CIVIC IDENTITY, PUBLIC EDUCATION, AND THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY IN INDIANAPOLIS: MENDING THE FRACTURE

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INTRODUCTION

...People were being detained for more than 24 hours without seeing a commissioner [they] were being held illegally. Knowing all of this, I was still not prepared for what I saw when I arrived. The small concrete booking cells were filled with hundreds of people, most with more than ten people per cell. . . . Many had not been able to reach a family member by phone. . . . Not only had these women been held for two days and two nights without any sort of formal booking, but almost none of them had actually been charged with anything. (Johnson, 2015)

This scene recounted by a public defender in Baltimore, Maryland, during recent unrest over the untimely murder of Freddie Gray, is disturbingly similar to scenes recalled in rural Mississippi throughout the 1960s; missing the reverberation of voices singing, *"On our way to victory, We shall not be moved, We're on our way to victory, We shall not be moved."* The grandchildren of the young women and men who were involved in

organizations such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), are the contemporaries of those jailed for participating in what some have deemed uncivil disobedience. The most significant difference between those jailed is the 54 years that have elapsed between their false imprisonment, revealing the relevance of historical context to the reason for and modes of civic engagement.

Much of the extant research on civic engagement and civic identity failed to consider the impact of race and time on the expressions of civic behavior. Verba and Nie (1972) have been credited with expanding the notion of civic engagement beyond myopic constructs, such as voting patterns that dominated scholarly work on topic. These scholars challenged the common narrative of political participation as the only measure of civic engagement. In contrast to previous studies, Verba and Nie (1972) found four modes of civic engagement that included non-electoral activities such as communal activity and particularized contacting in addition to civic activities centered on campaigning and voting.

In this qualitative study we investigate how relational groups of African-American community members in Indianapolis understand their sense of civic identity, its unique formation, and its relation to contemporary public education. Participant responses to interview and focus group questions related to their historical sense of the connection between public education and civil society provide the point of departure for an investigation in civic literacy beyond standardized measures, voting data, and political party membership. The development of new theoretical understandings of civic engagement within the local African-American community—grounded in data collected from those who have exhibited a commitment to civic engagement in that community—holds the promise of more nuanced conceptions of historical and contemporary civic relations from the perspective of citizens outside of the dominant social order. Our hope here lies in moving beyond deficit narratives and reflecting modes of engagement that may be missed in more traditional studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Through the years the idea of civic engagement has captured the scholarly attention of political and social scientists (Anderson, 1988; Beyerlein & Hipp, 2013; Payne & Strickland, 2008; Costa & Kahn, 2003; Watts & Flanagan, 2007; Hahn, 2003). The definitions of civic engagement are as diverse as the perspectives of scholars who have devoted attention to the phenomenon (Adler & Goggin, 2005). Peter Levine (2007), Philosophy scholar and Director of the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), reviewed 10 different conceptualizations of civic engagement and observed variations among the definitions that include:
- Characteristics of citizenship (deliberating, advocating),
- Scale (local, national, or global),
- Emphasis on civil rights versus civil responsibility,
- Emphasis on significant relationships and their dynamics, and
- Manifestations and outcomes.

Ehrlich (2000), offered a definition of civic engagement most relevant to the present study:

> Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting quality of life in a community, both through political and non-political processes (p. vi).

Research supports Erlrich's argument that civic engagement involves political and non-political activity. Ehrlich's definition makes assumptions that are well supported by the empirical and theoretical literature:

1. Civic engagement is contingent on some kind of knowledge
2. Civic engagement involves action of some kind
3. Civic engagement is significantly shaped by connection to community and others belonging to that community.

African-American Civic Engagement

The inequality serves as a unifying agent within the African-American community; the similarities in their daily experiences engender trust that plays an important role in civic engagement (Uslaner & Brown, 2005). According to King (2010), blacks in America have engaged in politics in various ways; they were precluded from equal participation in the American democratic society. Consequently, the shared social marginalization forced African Americans to empower themselves within their communities, so they could challenge the "political institutions" that served to maintain hegemony by denying them rights enjoyed by white Americans.

