GET ON THE BUS: BLACK COLLEGE TOURS AT INKSTER HIGH SCHOOL FROM 1978-2010

By

Tanya Upthegrove

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines the Black college tours implemented at Inkster High School which exposed high school students to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) throughout the Midwest, South, and mid-Atlantic regions of the United States. While there is substantial grey literature that describes the Black college tour experience, there is limited empirical research which defines Black college tours, describes how they are designed and implemented, and how they inform the college choice process for participating students. I conducted a phenomenological case study comprised of interviews and document analysis to summarize the historic context of the Inkster High School Black college tour and synthesized the experience of teachers, students, and parent volunteers who participated in the tours over thirty-two years. I learned Black college tours—as a cultural artifact—helped students navigate the college choice process and shaped their ongoing perspective about HBCUs. Black college tours and similar experiences hold significance for former students, parents, and teachers who experienced school closures and grapple with institutional mourning. This study contributes an example of Black student college choice (Chapman et al., 2020) and draws from community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and fugitive pedagogy (Givens, 2021) to situate Black college tours within existing literature on college choice. The study further acknowledges how a small predominantly Black local school district partnered with community to provide college access programming for its students.

This dissertation is dedicated to my twin brothers,
Marcus Jamal Upthegrove and Michael Lamont Upthegrove,
for your undying love for our beloved hometown Inkster.
May you continue to rest peacefully, together.

provided extra laughs, libations, and leniency over the past six years: Dr. Raven Jones, Dr. Curtis Lewis, Dionna Harvell, Candace Bacchus, Latasha Lucas, and my mentor Tameka Gibson. I also thank my dynamic mentees who often checked on me and gave me a bit of my own advice when I needed it most: D'Angelo Gillespie, Cornetta Lane, Je'Corey Hawkins, Shaina Jones, Diamond Wilder, Alexis Harvey, and Chakara Wheeler. To Jeremy Cranford, thank you for helping me capture the magnitude of this moment through your phenomenal photography. You took my half-baked ideas and transformed them into a remarkable collection of images. You never disappoint!

To the people across the United States that have led or currently lead Black college tours, thank you for your tireless efforts. I hope my dissertation contributes to the cause and helps tell the story of your remarkable work. I also pray that it helps you attract caring chaperones, continued research, and abundant financial resources from individual donors, giving circles, and philanthropic organizations who want to support Black students in understanding the significance and value of History Black Colleges and Universities through the Black college tour experience.

Saving the best for last, I thank my heaven-sent, handsome, and hella-humorous husband Kevin Nelson Gregory. We began dating when I started the MBA program in 2012, now 12 years and two advanced degrees later, here we are. I am immensely grateful for your love and support during every course assignment, APA citation, and 'study of my study'. You've made me laugh, held me when I cried, and popped bottles for every milestone. Thank you for accepting me just as I am, including my insatiable hunger (for knowledge). I love and thank you for being the hype man for all my dreams, goals, and random ideas. I look forward to writing our next chapter together, and you have my word that I'm PhinisheD with all my schooling! XOXO.

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Chapter One: Introduction

During the week of March 20-26, 1994, Inkster High School (IHS) Black history teacher Miss Johnson (pseudonym) chaperoned five students from Inkster, Michigan to Washington D.C. as they participated in a weeklong trip hosted by the Close Up program, offering high school students from across the United States a first-hand experience of the federal government. Among the hundreds of students who participated, the five students from IHS—including me—were the majority of the seven Black students in attendance. During the weeklong experience, we visited the monuments and toured the hallowed halls of various historic spaces. However, the most memorable part of the experience for me was not part of the Close Up program agenda. One morning, Miss Johnson decided that instead of participating in the scheduled sessions, we would break away from the structured Close Up itinerary and visit the campus of Howard University, a Historically Black College & University (HBCU) located in the heart of Washington D.C. For just a few hours, we were offered a glimpse of life at a Black college by participating in a campus tour, observing Greek life on the campus yard, and soaking up the Black culture that was glaringly missing from the experience on the trip to our nation's capital.

Miss Johnson's deviation from the Close Up program schedule was not by happenstance. She graduated from Tennessee State University—also an HBCU—and coordinated the IHS Black college tour, an annual trip which exposed high school students to multiple HBCUs throughout the Midwest, South, and mid-Atlantic regions of the United States. For Miss Johnson, exposing her students to our country's most significant institutions also meant exposing them to HBCUs during every opportunity possible. While visiting Howard was my first experience at an HBCU, it would not be my last.

A year later, I participated in a Black college tour organized by Miss Johnson and other

IHS teachers. Building upon the short time spent at Howard University, the weeklong excursion by chartered bus included campus visits to six HBCUs across Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee. I can recall the distinctiveness of each campus, with characteristics which appealed to some of us, and deterred others. Like Howard University, some colleges were situated in urban settings, whereas others were in rural communities. The common thread connecting each school we visited was a deep-rooted appreciation for Black culture and history, and an unwavering mission to educate Black students.

There were an estimated 40 Black high school students who participated in the Black college tour in 1995, all of whom were making decisions about where they would eventually attend college. This process—often referred to as the *college choice process*—is complex for all students and families to navigate. Researchers have devised models to understand how the college choice processes works, and the college choice model is a widely recognized framework used to describe the process students use in determining their institution of choice for post-secondary study (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). However, it is also criticized for not accurately reflecting the decision-making process used by Black students and other marginalized student populations, despite being recognized and used by academics and practitioners alike. (Stodghill, 2015; Tobolowsky, 2005; Williams et al., 2018). Because the traditional college choice model does not adequately represent the experiences of diverse student groups, it is also unable to fully represent activities like the Black college tour, a unique experience for Black prospective college students. For the study, I defined the Black college tour as a cultural artifact used by Black students in navigating the college choice process through campus visits to two or more Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and the communities in which they are situated within a designated timeframe.

Within the United States, Black college tours have been implemented in various forms coordinated by a range of educational institutions and community organizations (Jett, 2019). Despite this longstanding presence within the college decision-making process of Black students, there is limited empirical research about the program activity. This limited representation within scholarly research minimizes the role of the Black college tour within the college choice process and limits the discussion of how such tours help Black students experience the college choice process in a different way. It is necessary to further understand the Black college tour, its purpose, and its positioning within the college decision-making process for Black students considering post-secondary education. I explored this through a study of IHS and the Black college tours it implemented until 2010. Three years later, Michigan Public Act 96 and 97 of 2013 led to the closure of Inkster High School through the dissolution of Inkster Public Schools (IPS) in 2013.

As an introduction to my research, I first provide background information which includes an overview of college choice and Black college students, historic and current contexts for HBCUs, a description of Black college tours, and context for IHS previously located in the predominantly Black city of Inkster, Michigan. Secondly, I provide a problem statement which further describes how the limited representation of Black college tours in scholarly research undervalues their significance in the college choice process unique to Black students. I then describe the significance of the study to key audiences including funders, researchers, and organizations interested in implementing Black college tours. Finally, I describe the structure of the study represented in the subsequent chapters and a list of key terms.

Black Student College Enrollment

Since 2010, an average of 3-million students enroll in post-secondary institutions in the

fall upon graduation from high school each year (US Department of Education, 2021). Prior to enrolling, these students engage in a decision-making process often referred to as the college choice process whereby they engage in activities and consider factors which help inform their decision of where to attend college. Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) college choice model is among the most widely recognized research describing the college choice process as a phased approach for increasing college knowledge through interactions with sources—both formally and informally—that increase awareness about the college experience. This process may also include campus tours, interactions with campus staff and students, or advertisements from colleges and universities (McMillan Cottom, 2017; Secore, 2018; Swanson et al., 2019). Scholars such as Iloh (2019), Chapman et al. (2020), Williams et al. (2018), and Stodghill (2015) redefine the traditional college choice model for various reasons, including its inability to consider that for many students, the notion of 'choice' is not presented in the same way as it may be for White students (Iloh, 2019).

While all students go through a college choice process which Okerson (2016) describes as a "decision-making process used to determine whether and where to attend college" (2016, p. 5), the process for Black students who enroll in post-secondary education upon completing high school in the United States is far more nuanced (Stodghill, 2015; Tobolowsky, 2005; Williams et al., 2018). This nuance is based on the history of education in the United States and the deliberate attempts to prevent Blacks from obtaining an education through local, state, and national policies fiercely enforced, and at times punishable by law (Givens, 2021). This nuance is also based on the Black community forming and refining its own processes for learning and education despite insurmountable odds throughout history (Givens, 2021; Williams et al., 2018) While for some students, deciding on where to attend college has offered a choice, the notion of

college choice for Black students was non-existent well into the mid 20ᵗʰ century, over 300 years after Harvard University was founded in 1636 as the first higher education institution in the United States (Givens, 2021). This legacy of discrimination in education remains part of the nuance associated with how Black students make decisions about whether and where to attend college, as racism continues to permeate the current education landscape at both the K-12 and post-secondary levels, as well as within other U.S. institutions (Ladson-Billings & Tate, IV, 1995; Warren, 2017).

While the college search process can be challenging for all 3-million students who enroll in post-secondary institutions upon graduation from high school each year (US Department of Education, 2021), it poses a unique set of challenges for Black students as they navigate a culture of racism and consider a broader set of factors in determining where to attend college (Johnson, 2019). Given the realities of racism in the United States when deciding which college to attend, Black students often factor in the possibility of attending an HBCU. Distinct from historically or predominantly White institutions (PWIs), HBCUs have deep roots and substantial cultural relevance within the higher education landscape in the United States given their mission to prioritize the education of Black students (Johnson, 2019). These colleges and universities comprise a broad cross-section of institutions across differing geographic locations and remain institutions of choice among Black Americans as more than 300,000 students attend HBCUs each year (US Department of Education, 2021).

The reasons Black students continue to attend HBCUs despite broader options available are widely documented in the literature, with sense of belonging and identity consistently recognized among the main factors (Jayakumar, 2013; Johnson, 2019; Van Camp et al., 2010; Williams et al., 2018). But there is limited scholarly research on the Black college tour which has

influenced the college decision-making process for Black students in various communities and across generations.

Black college tours have been generally described in scholarly research as structured campus visits for high school students to multiple HBCUs within a designated geography (Jett, 2019). Often organized as road trips through the Midwest, mid-Atlantic, and Southern regions of the United States, grey literature sources indicate Black college tours have been implemented for more than 30 years in communities across the country (32nd Street Theater, 2023; Shawn Carter Foundation, 2023; Stepping in the Right Direction, 2023). Community-based organizations, church groups, school districts, and other institutions have planned and executed Black college tours in a variety of formats to expose Black students to HBCUs as part of their college decision-making process (Forquer, 2022; YMCA of Metropolitan Milwaukee, 2023).

Beyond the college campus, Black college tours are often coupled with visits to historic museums and other cultural landmarks providing prospective college students with a context of the broader community where HBCUs are located (Forquer, 2022; Jett, 2019; Spriggs, 2010). By design, the Black college tour appears to align with the tenets of critical race theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, IV, 1995) which acknowledges the permanence of racism in society. It also connects with the African American college choice model (Chapman et al., 2020), which considers race, racism, and the various contexts which influence the decision-making process for Black students considering post-secondary education. Additionally, the Black college tour connects with community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) which identifies the various assets a community possesses, and fugitive pedagogy which describes the approaches taken by the Black community to formulate education on their own terms (Givens, 2021). Because there is only limited empirical research on Black college tours, their connection to such theoretical

frameworks is only speculative. For these reasons, deeper exploration of the Black college tour is needed to further examine the role it potentially plays in the college decision-making process for Black students.

Inkster High School

Inkster High School was formerly located in the predominantly Black city of Inkster, Michigan. Inkster was originally incorporated as a village in 1926, and during the 1930s its infrastructure and school district were funded by automotive titan Henry Ford as part of the Ford-Inkster Project, a ten-year social engineering initiative of Ford Motor Company's Sociological Department during the Great Depression (Lindsey, 1994). In 1953, a new school was built, through $900,000 in federal grant funds and an additional $100,000 raised by the district, a substantial amount for a Michigan school during its time. The city of Inkster experienced a declining tax base following the annexation of its industrial corridor which formed the city of Dearborn Heights, Michigan in 1960. As a result, local tax revenue to support the school district became substantially limited. A predominantly Black school district since its inception, Inkster Public Schools (IPS) was the among the first districts in metropolitan Detroit to hire Black teachers—many of whom held advanced degrees as early as the 1960s—although the school district could only offer lower wages when compared to more affluent districts (Equal Educational Opportunity, 1971). Despite limited resources, for more than 30 years IHS implemented an annual Black college tour for its students. Led by teachers who were also HBCU alumni, IHS garnered institutional support from IPS district administrators and elected school board officials to engage no fewer than 40 high school students each year for a weeklong trip typically aligning with the IPS spring break schedule or key events taking place at the HBCUs visited.

In 2013 an unprecedented state policy decision—Michigan Public Act 96 and 97 of 2013—targeted IPS for dissolution, and its students were subsequently reassigned to school districts located across western Wayne County, Michigan (Citizen's Research Council, 2019). While exploring the dissolution of IPS is beyond the scope of the research study, it is worth noting that the closing of IHS inevitably ended the Black college tour for local students as it was embedded into the school programming over the previous three decades. This institutional loss also prevents the opportunity for ethnographic research on the Black college tour with students from IHS.

Although IHS and its Black college tours are no longer operational, the lived experiences of former IHS educators and students serve as an invaluable perspective on the Black college tour. This is particularly important given the limited representation of Black college tours within scholarly literature, and thus a limited understanding of the significance of the Black college tour experience. Through the research study, I explored Black college tours drawing from the first-hand accounts of former IHS students and educators that participated in or led the Black college tours from 1978-2010.

Problem Statement

When determining whether to attend an HBCU, Black students draw from various community-based resources and activities to gain knowledge about various institution types to inform their college decision-making process (Brown et al., 2022; Clayton et al., 2023). Black college tours and other activities such as HBCU alumni panel discussions, and HBCU college fairs are identified in the literature as instrumental in exposing Black students to HBCUs (Clayton et al., 2023), yet minimal research is focused on understanding such experiences in detail, and the role they play in the college choice process for Black students (Jett, 2019).

Within the United States, Black college tours have been implemented in various forms coordinated by a variety of educational institutions and community organizations (Jett, 2019). Despite this longstanding presence within the college decision-making process of Black students, there is limited empirical research about the program activity. While there is no singular format through which Black college tours exist, they consistently include engaging college-bound students in campus tours at multiple HBCUs within a targeted geography. It is necessary to further understand the Black college tour, its purpose, and its positioning within the college decision-making process for Black students considering post-secondary education.

The limited representation of the Black college tour in scholarly research undervalues its significance in the college choice process unique to Black students. This is problematic for three key reasons. First, Black college tours and similar activities and events are often community-led, leveraging expertise from HBCU alumni and other local stakeholders who are also trusted sources of information on post-secondary education (Clayton et al., 2023; Tobolowsky et al., 2005). Because little is known about Black college tours (Clayton et al., 2023; Jett, 2019), we also have limited knowledge about the tours' organizers and participants, their motivations for engaging in such efforts, and how they would describe the Black college tour experience.

Secondly, our limited understanding of Black college tours also compromises our understanding of how such activities are designed and supported by local communities. This, in turn, limits the opportunity for Black college tours to be replicated across communities through support from policymakers or philanthropic organizations.

Thirdly, absent a comprehensive understanding about Black college tours and their role within the college choice process for Black students, we are unaware of whether participating in such tours has benefitted HBCUs by students enrolling in and eventually graduating from the

post-secondary institutions they visited.

Research Questions

I explored the identified problem through a case study of Inkster High School and the Black college tours it implemented for three decades. The following questions guided the study:

RQ1: *How does the Inkster High School Black college tour illuminate and inform what we know about Black college tours?*

RQ2: *How did Inkster High School sustain the Black college tour from 1978-2010?*

RQ3: *How did the Inkster High School Black college tours inform the college decision-making process for participating students?*

Research Methods

Two methods were used during the research project: phenomenological interviews and document analysis. The phenomenological interviews included two groups: 1) former staff and volunteers responsible for planning and implementing the tours, and 2) former student participants of the tours. Study participants initially responded to general questions about their own background, including their educational attainment level. The interviews also included open-ended questions for participants to describe the tour from their own lived experience as either a staff/volunteer or a student participant.

The document analysis included a review of all historical records which describe the tour. This included minutes from school district board meetings when approval of the tours was granted to staff, post-tour presentations made before board members, tour itineraries, yearbook images, and other relevant information sources including research articles and news publications that provide additional context about IHS, IPS, and the city of Inkster.

Study Significance

The study holds significance for two reasons. First, it broadens the scholarly discussion regarding the college decision making process for Black students. Second, it expands the body of scholarly literature on Black college tours as a key approach in exposing Black students to HBCUs. These two reasons can be further understood by exploring the potential interests for the research across three audiences: researchers, schools and community organizations, foundations and policymakers.

For researchers, the study offers new considerations for using fugitive pedagogy (Givens, 2021), the African American college choice model (Chapman et al., 2020), and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) to investigate culturally relevant program activities within college access and post-secondary education. The study also adds to the body of literature on school closings and institutional mourning as described by Ewing (2018) in exploring the programs and services which are lost when a school closure takes place.

The study may be of interest to schools or community organizations currently implementing Black college tours as well as those considering executing such tours as part of a broader college access program design. It also documents the experiences of both student participants and tour organizers to assist in refining and establishing tour design and outcomes.

Foundations and grantmaking organizations may also find the study useful as they continue to identify college access and supporting HBCUs as part of their respective funding priorities. The first of its kind, the study offers both historic lessons from community stakeholders as well as insight for designing programs to support post-secondary education within the K-12 context.

Structure of the Study

The study on Black college tours at IHS is further divided into five chapters and appendices. In chapter two I review existing relevant literature and describe what is known about Black college tours, what is not known, and why it matters to educational research.

Chapter three begins with a description of Black epistemology, followed by the selected methodology—case study—and an explanation of its appropriateness for the study. I then explain the research methods selected for data collection—phenomenological interviewing and document analysis—followed by a description of the recruitment process and data analysis. Chapter three concludes with statements regarding my positionality, trustworthiness, and the boundaries of the study.

The findings of the study are divided into two chapters. Chapter four draws from the document analysis and includes a historic overview of Inkster, IPS, and IHS from the 1840s to 2013. It includes local, statewide, and national context related to the Black college tour, including within the educational landscape. Chapter five summarizes the themes identified from the interviews with former IHS teachers, parent volunteers and students, all who participated in the Black college tours.

Chapter six includes an overall summary of the study as well as implications for various audiences including educational researchers, practitioners who implement Black college tours, and philanthropic organizations who fund college access programs. The appendix includes the interview protocols used during the study, correspondences used for recruitment and interviewing referenced throughout chapters two through six.

Key Terms

- **African American college choice model:** a theoretical model which draws from the tenets

of critical race theory to represent the prevalence of both race and racism as part of the college choice process for Black students. It also identifies key influencers which impact the college choice process such as family, school contexts, and federal and state policies (Chapman et al., 2020).

- **Black college tour:** Defined in the study as a cultural artifact used by Black students in navigating the college choice process through campus visits to two or more HBCUs and the communities in which they are situated within a designated timeframe.

- **Black student college choice:** scholarship and practices that broaden existing college choice research by considering the unique experiences of Black students in deciding whether, where, and when to attend college.

- **Community cultural wealth:** a theoretical approach based in critical race theory which acknowledges the various assets existing within a community which make it possible for individuals to thrive leveraging the resources available to them through an accessible collective of individuals and entities (Yosso, 2005).

- **Critical race theory:** a framework which represents the relationship among race, racism, and power in society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

- **Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs):** Defined by the Higher Education Act of 1965 as "…any historically black college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was, and is, the education of Black Americans, and that is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association determined by the Secretary [of Education] to be a reliable authority as to the quality of training offered or is, according to such an agency or association, making reasonable progress toward accreditation." (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.)

- **Inkster High School (IHS):** the sole high school of Inkster Public Schools which operated from 1933 to 2013, when Inkster Public Schools was dissolved through Michigan Public Act 96 of 2013.

- **Inkster Public Schools (IPS):** A school district formerly located in Inkster, Michigan, a predominantly Black inner-ring suburban city of metropolitan Detroit.

- **Michigan Public Act 96 and 97 of 2013:** Michigan state legislation enacted in 2013 which approved the dissolution of two predominantly Black school districts, Inkster Public Schools (Inkster) and Buena Vista School District (Buena Vista Township).

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Black college tours are connected to the history of higher education in the United States, which includes the founding and continued presence of Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs). Although foundational college choice theories and frameworks vaguely considered the unique experiences of Black students and failed to acknowledge the inherent racism they experience within the U.S. education system (McLewis, 2021), Black college tours can also be positioned in the literature on the college choice process given their general role of exposing college-bound students to HBCUs. While education scholars have carved out space to discuss the unique experiences of Black students navigating the college choice process (Chapman et al., 2020; Clayton et al., 2023; Freeman, 2005; McLewis, 2021), there is minimal empirical research on Black college tours across the literature, including within research on campus visits. Despite this void, existing grey literature provides historic summaries and current offerings about individual Black college tours. However, grey literature alone is unable to fill the sizeable gap within scholarly research that diminishes the significance of Black college tours, the individuals and organizations responsible for the tours, and the students who participate in Black college tours as part of their college decision-making process.

Through a review of existing literature relevant to Black college tours, I will first describe the racism historically embedded into the U.S. higher education system, which led to the establishment of HBCUs, and how HBCUs have endured over time, both because of and despite systemic racism in the United States. Secondly, I will provide a summary of existing literature on the college choice process, including traditional models, common critiques of these models, and alternatives that consider the experiences of Black students pursuing post-secondary education. Thirdly, I will describe college tours and their role in college choice process. Fourth,

I summarize what we know about Black college tours, what we do not know, and why this matters to the literature. For the study, I defined the Black college tour as a cultural artifact used by Black students in navigating the college choice process through campus visits to two or more HBCUs and the communities in which they are situated within a designated timeframe.

U.S. Higher Education System & HBCUs

The history of higher education in the United States is one of layered complexity and divergent narratives. At first glance, the establishment of Harvard University and other foundational colleges in the early 1600s–1700s appear to build institutions of learning and knowledge creation for the betterment of a newly formed society (Harvard University, 2022). However, beneath the surface of high ideals lies a coordinated system of superiority and exploitation which blended slavery, capitalism, and racism, causing the three to become inextricably linked and embedded into the fabric of institutions within the United States, including its educational institutions (Givens, 2021; Harris, 2021; Harvard University, 2022; Ladson-Billings & Tate, IV, 1995; Wilder, 2013). From Harvard University's financial investments into slave plantations in the West Indies and the Southern states (Harvard University, 2022; Wilder, 2013) to the anti-literacy laws of Virginia, which "prohibited education for enslaved and free Blacks as early as 1819" (Givens, 2021, p. 28), the U.S. education system—including higher education—is historically entrenched in systemic racism, impacting both institutions and individuals alike (Ladson-Billings & Tate, IV, 1995).

Despite the exclusionary practices upheld within the formal education system and widespread legal policies, through resistance and determination, Black women and men established alternative informal learning spaces as a fugitive act to advance their own teaching and learning (Givens, 2021). These community-led efforts that have persisted for hundreds of

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years laid the groundwork for establishing formal learning institutions as educating free and formerly enslaved persons began to align with the interests of White religious leaders, abolitionists, and philanthropists (Gasman, Nguyen & Conrad, 2015). Lincoln University, Cheney University, and Wilberforce University are three of the foundational institutions which later became federally designated through the Higher Education Act of 1965 as historically Black colleges and universities, or HBCUs (Harris, 2021). The histories of Cheney University of Pennsylvania and Lincoln University in Pennsylvania are examples of such efforts to educate free and formerly enslaved persons and were founded by Quaker philanthropists (Gasman, Nguyen & Conrad, 2015). The founding of Cheney and Lincoln Universities in 1837 and 1854 respectively was then followed by Wilberforce University in Ohio, which in 1856, was the first formal institution to be founded and operated by Black Americans through the African Methodist Episcopal Church (Albritton, 2012; Bettez & Suggs, 2012; Stodghill, 2015). Among the more than 3,982 post-secondary institutions in the United States, 107 are defined as HBCUs (NCES, 2020). While few in comparison to the overall number of colleges and universities, this unique cross-section of institutions includes public, private, urban, rural, and both 2- and 4-year colleges and universities. Despite these varied characteristics, the common thread among these institutions—located in the South, Midwest, and Mid-Atlantic regions—is their historic mission to prioritize the educational, social, and cultural advancement of Black students (Albritton, 2012; Johnson, 2019; Johnson & McGowan, 2017; Mobley, 2015; Williams et al., 2018).

