Under the Shade of Hopelessness: Future Orientation
And African-American Middle Class Youth

By
Kristin Anita Hill

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Approved:
Aimi Hamraie
Hector Myers
JuLeigh Petty
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Introduction

The million dollar question asked to children has always been, “what do you want to be when you grow up?” Today, however, many children and youth are convinced that they may not grow up, and are not concerned with dreaming of possibilities that may never be realized. Since 2010, I have been invited to speak to the students of Chute Middle School, my alma mater, on the beginning stages of planning for college before entering high school. Chute Middle School, located in the south central region of Evanston, is racially diverse with a student population that is 40% African-American/Black, 21% White, 30% Hispanic, and 9% Asian and other. Sixty to 65 percent of their student population receives free or reduced lunch. The student to teacher ratio is 10:1, and over 50% of their 6th and 8th grade students meet school, district, and state standards in reading and math ("Chute Middle School", 2006-2015). Each visit consists of informal conversations with the principal, my past teachers, and students in science, language arts, history, reading, Spanish, and math classes. These students are usually excited to see a college student, most listening attentively with a glint of fascination, however, in the past two years, I began to notice, with each visit, communication from the students decreased. They appeared to be attentive, but would not engage, ask questions, and/or would correspond with a defeatist attitude by making statements akin to, “I’m afraid to go to high school because it’s hard and I know college is harder.”

As I contemplated this exchange, I conversed with one of the faculty with whom I was formerly instructed, who helped me gain a little bit more insight. A few weeks before their graduation, several students entered the classroom to receive copies of missing assignments in efforts to complete them and meet graduation requirements. I was discouraged by the students’ lack of zeal for learning, lack of inquisitiveness, and their nonchalant persona about their school performance. They wanted effortless success and had not given much thought about their future or the steps to take to reach long-term goals. The teacher noticed that there had been a shift in education, in both the curriculum and the students in recent years. Standardized test scores also confirmed a drastic decrease in performance since 2012. After hearing this and seeing the evidence, I began to wonder what societal changes could be contributing to this lack of achievement and future orientation, or the image one has for their future.

This generation of youth have been reared in an environment with overwhelming and constant exposure to violence, both domestic and abroad. Twenty-first century technological advancements and social media have allowed for salient occurrences both domestic and abroad to rest on the fingertips of individuals across the world. Tragedies, injustices, famine, war, genocide, and natural disasters across the world have penetrated the conversations, lives and psyches of American youth, as well as overwhelming domestic economic, political, and structural violence. Combined, these events beget a sense of hopelessness toward the future. African-American youth are particularly vulnerable to this sense of hopelessness due to their high exposure to economic recession, parental unemployment, and targeted criminalization such as NYC stop and frisk, widespread police brutality, over-suspension, and the school-to-prison pipeline.

The teacher’s response began a conversation I hope to continue in this research on the impact of violence on safety, longevity, and the possibilities of upward mobility in the development of youth and their future orientation. Jari-Erik Nurmi (1991), argues that future orientation is a complex and multistage process that must be conceptualized in relational terms to embody personal-related and contextual properties. Future orientation is thus described by Nurmi
as a three-step psychological process; motivation – the setting of goals based on a comparison of motives, values, and expectations concerning the future, planning – exemplifying an effort to realize goals through outlining and problem solving, and evaluation - assessing the possibility of achieving goals and actualizing the plan one has constructed\(^1\). The teacher posited that the students’ sense of reality or perspective about the future is crucial in their school performance and that when violence violates these aspects of their lives, they no longer expend energy planning for or investing in the long term. There is a colloquial saying that the future is now, but for these children, and children like them across the country, this is a harsh reality that is changing the development and pursuit of their future orientation.

In this thesis, I draw upon several bodies of literature in order to test the hypothesis that adolescents at Chute Middle School experience pessimism toward the future that diminishes their future orientation and academic achievement. I begin with a description of Evanston and a discussion of the contribution of race and class to the development of suburbia. I then, expand this context to discuss future orientation in the context of positive adolescent development; highlighting the perils of violence, comparison, and inequity as barriers to its successful development and pursuit. Divided into hopelessness in the shade of black and green, I expound on the impact of violence, comparison and inequity on Black identity formation and upward social mobility, respectively. I conclude with a discussion on resilience formation as an effective remedy to these barriers and a host of ideas to be considered in future research.

This research is unique in that it offers a new perspective of future orientation as a summation of self-concept\(^2\), perceived societal worth, life expectancy, and belief in one’s potential for upward mobility. \(^3\) These attributes are imperative to adolescent development, and I argue that the lack of development and pursuit of future orientation is a manifestation of the impact of violence on these factors. The phenomenon of hopelessness that results from the impact of exposure is framed around two aspects I have deemed important in the formation of future orientation; identity formation and upward mobility, the former which I have named “hopelessness in the shade of black” and the latter, “hopelessness in the shade of green.” Many sociologists believe there are two common, irrefutable aspects of success; a good neighborhood (environment) and positive self-esteem; however, the lack of investment in future orientation in the African-American youth in Evanston, Illinois suggests that this logic is flawed (Wilson, W. J., 1991). I argue that two important elements of future orientation are Black identity formation\(^4\) and upward social mobility when they are probably and positively and properly supported. The youth in Evanston, IL, often have both positive self-esteem and a far more positive environment than the neighboring Chicago. However, their Black identities and upward mobility are being compromised by disparity, comparison, and violence. This thesis, and the subsequent research

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\(^1\)This is one formal definition of future orientation I found exceptionally useful in the literature. In this research I will expand upon this definition and introduce my own that encompasses the nature of this definition and further highlight two specific aspects I believe influence the three step psychological process.

\(^2\) Self-concept is a consolidation of knowledge of oneself that encompasses self-esteem and perceived regulatory, emotional, and social self-efficacy. Self-esteem refers to the extent to which one’s self is accepted, approved, or valued. Perceived self-efficacy is defined as an individual’s conviction of being able to master specific activities, situations, or aspect of his or her own psychological social functioning. Regulatory self-efficacy is the capacity to resist environmental pressures from ones actions and emotional self-efficacy is the capacity to cope with and regulate one’s own emotional reaction. These concepts work together to for self-concept that encompasses how one feels about themselves as well a sense of capability and competency. (Bacchini, D & Magliulo, F., 2003)

\(^3\) Future orientation therefore becomes a multidimensional measurement situated at the intersection of race and class statuses that is impacted by inequalities and disadvantage in both realms in a unique additive manner. This introduces an intersectional framework and consequent argument that is unique to this body of literature, especially for the working/ lower middle class African-American population in Evanston, IL.