Historian Steven Hahn (2003) shares examples dating back to the early 1800s, of ways that enslaved people asserted themselves as political beings to change and challenge the institutions that denied them equal participation. For instance, Hahn described African-American churches as a mobilizing and unifying agent that created a network of communication with an expansive geographic reach, thus making the African-American church a political institution. These alternate and informal political institutions were shielded from the oppressive influence the slaves experienced most of the time. Work by Melissa Victoria Harris-Lacewell (2010), builds on the theme of the communal nature of civic participation among African Americans. In *Barbershops, Bibles and BET,* Harris-Lacewell offers more contemporary examples of how seemingly ordinary spaces are transformed into political institutions because, in those spaces, African Americans interact in ways that often shape political attitudes; she asserts:

> To more fully appreciate the political thought and action of African Americans, it is imperative to understand that these interactions are more than social. They are the spaces where African Americans jointly develop understandings of their collective interests and create strategies to navigate the complex political world (p. 1).

There is also a large body of work that examines political socialization of black children, thinking through the role racial discrimination and black institutions play in developing their civic engagement capacity.

Civic Identity

"Researchers of adolescent development identify the transition into an active and contributing citizen as an important developmental marker of adulthood" (Mahatmya & Lohman, 2012, p. 449). One's civic identity is shaped by "a variety of sources, including existing constructions of ethnicity, race, gender, and social class" that influences the way one sees him or herself in the world and makes meaning of it (Rubin, 2007, p. 450). Therefore, civic engagement and the variety of activities and outcomes it encompasses cannot be fully understood without some discussion of the development of a civic identity. Many scholars have focused on the diverse experiences that influence the formation of an individual's civic identity (Atkins & Hart, 2003; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997; Rubin, 2007). One study by Mahatmya and Logan (2012) explored the impact of childhood neighborhood characteristics, family structure changes and social capital on the civic engagement behavior during early adulthood. The scholars found that higher levels of social capital acquired by students during childhood positively influenced civic behavior exhibited as adults.

Some scholars have attributed the development of civic identity to formal structures, such as schooling and community service (Galston, 2001). Other scholars have acknowledged more informal influences including interactions with "civic agents" such as police and teachers (Rubin, 2007) and interactions with friends (Putnam, 1996). According to Rubin (2007), "students have civic experiences on a daily basis, both within schools and beyond, that shape their understanding of what it means to be American citizens and participants in the civic life of a democracy. These experiences may differ sharply depending upon how students are situated socially, historically, and culturally" (p. 451).

The worlds of politics and education have historically overlapped for African Americans. One needs look no further than the historical African-American struggle for equal citizenship and educational opportunities in the United States as evidence. An examination of these struggles reveals a convergence of each of the aforementioned domains of civic engagement: community service, collective action, political involvement, and social change. Few studies have examined the process of development of civic identity and the subsequent civic engagement among educational leaders. Farmer (2006) explored the role of social organization and diversity of friends on the involvement on the civic engagement of African-American men. This study found that involvement with church organizations was less influential over the civic engagement than participation in nonreligious organizations.

Few studies have examined the process of development of civic identity and the subsequent civic engagement among educational leaders. This void in the literature limits our understanding of the experiences that motivate individuals to be committed to education reform in communities that suffer from gross inequalities. The present study aims to contribute to this body of literature.

METHOD

A grounded-theory approach guided the design of this study and provides the opportunity for theory-building emergent from the data collected as opposed to testing hypotheses or confirming existing theoretical frames. As little is presently known about how members of the African-American community of Indianapolis have come to understand their sense of civic identity and, further, how that understanding guides their commitments to education reform in the city, individuals were selected who have publicly exhibited civic behaviors through their careers and/or participation in community organizations tackling educational issues. As this study investigates how members of the African-American community of Indianapolis understand the formation of their civic identity and its relation to contemporary education discourse, research questions included: *What experiences influenced your views on civic responsibility? In what ways do you think public education plays a role in civil society? What do you need to know to engage effectively on issues related to the politics of education reform?* and, *What particular issues are important for the African-American community in Indianapolis as related to public education and civil society?*

From the onset, we as researchers shared an understanding of the importance of fluidity and flexibility throughout this investigation. Equally important is the involvement of the research participants in the design and implementation of the study that serves to empower participants and produce rich data (Lather, 1986). During the conceptualization of this undertaking, the researchers decided to conduct one-on-one interviews with participants as the primary data source. However, what emerged is a data collection strategy we have found to be unique, *relational groups*, a change initiated by one of our program participants. The first participant approached to be involved in the study suggested to the investigator that a third person, a friend with similar experiences in the Indianapolis Public School system, join the conversation. Borrowing from tenets of postcritical ethnography, we embraced the role of the participant as collaborator in the research design and honored the request (Hytten, 2004). The second participant, upon being asked to join the study, also asked if similarly situated friends could join the group. Subsequently, we asked the other participants if there was a friend or other significant other that should join the conversation, thus taking on both a snowball sampling and an emergent methodological approach. The relational groups consisted of two or three participants who belonged to the same generation and worked closely together on issues related to education reform in Indianapolis.

