PATHWAY TO PROGRESSION: FINDING MOBILITY IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of
The School of Continuing Studies
and of
The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

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Washington, D.C.
April 1, 2013
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ABSTRACT

Progression in the African American community is questionable. For the purpose of this thesis progression for the African American community means the community moving towards at least middle class attainment. Historically, African Americans have served as the minority group that faces continual suppression and the least amount of progression. But is this enough to excuse the black community’s high rates of poverty and the dysfunction prevalent in the black family structure? What is the correct direction to achieving progression? Who is responsible for the progression of the black community?

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the idea of progression in the black community and the approaches to mobility. Chapter 1 will show the roles between the black community and the government, and how these roles have played a part in where the community stands today. Chapter 2 will test the approach to mobility by African American blacks and the Nigerian community in the United States. Both groups deal with the same obstacles because of the color of their skin. What strategy does the Nigerian community apply that the African American community does not? The outcome of social placement tends to be different because the logic of both groups is different. Chapter 3 will explore cultural solutions to the black communities’ lack of progression.
This thesis takes a broad, whatever-it-takes approach to fixing the black community’s problems in the United States. The problems of the community can be fixed with help from the government but more importantly, from action within the black community. Ultimately, this will be the pathway to progression.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The research and writing of this thesis is dedicated to my mother, Angela Smith.

Many thanks,

ANDRAE J. SMITH
# CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................................ iii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS....................................................................................................................... v

ILLUSTRATIONS............................................................................................................................... vii

INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................................................. 1

CHAPTER 1: STRUCTURE VS. CULTURE ......................................................................................... 3

CHAPTER 2: CULTURAL CULTIVATION ......................................................................................... 34

CHAPTER 3: CULTURAL SOLUTIONS ............................................................................................... 69

CONCLUSION ...................................................................................................................................... 90

BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................................................................................................... 93
ILLUSTRATIONS

Figures

1. The Black Dilemma................................................................. 21

2. Black Single Mothers ............................................................. 25

3. Births outside of Marriage in Black Community.......................... 26

4. High School Dropouts with Employment.................................... 28

5. Projected Minority Growth..................................................... 83
INTRODUCTION

Progression in the black community is a difficult topic to define because the word progression itself can mean so many different things when put in the context of a group. For the purposes of this thesis, progression for the black community means the community moving towards at least middle class attainment. Progression means moving away from high rates of poverty, high rates of single-parent homes, and high rates of job displacement. The black community as a whole suffers from many of these situations as they are symbols of dysfunction within the community. Movement away from this state of dysfunction toward a functioning community of hopefully reaching middle class attainment would be seen as a form of mobility. Mobility can be seen as a means from moving from one social class to a higher social class. Middle class attainment is important because it represents a status in American society where life is comfortable and not dysfunctional.

What should be the approach to mobility in the black community? This thesis will answer that question, first by analyzing the approach of foreign blacks in the United States to navigating the American system to achieve middle class attainment. What methods did they use to achieve this social status? The foreign group that will be used is the Nigerian community in the United States. Because of the color of their skin, Nigerians face many of the same hardships, such as discrimination, that the African American community faces. And if the Nigerians can navigate around some of the hardships such as discrimination, could the black community also use these tactics?
Approaches for achieving mobility can vary, but is it the community’s responsibility to create mobility? Or should it be a function of government to create mobility for a community that has been historically disadvantaged in American society? American society itself can represent “the system”; this system has been a struggle for the black community to successfully navigate. Both parties, the government (structure) and community (culture), which are products of American society, bear their own responsibility and play separate roles in the progress or lack of progress in the black community. Since the role that government has played in the progression of the black has not worked, it is now the communities’ responsibility to play a greater role in achieving progression through the goal of middle class attainment.

If behavior and strategic action are shifted in the black community, greater results in progression through middle class attainment may be achieved. In addition to the community’s actions, the joint effort between government action and the black community’s participation can become a positive force that moves the black community towards solutions. These solutions become an action by the black community therefore they become cultural solutions. But is a shift in the community’s actions possible?
CHAPTER 1

STRUCTURE VS. CULTURE

A narrative of the black community is seen through Daniel Moynihan’s and William Julius Wilson’s work; they both show the relationship between black culture and the government structure. Moynihan tends to focus more on the structural causes of the black communities’ struggles, which can be seen through the cultural lens of collective memory, whereas Wilson highlights the cultural means of dealing with structural social barriers, such as discrimination and racism. The outcome of the relationship between culture and structure brings about a force that causes culture to react. This can be seen as culture in action.

Moynihan’s work was prophetic as he predicted that if more government action wasn’t taken to help lift the black community out of poverty, the community would continue to decline and would not see the progression for blacks that was desired. For example, Moynihan spoke of the continual fragmentation of the black family structure through the increase of children born out of wedlock and the increase of single-parent homes. He thought all of these problems could be fixed through government intervention, just as Wilson considered government intervention an example of structural force.

Moynihan discussed these issues in the 1965 report called *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, also known as the “Moynihan Report,” while serving as the Assistant Secretary of Labor in the U.S. government. Later in life, he would be elected to the U.S. Senate. The report was an internal government document and when
it was written, it was not filtered to be socially sensitive. The report was very direct in the style of writing.

“The Moynihan Report” was leaked to the public and received a lot of criticism from leaders in the black community, as they took it as an attack on their culture. This was during the time of the Black Power Movement in the 1960s and any words that were not positive or uplifting to the community as a whole were seen as a threat to the black community. When speaking of the criticism Moynihan faced, Wilson states: “Many black leaders were critical of this article because it ran counter to their claim that the black community is on the rebound of building a community that would become a major force.” The black leaders lacked the social will to review the report and take an honest look at the possible repercussions of what the report predicted.

Moynihan believed that the heart of the problem in the black community would be the fragmentation of the black family; the fragmentation of the black family is the high rate of single-parent homes in the black community led mostly by black mothers, he made structural arguments to justify this claim. His structural arguments included urbanization, discrimination, high poverty, and employment. He thought with time these structural forces would be so destructive to the fabric of the black family and culture that ultimately the structure itself would not be needed to inflict damage on the

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2 Ibid., 95.
culture any more as it would be in such a deprecate state that culture itself would begin to cause self-inflicting damage.

In his analysis, Moynihan did not provide any cultural argument in his analysis of the black community. He did provide some form of structural framing of the family but did not push it further by discussing cultural behaviors and attitudes. William Julius Wilson fills this gap in his analysis as he tackles how cultural habits impact the black community.

William Julius Wilson’s book entitled *More than Just Race: Being Black and Poor in the Inner City* was heavily influenced by the work of Moynihan. Wilson writes: the “Moynihan report is a prophetic document because Moynihan’s predictions about the fragmentation of the African American family and its connection to inner-city poverty were largely born out.”³ Wilson shows how single-parent homes in the black community have almost tripled since the writing of Moynihan’s report. *More than Just Race* serves as a follow-up on Moynihan’s initial work, but goes a step farther with linking the relationship between structure and culture.

For Wilson, government intervention alone cannot provide progression or cause a socioeconomic decline in the black community; it will take effort from the community and individuals within the community to shape cultural habits.

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³ Ibid., 96.
Wilson describes cultural norms that need reshaping in the black community, such as:

… [the] cool-pose culture, code of shady dealings, and go at it alone approach that have negative effects on the culture as a whole. For example the cool-pose culture which idealizes the street savvy-ness, hip hop culture and celebrates sexual exploits leads to irresponsible fathering in the black community and only adds to the increasing rate of single-parent homes.  

This is not to discount that many young black males lack the structural opportunities in the workforce, but the cultural attitude towards marriage and responsibilities is just as negative as the structural force of high unemployment among young black males. The overall theme in Wilson’s book is that the structural forces and the cultural forces all equate to a culture of poverty that has plagued the black community.

**Collective Memory**

**Slavery**

The African slave trade began in the United States in the early 17th century providing a substitution for American Indians as plantation laborers. Slave labor was an economic force for such industries as the cotton industry. African slaves in the United States were treated inhumanly, almost like animals, with chains forced around their necks, feet, and arms. Sold to the highest bidder on the selling block, families were broken apart to divide the slaves.

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4 Ibid., 119.

This new epidemic of African slavery affected all of the Americas but slaves in South America were treated with more human decency.\(^6\) For example, slaves in Brazil had some rights. Nathan Glazer uses comparisons of rights between slaves in the United States and slaves in Brazil. In Brazil, slaves could marry, be baptized, become members of the Catholic Church, and families could not be broken up to be sold. In the U.S., slaves were not given recognition as human beings by any agency, not allowed to marry, children could be sold, and could not be educated. This comparison shows that slavery in the United States was the worst of its kind during that period when the Atlantic slave trade was popular.

In Moynihan’s writings, he highlights Stanley M. Elkins statement: “Since many slave owners neither fostered Christian Marriage among their slave couples nor hesitated to spare them on the Auction block, the slave household often developed a fatherless matrifocal (mother-centered) pattern”.\(^7\) The single-family household with the mother as the center is not a new phenomena. This is an effect of slavery when households were broken up; there was never a place for the father. Even though there is no evidence to set up comparisons like to high percentage of single-parent homes now and single-parent homes during slavery that does not mean that the broken home is not a part of the collective memory of the African Americans. The matriarchal family is not distant memory, as the number of single-parent homes run by single


\(^{7}\) Ibid.
mothers is a high percentage in the black community. In 2006, 45% of black females were raising their children as single parents.\textsuperscript{8}

\textbf{Jim Crow}

With the removal of slavery, Jim Crow laws were the new form of suppression for the black community in the United States. The Jim Crow laws were a systematic form of suppression putting in place a set of laws that was supposed to make the black community feel inferior through a form of disenfranchisement. By law, blacks were to use public space separate from whites. Signs bearing “colors” and “whites only” were posted everywhere, atop of water fountains and restaurants. Blacks had their freedom but not their equality. This was a form of mental warfare inflicted upon the black community.

Jim Crow itself may have created a strong seed of distrust for the American institution in the black community. After the abolition of slavery, the black community was to believe in a truly brighter future, but they were almost misled because Jim Crow brought a new form of suppression: the idea of inferiority. From the late-1800s to the mid-1900s, the continuation of blacks being exploited by the institution continued. It did not end with slavery. The collective memory of Jim Crow is that even with freedom, blacks are not equal.

\textsuperscript{8} Wilson, \textit{More than Just Race}, 100.
Discrimination in Institutional Settings

Discrimination in institutional settings for blacks is part of the collective experience in the United States. Jim Crow was the precursor to laws later set into place that encouraged discrimination. But the discrimination comes from racism. Wilson describes racism as two features: “(1) Beliefs that one race is either biologically or culturally inferior to another and (2) the use of such beliefs to rationalize or prescribe the way that the “inferior” race should be treated in this society, as well to explain its social positions a group and its collective accomplishments.”\(^9\) When racism is part of the mindset of the people controlling the system, the system itself will reflect these racist ideas. These are ideas are seen through the discrimination in the institutions that control the American cultural system, such as schools, the workplace, and government. Those who are made to feel inferior because of racism now have to operate and navigate around social and institution barriers. One example of these social barriers are black people not gaining employment because of the color of their skin.

The recent generation’s form of racism is the “laissez faire racism.” Wilson describes this form as: “A perception that blacks are responsible for their own economic predicament and therefore undeserving of special government support.”\(^10\) Now the dominant social idea of the black community is one that is undeserving of support from the institution and that blacks have put themselves in the state of being

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\(^9\) Ibid., 15.

\(^10\) Ibid.
socially and economically disadvantaged. This view does not take into consideration the collective past and memory of the struggles the black community has had to face. This is a different type of discrimination but it runs parallel to the idea of blacks being inferior to others, because other races and groups are justified in support from the institution but the black community is not.

Public School Segregation

Institutional discrimination has long been a social barrier and a tool to hold back mobility in the black community. This is part of the collective memory of blacks as in the past, schools were segregated during times of the Jim Crow laws. Children in black schools did not receive the same funding nor education as children in the white schools. This was a tool against blacks because if they did not receive the same education as whites, then white Americans would not have to compete with blacks in the job market. The system was designed to create handicaps or disadvantages for blacks, not allowing them equal footing in school, which would then dictate chances in the job market. Wilson believes that jobs in the market place and formal schooling were part of the process hurting black mobility. He states, “Black mobility in the economy was severely impeded by job discrimination, as well as by failing segregated public schools, where per capita expenditures to educate African American children were far below amounts provided for white public schools.”

