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Back on track: the epidemic of violence among African-American youth in the Gresham Park Community

Hubert Brown
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BACK ON TRACK: THE EPIDEMIC OF VIOLENCE AMONG
AFRICAN-AMERICAN YOUTH IN THE GRESHAM PARK COMMUNITY

by

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Bachelor of Science, Tennessee State University, 1976
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A Doctoral Dissertation
submitted to the faculties of the schools of the
Atlanta Theological Association
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of
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at
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ABSTRACT

BACK ON TRACK: THE EPIDEMIC OF VIOLENCE AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN YOUTH IN THE GRESHAM PARK COMMUNITY

by

Hubert Brown

May 2014

155 pages

This project was designed to address the reduction and prevention of violence of African-American youth ages (12-16) within the Gresham Park Community of Decatur, Georgia. Moral development and character development are used interchangeably.

A curriculum was developed for youth and parents to assist them to help young people in reaching their potential regarding moral character to avoid the pitfalls of violence. The underlying principles of the study were moral character, spiritual formation, and personal responsibility. The major premise of the project was that if youth feel good about themselves and feel a connection to God, parents, school, and community, then youth will behave better, love themselves and God, and they will make better decisions to negotiate life in regards to nonviolence as opposed to violence.

The study was conducted at Flat Shoals United Methodist Church, and Cedar Grove High School. The total number of youth participating in this study is twenty two.
Eight adults observed, supported, and occasionally gave verbal input. The training took place over a sixteen week period. This study indicates that there was a significant increase in the moral and character development among the youth.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the loving memory of my mother Cora Wilkes, Rev. T. M. Brown, Ethel Brown, grandfather and grandmother. To Aunt Mildred, aunts and uncles, my deceased brother, Herbert, brothers Raymond and Rodney, my only child and wonderful son Nah’shon, and to my extended family, I lift you up. If it had not been for your love, support, encouragement, and the love of God, that I received, I would not be the person I am today. I saw the breath of God in them.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Flat Shoals United Methodist Church for their inspiration, encouragement, guidance, and direction given me throughout this process.

My deepest appreciation is extended to Dr. Maisha Handy, who went beyond the call of duty and service to enhance my life and career, for sharing her professional attributes, strengths, caring, and sensitive nature that assist in developing others.

My warm thanks to Dr. Marsha Snulligan Haney, for being an example of excellence, as well as a leader and guide for myself, inclusive of the doctoral students as well. Thanks to Mrs. Melody Berry, for your assistance and constant watch, for the success of the staff and students.

Furthermore, I would like to thank Rev. Drs. Betty Jones and Steven Jones for their concern, guidance, and selfless service others. To Angela Williams, a doctoral student, I extend my best for your constant assistance, and to Mrs. Cece Dixon, for her editing and conferencing.

Thank you. And, may God bless you.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The author himself was a victim of violence as a teen and has a teenage son. The acts of violence are genuine concern for our children and youth ages 12 –16 specifically in the Gresham Park Community of Decatur, Georgia. The lack of teaching the importance of heritage, pride of history of who we are can be viewed as a serious problem.

The author has been convinced through personal experience, that changing the lifestyle of our teens who are offered opportunities of how to live non-violent lives, guarantees that they too can be our future leaders of tomorrow.

For this doctoral project, the researcher utilized two curricula, one from: Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) designed to serve as tool to access the knowledge and skills to prevent, and ultimately transform youth into nonviolent persons with purposed filled lives.\(^1\) The other, Character Education Development, a Youth Training Package (YTP) was designed to enable youth to become critically aware of the importance of choosing alternatives to violence.\(^2\) This curriculum enabled African American youth to become prevention specialist and to help to enhance character

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\(^2\) Ibid.
development. In addition, the Youth Survey Response Question (YSRP) was designed as an orderly method of analysis, evaluation, and critique, by which to measure characteristic profiles as it relates to violence.

The researcher chose the different approaches to undergird modification of behavior and alternatives to violence. One must love and live through the eyes of faith and the church. Using the Bible to develop a formation of thought relative to decision making is priority, allowing people to have a glimpse of themselves and situations otherwise that may go unseen. This understanding that takes place within individuals and has a positive effect, causes them to behave according to moral principles—right vs. wrong, good vs. bad.

For example, Jeremiah 22:1-5 says, "Thus says the Lord: Go down to the house of the king of Judah, and speak there this word. And say, Hear the word of the Lord, O king of Judah, that sittest upon the throne of David, thou, and the people that enter in by these gates: Thus says the Lord; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor; and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, nether shed innocent blood in this place. For if ye do this thing indeed, then shall there enter in by the gates of this house kings sitting upon the throne of David riding in chariots and on horses, he, and his servants, and his people. But if ye will not hear these words, I swear by myself, saith the Lord, that this house shall become a desolation."3

How Moral Decisions are Made, St. Paul offers a glimpse to understand "how" and "why making decisions are important: St Paul says, "I do not understand what I do." "For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do." (Romans 7:15) the mission of the church remains intact from the time that Jesus pronounced it over two millennia ago to a band of eleven disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them

to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.⁴

“The Child that Fights”
Soul binding
mind cleansing
hold on to the fight
and cry for the child that cries every night
this child needs a savior to open his door
for this child knows pain and can’t take it anymore
the key to enlightenment awaits this child, but
this child won’t stop crying until his savior comes,
so until then the child will have to hold on to life
who will cry for that child that cries every night? Caitlin Easley⁵

Caitlin A. Easley offers a portrait of despair of a child who is in some type of struggle. A child that fights, one who knows pain, one who needs a savior, but, won’t stop crying until his or her savior comes, who will come to the child’s rescue who cries every night. There is a violent “cry of the soul” for help, and the outward behavior represents something violent on the inside. This condition described is violence in the basic meaning of (violation against personhood.) So, he or she waits for the savior to come, but who will cry for that child that cries every night. Enlightenment awaits this child, only someone would hear their cry.


⁵ Christopher Anne Robinson-Easley, Our Children, Our Responsibilities: Saving the Youth We Are Losing to Gangs (New York: Peter Lang International Academic: First Printing edition, January 2012), 1.
Like many of my contemporaries the question that has been asked was, “When will the church and the community “hear the cry” in the 21st century and serve as a force of transformation and change in the respect to youth violence? How do the youth see the church as an institution, and does the church have the power for change given their perception of the situation they live in on a daily basis. And, what alternative does the church offer as a prescription for hope and wholeness. The child’s cry is for an end to “fighting” brokenness, pain struggle, hopelessness, and the helplessness that has entangles the heart in the web of despair. The project explored avenues of research and practical ministry (a comprehensive study of the study context and ministry issue) to address the complex problem of violence among African-American youth in the Gresham Park Community.

According to Albert D. Farrell in his article, “Environmental Influences on Fighting Versus Non-violent Behavior in Peer Situations: A Qualitative Study with Urban African-American Adolescents” makes the projection that many adolescent environments contain social norms that support violence as an appropriate path to achieve social status or seek revenge for preconceived injustices. Farrell guides us through potential factors (social-cognitive skills, family, peer, school, and community domain) that are associated with violent behavior reducing violence among youth, further, but those that are practical and influential in effective nonviolent behavior as well.6

Farrell’s research (analysis) offers clues into violent and nonviolent behavior expressed in the following:

Family Domain

- Parental endorsement of fighting, representing implicit or explicit messages that supported aggression
- Mixed messages about fighting, although by definition somewhat ambiguous, were most often viewed as encouraging rather than discouraging fighting
- Parental modeling of violence and antisocial behavior noted that, adolescence whose parents model aggression and poor emotion regulation are more likely to use violence to solve problems

Four themes within the family domain were identified whose presence supported nonviolence and discouraged fighting.

- Parental values against fighting were considered important determinants of adolescents behavior
- Parental modeling of pro-social was viewed as an important influence on adolescents' behavior and was generally seen as a support for nonviolent behaviors
- Parental disciplinary practices include parenting practices such as monitoring, supervision, and imposing punishment or other contingencies, act as barriers to fighting
- Proximal support from an adult authority figure at home was described as having a parent or other adult family member who provides nurturance, reassurance of worth, and guidance in problem solving, aided in suppressing violence behavior. Family support was viewed as a barrier to fighting.
Peer Influences

Peer Influences Supporting Fighting (i.e. peer pressure, instigation, direct verbal victimization, bystander pressure, and concerns about image and reputation).

Peer instigation is an interpersonal process by which friends and peers can exacerbate a potential conflict and increase the likelihood of argument or fighting by saying or doing negative things, maintaining conflict by continually bringing it up, and generally encouraging conflict. This theme was mentioned most often when responses involved fighting.

- Friend’s and support for fighting was seem as most common as a factor that encouraged fighting
- Peer pressure for fighting included verbalizations and other actions that encouraged fighting, such as: “fight themselves,” “encourage them to fight,” “tell them to fight,” and “are into fighting.”
- Direct verbal victimization is a specific form of teasing, name calling, and other forms of ridicule. Direct verbal victimization was more often a barrier to nonviolent behavior rather than a support for fighting, although it served as both.
- Bystander pressure to fight publicly influenced by individual’s response to a problem situation is influenced by an audience of peers. This theme was mentioned most often in responses that involved fighting, but also to a lesser extent in several close friends scenarios that were paired with nonviolent responses.
- Friends who supported nonviolent behavior were viewed in various forms, made it easier to support nonviolent behavior, friendships, and achievement.
• Lack of friends' support for fighting, took the form of prohibition against fighting, reflected in statements such as "Don't fight. Lack of support for fighting was frequently mentioned in situations that involved close friends.

• Concern over tough image and reputation often were seen in situations involving pressure to fight. Concerns about reputation and image inhibit nonviolent responses. Sharing with school officials, parents, offered alternatives, although at times this was hard.

School Influences

• Proximal support or supervision at school indicated that close relationships with staff, supervision and active intervention by staff, and a school environment promoted peaceful norms supported nonviolent behavior.

• School consequences was seen as supporting nonviolent behavior and discouraging fighting, and included students indicating that knowledge of consequences prevented them for fighting.

Neighborhood Influences

• Exposure to violence/trauma, delinquency, drugs or alcohol abuse indicates that being around people engaging in violent and delinquent acts and using drugs or alcohol can influence youth. Exposure to violence/trauma, delinquency, drugs, or alcohol abuse, were viewed as barriers to nonviolent behavior as well.

• Proximal support, supervision, or monitoring with the neighborhood occurs when resources such as programs are available, positive alternative activities are provided, and norms reflect a sense of community and caring. The availability of
community support, extended family advice, supervision, and support served as important factors in determining behavior.\(^7\)

The task of the researcher is to engage in conversation about the critical elements of violence and non-violence as a means of exploring pathways to prevent reduce violence among African-American youth. The problem of youth violence is profoundly significant to the Afro-American race as a whole. The African American race is intimately connected through history and heritage, and, therefore, cannot be dissolved. Some specific manifestations of youth violence are: murder, assault, suicide, parricide, theft, sexual violence, gang violence, domestic violence, and dating violence. The church and community must co-op together in order to challenge this dilemma. The researcher is convinced that the youth of this day (21st century) is tomorrow’s life line for the church and the community. The passion that drives this researcher is the loss of young people, who if nurtured properly, will be able to turn away from injury to self and others. Nonviolence will be approached as an alternative to address the problem of violence, although, further work is needed.

\(^7\) Ibid., 23-30.
The Study Context

Historical Context

DeKalb was established as Georgia’s 56th county. The southern boundary is the South River and the northern boundary is the Hightower Trail, a trading path used by Indians. The county has 269 square miles. DeKalb was established from parts of Henry, Fayette and Gwinnett Counties. The county was named after Baron Johann de Kolb, a native of Germany and self-proclaimed baron who aided the colonist in their fight for independence.8

In July of 1864, DeKalb had its first taste of war much of the battle of Atlanta actually took place in DeKalb County around the Courthouse and along DeKalb Avenue.9

Chief of the industries during the early years in DeKalb were granite quarrying, farming, dairy farming and cotton and grain mills. Land near the South River produced 1000 or more pounds of cotton per acre, and the county was one of the largest milk producers in the southeast. Large truck farms supplied vegetables throughout the region. Development in the early years was along the rivers along the railroads from Decatur, east to Stone Mountain and south east to Lithonia.10

Gresham Park is a community located in DeKalb County within the City of Decatur, Georgia. The Gresham Park is a predominately black. See chart below.

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9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.
The Ministry Setting

The author is an elder in The United Methodist Church, in particular, the North Georgia Conference which is part of the Southeastern Jurisdiction of the denomination of which reports directly to the General Conference of The United Methodist Church. He is the senior pastor and reports directly to the district superintendent who is part of the cabinet that reports directly to the appointed resident bishop. The appointment is for one year which is announced at the end of the annual conference each year. The pastor may be re-appointed as deemed by the resident bishop. John Wesley was an 18th century Anglican evangelist, the founder of the Wesleyan Tradition and Methodism.
The United Methodist Book of Discipline reflects our Wesleyan way of serving Christ through doctrine and disciplined Christian life. It is the guidebook of rules and policies and procedures handed down from the General Conference governing United Methodist Churches throughout the world. FSUMC administration is interconnected to the General Conference, Annual Conference, Charge Conference, Administrative Council, which comprises the local church’s governing body. The Administrative Council shall provide for the planning and implementing of a program of nurture, outreach, witness, and resources in the local church and for the administration of its organizational and temporal life. The pastor serves as ex-officio of the local church. The council consists of nominated and elected officials to chair various committees designed to execute the purpose and mission of ministry. The District Superintendent serves as ex-officio of each local church confined to a district appointed by an Episcopal Bishop in designated Annual Conferences. FSUMC is located in the North Georgia Conference, the Atlanta Decatur-Oxford District.

Flat Shoals United Methodist Church, (FSUMC), is located at 2400 Flat Shoals Road, Decatur, Georgia 30302. The church was originally a white congregation. Due to the flight-of the white middle class to suburbs in the 60’s, there was an influx of Afro-Americans to Decatur and DeKalb County. Under the leadership of Rev. Grace Washington, FSUMC grew in total to over three hundred and fifty members. Shortly thereafter, Rev. Washington made a decision to begin her own ministry and relinquish all relationship with the United Methodist Church. The majority of the members followed

11 "From The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church – 2012, Copyright © by The United Methodist Publishing House, used by permission, 254."
her to the new ministry leaving behind some fifty persons. Various pastors were appointed to FSUMC after this schism occurred.