We believed the relational groups were distinct from focus groups because of their size and the closeness of the personal and working relationships of the participant in each group. Similar to focus groups, the relational groups provided a more conversational, open dialogue allowing participants to prompt one another and either confirm, modify, or reject perceptions of shared experiences. However, the personal connection of the participants in each group set them apart from focus groups. There was an intimacy among the participants in each group similar to that explored by Bjørnholt and Farstad (2014) that offered promising benefits to

interviewing couples together in the field of family research. Most relevant to this study is the premise that this interviewing method provides participants with a "common reflective space that resulted in the production of rich data" (p. 15). Bjørnholt and Farstad argue the richness of data can be contributed in part to the nuances of data material revealed by individuals with varying perspectives of the same phenomenon, which in this study is involvement in education reform in Indianapolis. While there are fundamental differences between the dynamics of married couples compared to the relationship between participants in this study, an important similarity is the trust inherent to both types of relationships.

Data Analysis

A thematic analysis of the relational groups was conducted utilizing the constant comparative method (Glaser, Strauss, & Strutzel, 1968; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in which information is coded and sorted into categories, and then additional information is compared to and integrated with the emerging categories. NVIVO9 © qualitative research software was utilized for coding of themes and reporting prevalence of codes and themes for use in analysis. Researchers coding and analyzing data met intermittently during coding to discuss the relationships among codes, to compare memos, and to combine similar codes and memos into broader patterns or themes (Creswell, 2012).

Sampling

Purposeful sampling methods were used to select individual cases that would enable us to gain an in-depth understanding of civic engagement among African Americans in Indianapolis, primarily intensity sampling (Patton, 2005). Intensity samples include information-rich cases that exhibit strong examples of the phenomenon we chose to study—civic engagement—and required selection based on some prior information to identify an appropriate pool of participants (Patton, 2005). In the present study, prior knowledge of individuals who have been involved in educational reform discussions in Indianapolis was essential to identify a pool of participants who have exhibited exemplary civic engagement around educational issues (Patton, 2005).

Participants

Participants, who included members of the Indianapolis African-American community, were selected based on their involvement in public conversations regarding education in the city. Each participant at one time represented the NAACP Education Working Group, The Urban League, Indianapolis Public Schools, and/or faith-based organizations focusing on the education of African-American young people. These individuals were asked to participate because they are deemed by the researchers to exhibit exemplary civic engagement in the community. Emerging organically as part of the relational group strategy, the participants were interviewed in generational groups with each representing an age category: Emerging (30-40), Middle (41-60), and Elder (61-80).

FINDINGS

Contrary to scholar William Galston's (2001) suggestion that traditional, classroom-based civic education should be the focus of efforts to raise political knowledge and promote civic engagement, findings from this study suggest the formation of the civic identities of African Americans active in education reform efforts in Indianapolis were shaped by knowledge acquired outside formal curriculum. For these education activists, civic education or knowledge was transmitted through their families, communities, and own personal experiences inside and outside school. Consequently, their civic identities became firmly grounded in essential lessons learned at young ages that ultimately guided the participants' occupational choices and civic behavior. Our findings illuminate: the importance of *generational*, *community.* and *experiential* knowledge; the essential lessons acquired that ultimately guided the participants' occupational choices and civic behavior; and their perceptions of a fracture in civic engagement of youth today.