HBCUs are preternaturally impacted by the history of the United States, particularly through policies enacted at the federal and state level. While financial and political support for higher education for Black Americans began to take shape, as evidenced by the more than 70 Black colleges that were founded between 1860 and 1900, such support was neither commonly

accepted nor equitable when compared to historically White institutions (Harris, 2021). Federal legislation such as the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 led to more HBCUs being established across the South, Midwest, and Mid-Atlantic regions (Bettez & Suggs, 2012; Chapman et al., 2020; Harris, 2021). However, Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 forced HBCUs into competing more directly with predominantly White institutions (PWIs) for Black students with more options for where to attend college at the time. Beyond federal legislation, longstanding disparities in state funding, particularly in Maryland, Tennessee, and North Carolina led to HBCUs to receiving substantially less funding for decades compared to PWIs located in the same state (Bettez & Suggs, 2012; Harris, 2021). The sanctioned and coordinated underfunding of HBCUs limited their ability to invest resources into capital expenditures and faculty, and as a result, HBCUs have been heavily scrutinized and deemed substandard, when compared to institutions either exclusively or predominantly for White students (Gasman, Nguyen & Conrad 2015; Harris, 2021). This stigma has been further perpetuated in how HBCUs are portrayed in the media as stories about financial woes and challenges with accreditation are amplified, although such problems also impact PWIs which are far greater in number across the US higher education landscape (Williams et al., 2018).

HBCUs are significant to the higher education landscape, given their longstanding mission to advance learning and prioritize the history and culture of Black Americans. Over the years, HBCUs have consistently led in several outcomes related to Black student achievement in post-secondary education, including social mobility, Ph.D. attainment, degrees conferred, and attainment of STEM-related degrees (Bettez & Suggs, 2012; Williams et al., 2018). While more students have enrolled at certain HBCUs in recent years, particularly due to ongoing experiences of racism on predominantly White college campuses and in communities across the United

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States (Williams et al., 2018), in-person exposure to HBCUs remains limited in geographies where no HBCUs are located. One mechanism used to increase exposure to HBCUs has been Black college tours, which offer students an opportunity to visit multiple HBCU campuses within a defined geography. Given their significance, opportunities to showcase HBCUs—particularly to prospective students—are of paramount importance for Black students to consider all their options as part of the college choice process.

College Choice in the United States

Unlike their relatives from prior generations, Black high school students now choose among nearly 4,000 colleges and universities for post-secondary education, including 107 HBCUs (NCES, 2021). The college choice process, as it is often referred to, can be generally described as the "decision-making process students use to determine whether and where to attend college" (Okerson, 2016, p. 5). While the decision-making process is unique to each student, various education researchers have identified commonalities in how the process takes form. There are several college choice models which attempt to represent the phases and influences college-bound students experience, but they often do not consider how racism impacts the college choice process for Black students, in particular (Chapman et al., 2020; Clayton, et al., 2023; McLewis, 2021). Given this limitation of prevailing college choice models, there is a growing body of research that centers the experiences of Black students navigating the college choice process and introduces alternatives to traditional college choice models. In this section, I first describe two of the prevailing college choice models—developed by Hossler and Gallagher (1987) and Perna (2006)—and the limitations of each to fully represent the college choice process for Black students. Secondly, I introduce alternatives to the traditional college choice model, including Iloh's Model of College-Going Decisions and Trajectories (2019), and the

African American college choice model (Chapman et al., 2020), which I have selected to situate Black college tours within the existing college choice literature.

Traditional College Choice Models

Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) college choice model uses three distinct stages to describe the college choice process: predisposition, search, and choice. Drawing from several pre-existing college choice models, Hossler and Gallagher use the three stages to position factors that "influence student attitudes about attending college, which shape the selection of a specific institution" (p. 207). The predisposition stage represents various student characteristics, including socioeconomic background, academic ability, influences of parents and peer groups, and involvement in co-curricular activities as shaping whether a student chooses to attend college. During the search stage, students gain insight into institutions and engage with them directly, whether initiated by the student or the institution. Finally, the choice stage occurs when students "narrow their choice set to specific institutions to enter" (p. 215).

Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model draws from research reliant on conventional data sets, including standardized tests and financial aid application data, which can lead to broad generalizations about student groups and how they experience the three identified phases. Race is only mentioned during the search phase in Litten's (1982) study—one of several earlier works referenced in Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model—where students who identified as Black, low-income, or whose parents had less education were further described as having "college searches that took longer and were less efficient" when compared to White students. (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987, p. 214; Litten, 1982). Litten's study (1982) also indicates that Black students rated campus visits as more beneficial compared to other students, but no context was offered regarding why this preference was identified. In both instances, Hossler and Gallagher's (1987)

and Litten's (1982) research contain information about Black students, but it is merely provided as a categorization to distinguish among student groups. Broader contexts regarding the experiences of racism and how it impacts college choice decisions are not explored in either study.

Unlike Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model, which implies a linear, developmental college choice process (McLewis, 2021), Perna's (2006) college choice model considers the limitations of human capital and sociological perspectives of the college choice process and offers an ecological model which accounts for differences among student groups. Perna's (2006) model depicts "multiple routes" which lead to college choice based on four contextual layers: habitus, school and community, higher education, and social, economic, and policy (pp. 116-117). At each layer, the model considers the direct and indirect influences—both supportive and adverse—on college choice for individual students, including those from racial or ethnic minority groups. With its multiple layers, Perna's (2006) model is both comprehensive and convoluted, yet does not center the student or their agency—whether real or perceived—within the college choice process. McLewis (2021) further critiques Perna's (2006) model for failing to explain how and why racism is experienced during the college choice process for students with intersecting identities.

Iloh's Model of College-Going Decisions and Trajectories

One alternative to the traditional college choice model is the Iloh Model of College-Going Decisions and Trajectories, which excludes the notion of "choice" due to its roots in privilege and disregard for race, socioeconomic status, and other factors (Iloh, 2019). Iloh's framework uses a three-dimensional ecology model incorporating three interrelated dimensions: a) information – which includes general and/or institution-specific insights, recommendations, or

warnings, along with the delivery mechanism; b) time – which takes into account the state of that individual's life during the decision-making process; and c) opportunity – which "brings into focus one's beliefs and realities about what is possible personally within the landscape of postsecondary education" (p. 6). Similar to Perna's model, Iloh's model also uses an ecological approach but centers the student experience within the three dimensions. While Iloh's (2019) model challenges traditional notions of college choice, Black students who opt to attend HBCUs over PWIs represent a redefining of what college choice means often based on both the historic and current racialized climate in the United States. Although Iloh's model is further critiqued as not describing an actual pathway (McLewis, 2021), it does create space for describing marginalized students as well as the experiences they engage in to inform their college choice process.

Black Student College Choice

Within the body of literature on Black student college choice, traditional college choice models like Hossler and Gallagher (1987) and Perna (2006) are critiqued for their inability to describe the college choice process for Black students (Freeman, 2005; Mclewis, 2021; Tobolowsky et al., 2005). Recurring themes represented in the Black student college choice literature include racism experienced by Black students during the college choice process (Freeman, 2005; McLewis, 2021), the role of community in providing Black students exposure to college, including HBCUs (Chapman et al., 2020), and identified factors for Black students choosing to attend HBCUs (Johnson, 2019). Given the limitations of traditional college choice models, Freeman (1999), McLewis (2021), and other scholars notably broaden existing college choice research by considering the unique experiences of Black students in deciding whether, where, and when to attend college.

Freeman's (1999) qualitative study engaged student focus groups conducted across five U.S. cities with large Black populations, where study participants described their own experiences with the college choice process. Building upon traditional college choice models, Freeman further identified three key influencers for Black students in college choice: "family or self-influences, psychological or social barriers, and cultural awareness" (pp. 17). Since Freeman's seminal study, various scholars have contributed to the literature on Black student college choice by considering various subpopulations, including high-achieving Black students (Chapman et al., 2020; Freeman, 1999; Johnson & McGowan, 2017), Black male students (Butner et al., 2001; Hines et al., 2020; Matabane & Merritt, 2014; Warren, 2017), Black students in STEM majors (Bentley, 2017; Strayhorn, 2015), and Black students from California impacted by Proposition 209 and other state legislation impacting college admissions (Chapman, 2020; Spriggs, 2010; Tobolowsky et al., 2005). Similarly, McLewis (2021), considers Black women and girls in the Black student college choice literature, as she critiques both traditional and emergent college choice models, which fail to acknowledge structural intersections of oppression present within the college choice process. McLewis draws from Black feminist thought to identify ways "oppression and power shape the college choice process" (pp. 105), particularly for Black women and girls who remain understudied within college choice literature.

The African American college choice model (Chapman et al., 2020) draws from the tenets of critical race theory to represent the prevalence of both race and racism as part of the college choice process for Black students. It also identifies key influencers which impact the college choice process such as family, school contexts, and federal and state policies, which are commonly described in other models. While the African American college choice model was initially developed based on research focused on "students who were accepted to at least one

University of California school (p. 28), its design is relevant for a broader range of Black students, and it was incorporated as part of my methodology for the study and further described in the next chapter.

Campus Tours

Across higher education institutions, the campus visit is recognized as a common tradition for students to become familiar with the unique offerings present at individual colleges and universities (Magolda, 2000; Secore, 2018). As most HBCUs are concentrated within the South, Midwest, and Mid-Atlantic regions of the United States (Williams et al., 2018), Black students residing in states without an HBCU nearby may have fewer opportunities to partake in HBCU campus visits as part of their college choice process.

While specific definitions may vary and the terms "campus tours" and "campus visits" are often used interchangeably, campus visits are defined by Okerson (2016) as "any visit, whether formal or informal, to a college campus, which may include an information session, formal campus tour, sitting in on a class, overnight visit, or admitted student program" (p. 10). The format of campus tours may differ across institutions and are further defined by Damron (2011) as "an appointment during which a current university student guides prospective students and their guests around the campus, sharing information about university buildings, athletics, academics, social life and other aspects of college life" (p. 9). Between 2020 and 2021, colleges and universities nationwide modified campus visits to align with institution, local, and state public health regulations due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some institutions offered tours of the campus but limited access to residence halls, whereas other campuses chose to eliminate campus tours altogether and offer virtual tour experiences instead (Ezarik, 2022).

While some scholars regard campus visits and tours as significant components to the

college choice process (Secore, 2018; Swanson et al., 2021), Okerson (2016) critiques its role given a range of variables that may impact the tour experience including weather, campus construction, scheduled events, and other factors. Despite the differing critiques on the significance of campus visits, they are recognized by Black students as a primary way to learn about a specific college or university (Chapman et al., 2020; Clayton, 2023, Litten, 1982).

Black College Tours: What We Know Based on Literature

There is limited representation of Black college tours within scholarly literature. Although Black college tours are referenced within empirical studies on the Black student college choice process (Chapman et al., 2020; Johnson & McGowan, 2017; Spriggs, 2010, Tobolowsky et al., 2005), such acknowledgements do not represent a singular research focus on the tours, and offer very little by way of description, history, or their significance in the college choice process for Black students. Jett's ethnographic study (2019) of high school students from Benton Harbor, Michigan is the sole empirical study which explores the Black college tour and its impact on Black students in depth. Jett uses the term *culturally responsive college tour* (p. 17) to broadly categorize Black college tours which are further defined by Jett as "exposing urban high school students to a Black college tour experience that is tailored to their heritage, culture and faculty/student body who looks just like them" (p. 17).

Jett's (2019) dissertation study draws upon Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) college student choice model, social cognitive theory, foundational literature on campus visits, and culturally relevant pedagogy to explore the perspectives of 10 high school students following their participation in a weeklong Black college tour in 2019 hosted by Benton Harbor High School, a predominantly Black high school. During the tour, students visited four HBCUs located in Maryland and Washington D.C. Through surveys provided before and after the tour,

focus groups, and semi-structured interviews, participating students indicated the Black college tour affirmed their decision to attend college, and in some instances, to attend an HBCU, more specifically. Additional insights from Jett's study include the cost of participating in a Black college tour, which poses challenges for some students to engage, and the need for increased support to students before and after the tour in completing applications and FAFSA forms. Some participants indicated the "lack of support from staff" was because their school was slated for closure by the State of Michigan. The decision to close Benton Harbor High School was diverted through a 2019 debt elimination plan approved by the Benton Harbor Area Schools, a local community advisory committee, and the Michigan Treasury (Benton Harbor Area Schools, 2020).

Jett's (2019) study focused exclusively on the student's perspective of the Black college tour experience, and how it supported their college choice process. While the perspective of students is essential to formalizing knowledge about Black college tours, we are unable to gain a comprehensive understanding of the Black college tour as implemented at Benton Harbor High School. No information is provided regarding whether the tour was conducted over time or if it was a sporadic activity. Little is conveyed about the teachers, chaperones, and administrators responsible for the tour. Although Jett (2019) describes the conceptual framework used in the study as blending Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) college choice model with social cognitive theory, and oppositional culture, the study offers minimal local community context about Benton Harbor—one of twelve predominantly Black cities in Michigan—and how this broader context may have shaped the experiences and perspectives of the students participating in the Black college tour, and their overall college choice process. The first of its kind, Jett's (2019) study creates space for further exploration of Black college tours within scholarly research.

Although the Black college tour is not widely acknowledged within existing scholarly works, representation of the phenomenon can be found in various grey literature sources including websites of non-profit organizations, grassroots community groups, private foundations, and independent tour companies that previously or currently organize Black college tours. HBCU Lifestyle, a Black college culture website, provides a general description of Black college tours, and is the only website that lists various entities hosting tours across the country (HBCULifestyle.com, 2024), although the list is not exhaustive of all Black college tours offered. Across other sites, Black college tours are diversely represented in their structure, target geographies, and coordinating entities. While some Black college tours are embedded within college access programming (Shawn Carter Foundation, 2024), others are standalone activities operated by independent tour companies and community organizations (32nd Street Theater, 2024; Investing in My Future, 2024, Motivational Foundation, 2024). National membership organizations such as the YMCA has local chapters that host Black college tours annually primarily for high school students directly involved in their organization's programming (Forquer, 2022; YMCA of Metropolitan Milwaukee, 2024). Individual sites provide information about upcoming Black college tours including the cost, tour dates, and itinerary, as well as information about the history of the tours, with some dating back to the 1980s (32nd Street Theater, 2024; Shawn Carter Foundation, 2024; Stepping in the Right Direction, 2024). Some organization websites also promote fundraisers and offer opportunities to financially contribute specifically to the Black college tour to help defray costs for participating students (Motivational Foundation, 2024).

Despite their differences, Black college tours are collectively described as engaging high school youth from across the United States with tours taking place in the South, Mid-Atlantic

and Midwest regions where HBCUs are concentrated (HBCU Lifestyle, 2024; YMCA of Metropolitan Milwaukee, 2021). Key descriptors of the Black college tour include its format of "visiting multiple college campuses in a single trip" (HBCU Lifestyle, 2024) coupled with the goals of increasing both enrollment at HBCUs and awareness of the benefits of attending HBCUs among Black students (Investing In My Future, 2024; Shawn Carter Foundation, 2024). As colleges ceased campus tours during the COVID pandemic (Ezarik, 2022), some tour providers including Investing In My Future based in Des Moines, Iowa pivoted to hosting a virtual HBCU tour in 2020 and 2021 before returning to in-person tours in 2022 (Investing In My Future, 2024).

Based on insights gained from Jett's (2019) study and the descriptions provided within grey literature, we learn that Black college tours differ from a traditional campus visit to a single institution in very specific ways. Guided by existing literature, I defined Black college tours as culturally relevant explorations which include campus visits to two or more HBCUs within a designated timeframe engaging primarily Black students who plan to enroll in a post-secondary institution following graduation from high school. Table 1 further distinguishes between the traditional campus visit to a singular institution, and the Black college tour structure based on the definition provided.

What We Don't Know About Black College Tours & Why It Matters

The limited representation of Black college tours in the literature sheds light on what is not known about Black college tours from a historic perspective as well as from the vantage points of those connected to the Black college tour experience. Historically, we do not have a clear sense of the earliest account of Black college tours taking place, from which region of the United States tour participants came, who led it, and which HBCUs they toured. Because tours

function independently, we do not have an accurate sense of how many tours have taken place on an annual basis since their inception, and how many participants have been engaged in the tours over time.

We also lack information on how Black college tours have been funded, and whether participating HBCUs have collected longitudinal data specifically on tour participants. From the tour organizers, we do not have insight on their motivations for establishing the tours, challenges encountered, or the support (or lack thereof) garnered for the tours. Among student participants, we do not know whether tour participants ultimately enrolled in any post-secondary institution—whether a PWI, an HBCU generally, or any of the HBCUs visited during their Black college tour experience. While we know COVID-19 impacted Black college tours—as all campuses eliminated campus tours during 2020–2021 (Ezarik, 2022)—we do not know what organizations completely ceased planning Black college tours because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The absence of key information about Black college tours is significant to the literature for three reasons. First, without an identified historical account of Black college tours we cannot chronicle a clear timeline for community-led efforts that support college choice for Black students. Second, absent representing the lived experiences of tour participants and tour organizers in the literature we are unable to draw from their expertise to develop common language about the Black college tour and its purpose. Finally, given the lack of a comprehensive body of research on Black college tours, organizations that continue to operate tours are unable to draw from research to describe the Black college tour experience and its positioning within the college choice process to garner resources from funders and other supporters, posing a potential threat to their longevity and utility.

Chapter Three: Methodology

As shown in the literature review, there is limited research on the Black college tour experience. This study contributes to the literature by describing Black college tours through existing documentation and relevant historic sources as well as the experiences of individuals that have previously organized or participated in Black college tours through Inkster High School. In this chapter I first describe my research paradigm as a qualitative researcher by explaining Black epistemology, which allowed me to situate Black college tours as a cultural artifact unique to the Black community in the United States. Second, I provide a summary of the relevant theoretical perspectives I draw from: critical race theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, IV, 1995), fugitive pedagogy (Givens, 2021), community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), and the African American college choice model (Chapman et al., 2020). Third, I explain how, individually, each of these theories and frameworks had limitations in fully situating the Black college tour experience, substantiating the need to use these frameworks collectively. Fourth, I explain the selected methodology—case study—and research design. Lastly, I provide my positionality statement, the steps taken to ensure trustworthiness throughout my research process, as well as notable boundaries for the research project.

Research Paradigm

I have never described myself without considering my Blackness. The same holds true for my research paradigm, or as Waring (2017) describes, my "conception of the world, its nature, [my] position in it, [and] relationships with [the] world and its constituent parts" (p. 17). To help the reader understand all four aspects of my research paradigm and their contributions – epistemology, theoretical perspectives, and methodology, and methods (Crotty, 1998) – I first describe Black epistemology in detail.

Black Epistemology

My assumptions as a researcher are guided by a Black epistemology that centers both the historic and sociopolitical characteristics of *Black people*, along with the notion of *Black-being* (Thompson, 2022) which represents the cultural essence of Blackness shaped by music, literature, language, and tradition as gateways to explore a unique form of Black freedom. (Paris, 2022; Thompson, 2022). Unlike Western epistemologies that were developed by White scholars (Scheurich & Young, 1997) and align with the tenets of capitalism and colonialism (Yarish, 2019), the tradition of Black epistemology centers the broad and diverse lived experiences of people of African descent as its starting point (Gordon, 1990), and emphasizes "our commitments to use our knowledge (and knowledge production) for the benefit of our people, and humanity" (p. 180). Molefi Kente Asante first introduced *Afrocentricity* (1993), as "a perspective which allows Africans to be subjects of our historical experiences" (Asante, 1993). In considering education research, Gordon (1990) described an *African American epistemology* as "the study or theory of the knowledge generated out of the African American existential condition, that is, of the knowledge and cultural artifacts produced by African Americans based on African American cultural, social, economic, historical, and political experience" (p. 90). While differing terminologies have been used to describe Black epistemology, centering *Black people* and *Blackness* in understanding the world are commonly identified themes, in which distinctions in scholarship within the tradition are similarly couched.

In "Phenomenal Blackness" (2022) Thompson further contributes to the Black epistemological tradition by describing the study of *Black people* to include the foundational scholarship of W.E.B. Du Bois, Alain Locke, and Ralph Ellison drawn primarily from experiences captured through the study of sociology and anthropology (Thompson, 2022).

Dating back to Du Bois' seminal works depicting Black life in the United States using geo-coding, infographics, and participatory research (Battle-Baptiste & Rusert, 2018; Toldson, 2019), and Zora Neale Hurston's use of anthropological theory in her literary works (Paris, 2022; Thompson, 2022), the study of Black people primarily considers categorization based on racial identity, and associated social and historic experiences including key events such as the Transatlantic Slave Trade, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights Movement (Thompson, 2022). Thompson then describes the study of Black-*being* as a shift that took place through the Black Arts Movement in the 1960s. During this era philosophy and critical theory were shaped by the works of James Baldwin, Angela Davis, Malcolm X, Amiri Baraka, and Eldridge Cleaver, who focused on Blackness as a form of expressivity through creative works and considers the roles of griots including the "the orator, artist, singer, and poet in the African American public sphere…to conserve and promulgate Blackness which they take to be a necessary condition for any Black lifeworld" (Paris, 2022).

Both realms of scholarship – focusing on Black people and Blackness – were essential to my use of Black epistemology within the research study on Black college tours. Focusing exclusively on Black people only offers a historic and sociopolitical timeline dependent solely on formal legislation to depict progress in Black life within inherently racist institutions. Alternatively, without the historic and sociopolitical timeline the full context of institutional racism impacting Black people in the United States is diminished. The two realms combined link back to Gordon's (1990) explanation of African American epistemology and its focus on "knowledge and cultural artifacts produced by African Americans based on African American cultural, social, economic, historical, and political experience" (p. 90). As Black college tours are designed by members of the Black community to assist Black students in navigating the college

choice process by exploring HBCUs and the communities in which they are situated, they serve as a cultural artifact which not only signals a cultural affiliation (Collins, 2023), but signifies the value placed on education within the Black community. This use of Black epistemology to position the Black college tour served as the foundation for the remaining components of my research paradigm including my theoretical perspectives, methodology, and methods for the research project.

Theoretical Perspective

Crotty (1998) defines a theoretical perspective as the "philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and criteria" (p. 3). Building upon the use of Black epistemology, I combine critical race theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, IV, 1995), fugitive pedagogy (Givens, 2021), community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), and the African American college choice model (Chapman et al., 2020) as key theories which further situated the Black college tour as a cultural artifact within the Black community within the United States used to navigate the college choice process.

Critical Race Theory. Critical race theory (CRT) is a framework which represents the relationship among race, racism, and power in society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Originating within a community of legal scholars including Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, Kimberli Crenshaw and others, CRT includes several key tenets which further explain how racism is embedded, perpetuated, and experienced, as well as the need to transform both policy and societal norms in service to those impacted by racism (Chapman et al., 2020; Love, 2019).

The tenets include *race as a social construction* which explains that although human beings are similar, throughout history 'arbitrary genetic differences like skin color, hair texture, eye shape, and lip size' (Ladson-Billings, 2021, pp. 45) have been used to formalize a system of

White supremacy which disadvantages people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2013); *racial realism* which acknowledges the embeddedness of racism within all institutions of the U.S. society, creating a normalized experience for Black Americans, and a corresponding call to reimagine racial strategies that transcend racial equality as a goal (Bell, 1991; Chapman et al., 2020; Ladson-Billings, 2013); *interest convergence* which argues that any societal gains made for those impacted by racism happen as identified gains align with interests from the privileged group (Bell, 1980; Chapman et al., 2020; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2013), and *intersectionality* which emphasizes that individuals impacted by racism are also impacted by other forms of discrimination including gender, age, ability, and sexuality (Chapman et al., 2020; Crenshaw, 1991; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2013). The tenets also prioritize the *lived experiences* of those impacted by racism, and the *counterstories* they offer which provide context for the varied encounters of navigating racism in their daily lives. (Chapman et al., 2020; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ewing, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Warren, 2017).

Scholars Gloria Ladson-Billings and James Tate, IV, (1995) were the first scholars to describe CRT theory in education, and it has since been represented across the education landscape, including within college choice literature. Because of this this widespread representation, Ladson-Billings (2021) emphasizes concerns regarding the overuse of CRT, as well as the importance of prioritizing a connection to policy as a key characteristic of describing CRT in alignment with its original intent (Ladson-Billings, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2021).