The church did not rebound from this situation and reclaim its former glory. In June 2010, the researcher was appointed to FSUMC as senior pastor under the Episcopal leadership of Bishop B. Michael Watson, the North Georgia Conference. Rev. Sharma Lewis serves as District Superintendent (Administrative Leader) of the Atlanta Decatur Oxford District where FSUMC is currently located. The intent of this appointment was and remains a crucial attempt to resurrect, stabilize, and empower the church to become a vital congregation to continue transforming the world by making disciples in and through Jesus Christ.

Upon the author’s arrival at FSUMC, he entered the sanctuary for the morning worship and found twenty-five persons in the congregation. This is consisted of one child, two young adults, eighteen adults, and five seniors. This was a spiritual awakening. The condition of the church was heartfelt and moving. Moreover, after serving the United Methodist Church for twenty-nine years of ordained ministry, this opportunity was another moment to develop leadership skills and address the problem with a clear vision. The pastor met with key leaders who would bring to light the absence of youth in the church, as well as to address an external problem of youth violence within the community. Thus, the decision was made to go forth with the effort of transformation using education as the vehicle.

The condition of the church was surprising, real, and challenging. Observing the number of congregants, the author immediately felt the need to call upon the Lord and to remember the “call to ministry.” The spiritual condition of the people was so surreal and
provocative. Here again, was another situation of brokenness within the church and among the African-American community at large.

It became apparent that the only hope for the wholeness of FSUMC would squarely rest upon the presence of the Holy Spirit for his the people, and the power of transformation that would eventually unfold. As a consequence, the hope is renewing trust in God would yield positive results and bring forth new hopes of liberation for God’s people in difficult times.

The spiritual condition of FSUMC touched the pastor’s heart, soul, and spirit that paralleled with the prophet Jeremiah :9:1-13:17 “Oh that my head and mine eyes fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughters of my people.” But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because the Lord’s flock is carried away captive.” There were many probing questions that began to surface about the future of the church. Questions such as:

- “Where do we go from here?”
- “Where is God in the midst of the situation?”
- “Where and what is the vision for the church?”
- “What should the picture look like?”
- “How can the pastor and FSUMC focus upon prayer and meditation as the pathways to connect and remain connected to God?” and,
- “What methods/plans are to be developed and practice in order to foster resurrection and restoration?”
At no time did the author feel inadequate nor up for the task. The task seemed overwhelming, however, a calmness pursued that reconcile the moment. The author was reassured by the promise Christ shared with his disciples from Matt: 28:20: “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” “Amen.”

The church’s history was indicative of a broken past. Their hopes and dreams were shattered, lost, and co-mingled with the struggle to continue as a church family, this was evident. To those who continued to be faithful in spite of the conditions and circumstances the author was motivated to join them in the struggle. The suggestion is: justice is the concept that every person receiving what is due to them regardless race, age, gender or class, as full participants in the body of Christ. Spiritually speaking, the church suffered a violent episode in its history that did not go away. The author joined the congregation with an emphatic heart, love for the people, and a made up mind for its change and transformation.

Observing the absence of children and youth, the focus clearly centered on the restoration of the church through evangelism and outreach, targeting young people, and nurturing the existing congregation. The challenged was trying to help the church and community recognize how important it is to invest in young people. The risks cannot overshadow the need. There is a voice within that brings into conversation the need to access, analyze, critique, and development opportunities for wholeness for Black children and youth. The pastor felt that focused programs for the children and youth was the pathway for healing and restoration for the FSUMC and the African-American children and youth within the Gresham Park Community.
The pastor's assurance of the spoken word, speaks to FSUMC that God is a presence among the suffering of faithful believers. The author's first preaching message to FSUMC was gleamed from 1st Peter 5: 10-11. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. The message to the people of God is; God is faithful to his word, and this, would provide the framework for FSUMC to realize anew, that, God is present among the suffering of faithful believers. The community that surrounds FSUMC is unique to the church's predicament with some similarities and differences. The condition is economic, social, political, historical, domestic, and spiritual, that plague the church and community. However, the struggle/plight within the African American's dilemma need to be address, the aforementioned conditions will not disappear if the problem is not address together. Nehemiah 2:18 And the said, "Let us rise up and build. So they strengthen their hands for their hands for this good work."

With the challenges facing the youth of the community, the FSUMC initiative should be to embrace the youth and offer them Christ. The overwhelming statistics of youth crime in the community reflects, murder, rape, theft, and domestic violence, to mention a few, would call for an immediate sense of urgency due to the magnitude of the problem of violence in the Gresham Park Community. FSUMC is to realize and becomes sensitized as to the horrific effect of the African-American youth's dilemma on the church, family, community, and the youth themselves, and be steered toward this objective. Consequently, the church should embrace a renewing of faith and hope, own
the problem, address the problem, recognize the value of the youth, and offer a (Christ centered) heartfelt approach to change, resolution, and transformation.

The Ministry Issue

The ministry issue that formed the basis for the project was found in the problem: The Epidemic of Violence: among African-American youth in the Gresham Park Community.

The Motivation for the Study

The researcher's motivation for addressing the issue of African-American youth violence in the Gresham Park Community is two-fold: 1) pastoral 2) experiential.

Pastoral

The stated mission of FSUMC is to go make disciples for the transformation of the world in and through Jesus Christ. As pastor, the researcher believes that God calls us to help the church live up its mission and mandate. The Great Commission (Matt: 25:4) calls the church to go “beyond the walls.” Observing the absence of youth in the church coupled with the violent dilemma that engulfs their lives, the researcher was motivated to address the problem of violence, as a priority. Therefore, creating, implementing, and sustaining an effective youth outreach ministry that would empower FSUMC to live up to its mission and mandate to transform lives. The realization of this mission will give the church more assurance that “God is with them.”
Growing up in Early County, rural South Georgia, reared by a Methodist grandfather and grandmother, after the premature death, of the author's mother, at the age of ten, due to complications of child birth, he experienced violence in its most horrific form. In 1970, Blakely, Georgia was segregated. He was privilege to hold the office of senior class president. While waiting after school for a basketball game, another student and he entered the café’. We were confronted by a white male. He began to shout, "What are you niggers doing in here!" He began to fight and the writer responded. This altercation was brief and we immediately exited the property. To his surprise and shock, the person left the property, got into his vehicle, across the street, and presented a firearm. He fired the weapon directing his anger at the two of us. There were several shots fired around our feet as we ran away. After walking two blocks we were met by a police requesting the details in full. The police asked detailed questions pertaining to the incident. When the police were satisfied with the answers, we left the scene, and proceeded to walk back to school. The remaining students at school were surprised, shocks, perplexed, and troubled. Many suggestions were mentioned, such as: throwing rocks through the window of the proprietor, rallying other students together, informing the school staff, and investigating other approaches to seek justice.

The night of the basketball game, the students wanted to retaliate and destroy the café’. However, calm heads prevailed. The following morning, the faculty, and the student body were assembled in the gymnasium. They wanted to hear from the author as to what transpired. The faculty, families, and the community got involved. Their efforts proved successful. After three months of painstaking negotiations, Early County was
transformed. Segregation ended in the county. Two years later, the perpetrator was arrested while transporting alcohol illegally across the South Carolina into Georgia. Justice was served.

African-American youth violence has reached epidemic conditions within the Gresham Park Community. Within a two mile radius of FSUMC there has been a surge in crime as illustrated by DeKalb County Police Services, See Table 1. The results of the statistical data demonstrate a crisis of within the Gresham Park Community.12

Table 1 DeKalb County Police Services Crimetrac

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crimes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>800</td>
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The challenging question is: How can a small growing urban church become so transformed that the congregation will engage a social problem affecting the community? The church and community mandate is: become sensitive to the problem, embrace a sense of urgency, and confront the ongoing war as youth attack each other, and commit crimes. Crimes such as murder, rape, theft, and the like occur on a daily basis. Members of FSUMC have been affected by violence in the community. With the challenges facing the youth of the community the FSUMC initiative should be “embrace to empower” the youth, and offer them Christ.

The researcher recognized influential factors that contribute to the crime epidemic in the community stemming from several categories. Numerous theories attempt to explain the prevalence of violence among African-American youth in metropolitan areas as well as factors that put youth at risk for engaging in aggressive and or violent behavior. Some attribute the high rates of violence associated with Black youth to poverty, limited economic opportunities, and non-nurturing families, whereas, others suggest that the root cause is chronic stress, which creates feeling of frustration and aggression that are then discharged onto others in the community.13

From this perspective, the researcher believes that the inner city naturally produces high levels of stress, depression, and feelings of hopelessness, powerlessness, and alienation among youth, who then act out their despair with violent behavior. Family factors include low levels of social support from family members, poor monitoring and supervision skills, family disruption, exposure to family violence, problem parental behavior, low emotional attachment to parents, and poor family functioning. Peer and school factors include negative peer influences, low commitment to school, academic failure, and certain school environments and practices. Environmental and neighborhood practices include living in poverty, low community participation, diminished economic opportunity, and access to drugs and firearms. The three categories mentioned above are important perspectives to the influential factors that offer understandings of urban youth violence as a complex phenomenon, since all of these factors play a role in the creation of this growing social problem.

The researcher identifies various factors that contribute the violence within the Gresham Park Community: (i.e. lack of employment, substance abuse, poverty, single parent homes, poor self-image, lack of self-esteem, racism, lack of education, peer pressure, lack of role models, lack of participation with the church, entrapment, etc. The strategy is to co-op with other groups in order to address this issue. The problem of youth violence demands a more expanded approach to provided hope and growth experiences for troubled youth. A multi-level approach is needed for prevention and change. The researcher suggests a look at theories of change or models of change. FSUMC must focus on enhancing the lives of children and youth through, church involvement, strengthening families, co-op with community, advisory boards, and neighborhood alliances, must be formed.

The suggestion is: the African-American churches and the community need a spark, a sense the urgency, owning the problem, evaluating the magnitude of the problem, and igniting a revolution for transformation. Members of (FSUMC) are affected by epidemics of violence in the community. A previous attempt to address the issue was held in September 2012 at FSUMC. The group’s discussion center was, “Stop the Violence” FSUMC says, “enough is enough,” the epidemic of violence among African-American youth in the Gresham Park Community. The specific questions to be addressed were: What are the problems? What results can be expected by embracing the problem? Is God in the African-American youth experience in the 21st century? If so, where and how is God involved? Can the church and community address the problem of violence among the youth and How?
Several factors emerged as to what promotes violence among teenagers:

- Single parent homes
- The lack of fathers in the home
- Christian teachings are not being taught
- Generation Gap
- Society has implanted structures that give rise to violence
- Substance Abuse
- Peer Pressure
- The community is silent
- The church needs a spiritual awakening to the urgency of the problem.\textsuperscript{14}

The researcher and FSUMC designed a second public forum to address African-American youth violence in February and April in 2012. Again, the theme was, “Stop the Violence, the FSUMC says; enough is enough!” The panel consisted of Sheriff Thomas Brown, DeKalb County, NAACP and SCLC representatives, clergy, principals, educators, activists, parents, youths, and the community. The purpose was to communicate the urgency of youth violence, consolidate, plan, and set goals for change.

The results of this forum did not achieve what it had intended due to the lack of commitment to follow-up on the initial conversation shared within the forum. The

\textsuperscript{14} Group Session, Flat Shoals United Methodist Church), 2010.
researcher believes there are a few fundamental reasons why the forum became socially

disengaged. First, persons in power and authority would have to be fully engaged

personally, (urgency, priority, time, support, and resources) in order to ignite to the point

of total commitment. Second, clear delegation of committed leaders to address and

engage the problem needs to be identified and owned. Third, parental involvement

(volunteers) is critical to the group. Fourth, youth participation is also critical as

(principal players) desiring change. Fifth, the community must rally behind the goals for

change as the foundation of strength. Finally, the church must ignite the passion that God

is present in the struggle through faith, so that, the vision will not be lost, and (See it

through). The follow up required more committed volunteers, who with concerted efforts

organize, develop, execute, and maintain the vision. The project is ongoing.

On November 3rd 2013, the FSUMC congregation participated in the following

questionnaire.

This questionnaire serves as information to enlist responses to violence among Afro-American youth. Please circle Yes or No to the following questions.

1. Is one cause of youth violence the absence of Biblical teachings? Yes or No

2. Have you ever had an experience with youth violence? Yes or No

3. Is violence among African-American youth an epidemic in the Gresham Park Community? Yes or No

4. Do you believe that nonviolence is the correct approach to solving or reducing youth related crimes? Yes or No
5. Do you think nonviolence can be a model in changing youth violence? Yes or No

6. Do you see yourself as being nonviolent? Yes or No

7. Have your parents told you about violence and nonviolence? Yes or No

8. Does good character play a role in youth making good decisions? Yes or No

9. Have you experience friends, family, or peers influence youth to react violently? Yes or No

10. Is this generation more subject to violence as opposed to your generation? Yes or No

11. Do you know any youth who makes good choices when confronted with violence? Yes or No

12. Do you believe in God? Yes or No

13. Do you believe in the Bible? Yes or No

14. Do you believe that applying the scriptures to African-American youth's lives will help transform their way of thinking? Yes or No

15. Do you believe in this 21st century that the church can make a difference in impacting youth decisions concerning violence? Yes or No

16. Is it important that the church and the community co-op together in addressing the problem of youth violence in the community? Yes or No
The results of this questionnaire indicate that participants answered yes to the 16 questions present. Twelve participants answered “yes” to question 1-16 and 2 answered “no” to questions 1, 2, and 3. The finding suggests that youth violence is prevalent and is a factor in the development of the lives of African Americans. It further suggests that the Bible, church, and community do matter and is important to the overall welfare of young people lives. In addition, nonviolence surfaced as a model for thinking and decisions making to impact violent behavior.