Sources and Types of Civic Knowledge

According to Galston (2001) civic knowledge is important because it helps citizens understand the role of individuals and groups in democratic society, political institutions and processes, and the importance of political participation. Traditionally, formal education has transmitted such knowledge through courses centered on topics including the U.S. Constitution, functions of the branches of government, and political due processes. While there is general agreement about the importance of civic knowledge, there has been some debate about the utility of school curriculum in providing all knowledge deemed essential for civic engagement. On one hand, scholars such as Butts (1980) argue that schools have a unique role in educating for citizenship that includes: "1) providing continuing study of and commitment to the value of claims of political democracy; 2) imparting realistic and scholarly political knowledge; 3) teaching participation skills required for the maintenance and improvement of the democratic political system" (p. 126). However, critics of this viewpoint, such as Rubin (2007) contend more informal structures and interactions impart that same knowledge within marginalized communities.

Responses from the participants in the present study lends merit to Rubin's claim; their civic identities and subsequent civic engagement were more strongly influenced by knowledge transmitted by their families (generational knowledge), community networks (community knowledge), and own personal experiences (experiential knowledge).

Generational knowledge. All of the participants in the study referred to the role that family played in imparting knowledge and values that guided their personal, educational and civic lives. For example, one participant from the Middle relational group shared:

> The family was always about, taught you have a black tax to pay. Taxes that you have to work harder. Do better. Be smarter just to be considered like an average white person. So I always worked. that is what I was taught. You have to work harder, be smarter and stronger.

After noting the work ethic instilled in him by his parents, this participant went on to describe the civic lessons he learned through his father's service to the community that earned him a key to his city after his death:

> His focus was keeping them out of trouble, off the streets and in school. . . . And so in my family, that has been the norm. You engage yourself in your community. You make things better but mostly work with the youth.

A participant from the same relational group shared that her mother modeled the importance of giving back to the African-American community through her profession:

> My mother was a counselor at Children's Bureau and the Juvenile Center. She would come home with these stories and I was like 'how can you deal with that?' I mean that is so sad and it is heartbreaking, how do you do that? And then I found myself getting involved with families in the Marion County Juvenile System that I'm working with and the Children's Bureau. It was so funny. When I first started working at the Girl's Prison, and she worked with those kind of kids, too.

This admission also exposes the influence of a parent's occupation on the career choices of their children.

Several participants in all relational groups spoke of the role their grandparents played in shaping their understanding of African-American history and the dynamics within the African-American community in the state. One participant from the Emerging relational group recalled:

> What my grandmother always talked about was the fact that half-assed Negroes in this state, because what happened is that folks were fleeing Jim Crow. That when they crossed the Ohio River and came into Indiana, she always said the Mason Dixon line that Indiana was the middle finger of the Mason Dixon line [laughs]. . . . But she always talked about that Indiana was really a northern southern state. But folks who were really fleeing from hardcore like engrained Jim Crow, they got to Indiana and it wasn't perfect and it wasn't great but it was so much better than where they were. They just kind of settled.

Community knowledge. Across our conversations, the lines between family and community were often blurred; given the dynamics of racial segregation, families often lived within close proximity to each other and closely connected networks developed. A participant from the Emerging relational group described this tendency:

> I am a long time or a lifelong resident of the near eastside of Indianapolis. I grew up three blocks east of Sherman. Lived there my whole life. At one point my grandparents, parents, aunt and uncle, everybody was on the same street. And so I attended IPS [Indianapolis Public Schools] schools from kindergarten through 12th grade. My kids have been in IPS and always public schools, so either IPS or charter schools. I have a strong sense of community related to that place and although I'm no longer on that particular street, I'm three minutes away.

This statement describes how family roots within the community bolstered the sense of community felt by the participants in the present study. A strong sense of community engendered the idea of community responsibility within African-American communities in Indianapolis. Participants from the Elder and Middle relational groups both reported that they learned the importance of using formal education to give back and to empower the African-American community at large to address issues of educational inequality. Participants acquired this knowledge by observing the behavior of leaders who lived in their neighborhoods. A member of the Elder relational group described the way a local African-American attorney, Frank Beckwith, assumed a leadership role in bringing about changes in racist educational policies like busing through litigation:

> No black person who lived in Indianapolis, certainly those with high educational levels, could exist in this community without knowing these things. The fact that he took it up or he was finally able to take it up because of his educational background, his sensitivity to it. He was not the only person who had similar reactions to the situation that we all were living with. But he had risen to the position, education and politically, where he could use what he knew.