Fugitive Pedagogy. Fugitive pedagogy is defined by Givens (2021) as "a metanarrative which depicts the approaches taken by Black teachers to create a structure for teaching and learning for themselves and Black students" (pp. 11). Givens argues that the foundation of the

Black Studies movements of the 1960s and subsequent timeframes has its roots in the approaches taken by Black people in the United States who through 'fugitive acts' sought to organize and educate themselves despite a larger system designed to prohibit their access to knowledge. Based on the life and career of Carter G. Woodson and his quest to educate Black Americans through *Blackeducation* and to formalize the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History to support Black teacher professionalism. Givens (2021) uses fugitive pedagogy to further describe the relationship between Black students and Black teachers and their 'shared vulnerability' (pp.24) as victims of the larger education system while also sharing a commitment to learning and advancement which they describe and construct for themselves.

Community Cultural Wealth. Community cultural wealth acknowledges the various assets that exist within a community which make it possible for individuals to thrive leveraging the resources available to them through an accessible collective of individuals and entities (Carpenter, 2019; Jayakumar, 2013; Love, 2019; Warren, 2017; Yosso, 2005). It has been popularized by Yosso (2005) who positioned community cultural wealth as an 'CRT approach to education' (pp. 69) which challenges the traditional Bourdieuean cultural capital theory which focuses on traditional measures of capital centered on the acquisition of income and wealth. Yosso's community cultural wealth framework draws from the tenets of critical race theory and identifies six forms of capital which comprise community cultural wealth. *Aspirational capital* refers to the belief in the possibilities and goals an individual can accomplish despite adverse experiences or barriers present in their lives (Jayakumar et al, 2013; Warren, 2017; Yosso, 2005). *Familial capital* describes a broad sense of kinship and connection to community knowledge, culture, and values (Ako-Asare, 2015; Ramirez, 2018; Yosso, 2005). *Linguistic capital* considers the culturally representative languages or styles of communicating which also encompass music,

art, and poetry (Carpenter, 2019; Knight-Manuel et al., 2019; Yosso, 2005).

Community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) also includes *navigational capital* which considers the specific skills utilized to maneuver institutions not designed for communities of color (Brown et al., 2022; Harris, 2019; Yosso, 2005). *Resistant capital* prioritizes "knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (Yosso, 2005, pp. 80). *Social capital* acknowledges the networks of people and community resources used to navigate within societal institutions, including colleges and universities (Harris, 2019; Warren, 2017; Yosso, 2005).

African American College Choice Model. As described in the preceding literature review, Chapman and colleagues' (2020) African American college choice model is largely based on CRT and incorporates its tenets within the model's design. Most notably, it prominently depicts race and racism as encompassing all components of the college choice process for Black students. It also identifies four major components that influence their college choice process: state and federal policies, K-12 schools and school contexts, family background and systems of support, and the institutional and social contexts of higher education.

Limitations of Selected Theories

Although CRT, fugitive pedagogy, community cultural wealth, and the African American college choice model all hold relevance to the research study on Black college tours, as individual theories and models they fell short in examining the Black college tour within scholarly research. Critical race theory is best positioned as an overarching frame given its foundational tenets based primarily on the experiences of Black people in the United States. However, it does not focus exclusively on college choice.

While fugitive pedagogy specifically addresses the relationship between the Black

student and teacher navigating an inherently racist education system while engaging specifically in *Blackeducation*, fugitive pedagogy does not speak to the college choice process and does not acknowledge the contributions of the Black church as a key institution advancing education in the Black community for generations (Jelks, 2021). Community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) identifies the assets possessed by marginalized students relative to their post-secondary education experience, however it does not focus exclusively on the unique experiences of Black students and how this differs from other students from marginalized communities. And while the African American college choice model developed by Chapman and colleagues (2020) utilizes the tenets of CRT, it provides a macro-level focus on institutions as influencers to the process and does not delve into the assets or experiences necessary for establishing programs or activities essential for developing a Black college tour or similar activities within a school context. Despite these individual shortcomings of each model or theory to explore the Black college tour, collectively, they informed the methodology for the research study.

Methodology: Case Study

Aligned with Black epistemology and using the described theoretical perspectives to center the Black college tour experience, the case study was the overarching methodology used in the study. Using a bound structure (Ashley, 2017; Bhattacharya, 2017), the case study methodology allowed me to focus specifically on the Black college tour considering the specific context the tours took place at Inkster High School from 1978-2010, based in the predominantly Black city of Inkster, Michigan with a documented history impacted by race and racism. In the following section, I further describe and provide a rationale for selecting the case study as the methodological approach for the study.

The case study methodology is described by Merriam (1998) as "an intensive, holistic,

description, and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit" (p. 21). Ashley (2017) further asserts that case studies "enable the researcher to intensively investigate the case in depth, to probe, drill down, and get at its complexity" (p. 114). The case study is bound by parameters established by the researcher (Ashley, 2017; Battacharya, 2017) and uses open-ended 'why' and 'how' questions to evaluate or explain a study (Ashley, 2017), coupled with document analysis or observations to construct validity. Case studies can be structured as a single case or multiple case, depending on the interests of the researcher (Ashley, 2017; Battacharya, 2017).

In considering the Black college tours at Inkster High School from 1978 to 2010 as a single case, I explored the contextual factors which shaped the establishment of the Black college tour within Inkster Public Schools, located in the predominantly Black city of Inkster, Michigan. As I interviewed former teachers responsible for organizing the tours I gleaned their descriptions of the planning and implementation of the tours, whereas tour participants explained how the tours contributed to their college choice process. Although Inkster High School is longer operational, the case holds relevance as Black college tours are currently implemented in a variety of ways by a cross-section of organizations – including school districts – throughout the United States.

Research Design

My research design included phenomenological interviewing and document analysis. In this section I describe each research method as well as my approaches used for sampling and selection criteria, data collection, and data analysis.

Phenomenological Interviewing

Phenomenological interviewing is a form of qualitative, in-depth, interviewing where participants respond to open-ended questions to deeply describe a place, topic, or experience

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(Mears, 2017). It is often used in critical research because of its reliance on participants as serving as experts on a given topic (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). Aligned with tenets of the case study methodology, phenomenological interviewing is semi-structured by design, with identified suggested questions to guide the discussion (Bhattacharya, 2017; Brinkman & Kvale, 2015; Mears, 2017).

For the study, I conducted eighteen interviews comprised of two groups:

1. Students Group – Thirteen individuals who were formerly Inkster High School students and participated in the Black college tour across each of the four decades when the tour took place from 1978 to 2010.

2. Staff and Parent Chaperone Group – Five individuals who were formerly staff or parent volunteers of Inkster High School that either planned or chaperoned the Black college tour during the four decades when the tour took place from 1978 to 2010.

Each interview was forty-five minutes to one hour in length and was held in person or virtually through the Zoom videoconference platform. During the interview, participants were asked several open-ended questions focused on their reflections of the tour and their connection to Inkster High School. The students were asked questions about their college choice process, whether they attended college, and if they chose to attend an HBCU. The staff and parent chaperones were asked questions regarding the process for establishing the tour, and other aspects of the tour design. Interview participants were asked to bring artifacts (photos, yearbooks, music, clothing, etc.) and other items of significance to the interview that may help them recall their experience on the Black college tour. For additional context, participants were also asked to reflect on their experiences with IPS and within Inkster broadly. Participants were also invited to speak freely providing any additional information they considered beneficial to

the research.

Document Analysis

        I analyzed a total of 59 documents which provided additional context on the IHS Black college tours, IPS, and Inkster, MI. Through the document analysis I constructed a historic timeline (Appendix A) summarizing key experiences of Black people in Inkster, including those connected to IPS. The documents analyzed were grouped into three categories: personal and private documents, public and official records, and media documents; each group provided unique data and helped construct validity from the phenomenological interviews conducted.

        Personal and Private Documents. The personal and private documents included seventeen photographs taken during four IHS Black college tours held in the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s. The photographs captured tour participants, HBCU campuses, and other landmarks visited. The photos were provided by tour participants as digital copies transmitted by email.

        Public and Official Records. The public and official records was primarily comprised of the IPS Board of Education meeting minutes. All Black college tours conducted by IHS were approved by the IPS Board of Education, and IHS staff and students often attended IPS school board meetings to share tour itineraries before tours were conducted, and summaries once the tours were completed.

        Although retrieving the IPS school board meeting minutes was an important step, accessing such public records for a dissolved school district included additional layers of complexity within my data collection process. I initially submitted a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request (Appendix B) to Wayne Regional Service Agency (Wayne-RESA) the entity that has maintained all student records for IPS since its dissolution in 2013. Within four days the FOIA request was formally denied (Appendix C) and Wayne-RESA staff indicated that all IPS

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school board records were maintained by the Archives of Michigan. I subsequently notified the Archives of Michigan (Appendix B) and was immediately informed that board meetings minutes from 1988-2013 were available in print form and could be accessed in person without a FOIA request. From the initial FOIA request to Wayne-RESA to gaining access to the documents at the Archives of Michigan a total of two weeks was spent confirming the location and format of the IPS school board meeting minutes.

A total of eight file boxes were maintained by the Archives of Michigan, and only one file box was fully processed and organized in chronological order. In total, I reviewed more than 6000 sheets of paper and identified 31 documents from 1988 to 1995 which referenced the IHS Black college tours or provided additional context about IPS relevant to the study.

To complement the 31 documents retrieved from the Archives of Michigan, I also reviewed published reports and archived information on Inkster Public Schools and Inkster, MI available through search engines and educational databases including ERIC, Proquest, and Google Scholar.

Media Documents. Media documents reviewed included five IHS yearbooks representing years 1979, 1980, 1992, 1995, and 1996 which referenced the Black college tour and other relevant context. Other media documents included six newspaper articles from the Detroit Free Press, and statewide and national Black magazines and newspaper sources including Michigan Chronicle, Black Enterprise, and Ebony Magazine. While mainstream newspaper sources primarily featured negative stories about IPS and Inkster, the Black press also featured articles on notable accomplishments for the school district, city, and its residents. IHS yearbooks were retrieved from IHS alumni and digital copies of photos were transmitted by email whereas newspaper and magazine articles were accessed from library research databases.

Sampling and Selection Criteria

Study participants were recruited through a combination of purposeful sampling and snowballing, primarily through the Inkster High School All Class Reunion, a nonprofit organization that hosts an annual picnic on the grounds of Inkster High School that attracts over 2,000 attendees. The organization also manages *IHS Annual All Class Alumni Picnic*, a public Facebook group of over 3,000 Inkster High School alumni from 1952-2013. The Facebook group regularly posts information about upcoming events and activities of relevance to Inkster High School alumni and supporters. Several Facebook groups were also used to recruit participants, including *Inkster*, *Living and Growing Up in Inkster*, and *Inktown Fam Inkster Family*. Targeted outreach with personal contacts was also conducted to recruit participants not on Facebook or not actively engaged on social media. Targeted outreach was also done to ensure a diverse group of participants was reached based on involvement with Inkster High School, those who attended HBCUs, and gender identity.

An electronic flyer was used to route interested individuals to a website which provided information about the study (Appendix D). Linked to the website was a Qualtrics-based participant information form where interested individuals provided consent and responded to 23 open and close-ended questions (see Appendix E) used to determine participant eligibility for the study based on the following criteria:

- Former Inkster High School teacher and participant in a Black college tour from 1978-2010 as a tour organizer or chaperone.
- Former volunteer of Inkster High School and participant in a Black college tour from 1978-2010 as a chaperone.
- Former student of Inkster High School and participant in a Black college tour.

- Confirmed participation in the study and a required statement of informed consent.

- Able to participate in one of the interview slots based on the schedule to be determined.

Upon completing the information form each participant received a follow-up email that further explained the details of the study and offered available dates to interview. A confirmation email was sent to the participants providing details about the interview format whether in-person or virtual. Participants also received an email reminder one day prior to the scheduled interview. All participants received a $25 Amazon gift card for full participation in the study, described as completion of the information form and interview.

Data Analysis

There were three distinct processes used to review data collected through the participant information form, document analysis, and participant interviews.

Participant Information Form. Once prior consent was received, the data were exported from Qualtrics into a spreadsheet for further analysis. A total of 24 individuals completed the information form, of which 18 scheduled and completed interviews. The data records for each individual were categorized based on their involvement with the Black college tour as a teacher, student, or parent chaperone. Data records were also categorized based on whether the individual attended an HBCU, and the specific timeframe they participated in the Black college tours.

Document Analysis. Document analysis consisted of identifying pertinent information related to the tours, and broader context regarding IHS, IPS, and Inkster relevant to the study. Each document was logged into a spreadsheet with a unique identifier, along with its date,

source, artifact type, and summary description. In addition to empirical data and grey literature sources, a total of 59 documents were analyzed as listed in Table 2. Once each artifact was logged, it was coded based on its alignment with the research questions and theoretical frameworks selected for the study.

Participant Interviews. Each interview was recorded with permission by participants using Zoom video conferencing, Otter web-based transcription service, voice memos, or the Record My Calls software application. Once the interview was completed, audio data was transcribed using Otter, a web-based transcription service. I read each transcript initially and corrected obvious errors based on the audio transcript. I then conducted the first round of member checks with interviewees by sending a copy of the transcript for review and corrections as needed. After incorporating edits from the first round of member checks, it was important to sort interviewees based on proximity to the HBCU experience. I categorized the interviews identifying those who either attended an HBCU or identified as the parent or child of someone who attended an HBCU. This process of determining HBCU proximity was used to identify emergent codes during the second read.

During the second read, interviewees with a closer connection to HBCUs were read first. As all transcripts were read, a total of 1,200 data points were identified and logged manually into a spreadsheet. The data points were then categorized into 66 emergent codes which were further grouped into nine general categories that were also logged into a spreadsheet. Each of the 66 emergent codes were reviewed for alignment with the research questions and theoretical frameworks.

I completed a third read of each transcript to confirm the context of identified codes, then reviewed the 1,200 data points based on the assigned codes and categories by developing a pivot

table to determine the frequency of each code across interview participants. Codes with a high frequency represented in the pivot table were used to identify corresponding themes. Any codes with a low frequency represented in the pivot table were further reviewed in the interview transcript to determine if it was a unique statement to be amplified, if the code aligned with a pre-existing code with greater frequency, or if it was a potential subcode. From the data analysis process a total of four key themes were identified across the interviews: 1) Black college tour purpose, 2) tour structure, 3) community-wide support for the tour, and 4) the tour's influence on choosing HBCUs. These four themes were organized based on the three research questions and are explored in detail in Chapter 5. Once the themes were identified, a preliminary findings session was held with interview participants in a group setting to confirm the data presented were consistent with their experience with the Black college tour, and to identify themes that may have been omitted or needed to be further amplified. Feedback from the preliminary findings session was incorporated into the study, and the session was recorded and shared with interview participants unable to attend.

Positionality Statement

I consider myself on the border in many respects to my research. I am closely connected to the topic of Black college tours in some ways, while in other ways I consider myself an outsider. I was born and raised in Inkster, attended Inkster Public Schools during preschool, elementary, middle, and high school, and ultimately graduated from Inkster High School. I later became employed at a local nonprofit overseeing a citywide literacy initiative in Inkster while residing in a neighboring municipality. While I take pride in my geographic roots and time spent engaging with the local community, I have not resided in Inkster since 2003. This limited physical proximity to the city in which I was raised makes me an observer to how the city has

changed, especially since the school district was dissolved in 2013.

      I identify as a Black woman and a first-generation college graduate. Growing up in Inkster, I participated in several federally-funded programs such as Head Start, Upward Bound, and King-Chávez-Parks all of which supported my educational pursuits at various stages. Within the city of Inkster, an estimated 11.1% of residents have attained a bachelor's degree or higher as of 2021, which translates to even fewer having earned a doctoral degree (American Community Survey, 2021). As someone who has earned a bachelor's degree, master's degree, and doctorate degree this educational attainment level categorizes me in a position of privilege and as an outsider to the lived experiences of most former and current residents. Throughout my research study, I emphasized to participants the importance of their expertise on the Black college tours and Inkster given their lived experience and the significance of their participation in the study.

      While in high school I visited six HBCUs, with five of those being through a formal Black college tour through Louisiana and Mississippi, and one in DC through a scheduled campus visit, as introduced in chapter one. Since high school, I have visited nearly 30 HBCUs located across the Midwest, South, and mid-Atlantic coastal regions. Despite this familiarity with various HBCU campuses, along with having teachers, mentors, mentees, classmates, and colleagues that either attended or have been employed by HBCUs, I did not attend, nor have I been employed by an HBCU. Although I have focused on HBCUs as an institution type throughout my doctoral study, I by no means consider myself an expert on HBCUs, but cautiously describe myself as an advocate, supporter, and learner of the HBCU experience. Throughout my research I have consistently relied on the perspective of individuals who have either attended or have been employed by HBCUs to ensure my research appropriately represents the sacred spaces of HBCUs in ways that my limited vantage point simply does not

allow.

I knew many of the research participants, and I acknowledge the risks associated with interviewing friends and others with whom I have a relationship. Each interview participant will be asked to provide a pseudonym so their identities will remain confidential. I also exercised caution regarding whether research participants felt objectified through my work with their personal identities stripped away. To address this risk, I discussed with the interviewees how the information shared will be used, so they can opt out at any point in the data collection process, before, during, or after. Despite these risks, I acknowledge why this approach holds value. There is a level of trust that I leveraged for participants to be open about their experience in ways that others may not be able to establish in conducting the research. I also conducted the in-person interviews at community spaces that are familiar to participants and are located within Inkster's neighborhoods. This played a key role in ensuring that interviewees were comfortable sharing their reflections and the focus of the interview can be more attuned to data collection.

Trustworthy Statement

I acknowledge that phenomenological interviewing has its risks, especially since I am expecting the participants to recall an experience which may have occurred up to 30 years ago. Their historic accounts shared both individually and as a collective through this study allowed for synthesizing stories to create a shared experience. I also acknowledge that the experiences captured from those who participated in the Black college tour does not represent all Black college tour experiences as there are variations in the geographies and schools visited, student participants, and other factors such as the weather and traffic, which influence the tour experience.

Boundaries

As a case study, the defined boundary focused on the participants of Black college tours which took place at Inkster High School in Inkster, Michigan beginning in 1978 through 2010 The eighteen research participants self-described as either students who attended Inkster High School and participated in one of the scheduled Black college tours, or IHS teachers or parents who chaperoned the Black College tours. I defined the Black college tour as a cultural artifact used to assist Black students who plan to enroll in a post-secondary institution navigate the college choice process by visiting the campuses of two or more Historically Black Colleges and Universities and the communities in which they are situated within a designated timeframe. Given this definition, the study did not include episodic visits to singular HBCU campuses by students or staff which may have taken place during the identified timeframe. The definition also focuses on individuals who identify as Black, and/or African American; students or staff identifying as other races or ethnicities are not included in the study.

Based on the identified boundaries, there are several limitations of the study. First, by design the study had a small sample size representing a subset of all students and teachers who participated in the Black college tours conducted by Inkster High School. As a result, the findings of the study do not apply to all Black college tours, including tours currently operating. Because the study is based on participant reflections rather than observations, it is assumed that the research participants were truthful in their responses and that information shared is consistent if shared with another interviewer. It is also assumed that the process was nonleading and accurately represents the information shared by research participants.

Chapter Four: Historical Overview

To understand the Inkster High School Black college tour, it is necessary to understand it was implemented within a predominantly Black school district, in a predominantly Black small Midwestern city in the United States. To describe how the Inkster High School Black college tours illuminate and inform what we know about Black college tours, I argue the Inkster High School Black college tours were not established as isolated episodic activities, but rather drew upon a much broader context which includes Black culture, as well as the national, statewide, and local education landscape impacting Inkster and Inkster Public Schools. This broader context also considers Inkster's geographic location in southeast Michigan—situated less than 10 miles west of Detroit, and near eight colleges and universities including three research institutions: Eastern Michigan University, Wayne State University, and the University of Michigan.

In addition to Census data, research studies, news articles, and other publicly available sources, the historic overview includes context from published Inkster High School yearbooks and Inkster Public Schools Board of Education meeting minutes retrieved from the Archives of Michigan, which has maintained the school board records since the dissolution of Inkster Public Schools in 2013. Using these sources, I first summarize Inkster's roots including its documented history of race and racism dating back to the 1840s when enslaved persons began seeking freedom in Canada through Michigan to 1978 when the Black college tour was established at Inkster High School. Second, I describe the three timeframes when the Black college tours occurred, which I have identified as the Early years (1978 to 1992), the Middle years (1993 to 2000), and the Later years (2001 to 2010). These periods align with the transition of teachers who led this work. Through this historical overview I describe the various factors that influenced

the establishment of the Black college tour at Inkster High School, as well as interest in the tour among participants across the three historic periods. Figure 1 provides a visual summary of the historic timeline represented in this chapter.
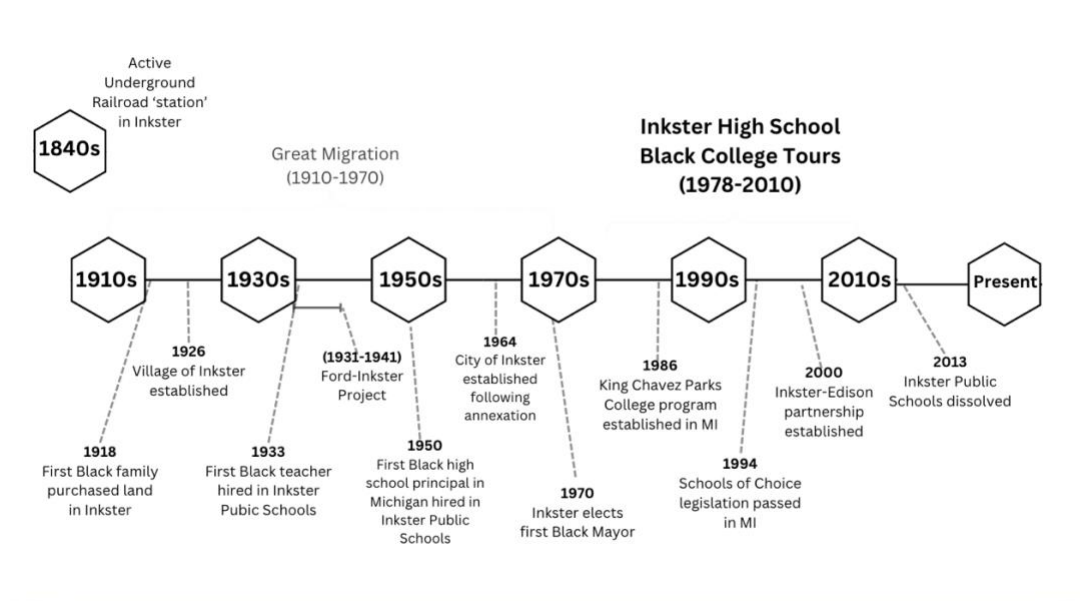
Figure 1: Historic Timeline of Inkster (1840 to present)

Inkster's Historic Roots (1840-1977)

Throughout history, Inkster, Michigan has been a notable landmark for Black people. During the 1840s and 1860s over 30,000 formerly enslaved persons made passage along the Underground Railroad through Michigan's cities, including Inkster. (Bostick, 1980; Lindsey, 1993; Mull, 2016; Talley et al, 2023). This passage was made possible through the efforts of abolitionists such Jotham Goodell, a Washtenaw County farmer who would, hide "freedom seekers in the grain crib where they were unlikely to be discovered" (Mull, 2015, p.16). According to his son, Solon Goodell, Jotham Goodell would then transport the formerly enslaves persons to "Rough's [*sic*] Hotel, now called Inkster, eight miles from Detroit on the Detroit and Saline Plank Road, as they used to call it, and Rough would see that they got further." (Goodell,

1895, page 2). Ruff's Hotel was formerly located on Michigan Avenue "where Henry Ruff Road lay east of Merriman" (Mull, 2015, p. 16), and it was there in Inkster where local abolitionists further coordinated the journey to Trenton, Michigan, and by ferryboat into freedom in Canada (Goodell, 1895; Mull, 2016).

Nearly 50 years later, Inkster was no longer a transient stop for Black people as it became a destination point to establish their own roots for generations to come. As the first wave of the Great Migration began, Black Americans moved from Southern states to cities in the industrial north—including Detroit—where they were concentrated in segregated communities such as Black Bottom and Paradise Valley, which inevitably became overcrowded (Frey, 2022; Lindsey, 1993; Talley et al., 2023). In 1918 and 1919 the Lawrence and DeBaptiste families were the first Black families to purchase land in the Village of Inkster (Lindsey, 1993; Talley et al, 2023).