\(^4\) Racial Identity formation is a multidimensional construct that has been defined in various ways. There definitions include an understanding and acceptance of one’s socially constructed racial label – Black or African-American-, Knowledge of one’s racial groups history and cultural norms, a sense of shared activities, beliefs about the social position of one’s racial group, and feelings, of pride regarding one’s racial group. (Mandara, J., Gaylord-Harden, N. K., Richards, M. H., & Ragsdale, B. L., 2009, p. 1661)
substantiating it, is my response to this question and idea, my advocacy for youth who do not
realize they have given up, and my attempt to understand what it will take to change the tide.

Suburban Development and Race and Class relations

Violence against Blacks in America is not just an interpersonal dilemma. Although race
relations are rarely discussed in conversations of urban and suburban development and renewal,
race, class, gender, sexuality and other lived, embodied experiences actively shape cities,
suburbs, and public spaces. Consequently, racism and other oppression hide behind masks and
infiltrate city relations as well (Heathcott, Joseph, 2015). Urban renewal projects and other
factors also create interesting shifts in suburban development and dynamics. A suburb is a broad
term including multiple locales situated on the peripheries of urban space. Originating as an
implied post war bedroom community occupied largely by working and middle class whites, 21st
Century suburbia is a complex, dynamic set of residential and multipurpose spaces that defy easy
categorization (Heathcott, Joseph, 2015). Suburbs often grow and shift in response to individuals
fleeing the inner city, often referred to white flight and brain drain, resulting in demographic
shifts. If white flight refers to the migratory process in which whites flee to the suburbs fearing
racial segregation, many suburbs are enduring a demographic shift as Black families are fleeing
poverty in the city for greener pastures in the suburbs. However, as the saying goes, the grass is
not always greener on the other side, and their migration often brings forth suburban segregation
and truncated versions of the American dream. Consequently, taking advantage of resources and
opportunities becomes a game of overcoming inequity, comparison, and even violence.

Evanston, Illinois

Stretching north from Howard Street – the Chicago/Evanston divider line- and west from
Lake Michigan, Evanston, IL is a vibrant community comprising of many strong neighborhoods
and unique diversity in race, religions, and levels of income. Evanston is the 15th-largest city in
Illinois, with a population of 74,486, with a rich mix of businesses, light industry and
institutions, and it employs 40,000 workers. Far more than just a quiet monotonous middle-class
white suburb that is dependent on Chicago, Evanston, has taken on an urban identity, and
therefore prefers the nomenclature of a small city rather than a suburb. Established by one of the
founders of its major landmark, Northwestern University, Evanston continues to be a thriving
independent city with a thriving business economy where 31% of its residents have master’s
degrees or higher and nearly 40% of the people who live there, work there (Steele, J, 2009). The
city boasts of 93 neighborhood parks and beaches, excellent public transportation, shopping,
entertainment, two hospitals, 86 churches and synagogues, a modern public library, 12
elementary schools, 3 middle schools, 1 high school, private and specialty schools, and many
estimate that the median household income for African-Americans is about $50,000 and 62% of
the income distribution is above $50,000 for all residents. Lastly, Evanston schools scored an
above average score of 8/10 in both test score measurements and broader measurements of
school quality including student achievement, student growth, and college readiness ("The

Evanston also boasts of its variety in housing from 1,000 square-foot to 30,000- square-
foot homes, apartments, condos, townhouses, and mansions, both vintage and modern. While this
may sound like a key selling point in a travel magazine, it speaks volumes to the historical and modern construction of public and private spaces under racial and class-based influences. This variety in housing is a gesture, suggesting that everyone is welcome and can find a place to call home. Indeed, Evanston is quite eclectic, however, similar to larger cities, Evanston also has race and class-based concentrations of people and resources. Representation does not always equal integration, and this becomes quite evident at the comparison of the demographic make-up of wards as well as zoning to elementary and middle schools. Race and class, therefore become classifiers of one’s experience, even in the suburbs. Consequently, the quick-fix remedy of a new environment and exposure to white middle-class culture and resources, becomes convoluted by a segregated reality.

**Critical Framework and Systems**

The interconnection and influence of race and class on the formulation of public spaces, also exist in the formulation of future orientation in positive youth development. As before mentioned, Chute Middle school is located in the south/central region of Evanston, and has an over-representation of minorities in comparison to the overall demographic make-up of Evanston. In extending beyond the school itself and investigating other societal dynamics that may be a contributing to the shifts in the life and academic perspectives of these students, I observed increasing incidents of violence. Over the last 4 years there have been shootings and killings of high school students, bombs going off near middle schools, and increasing gang violence throughout Evanston. At the same time, there has also been overwhelming societal violence and injustices in the media against Black and brown bodies. With one lens focused on the dynamics of Evanston as a racially and class influenced space and another on the increasing incidence of violence, the picture of Black adolescents inability to develop and pursue a future orientation became more systemic than individualistic. Rather than pathologizing or blaming those students, the question of systemic influence and oppression came into focus. Perhaps the violence around these youth was taking a toll of their psychological capacity and competency to invest in a future they no longer felt was promised.

Two psycho-sociological theories speak to this phenomenon; Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and Urie Bronfenbrenner’s socio-ecological model. In efforts of designing a theory of human behavior, Abraham Maslow posited that people are motivated into action to achieve certain needs in a successive order from basic physiological needs to more complex needs of self-actualization. Most often depicted as a hierarchical pyramid with five categories of motivational needs. The bottom three layers are deficient needs that motivate people when they are unmet and must be satisfied before higher needs. The top two layers are growth needs that lead to self-actualization ("Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs", 2007).

Complimentary to Maslow’s individualistic approach, Bronfenbrenner offers an important ecological theory. Bronfenbrenner’s initial theory of human development presents the entire ecological system within which growth occurs, as dynamic interactions of personal and environmental factors that shape individuals and their behavior. The theoretical model consists of concentric circles representing each smaller system being embedded in larger systems and operating in a reciprocally causal relationship where each system shapes and is shaped by the other systems. In theory, Maslow’s model would reside within the intrapersonal level of Bronfenbrenner’s theory, allowing these two theories to work together in examining and understanding human behavior in its vast complexity. Together they construct a framework for dynamic interaction between the individual and the environment. More specifically, these two
theories are brought together in this thesis to provide a framework for understanding the personal and contextual factors that impact future orientation development in African-American adolescents.