This Elder uses Mr. Beckwith as an example of the ways that the highly educated people became an asset to the communities in which they lived because they used their educational training to improve the conditions of their neighbors:

> They would lead us in many ways. The fact that they usually had businesses or professions but we all lived in the same community. Right down the street was Dr. So and So—right over here. Everybody in the black community was affected by the segregation. Everyone knew something about somebody who had a little bit more money. He wasn't something exceptional beyond his profession. He was just somebody, he was our neighbor.

The case of Beckwith also provides an example of the ways that communities united to solve problems experienced by African Americans in urban settings such as Indianapolis. One participant from the Middle relational group recalled his early experiences with civic engagement as he witnessed how the community also banded together to promote voting within his neighborhood:

> Civic engagement? I have always been involved. I think it is instilled in me through my parents. They helped run voting stations and all that throughout my life. I remember in grade school the coolest thing to happen was the day before elections when they started rolling in these machines that they voted on that sounded like trains because they were on these big iron casters. And over the marble floors it just sounded like there were trains moving in. . . . They were doing the whole thing at that time. Making food. The precinct would hire people to make food. They would make food for the poll workers and it would be hot, smoking what you would like for a 12-hour day.

Another participant suggested the communities also played a role in alleviating some financial stress that African Americans were forced to endure because of racially discriminatory practices in hiring and compensation:

The main guiding thing was economics. We had to have so much money, whatever it was. I don't know how he managed to feed and clothe and house us off of $25 a week. He was always taking extra jobs. He had friends that also were in the same boat so they could get together and do things collectively and divide up the resources in whatever way possible.

A sense of place, leadership, and the ways in which the community rallied together in response to structural constraints characterize the ways in which the relational groups responded.

Experiential knowledge. Daily experiences with teachers, police, and other civic agents have been found to be important in shaping the civic identities of young people from socioeconomically marginalized groups (Rubin, 2007). This held true for the participants in our study. Many of our participants described knowledge imparted to them through their educational experiences, in effect shaping their civic identities.

For example, participants from both the Elder and Middle generational groups learned the value that their teachers placed on teaching students about black history. Teachers were committed to imparting valuable cultural knowledge on the students. One participant, a graduate of Crispus Attucks High School described the teachers of her school as those "who had their PhDs from black colleges. They were our teachers. So we had the best of the best. In a way they gave us more than they thought they were giving us." During the relational group interview, her classmate explained that the teachers gave the students the gift of black pride. She reflected on a teacher who created a black history club to expose his students to knowledge they would not have gained through the mainstream curriculum:

> He had a PhD in history. He had the after-school black history club. We couldn't do it on school time. If you remember [stated to classmate], we met after school for an hour. That is where I got the knowledge and the interest in black history. When he started telling us how many things we used the sewing machine and so many things were invented by black people then I started looking it up myself. He brought us so much information that we used to wonder how that little black man could have all that knowledge that he was imparting in us. This was after he taught American and European history in the classroom. The black history thing was after school because it was not a part of the curriculum. He did that because he wanted to. But it opened doors and minds for us that are with us until this day.

Essential Lessons

Persistence of inequality and racism.
The fact that my mom was graduated from Crispus Attucks in 1939 and we had a conversation when I was older about bussing and how that related to education and access in Indianapolis. And she said no, bussing is not new. I'm like, 'excuse me?' New to me!

In discussing civic knowledge and education, a general theme was dominant—the persistence of racially constructed inequity. All relational groups addressed this specific component of understanding the civic life of African Americans in Indianapolis; although, certainly, the historical context of these recollections does matter. Casual conversations between our study participants and members of their families exposed the longevity

of racist policies that impacted the African-American community in Indianapolis, such as bussing as part of a segregated school system.

One participant who attended IPS schools in the 1930s noted that students made the best of unjust circumstances created by the racist underpinnings of the educational policies that required busing. She stated, "A crowd of us would be walking together and having fun if it was cold, throwing snowballs, it didn't seem like that much hardship until we would sit down and our parents would talk about it and that is how the movement got started." This participant stressed the importance of generational transmission of knowledge, while emphasizing the role of informal and familial networks in negotiating both the civic constraints of the time and strategies of resistance and resilience. "The movement" referenced here relates to the strategies the community had to employ to get their children safely to school and subsequent organizing around appeals to the state for transportation support. Another participant added, "we knew there was racism because our parents talked about it. My mother would come home from doing housework and talk about what she would experience." But these civic lessons were also cautionary and strategic. For example, one male participant from the civil rights generational group shared:

> We knew about racism when we came in contact with it. My mother emphasized don't look them in the eye. Yes sir. No sir. If you are confronted by the police and all of that. I had those type of skills. Always smile. All those kind of things were embedded in me.