Over time, and with coordination from the Detroit Urban League, Inkster continued to attract Black families to the southwest quadrant of Inkster, the only area of the village where Blacks could live and work at the Ford-Rouge plant in Dearborn (Lindsey, 1993; Talley et al., 2023). Although Black residents from Detroit and Inkster were able to work at the Ford-Rouge plant, racially restrictive covenants, which were championed by Ford Motor Company, prevented Blacks from living in Dearborn (Talley et al., 2023). Inkster's Black community began to establish its own institutions including churches such as Smith Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church and Womack Temple Christian Episcopal Church that were founded in 1924 and 1927, respectively (Lindsey, 1993). The Black community in Inkster also established the Inkster Civil Club and Inkster Booster Club which merged in 1929 with a shared agenda to support individuals with political aspirations. In 1933 Inkster Public Schools was among the first school districts to hire Black teachers and Black administrators in Michigan, primarily from

HBCUs (Equal Educational Opportunity, 1971; Hexter et al., 2011).

With the onset of the Great Depression, the village of Inkster suffered tremendously due to limited infrastructure. It was during this period that the Ford-Inkster Project was established (Talley et al., 2023). Described as a social engineering project, the Ford-Inkster project included one of three community commissaries established in metro Detroit, as well as provided financial support to pave roads, provide city services, and build the first Inkster High School building, and its first elementary school named after George Washington Carver, prominent agricultural scientist and collaborator of Henry Ford. While the program was heralded by many as an example of Ford's goodwill, it included substantial scrutiny and surveillance of Inkster residents, the majority of whom were Ford Motor Company employees. Loan programs were established that were akin to indentured servitude, and residents faced impromptu visits from project supervisors to conduct subjective inspections of their living conditions, which led some residents to resist the program. The Ford-Inkster project ended in 1941 as Ford employees sought union representation.

The 1940s also marked the beginning of the second wave of the Great Migration when Blacks began to relocate from the South to secondary cities in Michigan including Grand Rapids, and Ypsilanti (Robinson, 2013). It was during this secondary wave that Inkster began to reach its peak as residents came both from Detroit and Ypsilanti which were becoming overcrowded, as well as directly from states across the South. In response to the influx of Black residents, the first annexation attempt was made in 1943 by Inkster's White residents. They aimed to separate a parcel of land from the village to create the "highly segregated Westwood city" (Talley, et al., 2023, p 53). During the same year, there was a second annexation which benefited Inkster by adding a subdivision of primarily Black residents from Romulus Community Schools to the

Inkster Public Schools' student enrollment (Lindsey, 1993).

As support from Ford Motor Company waned, Inkster's Black community charted its direction on its own terms in the 1950s. Inkster Public Schools gained grant funding to build two additional elementary schools—Frederick Douglas and Carter G. Woodson Elementary Schools—Hiram McNeely was elected as state representative during this timeframe, and a new Inkster High School was built (Lindsey, 1993). It was also during the 1950s that activist Malcolm X resided in Inkster after becoming a member of the Nation of Islam (Achtenberg, 2022), Inkster was home to the first fully Black owned radio station in the United States, WCHB, (Lindsey, 1993; Talley et al., 2023) and Allen Supermarket opened as the largest Black owned supermarket in the United States (Ebony Magazine Archive, 1955; Lindsey, 1993; Talley et al., 2023). Beginning in the 1950s and 1960s Inkster's children and youth attended school across five independent school districts: Cherry Hill, Taylor, Wayne-Westland, Westwood, and Inkster Public Schools (Lindsey, 1993). The Inkster Preschool Project was also established during this era, with similarities to the Perry Preschool Project of Ypsilanti which "provided an organized educational experience directed at the intellectual and social development of 123 black youths from families of low, socioeconomic status, who were at risk of failing." (Berrueta-Clement, 1984, p.1). As Inkster's population peaked in 1960, IPS maintained a comprehensive education landscape for its 5,000 students, the majority of whom were Black. The education landscape in Inkster Public Schools included "six public elementary schools, an adult education center, two Head Start centers, a middle school and high school with 1,000 students," and was known for its athletic programs, as well as its jazz and marching bands (James, 1999).

Inkster's Black residents became the city's majority population in the 1960s, leading to increased discontent among Inkster's White residents (Lindsey, 1993). It was also during this

time that Inkster faced the third and most detrimental annexation in its history, as the city of Dearborn Heights was established by legally acquiring a two-and-a-half-mile parcel of land, which also was the Inkster commercial corridor adjacent to the city of Dearborn, a key component of Inkster's non-residential tax base (Lindsey, 1993; Talley et al., 2023). Despite residents' attempts to sue Wayne County Circuit Court to prevent the annexation, their efforts were unsuccessful, and in 1960 the city of Dearborn Heights was established. After unsuccessful attempts to sue Wayne County for the annexation which formed Dearborn Heights, Inkster was finally established as a municipality in 1964.

While the annexation was a substantial blow especially to Inkster's Black community who considered the annexation racially motivated (Talley et al., 2023), Inkster's Black residents continued to seek progress within education and politics. The desire and demand for more culturally relevant instruction was experienced nationwide as Black parents and teachers in major urban cities—including nearby Detroit—began advocating for Black history and African-centered education within K-12 schools (Halvorsen, 2012). Through these influences a Black history course was established and incorporated into the high school curriculum in 1964 and a Black History Club was established in 1968 that focused on providing events and activities for Inkster High students in celebration of Black history and culture, including the Black college tour. In 1968 Inkster High School began partnering with Wayne State University's Upward Bound program (Battle et al., 1971), established to "generate skills and motivation necessary for success in education and beyond," implemented primarily by colleges and universities (Mathematica, 2009). Wayne State University, was one of the first universities to implement the Upward Bound program across the United States through its predecessor, Project 350 (Battle et al., 1971). In the 1971 United States Senate Committee Hearing on Equal Educational

Opportunity, IPS superintendent Dr. Edward B. Fort testified that within IPS there was a disproportionately higher rate of students who graduated and went on to pursue higher education in comparison to surrounding districts (Equal Educational Opportunity, 1971). He further testified that the IPS teachers had a true commitment to the students despite disparities in pay and district resources, and the students "had a commitment to higher education" (Equal Educational Opportunity, 1971, p. 9625).

Edward Bivens was elected as Inkster's first Black mayor in 1970 (Lindsey, 1993), and in 1974, Equilla Bradford became the first Black female superintendent in the state of Michigan in Westwood Community School District, which includes the southeast quadrant of Inkster.

The Early Years (1978 to 1992)

Amid societal woes, including severe unemployment and drug epidemics which adversely impacted the Black community at alarming rates (HUD State of the Cities User Data, n.d.; Haaga et al., 1992), during the late 1970s and early 1980s Hip Hop culture began to move crowds through radio and music videos broadcast across the country (Charnas, 2011). In 1981 Don Barden, an Inkster High School alum established Barden Cablevision and landed his first contract with the City of Inkster to wire residential homes with cable television. Barden leveraged the contract in Inkster to win a subsequent bid with the City of Detroit in 1983, leading to more than 120,000 cable subscribers to Barden Cablevision (Chappell, 2004). It was also during this era that millions of viewers tuned in to watch Alex Haley's *Roots* in 1978, and three foundational artistic works were created that shaped the depiction of Historically Black Colleges and Universities in both TV and Film: *The Cosby Show* in 1984 and its spinoff *A Different World* in 1987 both produced by Bill Cosby, and *School Daze* directed and produced by Spike Lee in 1988. Through these creative works, audiences across the United States were exposed to the

experiences of students attending two fictionally based HBCUs: Virginia-based Hillman College and Atlanta-based Mission College (Mobley, 2015). The representation of students attending HBCUs through both film and TV audiences which has been documented as increasing interest in attending HBCUs in the 1980s and beyond (Mobley, 2015; Whatley Matabane & Merritt, 2014).

As the depictions of HBCUs through Cosby and Lee's works provided fictional exposure to HBCUs, predominantly White college campuses were also featured in the media for the realities of racism experienced by Black students during this era (Rojas, 2012). This included protests at the University of Michigan in 1987 (University of Michigan Library, 2024), and both Wayne State University (Franzen, 2016) and Michigan State University in 1989 (United Press International Archives, 1989). Such protests and sit-ins were aligned with the Black studies movement of the 1960s, where Black students at PWIs led efforts to increase resources and support for Black students on campuses across the United States, and formalize Black studies programs (Rojas, 2010).

The student unrest on PWI campuses occurred just as the King-Chávez-Parks (KCP) program was established by the Michigan Legislature in 1986 to "increase the number of academically or economically disadvantaged students to complete college degrees" (Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity, n.d.). This state-funded program was based at two- and four-year colleges and universities across Michigan in partnership with local school districts, including Inkster Public Schools, to provide college exposure activities to high school students. The KCP program complemented the nationally funded Upward Bound college access program hosted at Wayne State University which engaged IPS students. It was also during this era that the controversial report 'A Nation at Risk' was published by the US Department of

Education in 1983, which led to sweeping education reform efforts (Horsford et al., 2019) impacting public districts like Inkster for decades to come.

Over time, Inkster's declining population and tax base translated into reduced enrollment as neighboring suburbs continued to become viable options for Black residents to live. As a result, families continued to leave both Inkster and Inkster Public Schools (Hexter et al, 2011). The Inkster School Board reported in 1988 the district-wide enrollment included 2,635 students, 200 less than what was projected for the district's budget. This led to a reduction in state aid of more than $650,000 for the academic year, resulting in the elimination of eleven staff positions, including teachers, administrators, and support staff throughout the district (Inkster Board of Education, 1988a). In 1989, the district enrollment was down to 2,350, leading to an additional $500,000 reduction in state aid (Inkster Board of Education, 1989). Beyond staff layoffs, other approaches implemented by the district included consolidating elementary schools (Beverly, 1987) and passing an additional millage in 1988 (Inkster Board of Education, 1988b).

While administrators navigated these challenges at the district level, school leaders and instructors focused on providing unique curricular and co-curricular experiences to benefit the students who remained in Inkster schools. Such initiatives were well received by the school district leadership and in 1990, the District Board of Education acknowledged the Inkster High School Black history course and the Black History Club for its efforts to expose students to Black history and culture, including the Black college tour (Inkster Board of Education, 1990).

The Middle Years (1993-2000)

The assault of Rodney King by Los Angeles police officers in 1992, the film portrayal of Malcolm X by Denzel Washington in 1993, and the fall of apartheid in South Africa and subsequent election of Nelson Mandela as president of the African National Congress in 1994 all

offered opportunities to see Blackness on display in media in equally affirming and alarming contexts in the early 1990s. This period also began the reverse migration of Black Americans as many—including those residing in the Midwest—began to relocate to Southern cities (Frey, 2022). Atlanta became the largest cultural magnet for Black Americans, as more than 114,000 migrated from across the country to the Atlanta region from 1995-2000. This was also a time of increased enrollment among HBCUs (NCES, 1996), as well as continued visibility in the media from School Daze, The Cosby Show, and A Different World, and increased popularity within Black culture fashion trends as Hip Hop artists and other Black celebrities wore HBCU apparel in music videos and in prime time TV shows, and in some instances were themselves students of HBCUs (McClure, 2011; Peebles, 2023).

Legislators at the local, state, and national levels continued to position themselves through policy agendas focused on education, with varying approaches to address the need for quality schools across the United States (Horsford et al., 2019). In Michigan, charter school legislation of 1993 and Schools of Choice legislation in 1994 were passed (Eastern Michigan University, Division of University Relations, 1997; Strate & Wilson, 1991). These two pieces of legislation led to more options for parents to enroll their students in charter schools including those newly opening in Inkster and surrounding communities (Ladner & Brouilette, 2001). Gaudior Academy, authorized by Eastern Michigan University became the first charter school operating in Inkster in 1996 (Eastern Michigan University, Division of University Relations, 1997), and by 1999, Inkster Public Schools' student enrollment was down to 1,490, a 37% decrease from 1989 enrollment numbers (James; 1999; Ladner & Brouilette, 2001).

In addition to declining student enrollment, Inkster Public Schools also grappled with low standardized test scores on the state administered Michigan Educational Assessment Program, a

measure used to determine school quality. According to school board records, Inkster ranked lowest among metro Detroit school districts for the 1991 statewide assessment (Inkster Board of Education, 1991; Strate & Wilson, 1991).

IPS leadership demonstrated it was determined to change both the outcomes and narrative about the district by retaining its current students and attracting new students through Schools of Choice legislation. During this era, Inkster High School maintained its partnerships with Wayne State University's Upward Bound Program, and University of Michigan's King-Chávez-Parks College Program, with a focus on college readiness and college exposure. Both programs were unique among school districts enrolling Inkster students within surrounding communities. The Black college tour remained another unique staple for Inkster High School, and in 1992 the district also partnered with local churches, businesses, and the local circuit court to implement the Save Our African American Boys program which included a Black college trip for K-8 students to visit HBCUs in Atlanta (Inkster Board of Education, 1992). The district also remained supportive of the Black College tour through Inkster High School, and in 1994, it was acknowledged for tours visiting HBCUs in Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia (Inkster Board of Education, 1994a). The district also partnered with Focus: HOPE, a Detroit-based workforce development organization to offer the *Fast Track* program to establish a dual enrollment program whereby participating students could potentially earn an associate degree alongside a high school diploma (Inkster Board of Education, 1994b).

Despite a valiant effort by school leaders and district administrators, enrollment could not be stabilized within Inkster schools, which continued to diminish the district's operating budget. In 2000, the district made the decision to relinquish its management to the Edison company, a for-profit education management entity that operated school districts across the United States

(Hexter et al., 2011). Through the partnership, Edison provided bold strategies to increase MEAP

test scores by ten-percent over five years to stabilize educational outcomes for students (Moser,

2001). The partnership with Edison yielded an initial student enrollment increase of fifteen-

percent, which eventually waned. Declining enrollment, concerns with building facilities, and

unkept promises caused the partnership to become strained, and the contract with Edison was not

renewed in 2005 (Hexter et al., 2011).

The Later Years (2001-2010)

For prior generations, Inkster's location proved beneficial for its geographic positioning

amongst automotive industry titans Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler (now Stellantis North

America). This location became a positioning of vulnerability during the early 2000s, as Detroit

experienced its own financial woes and subsequently lost more than 24.8% of its population

(State of Michigan, 2015). The ripple effect of the economic challenges Detroit faced also

impacted Inkster during this time because a sizable number of residents were also employees of

automotive companies and their suppliers. The reverse migration continued, and Black residents

continued to leave Detroit for other locales including Atlanta, where the Black population grew

to the second-largest concentration in the country (Frey, 2022). The movie Drumline was also

released in 2002 popularizing the HBCU experience for younger audiences. This film centered

on the fictional Atlanta A&T University and emphasized the HBCU band culture, which has

influences from all-Black military bands, as well as jazz and blues performers (Georgia Public

Broadcasting, 2022).

Education continued to become more politicized in this period, with Michigan positioned

as a clear battleground state. In 2006 the University of Michigan ceased using racial

considerations within its admissions process due to the statewide passage of Proposal 2 which

"ban[ned] public institutions from using affirmative action programs that give preferential treatment to groups or individuals based on their race, gender, color, ethnicity or national origin for public employment, education or contracting purposes." (Michigan Civil Rights Initiative Committee, 2006). The charter school movement continued to expand in Michigan, as the statewide cap in the total number of charters was lifted. However, of the eight charter schools operating in Inkster and in nearby communities in 1999 (James, 1999), only four schools remained in 2010 (State of Michigan, 2010).

Despite competition from the remaining nearby charter schools and enrollment sitting at only 1,200 students in 2003, Inkster Public Schools began to see signs of improvement. The district eliminated its deficit and operated at a surplus through the efforts of a state appointed financial manager from 2002 to 2005 (Hexter et al., 2011). Oversight of the district was subsequently returned to the local community, and in 2005, a new superintendent was hired who established a district-wide culture focused on educational excellence, operational effectiveness, and parent engagement (Scott, 2005; Brown, 2008). The superintendent implemented policy changes including uniform requirements, and approved innovative programs designed by teachers and school leaders across the district. To support such efforts, the district partnered with local churches and organizations in Inkster. It also partnered with nearby colleges and universities such as Wayne State University, Wayne County Community College, and Eastern Michigan University, and institutions outside of Michigan including Harvard University and Meharry Medical School (Brown, 2008).

An academy structure was established to cultivate the interests and potential educational pathways of students. Notable academies include those focused on international business and performing arts, such as gospel choir and marching bands. The Ivy League academy offered dual

enrollment programs in partnership with Wayne County Community College and University of Michigan-Dearborn, which engaged over 30 students between 2006 and 2011(Center for Educational Performance and Information, 2007; Center for Educational Performance and Information, 2011; Rosenberg, 2009), and the Upward Bound program also continued at Wayne State University during this period. The academy structure also led to a specialized format for the Black college tour, which focused on those engaged in the choir or band and included parent chaperones which aligned with the superintendent's vision for increased parent engagement (Brown, 2008). Unlike the tour structure of the 1980s and 1990s, the later Black college tours allowed students to become fully immersed into the HBCU campus experience through overnight campus visits and auditioning for the choir or performing during halftime shows during major football classics, a campus tradition at several HBCUs.

As a result of innovative programmatic efforts and its geographic location, an influx of students who were Detroit residents began enrolling in Inkster schools, and by 2009, they comprised 43% of the district's student enrollment totaling 3,276, a nearly three-fold increase in six years (Metzger, 2011). Inkster students also made notable gains in the classroom during this timeframe. All K-8 students met Annual Yearly Progress on statewide assessments in 2007, with considerable progress made among high school students compared to prior years (Brown, 2008). Inkster Public Schools received national attention for its progress, including from Education Trust for the district's ability to "surpass state standards" during the 2011 academic year. (Arellano et al., 2012).

Conclusion

The Inkster High School Black college tours did not happen in isolation but were influenced by the history of Inkster dating back to the 1840s, Black culture, and the educational

landscape at the national, statewide, and local levels during the three time periods when the tours took place. Despite its identity as a small city, Inkster was both influenced by and influential in shaping the Black experience in the United States. Its geographic positioning allowed it to benefit from Detroit, but also left it vulnerable to market conditions and deeply seeded institutional racism. Inkster Public Schools was one of many institutions facing financial challenges in the beginning in the early 2000s, yet maintained a focus on college-readiness for its students, even amid other concerns. This focus served to attract and retain Inkster students, even as larger forces worked against the district. Inkster contended with a lot through the years and continued to offer resources to support its students leveraging the expertise of the city's most valuable assets: its educators, students, and the broader community.

Chapter Five: Findings

The prior chapter illuminated what we know about Black college tours by considering the history of Inkster dating back to the 1840s and situating the Inkster High School Black college tour within Black culture and the national, state, and local education landscape from 1978 to 2010. Because there is limited written documentation about the Inkster High School Black college tours, personal interviews from individuals who experienced the tours provide additional context to address the research questions:

1) How do the Inkster High School Black college tours illuminate and inform what we know about Black college tours?

2) How did Inkster High School sustain the Black college tours from 1978-2010?

3) How did the Inkster High School Black college tours inform the college decision-making process for participating students?

First, I provide a summary of interview participants. Second, to continue describing how the Inkster High School Black College tours illuminate and inform what we know about Black college tours, I draw from the interviews to summarize the purpose of the Inkster High School Black college tour by highlighting exposure as the primary purpose of the tours and describe the four types of exposure the tour provided: exposure to HBCUs, exposure to college and collegiate life, exposure to travel, and exposure to independence. I also further explain the structure of the tours and their four components: the bus ride, campus visits, cultural visits, and recreation. I then describe the motivations for participating in the tours as described by the student participants who were interviewed.

Thirdly, to explain how the Inkster High School Black college tour was sustained over time, I describe the roles carried out by those directly and indirectly connected to the tours:

teachers, students, school and district leaders, and the broader Inkster community. Fourth, to position the Inkster High School Black college tour within the individual college choice processes of participating students, I summarize how participants describe the Black college tour as helping inform their decision of whether to attend an in-state or out-of-state institution and deciding exclusively among HBCU institutions. Finally, I provide concluding thoughts which foreground the discussion and implications for further study found in the next chapter.

Summary of Interview Participants

All interviewees identified as Black or African American, and participated in the Inkster High School Black college tour during one of the three identified timeframes: the Early years (1978-1992), Middle years (1993-2000), and Later years (2001-2010). The three major groups interviewed include teachers (3), parent chaperones (2) and students (13). The teachers are HBCU alumni, and both parents have children who attended or graduated from HBCUs. There are additional similarities and distinctions represented across the group including the years of their enrollment as students within Inkster Public Schools, degree attainment, current location, and career field as shown in Table 3.

Inkster High Black College Tour – Purpose, Structure, and Motivations

Exposure as the Primary Purpose

When asked to explain the Black college tour to someone completely unfamiliar, interviewees overwhelmingly used the word *exposure* to describe the tour's purpose. The interviewees further described exposure in one of four ways: exposure to HBCUs, exposure to college, exposure to independence, and exposure to travel. This notion of exposure aligns broadly with the tenets of community cultural wealth, fugitive pedagogy, and African American college choice by providing students with an immersive educational experience rooted within

Black culture to inform their decision to attend college (Chapman et al, 2020; Givens, 2021; Yosso, 2005). In the following sections, I identify the specific tenets of each theoretical framework which connect directly to the four types of exposure described by the interviewees.

Exposure to HBCUs. According to Louise, one of three former Inkster High School teachers interviewed, the Inkster High School Black College tour was designed to provide students with an in-person experience to visit the HBCUs they studied in the Black history class offered as part of the high school curriculum. Louise further explained that in 1968, ten years prior to the first tour, units on Black history were incorporated into the curriculum at Inkster High School after similar efforts were successful in nearby Detroit.

The textbooks did not cover very much of African American history. So [we] began inserting various units about Black history…the Detroit schools probably were the pioneers of this. And [we were] in contact with some of those teachers in Detroit. And after having dealt with the units on Reconstruction, and how education began to be formalized for Blacks during this period, we talked about Historically Black colleges, then somehow it dawned on [us], why not take some tours and show them what we have been studying about?

Detroit Public Schools was among the first districts to implement a districtwide focus on African-centered Education in 1992 (Halvorsen, 2012). This groundbreaking work was heavily influenced by decades of instruction led by DPS teachers who embedded lessons on Black history and culture into the existing curriculum. These efforts, coupled with the emergence of the Detroit Community Control of Schools Movement served as early examples to teachers in Inkster Public Schools about the possibility of incorporating Black history into the existing curriculum, with inserting lessons on HBCUs becoming an extension of student learning. Louise's description of efforts to incorporate lessons on Black history built upon the tenets of

fugitive pedagogy by designing lessons based on the teacher's own lived experience as HBCU

alumni (Givens, 2001). Connecting with educators from Detroit to establish such lessons further

aligns with fugitive pedagogy due to their work to leverage an established network of Black

educators to advance knowledge on Black history and culture, which was the purpose and

strategic design of Carter G. Woodson's Association for the Study of Negro Life and History.

Louise explained that prior to the tours, Inkster High students had "limited familiarity"

with HBCUs, including those in nearby Ohio. Students were also familiar with the alma maters

of teachers and administrators within the district, as well as the HBCUs located in the states

where their families were from, primarily Mississippi and Alabama. Despite this general

familiarity, most had not visited an HBCU campus and had not been exposed to the variety of

institutions represented across the HBCU landscape:

> They did not know anything about any of the other Black colleges. Very few of them
>
> have come into the deep South and gone to schools in Alabama unless they were natives
>
> of that state and had relatives that graduated from those colleges and then moved to
>
> Michigan and got jobs.

For Louise, this limited exposure to the full HBCU landscape compromised the student's

understanding of Black history and potential educational options after graduating from high

school. Beyond exposing students to HBCUs for their historical significance, Louise further

explained the purpose of the tours was to serve as a potential recruitment tool for HBCUs by

informing prospective students about their current course offerings, campus life, and the

communities in which they are located. As alumnae of HBCUs, tour organizers Louise, Athena,

and Diana were advocates of the HBCU college experience and the unique college experience

offered at these institutions which focused on educating Black students. This mission manifested

uniquely at HBCUs compared to what former Inkster High School students experienced

attending PWIs where, as Diana describes, they "felt threatened and intimidated by going to a

White university, and "were just lost in the shuffle."

Former student, Qaiser, had experience visiting both HBCU and PWI campuses prior to

the Black college tour and indicated that the Black college tour expanded his exposure to an

HBCU he was considering attending and the one he ultimately chose to attend. From his

perspective, the tour was "a good opportunity to not be a student, but to see what the student life

was like." Although Mary had previously determined that she would attend a flagship school in

Michigan, her exposure to the HBCU band culture, coupled with the Black college tour,

ultimately led her to only consider HBCUs throughout her college choice process:

> I hadn't known anything about HBCUs before I joined marching band, because our
>
> director graduated from an HBCU. So that was my introduction to HBCUs. And literally
>
> since then, I'm like, okay, this is where I want to go. As soon as I stepped foot on or even
>
> heard about HBCUs, I was like okay, no, this, this is me. This is what I need to be doing.
>
> My whole trajectory changed after that.