The researcher realized that there are no earthly guarantees to resolving the problem of violence among African-American youth, and, youth in general. However, the church’s mission is to offer the “reign of God” which has come in Jesus Christ as “intended” for all humanity. Moreover, FSUMC, and other churches and the community, may be missing out on an opportunity for God’s plan of salvation. Moreover, the condition of Black boys and girls are in a state of danger in 21st century America. It is imperative that the situation is address now. Statistics makes it known that incarceration among Blacks are totally out of proportion. We must confront issues that relate to the youth when it comes to their future and the future of the Black race inclusively. We must not continue to make the Playground to Prison a reality.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Theological

Theology as an area of inquiry has involved two significant parties—people and God. It involves our human interpretations of God and the Christian faith in our historical and contemporary settings. Owen Thomas suggests; “our efforts to write theology encompasses a three-fold task.” 1) Theology determines the essentials of the Christian faith. 2) Theology teaches and explains the meaning and requirement of the Christians faith. 3) Theology translates the thought world of the Bible for us today differentiating first century world view from our contemporary world view.15

For centuries, however, this three-fold task has been carried out by white males. Careful examination reveals that male theologians have offered interpretations more than sympathetic to their own dominant culture. The essentials of Christian faith have been confused with essentials of being a member of the dominant culture. Moreover, in much theological writing, being Christian has been confused with being white. Theology, though, handed down to Blacks as pure and universal, has actually been a particular theology.

This ‘white theology’-as it has been called-has undergirded ideologies of white supremacy ensuring the beliefs in the superiority of whites and the inferiority of non-whites. For too long, this superiority has served as the basis for dominion and submission relationships between the races in the institutions of our society.

Dr. Jacquelyn Grant, ordained minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Christian educator, and theologian, shares the assumption that black theology is the impetus in youth ministry. Youth ministry purposes and strategies drawn from traditional European American theologies miss the mark. Consequently, the need is to purpose a theological framework that might more appropriately guide the development of programmatic and curricular structures for black youth ministry.16

The development of black theology systematically challenged this way of thinking. Black theology suggests suspicion underlying truth hidden within a thought, word or idea. In the reading of scripture they discovered that God worked consistently on the side of the victimized the oppressed of society. As a result, a “theology of liberation” emerged. As the rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed community, it relates to forces of liberation to the essence of the gospel, which is Jesus Christ.17

Theology from this perspective is directly related to the praxis of liberation; that is, theology arises out of the experience of people, reflecting and discerning God’s activity in the midst of their own liberation. The question for African Americans is: how

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16 Ibid., 55.

17 Ibid., 59.
can we reconstruct a theology, reflecting the liberating focus of the gospel in the 21st century?

Howard Thurman, mystic, theologian, pastor, and ecumenist, proposed the idea of community, “the search for common ground” as a goal for all life and the basis for ethical reflection. Liberation is an exterior privilege, option or grant that a social entity gives an individual. Community, as achieved potential, concerns wholeness, harmony, and interaction. The self, God and the world shape community. Suffering concerns the personalized problem of evil and hostile activity toward God. Thurman posits that all evil is redemptive, even innocent suffering. For Thurman, the question posed by theodicy is to determine what we do with that which affects us privately for good or bad, and when we stop evil from destroying all meaning in human lives. In response, Thurman indicates that one does everything within one’s powers to arrest evil, and replaces the evil with something good, by internalizing love and truth and then working to love and truth in society. One says “No” to evil because the community’s work is the Work of God.

Martin Luther King, Jr., minister, civil rights activists, Nobel Prize winner, and theologian, begins his theological and ethical discussion with a search for the “beloved community.” He saw nonviolent direct action as the solution to overcome barriers to community on a domestic and international level. King asserted the ultimate goodness, the sacredness of all humanity, for all are in the image of God, Imago Dei, made free. The beloved community, a Christian social eschatological ideal, is a mutual, voluntary, cooperative experience that affirms solidarity and embraces relationships among people. The daily work of living a balanced life produces the likelihood of sin. God, the rational,
loving God in history, sustains and creates life as just and righteous God. God reveals divine purposes through the Christ event; and people acting as free, self-directed, and self-conscious participants cooperate intimately with God to create community.  

King sees Christ as the model source for the beloved community; the Cross symbolizes God’s redemptive love. Agape, ultimate love, allows one to be a good neighbor and engage in forgiveness and reconciliation. Cooperation with God through Jesus Christ is the way to overcome evil. The beloved community includes a loving, just God and a balanced life rooted in love of one’s self, self-respect, and the power to choose.

James Cone, father of Black Liberation Theology said King is correct when he claims that King’s dream was “grounded not in the hopes of white America but in God.” King’s conception of the Beloved Community was grounded, in the final analysis, not in the tradition of the Enlightenment or secular democratic political theory but in the millennial hope of Judeo-Christian religion.  

Nelson Mandela, activist, politician says, “no one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can love to hate, the can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite. Furthermore, freedom is indivisible; the chains on

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18 Kenneth L. Smith and Ira G. Zepp, In Search for the Beloved Community: The Thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Valley Forge: Judge Press, 1998), 141.

19 Ibid.
anyone of my people were the chains on all of them, the chains on all my people were the chains on me.\textsuperscript{20}

However, the critical question in considering youth ministry is: Can we assume the relevancy of theology to young people for whom ignorance of their own heritage precludes conscious identification with it? The lack of adequate education in the churches and secular institutions means that the past denial of black culture and history (especially in the schools) has fostered patterns of assimilation. But to deny one's own heritage in the processes of assimilation into the dominant cultural experience yields the same consequences—displaced disoriented, detached, angry, confused black youth.

In considering the issue of violence as a social dilemma, reading and understanding the Bible is not easy. Violence exists in the Bible through divine and human activity. Theologically, the Bible sees divine violence as a warranted and most human violence as disobedience or sin. The researcher believes that theology and the Bible makes it clear that the evidence of violence forms the basis for transformation of lives (via of power of the Holy Spirit). Biblical violence reminds us that human beings are capable of doing bad things as opposed to good with or without a cause. Revealing acts of violence gives us an opportunity to learn how people do violence and, therefore to do what we can to avoid engaging in violence ourselves. The focus being, the fullest view of liberation of the Christian spirit in context, the fullest and most aware to what the Spirit of God is doing here, now, and inviting us to do.

From its earliest days, Christianity has been challenged to reconcile the scriptures known as the “Old Testament” with the scriptures known as the “New Testament.” Ra’anan S. Boustan states that, “violence can be found throughout the pages of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and the New Testament. Phillip Jenkins describes the Bible as overflowing with “text of terror.” In response to allegations of violence in the scriptures, many Christian theologians and apologists counter with claims that the “God of the Old Testament” is a violent God and the “God of the New Testament” is a peaceful and loving God. This perspective has been labeled as a “millennia-old bias,” and as one that “places the origins of Judeo-Christian violence squarely within Judaism.” Terence Freiheim describes the Old Testament as a “book filled with...the violence of God.” He asserts that while the New Testament does not have the same reputation, it too is “filled with violent words and deeds, and Jesus and the God of the New Testament are complicit in this violence.” This apparent contradiction in the sacred scriptures between a “God of vengeance” and a “God of love” are the basis of a tension between the irenic and eristic tendencies of Christianity to the present day.\(^{21}\)

There is a long tradition of opposition when addressing the connection between God and theology. Some early figures in Christian thought explicitly disavowed violence. Origen wrote: “Christians could never slay their enemies. For the more that kings, rulers, and peoples have persecuted them everywhere, the more Christians have increased in number and grown in strength. Clement of Alexandria wrote: above all, Christians are not allowed to correct with violence.” Several present-day Christian churches and communities were established specifically with nonviolence, including

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conscientious objection to military service, as foundations of their beliefs. In the 20th century, Martin Luther King, Jr. adapted the nonviolent ideas of Gandhi to a Baptist theology and politics. In the 21st century, Christian feminist thinkers have drawn attention to opposing violence against women.22

What is most characteristic of God in the Bible is that, God is the God who takes sides. God is not indifferent, God is not aloof, is not uncaring. What happens to people does matter. And if there is anything that is clear in the Biblical drama as a whole, it is that when God takes sides, he sides with the oppressed. Even his initial bias toward Israel is an example of this. God chooses Israel not because Israel is the greatest of nations; Israel is in fact "the least of all people," a tiny, insignificant nation, the doormat of the ancient world on which the great empires scuffed their boots. God chooses Israel simply because he loves Israel. Israel was pitted against mighty Egypt. God did not side with Pharaoh, the powerful political leader, but with the oppressed menial servants, the scum of society.23

So it goes in the New Testament as well. When Jesus came to Nazareth to preach, he takes the cue for his own mission from the prophet Isaiah, asserting that the Spirit of the Lord has anointed him "to preach good news to the poor... to proclaim release to the captives...to set at liberty those who are oppressed." (Luke 4:18) A favorite imagery to describe him is that of "servant." When he paints the picture of the Last Judgment and seeks to test the authenticity of the life of the nations, the criterion is not right belief or

22 Ibid., 7.

theological orthodoxy, but what has been done for the sick, the naked, the hungry and the imprisoned.

The bias is clear beyond any doubt. God sides with the oppressed. The oppressors are on the wrong side. It is as clear as that. It is as disturbing as that. For here is where the theological shoe begins to pinch: on how many contrasting lists of oppressors and oppressed are white middle-class Americans likely to be found in the second column rather than the first? So here is the point at which a significant identity crisis will continue to confront white middle-class Americans: do they find their true identity in terms of nation, race, and class, or in terms of the larger identity their religious community offers them.24

When addressing violence, theology can help expose the nature and impact of violence on society. Theology is the study, contemplation, and conversation about God, and, how God is related to, who we are, and what we believe because of our understanding of God. Theology is a component of religious expression. Whenever we think or talk about the impact God has on the world and our lives, we are doing theology. For example, Womanist theologians, generally women of the African Diaspora who are scholars of religion intentionally name violence and oppressions of racism, sexism, and classism—anything that harms people.

What does Jesus say about violence? Some see Matthew 10:34, where Jesus comes to bring a sword not peace, as affirmation of aggression and violence. Many scholars suggest this is a misinterpretation. Rather, Jesus warms that persecution will come to Christians, and that ultimately it will divide the world, for we have different

24 Ibid., 96.
interpretations and understandings about God, life, faith, and truth. Those who intimate the followers of Jesus must be willing to give up everything; they may face persecution. In the Temple with the money changers (Matthew 21:12, Mark 11:15, Luke 19:45; and John 2:13) Jesus causes no harm. He tells them to get out and not desecrate the Temple: a "dramatic disruption." In ancient cultures, his wisdom language was not considered violent. Some of our staunchest enemies are those from our households. (Matthew 10:36) In sum, there are times when God orchestrates violence for the greater good of god's chosen people; other times divine violence seems too harsh. In Biblical violence, violence is complex and needs to be heard and reckoned with, story by story, for a better grasp of Scripture.

Obery M. Hendricks in the book, The Politics of Jesus, writes: indeed, more than sixty chapters of the Bible reflect a negative view of empire. The rhetoric of empire certainly is not consistent with the politics of Jesus, who scolded his disciples, "The Gentiles lord it over one another, but it is not so with you." This doctrine represents the very kind of denominationalist sentiment that Jesus so adamantly stood against. In fact, it is little different from the ideology of the Roman Empire that crushed the people of Israel underfoot and ultimately executed Jesus in its quests to subjugate the whole world. In this sense, the NSS articulates the oppressive imperial rhetoric of Caesar, not the liberating Gospel or Christ. It idolatrous ideology—yes, idolatrous—ina that it replaces God's love for all humanity with its own judgment that some of God's children (that is,
American, and not all Americans, either) are more worthy of the fruit of the tree of life than others.25

Empires are built on violence and greed and gross disrespect for the rights, even the humanity, of everyone but those sanctioned by the empire. George F. Will a conservative columnist, admits, “Empire is about domination.” The very notion of empire violates the politics of Jesus in the most fundamental ways. By definition it entails war and greed, theft and deception. It is inescapable of culture of death masquerading as a culture of life. It is a handful of leaders making an idol of their own culture and their desires. An empire is a nation playing God.26

Theology asks us what it means to be human, what is the nature of society, and pushes us to examine the potential for justice and transformation of violence. Violence places all of creation in a survival mode and diminishes the inherent dignity of the created, denying the imago Dei in humanity. Violence displaces the role, holiness, and sacrality of God and of humanity. Violence also blurs the lines of reality and often exudes ambiguity. Sometimes the issues are massive and unwieldy so that it seems violence can never be transformed.27

So how does youth violence connect with Black liberation theology? While James Cone speaks of Black Liberation Theology as White oppression, and Blackness is


26 Ibid., 223.

identifying with black Jesus is central to understanding or seeking liberation through this thought, Akindele Akinyemi, in his article, “The End of Black Theology” takes a different twist, a radical approach, as to whether or not Black theology is dead. Akinyemi says, “in order for Blacks to build urban power in regional communities, we must redefine the theology in which Black liberals embraced for the last decades.” The main method employed by Black theology is to manipulate embittered young Blacks by turning their feelings of inferiority, alienation, jealousy, hopelessness and self-hate, into racist rage against Whites, Asians, and affluent Blacks who are conveniently blamed for their lack of personal initiative to better their lot in life. While those who follow Black theology claims to give Blacks better self-image, they unwittingly encourage a poor self-image among Blacks by defining “blackness” in such negative terms as “the poor,” “the oppressed,” and “niggers.” Why must we fine the “Black Experience” in such negative terms? All Blacks do not live in the ghetto subsisting on welfare and engaging in filth and crime. They cry about how affluent Blacks are not helping the “little” people when in fact the “little” people have not done anything to help themselves. 

In order for this type of theology today to work it must evolve from the Socialist concept and get into the spiritual concept of living. Stressing the congregation about free market enterprises is what will help young people get in tune. Our young adults are into the Silver Rights (not Civil Rights) Movement. Most people who follow Black Theology today do not understand the spiritual nature of God and even though they pray daily they still find hardships in their personal lives. Struggle is a choice not a mandate. Children

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should be taught a conservative form of biblical teaching. We should be placing emphasis on education, family values and economics in our children. Children in this Black Theology movement should embrace relationship between boys and girls and understand that males are brothers in Christ and females are sisters in Christ. The old leadership always place the youth on the back burner in Black Theology churches.

For Akinyemi, the reason why young people will not embrace Black theology because Black Theology is dead theology what will never be brought to life. In this day and time it has outlived its time. The only people who are embracing it today are old people for the 60's and 70's. They sit around and tell war stories about what they used to do instead of living in the present. Young people want to be prosperous and be educated so they can give back to their communities. You will not see young people in Churches that preach Black Theology. Where is liberation and reconciliation today among the African American church and the community? We turn now to another point of view to gleam an interpretation of the problem.”