Ibid., 9.
Today, even though schools are not segregated by color, they are segregated by access to monetary capital as schools in neighborhoods with high income provide a better education. Because the black community has the highest amount of poverty in the United States, it is easy to believe that collectively the community is subjected to not receiving equal level of education than whites in the United States.

The collective memory of a segregated school is not that far from the present. Now the social barrier of poverty restricts blacks from receiving a good educational background. One can fight for better education in an impoverished community but the excuse that poverty is such a big factor, allows for the lack of government intervention evening the standard of education between all groups. The collective memory of blacks feeling inferior in educational access, possibly allows this acceptance of inequality.

**Residential Segregation**

Residential segregation has served as another form of discrimination and is part of the collective memory in the black community. Historically, blacks have always lived away from whites due to the structural forces that support and reflect institutional discrimination. For example, members of the black community were not loaned the money to purchase property in white neighborhoods.

The Federal Housing Authority (FHA) encouraged this lending, or rather failure to lend, practice. The FHA was created in 1934 with the sole purpose of underwriting home mortgages, nearly guaranteeing the Bank that it would receive the money when the home went into default. This guarantee gave the average person the
opportunity to get in the market and buy a home. However, the FHA would only underwrite homes in selective locations. These selective locations were primarily in large, white neighborhoods. The inner city, where the majority of blacks lived, would not qualify for these types of FHA loans, so the banks would not lend to people of color. This discriminatory practice is known as redlining.\textsuperscript{12} On the issue of redlining, Wilson says, “Home buyers hoping to purchase a home in a redlined neighborhood were universally denied mortgages, regardless of their financial qualifications.”\textsuperscript{13} By choosing to give loans out based on location, the FHA, in conjunction with the banks, all but excluded the black community from the purchase of homes. Redlining continued the cycle of keeping the black community underprivileged and living in poverty, providing no opportunity for mobility through purchasing of property and having an exchangeable asset that matures in value with time. In the 1960s, the government discontinued this practice of redlining but by that time, the damage was already done.

Another example of residential structural force that affected and continues to affect the black community is the massive development of the freeway systems that tended to section off parts of inner cities. The freeways were built through cities, dissecting the city into multiple pieces. Wilson describes the example “of the deleterious effects of highway construction is Birmingham, Alabama’s interstate

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 28.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
highway system, which curved and twisted to bisect several black neighborhoods rather than taking a more direct route through some predominantly white neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{14} These highway systems also encouraged the departure of the higher income owners to suburban neighborhoods. The inconvenience to these neighborhoods and way of life was not an issue for the institution when considering the effects the highway would have on the inner city.

Following this mass exodus of whites from the inner cities, blacks were denied opportunities to live in these new suburban neighborhoods. For example, Levitt & Sons, one of the biggest mass producers of suburban homes developers who are known for Levittown neighborhoods, would not sell to African Americans.\textsuperscript{15} The only way African Americans could acquire property in these townships would be through sympathetic white homeowners who were moving after owning the home for some time.

Through lending practices and the construction of highways, the black community has always received the message of not being welcomed into suburban/white communities, therefore forcing a subtle form of segregation. In the past, homes have not been sold to members in the black community just because of the color of their skin. The collective memory of redlining, highway construction, and denial of access to new development communities speaks the spatial location form of institutional discrimination.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 29.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 30.
The worst thing about denying black homeownership for so many years is the mobility gap it created. Homeownership is a staple of American mobility as owning the asset for some time allowing the property value to mature guarantees a profit. The possible profit from the sale of a home is a major gain, but also the ability to pass down a home from generation to generation is a powerful tool of mobility. In my writing, I only highlight the 1930s to the 1970s of the discrimination the black community faced with the acquisition of home buying of even being spatially located in better neighborhoods with a better school district. These examples of forcing blacks out of better spatial location are representative of the structural attempts by the American institution and culture. While the same social barriers are not in place today, it is a strong collective memory that blacks are generally not welcomed outside of the poor inner-city ghetto.

**Employer Discrimination**

With the rise of suburban culture in the United States and the mass exodus of whites and the middle class leaving inner cities, manufacturing jobs declined rapidly. Manufacturing positions were the foundation for stable employment in the black community. These jobs offered steady pay and an increase in wages, but by the 70s, many of these manufacturing job opportunities relocated to the suburbs. This created a gap between the job market and the spatial location for blacks. Wilson defines this as a spatial mismatch: “… the relationship between inner-city residents and suburban jobs: the opportunities for employment are geographically disconnected from the people
who need the jobs.\footnote{Ibid., 41.} This spatial mismatch created in a displacement for blacks in the workplace, because now transportation is a factor. Even though the relocation of the manufacturing industry to the suburban areas was not necessarily created to persecute blacks, it certainly served as structural force to make navigation in the workforce more difficult for the black community.

For black males, the most difficult part about getting jobs has been statistical discrimination. As Wilson points out, employers “make generalizations about inner-city, black male workers and reach decisions based on those assumptions without reviewing the qualifications of an individual applicant.”\footnote{Ibid., 75.} Black men are automatically disqualified because of the color of their skin; statistical discrimination would only incite the black male to want to quite looking for work placement.

Wilson gives an example of how bad it is by speaking with an employer and the employer makes the following comment:

All of a sudden, they take a look at a guy, and unless he’s got an in, the reason why I hired this black kid the last time is cause my neighbor said to me, yeah I used him for a few, he’s good and I said, you know what, I’m going to take a chance. But it was a recommendation. But other than that, I’ve got a walk-in, and who knows? And I think that for the most part, a guy sees a black man, he’s a bit hesitant.\footnote{Ibid.}

Wilson points out that some studies have revealed that employers would select a white applicant with a criminal record than a black applicant with a clean record for the same
The structural bias against blacks in the workplace makes successful navigation in the workplace almost impossible. The past and present collective memory of blacks does not support the image of successful attainment of jobs. Discrimination ultimately encourages involvement in the informal work market, because the formal work market is not inviting to the black community.

The collective memory of negative structural forces against the black community (slavery, Jim Crow) and institutional discrimination encourages the black community to resent American cultural system. The past tells the black community that the American institution will always put obstacles and social barriers in the way to hold the black community back. Therefore, resentment breeds distrust for the American institution as a whole.

The relationship between structure and culture are foundations of the American cultural system, structure can represent the government, laws, or American institutions when describing culture this describes the people that make up a subgroup in. For example, the African American community can be defined as the black culture. The relationship between the people and the institution is the American cultural system and can be one of friction as these two relationships try to work together.

From this tension, the American cultural system creates outputs such as cultural logic and cultural lenses. For example, the cultural logic of the black community may be that the U.S. government can’t be trusted because of negative past experiences when the government has inflicted struggle and pain on the black community. Cultural

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19 Ibid.
lenses are outlooks on life. For the black community, an example of a cultural lens is that navigating the American institution is more difficult if you are a person of color because of the discrimination against blacks in the past.

The foundation of American cultural system for the black community in the institution is one based on friction as social barriers have been created to suppress progression of the black community. The structural force that restricts mobility creates cultural habits that becomes social barriers. For example, by design the black community has a strong history of the home being led by the single-parent mother. This collective history dates back to slavery when the fathers were separated from their children on the slavery auction block. Slaves were not even allowed to marry. Today, the lack of structural opportunity in the job for black males has created an attitude that leaving the home is understandable because the father does not have the economic means to provide for the family. Therefore, the structural force of creating an environment of single-parent households in the black community leads to poverty that will only continue to recreate the same cycle.

**Structural Forces**

In an attempt to understand the American cultural system and how it is relevant to the black community, this next section will take a more in-depth look at structure and how it has served as a force on the black community.

Wilson describes structure as “the way social positions, social roles, and networks of social relationships are arranged in our institutions, such as the economy,
Therefore, social positions and networks are created by institutional or government design; the structure itself is somewhat a representation of government control. Government control acts as its own force, because it has the ability to dictate the environment that is inhabited by people, the government dictates the way social positions, social roles, and networks of social relationships are arranged in institutions, but more importantly our social environments.

To view the lack of progression or mobility in the black community one has to ask if the government does enough. The stigma of racism is something manifested by the institution as the government has enforced laws that encouraged white Americans to view blacks as inferior to them.

But has the institution done enough to remove idea of looking at the black community as less in the mind of others. Massey believes:

Cognitive structures do not simply disappear. Racial schemas honed over generations tend to persist in the minds of adults and get passed on to children in conscious and unconscious ways. Likewise institutions and practices that have evolved over centuries do not just cease to exist when laws change.  

In short, Massey believes the racist collective memories of whites that were engineered by structural design can only disappear with time. This may be true to some degree but the structural forces itself must design an environment that would discourage these

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20 Ibid., 4.

ideas. The government must put policies in place that will overcome the stigma of racism. Moynihan strongly believed that because of the strong history of discrimination against the black community in the United States, even more aggressive structural forces must be put into place to fix the social barriers like discrimination, therefore putting this responsibility on the government structure.

The government made an effort to fix racial inequalities and assist the black community through the structural force of government policy; this was done in the 1960s during the Kennedy/Johnson era. The first example of this reform was The Manpower Development and Training Act of 1962, which “endeavored to train and retrain thousands of workers unemployed because of automation and technological change.” This was important to blacks because they were eligible to receive training that gave them the work skills to acquire employment. The second example was The Economic Opportunity act of 1964 that was Presidents Johnson’s answer to the war on poverty. This act assisted the black community as they were among the most impoverished in the country. The third act was The Civil Rights act of 1964, which ended legally sanctioned discriminatory practices against blacks in the workplace,


schools, and general public locations. This legislation required blacks to be treated equally.²⁴

The main problem is that the long collective past of discrimination and negative thoughts towards the black community is that it has become its own social barrier. Even though laws are in place to encourage progression, it has now become a cognitive thought issue of those outside the black community. The negative judgment that comes with being black in the United States is its own structure and serves as a structural barrier. The problem is, as Moynihan puts it, that those outside of the black community don’t really understand how bad things are for black community and the situation seems to be getting worse and not better²⁵ with the increasing number of poverty in the black community.

This social barrier is now a phenomenon that blames black people for their own woes, almost not remembering the structural damage that was done in the past. Most Americans believe that if an African American is in economic or social despair it is of his or her own doing. A Pew Research Center report detailed this idea: “Two-thirds of all Americans believe personal factors, rather than racial discrimination, explain why many African Americans have difficulty getting ahead in life; just 19% blame


discrimination.” Nearly three-fourths of US whites (71%), a majority of Hispanics (59%) and even a slight majority of blacks (53%) believe that blacks who have not gotten ahead in life are mainly responsible for their own situation (see Figure 1). 

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**Figure 1 The Black Dilemma**

Source: Blacks See Growing Values Gap between Poor and Middle Class: Optimism about Black Progress Declines (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, November 13, 2007), 33.

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26 Blacks See Growing Values Gap between Poor and Middle Class: Optimism about Black Progress Declines (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, November 13, 2007), 33.

27 Ibid.
This belief that blacks are their own greatest problem creates a lack of empathy for the collective history of blacks. Even though I believe that the black community can make cultural changes to see progress, the views reflected in the Pew report neglect the importance of the structural role even creates a greater problem, as structure tends to dictate the outcome of culture.

Just as blacks have distrust for the structural role of the system, the culture outside the black community has resentment about the problems that blacks face. Wilson believes that Americans downplay the structural importance of things like poverty in the black community because they lack knowledge about how structure plays such an important role.\textsuperscript{28} Massey believes that the government did not manage the idea of white loss properly: “A significant failure of the civil rights movement was that it never developed a political plan to manage the white loses of material, symbolic and emotional resources entailed in the ending of racial stratification.”\textsuperscript{29} Whether the resentment is from the lack of knowledge or material losses, the resentment formed its own social barrier as most Americans believe that structural assistance in the mobility of the black community is not necessary, and therefore are resistant to the idea of blacks getting structural assistance.

Structural forces have the ability to dictate and shape human behavior in negative ways. Discrimination, racism, and social barriers were effects of the structure

\textsuperscript{28} Wilson, \textit{More than Just Race}, 43.