In contrast, Lela had already decided that attending an HBCU was not her preferred choice for

college, but was still interested in seeing if the in-person experience on the Black college tour

was like the depiction of HBCUs shown on *The Cosby Show* and *A Different World*.

Exposure to college. Four of the student interviewees had not visited a college campus

prior to the Black college tour. Marie described family and community members "pushed [her]

to get an education and go to college" although it was not her preferred path after high school.

She expressed that "it was through going on the Black college tours" that she decided to go to

college, and only considered Black colleges in her college choice process. While Aliyah had

visited nearby PWI campuses on several occasions prior to the tour and was familiar with the TV show, *A Different World*, she indicated she had not thought about attending college before participating on the tour. For Marie and Aliyah, the Black college tour served as an opportunity to view attending college as a viable next step beyond high school worthy of consideration. As Chapman and colleagues (2020) describe activities like Black college tours—when designed by trusted individuals such as high school teachers—help inform students of the options available to them to pursue post-secondary education. Such opportunities become part of a student's aspirational and navigational wealth, affirming the student's hopes of attending college, adapting to the environment, and potentially attaining a post-secondary degree (Yosso, 2005)

Interviewees who experienced visiting PWIs in Michigan and other states explained how the Black college tour was different from a traditional campus visit, and how the experience of visiting an HBCU differed from a campus visit at a PWI. This allowed the tour participants to compare their experiences visiting both institution types as part of their decision-making process of where to attend college. From their perspective, the display of Black culture on HBCU campuses was notably different when compared to the absence of an identifiable culture present on PWI campuses. Patrice described the visits to PWIs as "sterile" and regimented. She further described the campuses as absent of life, with tour guides focusing solely on the campus facilities. In contrast, Patrice described the HBCU campus tours as featuring the campus facilities and educational experience, but also including the opportunity to "walk through the life of the campus." Geoff, Qaiser, and John expressed similar sentiments as Patrice regarding a cultural void recalled on the PWI campuses but were on full display on the HBCU campuses they visited during the Black college tour. Geoff compared visiting an HBCU campus to attending a family reunion:

Because when you go to your family reunions, you're going to be educated, you're going

to sit with grandma, sit with aunties, you're gonna get to hear history, you're going to

have a learning experience as a part of something you're looking forward to. And when

we, as people of color, you find out historical things that impact the way you make

decisions today, so this is what happens at an HBCU for people like us. Now at a PWI,

you start looking mechanically at what will be some outcomes, what might I get from my

education? How much is this going to cost? Is it worth being bothered? How disrespected

am I going to be? Will I be able to stay? Are they going to be trying to push me out? And

you start looking for diversity, equity, and inclusion programs.

John further explained that while the sense of camaraderie and support for Black students

embedded into the mission at HBCUs is absent on PWI campuses, it is "the best introduction

into the real world because you are all by yourself".

Exposure to other communities. Among the student participants that were interviewed,

they had varying levels of experience with extended travel outside of Inkster, including out of

state travel. Athena, one of the former teachers, expressed that many of the students had limited

exposure even to the various diverse communities of Detroit. Lembert expressed that the Black

college tour allowed him to have a change of environment that "gave him hope, seeing Black

people going for education, achieving something, and seeing that success." John also shared that

the Black college tours "prepared us and opened our eyes to a world bigger than Inkster." He

explained that although Inkster High School was a small school within a small city, there was "a

community feel that also broadened our horizons to know that the world was bigger than

Inkster."

Thumper and Fortunate both expressed that travel was important to their family, and the

Black college tour built upon their prior travel experiences throughout the South. Among the many communities visited, there was particular interest in visiting Atlanta especially in the middle years, as it became a popular geography within the Black community, and among young adults. "Everyone heard about Atlanta," Qaiser said. He further explained, "A lot of folks may have never been, so it was two-fold. You get to see the city, and then you're going to see the schools and consider if would you want to live there."

Exposure to independence. Louise and Diana indicated how the Black college tour also provided an opportunity to experience independence similar to college life by traveling without parents, sharing hotel accommodations with other students, and managing expenses across multiple locations throughout the weeklong trip. John affirmed this in his interview, reflecting on traveling for the first time without his parents. Prutunda—one of two parent chaperones interviewed—described this notion of exposure to independence differently. "The first thought that comes to me when thinking of the Black college tour is the Underground Railroad," Prutunda said. "It's a path to freedom. There are people who will lead you from this station to that station to that station until you get to the freedom land." For Prutunda, each HBCU campus visited was a stop along a longer journey of understanding Black history and gaining clarity about your own purpose and contributions to be made that builds on the legacy of others.

Black College Tour Structure

In addition to explaining the purpose of the Black college tour by describing the types of exposure it provided, interviewees also described the tour structure by explaining the formal and informal preparation required for the tour, and the unique tour elements they experienced.

Tour Preparation. Planning for the Black college tour was a process that involved staff, parents, teachers, students, and the community. According to the teachers interviewed, designing

the itinerary was the most important task to be completed in preparing for the tour. In the early

years this task was jointly completed by teachers and students in the Black History Club, which

included "asking for ideas of where [students] wanted to go on the Black College tour." This was

followed by a series of polls to determine the specific HBCU campuses to visit. Diana further

explained that once the schools were selected, the students helped formalize the tour route until

the full itinerary—including lodging, recreation, and cultural experiences—was finalized. Once a

tour itinerary was decided upon, several logistical steps were completed by the teachers,

including permission from parents and district leadership, confirming the exact timing of HBCU

visits, and securing travel and hotel accommodations. The tour was initially marketed to students

participating in the Black history class and the Black history club, but in the Middle Years it

began to attract other students interested in the experience. As demand for the Black college tour

continued to increase, the student composition on the trip continued to expand. During the

middle years Inkster students enrolled in neighboring districts were granted permission to

participate in the tour. Lembert explains:

> My cousin and I were real close growing up. I told him, 'my school got a Black
college tour, you want to go?' He said, 'Yeah I want to go!' So I explained that, I have a cousin
who wants to go. He's in private school, and it's like a handful of Black kids there. But he wants
to go on the Black college tour. [My teacher] handed me a form, and said, 'if he can get
permission, he can go.'

The teachers worked with students and parents to organize fundraisers to help defray costs for

the tour, as well as to coordinate payment plans for students in the months leading up to the tour.

In the weeks prior to the tour, teachers also met with parents to review expectations during the

trip in terms of attire, behavior, steps taken in the event of an emergency, and the consequences

for students not adhering to the expectations while on the tour.

For the students participating in the tour, preparation also meant new clothes, shoes, and hairdos as Lela stated, to accommodate the warmer climates where the HBCUs were located. In addition to the difference in weather, Lela further explained that "HBCUs have long been known as fashion havens. And show up wearing last years' back to school fashions was unacceptable." Lela's statement about the fashion-forward culture observable at HBCUs aligns with Mobley's (2015) interviews of HBCU students identified as low-income who "adjusted themselves with regard to their attire and the purchasing of specific designer labels and other types of attire to socially fit" (pp. 109-110). Along with their appearance, students planned for the trip by purchasing snacks for the long bus ride, up to 22 hours depending on the first tour stop. Lela acknowledged that although carrying snacks for long road trips is not unique to the Black experience, "[Black people are] known for traveling the highways and byways with a shoebox filled with chicken and biscuits because [of] Jim Crow."

Tour Elements. The tours typically lasted five to eight days with visits to several HBCUs, which varied depending on the specific route taken and consisted of 4 elements: the bus ride, HBCU campus visits, cultural components, and recreational activities.

Bus Ride. The groups traveled using a chartered motorcoach with a designated driver. The tours always departed from the parking lot of Inkster High School, and Thumper recalls that as they departed, the Inkster High School principal would provide parting words as they embarked on their journey:

You get on the bus with a strong sense of self, like you represent your school. You are a representative of your school, and you are headed to a place that potentially represents your future. You get on the bus with a sense of pride. And the principal, he was like, you know, 'go

and represent us well. So we're all dressed really well. Everybody is happy. Everybody is singing songs. Everybody has a sense of pride and community.

Along the journey, the bus trip was a time for social interaction for students participating on the tour. Lela described how the beginning of the bus ride was "full of excitement" as the students anticipated "the first campus and see what it's about". As they transitioned from one campus to the next, Mary recalled the post-campus discussions among students as they made comparisons among the different campuses and began to make decisions about which schools piqued their interest. Along with the conversations and camaraderie experienced, John and Qaiser both described the music that was played as a key component bus ride, which allowed the students to enjoy themselves during the long bus ride.

HBCU campus visits. A common starting point for the tours was to visit the HBCUs closest to Michigan. Based on the recollections of former teachers, students and parent chaperones, the Inkster High School Black college tour traveled to 16 of the 20 states and regions where HBCUs are located[1]. The tours included visits to large and small campuses located in both urban and rural communities, including public land-grant universities, and private liberal arts colleges.

> When you get off that bus, it's not that you're fully aware about what you're walking into. But you're walking into the arms of, it's almost like you're walking into the arms of your ancestors. They are now taking your hand and they're now showing you the way. And it's not just about meeting with the financial aid officer. It's not just about seeing what a college classroom looks like, for the first time. That's all important. But the bigger thing was that, that sense of community and a handoff from that high school to that

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[1] HBCUs located in Missouri, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania and the US Virgin Islands were not identified as visited through the Inkster High School Black college tours.

university, each time you do that, you are welcomed. (Thumper)

The visits to HBCU campuses were the focal point of the tour and held significance to students for various reasons. Fortunate and Patrice described familial connections to specific campuses they visited. Fortunate, explained a "draw" she felt to one of the campuses she visited, and later learned the campus was in "the area where [her] ancestors had been." Patrice also had a familial connection to one of the campuses that was in her father's hometown. Qaiser and John recalled specific sights and smells of rural campuses and how they differed from urban campuses. Thumper and Lembert described the presence of the Black fraternities, sororities, and marching bands that had a notable presence on specific campuses. Mary recalled spending time on the campuses allowed the students to envision themselves as college students soon:

Being on a college campus, it was almost like this could be our life. Like we could just all decide to go, which kind of happened, four or five of us ended up going [to college] together that year. So it was just like, oh, this could be us for the next four or five years.

Patrice described that during the campus tour, someone was playing the Montel Jordan song, *"This is How We Do It."* Experiencing this moment within an educational context was compelling for Patrice as she explained: "I was sold. Where's the admissions office? Sign me up. If this is the vibe that I get every day. I want to feel it. I want to walk to the class, bopping my head, it was everything."

During the early and middle years, the tours were held either in the fall to align with Homecoming festivities held on the visited campuses, or during the spring to align with spring break for Inkster Public schools. During the later years, trips were also held during Thanksgiving Break to coincide with performance dates for Football Classics which featured the band, or to align with audition season for students participating in the gospel choir. Mary explained the

specialized tours were appealing because they were "tailored to what [students] were interested in," and involved current HBCU students to "hear their experiences instead of always listening to the adults."

Cultural Components. To complement the HBCU campus visits, scheduled trips to historic museums and cultural landmarks such as the King Center in Atlanta or the National Civil Rights Museum and Lorraine Motel in Memphis were also incorporated into the travel itinerary. Louise vividly recalled a 1998 tour that included a visit to Bishop College, which as she described, "was right on the edge of closing." Although the school could no longer offer the scheduled campus tour, Louise explained that one of the staff members arranged for the group to visit the Johnson Hair Products Company, a Black hair care company, to "see how hair oils and other hair care products are manufactured." From Louise's perspective, this was just one example of the impromptu support they received while conducting the tours over the years. "[The people] just made a way when you did not exactly know what you were going to run into, she said. "We kind of operated on faith and prayer."

Recreation and Fun. Louise also acknowledged that while the trip was always intended to be educational, it was also intended to be a fun experience for the students. In addition to visiting HBCU campuses, cultural museums, and historic landmarks, the tour would often include a trip to an amusement park or similar experience.

> We were just very blessed to find people along the way who were so helpful. I had a
> friend, and his wife on staff at a Black college and when they found out that we were
> coming, they invited us to come out to their farm. He had like a working farm that was
> also a park recreational facility. And it was way back out in the boonies. And when the
> students found out that we were going out there, they said, 'we don't want to go out

there' because they wanted to go to Birmingham. You know, where the action was. I said, 'well listen, these friends have invited us to their place, and we are going'. And on the way out, through the woods, and the trees, and oh goodness! They got out there and they had a big pond that had fish and boats and all kinds of swimming that the kids got a chance to enjoy. Once it was dark, and they didn't want to leave. What a good time that we were shown when they hosted us.

Additional Motivations for Participating in the Tour

The motivations former students expressed for participating in the tour aligned with the purpose of the tour, including exposure to HBCUs, college, travel, and independence. Additionally, former students identified spending time with friends, and time away from school, home, and Inkster as additional motivators. Several former students acknowledged the role of media in exposing them to HBCUs. Most notably, the influence of *School Daze*, the *Cosby Show* and *A Different World.* John explains this not only provided initial exposure to college and HBCUs, but sparked a desire to attend college:

My earliest memory of wanting to attend college was watching two shows. *A Different World* was my first introduction to like okay, I want to attend college…The next thing that really propelled me was *School Daze*. Those two cinematic experiences or memories that I have or were first thoughts of okay, I have to go to college.

Kim further affirmed this exposure specifically with *The Cosby Show* and the college sweatshirts worn by the lead character Heathcliff Huxtable as "he always had on sweatshirts that advertised different Black colleges, or just any college, and I thought hey, I have never heard of that [school]." Lembert and Patrice also indicated that *School Daze* and *A Different World* affirmed their interest specifically in attending Black colleges. While Mary acknowledges the influence of

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media, she explains that she was "too young to say a Different World influenced [her] to want to go to a Black school." Instead, the film *Drumline*, "indirectly introduced [her] to HBCU-style band" while she was in middle school. This early exposure was further cultivated at Inkster High School where she gained a greater understanding of HBCUs.

Sustaining the Inkster High School Black College Tours

Based on the interviews, the Inkster High School Black college tours were sustained over time based on the efforts of those directly and indirectly connected to the tours. Individuals directly connected to and participating in the tours included Inkster High School teachers, student participants, and parent chaperones. Individuals indirectly connected to the tours included Inkster High School & Inkster Public Schools District leadership, and Inkster community members. Each group is further described in the following section along with the specific efforts taken to sustain the tour as described by the interviewees and the alignment between the efforts and the identified theoretical frameworks.

Inkster High School Teachers as Innovators

Inkster High School teachers include employees of Inkster Public Schools, assigned to Inkster High as their primary location of employment, who oversaw the planning and implementation of one or more Black college tours from 1978 through 2010. Five individuals were teachers at Inkster High School who also organized the Black college tours at the school. Not only were teachers described as innovators by establishing the Black college tour, but also by formalizing approaches for fundraising to reduce costs for students and their families. Louise explained that fundraising activities were often held in partnership with the athletic department and Inkster High School Booster Club to "get students who had a lot of potential to participate but did not have the wherewithal to attend [the tour]." Such fundraisers included "hotdog sales at

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the basketball games for students to make money toward their Black college tour expenses."

Other fundraising efforts implemented by teachers included securing donations from local

businesses to benefit the Black college tour as Diana explains:

> I went out and solicited five businesses in Inkster that would sponsor X amount of dollars
>
> a year, they would ask me what I needed. The students were responsible for their own
>
> food, but [support from businesses] helped take care of the bus and hotels that we stayed
>
> in. The businesses were more than generous, in giving me funds for the kids to go.

Beyond their relationships with local business owners to support fundraising, Diana,

Louise, and Athena also described how they leveraged their relationships with fellow HBCU

alumni to coordinate campus visits to their alma maters and other campuses. They also leveraged

their memberships in Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, and Delta Sigma Theta

Sorority, Incorporated, two of the four Black Greek-letter sororities with alumni and

undergraduate chapters located across the United States, including on HBCU campuses. This

approach of leveraging existing relationships to benefit the Black college tours was also used

during the Later Years, as tour organizers coordinated tours to include HBCUs where there was a

pre-existing relationship with faculty and staff members on campus. Mary explained it was this

type of established relationship between the Inkster High School band director and the band

director at one of the HBCUs they visited that allowed for Inkster High School band members to

march in the parade at an annual football classic held at the HBCU.

Inkster High School Students as Tour Co-Designers and Promoters

Inkster High School student participants were individuals enrolled at Inkster High School

as students from 1978 through 2010 who also participated in one or more Black college tours. As

Louise described, the members of the Black History Club were charged with collecting data from

students to determine the tour itinerary based on student interest. Not only did students assist with designing the tour, but they were also the primary promoters of the tours among their peers. Patrice, Qaiser, and Lela all explained how upperclassmen or former Inkster High School students were instrumental in piquing their interest to participate in the tour. In addition to promoting the tour to fellow classmates, the students also promoted the tour to students in neighboring districts, which led to tour organizers opening the tour for such students to attend. For Kim, hearing about the tour as well as the Black history class is what led her to return to Inkster schools after attending parochial schools for eight years. As some tour participants graduated and subsequently attended HBCUs, their influence on underclassmen continued to shape the interest of Inkster High students participating in the tours, and in some cases, attending HBCUs.

Parent Chaperones as Influencers

Parent chaperones were not paid employees of Inkster Public Schools but participated in the Black college tour as volunteers. Based on the interviews, parent chaperones were introduced into the tour design during the Later years to align with state mandates to increase parent involvement within the school district as a tactic to improve student outcomes connected to statewide assessments.

I had the opportunity not only to support my son in the classroom, but to support the entire school district as a volunteer parent, and being one of the leaders of the parent association. And it wasn't like a PTA it was something that the state had implemented to help us get on that trajectory to get our scores up and all of that. (Geoff)

As chaperones, parents also could experience the HBCU campuses along with their high school students, and offer insight and perspective to their students who were making decisions

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about where to attend college. Prutunda explained that she wanted to "be on the campus of an HBCU for myself." As a parent chaperone, she saw it as her responsibility to make sure [students] left with information that they needed to succeed," and represent on behalf of other parents unable to participate due to work constraints.

School & District Leadership as Tour Supporters

Unlike Detroit Public Schools which struggled to attract and retain Black teachers well into the 1960s and 1970s (Halvorsen, 2012), Inkster Public Schools was a predominantly Black school district with Black administrators in leadership positions, including principals and the district superintendents dating back to the 1940s (Lindsey, 1993). According to Louise, this educational landscape made it possible for teachers to introduce innovation to the curriculum that was well received by school district leadership:

They really were outgoing, I mean, visionaries. And they would allow you to be creative. You know, there wasn't a matter of trying to keep you from doing things. If you brought up an idea, and it sounded good, and you had some kind of plan in mind, with an outline of what you're doing and why you're doing, they would say oh, yeah, go ahead. You know, and that was the kind of administrators that we were exposed to, and by having a predominately Black board of education. They understood and see most of Inkster is composed of people who migrated from South and that Southern experience had a lot to do with the way they operated.

This support also laid the groundwork for continued support for the tour within Inkster High School as well as from district leadership. Louise and Diana explained the support included approval for the tours to take place, substitute teachers providing coverage for the teachers participating in the tour, and, as Diane described, during certain years, it included an emergency fund for students who did not have sufficient spending money during the trip.

Inkster Community Members as Tour Supporters

Community members were individuals who lived, worked, attended church, owned businesses, or were members of national service organizations with chapters located in Inkster, including Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., and Top Ladies of Distinction, Inc. Based on the interviews, community partners and residents played an integral role to ensure the Black college tour was funded each year. It is also worth noting the community partners and residents' group has considerable overlap with the four previous groups described, as individuals directly connected to Inkster High School and Inkster Public Schools were also residents in the city of Inkster.

Financial support was provided by community members to assist with fundraising efforts. Diane explained that Inkster-based churches would "support the children that attended their church, by paying the money for that student to come on the tour." She further explained that "parents had their own little fundraisers so that their child would be able to go" which were supported by neighbors, coworkers, and other community members."

The efforts of teachers, students, parent chaperones, school and district leadership, and Inkster community members demonstrate that the Inkster High School Black college tour was a community-wide initiative, not an activity that occurred in isolation. Athena explained that such community-wide support was consistent with the characteristics of the Inkster community overall.

> Inkster, the whole community, was considered underprivileged. So, we just had to help
> each other, whether it's a church or community organizations or whatever, when it comes
> down to it, it's all about money. If you don't have the money, you can't go on the trip. If
> your parents can't afford it, then we must fundraise and make as much money as we can.

Or if there are individuals who can help, then you gotta seek benefactors who were

willing to do it. We were fortunate we had one that we must keep anonymous all these

years, that would come to the rescue every time we needed it. Many students would not

have been able to go had it not been for this benefactor.

Lela further described how the Black college tour, by design, was affordable to participants who

otherwise would not have been able to experience such an opportunity.

One of the things I think is most beneficial about the Black college tours is that they

made it economical for people. It wasn't cheap, but it brought it to a scale where it's

affordable. It's on payment plans, which you know, we love a good payment plan.

Because you're pooling, you're scaling these resources, it makes it more economical, and

it puts college the even the idea of college in reach for kids who may not have even

considered going to college before and whose parents didn't necessarily push it because

they had no way to support it.

As the collective efforts of the community made the Black tour—and ultimately college—

attainable for participating students, they became positioned to make decisions about where to

further their education, including whether to attend an HBCU.

Black College Tour and College Choice

According to the former students, participating in the Black college tour informed their

college choice process by increasing their understanding of HBCUs and their ability to decide

exclusively among HBCUs, between in-state and out-of-state schools, and selecting a school

with an established community of Black students.

Deciding exclusively among HBCUs

Among the 13 former students interviewed, four indicated their college choice process

was exclusively focused on HBCUs—a decision each indicated was made prior to participating in the Black college tour. Marie and Mary enrolled in HBCUs they did not visit on their respective tours, whereas John and Qaiser enrolled and graduated from the HBCUs they visited on the Black college tour. Qaiser is currently completing a master's degree at a PWI, and Mary, who is completed a doctoral program at an HBCU, also attained a master's degree from an HBCU. Three of the four students who attended HBCUs had a relative, fellow classmate from Inkster High School, or someone they knew from Inkster who also attended their selected institution. While Marie did not know anyone at the HBCU she attended, her cousin attended an HBCU in a neighboring city. The two parent chaperones who were interviewed now have adult children who attended the HBCUs they visited through the Inkster High School Black college tours. After attaining a bachelor's degree at an HBCU, Prutunda's adult child also graduated from a PWI with a master's degree.

Deciding between HBCUs and PWIs

For the students who decided not to attend an HBCU, only Lela indicated attending an HBCU was not her preferred path for post-secondary education. However, she remained open to the idea of attending an HBCU, including participating in the Black college tour. However, Lela continued to receive guidance, including during the Black college tour, that she likely would not be admitted because of the two years of foreign language requirement at certain HBCUs, and as she was told, "you only have one year of French"; French II was not offered at Inkster High School at the time.

Her final decision was primarily based on scholarship awards given her competitive merit status, and her desire not to be a financial strain on her parents. While accepted to both in-state and out of state institutions, Lela chose to attend an in-state PWI.

Deciding between in-state and out-of-state schools. The remaining eight students also attended in-state PWIs, which included both two-year and four-year institutions. For these students, it was not about choosing between an HBCU and a PWI, but choosing between an in-state and out-of-state institution, as they expressed an interest in attending an HBCU was a priority for them which was further affirmed by participating in the Black college tour. Based on the interviews, the students only considered HBCUs outside of Michigan, although Lewis College of Business was operational in nearby Detroit throughout the years the Black college tour was implemented.

Lembert and Aliyah started at in-state institutions but later transferred to out-of-state PWIs as they relocated out of Michigan. Conversely, Thumper started at an out of state PWI, then transferred to an in-state PWI where she attained a Bachelor's degree and later attained a Master's degree. Patrice, Kim, Fortunate, Bam, and Lembert were all admitted to HBCUs, but chose to attend PWIs based on concerns with going 'far away from home'. Patrice elaborated on her decision to attend an in-state PWI:

> I did apply to a Black college and I was prepared to go to a Black college. But then when the time came, I couldn't leave my mom. I think the Black college tour hyped me up and I thought it was ready to do it, and when the time came, I couldn't pull the trigger. So I'm not sure if it really did, or if my emotions overruled what I was thought I was feeling on that tour and ultimately, the weeks after. I really thought up until the very end, I was going to go, and then I was like, Whoa, this is like hours away. Like, can you really be about that life? No, I thought I could, I wanted to.

