TV says. More so, not all of us Black fathers are absent from the home and these narratives must change to really help lead to change within our communities and how the hip-hop generation see their options are.

In fact, a study conducted by Parson and Mikawa (1991) found that roughly 78% of their participants lived with their biological fathers up to at least the age of 18. It is important

to note that the study conducted by Parson and Mikawa focused on Black American men raised in Black Christian churches, which also brings back into the discussion of the importance of the church. However, if the belief that Black men are absent can be changed, there may also be a change in the structure and confidence in the Black family, which may help the stigmas associated with the incarceration of member of the hip-hop generation.

Another recommendation is to work toward better relationships with members of law enforcement. As a youth growing up in South Los Angeles, I had respect for the police but I never trusted them. I did not trust them because they never respected me or any of my friends, because in their eyes we were the enemy. Therefore, when NWA released "Fuck tha Police" in 1988 I understood what was being said. In the song, Ice Cube said, "A young nigga got it bad cause I'm brown, and not the other color so police think they have the authority to kill a minority" (NWA, 1988, track 2), which still has meaning even today. In an interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine in 1989, Ice Cube said his lyrics "deal with reality. Violence is reality. When you say something like that, it scares people. You're supposed to picture life as a bowl of cherries. But it's not" (Hochman, 1989). Recently we have seen numerous incidents between the police and the Black community, which only hinders hopes of better relationships between the two. Most recently, the summer of 2015 saw footage emerging of a teenage Black American girl in McKinney, TX, being thrown to the ground with force and a gun being pulled on other teenagers that seemed to be trying to help her. Mr. LA stated, "The police has always been the enemy because we are seen as their enemy. So, when I see the things I

see on TV now I am not shocked because it has been like this for us for years." Thus, in order to fix the dynamics between the police and the community, it is first necessary to identify that there is an issue.

Once there is understanding of a strained relationship with the police, change can occur. Ms. A, who is a retired sheriff officer for the County of Los Angeles, said, "We have to stop seeing the police as the enemy because there are some of us that are good and want to help. Yet, if there is hate within the community, we cannot do our jobs." Mr. DA, who is a former police officer and parole officer, said, "We have to start teaching our kids to respect and appreciate the police while knowing their rights as citizens. Then we have to start training officers [about] the cultural difference of the individuals they serve." I asked Mr. DA and Ms. A, "Why don't more police officers work in the communities they serve to help build relationships?" This question was motivated by the view expressed during interviews that many officers work in their communities but have no idea what it is like to live in them, because when they get off work, they go to the other side of the city or county, where they live. Ms. A said, "many officers just want to go home and not be still at work when they go home. More so, it can also be a question of safety." Mr. DA said, "I used to live in the community and it did help my relationship with the residents, because they saw me as part of the community." Thus, there are opposing views from former officers, but there is agreement that change needs to occur. If members of law enforcement better understood the hip-hop culture and did not see it as a distant problem, it may be possible finally to move away from the current hostility

between the two segments and into a place of community where the police and the community work as one.

The last recommendation is to increase civic participation. Many of my participants felt that the lack of civic participation has led to many of the issues within the Black American community and for its hip-hop generation. The vast majority of my participants (Ms. LT, P, TK, K, and Mr. A, C, D, E, AS, B, LA, L) believed that the only way things will get better for the hip-hop generation and the Black Americans community as a whole is if more members voted. However, this cannot be simply voting for the sake of voting, but, as Mr. E stated, "making educated and rational votes that will lead toward positive effects within the community." Nas in his song "American Way" said,

> Talkin 'bout +Rap the Vote+, you ain't thought about; The Black vote mean nathan, who you gonna elect; Satan or Satan? In the hood nothin is changin, uh; We ain't got no choices who to choose; Ten-years ago they were tryin to stop our voices; And end hip-hop, they some hypocrites. (Jones, 2004, Track 4)

Nas's words suggest that the hip-hop generation and Black American community has been taken for granted by political officials, has few viable options, and many still remember when they were seen as the enemy as expressed by NWA and others.