Figure 1: Maslow’s hierarchy of needs
Table 1: Levels of Influence in Bronfenbrenner’s Socio-Ecological Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of influence</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intrapersonal</td>
<td>Individual characteristics that influence behavior: Knowledge,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>skills, self-efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal: Family, friends, peers</td>
<td>Interpersonal processes and groups providing identity and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational: Churches, stores,</td>
<td>Rules, regulation, policies, structures constraining or promote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>community organizations</td>
<td>behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community: Social Networks</td>
<td>Community norms (community regulations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Policy: Local, State, Federal</td>
<td>Policies and laws that regulate or support healthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>practices/actions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Matthew Desmond and Mustafa Emirbayer, utilize Bronfenbrenner’s model to discuss the impact of structural disadvantage—which refers to the concentrated accumulation of overlapping and mutually reinforcing social problems in a single residential area—on youth from a top-down perspective. They argue that if the violence and homicide rates are unparalleled in Black communities, it is because the level of structural disadvantage is unparalleled as well (RDRP, 284). Formal and informal social support is critical to prosocial development, for this reason, the communities in which African-American youth reside and the institutions that serve them are important in acting as a buffer of social support. These social systems provide the social

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This structural disadvantage is in reference to the interpersonal level institutions in Bronfenbrenner’s socio-ecological framework. This layer houses social systems and civil society institutions that affect community dynamics as well as household dynamics and school achievement.
African-American youth need as a protective factor to facilitate resilience. Schools are a large part of the interpersonal environment that contributes to the development of adolescents and their social capital. During adolescence, most youth spend more time at school and in extracurricular activities than they spend in any other environment. In some communities, school and the subsequent extra-curricular activities work as protective factors against violence in the community. However, in sharing the interpersonal level status with the community itself, the barrier between neighborhood dynamics and school dynamics is highly permeable and the violence in one setting can quickly and easily leak into the other. Maslow’s theory is important to this research because he provides a framework for understanding the interconnectedness of violence, communities, schools, individuals, and achievement; providing a logic for violence as a barrier to success.

The topic of race and crime has been a highly charged debate mixed with controversy and uncomfortable silence within multiple disciplines for many decades. Existing at somewhat of a stalemate, two perspectives reign heavily in the literature in efforts of understanding and analyzing Black crime. On one hand, structuralists argue in favor of a social-class based argument, “relative deprivation”, in support of Black engagement in crime out of discontent of being deprived of something one feels entitled to. On the other hand, cultural theorists tend to promote the theory of an indigenous culture of violence in Black ghettos or a predisposition of Blacks to be violent. Ironically, although these views are highly discussed, the evidence to support both social-class arguments and race-based arguments are relatively weak (Sampson, R. J., & Wilson, W. J., 1995). In an attempt to break this stalemate and propose a new argument, Robert Sampson and William Julius Wilson offer a theoretical strategy that incorporates structural and cultural arguments regarding race, class, and inequality. They argue that macro-social patterns of residential inequality give rise to social isolation and ecological adaptations that undermine social organization. Their perspective brings the importance of communities and healthy environments to the forefront (Sampson, R. J., & Wilson, W. J., 1995). Wilson goes on to argue in several other works that social isolation in Black ghettos is problematic and breeds social disorganization, Black crime, and youth underachievement (Wilson, 1991). His remedy, is therefore strongly in favor of relocation and integration of Blacks into middle class areas, similar to what is being done with recent Black migrants into Evanston, IL from Chicago projects. However, there seems to be a missing link to Wilson’s magic fix because these youth are still struggling to envision and invest in their future.

Patricia Hill Collins adds to this discussion by emphasizing the intersection of identity and oppression. This thesis sits at the intersection of race and class, but it cannot exclude other embodied experiences such as gender and sexuality that impact youth development and their subsequent oppression. Collins argues that oppression cannot be quantified, or compared and weighed against other forms of oppression (Collins, P. H., 1993, p. 2). The Black middle class and the inhabitants of Evanston, IL exist in an interesting intersection of oppression and privilege. To this notion, Collins states that, “few are pure victims or oppressors, and that each of us derives varying amounts of penalty and privilege from the multiple systems of oppression that frame our lives” (2). Her description of race, class and gender as distinctive yet interlocking structures of oppression, is another important framework to overlay Bronfenbrenner and Maslow’s theories in understanding and analyzing youth development and behavior in the face of violence as an oppressive force.

Social Capital can be defined as “features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit.”
Adolescence

Adolescence is a unique period of development that is highly focused on personal and academic development. With its unique emphasis on personal mastery, relationships, identity formation, and the development of one’s future self; exposures to violence, whether through personal experience, witnessing, or hearing about violence within family, school, and community, is detrimental to adolescent well-being (Nurmi, J-E, 1991; Landis, 2007). According to Patton, Woolley, and Hong (2012), violence exposure within Bronfenbrenner’s interpersonal, organizational, or community levels lead to increased risk for mental illness and risky behavior. Violence exposure, in accordance with Maslow’s theory, can deplete physical, emotional, social, and cognitive resources, resulting in a negative impact on future orientation and academic achievement, by threatening the fulfillment of low level deficient needs. According to Maslow, safety and security come secondary only to physiological needs and are a great priority over higher level needs associated with school achievement. It then follows that, exposure to and perceptions of danger in schools and neighborhoods are likely to threaten the ability of youth to fulfill their potential in school. Also, research has documented associations between violence exposure and negative emotional and behavioral outcomes, further validating the relevance of Maslow’s theory. Literature supports this phenomenon heavily in impoverished urban communities, however, the research is limited in suburban communities, especially in the unique, heterogenic environment of Evanston, IL.

Violence can kill quickly as an interpersonal act by one man against another, but violence can also exist systematically within institutions as an oppressive force, referred to as structural violence. Structural violence describes arrangements that are embedded within the political and economic organization of the social world that put individuals and populations in harm’s way. This violence is often anonymous, historically perpetuated and an economically driven process and force that conspires to constrain individual agency and deny access to the fruits of scientific and social progress (Burtle, A., 2010-2013). School and neighborhood segregation, local disparity in resources and services, lack of adequate insurance, insufficient funds, and lack of political advocacy and attention; are all sources of structural violence that are often faced by the Black middle-Class.