Ron Rhodes offers a reflection in his article, “Black Theology, Black Power, and the Black Experience” states: a biblical theology of liberation must include an emphasis on reconciliation among, without which the theology ceases to be Christian (Eph. 2: 14ff.). Black liberation theologian DeOtis Roberts (b.1927), though committed to liberation, agrees with this and insists that black theology must speak of “reconciliation that brings black men and white men together. Roberts says, “It is my belief that true freedom overcomes estrangement and heals the brokenness between peoples.” However,

29 Ibid., 9.
Roberts argues, "reconciliation can take place only between equals. It cannot co-exist with a situation of Whites over Blacks.

Roberts's point is well taken. Reconciliation and racism are birds of a different feather; the never together. Genuine reconciliation can come only if people—both black and white—commit to a scriptural view of their brothers and different color, seeing all people as created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26) and of infinite value to God (1 Cor. 6:20, 1 Pet. 1:18). Society and human being comes together with genuine intention is the mechanism to offer resolution. With the absence of reconciliation, chaos and violence will exist. Old and new must come together as equals. Liberation Theology must insist on reconciliation as its core of thought and reflection.

The project focus is to address African-American youth violence within the Gresham Park Community. It is critical to gleam in and through the lens of Womanist theology. Womanist theology is an emergent voice of African-American women in the United States. Employing Alice Walker's definition of Womanism in her test In Search of Our Mother's Garden, black women in America are calling into question their suppressed role in the African American church, the community, the family, and the larger society. But Womanist religious reflection is more than mere destruction. It is, more importantly, the empowering assertion of the black women's voice.31

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Womanist theology is critical reflection upon black women’s place in the world that God has created and takes seriously black women’s experience as human beings who are made in the image of God. The categories of life which black women deal with daily (that is, race, womanhood, and political economy) are intricately woven into the religious space that African American women occupy. Therefore the harmful and empowering dimensions of the institutional church, culture, and society impact the social construction of black womanhood. Woman theology affirms and critiques the positive and negative attributes of the church, the African-American community, and the larger society.

Womanist theology can help expose the nature and impact of violence on society, (i.e.) Womanist theologians, generally women of the African Diaspora who are scholars of religion, intentionally name violence and oppressions of racism, sexism, and classism—anything that harms people. They do analysis of varied sacred text, novels, poetry, music, and folk wisdom to name the violence and offer suggestions about how to transform and change this behavior. Womanist thought is theory and praxis, and a way of life. This indeed helps one to see the other side of the nature and impact of violence, for it is critical to understanding. Other scholars engaged in liberating God’s people understand that anything that obstructs personal or communal well-being and communal development must be examined, and people must be encourage to believe and act differently. Combing the two approaches, offers scholarly interpretation for the task at hand.32

Looking through the lens of Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan, that researcher takes away a conversation that is parallel to the thoughts of the author in regard to Biblical violence.

32 Ibid., 14.
After intensive investigation, the author states that, there are times when God orchestrates violence for the greater good of God's chosen people; other times divine violence seems too harsh. Biblical violence is complex and needs to be heard and reckoned with, story by story, for a better grasp of Scripture.33

Violence exists in the Bible through divine and human activity. Though some violence may seem uncalled for, or unjustly pronounced on people by, God divine violence involves act of disobedience, a need to control, and self-aggrandizement. Theologically, the Bible sees divine violence as warranted and most human violence as disobedience. A Bible reader can know that violence exist and is not always understandable. Yet, it is important not to deny the biblical socio-historical, cultural context is different from our reality. From a Womanist ethical perspective, we must name violence, even when it is uncomfortable, and note who does violence, the results, and how the text understands what transpired. A Womanist reading views with suspicion unnecessary violence that causes oppressions of racism, classism, sexism, or violence that produces any harm and wonders about the Bible's purpose, who shaped the divine and human characters, and what we might learn not to do from biblical insights. Often, scapegoats appear where one person or a group of persons blamed or are used to resolve crisis: e.g., Jephthah's daughter pays with her life for her dad's impetuosity; those without blood on doorpost pay for Pharaoh's wrongs. Biblical violence reminds us that human beings are capable of doing bad things, with and without cause. Revealing these

acts of violence gives us an opportunity to learn how people do violence and, therefore, do what we can to avoid engaging violence ourselves.

Reconciliation with youth begs a curricular and pedagogical framework for ministry with African-American youth that seeks to keep it real. Keeping it real calls for an embrace of engaged pedagogy. The pedagogical context focuses on connecting teaching and learning with overall life experiences of those being educated. Through methods such as: inviting, listening, connecting, engaging, exploring, emerging, and honoring youth challenged them to grow in wisdom and all its varied forms. Youth will be able to connect with a structural approach that honors them as human beings, and unwrap their thinking of who they are, and how they see themselves in light society, church, community, and family.  

The writer’s reflection as it relates to the direction of Black Liberation Theology is: we must be cautious in dispensing with the impact of Black Liberation theology as dead and unattractive to the liberation of African Americans. African-American history provides us with glues that demonstrate the old and the new, combining forces to drive home effective means of interpreting the past and current cultures. Black Liberation Theology and Post-modern theological discourse must be synthesized to gain the value and benefit from both. For example, the Hip-Hop culture did not come from today’s reality. Hip-Hop culture is a product of African-American history. African American must be embrace and engaged with enthusiasm the present day culture, and attempt to accent the positives therein. Understanding the past and present, is critical to the process, procedure, and progress of the future. Moreover, African Americans must reconcile

34 Ibid., 44.
within the race (with each other) in order to become empowered to liberate, to heal, and take a new approaches to violence, African Americans are all in it together. The church must continue to be a catalyst for change and transformation, given the difficulties, for, "Stony the Road We Trod" is not a new phenomenon.

Black folk expect the preacher to reassure them of God’s might power, not to question or doubt it. They expect the pastor to help them cope with joblessness, poverty, and discrimination by transforming their despair into hope. Black theology needs to provide the content and method for the changing the social, economic, and political obstacles for blacks.35

The black church needs a practical theology that can help liberate it from social, political, and economic oppression. Though academic black theology purports that Jesus is the liberator and that God sides with the oppressed, these assertions, however hermeneutically sound and exegetically valid, fail to deal with the systemic poverty and suffering that disproportionately affect the black community.36

Black churches can also adopt public schools, into which they can send volunteers to “testify” to young blacks about the value of quality education. They could provide “education mentors” to work with teachers and counselors in order to help children and youth increase educational achievement, develop self-esteem, and enhance moral and intellectual integrity. This would be the first step toward a decentralized educational structure that would enable communities and churches to take control of the future of our


36 Ibid., 2.
young people, instead of the streets. In this scheme, churches would monitor the progress of their young parishioners from kindergarten through 12th grade and find tutors or provide them qualified teachers to teach subjects in which children and youth need help. Investing the churches time, talents, gifts, and service to young people is critical to African-American youth future as well as the vitality of generations to come.37

Flexible thinking and praxis connects what we teach/preach, for many are uncharted waters. In today's challenge we cannot hold on to concepts or boundaries that reflect rigidity, which when compared to bias is equably debilitating. Our youth need to learn what it means to shed their rigid stances and understand that there should not be perceived differences because you belong to a different gang or belong to a different community. For far too many of our youth, rigidity has meant death. Our youth equally important need is to reexamine and reframe their praxis regarding their relationship to God and self. There is no reason for a child to assume that he or she will not live to see their 18th birthday because of violence. To a child of God, a scale of values becomes available by which men are measured and their true significance determined. Even the threat of violence, with the possibility of death that it carries is recognized for what it is—merely the threat of violence with a death potential.38

What does it mean to expand the operations of ministry for what we teach/preach and how youth live. The researcher concurs with Cone: the task of the Christian theologian is to do theology, in light of concreteness of human oppression as expressed in color, and to interpret for the oppressed the meaning of God's liberation in their

38 Christopher Anne Robinson-Easley, Our Children Our Responsibilities: Saving the Youth We Are Losing To Gangs (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2012), 172.
community. The operations of ministry should reflect how we teach and preach in a given community in order to connect with the reality and conditions that affect people as a whole.

We also need the reflections of our theology brought to the pulpit on Sunday morning, which drives the need for both theologians and African-American clergy to come together as the initial drives of our change process. When you combine that which they each bring to the table, their critical role in a change process helps to erase fears, grab on to our cosmological heritage, and embrace all the is ours by right.

Black theology has little practical value apart from the black church because liberation cannot be achieved with the church. Cone, in his very compassionate book *For My People*, says that “black liberation is, in part, dependent upon the attitude and role that the church assumes in relation to it.” Although black preachers, theologians, and church leaders may disagree on the relation of black theology to the church, the time for differences between the aforementioned has passed. It is now time for unity and action—time to practice what we teach and preach, especially in times like these where black youth futures are a stake.

**Biblical**

“Violence,” covers a wide spectrum of time, past, present, and future demonstrating its over-arching existed in history. In the Old Testament, there are hints of domestic violence, incest, and child abuse in Abraham (Gen. 16:6, 20:1-8, 22:1-14) and Lot (19:30-38). Throughout the Bible, assault against the community is an assault against

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God, As the Psalmist states; **"Happy shall be he who takes our little ones and dashes them against a rock!"** (Psalm 137:9) Modern commentators feel unhappy and seem to imply that the Psalmist-poet should rather not have said this. They express their uneasiness basically in two ways. On the one hand, they try to show that the poet’s words are actually less harsh than they seem to be *prima facie*. On the other hand, they maximize the historical distance between the poet and the modern reader, so that the psalmist is allowed to have spoken in this way in his days but we cannot repeat his words in our day.

As for the first, it is suggested that the verse should be understood figuratively—rocks are scarce in Babylonia. Another suggestion is the ‘children’ may have been used in the sense of ‘inhabitants of the city’, who can be responsible adults. An addition view is that the children were at least considered as tomorrow’s soldiers. Other opinions stress that the verse is not an expression of blind hate: it is rather a prayer that the ruthless conqueror might now himself taste the bitterness of defeat and helplessness that Israelites experience when their babies were killed, or it is even an appeal to the Lord’s power over history—is the Lord God or will the superpowers triumph.

And for the second, the accent on the historical distance between the poet and the modern reader, commentators agree that killing children was a common practice in ancient warfare. One explains that the principle of blood revenge, transmitted as a duty to offspring, made it necessary to exterminate all males in order to prevent future vengeance. More important, commentators can say the poet, or the Israelites in general, had yet to learn something. For example, ‘they had yet to learn that God’s ways are not man’s ways’ and that suffering love can reconcile former enemies.’ Or, the psalmist is
'typical of the man in every age who is godly and devoted to things of God, yet who-theologically speaking-lives in the B. C. What these comments suggest is that our real distance to the text is not lain in the fact that our warfare has become so much more civilized, but in the fact that Jesus Christ has come and taught us a new way to look at our enemies. For this moment, it suffices to remark that modern commentaries are far from saying ‘amen’ to Psalm 137:9, which, in fact, would be a rather natural response to the final verse of a psalm.40

Cross references would include: (2 Kings 8:12) “Why is my lord weeping?” “Because I know the arm of harm you will do to the Israelites,” he answered. “You will set fire to their fortified places, kill their young men with the sword, dash their little children to the ground, and rip open their pregnant women.” (Isaiah 13:16) “Their infants will be dashed to pieces before their eyes, their houses will be looted and their wives violated.” (Hosea 13: 16) “The people of Samaria must bear their guilt, because they have rebelled against God. They will fall by the sword; their little ones will be dashed to the ground, their pregnant women ripped open.” (Nahum 3:10) “Yet she was taken captive and went into exile. Her infants were dashed to pieces at the every street corner. Lots were cast for her nobles, and all her great men were put in chains.”

But if there are passages like these, there are also passages that witness to the surpassing tenderness of God’s love for his people, and the peace that he will bring clarity to a biblical perspective of violence. In the New Testament, Jesus says, “I have come not to bring peace, but a word” Matt: 10:34, although it may be a metaphor, it

implies some type of aggression, violence against sin. He further says, “If my kingdom were the world, my servants would fight.” John 26:52 clearly witnessed a picture of violence. Jesus taught, “There is a positive command to love the enemy and even to pray for him. He may not be subject to retaliation; if one is smitten on the cheek, the other cheek must be turned.” You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Matt: 5:38

The Sermon of the Mount (Matthew 5: 3-12) portrays a new relationship to God as father, a relationship that is epitomized in and somehow made possible for others by Jesus. A key theme of the Sermon’s depiction is: imitation of God; to act as God does, with inclusive forgiveness and mercy, is to live in the kingdom. Individuals actually and presently experience this relationship in their own live and communities; it transforms their relationships so that, like God, they can look selflessly even on their enemies through the eyes of God’s unconditional love. Lisa S. Cahill said: “love your enemies.” Matthew in chapter 5:38-48 apparently begin this section with regard to retaliation. The ancient Hebrew law of retaliation (Exod. 21: 23-25) was an advance over the tribal practices which assumed that a single offense against a member of the tribe called for wholesale destruction of the offending tribe.

But Matthew demonstrates that Jesus rejects the whole notion of retaliation and demands instead a response to a misdeed that is the reverse of what is expected. It is not the recommendation of such a negative factor as nonresistance; it is rather the response of positive good in the face of evil. One of Matthew’s favorite sayings, “You have heard that it was said,” introduces this discourse on retaliation. The hearer would then anticipate something to follow. This concept of teaching a person or a group would
primarily entail getting one attention. This type of set up would open the door for an intelligent teaching platform. The Mosaic Law, the Code of Hammurabi, and the Roman law required the wrongdoer should "get as good as he gave." In Jesus time the equivalent in money was exacted by the courts as a recompense for injury, and that practice may have represented some advance: it placed restraints on private retaliation or clan vengeance. But the principle remained, and the law of the kingdom took direct issue with it; Jesus here proposes a gentle revolution.41

"But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also", Matt: 5:39 do not resist through violent means of self-defense. One who is evil (RSV) is the correct translation; not evil in the abstract. (KJV) The saying illustration of how a right minded person will act, not a rule to be interpreted legally. One might be mistaken in saying that Jesus enjoins this "as a positive principle of action with the definite purpose of ...reconciliation of an enemy." Such is the idea of Rom. 12:21 and Prov.25: 21-22, but Jesus' saying has no motive of any kind. His point is that the mere fact that wrong has been done a man does not give him license to do wrong. Jesus' followers must not retaliate and they must suffer the same injury again, simply because it is God's will that their attitude and conduct should be of this kind.42

Matthew's insertion of this verse, and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well, Matt: 5:40 is an expression of grace as seen in verse 39.