However, there is also a need for a movement that the hip-hop generation can stand behind. Michael Eric Dyson (2007) suggested that the culture and music could only do so much. He said,

If you don't have a vital political movement, the music can only go so far. It can

help alter the mind-set of the masses; it can help create awareness of the need for

social change; it can help dramatize injustice; and it can help articulate the

disenchantment of significant segments of the citizenry. (p. 72)

Yet, there must be a call for action that brings together the hip-hop generation and the

Black American community—A movement that is bigger than themselves but their

future, because it is not fair to expect poor individuals to be responsible for change when

they are trying to find ways to survive. (Dyson, 2007). This was done before, such as

during the 1990s in response to the beating of Rodney King. This was an example of a

moment when the hip-hop generation was "driven to create something important out of

the fragments of culture because the economic suffering of poor folk during the Reagan

era," such as the lack of resources and poorly budgeted schools to name a few (Dyson,

2007, p. 74). This movement was the music and later in the form of action which became

the LA Riots.

"Hip-hop grapples with politics, which is the art of making arguments over how

social resources are distributed, cultural capital is accumulated, and ideological

legitimacy is secured" (Dyson, 2007, p. 82). This level of consciousness was evident in

the music, but today it is often absent. As Mr. E said, "today there are two forms of

music–rap and hip-hop. Rap is what we here every day on the radio and is not conscious;

whereas, hip-hop is rarely played on the radio because it is conscious." Even Jay-Z

admitted to not being conscious because it is not popular. In the song "A Moment of

Clarity," Jay-Z said,

> I dumb down for my audience; And double my dollars; They criticize me for it;
>
> Yet they all yell "Holla"; If skills sold; Truth be told; I'd probably be; Lyrically;
>
> Talib Kweli; Truthfully; I wanna rhyme like Common Sense; (But I did five Mil);
>
> I ain't been rhyming like Common since. (Carter, 2003, track 8)

Thus, due to the lack of conscious hip-hop there is uncertainty as to whether the music is helping garner a movement for change when it comes to incarceration. Mr. B said, "Music plays a big part into asking us [the hip-hop] generation to come together around a cause because there is so much crap out now." In order for social change to occur, this will have to change, and there are signs that this is occurring. In 2014 and 2015, there has been an outcry for change in policing in the United States, with numerous Black American men being killed or arrested under questionable circumstances. Thus, there does seem to be a movement for change, and hip-hop can help with the change the way music has done in the past. Future research should explore this change within the hip-hop generation from an Afrocentric perspective through quantitative research methods.

Quantitative research will help explore a larger base of the hip-hop community. There is a need for an empirical dataset gathered through statistical methods to help really move toward positive social change. Thus, an empirical investigation of the effects the stigmas associated with the incarceration of the hip-hop generation have had on the Black American community politically and economically is needed to provide an even richer dataset of the Black American community through self-administered and internet based surveys. The research would have to focus solely on Black Americans of the hip-hop

generation born in the United States, as this study did, but there is a need for a greater

inclusion of the Black American community to actually say their voice is being heard.

Recommendations for Further Study

Critical Ethnographic research allowed for the use of Afrocentric theory to focus

on the Black American community, and specifically its hip-hop generation. The data

collected was very personal, with culturally sensitive interviews that allowed the

Afrocentric voice to be the center of the research. However, the sample was very small. A

topic of this nature requires both a personal element and a broader perspective. Thus, a

quantitative counterpart to this study is needed to help reach a larger section of the Black

American hip-hop generation that was not able to share its voice due to the limitations of

this study. In addition, a more rounded inclusion of the hip-hop generation will be needed

after a quantitative study has been completed to truly ensure the full Afrocentric voice

has been reported, and not a small sample as was done within this study and the proposed

quantitative study.

Implications

With the rise in technology and camera phones, the 21st century has seen many

racial incidents make the news. However, the country is still divided on whether America

has an issue with race. In May of 2015, *Wall Street Journal*/NBC conducted a poll and

found that the nation is split along racial lines when it comes to police treatment of

African Americans. When respondents were asked to explain the events that led to the

2015 Baltimore riots and other events where the community was in confrontation with

the police, Black Americans and European Americans saw the issue very differently.