Kim's experience was similar to Patrice's as she contemplated what going away to college would mean for her as a student and the support system she would need while in school:

So I did get accepted [to an HBCU]. And I remember the excitement of the letter. But that's when reality set in. How are you gonna get there? How are you gonna get back home for the holidays? Who in the world do you know, in the state. So that's when a more adult lens, or my adult cap came on. And that's when I really realized, okay, your parents are taking care of all these needs while you're at home. And I mean, even your minute needs. So who's going to do that if you're that far away? And I did not have relatives in that state. And by me being a younger child, we weren't having that conversation. But worry and stress crept into my life. So looking back on that I wish there had been more conversations about that? Maybe that's something that probably any adult should probably talk about, is addressing that fear, because I've always wondered like, what would that had looked like for you? If you had went on and accepted going to a Black college?

Bam and Fortunate had similar experiences as Patrice and Kim when deciding where to attend college. They considered the financial strain it could place on their families for the overall cost of attendance as well as the costs associated with traveling back and forth out-of-state during breaks or for an emergency. Although Lembert was admitted to an HBCU, he stated that he "ended up not being able to afford it." In hindsight, Lembert acknowledged that he "should have just gone and worked," but was concerned about "going away and failing." For Patrice it was clear the HBCU experience offered a sense of community. But the question still loomed: what about the community she already had and the detachment that was inevitable with being far away from home? She further expressed that the Black college tour affirmed her desire to attend a school that provided an established sense of community with other Black students. This included deciding to attend a school with a familiar community of Black students:

It let me know what I really wanted, It was a sense of community. I wanted a tight knit

group. I wanted something to feel like family still, even if it couldn't be at an HBCU, I

still wanted that feeling wherever I went. That was important to me.

Thumper's decision not to attend an HBCU was because she wanted to participate in a summer

bridge program that would allow her to "take classes, be a student, and be embedded." She

explained the bridge program at a PWI provided her with "a microcosm of what it means to look

like and be a student on a university campus." She was not aware of comparable bridge programs

available at the time hosted at HBCUs, whereas several Inkster students participated in the same

bridge program with her at the PWI she attended. Aliyah—who has led college access and

success programs at a PWI—also explained that students often choose colleges with which they

already have a level of familiarity. Given her practice and research, Aliyah further acknowledged

bridge programs as instrumental in helping students become acclimated with a particular campus

and envision their success at that specific institution.

Support College Choice Decisions for Their Children and Other Students

Many of the former students who participated in the Black college tours during the Early

and Middle years are now parents and talked about how they are now considering the college

choice process for their own children, and how HBCUs have been discussed and considered.

Lembert explained how the Black college tour became the template he used for exposing his own

children to HBCUs:

The Black college tour sculpted how I approached sending my kids to college, 30 some

odd years later. When I took them on a Black college tour they had the same energy I did

when I watched School Daze. 'They were like 'Oh my God! This is amazing! There are

people here who are like us!' Me and my wife we've always been real big on teaching

our kids the history of our people and getting them involved in different activities within

different Greek organizations, and being involved in community outreach for people of

color. We made sure that they had a multi-state college tour experience that included

HBCUs.

Bam and Aliyah expressed that their children have already begun to express interest in HBCUs

based on exposure from teachers and relatives. Marie expressed concerns about the limited

exposure her daughters have to HBCUs compared to her educational experience:

For a lot of our children, they don't even know that [HBCUs] really exist as they do.

Like, my kids are not in predominantly Black schools. So of course, they don't teach, you

know, about Black colleges. So yeah, I think it's important, you know, the same way it

was important for us to be able to learn that they do exist.

Both Thumper and Aliyah currently work directly with students within higher education.

Thumper expressed that her various experiences at Inkster High School, including participating

in the Black college tour are "the things that led [her] to become a college counselor." Marie and

Prutunda both expressed interest organizing or supporting Black college tours, specifically for

current students in Inkster. Aliyah has also and facilitated campus visits to a range of colleges

and universities, including to HBCUs. From these experiences, she acknowledged the level of

effort required to implement what she described as a "good Black college tour". From her

perspective, such tours should be attuned to who the student participants are, and how their

interests align with the majors offered at the schools selected to visit. She further emphasized the

importance of such tours offering a sense of belonging for prospective students, and structured

financial aid packages, particularly for out of state students:

We talk about how supportive HBCUs are, and I do believe there's something to that.

Well, we got to make sure we support them, not just the camaraderie, or the fact that we
all look alike, and we can step and dance, and all that kind of stuff. We've got to make
sure we got their finances right. Because if they're coming down to Mississippi, they're
gonna leave Michigan, their parents need to know, what do I have to contribute? Or can
we do this? I will say that it's a lot of work. But if we're going to do it, and if the point is
to really get these students at HBCUs, those are the main things for students to know.
They're gonna be welcome, their major is gonna be there, and they'll have what they
need financially to do it.

Geoff also pointed to how chaperones—particularly parent chaperones less familiar with
HBCUs—can shape the tour experience, and ultimately the college choice decisions of their
students:

I think we missed an opportunity that I would consider a challenge to really reinforce our
children and HBCUs. Because we would say things, and I heard this a lot as I recollect
the conversations there, Oh, that's so nice. But I want my daughter at [a PWI]. That's so
nice, but I want my son to be here. I don't want them to go that far to school. I really
know those kinds of things kids receive as statements of truth, that matter to their parents,
which in turn makes it matter to them.

Balancing Stigma with Pride

All participants notably identified Inkster as a Black city, and similarly described Inkster
High School as a Black school given its majority Black student population. Several former
students further explained how living in Inkster and attending IHS was distinct from neighboring
cities and school districts with majority White residents and students. They also expressed how
this distinction for IPS as the Black school district within a predominantly Black city often led to

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greater criticism including among Inkster's Black families who opted to enroll their students in other nearby districts. John, Qaiser, and Kim explained how IPS was considered by their peers attending other schools as an under resourced district offering a substandard education, and inundated by violence. Qaiser reflected on his experience at IHS as an 'average high school experience', offering many of the same academic and co-curricular opportunities available at neighboring schools. He acknowledged the IHS varsity wrestling team as a significant experience available to him as a student. John explained that while IHS was not perfect, he wished that his peers from other schools "could see Inkster High through [his] eyes", to fully appreciate its focus on Black history and culture that was noticeably absent at neighboring schools. Lembert expressed that he often engaged in fights with other students during his first two years at IHS, but also identified specific students and teachers who showed him support, and made remaining years at IHS more enjoyable. Lembert further expressed the Black college tour was one of the most positive experiences he recalled from high school.

Despite the stigma, interviewees further described the sense of pride and unique culture experienced at Inkster School which emphasized an appreciation for Black history and community support. Omar explained that living in Inkster coupled with attending Inkster High School was a uniquely defining experience for him because of the strong sense of community:

Some of the same teachers that taught me taught my mother. And they really took pride in that. They would say 'I know your mother. I know what stock you come from. I went to school with your grandmother.'

Fortunate expressed the emphasis on Black pride and uplifting the Black community was a daily focus at IHS. "It was the standard," she stated. Kim, Aaliyah, and Patrice were enrolled in different school districts before attending middle and high school within IPS, and each also

described the sense of community and focus on Black history and culture as unique

characteristics of IPS compared to their prior school experiences. Patrice expressed that the

teachers were more concerned with her becoming a "more well-rounded student who gave back

to the community," an expectation that was not articulated at her prior school district.

Loss of Inkster High School and Inkster Public Schools

Overwhelmingly, interviewees expressed concern, disappointment, and anger about the

closure of Inkster High School and dissolution of Inkster Public Schools in 2013, and its impact

on the community. Qaiser expressed:

> You took away a staple from the city and that's when you start tearing cities down. You
>
> take away their education. And now you have these kids, and where do they go, where
>
> are you busing them? You made that experience that much more complicated for these
>
> kids.

Lembert shared similar sentiments and he recalls attempting to show his children where he went

to school and could only show them "an empty field". This reality was also expressed by Omar

as he indicated "Every school I went to was torn down." In Eve Ewing's Ghosts in the

Schoolyard (2018), she describes the impact of school closings which took place on Chicago's

South Side during the same timeframe Inkster Public Schools was dissolved. Through exploring

school closures Ewing introduces the term *institutional mourning:*

> "Institutional mourning is the social and emotional experience undergone by individuals
>
> and communities facing the loss of a shared institution they are affiliated with—such as a
>
> school, church, residence, neighborhood, or business district—especially when those
>
> individuals or communities occupy a socially marginalized status that amplifies their
>
> reliance on the institution or its significance in their lives" (p.127).

The former teachers, students, and parent chaperones all shared sentiments which align with Ewing's description of institutional mourning. Some further mentioned the *Inkster High School All Class Reunion Picnic*, an annual event held on the Inkster High School grounds which attracts thousands of Inkster High School alumni and supporters. Ewing described similar events in her research as interviewees "demonstrate[d] loyalty and commitment to the projects they once lived in, even after they have been demolished, by holding regular picnics where they stood" (p. 130).

Conclusion

The interviews from teachers, students, and parent chaperones built upon the historic context to further shape our understanding of the Inkster High School Black college tour experience. Though its format evolved over time, its dual purpose—providing exposure for students and assisting HBCUs with recruitment—remained consistent over thirty years. In addition to the tour components, the interviewees also described how members of Inkster's community designed, marketed, and financially supported the tours over time. The student participants also explained how participating in the Black college tour informed their decisions to attend college—including HBCUs—and in some instances how it further shaped their approach to supporting the college choice process for their children and other students. The interviews also shaped our understanding of how former teachers, students, and parents view Inkster High School, and what its closure meant to them personally and to the broader community. These insights help further situate Black college tours within in the selected theoretical frameworks which will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter Six: Discussion

This study utilized the knowledge traditions and research practices of academia to explore what the Black community in the United States has known for decades: the Black college tour is a core activity unique to the Black student college choice process. I initially became interested in a study of Black college tours for two purposes: 1) to broaden the scholarly discussion regarding the college decision making process for Black students, and 2) to expand the body of knowledge of scholarly literature on Black college tours as a key approach to expose Black students to HBCUs. While these initial reasons of interest remained constant as I engaged in the research study, exploring the Black college tour experience at IHS added layers of complexity to the research process as I considered the historic context of the tour as it was offered to Inkster students for more than thirty years.

By considering the history of Black people in Inkster and the subsequent dissolution IPS, the study amplifies the efforts taken by the Black community within a small city to create and sustain systems of support to advance education on its own terms and despite systemic racism. As the study shows, the Black college tour implemented at Inkster High School from 1978 to 2010 was part of a larger longstanding strategy implemented by IPS and supported by the community for Black students to gain exposure and pursue post-secondary education.

In this chapter I provide further discussion on the research study by considering relevant scholarship and implications for stakeholders connected to the Black college tour experience. First, I revisit the existing literature on HBCUs, college choice, and campus tours summarizing how the study builds upon current scholarship and positions Black college tours as a catalyst for further research. Second, I summarize how the identified research questions were addressed through the study. Finally, I conclude the chapter with implications for researchers,

philanthropists, practitioners, and policymakers, the study's key audiences.

Revisiting the Literature

In considering existing research on HBCUs, college choice, and campus tours as summarized in Chapter 2, the study sheds light on three key points: 1) IPS experienced similar systemic racism as HBCUs; 2) despite the systemic racism IPS experienced, it continued to support Black student college choice efforts, particularly at the high school level, and 3) the Black college tour implemented at IHS provides a historic example of comprehensive campus tours organized by a predominantly Black high school. These three points lay the groundwork for additional research on HBCUs, college choice, and campus tours.

Similar Experiences of Systemic Racism for HBCUs and IPS

From the study we see that IPS—a Black local school district within a predominantly Black small city—endured for over 80 years both because of and despite the same systemic racism experienced by HBCUs. IPS was predominantly Black since its inception, located in the only area where Black residents could live in Inkster—during a time when neighboring school districts were inaccessible to nonresidents—and IPS "was one of the few districts where Black teachers could work in the tri-county area [of metropolitan Detroit] that would hire Black certified teachers in the 1940s and 1950s" (Equal Educational Opportunity, 1971, p. 9617). Beyond its geographic positioning and composition of Black administrators, teachers, and students, IPS prioritized the education, history, and culture of Black Americans similar to HBCUs.

Just as HBCUs have been historically underfunded (Bettez & Suggs, 2012; Harris, 2021), IPS consistently faced financial challenges which were exacerbated by the loss of the city's tax base through a racially motivated annexation in the 1960s (Lindsey, 1993; Talley et al., 2023).

As the city experienced a population decline and neighboring cities and school districts became accessible to Black residents, IPS navigated tumultuous student enrollment and test scores, and—like HBCUs—IPS became further stigmatized, as the interview participants described. Despite the stigma, IPS persisted through the efforts of Black students, teachers, and administrators as they mobilized support from Inkster's community to address its challenges while also sustaining unique experiences for Inkster's students, including the annual Black college tour. As interview participants described, the systemic racism experienced for decades by IPS administrators, teachers, and students also led to ongoing scrutiny by state legislators and the dissolution of IPS in 2013. When IPS was dissolved, Inkster also lost a historic educational institution leaving behind a substantial void within the city as the cultural wealth embedded into the local school district was stolen.

The study creates space to further explore the parallel experiences of predominantly Black school districts and HBCUs as both institutions navigate systemic racism and state control. Such research can also investigate similarities between how Black school districts and HBCUs have prioritized the education, history and culture of Black Americans, and the advocacy efforts taken by local communities to sustain such institutions. It also invites further research on the historic role of HBCUs in providing a pipeline of teachers and administrators to small predominantly Black school districts within predominantly Black cities like Inkster. The study invites further research on how HBCUs have engaged with Black college tours both historically and presently. Whether considering such engagement at a singular HBCU or HBCUs within a specific geography, further research is needed exploring Black college tours from the perspective of HBCUs.

The study also builds upon existing HBCU literature by describing the Black college tour

as a unique form of alumni engagement which supports the marketing and outreach efforts for

HBCUs as a collective institution type. The IHS teachers who planned, led, and chaperoned the

Black college tours were alumni of various HBCUs, and their lived experience positioned them

as experts on the HBCU experience. This positioning can be further explored potentially

connecting Black college tours to existing literature on alumni engagement and Black student

college choice.

IHS' Ongoing Commitment to Advancing Black Student College Choice

Although IPS is no longer operating as a local public school district, this does not

diminish the longstanding commitment of the districts' teachers and administrators who

supported students to access post-secondary education, particularly at IHS. The Black

community in Inkster was established primarily as laborers for the nearby Ford Rouge plant, yet

the study shows how the education structure within IPS—formalized by Black educators

primarily from HBCUs—included strategies to support post-secondary education exposure and

access for its students through partnerships with both local PWIs and HBCUs dating back to the

1960s. In addition to structured support from guidance counselors and the Black college tour, the

document analysis and participant interviews point to various IPS college access programs and

activities through the years including Upward Bound, King-Chavez-Parks, Focus: HOPE Fast

Track, campus visits to colleges and universities in Michigan and across the Midwest region, and

in later years through formalized dual enrollment programs with nearby Wayne County

Community College and University of Michigan-Dearborn.

The coordinated system of support implemented by IPS—operating despite the systemic

racism faced by the district and broader community, drawing from the traditions of Black history

and culture—aligns with the tenets of the African American college choice model described by

Chapman and colleagues (2020) which incorporate the institutional and social contexts of higher education, family background and systems of support, K-12 schools and contexts, and state and federal policies. IPS was intentional about leveraging its geographic positioning located near several higher education institutions, its proximity to Detroit with similar student demographics, and its knowledge of state and federal programs which support access to post-secondary programming. What the district lacked in terms of a stable tax base it made up for through strategic partnerships, innovative programming, and alignment with state and federal education priorities. Through these efforts, IHS demonstrated its commitment to supporting college choice for its students through a comprehensive strategy that included a litany of programs and activities while remaining grounded in Black history and culture.

Beyond the alignment with Chapman and colleagues' (2020) African American college choice process, the study builds upon existing scholarship by examining the Black college tour as a specific program activity often embedded into college access programs but has not been fully explored through scholarly research on the college choice process for Black students. While IHS engaged in various efforts to expose students to post-secondary education, in some instances—and as some research participants pointed out—the Black college tour was the only exposure some students had to college campuses. Given the significance of this singular experience for some students, it is necessary to further explore the Black college tour and other programmatic activities such as HBCU college fairs and alumni panels which are unique to Black students through the lens of Black college choice frameworks to understand how they inform the college choice process for Black students. This is particularly important for exploring the college choice efforts of students within predominantly Black school districts including smaller cities and rural contexts where students may not have access to comprehensively

designed college access programming. Further research on Black student college choice should also consider cross-district collaboration as a strategy to leverage resources just as IPS made the Black college tour accessible to Black students in neighboring districts. Other examples of collaboration might include partnerships between local school districts and community-based organizations which provide college access programming. Additionally, the study provides an example of Black student college choice efforts implemented within a small Black-majority district, which is not widely represented within the literature as scholarship on Black students often focuses on large urban districts located in cities such as Detroit, Chicago, New York, and Atlanta.

Existing college choice literature tends to focus on students already on a path toward attending college, whereas the study includes some students who had not considered college prior to participating in the Black college tour. This range of representation among students amplifies the need for scholarly research to further explore how Black students arrive at the decision to attend college. Singular activities such as the Black college tour provide exposure for Black students to consider attending college and can serve as a pathway for students to further engage in the college choice process.

Black College Tours as Comprehensive Campus Tours

As described in the literature review, current research on campus tours focuses on visits to singular campuses, whereas Black college tours typically expose students to multiple campuses within a designated timeframe and geography. The study introduces a definition of Black college tours, which—along with grey literature sources—describe a more comprehensive approach to campus visits allowing students to draw comparisons across institutions and institution types to inform their college decision-making process. As an authentically Black

experience and given its widespread practice as shown in the literature review, the study lays the groundwork for an expanded representation of Black college tours in scholarly research, especially within the literature on Black student college choice.

Other characteristics of Black college tours represented in the definition—including the bus ride, cultural components, and recreational activities—identify the foundational elements of Black college tours. The study invites further research on the structure of Black college tours, how and by whom they are implemented, and how HBCUs benefit from such efforts including to increase student enrollment outcomes.

By considering Black college tours as an example of a comprehensive campus tour, the study invites additional research on other examples of comprehensive campus tours including tours focusing on other Minority Serving Institutions, specific majors, or tours within an identified geography. While such tours are already taking place (Detroit Area Pre-College Engineering Program, for example organizes an annual STEM College Tour), such activities are not represented in existing literature as a singular research focus, limiting opportunities for college choice professionals, HBCU administrators, or other stakeholders to identify models of effectiveness or link current practice to college choice frameworks.

Given the limited empirical research on Black college tours, the study builds upon Jett's (2019) research and represents the second instance of empirical research of a school-based Black college tour coincidentally also based at a predominantly Black high school in a predominantly Black city in Michigan. While we still do not have a clear sense of the earliest account of a Black college tour, where it originated, who led it, and which HBCUs they toured, this study creates the opportunity to further explore tours that have been operational since the 1970s with more extensive documentation available compared to the sources available for the study through IPS.

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Responding to the Research Questions

The Inkster High School Black college tour study focused on the following research questions:

1. How do the Inkster High School Black college tours **illuminate and inform** what we know about Black college tours?

2. How did Inkster High School **sustain the Black college tours** from 1978-2010?

3. How did the Inkster High School Black college tours **inform the college decision-making process** for participating students?

In this section I respond to each of the research questions drawing from the methodology, historical context, and findings represented in the preceding chapters.

Illuminate & Inform

The IHS Black college tour was about more than college choice. The study illuminated how Black college tours can serve as an opportunity for Black students to 'be Black' while exploring college choice, a form of community collaboration, and a positive memory for community members as they grapple with school closures. The study informed how we describe the purpose and elements of Black college tours, and initial discussion on what constitutes a 'good' Black college tour.

'Being Black' while Exploring College Choice. Rooted within Black culture, the IHS Black college tour offered an authentic experience for Black students to 'be Black' as they explored Black history and culture as part of the college choice process. Using Black epistemology as the knowledge tradition to frame the study situated the Black college tour as a cultural artifact unique to the Black community. This framing of the study also created space to explore the comprehensiveness of the Black college tour beyond the campus visit, to include the camaraderie, music, food, and culture from the perspective of teachers, students, and parent

volunteers connected to a predominantly Black high school in a predominantly Black city. Based on the phenomenological interviews and historic context, the study identified the Black college tour an extension of the Black experience in Inkster, connecting prospective students to colleges and universities where Black history and culture was both studied and celebrated within an education context. Given this description, the IHS Black college tour was an example of Black students led by Black teachers experiencing what Love (2019) describes as *Black joy*, the manifestation of pride and peace rooted in understanding one's identity of Blackness, and connection to a larger community of support and shared struggle.

      A Form of Community Collaboration. When explored through the tenets of community cultural wealth, fugitive pedagogy, and African American college choice, the study identified systems of support and collaboration IPS teachers and administrators leveraged for the Black college tours. In addition to the networks and support systems in Inkster, teachers also drew from contacts and connections in nearby Detroit as well as at various HBCUs. This notion of leveraging expertise from colleagues in other communities aligns with Yosso's (2005) descriptions of familial and social capital; using kinship and community to navigate systems and institutions. It is further described by Givens (2021) in considering how Black teachers' use of established networks helped further advance Black education and formalize learning experiences for students on their own terms throughout history. Such approaches are also represented in the African American college choice model in supporting high achieving Black students in their college choice process.

      Each of the selected theoretical frameworks was also relevant in considering the historic context of Inkster. Most notable was Yosso's (2005) description of resistance capital as an approach to pursue actions despite opposition and support. Historically, IPS was stigmatized

because, unlike neighboring districts, its educators and students were predominantly Black. The teachers in IPS established curricula that emphasized a deliberate focus on Black history and culture aligned with Woodson's vision for Black education as Givens (2021) described. Despite the stigma, Inkster Public Schools had two institutional assets that were leveraged to educate its students: its geographic proximity to nearby Detroit and the districts' sizeable number of Black educators who were also HBCU alumni. Through these assets, teachers drew from their own expertise and coupled it with the momentum gained from observing the African-centered education movement already underway in Detroit to establish the Black history class, Black history club, and subsequently, the Inkster High School Black college tour. As teachers noticed the existing curriculum and textbooks were void of culturally relevant content, they took it upon themselves to fill that educational void as an act of resistance (Givens, 2021).

A Positive Memory. As an extension of Inkster's Black community and connector to HBCUs, the Black college tour represented an invaluable memory to the students, teachers, and administrators interviewed in the study, as they described the impact of the dissolution of IPS which closed IHS. The interview participants spoke passionately about the closure of Inkster High School and the significance of the loss to the community, which is described by Eve L. Ewing (2018) as institutional mourning. Despite the eleven years that have passed since the dissolution of Inkster Public Schools, the former teachers, students, and parent volunteers who were interviewed collectively described the authentic learning, community, and culture of care that existed across the small, predominantly Black district, and the current void present in the community, as all the buildings have since been demolished. The pain, sadness, and loss expressed by the interviewees align with Ewing's statement, "when a school dies, a version of the self dies with it" (p.131). Some interviewees also explained concern about whether Inkster

students are currently being supported by neighboring districts or if they are stigmatized given their connection to the Inkster community. For the interview participants, Inkster High School was far more than an institutional facility where an educational transaction took place. Inkster High School was a sacred community space, a representation of Inkster's Black community, and ultimately a reflection of self of which they were, and remain, proud.

As the participants reflected on the closure of IHS and dissolution of IPS, overwhelmingly, reflecting on the Black college tour also allowed them to consider a positive memory of Inkster High School that in the case of the students played a role in their college choice process, and in the case of the teachers and parents supported the college choice process of participating students. Absent the physical presence of the school or school district, such intangible memories become invaluable when navigating institutional mourning, as Ewing (2018) describes.

The Purpose & Elements of Black College Tours. The study informed our understanding about Black college tours by describing their dual purpose as 1) exposing students to HBCUs, college, independence, and travel, and 2) supporting HBCU recruitment. From the perspective of interview participants, the study also identified the four key elements which typically comprise Black college tours: the bus ride, campus visits, cultural components, and fun. While such elements were previously mentioned in grey literature, the study provides more details, including how tour participants experienced them. This level of detail provided context for how the tour elements worked in concert to accomplish the tours' primary and secondary purposes while offering tour participants the opportunity to fully embrace and express their authentic Black identity and gain exposure to the Black experience in various contexts throughout the tour.