42 Ibid., 301.
This act, because it is not the "normal" human reaction, is intended to challenge the aggressor by grace rather than by retaliation. When one is sued for his essential clothing, his coat (the long outer garment reaching to the ankles that served as a basic covering for his body, he should offer as well his outer cloak (a heavy, more expensive garment which served for protection against sun, cold, rain as well as bedding at night. Again, the act of grace, which contradicts ordinary human reaction to harsh treatment, is intended to overcome the wrongdoer by love instead of by greater show of the coercive force. By this method the oppressor's mind may be changed. Jesus is teaching his followers how to go above the limits, real suffering is a revolution of change within itself. Jesus teaches that grace can change the world for the good.

From the passage, Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself" Matt: 19:19 clearly indicates Jesus is teaching a new way to think about violence within the church and community. FSUMC must be willing to confront and seek to transform those persons and institutional practices in the local church that engage in any form of violence against one's neighbor

What does such teaching mean? Our imagination recoils before it, and our everyday mortality (our speedy recourse to law, for instance, and our ultimate dependence on force) flatly contradicts it. Christ has in mind the injured person. Such a person's concern for justice is never pure: it is subtly entangled with vindictiveness. Christ warns the person against that revenge. Revenge is not sweet, despite the proverb: it is poison, strife breeding strife in endless circle. Has Christ in mind also the person guilty of inflicting injury? Do our law courts and jails really "satisfy" the oppressed, or reclaim the oppressor? How often they confirm the oppressor in guilt, leave the injured
unrequited, and thus hurt everyone! The wrongdoer must be brought to personhood, and that change is not wrought by retaliation. Above all, Christ has God’s will in mind: the intention is the world shall be a home in which children dwell in mutual love. Christ is not pleading for any cowardly yielding, and the phrase “passive resistance” is almost a parody of his teaching. The children of the kingdom must show good will, with no other strategy and ulterior motive.43

The researcher observed the phrase: “Do not resist.” The key question is: “will non-resistance be the kind of solution that will transform an oppressor and end oppression”? “Will this concept work in the African-American youth world in the 21st century”? The researcher believes that the historical life and teaching Jesus do apply here. The author witnessed a change in the heart of humanity when led by the Holy Spirit. Where is God, in the midst of violence in the lives of Afro-American youth is a vital question? How can the church offer and effective model by which young lives will be transformed and become followers of Jesus? Matthew indicated that Jesus’ teaching is not to resist evil: the answer for pastors and churches to evangelize young people as if it was the last thing on earth to do. There must evolve in the minds of the church that “enough is enough.” The reality is that young black adolescents are driven in this age by the forces of society. Resisting evil has to begin in the home with effective parents. The church’s opportunity is to seek and teach Christian values and implementation as the Holy Spirit leads.

A blow on the right cheek was an insult—with the back of the hand, so that the palm of the hand could return with a blow on the left cheek. What does this teaching

43 Ibid., 302.
mean? Walter Wink in his book, *The Powers that Be: Theology for a New Millennium*, *Jesus' Third Way* says, Jesus intended for his followers to “Stand up for yourselves, defy you masters, assert you humanity; don’t answer the oppressor in kind. Find a new, third way that is neither cowardly submission nor violent reprisal.” Christ warns us against revenge. The wrongdoer must be brought to truer humanity, and that a change is not wrought by retaliation. Christ has God’s will in mind: He intends that the world shall be a home in which children dwell in mutual love. He is not pleading for any cowardly yielding, and the phrase “passive resistance” is contradictory to his teaching. Do not become like the oppressor. Lift your banner high. Do not submit nor accept the standard of society. This is true victory.

“The epidemic of violence among African-American Youth in the Gresham Park Community,” quickens the researcher’s suspicions and raises issues as to whether or not an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is the operative behavior pattern in some of the African-American youth today. The researcher, personally, have witness the response to an offense among many youth who initiated the “get you back mentality.” This behavior seems to be prevalent and disturbing. The alarming rates of homicide and self-destructive behaviors among young Blacks have serious implications for the health and welfare of the entire black community, not only in terms of indirect costs of interpersonal violence and criminal activity, but also in terms of delayed family formation, potential years of life lost, and the general level fear and paranoia. The researcher is convinced that retaliation is an evil that is powerful within the human being. Teaching one another

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how to control this behavior and seek an alternative would alter the course of humanity is the researcher’s, opinion.

Did black youth create violent patterns of “get you back mentality,” or are they responding from cultural patterns handed down through society and generations? Dr. Edward Rhymes in the article, “Race Watch” writes: despite the firing of Don Imus, radio host, a 66 year old white guy, corporate media continue to attempt to divert attention from long-established institutional sexism, in order to depict Black youth culture as the vector of the disease. That American reality is one of pervasive celebration of violence, in general, and violence against women, in particular—a white cultural invention. Black rappers, who are owned and controlled by white corporations, did not create this culture of violence and misogyny, but are made the scapegoats for a much deeper national social crisis—a landscape in which “The Godfather” and “Goodfellas” are revered as “classic” films.  

In the wake of MSNBC’s and CBS’s firing of Don Imus, the debate over misogyny, sexism and racism has now taken flight—or submerged, depending on your point of view. There are many, mostly white, people who believe that Imus was a fall guy and he is receiving blame and criticism for what many rap artists do continually in the lyrics and videos: debase and degrade Black women. A Black guest on an MSNBC news program even went as far as to say, “Where would a 66 year-old white guy ever had heard the phrase nappy-headed ho”—alluding to hip-hop music’s perceived powerful

influence upon American culture and life (and apparently over the radio legend as well)-and by so doing gave a veneer of truth to the theory that rap music is the main culprit to be blamed for this contemporary brand of chauvinism.

However, Rhymes concurred with Bell Hooks, the noted sociologist and black-feminist activist who said that "to see gangsta rap as a reflection of dominant values in our culture rather than as an aberrant "pathological’ standpoint, does not mean that a rigorous feminist critique of the sexist and misogyny expressed in this music is needed. With a doubt black males, young and old, must be held accountable for their sexism. Yet the critique must always be contextualized or we risk making it appear that the behavior this thinking supports and condones-rape, male violence against women, etc.-is a black male thing. And this is what is happening. Young black males are forced to take the "heat” for encouraging, via their music, the hatred of and violence against women that is a central core of patriarchy.46

For example, Gangsta and hardcore rap is the product of a society that has historically objectified and demeaned women, and commercialized sex. These dynamics are present in hip hop to the extent that they are present in society. The rapper who grew up in the inner-city watched the same sexist television programs, commercials and movies; had access to the same pornographic and misogynistic magazines and materials; and read the same textbooks that limited the presence and excluded the achievements of black men and women (and people of color as well), as the All-American, Ivy-league bound, white kid in suburban America. It is not sexism and misogyny that the dominant

46 Ibid., 2.
culture is opposed to (history and commercialism has proven that). The dominant culture's opposition lies with hip-hop's cultural variations of the made-in-the-USA misogynistic themes and with the Black voices communicating the message. The debate and the dialogue must be understood in this context.47

During this research project the researcher is compelled and to examine perspectives, for example, Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan view (a Womanist perspective) says, we must rename violence, even when it is uncomfortable, and note what does violence, the results and how the text transpired. Moreover, a Womanist reading views with suspicion unnecessary violence that cause oppressions of racism, classism, sexism, or violence that produces any harm about the Bible's purpose, the divine and human character, and what we might learn from to do or not to do from theological and biblical insights. Renita J. Weems in the book, "Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets" expounds on violence in regards to racism, classism, and sexism in Scripture. In the chapter "Yet I Will Remember My Covenant with You" The World of Romance and Rape: The author examines thinking of the prophets used in the marriage metaphor for their intended audiences. The world of the prophets Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel was one where men had absolute power over women's bodies, a world where women's sexuality was considered threatening to male honor, a world where battery and rape and mutilation were potentially erotic, and where battery and rape culminated in romance and reconciliation. As clever rhetoric's however, the prophets must surely have suspected that there would be members of their audience who would question whether the parallels they drew between public policies and women's sexuality were fair,

47 Ibid., 3.
reasonable, or accurate. What they probably did not suspect—because they never had any reason to do so—was that their audiences might question the very morality of the metaphor. That is, the prophets probably never imagined themselves talking to audiences that would object to the metaphor’s depiction of women, its assumptions about female sexuality, and its justifications for assaulting women. This brings us to the question undeniable at the heart of this and similar studies on biblical imagery, and that is, what to do with a metaphor that promotes a world that is hierarchical, that demonizes and marginalizes women, and that rationalizes violence, a world that many modern readers cannot—even for the sake of argument—abide.⁴⁸

The researcher gleams from (Weems) reflections in regards to biblical imagery is: injustice toward the marginalized and rejects the sacredness of all persons. These views do not project a society reflecting the value of each person, despite the role in which each individual play themselves. Considering the biblical setting, it can be safe assume to say certain paradigm shifts occurred prior to the prophetic messages, indicating a society that needed some type of prescription for its ills. It is imperative to the modern reader to examine the correlation between the violence of the biblical setting and the 21st century. In a male dominated society in any age, careful and critical attention must be given to the content and context contained within the biblical message, and careful interpretation of the focus and intent is necessary. The content of the prophetic messages suggests, women were exploited, abused, and dominated. What needs to be recognized is: dominance in any form is violence. Violence of personhood, identity, value, and, exclusiveness leads a modern audience to observe the nonsense of the prophetic message for the rationalization

does not support equality. Moreover, African-American youth in 21st century America, is
an audience that rejects any message that clearly obstruct fairness, equality, and the right
for all persons to be embraced apart from race, class, sex, gender, and culture.

Katie Cannon, a black women, Carter a white woman, became friends, born out of
openness and assurance, suggests speaking the truth in life will not be futile. Cannon
speaks to classism, sexism, and racism, that perpetuate various forms of violence, in the
book, *God's Fierce Whimsy: Can We Be Different but Not Alienated? An Exchange of
Letters*, Cannon responds to a question in a letter to Carter, the question is: “Can we be
different but not alienated?” The answer is: “Only, if there is mutuality in our relating”.
The analogy for me, Cannon says, is the difference between the miracle of dialogue and
bilateral conversations. When two parties, people, races, nations, etc., are dialoguing,
they respect whatever their intellect, spirit, culture, and traditions tell them is sound in
each other, with an attitude of openness for growth and change that comes with the
moving for God’s spirit. The open-flowing energy between the two removes
alienation.”49

Moreover, racism, sexism, class, and, elitism are all false, institutionalized
systems of the abortive search for somebodiness (meaning). Therefore, such systems
there cannot be acceptance of difference. Difference is interpreted by those in power as
less than. Conformity is the norm, and anyone who cannot be bleached out and neutered
has to be isolated, alienated, and eventually exterminated. It is no coincidence that hard
and destructive drugs flow freely in our black communities. The self-defense that comes

49 Katie G. Canon, *God's Fierce Whimsy: Christian Feminism and Theological
from the side of the oppressed is to maintain the alienation that is already in place, because history bears out that whenever any of us try to heal the breach, they either get co-opted and become a token pet in the system or they get assassinated as a threat to the status quo: academic excellence, national security, etc.\textsuperscript{50}

The researcher reflects on Cannon's idea of relationship to differences among people, nations, and parties. The African-American youth today struggle is found within the problem of alienation. In their youthful creative minds, the focus is on new ideas and methods to express their identity in the culture in which they exist. A sense of adventure permeates young people journey into adulthood, wanting to be different, and finding their way through experience. The journey into adulthood calls for caution, maturing, making wise decisions, and having a support system (church, family, school, community, etc.), to undergird, guide, and nurture through life's realities. The cry for self-worth and somewbodiness is integral to the search for meaning in every youth. It is unfortunate that America, though-out its history, has been structured, designed, and orchestrated, in such a way that gives birth to: racism, classism, sexism, equality, injustice, and other hidden forms of oppression in the democratic idea, and its value system. The researcher would like to suggest: respect for differences in culture, tradition, spirit, is the power (cure) that will aid in the transformation of the human rationalization of what determines it's healing. And with determination, healing would ultimately become a reality. Moreover, with a God conscience, open hearts and minds, energy will flow anew, to offers possibilities to address the problem of alienation. To do otherwise is to perpetuate violence, alienation, and mistrust, to the rights of others as who are different, without

\textsuperscript{50}Ibid., 37.
unjust penalties in the search for meaning. The question is: will we accept others and hold each one accountable without subjection and or extermination?

Wilma C. Gafney in the book, *Daughters of Miriam Women Prophets in Ancient Israel*, contends: “the Hebrew Scriptures are narrow, sectarian, and androcentric sources for analysis of religious practices of the ancient Israelites. They simple do not and cannot accurately reflect the religious experiences of all ancient Israelite women and men whether or not they are named or unnamed or mentioned, or even hinted at, in canon.”

Scholars of biblical and Ancient Near East (ANE) prophecy have rarely considered all of the female prophets in ancient Israel. The exclusion of a group of biblical prophets and their prophetic practices from the study of biblical prophecy produces an incomplete portrait of biblical prophecy and diminishes the value of the scholarship. The lack of primary sources pertaining to female prophets in ancient Israel, as well as a lack of consistent, thorough scholarship on the available sources, coupled with the reluctance of most scholars to take the canonical valence of the prophet label at face value and therefore the discounting of female prophets in their scholarship on the prophetic enterprise biblical Israel, leads to the inevitability of holes in what can be known about these religious intermediaries. Since the biblical text is the primary witness to the prophetic practices of the ancient Israelites, each example of prophetic conduct offers valuable insights into the nature and function of prophecy. The practice of

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discounting some persons who are called prophets in the biblical text, particularly female persons, continues in the dominant culture scholarship in the modern era.\(^{52}\)

The dominant theme in Wilma Gafney’s work is *discounting* others, whether the action is covert, overt, ignorance, or within the culture that birth the text. The result speaks to voices that are excluded, and clouds the picture of the text. In this regard, exclusion of women prophets due to the lack of primary sources needs to be reviewed and critiqued. Women in scripture holds valuable insight into today’s African-American youth dilemma, for discounting persons are visible in modern society. The function of scripture is inherently limited when the scope of others are omitted. Consequently, the work of dividing the word of truth is twisted which lead the reader on a pathway of misunderstanding. The stereotypes labeled on African-American youth culture today are destructive and damaging. These persons, as all persons are unique, and defining them should not exist because of what one think they are prematurely. The suggestion is to listen, and allow a constructive interpretation to flourish and development as each story is different. To do otherwise, is violence, and discounting the worth of individuals who may bring into the landscape, a clear understanding and appreciation of inclusion. There must be a clear line of mutual respect for cultural differences.