\textsuperscript{29} Massey, \textit{Categorically Unequal}, 53.
and force the continued oppression of the black community. Negative structural effects change their forms for racism. For example, initially racism was defined by thinking one group is inferior but now racism has matured into a *laissez faire* racism that believes the black community is in a bad state because of its own doing. The structural forces are important because they have the ability to form cultural ideas and then practices like discrimination.

**Culture**

In the American cultural system, culture can be framed by the structure. The structure can create cultural norms in a community that build habits that become part of that community’s social construct. A negative attitude towards marriage only reinforces the social construct of percentage of single mothers in the black community. Even though the social structure of single parenting in the black community is an effect of structural design, it is now a cultural norm because the attitude has shifted to approving of single-parent homes in the black community.

Wilson describes culture as “the way individuals in particular groups, communities or societies develop an understanding of how the world works and make decisions based on that understanding.”\(^{30}\) A culture becomes the process of meaning making and decision-making for a group, which is reflected in cultural frames and is a

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shared group construction of reality. Ann Swidler also believes that culture includes beliefs and rituals that can serve as symbols.\(^3\)

One of the most troubling trends in the black culture is the high percentage of single-parent homes. The high rate of poverty is another troubling trend in the culture but the poverty and single-parent homes are linked. One of Moynihan’s biggest predictions was the rate of single-parent homes in the black community would continue to grow. He ultimately believed the rise in single-parent homes would lead to the decay of the black family structure and this stemmed from the high rate of poverty from black displacement in the workplace.\(^2\) Joblessness led to poverty and joblessness diminished the role of the male in the household to a figure of little to no authority, creating the environment for the man to abandon the household, which would ultimately lead to single-parent home.

At the core of Moynihan’s belief was that if the black family structure was broken, the entire community would suffer collectively. He correlated the continual growth of single-parent homes as the indication of crack in the family structure. He pointed that at the time (1960s) single-parent homes in the white community was decreasing where the single-parent homes in the black community began to rise.\(^3\)


\(^{32}\) *The Negro Family*, 19.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 9.
In Moynihan’s time (1965), the percentage of homes headed by single, black women was 25 percent. By 2006, the percentage was up to 45 percent (see Figure 2).\textsuperscript{34} Wilson highlights these numbers when he speaks of how Moynihan’s predictions came true.

![Bar chart: Black Single Mothers](chart)

**Figure 2 Black Single Mothers**


Another troubling trend is the percentage of children born out of wedlock in the black community. At the time Moynihan was writing, only a quarter of all black children were born out of wedlock; in 2005, it was at about 69 percent (see Figure 3).\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{34} Wilson, *More than Just Race*, 100.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
In both cultural trends, the numbers almost doubled in 30 year plus times span. This is bad because both trends have negative effects and ultimately continue the lack of progress in the black community because the trends run parallel to poverty. Wilson believes that the problem with single-parent homes is that they tend to be more disadvantaged because they lack income and a dual-parent support system. With the lack of income, single-parent homes tend to live just below the poverty lines.

The culture of single-parent homes in the black community leads to a gap in building of a strong base of character, which would breed success. A strong family unit can develop a strong character who will conduct him or herself in the culture in
positive ways.\(^{36}\) On the contrary, the broken family produces a fracture in all other areas of life, whether in the black community, school, or the workplace. Wilson says, “the available research indicates that children from low-income households without fathers present are more likelihood to be school dropouts, become teenage parents, receive lower earning in young adulthood, be welfare recipients, and experience cognitive, emotional and social problems.”\(^{37}\) Since there is a culture of single-parent homes in the black community the trends lend to this idea the other areas in the black community will affected as well for example work wages in the work place. Wilson talks about earnings:

For purposes of comparison, if we move to the 75\(^{th}\) percentile of the earnings distribution, the average annual earning s for twenty-four-year-old black males during this period were $22K, compared with earnings of $22,800 and $30K for Latino and white males…These numbers illustrate that the really significant discrepancy in work and wages is for those in the bottom quartile-the poorest men.\(^{38}\)

On average, the black culture earns the least in wages, but the lower wages correlate to the amount of high school dropouts. The black community had the highest rate

\(^{36}\) *The Negro Family*, 19.


\(^{38}\) Ibid., 66.
joblessness because of the high rate of high school drops.

![High School Dropouts with Employment](image)

**Figure 4 High School Dropouts with Employment**


Those in the black community who were high school dropouts found it the most difficult in finding employment. The percent for black high school dropouts that were employed were 33.4%, 53.8% for whites, and 57.6% for blacks (see Figure 4).\(^{39}\) As discussed above, dropping out of high school is related to single-parent homes and the community with the highest rate of single-parent homes is the black community.

The cultural norm of single-parenting is a problem in the black community, one that Moynihan and Wilson discuss as one of the greatest problems in the black community.

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 67.
community. Even though this cultural norm was created by structural design, it is now a cultural habit as the structure is no longer needed to enforce it. The culture of single parenting only feeds off of itself creating a cycle of poverty that is not conducive to the black community.

**Culture in Action**

Culture’s response to structural forces manifests itself in many different ways. For example, the increasing high rate of single-parent homes house led to a generation of young black adults who show negative cultural attitudes towards the idea of wedlock. This new idea now forms habits that become culture in action.

Wilson says, “when we talk about the impact of structure or culture, we are making explicit references to the forces they set in motion that affect human behavior.” Structure and culture have set into motion many different behaviors, but the behaviors boil down to the decisions that are made. Wilson says:

> The decision-making is often related to perceptions about how the world works what we call meaning making…in other words, residents of the ghetto develop ways, often quite creative, to adjust and respond to chronic racial and economic subordination as reflected in mean-making and decision-making processes, including those resulting in the development of informal codes that regulate behavior.\(^{41}\)

The decision-making is what dictates the behavior but the decision-making is based on an American cultural system that the culture and the structure provide. The culture has

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 4.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 134.
done this in multiple forms that are evident in the behavior of the black community collectively.

Wilson discusses some forms of cultural behaviors amongst the black community, such as the cool-pose posture and the code of shady dealings. The code of shady dealings is:

…an informal but explicit set of rules that regulate off-the books trading in the underground economy, rules that stipulate what is expected of individuals involved in these exchanges and where the transactions should take place…deep involvement in the code of shady dealings ultimately reduces one’s chances for successful integration into the broader society and thereby contributes to the perpetuation of poverty.42

This behavior is set in motion because of the lack of joblessness in the black community for low-skilled workers. This joblessness forces them to resort to informal markets that can be troublesome because they are illegal. A cultural logic is formed that the only means of economic survival is through the informal market. The problem with this logic is, if caught doing illegal activity, the person now has a criminal record and the structural design of the American institution does not reward people with criminal records. Finding a job in the formal market with a history of arrest is nearly impossible. The individual has only made the situation more difficult, therefore always guaranteeing that the individual will never see any form of mobility in the American cultural system.

42 Ibid., 134.
“Cool pose culture” runs counter to mainstream society. It “blatantly promotes the most anomalous models of behavior in urban, low-class neighborhoods, featuring gangster rap, predatory sexuality, and irresponsible fathering.”\footnote{Ibid., 80.} This behavior is not positively accepted in the American cultural system and manifests negative attitudes to any adaptation to the mainstream culture of the United States. Single-parent homes are already a product of structural design but the cool pose posture reinforces the cycle of single-parent homes. The cool pose posture celebrates an attitude that a black male having multiple children from different mothers is good and not playing a role in the child rearing is acceptable because that is the cultural norm. This serves as an example of the culture in action as the new cultural norms and attitudes become a structural force in motion.

Wilson believes that the sharp increase of single-parent homes in the black community is due to cultural change in attitudes towards the marriage; he acknowledges the effect of the cool pose culture on marriage in interviews he conducted in black communities in Chicago. Wilson states:

Males especially felt peer pressure to be sexually active, they said that the members of their peer networks bragged about their sexual encounters and that they felt obligated to reveal their own sexual exploits. Little consideration was given to the implications or consequences of sexual matters for the longer-term relationship or for childbearing. These reports could loosely construe as evidence for the cool-pose culture among young black men.\footnote{Ibid., 119.}
The problem with this behavior in the culture is that it negatively affects the African American females’ attitude towards the idea of marriage, as the African American female almost always prefers to rear the child alone than deal with the cool pose posturing of the African American male.\textsuperscript{45}

The behaviors formed from the interaction between structure and culture are negative and lead to a path of the decay of the black community. The code of shady dealings is more a behavior formed by structural design because of the difficulty accessing the formal work market and the cool pose culture is a behavior formed by cultural attitude. Ultimately, both roads lead to poverty in the black community that will restrict the chances for mobility.

Wilson argues in his book that structure will always play a dominant role against culture. But my argument is that culture itself can play an equally aggressive role in navigating the structural system. If cultural attitudes and habits shift towards a focus on economic mobility to middle class attainment, progression will be seen in the black community.

If the black community makes a concerted effort to focus on such factors liking “thinking ahead” by gravitating towards high skilled jobs and training because low skilled jobs in the manufacturing industry have shrunken significantly, the black community would see greater success in mobility. The black community tends to focus on ideas of doing what makes the individual happy in the market verses

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 123.
acquiring a skill that guarantees employment with good pay, which will positively affect the individual and his/her family.

This process is part of the theory of concerted cultivation that I apply to the process Nigerians in the United States use to achieve mobility. First, their mobility is economic and then it becomes social because they move into a higher social class attainment by reaching middle class status. I will compare how the black community aligns itself with the theory of accomplishment of natural growth which does not follow the motion to middle class attainment but gravitates to working class attainment.

Ultimately if middle class attainment is reached on a larger scale in the black community like it is achieved in the Nigerian community in the United States, this will assist in pushing the black community out of poverty and therefore will assist in achieving progression collectively as a community. This all comes from a shift in cultural approach that must align itself with the theory of concerted cultivation.
CHAPTER 2
CULTURAL CULTIVATION

Concerted cultivation can assist mobility in the black community. This cultivation of mobility moves away from the stigmas of race alone because it is built on the idea of cultivation in social class, as there are different traits practiced in the middle-class, working-class, and the poor. If the repertoires in the middle-class are adhered to, the consequence will be success in the American structural system. If not, the theory of accomplishment of natural growth will be practiced, which reaps negative results in the American structural system. The concerted cultivation and the accomplishment of natural growth apply different approaches and render different results: one pushes the individual towards the system and the other theory pushes the individual away from the system. In the pulling away from the system, the individual is left powerless because the system rewards middle-class traits that are aligned with the values of the system.

The Nigerian community in the United States has replicated middle-class cultural patterns effectively. They practice a form of concerted cultivation that results in mobility collectively as a community. The mobility itself serves as a counter to social barriers that may occur to the individual, thus providing progression in the American cultural system and a form of protection from social barriers of the American institution. Nigerians experience mobility mostly by acquiring and replicating traits of the middle-class.
Collective Memory

The collective memory of Nigerians is one of colonization, civil war, and a system built on social class. Nigeria itself was a victim of the slave trade industry. Nigeria was a major trade route for slavery with Western and European countries.

Ezekiel Umo Ette writes in his book *Nigerian Immigrants in the United States*, “Nigeria belongs to what was known as the ‘Slave Coast’ in West Africa where many slaves originated.”¹ Slavery itself is not a foreign idea in the minds and thoughts of Nigerians, as many of its ancestors were sold into slavery. When slavery ended the new era of European colonization began all around the continent of Africa. Nigeria was colonized under British Rule and took more than 50 years before it would receive its independence. Nigeria has a past from slavery to colonization. Colonial intervention is part of Nigeria’s collective memory as it is part of the collective memory of native blacks (African Americans) in the United States.

After the end of British colonialism, Nigeria went through a period of civil war starting in 1967. Once the country received its independence, there was a power vacuum resulting in multiple coups, assassinations, and the deaths of millions of Nigerians, region against region, Nigerians killing Nigerians. This violence created an environment of instability that can even be seen to this day where the Muslim Nigerians and Christian Nigerians of the northern region are constantly fighting and killing each other over fundamental differences of beliefs. The internal strife of the

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country in the last 50 years has created an environment of economic instability and restricts economic growth.