'Good' Black College Tours. The study also informed what we know about Black college tours by introducing discussion about what constitutes a 'good' Black college tour as described by the interviewees. The importance of engaging chaperones with expertise on the college choice process and the HBCU experience was emphasized by interviewees, along with ensuring the schools visited align with students' degree programs of interest. Interviewees also described the importance of other college access programs and experiences which complement the Black college tour experience for participating students. Because Black college tours are currently implemented through a variety of entities including schools, community-based organizations, and for-profit tour groups, there are considerable differences in the cost, tour structure, and HBCUs visited. Given such variation across Black college tour experiences, the study invites further research that can potentially assist parents and students in identifying tour experiences which best support the students' college choice process before, during and after participating in a Black college tour.

Sustaining the Black College Tour

The IHS Black college tour was sustained over time through the leadership and innovation of Black teachers and the support of students, parents, school and district-level administrators, and Inkster's Black community. By reviewing the history of Black people in Inkster, dating back to the 1840s through the three time periods the Black college tours took place the study details the efforts that helped create the conditions to establish and sustain Black college tours over time.

Through this research, we now understand how the IHS Black college tours were historically funded. Inkster High School teachers, students, and parents organized fundraisers and solicited donations from the broader community to help support the tour overall and help

defray the costs for individual students. Campaigns such as candy and hot dog sales, businesses contributing a portion of their profits, and churches passing the collection plate all demonstrated the commitment of the community to support the Black college tour in tangible ways. Unlike other college choice programs funded by government and foundations, in the case of Inkster, the community annually subsidized the cost of the Black college tour. Beyond the tour's core expenses of travel, lodging, and insurance we also understand through the study IPS staff and volunteers provided the labor to plan, fundraise, and execute the tour each year. This investment of largely unpaid time is important for organizations to consider when considering the overall cost to implement Black college tours.

Informing College Choice

The Inkster High School Black college tour informed the college choice process for participating students in two ways. First, it provided exposure to HBCUs during their own college choice process. Years later, the tour also yielded a form of intergenerational wealth transferred to their children and other students navigating the college choice process. Some of the interviewees described how participating in the tour sparked a desire to ensure that other students made informed decisions about where to attend college, considered HBCUs in their college choice process, experienced a Black college tour, and if they chose to stay in Michigan, attended a university where a community of support was present.

Implications

Given their longstanding presence in Black culture in the United States, Black college tours need to be further explored as a research topic and community-led practice which supports Black students into and through post-secondary education. As attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion are occurring with regularity in both K-12 and post-secondary education contexts,

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chronicling the history and current practice of Black college tours honors the efforts of educators and other community members to support Black student college choice. While researchers are the primary audience for this study, other audiences including philanthropists, policymakers, and policymakers—which includes community members—can draw from this study.

Implications for Researchers

There are multiple opportunities for further study that researchers may consider. The study offers new considerations for using fugitive pedagogy, African American college choice model, and community cultural wealth to investigate culturally relevant program activities within college access and post-secondary education. It also adds to the body of knowledge on school closings by focusing on a specific activity that is lost when a school closure takes place, and how a community continues to grapple with its closure through institutional mourning.

Overall, there is a need for historical studies that document grassroots programming efforts to support college choice, including HBCU college fairs, alumni panels, and Black college tours. This extends to Black college tours originating in other parts of Michigan, including Detroit, Lansing, Saginaw, Flint, and Grand Rapids which would broaden what is known about Black college tours across the state. Similarly, researchers may consider research on Black college tours originating in other states such as North Carolina and Alabama, where there is a large concentration of HBCUs present along with PWIs, or in Western states where no HBCUs are currently located. In addition to historical studies, there is a need for current ethnographic studies of current Black college tours and evaluations of programs that include Black college tours as an activity. The study also positions the opportunity to conduct an oral history project to be conducted interviewing former teachers, administrators, and students of Inkster Public Schools, similar to the oral history project completed in Ypsilanti, MI by A. P.

Marshall in the 1980s (Ypsilanti District Library, n.d.).

There are a myriad of research projects which can be drawn from the study, and it is important for researchers to consider how community members are engaged as experts to inform and co-create future research. This includes utilizing participatory action research methods, engaging residents in producing photovoice projects, and documentaries offering increased agency over how research is conducted, interpreted, and disseminated in ways which mitigate harm and empower residents. This is particularly important for research within communities that have experienced school closures and other forms of institutional mourning.

Implications for Philanthropists

Foundations with funding interests within K-12 education, HBCUs, college choice, Black history and culture, and predominantly Black cities may also have an interest in this study. Philanthropic organizations may also be interested in funding research projects on the role of Black college tours as a key activity within the urban higher education ecosystem, or cataloging this history and current practice of Black college tours across the United States.

There in a continued need for general operating support for the nonprofit organizations who lead Black college tours, especially organizations based in the Midwest and western states that incur higher travel costs to implement the tours given their geographic distance from HBCUs. Individual donors may consider supporting individual students participating in Black college tours, forming giving circles through community foundations or donating directly to local Black college tours that operate through local school districts and nonprofit organizations.

Implications for Practitioners

Practitioners may consider utilizing the definition of a Black college tours provided in this study as it is differentiated from a traditional campus visit. Utilizing the Inkster High School

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Black college tour as an example, practitioners may also consider the design of Black college tours based on the perspectives of tour organizers and participants, including its dual purpose and tour elements. Current tour organizers may also consider engaging former participants in the tour design, fundraising, and marketing efforts to help participants build transferrable skills, potentially providing early exposure to careers into college access and success programming. Adding to the documented history on Black college tours, practitioners may also consider ways to bolster their current data collection efforts to gain greater insights about participants before, during, and immediately after tours are conducted. Additionally, practitioners may also consider establishing formal and informal ways to engage with tour participants over time and continue collecting data regarding college enrollment, persistence, and completion.

The study can also be used by practitioners to describe the role the Black college tour plays in the college choice process to secure grant funds or describe the relevance and impact of the program activity in grant reporting. Practitioners may also consider using the language of community cultural wealth and fugitive pedagogy to describe how Black college tours are intentionally designed to support the college choice process of Black students. Practitioners who implement Black college tours can also draw from this research to identify ways to collect useful data to better understand their student participants including their familiarity with HBCUs, and where they are in their decision to attend college. Such insights can help practitioners identify additional supports for participating students which extend beyond the Black college tour. Practitioners may also consider forming a national coalition of Black college tour practitioners to regularly convene and discuss ways to strengthen their efforts as a collective group, and supporting organizations interested in establishing Black college tours in communities where there is a current demand among Black students and parents.

Implications for Policymakers

Policymakers should consider this study as an example of a local school district impacted by race and racism that was dissolved through state policy. Through a review of historical context including the districts' persistent efforts to prioritize college access for its high school students, the study offers an example of the collateral damage experienced by a community when a school district is dissolved. Beyond school closures, Policymakers can consider this study when seeking examples of how school-based programs—when properly funded—can potentially support college choice for Black students. As research on Black college tours continues to expand through engaging directly with practitioners, elected officials should consider allocating public funds to support Black college tours when incorporated into broader college access programs.

Conclusion

When I participated in the Inkster High School Black college tour nearly thirty years ago, I was already admitted to a PWI in Michigan. Nevertheless, I wanted to see first-hand what I would miss out on by not attending an HBCU. In the decades that followed, I have been enamored by the Black college experience, mainly from a distance. Participating in the Black college tour planted a seed within me to amplify the efforts of individuals in communities like Inkster as they work to expose students to the HBCU experience through the Black college tour.

Research on the Black college tour at Inkster High School was far more than an academic research activity. While the study adds to the body of knowledge on Inkster, Inkster Public Schools, Black college tours, Black student college choice, and school closures in small cities, it was a personally transformative journey for me. In researching the history of Inkster and Inkster Public Schools many of the stories were already familiar to me and some of the historic events I

experienced firsthand. To observe the history through documented research affirmed the pride I already had for the city I come from. This sense of pride I carry doesn't diminish the harsh realities I also carry about my hometown. In 2022, Inkster's poverty rate was 35% (American Community Survey, 2024). I have lost two brothers—both of whom were a year older than me— to acts of violence. However, reflecting on the history through documented research allowed me to see the insurmountable odds the community faced, and still managed to sustain itself and thrive on its own terms. There is a notable amount of information documented about Inkster. A cursory search creates a narrative which focuses on crime, poverty, and the dissolution of IPS due to financial woes. While this is not untrue, its history is complex and nuanced due to race and racism as a predominantly Black city in the United States. A deeper dive into Inkster, and into Inkster Public Schools specifically reveal that Inkster's history continues to be written, and its contributions to the education of Black students in the United States—including their college choice process—should not go unrecognized.

As I took time to get on the bus and journey back with former teachers and classmates to revisit the Black college tour experience, the nostalgic joy—Black joy—was also wrapped in the institutional mourning that Eve Ewing astutely describes. The Inkster High School Black college tour is one example of Inkster High School's commitment to the post-secondary educational attainment of its students. As a cultural artifact, it brings to the forefront the skill, expertise, and wherewithal harnessed by Inkster's Black community to persist and continue creating educational opportunities for its residents, despite the adversity it experienced for decades.

Table 1: Campus Visits Compared to Black College Tours

Black College Tour definition components	Traditional Campus Visits
Cultural artifact designed engage Black students	Designed to engage a broad cross-section of prospective students.
Campus visits to two or more HBCUs	Focus on a single college campus location of any institution type.
Exposure to broader community visits to museums, historic landmarks, and other experiences not directly tied to the college campus.	Rarely do traditional campus visits prioritize culturally relevant immersive experiences not tied to the college campus.
Coordinated by secondary schools, nonprofit organizations, or other separate entities.	Coordinated by admissions team or comparable department within the identified college.

Table 2: List of Documents

File Number	Title	Date	Summary	Source	Type	Connection to Theoretical Groundings
2024.042	Ohio History Connection	3/9/1895	Interview with Goodell describing Underground Railroad stops in Inkster and Washtenaw County, Michigan	Wilbur H. Siebert Underground Railroad Collection.	Public & Official Records	CCW, CRT
2024.033	WSU Upward Bound Program	1971	Evaluative Study of the Wayne State University Upward Bound Program, including IPS' involvement as the only school district outside of Detroit	Wayne State University	Public & Official Records	CCW, CRT, FP, AACC
2024.051	Inkster High School Yearbook	1979	Includes photos of Inkster High School Black History Club	Former IHS Staff	Personal and Private Documents	CRT, CCW, FP
2024.035	The Roots of Inkster	1980	Historical Summary of Inkster	Inkster Historical Commission	Public & Official Records	CCW
2024.052	Inkster High School Yearbook	1980	Includes photos of Inkster High School Black History Club	Former IHS Student	Personal and Private Documents	CRT, CCW, FP
2024.054	Photo - 1986 Black College tour	1986	Photo taken on trip to Fort Valley State University, Florida A&M, and Tennessee State University	Former IHS Student	Personal and Private Documents	CRT, CCW, FP, AACC
2024.055	Patch - Black History Club	1986	Fabric patch provided to members of the Inkster High School Black History Club	Former IHS Student	Personal and Private Documents	CRT, CCW, FP
2024.034	IPS: Community Power Structure	1987	Describes the challenges and opportunities for Inkster Public Schools given its leadership structure	Proquest	Public & Official Records	CCW, CRT, FP
2024.053	Inkster High School Yearbook	1992	Includes photos of Inkster High School Black History Club	Former IHS Student	Personal and Private Documents	CRT, CCW, FP

Table 2 (cont'd)

File Number	Title	Date	Summary	Source	Type	Connection to Theoretical Groundings
2024.056	Photo - 1993 Black College tour	1993	Photo taken on trip to Paine College, and AUC.	Former IHS Student	Personal and Private Documents	CRT, CCW, FP, AACC
2024.057	Photo - 1993 Black College tour	1993	Photo taken on Black college tour to Paine College, and AUC. Visit to King Memorial Center	Former IHS Student	Personal and Private Documents	CCW, CRT, FP, AACC
2024.045	Fields to Fords, Feds to Franchise: African American Empowerment in Inkster, Michigan	1994	Historical Summary of Inkster	University of Michigan	Public & Official Records	CCW, CRT, FP
2024.058	Photo - 1995 Black College Tour	1995	Photo of Black college tour to Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee HBCUs	Former IHS Student	Personal and Private Documents	
2024.059	Photo - 2006 Black College Tour	2006	Photo of Black college tour Alabama HBCU	Former IHS Student	Personal and Private Documents	
2024.037	CEPI Dual Enrollment Program 2006-07	2007	Inkster High School's participation in the statewide dual enrollment program during the 2006-07 academic year	Center for Educational Performance and Information	Public & Official Records	AACC, CRT
2024.038	CEPI Dual Enrollment Program 2010-11	2011	Inkster High School's participation in the statewide dual enrollment program during the 2010-11 academic year	Center for Educational Performance and Information	Public & Official Records	AACC, CRT

Table 2 (cont'd)

File Number	Title	Date	Summary	Source	Type	Connection to Theoretical Groundings
2024.047	The McCoys: Charting Freedom on both sides of the river	2016	Interview with James Goodell describing Underground Railroad stops in Inkster and Washtenaw County, Michigan	A fluid frontier: Slavery, resistance, and the Underground Railroad in the Detroit River borderland.	Public & Official Records	CCW, CRT, FP
2024.040	Allen Supermarket	9/1/55	Describes Allen Supermarket in Inkster as the largest Black owned supermarket in the United States	Ebony Magazine	Media Documents	CCW, CRT
2024.041	Equal Education Opportunity Committee	11/1/71	Testimony by IPS Superintendent Fort, descrbing the challenges of racism experienced by IPS	Equal Education Opportunity Committee	Public & Official Records	CCW, CRT, FP, AACC
2024.001	IPS School Board Meeting Minutes	8/9/88	the need for less low income housing within the district.	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	CRT
2024.002	IPS School Board Meeting Minutes	9/13/88	Need to pursue a millage to operate the schools given the current financial position	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	CRT
2024.003	IPS School Board Meeting Minutes	10/4/88	Elimination of positions based on low student enrollment	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	CRT

Table 2 (cont'd)

File Number	Title	Date	Summary	Source	Type	Connection to Theoretical Groundings
2024.004	IPS School Board Meeting Minutes	10/4/88	Millage, taxes, community reactions to both	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	CRT
2024.005	IPS School Board Meeting Minutes	10/11/88	Fourth Friday Count, total enrollment	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	CRT
2024.006	IPS School Board Meeting Minutes	10/24/88	Millage proposal	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	CRT
2024.007	IPS School Board Meeting Minutes	10/26/88	Resolution for proposed millage	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	CRT
2024.008	IPS School Board Meeting Minutes	10/10/89	150 fewer students, $500,000 reduction in projected revenue	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	CRT
2024.009	IPS School Board Meeting Minutes	10/26/89	Declining enrollment $500,000 less in revenue	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	CRT
2024.010	IPS School Board Meeting Minutes	4/10/90	Recognition by the board on the Black History Club	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	FP, CCW
2024.011	IPS School Board Meeting Minutes	1/8/91	Presentation by Miss Cobb - 4 sites to be visited	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	FP, CCW
2024.012	IPS School Board Meeting Minutes	5/14/91	School board underwriting the cost of the IHS Yearbook, Miss Cobb acknowledged for the Close Up Program, Student protest over dress code.	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	FP, CCW
2024.013	IPS School Board Meeting Minutes	8/13/91	The need for books to represent the Black student population	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	CRT, CCW, FP
2024.014	IPS School Board Meeting Minutes	10/8/91	Acknowledgement of IPS having a "deeply diverse' curriculum	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	CRT, CCW, FP

Table 2 (cont'd)

File Number	Title	Date	Summary	Source	Type	Connection to Theoretical Groundings
2024.015	Detroit News Article	1/6/92	Breakdown by District 1991 Meap Scores	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	CRT
2024.016	IPS School Board Meeting Minutes	3/10/92	Importance of a yearbook to the students and the school board	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	CRT
2024.017	IPS School Board Meeting Minutes	6/9/92	Potential Names of new building: Martin Luther King, Thurgood Marshall	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	CRT, CCW, FP
2024.018	IPS School Board Meeting Minutes	9/12/92	Job posting language: "Experience working with Black Students", "Large minority population".	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	CRT, CCW, FP
2024.019	IPS School Board Meeting Minutes	11/10/92	SAAB Black College Tour	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	CRT, CCW, FP, AACC
2024.020	IPS School Board Meeting Minutes	12/1/92	Increase in MEAP scores	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	CRT
2024.021	IPS School Board Meeting Minutes	2/8/94	Black History Club - Black Butterfly	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	CRT, CCW, FP
2024.022	IPS School Board Meeting Minutes	3/8/94	Black History Club - Black Butterfly	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	CRT, CCW, FP
2024.024	IPS School Board Meeting Minutes	5/3/94	Concerns regarding quality of counseling for students at IHS and access to financial aid and scholarships for graduating seniors	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	AACC
2024.027	IPS School Board Meeting Minutes	6/8/94	Request for presentation of financial aid resources for IHS students	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	AACC

Table 2 (cont'd)

File Number	Title	Date	Summary	Source	Type	Connection to Theoretical Groundings
2024.023	IPS School Board Meeting Minutes	6/14/94	Black History Club Presentation - Black College Tour	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	CRT, CCW, FP, AACC
2024.025	IPS School Board Meeting Minutes	6/14/94	Black History Club Presentation - Black College Tour	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	CRT, CCW, FP, AACC
2024.026	IPS School Board Meeting Minutes	6/14/94	Request for presentation of financial aid resources for IHS students	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	AACC
2024.028	IPS School Board Meeting Minutes	7/19/94	District evaluation conducted by Mr. Dobbs	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	CRT,CCW,FP
2024.029	IPS School Board Meeting Minutes	8/9/94	Focus:HOPE Fast Track Program for graduating seniors &Upward Bound students	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	AACC
2024.031	IPS School Board Meeting Minutes	3/4/95	Concerns regarding academic standards for high school students, including athletes.	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	CRT, CCW, FP, AACC
2024.030	IPS School Board Meeting Minutes	4/11/95	Inkster High School - Monthly calendar for April 1995	Michigan Archives	Public & Official Records	CRT, CCW, FP, AACC
2024.044	Inkster school district is in danger of extinction	6/14/99	Describes challenges faced by IPS as the charter school movement gains traction in Michigan	Detroit Free Press	Media Documents	CCW, CRT, FP
2024.039	Don Barden Feature story	10/1/04	Describes Don Barden's background and ascent in the gaming industry	Ebony Magazine	Media Documents	CCW, CRT
2024.049	District ready to work on its own, leader says: Inkster schools hires a new superintendent.	5/9/05	Describes leadership transition at Inkster Public Schools	Detroit Free Press	Media Documents	CRT, CCW, FP, AACC

Table 2 (cont'd)

File Number	Title	Date	Summary	Source	Type	Connection to Theoretical Groundings
2024.036	Inkster Public School System	2/27/08	Leadership transition at IPS and path forward to change educational outcomes	Michigan Chronicle	Media Documents	CCW, CRT, FP
2024.048	Inkster public schools: some said it couldn't be done!	7/1/09	Describes the turnaround experienced at Inkster Public Schools in enrollment and academic performance	Michigan Chronicle	Media Documents	CRT, CCW, FP, AACC
2024.046	Demographic and Social Profile of Western Wayne County, presentation to the Community Poverty Forum.	11/15/10	Includes poverty and population shifts in Inkster and IPS, including increase of Detroit students attending IPS	Data Driven Detroit	Public & Official Records	CCW, CRT, FP
2024.043	Revitalizing Distressed Older Suburbs. What Works Collaborative	11/1/11	Comparison of older suburbs across the US, including Inkster	Urban Institute	Public & Official Records	CCW, CRT
2024.032	Baylor Woodson Case Study	2/1/12	Overview of Baylor Woodson's successes as a high performing school with mostly Black low-income students	Education Trust	Public & Official Records	CCW, CRT, FP
2024.050	African American housing in Inkster, Michigan, 1920-1970.	5/1/23	Chronicles the history of Inkster, Michigan and it shaped housing development in the city for African American residents.	Michigan Economic Development Corporation	Public & Official Records	CRT, CCW, FP

Table 3: List of Interview Participants

Pseudonymn	Role	Time Period participated in Black college tour	Attended or Graduated from HBCU?	State Location of First Undergraduate School Attended	Year Attended Inkster Public Schools as student	Highest Degree Level Attained	Currently reside in Inkster or Metro Detroit	Industry
Aliyah	Student	Middle Years	No	Michigan	1-5 years	Doctorate	Yes	Higher Education
Athena	Teacher	Middle Years	Yes	Mississippi	0	Master	Yes	Retired, K-12 Education
BamBam	Student	Middle Years	No	Michigan	11 or more	Bachelor	No	Government
Diane	Teacher	Middle Years	Yes	Tennessee	11 or more	Master	Yes	Retired, K-12 Education
Fortunate	Student	Early Years	No	Michigan	11 or more	Bachelor	Yes	Retired, K-12 Education
Geoff Jenkins	Parent Chaperone	Later Years	Child	Kentucky	11 or more	Coursework Completed	Yes	Retired, Automotive Manufacturing
John Wick	Student	Middle Years	Yes	Alabama	11 or more	Bachelor	No	Technology
Kim	Student	Middle Years	No	Michigan	1-5 years	Doctorate	Yes	K-12 Education
Lela Marie	Student	Middle Years	No	Michigan	11 or more	Bachelor	No	Insurance
Louise Smith	Teacher	Early Years	Yes	Alabama	0	Master	No	Retired K-12 Education
Marie	Student	Middle Years	Yes	Virginia	11 or more	Master	Yes	Automotive Manufacturing

Table 3 (cont'd)

Pseudonymn	Role	Time Period participated in Black college tour	Attended or Graduated from HBCU?	State Location of First Undergraduate School Attended	Year Attended Inkster Public Schools as student	Highest Degree Level Attained	Currently reside in Inkster or Metro Detroit	Industry
Mary Bethune	Student	Later Years	Yes	Florida	11 or more	Master, enrolled in doctoral program	No	K-12 Education
Mr Lenbert	Student	Middle Years	No	Michigan	11 or more	Master	No	Retired Military, Construction
Omar Garvey	Student	Middle Years	No	Michigan	11 or more	Associate	Yes	Construction
Patrice Hunter	Student	Middle Years	No	Michigan	6-10 years	Bachelor	No	Media & Entertainment
Prutunda	Parent Chaperone	Later Years	Child	South Carolina	11 or more	Coursework Completed	Yes	Government
Qaiser	Student	Middle Years	Yes	Georgia	11 or more	Bachelor, enrolled in master's program	No	Technology
Thumper	Student	Early Years	No	Wisconsin	11 or more	Master	Yes	Higher Education

Table 4: Alignment between Research Questions and Theoretical Groundings

		CCW					FP			AACC			
		Aspirational	Familial	Social	Navigational	Resistance	Fostering Learning on their own terms	Teachers shared vulnerability with students	Network of educators to advance Black education	Institutional & Social Context of Higher Ed	Family Backgrounds & Systems of Support	K-12 schools and school contexts	State and Federal Policies
RQ1	Illuminate and Inform	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	
RQ2	Sustain		X	X			X	X	X		X	X	X
RQ3	College Choice	X	X	X	X						X	X	