Methods

The case of African-American youth and increased exposure to violence I witnessed in Evanston presents a timely opportunity to investigate the impact of violence on the development of future orientation within this community. To address this issue, I surveyed several bodies of literature to gain a better understanding of the magnitude of exposure, explored sociological and economical frameworks around violence and academic achievement, and studied the psychology of resilience as a primary defense against hopelessness in the pursuit of future orientation. Several theories and findings were consolidated in efforts of building a unique interdisciplinary framework to better understand the impact of violence exposure on future orientation through a sociological, economical, and psychological lens. This research will aid in exploring my hypothesis that the lack of development and pursuit of future orientation by many African-American youth is a result of the impact of violence exposure on their self-concept and their perception of opportunity for upward mobility. I also hypothesize that this relationship can be moderated by the formation of psychological resilience even in the presence of violence if it is facilitated effectively in intrapersonal, interpersonal, and community socio-ecological levels.
Literature Review

Psychology of Youth Development and Future Orientation

Future orientation provides the basis for goal setting and making tangible plans for the future during adolescence. Its growth and development is impacted by the realistic evaluations youth make about their ability to reach future goals. In this way, a hopeful sense of the future can facilitate positive development and successful transition into adulthood. However, when environmental factors such as violence and poverty induce hopelessness and defeat before hope, optimism, and possibility take root; an adolescent’s ability to develop a positive future orientation is limited or inhibited (Hinton-Nelson, M. D et al, 1996). Future orientation is as much about what adolescents envision for their future as it is about the behaviors they engage in and avoid to make that future possible. If youth do not have positive expectations for the future and do not see current behaviors as linked to future goals they may not be concerned about partaking in violent behavior and abandoning their future. Conversely, if youth envision a positive future for themselves it is likely for them to engage in fewer health compromising behaviors to help ensure that they will reach their aspirations (Janosz, M. et al, 2008). This research is not focused on youth engagement in risky behavior, but on the psychological costs created by the violence around them.

Future orientation has been measured in several different ways. In various studies, the measures for future orientation have involved questions such as: adolescent’s perception of the chance they will live to age 35, get HIV or AIDS, be a parent by age 18 and ever get in trouble with the police (Stoddard, Zimmerman, & Bauermeister, 2011). In general, these question speak to one’s life perspective, levels of optimism about the future, and one’s perception and involvement with a variety of barriers to the future. Future orientation is always discussed from a positive and constructive point of view. It is important to note that in Stoddard, Zimmerman, and Bauermeister’s findings, future orientation takes on the role of a protective factor when reported at high levels, but it can also take on the role of a risk factor for positive youth development when reported in low levels. This is significant because it is not only an important booster to success, but in its absence, future orientation contributes to failure.

The Magnitude and Type of Violence Exposure

Meaningful discussion of the impact of violence on youth development first requires a sound understanding of the type and magnitude of exposure experienced by African-American youth. Although Evanston is the main focus of this study, it is important to understand some basic city dynamics of Chicago, as they greatly influence the dynamics in surrounding suburbs. Across the nation, homicide is ranked as the number one leading cause of death for youth ages 10-24, and in the city of Chicago, from 2003-2011, 4,265 people were murdered via acts of interpersonal violent crime (Dahlberg, Lloyd, Potter, 2001). In comparing the exposure and victimization of African-American youth with their white counterparts, statistics reveal gross disparities. In 2012, the homicide rate for Black male teens was more than 20 times higher than

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7 It is important to understand the difference between risk factors and protective factors and the imperativeness of elements such as future orientation that have important consequences in both roles. This justifies the important of studying future orientation in addressing the public health and developmental issue of violence and adolescents.
the rate for white male teens. According to the Action partnership on Interventions for Black Children Exposed to Violence and Victimization, youth ages 12 to 24 suffer more violent crime than any other age group in the United States, and the victimization rates for African-American far surpass those of their white counterparts ("Action Partnership on Interventions for Black Children Exposed to Violence and Victimization", 2012).

These statistics, although heavily based on the south side of Chicago, have important impacts on recent migratory patterns and demographic shifts in Evanston. The current state of Chicago is a result of multiple factors, some of which are recent changes due to urban renewal projects and the combination of those changes with pre-existing inequalities and deficiencies. In the early 2000s, city officials began the demolition of Chicago housing projects with the stated intention of dismantling the reign of gangs and crime in those areas. The overwhelmingly Black tenants were then granted section 8 vouchers from the government and placed in housing scattered around the city and into neighboring suburbs, one of which is Evanston, IL (Tom, 2014). While the towering buildings of the projects were often ruled by gangs and a horrific place to call home, they also served as a dysfunctional insulator for gang activity, shielding the majority of the city from the violence within. Despite the intention of moving people from desolation to opportunity, the relocation of residents resulted in hundreds of warring gang members being uprooted from their territories and placed in the middle of rival, unfamiliar territories causing violence at record highs (Ruane, 2013). Some tenants greatly appreciated the relocation, after all, the Chicago housing projects had become Black holes of “chronic poverty that place stringent limitations on the ability to get by and steal the hope for a future away from its youth” (Muwakkil, 2014). But there were other residents, some of whom were gang members and young people, who perceived the relocation as a systematic plan to destabilize their communities, and further alienate minority populations. Although gangs are associated with negative activity, they also provided a unique form of social support for tenants that lessened the intensity and individuality of the struggle (Tom, 2014). Unfortunately, the unforeseen consequences continue to impact lives in both the cities and the suburbs.

Similar to Chicago’s high crime rates, FBI crime data suggests that Evanston is not one of the safest communities in America and has a crime rate higher than 86% of the cities and towns of all sizes in Illinois. Measuring about 31 crimes per one thousand residents, the chance of becoming a victim of either violent or property crime in Evanston is 1 in 32 ("Crime Rates for Evanston, IL", 2000-2015). According to recent analyses, the chance that a person will become a victim of a violent crime in Evanston; such as armed robbery, aggravated assault, rape or murder; is 1 in 348. This equates to a rate of 3 per one thousand inhabitants. Also, Evanston’s rate for property crime is 28 per one thousand population, or a one in 35 chance of becoming a victim. This makes Evanston a place where there is an above average chance of becoming a victim of a property crime – such as motor vehicle theft, arson, larceny, and burglary, when compared to all other communities in Illinois of all population sizes. ("Crime Rates for Evanston, IL", 2000-2015)

Although, far from perfect, Evanston is indeed a far more safe and resourced environment than housing projects in Chicago. William Julius Wilson and other sociologists strongly believed violent and greatly disadvantaged environments promote low academic achievement, and a change in environment and an infusion of opportunities and monetary resources could reverse these effects and promote success. However, this has not been the case for many of the African-American students who have relocated to Chicago’s suburbs. In comparison to Chicago public schools, the Chicagoland/suburban districts are far more
resourced, funded, and quipped to prepare students for success, but even in the midst of this land of opportunity, for many students, hopefulness, optimism, and the pursuit of future orientation is far out of their reach.