Many Nigerians fled their native land for economic and educational opportunities in the United States. However, upon completing their education in the States, many found it hard to return because of Nigeria’s civil war and lack of economic opportunities. Even recently the economic instability has led to a “brain drain” in Nigeria, as many skilled professionals flee Nigeria for opportunities elsewhere. Ette gives an example of this brain drain by remarking on the exportation of health workers: “In the healthcare field, for example, the World Health Organization (WHO) (2004) reported Nigeria as one of the largest exporters of health workers in Africa.”2 The fleeing of healthcare workers serves as an example of the massive departure of the skilled professionals who depart Nigeria. The healthcare field is a vital foundation in any country as this field includes the doctors and nurses who provide stability to a country, but with instability in the country and greater opportunities elsewhere the massive departures of skilled professionals in Nigeria makes sense, by the 1970’s it was about 1,500 Nigerians that legally applied for permanent residency in the United States, between 1981-1990 it jumped to over 35,000.3


2 Ibid., 71.

3 Ibid., 24.
This vacuum for skilled professionals is now filled by the United States as Nigerians have had a special niche in this country for occupying high skilled professions. The reminisce of civil war has created an environment of instability in Nigeria therefore created a desire for mass departure. More importantly when the Nigerians leave Nigeria returning home is not that much of an option, because of the current economic environment. When Nigerians migrate and settle in the United States this now becomes their land because returning to their native land permanently is not a smart economic decision.

Nigeria’s social structure is based on class, as there are no racial divides, no binary system of black and white, only the “haves and have-nots.” “The have-nots” make up the majority of Nigeria. The divide between the wealthy and the poor is great. The wealthy Nigerians have massive incomes that does not filter down to poor or create mobility. For example the expenditures towards Nigeria’s education is 0.9% the mean years of schooling for Nigerian’s is only 5 years and the literacy rate is only 60%.\(^4\) Therefore, there is almost no viable path to middle-class in Nigeria. The greatest lived experience I’ve had seeing this is in my travels to Abuja and Lagos, Nigeria where you can see a 12-bedroom mansion with a beautiful brick exterior and extravagant extetiques such as a gold plated front gate that is located in the middle of

a slum neighborhood. Shanty villages and homes will border a high-scale mansion’s perimeter.

Becoming rich guarantees social placement, if wealth is acquired social status is then elevated to place with no limitations because the wealthy Nigerians are not limited in the structural system, the wealthy only deal with the wealthy and they see continual growth from this system. But acquiring wealth from the position of poverty is almost impossible from the Nigerian perspective, because the access to the economic system is limited as it is controlled by the wealthy therefore there is no path to mobility.

This dynamic creates an atmosphere of economic inferiority, so Nigerians don’t feel inferior because of their skin color or intellectual abilities but they feel inferior because they were not born into a position of wealth. Therefore creating an environment of classism, most Nigerians in their native land are subjected to feel inferior because of their social class status. This is why Nigerians in the United States strive to be middle class.

The cognitive thought of Nigerians in the United States is one of middle class aspirations. Access to the middle-class, which in America is considered the foundation of the “American Dream,” is far more attainable from a place of poverty in the United States than it is in Nigeria. One can argue that the economic cultural system in the United States is restrictive to outsiders (poor and working-class) and controlled by the wealthy but this idea does not change the fact that economic and social mobility is greater in the United States than many other developed countries that run on a class
system. If the proper structural tools, such as education and concentration on high skilled positions, are utilized in the American cultural system, it will provide access to the middle-class social system. Nigerians in the United States have incentives to put in a concerted effort toward attaining education and high skilled professions that are accessible and now guarantee access to that middle-class social status that was not attainable in Nigeria.

The collective memories of Nigerians allow them to navigate through the American system putting a concerted effort on middle-class attainment. Nigerians in the United States come from a place where mobility is almost impossible so when they arrive to the United States, they apply methods that would help them achieve mobility in the American cultural system. This narrative is familiar to the struggle for the common immigrant’s individual economic freedom. The cultural lens of the Nigerians understands that opportunity in the American system begins with the middle-class and above. They follow middle-class traits that endorse the idea of concerted cultivation.

**Concerted Cultivation vs. Accomplishment of Natural Growth**

In her book *Unequal Childhoods*, Annette Lareau introduces the theories of concerted cultivation and the accomplishment of natural growth. She explains that different approaches to both theories will lead to specific social class attainment in families. This section will apply the theory of concerted cultivation to the Nigerian culture in the United States and show how concerted cultivation will lead to social attainment in the middle-class.
According to Lareau, middle-class traits can be applied across the board in the American cultural system among all racial spectrums and success in the middle-class attainment will be the result.\textsuperscript{5} These middle-class traits that lead to a higher social class attainment do not erase the social barriers or injustices in the American cultural system but they will allow greater navigation around these social barriers that exist for black people. She also shows that the theory of accomplish of natural growth has the opposite effect of concerted cultivation as it will create generational cycle of lower class attainment.

Lareau defines concerted cultivation as middle class traits applied to the rearing of a child who will “develop their talents in a concerted fashion.”\textsuperscript{6} Parents in middle-class homes tend to provide direction to children through organized activities and instill middle class habits that cultivate a sense of entitlement in the child and will assist the child in navigating institutional settings. If the same idea of concerted cultivation is applied in a broader sense to a community as a whole, the community will develop cultural repertoires that will create institutional advantages. Nigerians in the United States unconsciously utilize this method of concerted cultivation by applying middle class traits in their navigation in the American cultural system. They feel entitled to go to the best schools, own property in the best neighborhoods, and be

\textsuperscript{5} Annette Lareau, Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 4.

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 1.
competitive in the field of high skilled professions. The rationale of inferiority is reduced by the feeling of entitlement due to the practice of middle class traits and social positioning in the middle class system. This section will apply the theory of concerted cultivation to better understand the ways the Nigerian community has utilized this strategy.

Lareau defines the accomplishment of natural growth as working-class traits applied to the rearing of their children that will develop “a sense of distance, distrust and constraint in their institutional experiences.” Working class parents do not provide a sense of direction when childrearing that goes beyond working class traits. The general sustainment of a child is all that is important. For example, making sure that the child is fed, has clothes, and has a roof over his/her head is all that matters. In relation to the parent-child dynamic, Lareau describes it as such “For working-class and poor families, sustaining children’s natural growth is viewed as an accomplishment.” The accomplishment of natural growth and well-being is not a proactive approach. If a community uses this approach, the community will remain socially and economically stagnant as working-class.

The accomplishment of natural growth approach is damaging to the goal of mobility because the approach is founded on distrust for the system. Distrust for the system perpetuates a feeling of powerlessness and will result in the individual not

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7 Ibid., 3.

8 Ibid., 5.
being engaged in making the system work for them. In contrast, concerted cultivation creates a sense of entitlement in the individual, motivating them to make the system work for them. This motivation leads to “cultural capital” (i.e., skills individuals inherit that can then be translated into different forms of value as they move through various institutions) that creates advantages in the American cultural system.

As a whole, the native black community aligns itself more with the practices of accomplishment of natural growth. Middle-class attainment is desirable in the native black community but the traits that are followed replicate that of the working class. The collective memories of native blacks also play a role in the distrust for the institution. This distrust creates additional obstacles in navigating institutional settings and more importantly, a generational attainment of working class social placement.

Spatial Location

Lareau begins analyzing both theories by emphasizing the importance of spatial location. The spatial location of the concertedly cultivated flock towards suburban environments and the individuals who fit the profile of the accomplishment of natural growth lived in more inner city urban environments. This is key because the consequence of the spatial location reaps important results. In analyzing and observing twelve different families of multiple racial backgrounds, she noticed that the families in the suburban middle class schools all followed traits of concerted cultivation. It did

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9 Ibid., 7.

10 Ibid.
not matter if the families were black or white. They practiced middle class traits that would lead to the success of the children in those families in similar middle class attainment. The same could be said in the accomplishment of natural growth group but the opposite effect would take place. They all followed working class traits that negatively affect the children in the future. The surrounding community had a direct affect on the development of the child. Therefore spatial location can dictate the positive or negative path that may follow future of the children.

Schools in both communities demonstrated the importance of spatial location. The school in the middle-class areas of course had greater financial means and was altogether a more pleasant environment for the students. The resources available to the children in the middle-class made a greater effort to cultivate their youth in small ways. For example, while the schools in both communities had choirs, the choir in the working-class environments was more of an activity for leisure opened to all. The middle-class school choir practice was taken more seriously; the children (4th grades students) had to audition to participate and the group performed at different locations like nursing homes. Greater resources and more concerted approach create lopsided advantage for the middle-class children to outperform their peers in the working class. In the middle-class school (Swan school), “most children in the fourth grade, including the low achievers, perform at grade level; in reading, many of the students are two or
three years above grade level.”11 This alone shows how important spatial location can be for the development of a child.

Nigerians follow this pattern of achieving middle class spatial location by gravitating towards the suburban environment to live. Nigerians stay away from larger metro areas like New York because acquiring housing in a suburban environment can be more difficult. They are located in areas like Texas, Georgia, and Idaho.12 Staying out of the larger big city areas allow for rental and acquisition of single-family homes in economically inclined neighborhoods. This is part of a larger African immigrant culture pattern to have exposure to broader mainstream culture than African Americans tend to have; about half of African immigrants in the United States live in a neighborhood that has high exposure to whites living in the same neighborhood. This is the largest of any of the identified black subgroups in the United States.13 This trend leads to better schools, more diverse neighborhoods, and generally a better quality of life. Being in this environment cultivates middle class traits in the lives of the people occupy that community, no matter what the racial background. Therefore Nigerians learn to apply the traits of the middle class, because the spatial location almost enforces those traits. The Nigerian children raised in those neighborhoods will naturally

11 Ibid., 21.

12 Ette, Nigerian Immigrants in the United States, 121.

gravitate towards middle class traits because it is cultivated around them, even in the school system. This will ultimately lead to their academic success, as Jason Deparle speaks of in his *New York Times* article, which links the role of class to higher academic achievement.\(^{14}\) He believes that the role of class supersedes race in predicting academic achievement.

The majority of native blacks live in urban inner city environments that don’t cultivate middle class traits. A study in the ’90s conducted by Paul Jargowsky showed that a third of all American blacks lived in high poverty areas. By 2000, those numbers improved to 19% but native blacks still had the highest concentration of living in high poverty neighborhoods.\(^{15}\) This dates back from the 1970s when native blacks occupied high poverty inner city neighborhoods, beginning a consecutive generational cycle.\(^{16}\) This cycle, based on spatial location, became a generational issue for native blacks. The spatial arrangement of native blacks fits within the category of poor or working-class social status that is more aligned with the accomplishment of natural growth.

Inner city schools tend to be underfunded and undersupplied in multiple avenues, “from a shortage of teaching supplies, such as paper and art materials, to a


\(^{15}\) Wilson, *More than Just Race*, 57-58.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 52.
shortage of teachers…as salaries (as well as expenditures per pupil) are less than in the suburbs.”\(^{17}\) Although supplies and other resources are crucial, Wilson describes a more complex problem of inner city schools when he says: “Such schools have rigid district bureaucracies, poor morale among teachers and schools principals, low expectations for students, and negative ideologies that justify poor student performance. Inner-city schools fall well below more advantaged suburban schools in science and math resources, and they lack teachers with appropriate preparation in these subjects. As a result students from these schools tend to have poor reading and math skills.”\(^{18}\) The children in these environments are disadvantaged because they begin early stages of life as underperformers. It therefore becomes more difficult of a task to cultivate a positive learning environment that will shape these children’s and future adults’ outlook on the world. So the spatial location from the onset of child development has a negative affect.

The problems of the inner city don’t just stop with the challenging school environments. Inner city tends to have higher jobless rates and minimal employment growth.\(^{19}\) Wilson states, “As the world of corporate employment has relocated to America’s suburban communities, over two-thirds of employment growth in

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\(^{17}\) Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods*, 17.