Roughly 60% of Black Americans said the violence was due to pre-existing frustrations

about police mistreatment of the Black community (Hook, 2015), whereas only

approximately 32% of European Americans thought this was the case. When asked if the

issues with the police stem from some individuals looking to seize an excuse to cause

trouble, 58% of European Americans, agreed whereas 27% of Black Americans agreed.

These issues are directly related to the data collected via interviews on what the hip-hop

generation believes have led the negative stigmas associated with incarcerations and have

had negative consequences on their communities. If America is a true democratic

republic, it must "require that persons be treated equally insofar as they are autonomous

participants in the process of self-government" (Post, 2006, p. 28). Therefore, each

citizen should be given an equal chance of being an active participant in the political

arena and to maintain a family regardless of his or her socio-economic status. The

stigmas associated with the incarceration of the hip-hop generation of the Black

American community makes civic participation difficult to obtain based on the voice of

some members of the community. Nevertheless, there is hope for change through cultural

and political liberalism, which is based on liberty.

Social Change Implications

The racial division shown in the statistics above is only one example just how

valuable this study is. Many of the participants agreed that the biggest change could come

from strengthening the family and political participation. Thus, the most significant social

change suggested within the conclusions of this research is for political leaders to work

directly with the hip-hop generation and the Black Americans community as a whole to

make changes in legislation through political liberalism. The goal of political liberalism

is not to add another prejudiced doctrine that is already in place, but rather to create the policy framework whereby policy makers and members of the hip-hop generation and the Black American community work together and draft a framework that is neutral between what is sought and what is already in place (Gaus & Courtland, 2007). As a result, liberty becomes the key to political liberalism.

The argument over political liberty centers on the question of how a stable and just society where citizens are both free and equal but still be divided along philosophical and moral doctrines (Quong, 2005). That is to say, that liberty will always be based on each and not the whole citizenry. We must not then assume that it is human nature to disagree over conditions of freedom; it will also produce disagreements centered on what is a "good life," but not how to create it (Quong, 2005). For the most part, many Americans, as it is today, agreed that the government should have different things in place to ensure liberties, but cannot agree what is the best way for it to be done to help curb the incarceration of the hip-hop generation and limit the effects that the stigmas associated with incarceration have in their communities. Political liberalism is, therefore, dependent on the notion of liberty, because liberty and freedom work together in politics. Ultimately, everyone wants the freedom to do as they want, but this depends on the absence of obstacles (negative liberty) and the ability to excite change (positive liberty) through the election process. America was founded on the idea that everyone is entitled to individual freedoms granted by God and that these should never be infringed on. This still holds true even in the 21st century.

Conclusions

The goal of this study was to provide a voice for members of the hip-hop generation regarding the effect that the stigma of incarceration has had in reducing their political and economic opportunities. The data collected showed that there have been effects from the stigmas associated with incarceration and that there are ways to improve the current situation. Many of both the solutions and problems were discussed in 1964 by Malcolm X in his speech "The Ballot or the Bullet."

In Malcolm X's speech, he discussed the current state of the Black community as it relates to political power and the state of uplifting the Black American culture within the United States, both of which were focal points of my participants. When speaking about culture, he believed that Black Americans must first let go of our "differences" and stand together. Malcolm X laid out some good points to follow that, if used today, may ultimately help change the current effects that the stigmas associated with the incarceration of the hip-hop generation have had on the Black American community. When discussing differences, Malcolm X (1964) said,

> Whether we are Christians or Muslims or nationalists or agnostics or atheists, we must first learn to forget our differences. If we have differences, let us differ in the closet; when we come out in front, let us not have anything to argue about until we get finished arguing with the man.

Suggesting that the difference that members of the hip-hop generation may have with each other are minor; more so, if those differences were to be set aside, real change could occur, and it has happened before.