In addition, a female participant noted how this approach continues on in her adult life:

> They had information that they imparted to us that we could not have gotten anywhere else. I have been able to pass some of that on to my kids and my grandchildren.

> **Awareness of the African-American condition.**
> *It was that classic: Teach one, reach one. You have to.*

Central to participants' understanding of the civic life of African Americans in Indianapolis—regardless of generational group—was a deep attention to the conditions of the larger community both in contemporary and historical terms. Participants gained knowledge and developed values that seem to be fundamental to civic engagement related to education in the African-American community in Indianapolis. Nearly all participants referenced the role that their families played in the acquisition of that knowledge and a broader sense of community engagement. One noted:

> And so in my family, that has been the norm. You engage yourself in your community. You make things better but mostly work with the youth. . . . It has always been in my family. You work and engage civically and in education. Whether it is the public school system, Catholic school system, whatever.

Influences ranged the gamut of political activism, from the Indiana Black Panther Party (BPP), to Nation of Islam and Malcolm X, to the broader Civil Rights Movement. A participant clearly draws the connection: "My father also was a big fan of Malcolm X. So I was taught from early that you must do things in your community. You must because you come from a position that you are able to do that. You must do that." Another participant recalled the influence of the BPP in her early experience with civic engagement around education:

> And so still in high school. . . trying to find a way to be radical, I picketed our school librarian. I was picketing because she didn't carry the Black Panther newspaper. It is so hilarious. Then I was engaging civically with education but then I was going towards radical education. Be more global or universal. What is going on in the world? So then I really, I said I have to step it up. So I was in junior high school . . . . I got the first afro for a woman in the city.

She obviously felt empowered by the outreach of the Black Panther Party and learned from them the importance of education for global citizenship. She went on to describe how this belief continued to guide her subsequent personal and professional lives:

> I go off to college, Knoxville College. I met my first husband and he was from New York and they are very much involved in black empowerment. His brother was a captain in the Black Panther Party in Harlem. So I got very involved in upstate New York radicalism. I worked with a lot of people, particularly some Jewish communities, the Panther Party, Silver Panthers . . . I'm being radical. It has always been in my family. You work and engage civically and in education. Whether it is the public school system, Catholic school system, whatever. In my case, global education. Learning about what is going on in the world. My thing was the struggles of other people and other countries and the whole like that. So I teach my kids and grandkids the same thing.

This participant's observations describe the way that community, generational, and experiential knowledge interacted to shape the development of her civic identity and guide her subsequent involvement in education reform efforts and community development.

Participants noted other examples of ways they learned civic lessons primarily from example. Observing how their elders responded to the challenges in their community proved to be the strongest teacher. Emphasizing the connection between self-knowledge and community knowledge, one participant reflected:

> Well, growing up I went to a black elementary school. I went to a black middle school. I went to an all-black high school. So there was always, even in the South, the need to be self-knowing.

However, each family took up different strategies for working with the youth of their communities. One Elder emphasized practical engagement with both school and work structures:

My grandmother, her thing was teaching. She was teaching young women how to be beauticians. They could open up their own shop and be self- sufficient. She had an 8th grade education [but she was] smart, smart, smart. So was always educating: learn, go to school, do this, get a skill, help your family, help your community. So it was that classic: Teach one, reach one. You have to. Upward mighty race. You have to."

While another supplemented those structures with extracurricular programs of his own:

As far as civic, my father worked with youth in the neighborhoods. Now he always had drill teams. I have some newspaper articles about that. He would gather kids, we had a beauty shop. So we were able to help other families. My father started this drill team and their motto was we would rather drill than steal.

Stories like these ran through each of the participants' responses. Older generations took great care in creating access to opportunity for the next generation. Two further examples exemplify the approach:

When I moved here permanently in '63, my grandfather, who was the first black bail bondsman in the state of Indiana, his focus was making opportunities for black folks in the field of insurance. I had the same thing. You must engage in your community. My dad and his barbershop, I can remember black men, white men and women apprenticing in his barber shop so they could go out and open their own shops.