\(^{19}\) Ibid., 10.
metropolitan areas has occurred in the suburbs, many of the residents of our inner-city ghettos have become physically isolated from places of employment and socially isolated from the formal job networks that are often essential for job placement."\textsuperscript{20}

The inner city has almost become outcasts for any chance of reasonable growth. In contrast, the suburbs provide more security in job placement. Those living in the inner city environment feel the effects of the lack of growth. They are stuck without reasonable paying jobs and are pushed to stay in poor or working class status due to their spatial location. This also leads to additional strains in markets as access to decent goods and services are also located away from inner city such as banks, good grocery stores, parks, retail establishments and good transit transportation.\textsuperscript{21}

Inner city spatial location creates an environment of suppression; therefore, mobility into an upper social class is not possible. This environment cultivates the accomplishment of natural growth approach because the individual learns not to believe in the ideals of success and they begin to distrust the system as a whole. An invisible ceiling to success is now present. Ultimately, the environment cultivates a feeling of hopelessness and powerlessness.

Many Nigerians arrive to the United States with little money to fund high-end suburban living but the cultural logic keeps them away from inner city areas. By gravitating toward suburban areas or college towns, they have access to schools and

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 42.
jobs that lead to mobility as well as a cultural environment that improves the quality of life for themselves and their families. With time, the spatial location of suburban areas cultivates an environment of middle-class traits. If the majority of Nigerians moved and stayed in inner city areas upon arrival in the United States, it would be more difficult for the culture as a whole to adhere to the middle-class traits of concerted cultivation. The negative effects of inner city living, such as poor schools, fewer jobs, and less access to broad markets, would serve as suppressive device for the Nigerian community as a whole, if this occurred the spatial location alone would trigger the traits of the accomplishment of natural growth in the Nigerian community in the United States.

**Thinking Ahead**

Another form of concerted cultivation in Lareau’s theory was parents’ stress on the future. Thinking ahead and not just living in the present is the major difference between concerted cultivation and the accomplishment of natural growth. Concerted cultivation directs the individual to make preparatory steps now that will reap a greater return in the future. For example, graduating from an Ivy League school gives an individual a better chance of attaining a good job and earning higher income. The accomplishment of natural growth directs the individual to only worry about the needs of today. The individual reared under the accomplishment of natural growth approach is not worried about getting into a college with a better brand name. That individual would concentrate more on the effort of being employed for the moment in a job that
would most likely bring in a lower wage income. This idea is detrimental because that lower wage income leaves the individual stagnant in the working-social class position.

In *Nigerian Immigrants in the United States*, Ezekiel Umo Ette interviews and analyzes the lives of multiple Nigerians from their migration to the United States to their social patterns after their arrival. Their social pattern of thinking ahead adapts to the idea of concerted cultivation. For example, upon arrival Nigerians will take lower-class working positions with the intention of saving for school. Ette gives the example of how many Nigerians come from highly educated backgrounds in Nigeria but their Nigerian education doesn’t matter here in the United States so they will begin the process again to gain the United States credentials in education. For them, school is the springboard into mainstream society that serves as a method of attaining financial and social success. One Nigerian in Ette’s interview states, “To the Nigerian, education is seen as the passport into the mainstream American society.”22 They took jobs like driving taxis when they were engineers in their native land, but they knew taxi driving allowed them a flexible schedule and the money was fast and steady. These factors would allow them to save for school and attend college while working a flexible schedule. This approach is the method to educational attainment for some Nigerians.

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Most Nigerians from the book in Ette’s study did not stop with an undergraduate degree; they attained graduate (Master’s) level degrees and higher.\textsuperscript{23} As the adult Nigerian saw the attainment of education as a social marker of success, this also serves as an indicator for the future generational cycles of success. Lareau states, “One of the best predicators of whether a child will one day graduate from college is whether his or her parents are graduates. Of course, relations of this sort are not absolute: Perhaps two-thirds of the members of society ultimately reproduce their parents’ level of education attainment.”\textsuperscript{24} Whereas the parent graduating from college is not a automatic indicator of the child’s educational achievement, it does show that the odds of educational achievement with the children are greater if the parent has achieved the same educational attainment.

Nigerians push for high-skilled niche positions that are high in demand. The force of high-skilled jobs plus the educational attainment gravitates the Nigerian community towards middle-class attainment. Nigerians have grasped and utilized this cultural logic as a tool in mobility. They approach education in a strategic manner for mobility instead of just doing something that makes the individual happy. They get degrees in specialties where there is work. Ette reiterates this idea by saying, “The only way American employers can see you here is if you have the training that they

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[	extsuperscript{23}] Ibid., 152.
\item[	extsuperscript{24}] Lareau, Unequal Childhoods, 8.
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absolutely must use.”

For jobs, they seek positions that almost guarantee employment, provide higher salaries, and positions that demand a form of social respect. Ette says, “Those who are trained in needed areas of employment like engineering, nursing and computer sciences make more money… Nigerian immigrants are aware of this fact, and so for those returning to school, they plan their education to suit this reality.”

This method does not only suggest an understanding of the institutional environment but also is a strategy of survival for the Nigerian adults. They approach the system that attempts integration from an educational and workplace foundation that provides greater odds for social positioning (class) and economic attainment. Lareau says, “In the lives of most people, these separate threads- their educational attainment, what kind of job they get, and how much money they earn- are all tightly interwoven. Together, these factors constitute parents’ social position or social structural location.”

The steps taken by the Nigerian adult solidifies middle-class attainment, which cultivates the immediate family. When the group collectively follows these same steps, it creates a gravitational pull towards mobility and a generational pull towards following middle-class traits for the whole community.

With middle-class attainment achieved by the parent, cultivating these middle-class traits in the child is simple. Nigerian parents use the method of educational

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26 Ibid., 161.

achievement and high-skilled niche jobs as a method of direction to cultivate their children. They put a high importance on the education of their children as a foundation of their family structure. Lareau describes the importance of education by stating: “education development in children through proper parenting... include the importance of talking with, developing their educational interests, and playing an active role in their schooling.” Nigerian parents foster their children’s educational tract towards high-skilled jobs and completing their college education as this will dictate their successful attainment of middle-class status. Most of the Nigerians Ette interviewed agreed that they measure their success by the future of their children. The Nigerian adults don’t just worry about their children surviving or taking care of their basic needs. The Nigerian adults interviewed all focused on the future of their children, applying a method of concerted cultivation through education.

Unlike Nigerians whose ultimate goal is not the happiness of their children but rather their children’s economic success, the African American community follows the working-class American ideal of just doing what “makes you happy” and not follow the idea of “what is good for you.” This states that the parent wants the child to discover a niche without parent direction. One of the working-class parents Lareau interviewed finds it necessary to take care of her child’s basic needs, but does not see it

28 Ette, Nigerian Immigrants in the United States, 150.

29 Lareau, Unequal Childhoods, 4.

30 Ette, Nigerian Immigrants in the United States, 152.
as her responsibility to nurture the child’s creative development.\textsuperscript{31} This working-class trait does not focus on the future of the child and only affects the child negatively as s/he is ill prepared for the structural forces of the future. Deparle speaks of how even if the working-class child has the ability and talent to attend college, the road is so much more difficult because of the lack of parental guidance. In these cases, there is no safety net these children need to succeed in higher education.\textsuperscript{32}

The native black community should be more future-oriented because the lack of low-skilled jobs available creates a gap in employment opportunity. If educational attainment is not high in the native black community, it is assumed that native blacks can depend on low-skilled jobs as a means of the general welfare of the individual. However with the destruction of the manufacturing industry in America, the opportunity for low-skilled jobs no longer exists.

During the mass production era in the United States, native blacks found employment stability the manufacturing industry. The unions guaranteed security for the workers in benefits and pay increases. With this job security and pay increase, blacks experienced some mobility and in turn, could afford to better the quality of life for their families. However, U.S. manufacturing declined in reaction to increasing technological advancements. Wilson states: “production in the United States has

\textsuperscript{31} Lareau, Unequal Childhoods, 101.

shifted dramatically from manufacturing to one increasingly fueled by finance, services, and technological revolution... the relationship between technology and international competition has eroded the basic institutions of the mass production system.\textsuperscript{33} To this day, manufacturing has never recovered to what it used to be in the 1950s through the ’70s. The computer age of the technological revolution has ended the era of mass production.

Now, most positions that guarantee security require high-skill work. High-skilled work often requires an education, and if native blacks are not acquiring the education to fill these positions, advancement in economic and social placement will be difficult or even impossible to attain. It is almost as if a person is in a race and the route to the finish line has changed but the runner keeps running the same route. To survive, the native black community needs to adaptation to attain high-skilled jobs in the work place.

Low-skilled positions are concentrated in the retail and service industries, such as fast food staff, store cashiers, and custodial workers.\textsuperscript{34} These positions are easily replaceable and do not provide the security that being in a union in the manufacturing industry would provide. An individual in this position can count on being fired at times when business is bad and being restricted to working only part time hours. With native blacks not putting a concerted effort in collectively achieving the

\textsuperscript{33} Wilson, \textit{More than Just Race}, 39-40.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
educational backing for high-skilled positions, working these positions (low-skilled positions) becomes more of method of survival versus a tool of mobility. This strategy differs from Nigerians who accept low-skilled positions as a tool to fund education attainment.

The reality of deconstruction in the manufacturing industry has resulted in the shrinking of social mobility for native blacks. It has created a gap in structural opportunity whereas native blacks have seen a decline in participation in the workforce, because the educational attainment is not collectively received and low-skilled positions is not as available or embraced as the manufacturing positions time ago. Wilson speaks of the decline in the workforce by describing a survey conducted in Chicago: “In Chicago’s Bronzeville neighborhoods-Douglas, Grand Boulevard, and Washington Park, the traditional black-belt area where the original black migrants from the South settle in the early twentieth century on Chicago’s South Side- 64 percent of all males fourteen years and older held jobs in a typical week in 1960. By 1990, a few years before Douglas and Grand Boulevard experienced gentrification, only 37 percent of all males sixteen and over worked in a typical week.”\(^35\) This is an example of the gap in the native black community of workforce attainment. The decline in the workforce only increases the rate of poverty in the black community, which decreases the chance of social mobility.

\(^{35}\) Ibid., 64.
Some social scientists believe that native blacks do not gravitate to low-skilled jobs because of a negative attitude. For example, Roger Waldingers argues that “black males turn their backs on jobs that immigrants are happy to fill… an expression of disdain for the work they feel is too difficult, dirty demeaning and poorly paid.”

There is no concrete evidence that native blacks do not take these low-skilled positions because they look at the work as demeaning. The only concrete fact is that low-skilled jobs that provided security and the possibility for mobility in the past, like manufacturing jobs, are no longer present. The opportunity structure in the low-skilled work force has shifted so most likely the attitude has shifted as well, but there is no evidence that native blacks do not take these jobs because they believe it is hard and beneath them, the likely event that has occurred is less jobs available and no sight of low-skilled jobs providing progression. The mindset of native blacks with low-skilled positions follows the cultural repertoire of the accomplishment of natural growth; there is no concerted effort to improve the situation by accepting the low-skilled position as a possible stepping-stone. I agree with sociologist Mary Waters that foreign blacks tend to approach low-skilled positions with a different mindset.

Both black communities apply different approaches to this idea of thinking ahead. One can argue that native blacks have been disenfranchised by the lack of structural opportunity in working-class jobs that provide mobility, but I believe that the

36 Ibid., 85.
37 Ibid., 86.
Nigerians’ approach to putting a concerted effort to the attainment of education and high-skilled positions removes the long period in working-class positions. For Nigerians, the working-class position is only a tool for achieving high-skilled positions through education. The Nigerian community strictly aligns itself with ideas of concerted cultivation by applying the approach of thinking ahead and moving towards the goal of middle-class status.

The focus on the future or thinking ahead has generational effects that can be a positive or negative. If middle-class attainment is achieved by the parent, it is a cycle that will most likely be carried down to the child. Only because the parent has achieved that status and now has the tools to provide direction to the child, this ultimately creates a generational cycle for that family and if an entire community follows this trend it creates collective mobility for that entire group. If attention to the future is not the focus, middle-class attainment is difficult and stagnant because the proper direction was not provided. This creates a negative generational cycle that will consistently adhere to working class and poor values, therefore serving as an example of social reproduction where the parents pass on their cultural toolkits to their children.