One of the most significant moments of my childhood growing up in South Los Angeles was the 1992 LA Riots. I saw my community being burned to the ground out of hate and anger directed toward police officers that were set free after the beating of Rodney King. Latasha Harlins, who was a 15-year-old member of the hip-hop generation, was killed by a bullet to the back of the head after attempting to buy orange juice in a community store. Later in the year, the lady who pulled the trigger, Soon Ja Du, was not convicted but instead given probation and forced to pay a fine. All these events led to the LA Riots due to the strain and hostility the community was feeling. Yet, before all this occurred there was a truce between the Bloods and Crips street gangs on the streets of Watts in response to the police. Consequently, even though the violence and aftermath of the LA Riots was very costly, when members of the hip-hop generation band together they can insight change if it is guided in the right direction. Malcolm X said, "Their eyes are coming open. They're beginning to see what they used to only look at. They're becoming politically mature. They are realizing that there are new political trends from coast to coast." This can only happen once differences are put to the side and focus is placed on community involvement.

Malcolm X also spoke about politics. When referencing the election of 1964 he said,

It's also a political year. It's the year when all of the white politicians will be back in the so-called Negro community jiving you and me for some votes. The year when all of the white political crooks will be right back in your and my community with their false promises, building up our hopes for a letdown, with

their trickery and their treachery, with their false promises, which they don't

intend to keep. As they nourish these dissatisfactions, it can only lead to one

thing, an explosion; and now we have the type of Black man on the scene in

America today. (Malcolm X, 1964)

In 2015, the political arena is very tense. As Mr. L said, "this in some ways seem even

more tense than how it was in 1992 before the LA Riots, which makes me feel as if

things are really about to blow up, because the President is Black and things are still

messed up." Many of my participants spoke of how, even though some change has

occurred, it is not to the degree that they hoped. Considering the words of Malcolm X, we

may not be as surprised. He continued in his speech to say,

In this present administration, they have in the House of Representatives 257

Democrats to only 177 Republicans. They control two-thirds of the House vote.

Why can't they pass something that will help you and me? In the Senate, there are

67 senators who are of the Democratic Party. Only 33 of them are Republicans.

Why, the Democrats have got the government sewed up, and you're the one who

sewed it up for them. (Malcolm X, 1964)

As stated by Ms. TK, "many of us vote based on where our parents voted or where we are

told to vote. This is not making educated vote as we need to be doing." This coincides

with the thoughts of Malcolm X. As the data from this project have shown, Black

Americans mostly vote along party lines when they vote, yet very little has changed in

the last 51 years. So I ask the question that Mr. LA asked me, "why do we not vote based

on not the party but the record of accomplishment of the candidate?" If we were to start to do this, perhaps some change would occur in not only the incarceration of the hip-hop generation, but also the strength of the political voice of the hip-hop generation and also the Black community as a whole.

Lastly, the Afrocentric voice that was provided in this study is not one of anger, but rather one of hope: hope of progress for members of the hip-hop community such that they no longer need to wonder about their place within the American society and if the legal system will protect them. If the occurrence in Baltimore, Maryland in 2015 showed us anything, it is that people are tired. When people are tired and feel like their voice is not heard, negative things will typically occur. I can only hope the words and feelings expressed by the participants of this study will help lead us to positive social change where the stigmas associated with the incarceration of the hip-hop community is no longer causing negative effects for the community both politically and economically. As Tupac Shakur said in the song, "Better Days,"

> I'd love to see the block in peace; With no more dealers and crooked cops, the only way to stop the beast; And only we can change; It's up to us to clean up the streets, it ain't the same; Too many murders, too many funerals and too many tears; Just seen another brother buried plus I knew him for years; Passed by his family, but what could I say?; Keep yo' head up and try to keep the faith; And pray for better days. (Shakur & Isley, 2002, track 4, Disc 2)

We as a country have to reevaluate our current system of laws in order to truly fulfill the

promise of a democracy that is the foundation of America.

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Appendix A: Critical Ethnography Interview Questions

1. Hi, _____. How are you? Thank you for your time and please know that everything we discuss will be confidential, and I ask that you be candid with your answers. If you feel, you need a break at any time, please let me know and we will take a break. Let's get started.

2. Well, as I told you through email correspondence, I am interested in understanding your perspective on Black American incarcerations and their associated discriminatory stigmas.

Background questions

3. When and where were you born?

4. Did you grow up in this location?

5. Where have you lived? What section?

6. What was the most common cultural group in your area?

7. Where do you live now?

8. What is your educational background?

9. Last background question, what is your current occupation and role within the Black community?

Descriptive Tour Questions

The focus of this study is to explore how stigmas of Black American incarcerations have impacted the Black community and specifically the hip-hop generation.