**Hopelessness in the Shade of Black – Impact of Violence exposure on Black Identity Formation**

Research supports the argument that a presence of violence in the environment of a developing adolescent assaults feeling of hope and optimism, and creates a sense of uncertainty about their future that is detrimental to the development of a future orientation (Bolland, 2003, p. 146). The consequence of these feelings is an abandonment of hope, engagement in risky behavior, and a propensity to give up on education as a ticket to success. As stated before, future orientation is a summation of self-concept, perceived societal worth, life expectancy, and belief in one’s potential for upward mobility. “Hopelessness in the shade of Black,” refers to the assault on the self-concept and perceived self-worth aspects of future orientation because of their relationship with Black identity formation.

Personal identity is critical for all adolescents, but especially complicated for racial minorities due to the environmental hurdles they must overcome, especially in white middle class environments like Evanston. For African-Americans in particular, racism and poverty continue to constrain both adults and youth in American society. Oyserman, Terry, and Bybee (2002) attempted to intervene on the phenomenon of hopelessness that results from the minority struggle by honing in on adolescent creative ability to imagine possible futures for themselves. In working with youth after school, they encouraged and aided the youth in drawing connections between current behavior and future adult selves. They noted that this phenomenon is harder for poor and minority youth, especially African-Americans due to historical racism and the exclusion of African-Americans from educational and occupational opportunities. They conclude that low-income African-American youth may find it difficult to create positive and believable possible selves who focused on school, as a pathway to adulthood unless these possible selves are fostered in a social context that highlights the relevance of academic achievement for being African-American. In essence, future orientation is heavily influenced by the formulation of their personal and collective racial identity and belief in their societal worth.

Analyzing the dynamics and historical origins of a Black social problem, such as youth development and violence, requires an engagement with external systemic issues, such as social class. Ignoring these factors risks the endorsement of an essentialist pathological perspective such as blaming Black communities, families and culture for violence in and around their community. This pathological perspective often argues that Black youth who originate from unstable families and broken homes, exhibit certain negative psychological traits. These traits of low achievement motivation, an estrangement from schooling and formal learning activities, negative self-concept, and negative self-esteem create a propensity for delinquency and crime rather than a development and pursuit of positive future orientation (Cross, 2003). Key scholars of the Black experience such as Wilson, Patterson, and Ogbu have subscribed to this logic and

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8 According to Rivas-Drake et al (2014) the construction of ethnic or racial identity is thought to be one important means by which race heavily influences normative development and promotes positive youth adjustment. In studying youth achievement and identity, it was found that feelings of connection to African-American identity and community impacted adolescent’s sensitivity to racism and their GPA. Additionally racial pride was liked to expectation and anticipation of academic success in a somewhat convoluted way, resulting in high levels of racial pride being associated with higher GPA in low SES neighborhoods but lower GPA in higher SES neighborhood. Another finding indicated that a strong positive connection to one’s racial group reduced the magnitude of association of racial discrimination experiences with declines in academic self-concept and school achievement among adolescents.
tried to show that contemporary problems in the Black Community can be traced in a linear fashion to a legacy of slavery and past discrimination. They tend to depict Blacks as having been crippled by slavery and that racial injustices, such as Jim Crow, never afforded Black people the opportunity to right themselves psychologically or culturally. They also speak of recession and unemployment as contributing factors to the creation of the Black-underclass and Black oppositional identity. Ogbu (1978) claims that slavery blocked the development of a positive Black achievement motivation and turned the Black self-concept into a site of racial self-loathing, causing Black youth to drift away from mainstream models of success and toward involvement in delinquency and crime. The remedy for these dynamics often consists of an attack on Black families and an argument that high self-esteem and a subscription to a “white-middle class” culture - especially relocation to suburban neighborhoods, will reverse these effects and set a new trajectory toward success. However, William E. Cross (2003) counters Ogbu’s argument and Wilson’s subsequent remedy, suggesting that contemporary systemic causal factors are repeatedly and wrongfully underestimated in their contribution to Black social issues such as the Black family structure, Black achievement motivation, and Black delinquency.

Cross dismantles pathological arguments against the Black family structure by arguing that intact Black families accounted for 70 percent and higher of all Black Families in 1965 and that rate has remained stable. Cross also disassembles the argument of the lack of Black achievement motivation with a historical review of the long and perseverant pursuit of education and leadership by Black people both during and post slavery, echoing Cole and Omari’s sentiment that education has always been an important and preferred avenue to success for the Black Community. In all of these issues, researchers such as Frazier and Ogbu always reference the Black family rather than structural and institutional problems over which Blacks have little control. Other researchers such as Homel (1984) studied Chicago and located the problem of low Black achievement motivation and Black delinquency in the school system. Similarly today, rather than investing in youth potential and spending more resources as a community on Black youth, society has chosen to accept and promote pathological ideology that Blacks – Black males especially- are predisposed or culturally primed for violence. So blindly accepting of the Black-crime/Black-culture ideology and so far from believing that Black-Culture can lead to Black-success, Black youth do not stand a chance in envisioning a productive future in their Blackness.

It is an unfortunate reality that African-Americans continue to experience serious disparities and disadvantages in education, health, and socio-economic status when compared to United States averages and their white counterparts. I would love to say that to be Black in America is filled with richness, pride, and lauded achievement, but many African-Americans would report, that to be Black in America is to be feel as if one has no valued place. The year 2015 marks 50 years since the passing of the Civil Rights Act, and yet the state of middle and lower class African-Americans is still troubled. America has masked itself to pretend as if it has reached racial equity and equality. With one quick glance at America, one could find, Barack Obama, a Black man, standing as the President of the United States of America, 3 Black cabinet members, 2 Black senators, 10 fortune 500 companies with Black CEOs, and two Black

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9These terms and ideologies are situated at the intersection of race and class. Although there is a later section of this paper dedicated exclusively to that intersection, it is important to note that class cannot be separated from Race in an analysis of racial impact on social, political, environmental or developmental issues and the converse is also true.