Parenting Style

Another focus in Lareau’s book is the importance of parenting styles. Concerted cultivation and accomplishment of natural growth are different parenting styles. The parenting style of concerted cultivation leads the parent to have more of an open dialogue with the child. For example, in the parenting style of concerted cultivation the child is encouraged to express their needs, wants, and dislikes. This is a
liberal approach to parenting where the parent tries to teach verse direct. Ann illustrates how two parents practice this style: “Both parents use reasoning as their key mechanism of social control. They frequently answer questions with more questions and whenever possible guide the children through situations rather than issue directives.” 38 This approach is meant to teach the child to think for his or herself and provide the child with tools to help him or her navigate the social situations in the future. If a child has the confidence in his or her own decision-making abilities at a young age, when they reach adulthood s/he will think through problems with even greater success. The parenting style encourages self-reliance and independence.

The parenting style associated with concerted cultivation teaches the child cultural traits that will help him or her succeed in the marketplace as an adult. For example, a parent who engages a child in a dialogue, allowing the child to express his or her desires, will teach the child to negotiate. If the dialogue between the child and the adult was just the adult speaking and the child listening, the child would not be cultivated to express his or her thoughts in social environments outside of the home. 39 Teaching a child to negotiate through the parenting style of concerted cultivation is an important tool that he or she can apply to life.

The parenting style of the accomplishment of natural growth is the exact opposite of parenting style of concerted cultivation. Accomplishment of natural

38 Lareau, Unequal Childhoods, 63.

39 Ibid., 154.
growth is more of an authoritative parenting style where the relationship between the parent and the child is one where the parent is to issue directives and the child is to listen without challenging that directive. This style of parenting does not provide the child with the opportunity to express his or her wants and needs. The effect of children not being able to express themselves within the home creates a form of structural and social limitation outside of the home.

Where the child who is concertedly cultivated learns self-confidence, the child who is reared under the parenting style of accomplishment of natural growth does not have this opportunity to develop his or her confidence. A line is drawn between authority and subordination in the example of accomplishment of natural growth. With the child never having the ability to challenge directives, this lesson teaches the child to never challenge or question authority. The underlining thought to this process is that the child is therefore taught that they are less than and not equal too any authority figure so therefore authority should not be challenged. This will limit the self-confidence of a child in their future roles as adults.

Culturally, Nigerians gravitate towards the more authoritative parenting style of accomplishment of natural growth, but as they adapt to middle-class culture, a shift in parenting styles tends to occur. An example of this shift can be seen in the gender roles of the home. In Nigeria, the male is the head of the household, bearing only financial responsibilities. The wife’s duties include the majority of the child-rearing, housework, and cooking. Upon arrival in the United States, Ette provides many examples of how the patriarch adjusts and begins to share in a partnership with the
matriarch. For the male figure, this includes cooking, cleaning and child-rearing. Nigerian parents in the United States take more of a co-sponsorship parenting style, which is more aligned with the concerted cultivation approach.

With time, Nigerian parents learn to accept the more liberal approach of concerted cultivation parenting. Ette offers several examples of Nigerian parents adapting to a concerted cultivation style, including two mothers named Grace and Hope: “Grace said she likes the American culture, especially the way children are raised in American. She commented that children are encouraged to speak their mind and that it is a good thing… Hope says that the Americans do have liberal minds; they are accepting and they encourage kids to explore.”\textsuperscript{40} Both of these comments show that they have made the cultural shift and have learned to embrace concerted cultivation in their parenting styles. Grace’s comment specifically highlights the idea of a child speaking his or her mind, which teaches the child to express him or herself. Child-expression is the foundation of the parenting style of concerted cultivation.

In Ette’s study, one father named Tom found it important for his children to not feel threatened. Of Tom, Ette says, “In twenty-eight years that he has been here in the United States, he has found out that children strive when they are encouraged, not threatened.”\textsuperscript{41} Threatening a child and restricting expression are ideas that run counter to the parenting style of concerted cultivation. Tom does not believe in these ideas as

\textsuperscript{40} Ette, \textit{Nigerian Immigrants in the United States}, 79.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 128.
he practiced encouraging his children. The longer Ette’s interviewees lived in the United States the more they aligned themselves with the liberal child-rearing style of the mainstream culture. 42

With many Nigerian parents following this trend of the concerted cultivation parenting style, the children will learn skills that will assist them in the intervention of structural situations. Due to their parents’ cultivation in the early stages of their life, these children will be more confident in all social situations and negotiate their needs and desire, but know how to combine their wants and desires with the discipline. Their parents will have instilled in them a habit of “thinking ahead,” in acquiring education that lead to high-skilled positions so that next generation of Nigerians in the United States will find it easier to attain middle class status. The parenting style of concerted cultivation and of the focus on “thinking ahead” will prepare children to succeed by design.

Interventions in Institutions

Intervention in institutions is a critical middle class trait as it provides proper navigation through the structural system; an individual who challenges the institution and negotiates his or her desires on his or her terms will find that the institution will begin to work for him or her. Lareau provides example of middle-class parents intervening on behalf of their children in institutional settings, such as schools and doctors offices. She states, “Differences in educational resources are important as

42 Ibid., 127.
Middle-class parents’ superior levels of education gave them larger vocabularies and more knowledge. More education facilitated concerted cultivation particularly with respect to interventions in institutions outside the home… Middle-class parents’ educational backgrounds also gave them the confidence to criticize educational professionals and intervene in school matters. For working-class and poor parents, educators were social superiors. For middle-class parents, they were equals or subordinates.”

Intervention in institutions is clearly a middle-class trait because educational background that provides middle class tools help these parents feel confident to intervene. In addition, they have the necessary capital and knowledge to navigate the system.

Nigerians’ outlook at the institution is one that can be navigated. Their educational background and structural positioning in the workplace cultivates the ability for interventions in institutional settings. One of the people Ette interviews describes intervening in his workplace setting once he realizes that he consistently being passed up for promotion. He realizes that he has the educational background for the management position and he has the experience required to qualify for the position, which prompts his learned instinct to challenge the institution for being overlooked for this position in his workplace. Nigerian social placement in middle-class setting empowers them challenge the institution if needed.

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43 Ibid., 249.

The collective memory and the social positioning in the working class of most native blacks leans more to the theory of accomplishment of natural growth in regards to the outlook of navigating the American institution. The working class in general tends to resent and distrust the institutional structure and feel that the institution has no real place for them. When you compound that with all of the historical-structural harms the institution has inflicted upon the native black community, the distrust and resentment is even more ingrained in the social psyche. Therefore, the outlook of navigating the system successfully is a challenge in itself as it is not conceivable, especially from a working-class socioeconomic standpoint.

In addition, cultural codes of native blacks dictate behavior and serve as a barrier against successful navigation or intervention in the structural system. Wilson analyzes these cultural codes in the native black community to see how they can be structurally harmful for blacks in terms of integration into mainstream society. I make the argument that these cultural codes not only harm integration but they also resist the idea of intervention in the structural system.

The first cultural code referenced by Wilson is Elijah Anderson’s idea of “street smarts,” a cultural code that can make it difficult for an individual to navigate institutional settings. Street smarts are habits formed from living in an unsafe environment, and these habits are utilized as a form of self-protection. The example

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45 Wilson, More than Just Race, 18.
Wilson uses is the code of not making eye contact in the urban environment. It is perceived as physical threat when eye contact is made an urban environment. This cultural behavior may provide protection on the street but it does not provide advancement in the workplace. If an individual from this environment has a job interview and does not make eye contact with the employer, it hurts his or her chances for employment as the individual is seen as less confident and ultimately deemed undesirable for employment. This is an example of cultural behavior that makes intervention in institutional settings difficult.

The next cultural code is Wilson describes is Anderson’s “Code of the Street,” which takes into total disregard the governing body of law outside of the street. This disregard is a form of negative behavior that encourages the individual to act on a negative attitude towards the overall system that governs. Disobeying the laws that govern is a way of gaining respect and street credentials. This is harm for intervention in the institution because the individual does not believe in the institution, so trying to navigate the system is pointless to the individual.

Wilson believes these cultural codes are wrong and need to change for any type of mobility. He argues, “These cultural codes ultimately hinder integration into the broader society and are therefore dysfunctional. In other words, they contribute to the perpetuation of poverty…the draw of the street is so powerful that they cannot avail

\(^{46}\) Ibid.

\(^{47}\) Ibid., 18-19.
themselves of legitimate employment opportunities when those opportunities become available…that adherence to the code of the shady dealings impedes social mobility.”

These cultural codes translate to negative behavior and serve as a barrier for integration into mainstream society. They encourage the individual to not intervene in institutional settings.

Collectively, Nigerians choose not to follow these cultural codes but they still deal with these social barriers that could shift their outlook on the institution. They deal with the stigma of being a double negative: first, being black in the America and second, being Nigerian. As a Nigerian in the United State, they are automatically stereotyped as corrupt or involved in criminal activity, as they are associated with Internet scams.

Ette discusses this phenomenon of racism that Nigerians deal with upon arrival in the United States and also highlights how they overcome it by using education as a tool to navigate around the social barrier of racism. He states, “Though this brought stress to the Nigerian immigrants, education became an adaptive strategy for decreasing exposure to and mitigating the effects of, the racism and discrimination that

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48 Ibid., 19.

49 Ibid., 67.

50 Ibid., 166.
they encountered." More importantly, education is a tool that helps Nigerians achieve middle-class status, so overall their outlook at the institution is not shifted so deeply that it serves as its own force of suppression.

Middle-class achievement creates a sense of entitlement that can be utilized as a tool to overcome social barriers such as racism. As middle class attainment prompts institutional intervention because of social positioning or feeling equal to other citizens, social positioning also dispels the idea of a ceiling cap. This is an idea that Lareau addresses when discussing the idea of race in concerted cultivation in the study of the Alexander family. The Alexander’s are a black middle-class family that has to tackle the issue of race in their daily lives with their children. The example of the family showed that because concerted cultivation is the method utilized in the rearing of their child he will not be subjugated to feel as he is less because of the example of his parents social positioning (middle-class) and the middle-class traits, such as more resources, spatial location, education background all add to the capital of a child that leaves him feeling empowered and entitled. This phenomenon serves as a barrier against racism itself.

**Middle Class Status**

Concerted cultivation to middle-class attainment can be the saving grace for any community in the United States. In Lareau’s book, the theory of concerted

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51 Ibid., 159.

cultivation was not practiced amongst whites only but it was practiced amongst blacks as well. This portion of the paper demonstrates that this theory is practiced collectively amongst a black subgroup in the United States and collectively brings capital to that group.

The ability to reach middle-class status is powerful because it creates a generational cycle that will most likely repeat itself. The children now have the guidance that is needed to achieve middle-class status because the parents now serve as an example of how to achieve that status. And we discovered that things also begin to replicate it. If the parents are educated, most likely 2 out 3 times the child will match that education. If the parents own a home, most likely the child will own that home. If the parents make a higher wage income because of the education and their own parents’ direction, their child will also meet those criteria as well. One of the most powerful things discovered in Lareau’s book is that some of the sample families that fell into concerted cultivation category did not come from middle class families, but rather came from working class and poor families. All it took was one couple to achieve that status and now they could pass those traits on to their children and the positive cycle of concerted cultivation will most likely repeat itself.

Nigerians are successful in creating this generational cycle. Many of the example families from Ette’s book arrived in the United States with little to nothing but were able to apply middle-class traits to reach middle-class status. More importantly, many Nigerians were successful in making the shift from basic survival mode (accomplishment of natural growth) to a concerted effort in attainment of higher
education and high skilled jobs (concerted cultivation) that leads to middle-class achievement. Thinking in terms of just surviving today fails to think ahead of a promise for tomorrow. Lareau says, “The middle-class strategy of concerted cultivation appears to have greater promise of being capitalized into social profits than does the strategy of the accomplish of natural growth found in working-class and poor homes.” Applying a concerted effort to think and take steps towards the future and not just live in the “now,” pays back gains that can positively affect generations to come.

\[^{53}\text{Ibid., 244.}\]
CHAPTER 3

CULTURAL SOLUTIONS

Cultural solutions can be provided to the black community through a joint effort of structural opportunities by the government and participation in these opportunities by the black community. These structural opportunities are available in different forms; the military for example provides a pathway to middle class attainment because of the generous benefits that veterans receive such as funding for college, experience in high skilled jobs like computer sciences and engineering, and housing benefits that lead to the middle class marker of homeownership. The institution of the church also works as a form of bridging the gap between the culture of the black community and the structure of mainstream ideas. The final structural opportunity is charter schools in inner city areas, because they provide stability for the high rate of single-parent homes in inner cities. These structural opportunities add to the toolkits of the black community for example creating a larger amount of charter schools in inner city areas remedy the lack of support that is available to a child in the single-parent home or the military remedies the lack of middle class attainment in the black community for those who will form families. These toolkits themselves serve as cultural solutions to help the black community achieve progression.