*Reflections*

*A Place to Stand*

Reading and understanding from a Womanist biblical perspective presses the writer to ask questions about the violence amid oppressions, to be creative; to name the

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 164.
violence. It allows the writer the opportunity to further expose the connection and disconnection of biblical misinterpretation of Divine justice offered to all creation. Moreover, the lens of Womanist theology invite all to realize and demonstrate God’s overarching reality of inclusiveness into his Divine plan of redemption. The violence and crimes committed by human beings against women are unjust and warrants retribution by correcting the atrocities and bringing healing into the process of wholeness. To be able to express oneself and occupy space that only God has to give, is an expression of God’s ability to design and charter a course for all. This is not the place for human beings, only God. It is where God stands within Himself, his being, and sovereignty.

The Black woman’s voice, agency, feelings about the problem of evil, certify that God has been omitted in contemporary theological and general scholarly reflection until the emergence of Womanist scholarship. Womanist voices assist us in recognizing that although male-centered black theology laid the groundwork for new theologies, the limits of this male centered theology meant it could not help Black women totally in articulating and thinking through Black women’s and Black men’s labors to “make do and do better.” And, this Womanist, interdisciplinary analysis reflects that we can no longer deny the presence of evil and violence in our world, in our religious and secular lives in every arena, including race, gender, class and poverty, sexual orientation, and mental and physical disabilities.

While biblical characters and human beings in general can be violent, and God in some representations, can be violent, Black Liberation theology sees the Christian mission as bringing justice to an oppressed people through political activism, solving their social and economic plight. Black liberation theology has divided the world into two
groups, the oppressed and the oppressor. The poor are the oppressed and the rich are their oppressors. The violence committed by the oppressor is in direct contrast to the concepts of Black Liberation theology.

The theological framework of Black liberation theology suggests that Jesus becomes a liberator of the oppressed masses, which are black. This is in contrast to the word faith prosperity message preached by numerous black pastors today. Black Liberation theology describes Jesus as a poor black man who lived in oppression under, “rich white people” which makes this particular view racially based, accentuating the tension of being Black. The nation of “Blackness” is not merely a reference to skin color, but rather is a symbol of oppression that can be applied to all persons of color who have a history of oppression (except Whites, of course.)”

We look now at what James Cone’s Black liberation Theology teaches. James Cone, father of Black Liberation Theology, and one of the leading voices of this theology, he writes: the United States was a white racist nation and the white church was the Antichrist for having supported slavery and segregation. Furthermore, Cone says, “The ‘raceless’ American Christ has a light skin, way brown hair, and sometimes-wonder of wonders-blue eyes. For whites to find him with big lips and kinky hair is as offensive as it was for the Pharisees to find him partying with tax-collectors. But whether whites want to hear it or not, Christ is black baby, with all of the features which are so detestable to white.”

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In addition, Cone says, “For white people, God’s reconciliation in Jesus Christ means that God has made black people a beautiful people; and if they are going to be in relationship with God, they must enter by means of their black brothers, who are a manifestation of God’s presence on earth. The assumption that one can know God without knowing blackness is the basic heresy of the white churches. They want God without blackness. Christ without obedience, love without death. What they fail to realize is that in America, God’s revelation on earth has always been black, red, or some other shocking shade, but never white. Wholeness, as revealed in the history of America, is the expression of what is wrong with man. It is a symbol of man’s depravity. God cannot be white even though white churches have portrayed him as white. When we look at what whiteness has done to minds of men in this country, we can see clearly what the New Testament meant when it spoke of the principalities and powers. To speak of Satan and his powers becomes not just a way of speaking but a fact of reality. When we can see a people who are controlled by an ideology of whiteness, then we know what reconciliation must mean. The coming of Christ means a denial of what we thought we were. It means destroying the white devil in us. Reconciliation to God means that white people are prepared to deny themselves (whiteness), take up the cross (blackness) and follow Christ (black ghetto).”

54 Ibid., 3.

55 Ibid., 6.
Historical

The researcher will relied on several resources (i.e. books, journals, articles, and etc.) to support efforts to implement a youth target group at FSUMC. One primary resource is: Jewelle Taylor Gibbs, *Young, Black, and Male in America: An Endangered Species*, Gibbs fundamentally identifies the problem historically as; black youth (male and female) are the victims of a legacy of nearly 250 years of slavery, 100 years of legally enforced segregation, and decades of racial discrimination and prejudice in every facet of American life. No one could have anticipated that the tremendous civil rights and economic gains of the 60’s would have been eroded and ideologically challenged by the 21st century.56

Dr. Na’im Akbar, eminent psychologist, evaluate the history of slavery and its impact on the current state of African Americans as being an ongoing crisis of post-traumatic stress syndrome, which began with slavery. Slavery is therefore seen as the beginning point of understanding the black psyche. The slavery that captures the mind and imprisons the motivation, perception, aspiration, and identify in a web of anti-self-images, generating a personal and collective self-destruction is crueler than the shackles on the wrists and ankle. According to Akbar’s interpretation he says, “the most serious effect emanating from slavery been the violence destruction of the African-American youth and family, under which normal circumstances is the very foundation of healthy, constructive, personal, and community life.”

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Furthermore, Larry Aubry (Columnist) writes, Black Violence, Slavery and Reparations: The Crisis of Youth Violence and the Demand for Reparations,” argues that the current surge of violence among Black youth should intensify the demand for reparations. He feels that one of the most neglected aspects of the reparations discussion is ‘intergenerational deficits and damage incurred by African in America resulting from slavery.” For him, such dehumanization involves calculated effort to destroy the identity, institutions, language, music, religion and the historical memory of enslaved Africans—all of which is designed to engender subservience and facilitate control.

Understanding the relationship of Black (particularly Black-on-Black and violence among Black youth) and the demand for reparations begins with a clear definition of reparations. Succinctly, its purpose is to repair ongoing mental, cultural, spiritual and physical damages to a people.

Among the most egregious effects of slavery was the mangling of Blacks’ survival and development process, due in part to lapses in historical memory and lack of consistency in identity, purpose, and direction. This is of particular importance in understanding values and behavior of today’s Black youth.

Aubry and Daniels note, continuity of culture and identity serves as a foundation for social, economic, and political advancement for other groups that migrated to this country, but not for Blacks. He says, for African people the assault on culture resulted in disunity, disorientation, and was a serve obstacle to group development.57

He also maintains that Blacks' arduous path of survival and development is the direct consequence of a "holocaust of enslavement," and fratricide affecting Black communities is, in part, attributable to historical numbers of Black youth, their parents and adults generally.

The social movements of the civil rights era emphasized self-pride and community service; neither of which can be found on the Internet or in text message; *Knowledge of Black*; centuries of struggle is even a more distant amenity.

The demand for reparations could be crucial. The principal purpose is to repair the continuing damages caused by chattel slavery. That, notwithstanding, Black themselves must re-order their priorities and work together to reduce violence and the array of other important issues like education and recession level unemployment.

The daunting challenge is to restore and instill the historical memory essential for a new sense of identity, purpose and direction among young people. Of course this will require sustainable structures and institutions that continually transmit appropriate history and culture.

The researcher believes, besides the slavery issue as a historical factor, along with other historical factors, evolved to influence African American youth violence to date, such as; increased isolation for the black middle class and alienation from the white community, where few black youth have few, positive role models, involved in drugs, prostitution, gambling, and other forms of deviant behavior induces violence.

The question is where is the African-American church in the historical collective memory of today's dilemma that impacts African-American youth violence? As a
consequence, the church has a place to stand for African-American youths and all youths collectively, illuminating the message of hope, restoration, and rethinking the choices that are before them. We must own the problem and consult it by faith, in addition, consulting history as a tool from which to change, grow and be proud.

The African-American youth violence experience also begs the question: "Is there a special role for the White Churches? It may be a Christian role to be willing to suffer, but it will be decidedly un-Christian to tell blacks that their present role is to suffer to bring about a change; they have already done more than their share of suffering, and their concern must be to forge the tools of their own liberation. Whites cannot tell Blacks how to do this more than they can, legislate attitudes for Chicanos or Brazilians.

To be direct as possible, Brown suggests the task of white churches of one of seeking, at whatever cost, to embody revolutionary nonviolent love. Anything else is no longer worth the bother and can be done quite adequately by other groups in our society. If we are to talk about a special role for the Church—a role that might make a difference to the human family—then nothing short of the stance of revolutionary nonviolent love will do.

(a) The stance must be revolutionary, for the middle-class structures to which most white churches belong clearly against the well-being of a majority the human family; if God is on the side of the oppressed, then most of his churches are presently working against those with whom he chooses to side, and are thus thwarting rather than furthering his will.
(b) The stance must be nonviolent. This is the conclusion based on both moral and pragmatic grounds; moral, since only as the last resort "when all else fails" is violence justified, and there are still opportunities for white churches to exert leverage short of violence on the structures of which they are a part.

(c) The stance must embody love, which is the operative word for the whole position. Love, as the gospel pictures it, is self-giving, offered with any assurance of reciprocation, identifying with the recipient, and even willing to risk the loss of all things for the sake of the recipient.

"We must love one another or die" For the revolutionary nonviolent love is not reducible to blueprints or rules or instant specifications. But if it does not soon become an ingredient in the world of today, we can be sure there will be no world for tomorrow. White churches can and must come to grips with this endeavor.\textsuperscript{58}

This begs the question, "What will be a condition of African-American youth within the future decades if the problem of violence persists?" Is it annihilation, preservation, and or prosperity? The researcher believes that Divine Love" is the force that will transcend the epidemic of violence in an environment, when it is appropriately offered, received, and put into practice. Divine Love is the love that is God's love, or said another way, Divine Love is that Love that belongs to or is part of God. It is different than the love one would have for spouse or children. It's different than the love one would have for family, friends and neighbors. This is natural love, humankind natural love. Divine Love contains the essence of God, his substance. Divine love is the greatest

gift, and it is available to anyone! It does not matter if you belong to any particular religion or no religion at all. God's gift is for anyone who asks for it. The impact of Divine Love is directly related to transformation. As Divine Love is accepted by faith, humans are grafted into the essence of God, the Father. The operative word is transformation. This transformation result in the desire to be like the Father, and forgo all activities that would undermine his essence, and the nature of others. This would provide a pathway for African American youth to transcend their present condition that are faced on a daily basis, and discover alternative way of successfully changing, and, coping with the realities of life.

So how does the church and community contribute to the idea of addressing this social ill and offer change that is effective? The researcher makes the claim that the church in addressing social ills remains an avenue of hope. Therefore, the task of this writing is to offer a project proposal that engages theory and practice, qualitative research, (i.e. observation, interviewing, journaling, etc.) and to explore research that relates to the problem of violence African-American youth in the Gresham Park Community.

**Sociological-Cultural**

The work of socio-cultural theory is to explain how individual mental functioning is related to cultural, institutional, and historical context; hence, the focus of the socio-cultural perspective is on the roles that participation in social interactions and culturally organized activities play in influencing psychological development. Looking through the lens of socio-cultural theory is to consider a wide spectrum, when

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interpreting a situation, might attend to the broader social system in which the situation is happening and will draw interpretations about an individual, or groups’ thinking and development based on their participation in culture. It is within this framework that African-American youth violence will be considered.

Due to demographic changes the socio-cultural have changed dramatically African-American communities. As the black middle class have left the inner cities, it has left a vacuum not only in terms of values and resources. For example, in these transformed inner cities, the black church which had formerly been at the center of activity has lost much of its central function as monitor of norms and values. The power of political organizations has been diminished, as their constituencies no longer include the better educated and wealthier blacks who are more likely to participate actively in the political process. In cities with shrinking tax bases, civic, and social organizations have fewer resources to improve neighborhood, initiate youth programs, or provide incentives to attract external sources of support.

M. K. Asante, Jr., in his book: It’s bigger than Hip-Hop, provides an analysis of the policies that have radically shaped African American communities, socio-politically, in chapter four, “A Conversation with the ghetto.” The author employed words such as me, and my, to speak figuratively to the Black dilemma in America. The author offers a chronological approach to policies that led to the plight of Blacks beginning after the Civil War. He says, “all right, 40 acres and a mule is not just the name of Spike Lee’s film company, it’s also the colloquial term for the reparations that were supposed to be ensured to enslaved Africans after the Civil War—forty acres farmland and a mule to
cultivate that land. The official name was Special Field Orders, No. 15, and it was issued on January 16, 1865, by Maj. Gen. William Sherman.  

*So what happened?* Well, when President Abraham Lincoln was killed, Andrew Johnson, his replacement, revoked Sherman's orders. The very few Blacks who had already received land had it quickly taken away. Anyway, without any restitution, Blacks were forced into a vicious cycle of sharecropping, also known as Slavery II, where they paid rent to white landowners from their yearly yield. This form of neo-slavery also occurred later in South Africa and Zimbabwe where it was illegal for Blacks to own their own land. Sharecropping is the vicious cycle because, by the end of the year without fail, the sharecropper is always in debt, meaning he can never free himself for the land. This, couple with de-citizenizing Jim Crow laws, made it impossible to own land in the South, binding them-thorough the law-to the shallow pits of poverty.

Beginning around 1914, though large numbers of Blacks had moved north to industrial hubs like New York City, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Maryland, Detroit, Chicago, et cetera. It was however, bad everywhere. But mainly because of World War I, which began in 1914, called for a lot of unskilled factory workers. Blacks kept coming to the North, looking for work, even after it was over. You had a lot of Blacks looking for work in an already impossible job, then Depression hits. What happens is next to unconscionable: President Franklin D. Roosevelt cut Black people out of his plan to alleviate the poverty of the national Depression. President Roosevelt drafted these

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61 Ibid., 37-38.
programs under his Committee on Economic Security, and they were passed by Congress under his New Deal. One of the major problems was that both of these acts excluded domestics and agricultural workers, who make up more than two-thirds of the Black workforce.\textsuperscript{62}

The Federal Housing Administration was also developed under FDR. This organization guaranteed mortgages for up to 90 percent of the purchase price, which meant that people wanted to buy a home only had to cough up 10 percent rather than the 25 percent required before FHA. The catch was that the FHA refused to guarantee mortgages in Black communities due to a process called redlining. In most of these places, Blacks couldn’t receive loans at all.