10Cross (2003) goes on to state that even with single mothers and children born out of wedlock, this is not a phenomenon exclusive to the Black community, and references a historical facility, The Cradle in Evanston, IL, which aided in the disappearance and “clean-ups” of unwanted and untimely white pregnancies – a luxury not accessible to Black women.
billionaires—Michael Jordan and Oprah Winfrey. But beneath the surface, one would find that although African-Americans only make up 14% of the population, they represent 26% of juvenile arrests, 44% of youth detained, 58% of youth admitted to state prisons, are 6 times more likely to be incarcerated, and as of 2012, 33.2% of all Black families with related children under 18 are living in poverty ("Criminal Justice Fact Sheet", 2009-2015).

To be Black in America is to revere President Barack Obama and imagine a similar reality, while being tragically aware of the likelihood of sharing the fate of Black men and women behind bars and dying in the streets. It then follows, when a young person is asked about their future, they are forced to face head on the very real possibility of death and incarceration before investing in their imagination. It is at this intersection that racial identity can promote or hinder success. As America continues to perpetuate the misconception of a post-racial society, Black identity struggles in the crossroads of contradicting realities, resulting in the structures working to uphold society simultaneously hindering the future orientation of minority youth.

In expanding the concept of future orientation to include a measurements of self-concept, one must also explore the role of self-esteem and self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a critical factor in academic achievement because it is not only based on one’s feelings toward oneself, but involves measures of competence and mastery that bring confidence and conviction. Barrow et al. (2007) found that many African-Americans report high self-esteem and low self-efficacy because, although they are often loved and nurtured by their families, they do not always encounter positive experiences in schools and communities that reinforce personal competence. If it can be argued that self-efficacy is more influential in academic success than self-esteem, then a very individual "problem" has just taken on an environmental perspective and a need for an environmental solution.

Mastery, or the development of self-confidence through feeling and believing in one’s capabilities, successfully solving problems, and meeting challenges; functions as a bridge connecting and reinforcing self-esteem and self-efficacy. This bridge, if composed of positive experiences within families, schools, and communities, builds personal competence, and becomes coated and sealed together by resilience. Personal Violence, micro aggressions, and structural violence affront African-American Identity development by creating holes in this bridge. The greater the exposure, the more hopelessness fostered by each hole. Racial identity plays a large role in helping to ground pride and capability, however, the perpetual violence, both structural and personal against Black bodies, has the power to greatly distort racial identity’s contribution to resilience due to the conflicting messages perpetuated about Blackness in society and the media. Consequently, healthy racial socialization, plays an important role in providing Black youth with a suit of armor against the hostilities in their environment and the insults to their academic confidence. Similarly, racial identity, or the feelings of closeness to similar others in ideas, feelings, and thoughts, is revered by many researchers as a protective factor in building resilience in Black youth (Barrow, F. H., Armstrong, M. I., & Boothroyd, R. A., 2007, p. 396-397).

Hopelessness in the Shade of Green – Impact of Violence on Upward Mobility

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11 According to Bachhini and Magliulo (2003), self-efficacy is defined as an individual’s conviction of his or her ability to master specific activities, situations, or aspects of his or her own psychological and social functioning. They believe that clearly demonstrated convictions of efficacy, together with personal aspirations and standards, are among the principle determiners of human action.

12 Racial Socialization is defined by Barrow (2007) as tasks performed in the process of rearing African-American children to become physically and emotionally healthy individuals.
Continuing the discussion of the development and pursuit of future orientation in African-American adolescents, it is important to keep in mind the suggested unique perspective of future orientation this research offers. In considering future orientation as a summation of self-concept, perceived societal worth, life expectancy, and belief in one’s potential for upward mobility, this section seeks to engage with the intersection of race and class in relation to the component of upward social mobility. If one’s belief in the potential for upward social mobility is an important aspect of the development and pursuit of future orientation, then issues of social class and the barriers associated with intergenerational mobility become important and valuable to the conversation.

In an intersectional study of race, class and upward social mobility, Cole and Omari (2003) emphasize the unique realities of these intersectional identities and explore the psychological meaning and consequences of social class in the lives of African-Americans. Although this study does not refer to future orientation explicitly, its discussion of social mobility and its fragile nature in the Black community due to structural violence, especially in education, is relevant. According to Cole and Omari (2003), Black Americans have been struggling for upward social mobility in material terms as well as freedom from the restrictions imposed on them by the wider, whiter society since emancipation. The ideology of racial uplift\(^{13}\), places an unspoken obligation to achieve a higher status, become worthy of full citizenship, and states that upward mobility will follow from the attainment of middle class values and standards of behavior. Consequently, the material basis of class – ownership, educational degrees, and residence- becomes equated with the social and cultural practices of the white middle class and therefore success (788).

Cole and Omari (2003) speak to disparities in social class and race relations and state that middle class African-Americans lag behind their white counterparts in terms of accumulated wealth even with the same educational and income attainment. Similarly, the middle class status does not offer the same degree of protection from downward mobility that whites possess, thus there is little difference between the psychological plight of the middle and working class (789). Patricia Collin’s validates these disparities in her statement that African-Americans who attain middle class status cannot be considered equal to middle class whites in anyway because the particular economic context faced by African-Americans as a group, historically and presently, shape the psychological meaning of class, requiring an intersectional approach (Cole and Omari, 2003, p. 796). Future orientation and its pursuit are, therefore, of the utmost importance due to their role in helping to attain or sustain a position in the middle class. Despite what the media likes to portray about lower class African-Americans, there has always been great emphasis on self-improvement and the importance of striving for achievement in African-American culture, both as an individual value, and as a strategy for advancing the race as a collective (790). Subsequently, many African-Americans view education as the most respected and most effective mechanism for accomplishing the goal of upward mobility and an achievement that challenges race-and-class based oppression. However, education often becomes a place of oppression and disadvantage, and carries hidden psychological costs that accrue to those individuals, especially women who aspire to the middle class status, and to the Black community as a cultural and political entity. Thus being a member of the Black middle class yields a discontent, not out of

\(^{13}\) Racial uplift was a profound aspect of African-American culture, especially between World War II through the civil rights movement. It is important to note that this concept of racial uplift was always both a racial formation project and a classed project. Class and race are inseparable in this concept and perpetuated together. (Cole & Omari, 2003, p. 788).
rage of privilege, but as a result of a system of racial discrimination to which all Blacks, regardless of income or education, remain subject (796).