10. Please describe your knowledge of the hip-hop generation as a subculture of the Black Community? In other words, can you describe what the term hip-hop generation means to you?

11. How do you think that the hip-hop culture was influenced by the civil rights movement or the Black power movements of the 20th century?

12. The hip-hop generation is typically associated with its genre of music. Much like Marvin Gaye spoke to previous generations with his song "Inner City Blues" (we can listen to it if needed), hip-hop has allowed its generation to voice their views of society. For example, Tupac had a song named "Breathin" (we can listen to it if needed). To what extent do you think these lyrics speak for the average member of the hip-hop community?

Structural Questions

13. Can you describe how the hip-hop generation is affected by the stigmas associated with incarceration?

14. In what ways, if at all, do you feel that many of the stigmas that the hip-hop generation face in regards to incarcerations stem back to earlier events in the overall civil rights movement?

15. How would you describe the effects that the incarcerations and the stigmas associated with incarceration of the hip-hop generation have had on the Black Community?

16. Can you help me understand how your community deals with or dealt with the high incarceration of Black men and women of the hip-hop generation?

17. Upon release from jail or holding, how does the community help integrate the individual back into the community?

Contrast Questions

18. How effective is the method of integration of those that have experienced the American judicial system working in the Black Community? Is the community

helpful upon their release? What could be changed or added for a more effective assimilation into the Black community?

19. How useful are programs within the Black community in curbing the incarceration? What could be changed or improved?

20. How can the Black community help eliminate the stigmas associated with incarcerations and the high incarceration rate of its hip-hop generation? What changes should be considered by policy makers to help eliminate the stigmas associated with Black incarcerations? How would these changes help the Black community?

21. How can the Black community become more organized politically to become more of a factor in the policy-making process? How would these suggestions curb the current incarceration rate of Black Americans of the hip-hop generation?

Appendix B: Consent Forms

Paper (in person) Based Research

You are invited to take part in a research study on the stigmas associated with Black American incarceration from a Black (Afrocentric) perspective. The researcher is inviting African-Americans whom are part of the hip-hop generation (those born between 1965 – 1984) to be in the study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Wylie Jason D. Tidwell, III, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to provide an Afrocentric voice where the members of the African-American community are the center of the data collection on incarceration and the socio-economic stigmas it creates.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Verify that you are Black American, born between the years of 1965 and 1984, and have lived within or currently reside in an urban environment within the last decade (10 years).

- Be part of a audio taped interview that will take roughly 45 minutes to 2 hours with breaks given.

- After all interviews are analyzed, I will email you a voluntary request to review my notes from our interview to ensure accuracy of what you said and I will report within my dissertation.

Here are some sample questions:

22. Please describe your knowledge of the hip-hop generation as a subculture of the Black Community? In other words, can you describe what the term hip-hop generation means to you?

23. In what ways, if at all, do you feel that many of the stigmas that the hip-hop generation face in regards to incarcerations stem back to earlier events in the overall civil rights movement?

24. How effective is the method of integration of those that have experienced the American judicial system working in the Black Community? Is the community helpful upon their release? What could be changed or added for a more effective assimilation into the Black community?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary I will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during or after the study and no data collected will be used, but destroyed. You may stop at any time. More so, if a participant was disclose illegal behaviors they will not be reported due

to the nature of this study is to include all members of the Black community regardless of incidents that may have occurred before the inclusion within this study.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as stress or becoming upset. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing. However, in the event that any stress does occur, please refer to the attached resource guide for assistance.

Currently, Black Americans constitute roughly 12.8% of the US population; however, constitute roughly 1 million of the 2.3 million-prison populations in the United States. The focus of this study is to provide a outlet for you as the participant to voice your views of incarcerations and the stigmas they create for the Black American community in the United States. Unlike past research, the interpretation of the data collected will be reported from a similar culture background as your own; thus, providing a new lens on the social problem of incarcerations within the Black community.