Way before crack, there was “nigger removal,” as it was sometimes called by government officials. Officially dubbed Urban Renewal, this program was designed to transform poor neighborhoods into new, architecturally attractive structures that would attract tourist and increase business. The urban Renewal program had its shaky origins in the Housing Act of 1949, but it did not get under way in a serious fashion until 1954, when the Eisenhower administration several changes in the law patronizing businesses in me-bounced. Under Urban Renewal blacks were force out through eminent domain, where private property were seized for government or private use, giving the government the authority to jack residents. Uncle Sam decided that they needed to construct new area for those displaced Blacks to live. So they built shabby, health-hazardous, cheap housing called housing projects. Thanks to the highways, (federal system), that further separated my people for others, whites could get into the city when they need to from the suburbs.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 39.
Soon after, the factories left, too. However, those jobs fled with the whites, to the suburbs, and overseas.63

Integration was another blow for the writer. After the end of legal segregation, the Black middle class—who had traditionally been instrumental in creating, maintaining, and patronizing businesses in me—bounced. They, too, fled for the suburbs, leaving the poorest of the poor behind. Finally, Blacks left me in a mad exodus along with the whites at the end of segregation.

Bush is responsible for this wealth in America and most of my residents are for their poverty. So what do you think this has to do with political ramifications? If the majority of Americans think that the poor are poor because of their own faults, they’ll also believe that the poor should get out of it on their own. All of this is reinforced by popular culture, which literally makes fun of poor people. Their lack of education, is laughed at, their squalor glorified, their struggle criminalized. People certainly don’t want to change policies. *There is a big thing about pulling yourself up by your bootstraps.* You can’t pull yourself up by the bootstraps if you don’t have damn shoes! *What about the violence in you?* Is there anything that you’d like to tell the post-hip-hop generation? Organize, organize, and organize. The time is now.64

Within the socio-cultural dimensions of youth violence lies an interpretation that is critical to understanding contributing factors in violence, which is, “Legal Cynicism”. Cynicism indicates a type of attitude that believes that the human conduct is motivated wholly by self-interest; that virtue is the only good and that its essence lies in self-control

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63 Ibid., 43.
64 Ibid., 52.
and independence. F. D. Roosevelt said, “democracy; cannot be honest and efficient.” Legal Cynicism is the product of two related influences when viewed from the standpoint of Black youth violence: (1) neighborhood structural conditions and (2) neighborhood police practices and resident interaction with police. Furthermore, legal cynicism frameworks originate as an adaptation to neighborhood structural conditions.65

In socially and economically disadvantaged neighborhoods, people come to understand that the dominant societal institutions (of which the police and the justice system re-emblematic) will offer them little in the way of security, either economic or personal. Self-reliance emerges as an essential adaptation to this alienation from the mainstream society, especially under conditions of racial segregation, intense poverty, and deficient education, economic, and employment opportunity structures.

Evidence of alienation and adaptation is seen vividly in what is referred to as, "Code of the Street". The inclination of violence springs from the circumstances of life among the marginalized. The code of the street is actually a cultural adaptation to profound lack of faith in the police and judicial system. The code consists of use of violence as a statue-conferring mechanism, and the perpetual need to avoid victimization. The local streets are...tough and dangerous places where people often feel very much on their own, where they themselves must be personally responsible for their own security. As such, knowledge of the street code is essential if only to navigate potentially places and City situations.66

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66 Ibid., 1199.
A second root source of legal cynicism is the actions of criminal justice systems, particularly law enforcement. While perceptions of the law will not exactly objective reality, they do tend to correlate. The cynical views of the law are produced by seemingly contradictory factors: an approval of the substance of criminal law, yet antagonism directed at the agents of the law. This antagonisms and the consequent cynicism are the product of police conduct, particularly harassing behavior, and insufficient and ineffective crime control. In short, the way justice is administered influence legal cynicism.

In sum, residents of a neighborhood share a common existence and are subject to the same existence and are subject to the same ecological constraints. From this shared existence, as well as direct and vicarious experience with the police, emerges a culture. Resident experiences, with the police and with structural conditions, coalesce to produce a cultural frame. To be clear, the argument is, legal cynicism among neighborhood residents is static; rather, it is shaped and reshaped by neighborhood condition and direct and vicarious law and legal institutions are collective.

The consequence of legal cynicism constrains choices for resolving grievances and protecting oneself because individual are more likely to presume that the law is unavailable or unresponsive to their needs. In the face of such constraints, individuals may choose to engage in their own brand of social control because they cannot rely upon the law and to assist them; legal cynicism makes violence more likely.67

Self-help is "the expression of a grievance by unilateral aggression such as personal violence or property destruction, whereby violence becomes the vehicle through

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67 Ibid., 1202.
which grievances are resolved. The argument makes the case that violence, in both
traditional and modern societies, has often been used as a form of social control, to
induce others to conform in some manner. For the purpose, the point is that this aggression
as a form of dispute resolution is more likely to occur in the absence of the law. When the
law is unavailable to someone—when he or she perceives that it is unavailable—that
individual has help to help themselves. One important means for avoiding victimization
is to protect oneself using any available means, including violence.

**The Conceptual Model of Cultural Adaptation and Constraint on Action**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Structural Features of Neighborhoods</th>
<th>Interactions with Police and the Law</th>
<th>Cultural Framing: Legal Cynicism</th>
<th>Strategies of Action</th>
<th>Neighborhood Violence</th>
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Fig. 2 Note that this model does not represent the only path to neighborhood violence.
The intent is to emphasize the sources and consequences of legal cynicism.

Paulo Friere (Latin theologian) argues in his book, “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”
a cultural synthesis mode of action of confronting culture itself, as the preserver of the
very structure by which it was formed. Cultural action he suggests, as historical action, is
an instrument for revolution for superseding the dominant alienated and alienated
culture.” In this sense, this is a cultural revolution. This action of confronting culture is a
radical approach that needs to be studied from black church perspective and the Gresham
Park community situation and redefined to fit its needs. The question is: How can a
cultural revolution impact the crime and violence of African-American youth within the inner city? 68

From the sociological perspective, Jack Anderson, has identified the top ten cause of violence, according to young people in the most neighborhoods. 69

The causes are listed as:

- The Media
- Substance abuse
- Gangs
- Unemployment
- Weapons
- Poverty
- Peer Pressure
- Broken Homes
- Poor Family Environment/Bad Neighborhoods

Human beings will identify where they are hurting. The one who hears is the one that is in touch with understanding the predicament of others and offer hope. The church will rally when faith pushes into unchartered waters given effective leadership.

**Economic**

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and man.” (Matt: 6:24) RSV

This verse gives voice to the reality of divine edict that warms human

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68 Pablo Friere, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York: Continuum, 2000), 182.

beings concerning allowing money to become one's god. It bids us to reach out to those who have been oppressed and economically, or victimized, by the lure of money. Kenneth L. Smith and Ira G. Zepp Jr. writes in their book, *Search for the Beloved Community* says, it is equally clear that when King spoke about community he included all the poor, blacks; white; Hispanic, Asian, and native Americans. The vision of economic justice is a possession and right of the whole human race. The point is that King could not envision the beloved community apart from the alleviation of economic iniquity and achievement of economic justice. When one is excluded for economic justice violence erupts.70

The working hypothesis is; youth are more likely to comprise the more serious delinquency cases. It is further hypothesize that poor neighborhoods are indicators of social disorganization, found to predict delinquency resulting in juvenile participation in crime, and recidivism, might be the results initiating a destructive and damaging future.

Moreover, we must acknowledge, if we take seriously that the structures of our society contain within themselves elements that do violate the personhood of many of those within the society. Structural violence is the heart of the problem. For example, the slum is portrait of structural society that produces various forms of violence. It is not enough to say that violent acts, such as mugging, rape, or robbery, take place in a slum environment. The point is that the slum environment, it is structure of the slum itself, works violence against those we live within it, even if they never experience the physical harm so often attendant on slum dwelling. All this adds up to is "violation of

personhood” as result of how the system is structured. Economically, persons can be entrapped.

Social Structure as a Proposed Cause of Urban Crime and Delinquency

The estimated non-white incarceration counts have increased more rapidly than the white counts....Black American already constitute about 48 percent of the prison population. They are greatly overrepresented in relation to their numbers in the U. S., where they make up about 12 percent of the population.

To make sense of the arrest and incarceration patterns, the researcher believes society needs to abandon suggestions that physiologically or psychologically aberrant individuals have increased in some random or haphazard way. We will also have to abandon suggestions that it is the misconduct of police, prosecutors and judges that is producing this dismaying trend. The researcher believes we will have to look at widespread practices and procedures occurring in the larger society. In short, we will need what is at heart a structural explanation to understand the patterns shown above.

One of the most plausible explanations for these differences was suggested by Robert Sampson, “Sampson emphasized the importance of institutions-entrenched ways of doing things-over an emphasis on individual stress and strain. Sampson focused on changes in both family and economic arrangements. Sampson focused on changes of many adults and economic arrangements. He suggests that the economic position of black men increases rates of crime and delinquency through its impact on family life. Youth are caught up in this spiral. If long-term martial commitment and family life
suffer because of lack of steady, and good paying jobs, the result may be criminal
conduct within each surviving generation, not necessarily by those who are employed.”

The major cause of the observed increase in black crime is structured. The
suggestion is that a number of large changes in urban America have produced social and
economic conditions that have reduced the possibilities of much of the crime-limiting
socialization of children and youth in the past, and that still occurs in most suburban and
small town areas.

It is ironic that, as the rights of black Americans in relation to other citizens have
increased and after official legal segregation has been virtually eliminated, there should
be increased economic and social segregation U.S. cities. However, this is clearly what
happened as all-black areas of most cities grew in size and as the populations of most
cities either withdrew to other all-white areas or moved to the suburbs.

The situation was made worse by the reduction of employment possibilities for
central city residents with the movement or closing of many urban industrial plants. In
addition, it was these changes in family arrangements we have seen among large
segments of the black population.

The consequences of these losses of employment opportunities were not simply a
psychological strain for the adults involved. These changes also created situation where
there was less time and money for the cultivation of children and youth. The result is

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71 Journal of Research on Adolescence, The Enduring Significance of Racism:
Discrimination and Delinquency among Black American Youth (Society for Research on
Adolescence, 2010), 663.
that this isolation or exclusion from stable employment created more unstable and disadvantaged families.

It is the combined impact of increasingly segregated cities, increasingly impoverished cities, and dramatic changes in employment opportunities and family life that has produced the increases in robbery and other predatory crimes in most American cities.

Beginning in the early 60's, American social policy toward poor and disadvantage youth underwent a transformation. Poverty, it was included, is caused by structural features of capitalism. If a student misbehaves in school or a young man snatches a purse or a young women has a baby without a husband, these are expressions of or a response to social conditions beyond their control. Value judgment themselves are inappropriate. It is society that must change. Individual and group changes will occur; the rich must see the errors of their ways, and the poor should not take the system for granted if and when equalization occurs.

The researcher believes that the African-American youth is caught up in the structures within a system that causes anger, frustration, anxiety, rebellion, depression, ultimately violence. This system seems to invite failure, whereas the church offers equity and the self-worth of all individuals to take part in justice for all, even economic justice.

To understand the connection between ethnicity and violence, one must first understand the connection between ethnicity and poverty. Repeatedly, researchers from different fields “have firmly established that poverty and its contextual life circumstances
are major determinants of violence. Violence is most prevalent among the poor, regardless of race.

The contextual factors associated with poverty may be more significant in generating violent behavior than is the lack of money per se. Poor people are segregated from the mainstream of American society and many see little opportunity to obtain even the basic necessities of life. The consumer culture portrayed by the media only heightens their sense of deprivation. Even in good times, unemployment rates are highest among the poor, especially among poor African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans. Unemployment interferes with family stability, damages self-esteem, and leads to neighborhood instability as people move elsewhere in search of jobs and affordable housing. Moving, in turn, disconnects people from their supports systems and increases their sense of isolation.

In addition to poverty and its contextual factors, ethnic minority youth must deal with prejudice and discrimination—as must other minorities. Prejudice and discrimination harm people economically and psychologically, damage self-confidence and self-esteem, and "lay a foundation for anger, discontent, and violence. When ethnic minority youth have a few pathways to participation in mainstream American culture, the stage is set for violence.

It is important to remember that most ethnic minority youth growing up with the stresses of poverty, lack of opportunity, discrimination, family disruption, and community breakdown do not engage in violent behavior. Major protective factors in many minority groups are the values on communalism, family, and group harmony, all of which deter violent behavior by increasing the youth's social supports both inside and
outside the family. Yet another protective factor is strong religious orientation prevalent among many ethnic minority groups. In addition, strengthening the young person’s appreciation of his cultural heritage is likely to promote healthy development, especially if the mainstream culture generates negative messages about ethnic minority cultures.72

Being young and black in America today must be hard. The experiences of black youth are so often left out of the national discourse, it probably seems like no one really understand their plight. On the few occasions that stories about them appear in pop culture, particularly television and film, they’re often shown in one of two ways—the overachiever, the kid that “make it” despite the odds, like Jay-Z or the lazy underachiever, the thugs and welfare moms that so many on the right often allude to.

Bill Moyers, the writer of “Where are the Ordinary Black Youth in Pop Culture” says, He is surrounded by a number of young black men and women that are doing well, that are smart and talented and talk endlessly about annoying parents, relationships, and even politics. But pop culture is a powerful tool. It shapes and defines many of our beliefs about our larger society. And while it is important to voice the stories of those that need it the most—those that have been left behind, discriminated against and crippled

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by injustice in an all too often unequal society—we must also hear more about ordinary black kids, who are more than the norm than the exception.  