Military – Access to the Middle Class

If middle class attainment is a vehicle for progression in the black community, being part of the United States Armed Services can provide a pathway to the middle class. The benefits that the military provides are outstanding and if the black
community increased its involvement in the military it could be strategically good for the community on a collective level. The military itself provides a form of traits of concerted cultivation in regards to access to educational benefits, high skilled jobs, and housing benefits. Structurally, the military serves as a platform for middle class attainment because the benefits of serving are so strong. When any person, including those in the black community can come from a rough background, inner city violence, or single-parent home, and serves in the military he or she will almost always be given a positive chance in life to succeed. The military can even change a person’s cultural outlook in a positive way as individuals in the military have the ability to travel the world and serve with people from different cultural backgrounds and social classes. The black community serving in the military can serve as a stepping stone towards middle class attainment.

In the previous Chapter it was discussed how the Nigerian community gains middle class attainment through the path of acquiring high skilled jobs, likewise the military itself provides a pathway through high skilled positions. High skilled jobs such as accounting, medical, computer sciences and engineering are available to service members in the military. If a young black male acquired one of these positions in the military, his skills would be easily transferable and help him gain employment in the private sector once his service to the military was completed. His training and experience will guarantee a high skilled position that pays well.

Accesses to these types of positions in the black community are challenging to attain because of the lack of structural opportunity available in the black community,
but the military provides a form of structural assistance. Without this structural assistance gaining access to these positions can be a challenge, first the individual must pay for the training or education to learn the skill then the individual must get over the barrier of getting employed to gain experience in the field. Both training and experience are barriers for the black community to gain access to these types of jobs. As discussed in Chapter 1, the black community has a high number of high school dropouts and college attainment is lower among African Americans than it is among other races. So receiving the training or education without the structural assistance of the military for these types of positions would be a challenge within itself because the black community is already disadvantaged when it comes to achieving educational attainment.

Even if an African American person has a good educational background, the structural opportunity for employment can be low because of the racial biases and attitudes against hiring African Americans. If experience in the position is attained through service in the military this enhances the structural opportunity for that individual to receive employment in the high skilled position outside of the military. Now the experience and educational background serve as a tool to overcome any social barrier in attainment to good jobs once out. This will more likely provide a boost in confidence that can be likened to the Nigerian experience discussed in Chapter 2, where the cultural attitude of attaining the positions feels like its deserved and demanding access to that market of high skilled jobs is a cultural norm.
Without the structural assistance in the military, debt would be incurred getting the training for these positions, but in the military an individual is paid to learn these positions. Now the individual has the high skilled position without the incurred debt of paying for the training. This bonus of not incurring debt places the individual at an advantage because he or she enters the workplace without the pressures of debt. In the black community where poverty is high, the negative effect of debt only reinforces that poverty because debt itself serves as a tool of restriction. Purchasing a home or vehicle to go to work in is more difficult with large amounts of debt. Attaining positions through the military helps to curb that debt and now individual has one less pressure to deal with.

If the black community attained these high skilled positions through the military, the positions themselves are easily transferable to the private or civilian sector once an individual has separated from the military. The reason that these positions are transferable is because of the demand for high skilled jobs in the marketplace. For example, a young African American male can have no experience in the computer sciences but serve in the military for 4 years as a computer technician or engineer and once that young man’s time is served, it would be fairly simple for him to find a job in the corporate or normal business sector executing his trade of engineering or computing. Therefore the military itself serves as a stepping stone for success in the American cultural system. An individual who acquired a high skilled position in the military will set him or herself up for middle class attainment in the class structure, as high skilled jobs tend to pay more which offers a better quality of life. It is important
that members of the black community who enter the military think ahead and fulfill positions in high skilled professions as it will provide mobility when the military career is over.

One of the greatest benefits for veterans in the arms services is the educational benefits that one receives in and after service in the military. Access to higher education is a challenge for the black community as the inner city is ridden with poverty and paying for higher education becomes a major obstacle for the community as a whole. Even though there are resources that provide aid for low-income students, many times that aid does not cover all of the cost associated with school and that aid is not provided for all. This systemically holds back the black community as a majority of people in the community come from inner city backgrounds that fall within the category of high poverty. For many, access to education is not an option. The military is an opportunity to fill these gaps of educational opportunity in the black community. Opportunities are available to attend college with 100% tuition assistance while actively serving in the military or receiving the GI Bill after service is completed.

100% tuition assistance is provided for those who serve active duty in the military.\(^1\) Active duty means that an individual works full time in the military and is not on a reserve status. This type of individual serving in the military will have 100% of their tuition paid for. So if an individual in the armed services works an

administrative type of job in the daytime, 9am through 5pm, they have the ability to attend evening classes or distance learning classes (classes online). The educational cost of tuition will be covered by the military. This means strategically an individual can serve 4 through 6 years in the military with no past college attainment and complete a 2 through 4 year degree with the expense of tuition covered. Now the individual will have job training, job experience, and higher education to enter the civilian workforce.

100% tuition assistance is one of the greatest opportunities for educational benefits that the military provides. Yes, it is a challenge working full time and attending college, but many Americans live with the task of working full time and attending school and most Americans don't have the opportunity to have that school paid for. In addition, the money is not deducted from the $40K that veterans will receive from the Montgomery GI Bill to attend school after active service; with the Bachelors degree completed, the Montgomery GI Bill can work towards a Masters Degree or Doctorate degree.

The Montgomery GI Bill is an educational opportunity/benefit that most veterans take advantage of. It provides up to 36 months of educational benefits (tuition assistance) once a service member has completed service in the military. This benefit is valid for up to ten years after the service members’ end of duty.² It works similarly to the 100% tuition assistance program but has additional benefits. The traditional

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Montgomery GI Bill has the post-9/11 benefits that also provide veterans with Monthly Housing Allowance. For example, a student taking classes in Washington D.C. would receive a monthly stipend of $1400.00 to $1900.00 monthly to assist with living expenses. Also with the post-9/11 benefits, veterans receive an annual book stipend to assist with supplies. Some veterans are able to transfer these benefits to dependents (spouse and children) if they have serve ten-plus years in the military. If a veteran has no interest in attending school, his/her child or spouse will be given the educational opportunity to not pay for school. The military provides excellent educational opportunities for those who have serve and continue to serve in the military.

Why is educational attainment so important to the black community? We discovered in Chapter 1 that African Americans who are college graduates do well compared to other groups in regards to employment. Black males who were college graduates had 86.2 percentile of being employed, where whites had an 88.3 percentile and Hispanics 80.2 percentile of being employed. There was only a difference in two percentage points between the black and white groups. Therefore education itself served somewhat as an equalizer in providing opportunity for employment. The military service is a good opportunity for the black community because it can fill that gap in educational attainment. Even if the parents themselves don’t want to take


4 Wilson, More than Just Race, 67.
advantage of completing their education, with enough time served the parents can transfer the benefits to their child and almost guarantee that the issue of funding will not be a deterrence in educational attainment of their children. Ultimately, educational attainment will be achieved in one form of the other, whether it is through the adult or the child.

With educational attainment equating job attainment, this could provide stability in the black community by creating a pathway to middle class attainment. The military’s structural opportunity of fostering an environment that acquiring a college education is achievable because the military will bear financial responsibility serves as a possible structural force itself to eradicate the limits of achieving middle class status for the black community.

Another benefit that the military provides to its veterans is the home loan guaranty. In Chapter 1, it was demonstrated that the government, specifically the FHA, guarantees the loans for certain lenders to the private banks. The military has a similar home loan guaranty, but the military program is even more beneficial and aggressive in providing a positive environment for the person borrowing from private banks. The Veteran Association (VA) home loan guaranty “guarantees a portion of the loan, enabling the lender to provide you with more favorable terms.” The favorable terms include an aggressive low interest. Furthermore, the veteran is not required to put any money down towards the principle loan amount and the borrower is not

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required to pay property mortgage insurance. These are some of the favorable terms out of a number of benefits that the VA home loan guaranty provides. This type of loan is a bonus for the banks because if the borrower defaults own the loan, the government will pay back most of the loan to the bank. This is a structural opportunity because now the banks look for veterans to provide home loans too.

Having a down payment is one of the biggest obstacles borrowers face when getting home loans. Historically, 10% of the total cost of the loan is required but this obstacle is erased for veterans as they are not required to put down money towards the purchase of the home. The property mortgage insurance is a payment that most borrowers have to pay the lending institutions for putting at least 20% down towards the principal of the loan. Veterans with the VA home loan guaranty are not required to pay this monthly bill; now veterans have extra income and therefore, have one less expense to worry about. Both of these benefits provide access to the housing market, a powerful tool of mobility as it builds equity in assets.

Homeownership is a marker for middle class attainment. When an individual owns a home, he or she has an asset that belongs to him or her and which only appreciates in value with time. They can choose to sell that asset when the value of the property appreciates or they can hold on to that asset and pass it down to the next generation creating a form of generational wealth. Either way, homeownership tends to be a win-win.

The conventional mortgage is 30 years. This means for 30 years the bank that lends the borrower the money holds the note for the home. However, the borrower
pays the bank a fixed rate towards the mortgage for 30 years. In these 30 years, that monthly payment does not increase, but the value of the property does increase. The homeowner has a monthly expense for his or her living quarters that will not change or increase with the local market’s rents. This alone provides stability as money can be invested in other areas of the person’s budget. In addition, if the value appreciates higher than the original purchase price of the home the person can sell the home and take the profit from the original purchase price and selling price. This became a big marker of the American Dream as people in the middle class look to own the home they live in. The additional value of homeownership is the possibility of transferring the home from parent to child. A child is now automatically reached a marker of middle class attainment as he or she has a hard asset that is worth money.

The military provides pathway to homeownership and removes some of the common barriers that most people face when trying to get homeownership, like 10% down payment or the extra monthly expense of paying property mortgage insurance. Poverty because of spatial location is a common theme in the black community but the structural opportunity provided by the military overcomes the damage of poverty. If members of the community had greater access to purchasing homes with so many benefits (low interest rates, no down payments, no property mortgage insurance payments) it would decrease the collective poverty. The transition to middle attainment would be easy because the community has a stronger economic base with less poverty.
All of the benefits associated with the military provide structural opportunities to gain middle class status. High skilled positions, education, and home-buying power would put any person in the position for middle class attainment. The military cultivates these opportunities by providing a pathway for attainment and removes barriers that may hold individuals back from attaining these goals. The military closes a gap between the individual and middle class, but this is done by design because of the opportunities that the military provides to its service members.

**Individual Capital**

The military has additional positives that add to the capital of the individual. These positives can create cultural norms in the black community, such as leadership abilities and cultural outlooks. The cultural outlook in the black community has always been one that is negative because the collective memory creates a type of ceiling of how big the world can really be. The military culture removes that cap of a limited outlook by the design of the military culture. First, a person from the black community who has been only exposed to an environment of poverty and mostly the same subgroup culture now is put into an environment where he or she must socialize with people from different backgrounds. The setting of diversity alone is positive as now that individual must not only navigate this new diverse setting but he or she must individually grow and adapt to the other cultures and races to successfully work as a team. In this process his or her outlook begins to change as his or her understanding of other cultures changes. The spatial relocation that military provides works with the improvement of an increasing cultural outlook, now that individual is taken out of the
social setting of poverty and has the opportunity to travel the world. The outlook that only saw poverty now sees opportunity. A shift in cultural understanding will now occur because the cultural lens has been widened; taking a black individual from the ghetto and showing how big the world is has an amazing affect on his or her own personal goals and abilities.

One of the core principles of the armed services is instilling leadership in its service members. Installing leadership abilities adds to the individual capital of its members. They now have a mindset of being a leader. First they are not easily misled and the way they carry themselves in the world will showcase confidence. In the black community where a culture of defeatism has taken place because of the collective memory of the black experience, installing the ideal of being a leader can be a powerful tool to help heal the culture’s past.