One of the primary consequences of the pursuit of upward mobility, especially through education is movement away from all Black, low-income communities. This residential relocation is often in pursuit of better schools, occupations, resources, and opportunities. While these may be granted – as they were for many Black people displaced from Chicago to Evanston there are psychological costs. These new environments are often “whiter”, and result in feelings of double marginalization as students feel like outsiders in race, class, and cultural practices. Schools, then, become a stage for this outsider encounter to manifest itself and discourage and attenuate achievement. Ogbu’s (1984) research speaks to oppositional culture in which intelligence is equated with “acting white”, however, for the intersectional identities of Black and working or middle class, peer groups are formed to create and maintain academic identities and build resilience and support to withstand oppression within the academic structure (Cole and Omari, 2003, p. 792). Aside from the issues of their Black identity alone, class differences clash as the white middle class high-brow culture further excludes and isolates these youth. This is an instance in which future orientation is compromised by the perils of disparity and comparison, rather than violence, exclusively.

**Resilience as a Remedy to Hopelessness**

Violence exposure and race/class-based oppression and disparity seem to converge and foster a hopelessness that negatively impacts youth development and future orientation. Within the literature, violence and these oppressive processes and forces are often regarded as limiting deterministic factors against ones future, without truly considering the resiliency and adaptability of individuals and communities. A new literature on resilience in the fields of psychology and positive youth development sheds important light on this idea of personal and collective resilience that can aid adolescents in the development and pursuit of their future orientation, in the face of collective and systemic oppression. Building resilience to the black and green shades of hopelessness discussed above are vital to the success of these African-American adolescents.

Many researchers agree that resilience is a ray of hope that leads African-American children to success. Hinton-Nelson (1996) argue that trust and hope are not cultivated in violent environments, resulting in hopelessness clouding any vision of success. But the reality is that not all children reared in violent communities are violent, not all children born in poverty fail to complete school and provide for their family, and not all children crumble in hopelessness. Quite the contrary, regardless of skin color or socio-economic status, there are always children who thrive and many researchers have attributed these successes to this phenomenon resilience. The endless research on risk factors and vulnerabilities of African-American youth have led researchers to investigate measures to promote well-being, positive development, and achievement in the face of these hurdles. Beginning in the mid-1970’s as longitudinal coping strategies, research on resilience began with looking at internal physiologic methods of reducing tension and differing capacities for seeking and accepting help from the environment (Barrow et al, 2007, p. 396). Since then, resilience, beginning as a very individualistic, psychological trait, has been expanded in a more collective, cultural thought that can be fostered and promoted in more social rather than individual ways.

According to Masten (1990), resilience is the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances. In seeking to understand
and justify why inner-city youth fail, few engage in understanding how and why some youth in these same predicaments succeed. In regards to the largely ignored Black middle-class youth, in the late 1990’s, Pattillo-McCoy spent three years living, observing, and participating in a Black middle class neighborhood on Chicago’s South Side, in search of answers to these questions of resilience and oppression. She found that racial inequality and poverty persist as daily realities for many of residents who have reasonably achieved a good part of the American Dream (Squires, G.D., 2000). Her research highlights the perils of the Black middle-class and its youth as they struggle with the fragility of their class status, the vast differences in their experience and exposure, and their strong segregation from white American and proximity to low-income Black neighborhoods in comparison to the white middle-class.

Pattillo-McCoy comments, “What is remarkable is that more Blacks, including middle class Blacks, do not show more scars of battle fatigue from their daily encounters with the indignities of race in urban America” (Squires, G. D., 2000). This quote is absolutely profound for several reasons. First, I must take a moment to dispel any notions that the 21st century brought in an era of a post-racial society. While I fully endorse the powerful arguments about the influence of class status of the lived experience, race still stands bold and uninhibited in oppressing minorities, steeping inequality, and shaping the lived experience. Secondly, I would like to praise the resiliency and the strength of Black people, because it takes immense strength to persevere through and succeed against the vast interpersonal, biased, and structural violence placed against them, daily. Finally, I would like to respond to Pattillo-McCoy’s words and state that, I believe that the lack of future orientation manifested in these youth is a powerful example of battle fatigue scars. These scars may not be worn on their backs, but they are being etched into their futures. Even so, she is correct that, many persevere and succeed, substantiating the powerful claim of resilience as, far more than an extraordinary trait reserved for a select few, but rather a force of resistance to oppression and a necessity for survival. It is therefore invaluable to foster a spirit of community resilience in Black middle class youth. The road they trot is greatly threaten by systemic violence, police brutality, and significant encounters with micro aggressions and racism. It is important that this resilience be a product of and resource for their community that can uplift the community on a platform other than tragedy.

Hampton’s (2014) research, sought to quantify and specify resilience into distinct terms and characteristics to be infused into curricula and promoted collectively, rather than praised individually. This study revealed seven common characteristics, referred to as “Successful Learner Characteristics” (SLCs), regarding attitudes, behaviors, and skills that are related to successful learning and achievement even in the face of adversity. The seven SLC’s are; Self-respect, command of Standard English, goal-setting ability, self-motivation, time-management skills, consequence awareness, and respect for others. The culmination of these factors in an individual, creates a spirit of resilience that has the power to propel them through their adversity to success. Again, far from static, resilience is malleable, and these factors constructs a resilience infrastructure for success beyond the hopelessness surrounding them that can be shared collectively and systematically.

Gaps in Literature and Future Research
The aim of this thesis is to explore current literature as a means of understanding and analyzing the struggle for future orientation witnessed among the African-American students at Chute Middle School in Evanston, IL. In this effort a new perspective of future orientation was introduced that redefined it as a goal-oriented, 3 step process that is heavily influenced by Black identity formation and one’s judgement of the pragmatics of upward social mobility. It was further hypothesized that the increased violence, the perils of class comparison, and inequity, posed threats to both positive Black identity formation and upward social mobility through a cloud of hopelessness. Historically, research on these issues of class, race, academic achievement and future orientation has been concentrated on low-income, impoverished, urban communities. Suburbs are rarely sites of such research – with the notable exception of Mary Pattillo-McCoy – but with the changing tide of Evanston, this is an important conversation to have. However, this research and hypothesis are not complete, as there are several other considerations that are essential to this conversation. These considerations are listed in depth below.