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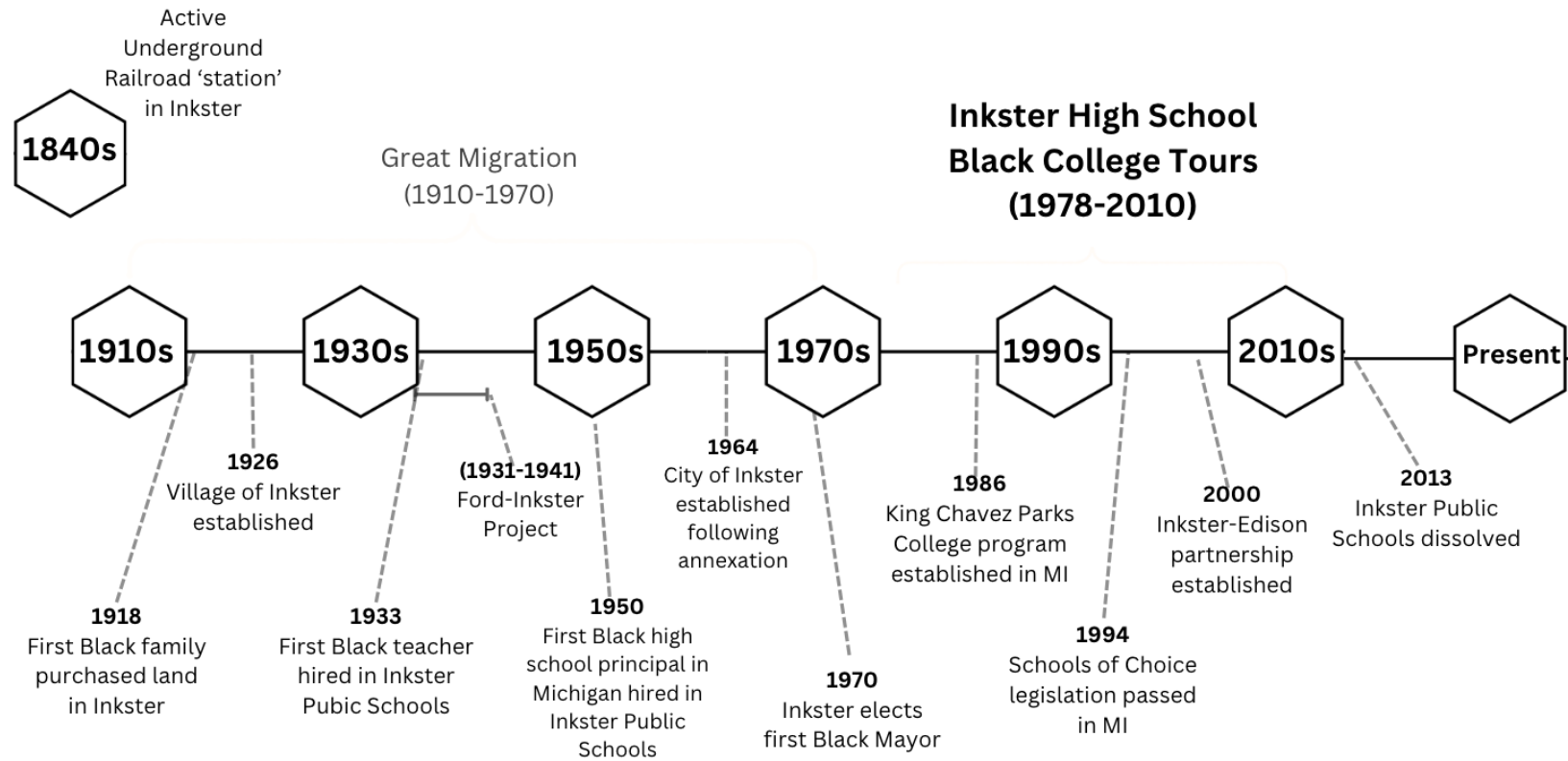
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APPENDIX A: Historic Timeline

1840s — Active Underground Railroad 'station' in Inkster

Great Migration (1910-1970)

Inkster High School Black College Tours (1978-2010)

1910s — 1930s — 1950s — 1970s — 1990s — 2010s — Present

1926 Village of Inkster established

(1931-1941) Ford-Inkster Project

1964 City of Inkster established following annexation

1986 King Chavez Parks College program established in MI

2000 Inkster-Edison partnership established

2013 Inkster Public Schools dissolved

1918 First Black family purchased land in Inkster

1933 First Black teacher hired in Inkster Pubic Schools

1950 First Black high school principal in Michigan hired in Inkster Public Schools

1970 Inkster elects first Black Mayor

1994 Schools of Choice legislation passed in MI

APPENDIX B: FOIA Request & Correspondence with Michigan Archives

M Gmail   **Tanya Upthegrove Gregory <tuptheg@gmail.com>**

FOIA Request: Inkster Public Schools Board Meeting agendas & minutes (1980-2013)
7 messages

Tanya Upthegrove Gregory <tuptheg@gmail.com>   Thu, Feb 23, 2023 at 1:43 PM
To: normant@resa.net

Greetings Ms. Norman,

I am Tanya Upthegrove, a 5th-year doctoral student at Michigan State University in the College of Education. As part of the Freedom of Information Act, I am requesting access to Inkster Public Schools (IPS) Board agendas and meeting minutes from 1980-2013 that your organization may have in its records.

I am currently working on my dissertation proposal which is focused on Inkster High School and the Black college tours it organized for students beginning in the 1980s until its closure in 2013. Over the past two years, I have corresponded with former students, teachers, and administrators and have made great progress in my shaping my research project thus far. In my conversations with former teachers, I understand that as a formal practice, the Inkster Board of Education would approve the trip each year during its general business meetings. Once the tours were completed, the tour organizers-often with students-would also summarize their experiences on the Black college tour for board members. By reviewing the IPS school board meeting minutes and agendas, I am hoping to identify a few examples of the tours being approved by the school board as described by former teachers.

Given the time period of my research project (1980-2013), and the amount of time that has passed since the closure of IPS, I realize this is a substantial request. I also realize that most of the records you have may be in paper form. As an emerging education scholar, access to the identified records can help support groundbreaking research on Black college tours, which have been significantly understudied despite their enduring role in the Black student experience. And as a proud graduate of Inkster High School (1995), access to these records will help me tell the remarkable story of Inkster High School, and the invaluable investment IPS made into its students and the broader community.

I am happy to discuss the request further with you as needed. I am also willing to come on-site to review the files in order to reduce time and defray any costs associated with scanning or printing information.

Thank you for your time, and for considering my request.

Tanya Upthegrove Gregory

Tanya Upthegrove Gregory <tuptheg@gmail.com>   Thu, Feb 23, 2023 at 1:46 PM
To: Kevin Gregory <thegregorygroup2006@gmail.com>

Fingers crossed!
[Quoted text hidden]

Tanya Upthegrove Gregory <tuptheg@gmail.com>   Mon, Feb 27, 2023 at 1:21 PM
To: archives@michigan.gov

Greetings,

I am Tanya Upthegrove, a 5th-year doctoral student at Michigan State University in the College of Education. As part of the Freedom of Information Act, I am requesting access to Inkster Public Schools (IPS) Board agendas and meeting minutes from 1980-2013 that your organization may have in its records. I have contacted Wayne-RESA and have been informed that the information I am seeking is the property of the State of Michigan, and it may be held in its archives.
[Quoted text hidden]

Tanya Upthegrove Gregory
703-992-4788

Archives <archives@michigan.gov>   Mon, Feb 27, 2023 at 2:50 PM

APPENDIX C: Wayne RESA FOIA Request Denial

Administrative and Financial Services

33500 Van Born Road
Wayne, Michigan 48184
www.resa.net

Steven G. Ezikian
Deputy Superintendent
(734) 334-1451
(734) 334-1662 Fax
EzikiaS@resa.net

February 27, 2023

Tanya Upthegrove Gregory
tuptheg@gmail.com

Subject: Freedom of Information Act Request dated February 23, 2022

Dear Ms. Upthegrove Gregory,

On February 23, 2022, this office received your email requesting access to Inkster Public Schools Board agendas and meeting minutes from 1980-2013.

Pursuant to Michigan Freedom of Information Act MCL 15.233 §35(42), we are denying your request as Wayne RESA does not have the records you have requested. Inkster Public Schools Board files are housed within the State of Michigan Historical Archives; I would suggest you contact archives@michigan.gov to request these records.

If you believe that your request has been improperly denied you have the right to do one of the following at your option:

(1)   Submit to the Superintendent of Wayne RESA a written appeal that specifically states the word "appeal" and identify the reason or reasons for reversal of the denial of the public records by this office, or

(2)   Commence an action in the circuit court to compel the Wayne RESA to disclose the public records within 180 days of the District's final determination to deny your request.

If after judicial review the circuit court determined that the Wayne RESA has improperly denied your request, you may be entitled to receive attorney fees and damages as provided in Section 10(7) of the Michigan Freedom of Information Act.

Wayne RESA's FOIA Procedures and Guidelines and Public Written Summary are maintained on its website and may be accessed at: https://www.resa.net/about/board-of-education/highlights-minutes-and-policies

A copy of this request will be kept on file for no less than one (1) year.

Should you have any questions concerning this letter, please contact me at the above listed address and telephone number.

Sincerely,

Steve Ezikian
Deputy Superintendent

APPENDIX D: Promotional Flyer

Figure 2: Promotional flyer used on social media

APPENDIX E: Participant Information Form

1. First Name
2. Last Name
3. Pseudonym. NOTE: All participants will be expected to use a pseudonym. If one is not provided, one will be assigned to you.
4. Email address
5. Please indicate your connection to Inkster High School, including the specific year(s) for each role selected. An example is shown in the table below:

Role	Earliest Year	Latest Year
Student	*1991*	*1995*
Teacher		
Administrator		
Support Staff		
Volunteer		

6. Did you participate in a Black College tour through Inkster High School? For this study, a Black college tour is defined as "*campus visits to two or more Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and the communities in which they are situated within a designated timeframe.*"
    a. Yes
    b. No
7. Indicate your connection to the Black College tours you participated in, including the specific year(s) for each role selected.

Role	Earliest Year	Latest Year
Student Participant	*1995*	*1995*
Tour Organizer		
Adult Chaperone	2007	2010

8. What HBCU campuses do you recall visiting during the Black college tour(s) you participated in?
9. Did you graduate from Inkster High School?
    a. Yes
    b. No
10. Did you attend college?
    a. Yes
    b. No
11. What college or university did you attend?
12. Did you graduate from college?
    a. Yes
    b. No
13. Are you currently in college?
    a. Yes
    b. No

14. Where do you currently live? (city/state)
15. What is your current occupation?
16. What was the highest college degree you attained?
17. How do you identify your gender?
18. How do you identify your race?
19. How did you first learn about HBCUs?
20. How did you first learn about Black college tours?
21. Do you have other family members who attended HBCUs?
22. Do you have other family members who participated in Black college tours?

Greetings Fellow Inkster Viking!
Thank you for your interest in my study on Inkster High School and its Black College Tours from 1980-2013. The next page includes a consent form to review. Please indicate your acceptance by clicking the arrow (-->) at the bottom of the page. Following the consent form, is a brief survey about your background and Black college tour experience. If you have any questions, please contact me at upthegr2@msu.edu.

Peace and blessings,

Tanya Upthegrove, Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Educational Administration, Michigan State University

Participant Consent
Study Title: Get on the Bus: A Case Study of Black College Tours at Inkster High School from 1980-2013
Principal Investigator: Brendan Cantwell, Ph.D.
Co-Investigator: Tanya Upthegrove (Ph.D. Candidate)

Description of Research: You are invited to participate in a research study exploring the Black college tours implemented at Inkster High School from 1980-2013. Qualifications for participation in this study include having been a student at Inkster High School between 1980 and 2013 and participated in the Black college tours hosted by Inkster High School during this timeframe.

The purpose of this study is to examine the Black college tours implemented through Inkster High School from 1980-2013. As there is limited empirical research on Black college tours despite their longstanding presence within the Black student college choice process, the study explores how the Inkster High School Black college tour illuminates and informs what we know about Black college tours, how Inkster High School sustained the Black college tour from 1980-2013, and how the Inkster High School Black college tours informed the college decision-making process for participating students.
.

What Will Participation Involve?
Your participation in this study is estimated to take about 2 hours total over the course of approximately one month. You will be asked to fill out a brief questionnaire about your background and study abroad experience, and then participate in an interviews lasting approximately 60-90 minutes. Interviews will be conducted one on one between the participant and researcher either in person or using the Zoom videoconference platform.

By signing this consent form, you agree to the recording of any interviews you participate in for this study. Afterwards, you will be sent the interview transcripts and have an opportunity to make changes or corrections if needed.

Are There Risks to Participation?
The risks associated with participating in this study are minimal and no more than those generally expected in everyday interactions. Such minimal risks may include potential psychological stress through feelings of discomfort while recalling previous experiences, if those experiences were unpleasant. Your participation is voluntary. At any point and without justification, you can ask to take a break, decline to answer any question, or end the interview. You are also free to contact the researcher at any time to request that your responses be withdrawn from the study.

What are the Benefits of Participation?
Benefits of participating in this study include the opportunity to reflect on and speak about your experience with the Black College Tour. The findings from this study have the potential to contribute to the body of literature on Black college tours and college choice and to inform the theory and practice of educators and policymakers. The findings from this study may be published.

How Will Confidentiality be Protected?
All information collected for the study will be confidential and stored electronically under password protection. Participants will be asked to select a pseudonym. If a participant declines to select their own pseudonym, one will be assigned to them. Additional details such as participants' undergraduate institution or specific study abroad program name will be pseudonymized. Only pseudonyms or general descriptions will be used in the researcher's notes, transcripts, drafts, or final manuscript, to protect participant identities.

Will Compensation be Offered?
There are no costs for participating in this study. As a token of appreciation, individuals who complete all parts of this study will have the option to select one of the following: To receive a $25 Amazon gift card for your personal use.

Who to Contact with Questions?
If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, you may contact the researcher, Tanya Upthegrove, at 703-992-4788 or upthegr2@msu.edu. You may also contact the principal investigator and dissertation chair, Dr. Brendan Cantwell Professor of Higher, Adult, & Lifelong Education, College of Education, Michigan State University at brendanc@msu.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program by phone 517-355-2180, fax 517-432-4503, e-mail irb@msu.edu, or postal mail at 4000 Collins Rd, Suite 136, Lansing, MI 48910.

By clicking on the → button below, you indicate your voluntary agreement to participate in this study, including having your interviews video-recorded.

APPENDIX G: Semi-Structured Interview Protocols

This document provides an overview of the semi-structured interviews conducted during phase two of data collection. It includes my interview outline and objectives of each section, script, interview questions, and their alignment with the research questions and the theoretical groundings. The questions followed a semi-structured format, allowing the responses of research participants to inform the flow and ordering of the actual questions used during the interview.

Interview Outline

1. Introduction/ Questions focused on participants.
   - To provide an overview of the research study, and structure of the interview
   - To establish rapport with the interview participant and gain key information about their background.
   - To confirm the period during which the interview participant taught or attended Inkster High School, and the years during they participated in the Black college tour.
2. Questions focused on Inkster High School & Inkster Public Schools
   - To gather information about the interview participants' overall experience at Inkster High School and with Inkster Public Schools during the identified period.
3. Questions focused on HBCUs and the Black College Tour
   - To gain information about the interview participants' perception and understanding of HBCUs and the Black College Tour experience.
4. Questions focused on College Choice Decisions
   - To confirm how the Black college tour informed the students' decision to attend college, and/or to attend an HBCU, including the ones visited during the Black college tour.
5. Closing
   - To provide next steps in the process including the opportunity to provide feedback on the interview transcript or provide any additional responses to the interview questions prior to the data analysis.

APPENDIX H: Interview Script

Introduction

Good morning/afternoon/evening! Thank you again for taking time to meet and discuss the Inkster High School Black college tour for my dissertation research. As a reminder, I'm Tanya Upthegrove, a doctoral candidate in the College of Education at Michigan State University. I study higher, adult, and lifelong education, with a focus on Historically Black Colleges and community engagement. I am interviewing you today to learn more about your experience with the Inkster High School Black college tour implemented from 1979-2010.

In the completed dissertation, pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity for all interview participants. If you need to stop the conversation at any time, please let me know. You also may decline to answer any of the questions posed during the interview. Your participation is completely voluntary, so feel free to share as little or as much information as you choose.

With your permission, I would like to record and take notes during the interview. I will be the only person with access to the recorded interview, whereas my dissertation committee will have access to the final paper to review before the final publication of the dissertation. At any time, you can tell me to stop recording, and if there is specific content you would like omitted, I will do so. Following the interview, I will provide a transcript for you to review. If there is any content in the transcript you would like to omit or further clarify, you can make revisions as you choose. Based on this description, do I have your permission to record and take notes during the interview?

The interview will last about an hour. I have prepared some questions, but feel free to share what you believe to be relevant to the conversation.
Before we start, do you have any questions?

Section One: Warm Up/Questions Focused on Participants

To get started, tell me about yourself.

- When did you attend Inkster High School?

- During what years did you participate in the Inkster High School Black college tour, and what HBCU campuses do you recall visiting?

Thank you for sharing! As you know, I also attended Inkster High School from 1991 to 1995, and participated in the Inkster High School Black college tour in 1995. On our tour we visited Xavier University, Grambling State, Jackson State, Dillard University, Southern University, and LeMoyne Owen.

Section Two: Questions Focused on Inkster & Inkster High School

Before we discuss the Inkster High School Black College Tour, I'd like to ask some general questions about Inkster Public Schools and Inkster High School.

- Overall, how would you describe your experience at Inkster High School?
- From your perspective, what were some factors that made Inkster High School unique?
- In thinking back, what were some factors that made Inkster Public Schools unique?
- What other schools did you attend or work at within Inkster Public Schools?
- How would you describe those experiences?

Section Three: Questions Focused on HBCUs and the Black College Tour

So now let's talk specifically about the Black College tour.

- When thinking about the Inkster High School Black College Tour, what word or words come to mind?
- If you had to explain what a Black college tour is to someone who was completely unfamiliar, how would you explain it?
- How did you first become familiar with Black colleges?
- How did you first learn about the Black college tour?
- What made the Black College tour appealing to you?
- Why was it important to have a Black college tour at Inkster High School?
- What were you hoping to gain from the Black college tour experience?
- Thinking back to individual HBCU campuses you visited, and using your senses to describe, what sights, sounds, smells, tastes, or feelings (emotional or physical) do you remember?
- How did you get around? What do you remember about the bus ride?

- Aside from the campuses what other stops or locations do you recall visiting during the tour?
- What made the Black college tour experience different from traditional campus visits, including campus tours at predominantly White institutions?

Teachers only

- What were some of the challenges you experienced planning or implementing the Black college tour, and how did you address those challenges?
- There was no playbook manual available for organizing a Black college tour, how did you go about structuring the tour?
- What supports did you draw from to ensure the Black college tour took place each year?
- How significant was the Black college tour to your experience at Inkster High School?
- It has been quite some time since you participated in your Black college tour. What was it about the tour that allows you to have such vivid memories?

Section Four: Questions Focused on College Choice Decisions

- What is your earliest memory of wanting to attend college?
- Prior to participating on the tour, which colleges were among your top choices to attend?
- How did participating in the Black College Tour make you feel about attending college?
- What school did you attend for college?
- How significant was the Black college tour to your college choice process?
- If you did not attend an HBCU, how was the Black College tour useful to you?

Closing

Those are the prepared questions I have, is there anything you would like to add? If there is additional information you would like to share, please feel free to email me. As a next step, I will share the transcript from today's interview. If there are any changes to be made, you can provide them by email, or we can schedule a separate time to review. I will also follow up with my analysis of the interview; you are more than welcome to respond to the analysis and provide feedback.

Correspondence 1
Subject Line: IHS Black College Tour Study: Schedule Your Interview

Greetings,

Thank you for your interest in my research study, Get on the Bus: A Case Study of Black College Tours at Inkster High School from 1980-2013. It explores the experiences of individuals who participated in Black college tours, as students, staff, or volunteers.

I would like to schedule a 60-minute interview with you to further discuss your experience. I am currently scheduling Zoom-based interviews to be held during the following days and times:

Date	Time Slots *NOTE: All times shown are Eastern Standard Time*
Option A	Start Time to End Time
Option B	Start Time to End Time
Option C	Start Time to End Time
Option D	Start Time to End Time
Option E	Start Time to End Time

Based on the options above, kindly respond to this email **as soon as possible** with your preferred first, second, and third choice times for the interview. To make the best use of the interview, please identify a time when you are stationary, have reliable internet access, are in a private setting, and are free from distractions. If none of the options above work with your schedule, please provide days and times that work best for you and I will coordinate them with my availability.

Once an interview is confirmed, I will send you a calendar invite with additional details including the Zoom link.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via email or by phone at 703-992-4788.

Thanks again for your help!

Correspondence 2a
Subject Line: Reminder: IHS Black College Tour Interview (Zoom)

This email serves as a confirmation for the following Inkster High School Black college tour participant interview:

(Day), (Date)
(Start Time) to (End Time)

Join Zoom Meeting
(Zoom Link)
(Meeting ID)
(Passcode)

Please plan to log on at least 5 minutes prior to your scheduled interview so we can start on time. To make the best use of the interview, please make sure you are in a location where you are stationary, have reliable internet access, are in a private setting, and are free from distractions. As a reminder, the interview will be recorded.

If you are no longer able to meet during our scheduled time, please contact me as soon as possible so we can reschedule.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me via email (upthegr2@msu.edu) or phone (###-###-####).

Thank you!

Correspondence 2b
Subject Line: Reminder: IHS Black College Tour Interview (In-Person)

Greetings!

This email serves as a reminder for our Inkster High School Black college tour participant interview scheduled for Saturday, November 4th at 11:00 am EST at Operation Refuge located at 27801 Carlysle, Inkster MI 48141.

Please plan to arrive 15 minutes prior to your scheduled interview so we can start on time. As a reminder, the interview will be audio recorded. Light refreshments will be provided.

If you are no longer able to meet during our scheduled time, please contact me as soon as possible so we can reschedule.

 If you have any questions, feel free to contact me via email (tuptheg@gmail.com) or phone (XXX-XXX-XXXX).
Thank you!

Correspondence 3
Subject Line: IHS Black College Tour: Transcript Attached

Thank you again for taking the time to interview as part of my dissertation research. As promised, attached is the transcript for your review. You will notice I used the pseudonym you selected, whereas other names mentioned during the interview are still included temporarily. Once I complete the analysis process, pseudonyms will be used throughout the transcript.

Please let me know by 12/20 if any content should be deleted, added, or revised. I look forward to starting the analysis process through the remainder of 2023.

In February I plan to hold a preliminary findings session to gain additional input from the community to help inform the final stages of the dissertation process. I will certainly keep you posted about the event, which will likely be held on Zoom.

I appreciate all of your help and look forward to sharing the completed dissertation with you once I cross the finish line!

Thanks again!

Correspondence 4
Subject Line: IHS Black College Tour: Many Thanks

Greetings,

Thanks again for sharing your experience with the IHS Black College Tour to inform my dissertation research. As a small token of gratitude for your time, you will receive a $25 Amazon gift card to be sent electronically to this email address. If you have not received your gift card by Wednesday, December 20th, please email me as soon as possible. Be sure to check your spam folder!

I am currently analyzing the interviews, identifying themes and insights. If there is information you'd like to add, delete, or revise based on the interview transcript you received, please let me know by Saturday, December 30th.

On Saturday, February 24th at noon EST I will hold a Preliminary Findings and Feedback Session via Zoom. You will receive a separate calendar invite, and feel free to join in if you are interested.

I greatly appreciate your time and input, and hope you have a wonderful holiday season.

T. Upthegrove Gregory (soon to be Ph.D.)

Correspondence 5
Subject Line: Event Reminder: Preliminary Findings & Feedback Session - Inkster High School Black College Tours

Greetings All,

Thank you for your continued interest in my dissertation research focused on the Black college tours implemented at Inkster High School from 1978-2010. As a reminder, I am hosting a Preliminary Findings & Feedback Session this Saturday, February 24th from noon to 1 pm Eastern time.

You can access the session using the following Zoom link:

Topic: IHS Black College Tour: Preliminary Findings & Feedback Session
Time: Feb 24, 2024, 12:00 PM America/Detroit

Join Zoom Meeting
https://msu.zoom.us/j/92985303405

Meeting ID: 929 8530 3405
Passcode: 697728

During this session, I will summarize my research findings based on document analysis and 18 interviews conducted with former educators, students, and volunteer chaperones from Inkster High School who participated in the Black college tours. I look forward to hearing your feedback on the findings including any additional insights that further address the identified research questions.

If you are unable to participate in the session, it will be recorded and a GoogleForm will be available to provide feedback immediately following the session.

I thank you again for your interest in my research and look forward to seeing you on the 24th! If you have any questions regarding the study or the upcoming session, please email me directly at tuptheg@gmail.com.

Correspondence 6
Subject Line: Follow-up: Preliminary Findings & Feedback Session - Inkster High School Black College Tours

Greetings All,

Thank you for your continued interest in my research on the Black college tours implemented at Inkster High School from 1978-2010. A special thanks to those who participated in the Preliminary Findings and Feedback Session held yesterday. I've already begun incorporating your input into my dissertation materials.

For those unable to attend, I've attached an updated presentation which includes the questions and observations from those who attended, and my summarized responses to each (Slide 10). The recording of the session can be viewed here.

As you review the slides or watch the recorded session, I am interested in your questions and suggestions! Please share them on the Google Form found here, and I will follow up with you directly.

Thanks again for your expertise and encouragement throughout this process. I look forward to sharing more updates soon!

Take care,
Tanya Upthegrove Gregory, Doctoral Candidate
Michigan State University
College of Education