Confidence and high expectations.
I am so secure in my blackness today because my blackness was made secure from the very beginning.

Participants from the Middle generational group frequently expressed the importance that black pride played in developing their self-confidence. One participant shared, "I grew up with you are capable of anything and to this day in my body and my soul, I feel no limits. I never have. . . . What our parents did for us, we had confidence. They made sure we had confidence. We had to. So we didn't have any problem stepping out there doing stuff because we knew you could do it. You better do it." This sentiment demonstrates parents were aware of the importance of setting high standards for their children. Confidence provided a buffer that was essential to the success for blacks who encountered oppression in various forms on a daily basis. Participant stories reflect that civic and racial identity were interconnected and the result of both school and community-based resources. The role of Crispus Attucks High School—the segregated secondary school opened in 1927—cannot be overemphasized but continually the curriculum is presented as supplementing lessons from families and other organizations in the city.

The Civic Fracture

As one might expect, the role and expression of civic engagement has evolved over time. Dalton (2000) examined the relationship between citizen attitudes and civic behavior in the aggregate and noted generational differences in attitudes and values that create a divergence in political thoughts and behavior.

He observed:

> Older generations remain more likely to emphasize traditional material social goals such as economic well-being, social security, law and order, religious values and a strong national defense. Having grown up in an environment in which these goals seem relatively assured, the young are shifting their attention towards post-material goals of self-expression, personal freedom, social equality, self-fulfillment and maintaining the quality of life. (p. 917)

For example, one participant from the Middle generational group emphasized the importance of working within the educational system to bring about educational equity as she described addressing the problem of inequitable punishment in her school:

> I saw that the white teachers did not seem to embrace our children based upon what I'm used to. So as a Dean of Students, I took my role as not to punish the kids. My role was to help *educate the teachers* [participant's emphasis]. So I kind of started doing that as I was working with the students but I found that was a hard nut to crack. It really showed me the institutional problems in education because when I would try to work with the principals, after I left the black principal and it was a white principal at [another school], he seemed not to get it. And so I would write proposals and then finally I wrote him up and sent it to the central office. . . . I just felt like I said, my mother raised me to. You see something wrong you make it known. You do. Sometimes I knew. I wrote a large proposal on alternatives to suspensions and that was back in 1982. I got some teachers onboard with it. But the principal wouldn't move on it. So like I said, I sent a letter about him downtown. So the next year, they came out to interview the staff from downtown and he got removed.

A participant from the Emerging relational group similarly acknowledged becoming a teacher to address another problem he experienced as a student in the educational system—the invisibility of some African-American students, exacerbated by low expectations held by teachers for their academic achievement:

> Basically, I got passed from one teacher to the other with the idea of you don't scare me or tear up my classroom then I'm not going to fail you and have to deal with you for another year. . . . it wasn't until I walked into a speech class, that this guy heard my voice before he saw the poor kid. Before he thought about the black kid. It was the voice and he was a speech coach and he knew he could do something with that. I did nothing short of harassment like he followed me from class to class and called my mom, my grandmother. Until I was harassed into joining the speech team. It was at that point that I finally found something that I was good at. That really changed everything. He and his wife had me tested and that is when we really discovered that I had a learning disability but they hid it. They kept it out of my academic records because tracking was so profound at that time that if it had been common knowledge that I had this learning disability, I wouldn't have been allowed to have taken any college prep classes. . . . So I decided I wanted to be a teacher because one saved me.

Though there appears to be some consensus in the political thought, the participants in this study suggest that a fracture has occurred in the sources of knowledge participants draw on to inform their civic agendas. The

most glaring difference between the groups is the near absence of the transmission of generational knowledge regarding the importance of education. For example, the under-educated parents of the Middle generational group often discussed and reinforced expectations for educational attainment. One such participant, who was the first in her family to attend college, expressed:

> I grew up with 'you are capable of anything' and to this day in my body and my soul, I feel no limits. I never have. I feel absolutely no limits. That is the way my body and mind operate. So I'm always just striving for the whole world.

In contrast, a participant from the Emerging generational group shared:

> I didn't think about college any other way. . . . It was just not a conversation. I was in all college prep classes when I was in high school but no one in my family had gone to college. So people kept talking about it like it was this abstract thing but it was no different for me than people talking about going to the moon.