The military experience has the opportunity to add cultural positives to the black community. A different cultural outlook of how the world works would assist in the navigation of the American cultural system. Installing leadership on the individual level in the black community would assist with confidence that has been battered because of the culture of defeatism that is a product of negative collective memory. The military does not just add the structural opportunity but it adds in cultural positives as well.

**Access to Military**

For the black community, access to the military can be a challenge but there are some positives for the black community in gaining access to the military. One of the
greatest challenges is passing an Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) test to qualify for entry into the armed services; this exam tests reading comprehension, mathematics, and word knowledge. As the black community occupies mostly inner city areas and the inner city schools traditionally underperform in education due to low funding and other reasons. This test may create an obstacle for military recruitment, but on the positive side even if an individual is a high school dropout he or she can still gain entry into the military with a G.E.D and passing the G.E.D examination serves as practice for taking and passing the ASVAB exam.

Activity in the military for the black community is a real positive. The military can create opportunity for middle class attainment. The middle class attainment is created through the structural forces of military benefits such as education benefits, VA home loan guaranty, and high skilled positions that the military offers. But the military can also increase the cultural capital of the black community on the individual level, as cultural toolkits enhance leadership abilities and changing the cultural outlook of the world. The military helps the black community to acquire middle class status. Fortunately a survey conducted by the Veterans Association projected the minority veteran population shows that black participation in the next 30 years is expected to increase. In 2000 it was only about 10% but by 2035 it will be 16%. This is greatest projected increase amongst minority groups as Hispanics participation in the military is

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only projected to increase from 4% to 6% (see Figure 5). Black participation in the military is not the only solution to community’s problems like poverty but it does create advantages that can lead to middle class attainment. The greater the participation in the military for the black community, the greater the chances in increasing black progression because of the structural tools provided such as education, housing benefits and high skilled jobs. The cultural tools like leadership and confidence through the military add greatly to the cultural capital of the community as well. The mix of structural tools and cultural tools lead to the ultimate goal of middle class attainment. The black community itself must take advantage of this strategy in joining the military because the military provides a clear pathway to progression because of the accessibility of middle class attainment.

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Figure 5 Projected Minority Growth


Bridging the Gap

In Chapter 1, the friction between structure and culture was illustrated. That friction creates a gap in the mobility of the black community. How do you fill that gap? One method of filling that gap is using the church as a platform.

The black church has historically played an important role in the black community. It was one of the only institutions that has presented structural support for black people to exercise leadership. That tradition of respecting leadership roles in the black church is still present today. The black community has a foundation of trust for
the black church and what it represents. Some of the most powerful leaders in the history of the black community are voices heard from a religious background, such as Martin Luther King. Therefore has always been a type of reverence to those who stand behind some type of pulpit. The collective memory amongst blacks has been relatively positive towards the institution of the black church.

Closing that gap would take place in the church focusing more on “actual life” than focusing on matters of the “afterlife.” Rather than speaking solely about tithing or the pathway to heaven, the church could focus on the daily practices that affect the community like financial discipline. The black community trusts the foundation of the church, whereas the black community has distrust for the government structure as a whole, which we discussed in Chapter 1. Therefore the church is one of the only institutions that the black community will listen to. If the influence the church has over the black community was managed correctly, it could serve as a powerful tool in providing direction of navigating the American cultural system.

For example, if all blacks church’s spoke about financial discipline in a way that was more applicable to everyday life this would benefit the black community. Imagine if most churches in the black community spoke of paying down debt or methods of improving credit scores -- this could empower the community. Where these ideas such as financial discipline are common and popular to the mainstream, the gap occurs with blacks aligning themselves with these ideas because the mainstream in large parts represents the government structure that the community distrusts. However, not aligning themselves with these ideas only leaves them displaced and impoverished.
Access to this information is useful and accessible, but the mouthpiece in providing this information or tools is missing, at least in a form that the black community trusts.

The trust for the institution of the church in the black community could enable a greater participation of mainstream ideas that are fundamentally common in the American society this would add to the capital of the community therefore provide an addition to the cultural toolkit of the black community. The acceptance of this participation could only take place with the direction of the churches’ guidance, therefore serving as a structural tool. This strategy would require a shift in the message that the church delivers. The benefit of trust in the institution of the church avoids the problem of the distrust that the black community naturally has towards the government structure which is a cultural norm in the black community. Therefore the church could provide guidance aimed towards concerted cultivation and a bridge that fills that gap between the culture of the black community and the structure of the mainstream.

**Substitution of the Single-parent Home**

Moynihan believed that the deconstruction of the family structure in the black community would be greatest detriment to the culture as a whole. As discussed in Chapter 1, his prediction came true, as single-parent homes are a common factor in most black homes in the United States. Some form of a cultural solution is required to stop the growing rate of single-parent homes, because the effects of the single-parent home only repeat the generational cycle of poverty.
A recommended solution would be the creation of aggressive charter schools that are similar to the Harlem Children’s Zone charter school. This model provides a cultural substitution to the single-parent home as it requires heavy parent involvement in the child’s academics and assists with the rearing of the child from cradle to college. Only this form of involvement from a structural force can replace the lack of a two-parent home.

The Harlem Children’s Zone mission is to break the cycle of poverty in the Harlem neighborhoods. This program was inspired and operated by the visionary Geoffrey Canada. He applies a “whatever it takes” attitude to ensuring that generational poverty does not continue in the neighborhood of Harlem. He provides much needed structural support to the parents but also provides guidance on the rearing of a child. This program is important because it not only fights poverty but also fills the hole in the structure of the single-parent home.

The structure of the family is very important; children who come from single-parent homes miss out on the structural support of having two parents. The one parent alone tends to struggle because he or she is left with the responsibility of providing proper guidance in the direction of the child, providing for the daily well-being of the child, and maintaining other needs of the household. Attempting to accomplish all these tasks at once can create an environment of instability. The lack of structure in

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the single-parent home can lead to a child having a disadvantaged future, as there is always a hole in the family structure.

Compile the strain of a broken family structure with the challenge of growing up in poverty and the child is naturally disadvantaged than his or her peers from other cultures who are reared in an environment with two parents and economic stability. This cycle of single-parent homes in the black has now become a generational cycle that tends to repeat itself and only adds to the greater dysfunction of the community, because now the child of a single-parent home that was dysfunctional is now a parent of a child only repeating the cycle. The worst part of this cycle is the gap that is created because the parent from that history of the broken family now is impoverished, and worst stretched so thin lacking the support to raise a child properly and lead the child out of the cycle of poverty.

This is why a program like the Harlem Children Zone can be very beneficial in underprivileged neighborhoods. They provide the structure that the single parent needs to break the cycle of single-parent homes in the black community. The Harlem Children's Zone focuses on the development of the child but also focuses on the development of parent in guidance in parenting skills. This overall leads to positive results in the numbers of the program.

The development of the parent is cultivated from the prenatal stage of birth. The Harlem Children’s Zone has researched and discovered that developing a parent’s skill of raising a child from the earliest stages leads to educational success in a child life. Harlem Children’s Zone has a 9-week parenting workshop that is given to
expecting mothers. This workshop focuses skills such as providing verbal discipline over corporal punishment, and the benefits of reading to children.\(^9\) Now the mother is learning skills such as negotiating with her child versus giving physical or verbal directives. These skills are very important to the cultivation of the parent and the child relationship as both now have a skill that translates well in the navigation of life in general. Fostering the idea of reading to the child plays creates an environment where the parent takes more of an involvement in the child’s educational activities. The program alone provides afterschool care but also requires the strong parental involvement in the child’s day-to-day educational activities, but the Harlem Children’s Zone fosters this idea from the early stages of childbirth. Another example of the parental development are the 3 Year Journey workshops. These workshops provides instruction to parents once a week for several months about child development, language skills, and parenting skills. The development of the parent is very important as it builds the skills set of the parent in the rearing of a child.

A form of structural assistance is provided to the children in this program, specifically through the effort of providing guidance. For example each child after the fifth grade is provided with his or her own case manager, one case manager to each child, not in the form a normal public schools guidance counselor that has to deal with possibly hundreds of children. The case manager is a professional that is with the child from 5\(^{th}\) through 12\(^{th}\) grade. Additionally children take part in programs that cultivate

the individual capital of the child. For example, a student will participate in weekly discussions that focus on topics such as “lifetime decision making, identifying values, communication and critical thinking, resume building and interview techniques, social etiquette, conflict resolution and community service”10 This form of cultivation only adds to the development of a child because his or her individual capital and cultural logic will be strong. These structural ingredients are more likely to be missing from the single-parent household, as the parent is more easily stretched thin.

The structural support that the Harlem Children’s Zone provides to the development of the child manifests in educational achievement. Over 90% percent of the seniors from the Harlem Children’s Zone program were accepted to colleges in 2011. 93% of ninth graders passed the New York State Algebra Regents exam in 2008. All third grade students tested at or above the New State required level on their math exam.11 This shows that the success was a trend that began at a young age. This program really cultivates the child to achieve educational success in the future.

Why does this matter? The Harlem Children’s Zone is more of a tool showing the success that could happen in the inner city in regards to educational achievement if the proper structure and cultivation is in place helping the single-parent home. The single-parent home has now become a cultural norm in the black community and breaking this cycle is important. If the government took more of a role in providing a


similar type of educational structure in inner city areas, it would positively cultivate the black community and lead to a form of mobility because of the increase of educational attainment. More importantly it would fill the gap in the dysfunction of the black communities’ high percentage of single-parent homes. Ultimately if this program was established in most inner city communities it would be a solution to breaking the cycle of single-parent homes because educational attainment equates to stable job attainment and job attainment would lead to middle class attainment.

**Conclusion**

The idea of progression in the black community is something that has to come through actions taken by structural and cultural forces. In Chapter 1, the role of the structure and the culture was examined and how the friction between them created dysfunction. The dysfunction became cultural behavioral traits that served as a culture in action. The suppressive actions by the structure have harmed the culture so much that now the culture has created negative cultural norms that harm the community.

Chapter 2 uses the culture of Nigerian community in the United States to show that concerted cultivation can lead to middle class attainment. The Nigerian culture in the United States followed specific traits from concerted cultivation that led to mobility in the community to attain a higher social class than the black community. The community was cultivated by different ideas such as thinking ahead, spatial location, and intervention in institutional settings. These methods combined provide cultivation in the Nigerian community that allows them to succeed in the American cultural system. If these methods are applied to the black community a higher rate of mobility
would be achieved. For example if the black culture aligned itself more with attaining high skilled positions; middle class social status would be easier to acquire and maintain. This Chapter highlighted that a shift in cultural actions can lead to a greater success in the navigation of the American cultural system.

In the final Chapter, the idea of cultural solutions was applied. The first one was access to middle class in the black community. The solution was the black community having greater participation in the Armed Services because of the excellent benefits that the military provides, access to educational financing, home financing and access to training and experience in high skilled positions. The military provides a pathway to almost guarantee middle class attainment as good jobs, education, and homeownership are all markers of the middle class. The second solution was bridging the gap between culture and structure; through the intervention of the church. The church could be used as a tool that provides the culture access to mainstream ideas that are aligned with the structure. The final solution was creating more charter schools like the Harlem Children’s Zone in inner city environments, the importance of these charter schools is fixing the dysfunction in the black family structure.

This thesis has shown that the dysfunction in the black community is a product of government doing, but ultimately the culture itself bears a role in its social placement of not seeing progression. The idea of progression is achievable because other groups such as the Nigerian community in the United States that face many barriers similar to the black community achieve middle class attainment collectively. Therefore achievement of middle class attainment is possible for the black community
as well, but cultural norms and attitudes must be changed to achieve progression. These dysfunctions of the black community can be shifted through strategy of taking advantage of structural opportunities that serve as cultural solutions such as the military. But ultimately the greatest remedy for the community is middle class attainment as the cultural toolkit of generations will be elevated and the negative cultural norms and attitudes will most likely disappear because they are not aligned with middle class social placement. The progression that the black community can achieve must be done with structural assistance from the government but the responsibility should be placed upon the black community as well as a pathway to progression is possible through an applied strategy.
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