**Discussion of the social/political costs of upward social mobility**

Despite the promise of the American dream, America functions heavily according to a class-based system, with unique realities and barriers at the intersections of class and race. For African-Americans, upward mobility by way of education carries hidden psychological costs that accrue both to those individuals who aspire to middle-class status, and to the Black community as a cultural and political entity (Cole and Omari, 2003). Research often offers anecdotal illustration of acute and chronic stressors experienced by African-Americans who endeavor to pursue upward mobility, especially in the middle class, from frustrations such as tokenism, residential segregation, subtle and overt discrimination, and a glass ceiling that limits their advancement (793). These encounters often result in feelings of isolation and double marginalization due to the burden of having to acclimate to white culture as well as upper middle class culture. If there is any truth to the suggestion by William Julius Wilson that class has become, and will continue to be a more powerful determinant of African-American life chance than race alone, two truths become evident and problematic. The first of these is that socio-economic class differentiation are not the same across racial lines, resulting in Blacks lagging far behind whites in income and accumulated wealth. In addition, another problematic truth in the Black community is that Black attainment of middle class status can result in a de-identification or political distancing from the Black community, especially when associated with migration out of Black neighborhoods (Wilson, W. J., 1978). In essence, it could be that the pursuit of future orientation is impacted not only externally by violence and hopelessness, but internally as one important aspect of it, upward social mobility, threatens another important aspect of it, Black personal and political identity.

Especially in neighborhoods of migratory growth and concentrated settlement, it is imperative for the Black community to have a political voice and advocacy to combat feelings of isolation and promote feeling of societal worth. In the larger economic and political context, residency in Evanston is a middle-class level privilege in itself, and contributes to the division of Blacks along class lines that innately create a Black underclass and isolates the Black middle-class. Subtle differences among the Black community are then enhanced, magnifying comparison, tokenism, and inequity. In light of the permeable barrier between school and community these details can extend to school climate, particularly, the direction a student walks home, the clothes and shoes they wear, and the brand of their school supplies become important factors in their academic achievement and future orientation. Further research could help explore
these notions in the Evanston community as well as search for the presence of political and educational advocacy for African-Americans.

**Gender differences**

This research also does not lend substantial investigation and consideration to gender differences among the future orientation development and pursuit of African-American Adolescents in Evanston. Cole and Omari report findings that upward social mobility carries extra burdens for Black women as they experience discrimination and social rejection at a higher rate when in contact with whites. Also, the barriers experienced by youth have a large impact on families, and if women or girls take on a care-taking role within their families, as they often do, they may have a differential reaction from men. Another important consideration, especially concerning social rejection and discrimination that may result in higher incidence in girls than boys, could be the exclusion of girls from sports or other gender segregated extra-curricular activities that may buffer the formation of Black identity and social acceptance for males.

On the other hand, Black males have significant gender-specific dilemmas of their own. It is most often the case that the violence perpetuated in the media and locally is against Black males. Also, there are higher suspension and special education rates for Black boys than any other demographic in schools, and this could also have a significant effect on their future orientation ("Civil Rights Data Collection: Data Snapshot (School Discipline)", 2014). These two examples of targeted discrimination send very potent messages to Black youth that insult their societal worth and life expectancy. Future research could really help to quantify this impact for Black males as well as Black females and identify differences of this impact. Gender differences are important, especially in regard to efforts of effective intervention against oppression and in the promotion of resilience.

**Structural and Community Perspective of Resilience**

In pursuing useful intervention, it is important to expand the concept of resilience beyond the individual. Resilience has historically been an individualistic psychological phenomenon, defined as the process of, capacity for, or achievement of positive outcomes in the context of significant adversity (Bolland, 2003, p. 146). Additionally, the adversity component is often conceptualized as individual exposure to major life stressors and individual level risk factors. However, this thesis suggests the consideration of a grandeur perspective of resilience on a structural and community level. Community level resilience could impact notions of racial uplift and positive Black identity formation against local and media perpetuated stereotypes, thus cultivating a hope against the suggestion of inevitable truncated life expectancies. This community level resilience can create structural resilience through advocacy, political and civic representation, and intentional incorporation into school dynamics and curricula. Future research would be useful in discovering effective efforts at creating this sense of resilience in adolescents and school climates in efforts of intervention.

**Resilience and the Black Lives Matter Movement**

Speaking to the idea of resilience being cultivated at a structural and community level, the current national and worldwide Black Lives Matter movement is an important source and advocate. #BlackLivesMatter was created in 2012 by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi after Trayvon Martin’s murderer, George Zimmerman, was acquitted, and 17-year old Trayvon was posthumously placed on trial for his own murder. Rooted in the experiences of
Black Americans who actively resist de-humanization, #BlackLivesMatter is a call to action and a response to the virulent anti-Black racism that permeates American society. Black Lives Matter offers a unique contribution that goes beyond extrajudicial killings of Black people by police and vigilantes, as an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise (A Herstory of the BlackLivesMatter Movement, 2014). This movement carries strong undertones of a spirit of resilience and empowerment, and has the potential to work against the images of violence that threaten the integrity of Black identity and the association of Blackness and success. It would be interesting to evaluate and measure the impact of the Black lives matter campaign, its ability to transcend class divisions, and the creation a sense of unity and resilience in adolescent youth who are currently being targeted by the movement.

**Conclusion**

The indignities of race and class in 21st century America are far from scarce, hidden, or impotent. Even for middle-class Black men, women, and children in Evanston, IL who are living part of the American dream, the perils of racism, inequality, and poverty are very much a part of their daily experience. Fifty years post-civil rights, many are content to argue that the growing Black middle-class is evidence of racial progress and equality, but in the words of Mary Pattillo-McCoy, “even the Black and White middle classes remain separate and unequal” (Pattillo-McCoy, 1999). This research on race, class, violence and future orientation is both an effort to understand the unique plight of middle-class Black youth, and a beginning to a conversation and future research on this population that can lead to their advocacy and an effective intervention.

In the future, I hope to use this research as a grounding for an ethnographic research and field work of youth in Evanston to truly gain an understanding of the hindrances to their future orientation and success. This would consist of me utilizing anthropological methodology of participant-observation, interviewing, and conducting focus groups to immerse myself in the current cultural experience of these youth and search for answers to these questions. I hope to mirror the methodology of Mary Pattillo-McCoy, spending three years collecting data, starting with 6th graders at Chute Middle school as my primary cohort and following them through their 8th grade graduation. This research will also include analysis of community dynamics, with a special emphasis of crime analysis against Black and brown bodies locally and nationally.
References