In hearing the contrast in these stories across generational groups, we are left with lingering questions around what changed. Dalton's (2000) characterization of shifting to "post-material" goals does not seem to hold as continued inequity in the city in regards to race remains.

Nearly each participant in our study offered valuable perspectives on the current state of civic engagement within the African-American community in Indianapolis and sources of fracture. Their observations also illuminate changes in *generational, community,* and *experiential knowledge* over time, which has had negative impact on civic engagement among youth today.

One participant from the Elder relational group suggested the breakdown in the relationship between African-American churches and youth has contributed to the lack of youth civic engagement:

> We talk about influence of churches and we have skated around with it. But you can drive around this city, you see churches everywhere. But there seems to be a lack of a universal approach to the children coming from all the churches.

The other participant of this relational group echoed that sentiment:

> [Churches] alienate people and they don't tell those young people the things that are fundamental. They are more intent on identifying with this or that. Unfortunately, there are some things that are universally accepted throughout humanity. Our kids need to know this is the way it is supposed to be everywhere. Call yourself what you want to call yourself but you've got to always permeate your humanity with those ideas which are fundamentally and universally accepted by humanity. I think that is where we are missing the boat.

A participant in one of the Middle relational groups pointed to a fracture in family structure that has resulted in low parent engagement and civic engagement among youth today:

> The parents that have to become engaged. When the parents become engaged things turn around. Because it is not all on the school.

However in the absence of parental involvement, this participant went on to say that the community should step up, as in generations past:

> The community is where these different things that we talked about earlier, if you can ever get some of those folks it doesn't really have to be the parents. It can be the community raising the child. But then we talked about other folks being engaged. Not parents because if the parents aren't engaged, it is going to be folks who are serving and giving and if we don't teach people how to serve and give, we are going to wear ourselves out and become less effective than we are now.

A member of the Emerging relational group suggested that socioeconomic and political marginalization negatively impacts youth inclination towards civic engagement:

> I think that there is a lack of knowledge in terms of how things work but if you couple that with like I don't know how to explain it. It's almost like a feeling that certain communities don't matter. So if you are a person who is disenfranchised where the system has never worked for you and maybe never even worked for your parents or grandparents, then what is the point in educating yourself about the civic engagement or taking steps to become more engaged when you don't feel like ultimately your voice will matter anyway?

However, conversations with this study's participants—representing cross-generational perspectives of African Americans in specific—suggest more of a convergence in the political thoughts and behaviors than Dalton suggests.

DISCUSSION

Conversations with the educational activists in our study revealed useful information regarding the precursors to, expression of, and barriers to civic engagement among members of the African-American community in Indianapolis. Our hope remains that these stories might guide efforts to address the civic engagement gap among African Americans in more nuanced ways. In fact, our findings suggest this is not just a gap, but a fracture; one created as a result of both segregation and the structural resistance to desegregation. Based on our conversations the following has become clear:

1. Civic identities are engendered through implicit and explicit messages sent by members of a young person's family and community.

2. Trust and shared commitments to address educational inequality—both in historical and contemporary contexts—have motivated civic engagement efforts among African Americans.

3. Though essential civic knowledge and subsequent engagement is shaped by historical and social contexts, a broader understanding of the conditions in which African Americans engage with the civic provides a critical foundation for agency.

Notable in this inquiry, these stories also seem to represent a generational shift in the ways in which educational expectations are conferred to young people. Certainly, more data need to be collected to pursue this more fully, but the stories of our participants point to what might be seen as an unintended consequence of desegregation. Perhaps ironically, the segregation of the city of Indianapolis formed tightly-knit communities of necessity that took up the project of civic identity in response to a fundamentally inequitable social structure. This study took up these questions within a relational group approach to begin the work of collecting these stories. We found rich, powerful experiences that point to the generational, community, and experiential components of the formation of civic identity that underlie the inextricable ties between public education and civic engagement in the African-American community. Without question, at the time of this writing, the recent actions of young people, communities, and activists in Ferguson and Baltimore suggest that the time has come once again to examine the phenomenon of civic identity development and civic engagement within the African-American community. To mend the fracture, a radical openness to new forms of research method such as relational groups holds the possibility of new understandings of the ways in which people make sense of the civic and their connection to it.

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