Payment:

All participants will receive a $5 Starbucks gift card (electronically mailed) as a sign of gratitude of your participation in the study. Please provide the email address you would like this gift to be sent to

_____

Privacy:

Any information you provide will be kept <u>confidential</u>. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports, but a alias identity will be used. Data will be kept secure by password protected word document and saved on a password protected external hard drive. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via 404-***-**** or wylie.tidwell@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 3121210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **12-09-14-0244415** and it expires on **December 8, 2015.**

<u>I will give you a copy of this consent form for your records.</u>

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing your name below, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

_____

Participant's Signature

_____

Researcher's Signature

_____

Online / Distance Based Research

You are invited to take part in a research study on the stigmas associated with Black American incarceration from a Black (Afrocentric) perspective. The researcher is inviting African-Americans whom are part of the hip-hop generation (those born between 1965 – 1984) to be in the study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Wylie Jason D. Tidwell, III, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information:

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- Be part of a audio taped interview that will take roughly 45 minutes to 2 hours with breaks given.

- After all interviews are analyzed, I will email you a voluntary request to review my notes from our interview to ensure accuracy of what you said and I will report within my dissertation.

Here are some sample questions:

25. Please describe your knowledge of the hip-hop generation as a subculture of the Black Community? In other words, can you describe what the term hip-hop generation means to you?

26. In what ways, if at all, do you feel that many of the stigmas that the hip-hop generation face in regards to incarcerations stem back to earlier events in the overall civil rights movement?

27. How effective is the method of integration of those that have experienced the American judicial system working in the Black Community? Is the community helpful upon their release? What could be changed or added for a more effective assimilation into the Black community?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary I will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during or after the study and no data collected will be used, but destroyed. You may stop at any time. More so, if a participant was disclose illegal behaviors they will not be reported due

to the nature of this study is to include all members of the Black community regardless of
incidents that may have occurred before the inclusion within this study.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be
encountered in daily life, such as stress or becoming upset. Being in this study would not
pose risk to your safety or wellbeing. However, in the event that any stress does occur,
please refer to the attached resource guide for assistance.

Currently, Black Americans constitute roughly 12.8% of the US population; however,
constitute roughly 1 million of the 2.3 million-prison populations in the United States.
The focus of this study is to provide a outlet for you as the participant to voice your views
of incarcerations and the stigmas they create for the Black American community in the
United States. Unlike past research, the interpretation of the data collected will be
reported from a similar culture background as your own; thus, providing a new lens on
the social problem of incarcerations within the Black community.

Payment:

All participants will receive a $5 Starbucks gift card (electronically mailed) as a sign of
gratitude of your participation in the study. Please provide the email address you would
like this gift to be sent to

_____

Privacy:

Any information you provide will be kept <u>confidential</u>. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports, but a alias identity will be used.. Data will be kept secure by password protected word document and saved on a password protected external hard drive. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via 404-***-**** or wylie.tidwell@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, extension 3121210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **12-09-14-0244415** and it expires on **December 8, 2015.**

<u>Please print or save this consent form for your records.</u>

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By <u>replying to this email with the words, "I consent"</u> , I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Appendix C: Participent Resource Guide

Please refer to one of the following resources in the event of stress due to participating in

this study (contact information have been changed due to privacy implications):

1. Kia Hansford, M.A., L.A.P.C.

    a. 770-***-****

        i. ***********@yahoo.com

2. Maurice Moore, P.L.C., L.P.C.

    a. 404-***-****

        i. **************@hotmail.com

3. Lawanda Huffman, L.P.C.

    a. 678-***-***

Appendix D: Participant Check Electronic Form

Dear ***(Participants name and alias)***:

Thank you for your very insightful and powerful interview. I have now completed the coding of the data you provided and would like to ensure you agree with the notes I have taken from our interview. ***This is voluntary, but will be helpful***.

Attached you will find a draft of the notes from your transcribed interview.

Please review and check for accuracy and that your response are your thoughts and feelings. Please feel free to contact me via email at ***wylie.tidwell@waldenu.edu*** or via ***404-***-***** should you have any questions or concerns.

By your act of reading the transcript notes, if I do not hear from you within seven calendar days, I will assume you are in agreement with the transcript notes. If you are in agreement simply reply by stating "***I Agree***".

Thank you so much for your help!