The mass media has played positive and negative roles in influencing the lives of black youth. Television coverage of the graphic brutality against blacks in the civil rights protest of the 1960's credited with awakening the conscience of white America to the widespread racial discrimination in this society, ultimately generating public support for the two landmark federal civil rights bills in 1964 and 1965. On the other hand, television has also fostered negative stereotypes of black men as criminals, drug addicts, buffoons, and hustlers, and black women are portrayed as meddling matriarchs, sexy "Sapphires," dumb domestics, and welfare widows. These images of blacks (with the exception of "The Cosby Show," in which everyone is too good to be true) offer very few positive role models for black children. With the exception of athletes, and celebrity entertainers, most of the smart, successful, and self-confident males who do appear in the media tend to reinforce the legitimacy of violence and aggression. Thus, black youth, who watch television regularly, are bombarded with negative images of adult blacks, as well as a steady diet of aggression and violence, frequently performed by or directed against non-whites males and white females. The results are devastating to the psych-socio-cultural development of black youth.

The print media should also be held accountable for its portrayal of blacks, its inadequate and biased coverage of the black community, and its poor record in hiring and promoting minority journalists. The mass media can and should be a powerful voice for

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equality and justice in a democratic society, yet it has sometimes abdicated this responsibility in order to pander to popular tastes and to increase profit margins. The depictions of Blackness are often illustrated in ways that promote (products and services) economic success, with wreck-less abandon for the moral factors that black youth may embrace.

As Carolyn Martindale noted, “Negative stereotypes of Africans Americans have been deeply ingrained in Anglo American culture ever since Africans were first brought to this country in chains.” These stereotypes predate the mass media, arising in folklore from the slavery period and transferred to and amplified in modern mass media. At various times points the stereotypes have served various ideological functions. In colonial times, the stereotypes provided a rationale for enslavement of blacks. After slavery, stereotypes served to justify segregation. They have reemerged in contemporary mass media, now functioning to justify differential distribution of resources in a free labor market economy.74

In a the largely segregated American society, the images and stereotypes supplied by the media can have profound effects on the dominant Anglo population, which in many cases lacks first-hand knowledge of people of others races. As Carolyn Martindale contends, “The images send a powerful subliminal message to Anglos that the majority of African Americans are violent, criminal, drug-addicts, and on welfare. And because

these images come from the news media which claim to represent reality and to provide unbiased information about, Anglos tend to believe it is true.\textsuperscript{75}

The goal is to understand how the portrayal of the black race in advertising has led to a unilateral misunderstanding of a group of people. There was mockery involved in the print media that featured African Americans between the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} century. From the visual rhetoric to the portrayal of the language-African American Vernacular English, and the marrying of both create the presumed identity for Blacks, advertising has long gone against the grain of ethnics prescribed for it due to its vast outreach and ineffable ability to influence and change lives.

Why are Blacks portrayed the way they are and in times past. We can conclude that the rhetoric and cultural domination of the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} century-from slavery to post emancipation and leading up to the civil rights era-is greatly responsible for the social construction of the black image, which in turn had a direct influence on the advertising practices that felt the need to use black images to appeal to their buyer. However, as time and society changes, the minority groups continue to establish a status in the society based on economical independence, the format and rhetoric of advertising will take on new forms, and varying studies in the field of advertising have begun to show what new ideals consumers look for in terms of way product and services are marketed to depict Blackness in America, and the larger sector as well.

From surfing the internet to spending time alone, teens today face choices and problems that are unique to their generation. Titles have been given to the present generation such as: the Violent Generation, Scapegoat Generation, Hollywood

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid. 4
Generation, and Ambitious Generation. From sociologist to journalists to parents and educators, adults categorize today’s teenagers with a slew of conflicting labels. But do we really know about this group of 12 to 18 year-olds, a population of more than 30 million people? Can we adequately generalize about today’s youth culture in a way that makes sense not just to those who label teens, but also to teens themselves?

Part of the difficulty involves the ambivalent images of today’s youth. Some see that youth are outperforming their teachers and parents in technology. But others worry that they are “secretive, “unsupervised-just a Web site or a video game away from becoming dangerous and violent. Some argue that the media exploit teens through advertising and television, whereas other feel that today’s teens, the savvy children of baby boomers, actually control an increasingly teen-driven market.

Generation X, the nebulous population characterized by shopping malls, cynicism, and 1970’s television reruns, has finally given way to the next generation, raised more on the Internet and video games than basic connection to human relationship and what that entails.

The Public Agenda’s most recent report, Kids These Days ’99: What Americans Really Think about the Next Generation; underscores their fears and feeling about the next generation. According to the report, more than seven in 10 adults think that teens are “rude,” “irresponsible,” or “wild. Moreover, adults say that teens lack values, character, and basic civility. This, despite the fact that the majority of teens surveyed feel that they have good relationships with their parents, strong religious beliefs, and good friends.
The education media also portray a new deterioration of teen values. For example, a recent issue of the American School Board Journal is titled Generation of Cheaters. For example, lead article, which gives results from a 1998 survey of 356 high school teachers, states that the nine out of 10 teachers say that cheating is a problem, and half say that they encounter students cheating in most of their classes, according to teachers, this is because of an "erosion of ethics in a self-centered culture."76

Given all the factors that engulfs educational we must understand that, when we teach urban youth, we can teach from a center of love. When we operate from a center of fear, we pursue self-protection. We promote values and practice that focus on control, uniformity, and lack of tolerance. When we teach from a center of love, we engage in pursuing what is best for students. We promote values and practices that focus on compassion, understanding, tolerance, and safety for all, in whatever condition, predicament, and environment we find them, we seek after excellence, for they created in the image of the God, and that in itself makes the difference. Free Minds, Free People, and ultimately, reconnecting with youth.

Reflections

With this break down or weakening of these tradition institutions, within inner-city communities, there has been a parallel breakdown of the traditional black community values of the importance of family, religion, education, self-improvement, and social cohesion through extensive social support networks. As a consequence, many black

youth in inner cities no longer seem to feel connected to each other, responsible for each other, or concerned about each other. Rather than a sense of shared community and common purpose, which one characterized neighborhoods the inner cities now reflect a sense of hopelessness alienation, and frustration. It is the kind of frustration that erupts into urban crime and violence.

It is also this kind of frustration that erupts into urban crime and violence, family violence and self-destructive violence. Thus, we see situations in which young black men sell drugs openly on major thoroughfares without fear of apprehension; teenage girls have multiple out-of-wedlock pregnancies without fear of ostracism; youthful gangs terrorize neighborhoods without fear of retaliation; and young teenagers loiter aimlessly at night on street corners without fear of reprobation.

The poverty and powerlessness of black youth are inextricably linked to the safety and security of the rest of society since, since the frustration-bred violence will ultimately spill over the invisible walls of urban society. The violence which young black males and females now direct mainly against the black community (black-on-black crime), against relatives and friends (homicide), and against themselves (suicide), will inevitably erupt and spread throughout urban and suburban America, leaving behind damage, destruction, and distrust in its wake. In anxious anticipation of this rising tide of black rage, urban dweller now put bars on their doors and windows, shopkeepers turn their stores into fortresses, and politicians build new prisons. The causes of these antisocial behaviors are ignored, denied, or blamed on the black youth, who are written off as being intellectually deficient, culturally deprived, and pathologically deviant. Short-term remedies are devised for the consequences of their behaviors, with little understanding
that these and-aid solutions are very temporary, very perishable, and very ineffective to
cure the underlying causes of frustration and anger in black youth.

**Empirical Review**

An empirical review of the literature indicates there had been numerous research studies
conducted in the area of African-American youth violence. The literature search revealed
that evidence is based on practices both religious and secular. Materials were identified in
the theological, biblical, and social science areas. In regard to the board scope required
for this research project, more information is needed to add to the base knowledge of
such a complicated problem. The development of curriculum for African-American
youth violence that is tailored to the needs Black youth begs more research, as violence
remains consistent factor among Black youth.

A research article by Albert D. Farrell entitled “Environmental Influences on
Fighting Versus Nonviolent Behavior in Peer situations: A Qualitative Study with Urban
African-American Adolescents” (2010) evaluates efforts to improve the effectiveness of
violence prevention programs could benefit from a clearer understanding of the factors
that promote effective nonviolent behavior, particularly in the context of environments
that may support aggressive responses. The findings suggest that making a successful
transition to adulthood requires more than simply avoiding behaviors such as violence. It
also requires mastering skills that enhance an individual's overall adjustment.

Further, the transition from elementary school to relatively larger and less
structured middle school is challenging. The transition co-occurs with many social and
physical changes. Not surprisingly, this stage of development is marked by increased
negative and social behavioral outcomes. This is particularly true for minority youth growing up in poor urban areas. The neighborhoods in which they live are often marked by significant problems with crime, housing, school and neighborhood resources and economic strain. By the time they reach adulthood may poor urban youth have been exposed to violence, drugs, poverty, family disruption, abuse, and, neglect. These factors underscore the need for a clearer understanding of contextual factors that may influence the effectiveness of programs designed to promote positive outcomes for these youth. Lastly, although findings suggest that a wealth of information has been research about factors associated with aggression, we know far less about factors that influence effective nonviolent behavior. Not all nonviolent responses are effective. If the focus of prevention efforts is to go beyond reducing violence, further work is needed to improve our understanding not only of the factors that reduce violent behavior, but those that influence the use of effective nonviolent behavior.\textsuperscript{77}

In the article, "The Violent Black youth Myth" Mike Males states, the latest figures from the FBI, Bureau of Justice black youth, rates of robbery and serious property offenses are the lowest in more than 40 years. Rates of murder and rape are now lower than when nationwide crime statistics first appeared in 1965-and those were far less complete than today's. Assault rates are lower than when this crime statistic was expanded to include domestic violence and new offenses a quarter-century ago.

Moreover, violent and other criminal victimizations of young African American have slowly plummeted to record lows, as have a host of other ills including unplanned pregnancy, drug abuse and school dropout rates. While the numbers remain considerably worse for blacks than for other groups: murder and violent crimes remain very rare events among Americans and among youth in general.78

We still don’t know the facts about the self-appointed neighborhood watch George Zimmerman’s killing of the black 17-year-old, who carried only candy and ice tea. The point to ask is why authorities and the media regularly depict young African Americans as cold and violent—a misrepresentation that lead to widespread fear toward black youth.

Consider President Barack Obama’s past comments. It is true that he called the shooting a “tragedy” on Friday, adding, I think we all have some soul searching to do figure out how does something like this happen?” But during his 2008 campaign, Obama deplored African Americans’ “epidemic of violence” that he blamed on an “entire generation in our society.”

In “The Audacity of Hope” and Change we Can Believe In, “ Obama connected “this generation” of young African Americans to “violence” and addiction” and fanned anxiety toward a host of supposedly new cultural dangers, including “teenagers hanging around on the street corners.” The finding suggest that it is troubling, however, that the inflammatory words would orchestrate that all young African-American males must be suspected of criminality, drug use or callous behavior—so much so that their presence

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could be seen as cause for concern—if not outright fear. Could this be stereotyping or victimization?  

In this study, Jody Miller and Scott H. Decker: Young Women and Gang Violence: gender, street, offending, and violent victimization in Gangs; examines how gendered situations dynamics shape gang violence, including participation in violent offending and experiences of violent victimization. Their finding rests upon the premise that participation in violence is a stronger normative feature of male gang involvement that it is for young women in gangs. The argument is that for girls, "violence (gang and otherwise) is not celebrated and normative; it is instead more directly a consequence of and a response to their lives at home." Furthermore, crime may not simply be a resource for accomplishing gender, but the converse also may be true; female gang members may use gender as a resource to accomplish both their gang retaliation; thus the threat of serious physical danger posed by rival gangs is much greater for young men. This is not to suggest that young women in gangs are not exposed to considerable amounts of violence. Gender inequality in youth gangs, however, appears to protect young women in regard to the victimization risk associated with much gang violence. More research is needed to address the issue.

The result of the investigations clearly suggests that African-American youth in socioeconomic status may help mitigate some of the mitigate influences associated with living in such environments. Youth who live in such communities who are strongly

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79 Ibid., 1.

attached to their parents are less likely to participate in delinquent activities become more involved in deviant behavior. Moreover, higher family socioeconomic status appears to be related to reducing youth participation in risk behaviors. Those who lack strong parents and child attachments and have low family socioeconomic statuses may be adversely impacted by individual, social, and community factors that leave them at a disadvantage.

In the book Search for the Beloved Community, Kenneth L. Smith and Ira G. Zepp Jr. clearly states that Dr. Martin Luther King's view of the Beloved Community should reflect the “Kingdom of God. “According to King, Jesus took over the phrase “Kingdom of God,” but he changed its meaning. He refused entirely to be the kind of a Messiah that his contemporaries expected. Jesus made love the mark of sovereignty. Here we are left with no doubt as to Jesus’ meaning. The Kingdom of God will be a society in which men and women live as children of God should live. It will be a kingdom controlled by the law of love...Many have attempted to say that the ideal of a better world will be worked out in the next world. But Jesus taught men to say, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” Although the world seems to be in a bad shape today, we must never lose faith in the power of God to achieve his purpose.

The authors of Working with Black Youth” Charles R. Foster and Grant S. Shockley contends that Black youth ministry involves incorporating or binding youth into the life and mission of the church as the contemporary extension and expression Christ’s ministry. “The point is: the continuity of the community of faith shaped by the gospel through the African-American experience depends of the effectiveness of congregations to gather youth into the historic faith traditions of African-American Christians. The
heritage of any people continues to have power only if subsequent generations find the resources to live with meaning into the issues they find in daily life.”

The pluralistic character of black youth culture and experience means that the binding of youth into the African-American experience can no longer be assumed. Therefore, black youth ministries must necessarily focus upon self-conscious and intentional efforts to incorporate black youth into a life style of discipleship. That the process begins in the efforts of congregation to help youth become so familiar with the stories, symbols, and traditions of African-Americans Christian experience that they become the means for understanding and articulating their identities and responsibilities as African-Americans Christians.

In the article, (“Black Pastors Addressing Youth Violence,”) Donald Byrd, a youth pastor ask, African American churches to remember the Black church was birthed from the experiences of slaves, and handed down to their sons and daughters. When thousands of blacks migrated north at the true of the 20th century, they brought their church with them, and it developed a deeply rooted tradition of activism.81

Over the decades, black churches have helped change history in America. The Black church has played an integral role in the reshaping of the plight of African Americans. In subsequent years, black churches were at the forefront of civil rights, education, housing, and health reforms. Today, the black church is addressing youth violence. African American churches are still relevant. While at the black church’s center has always been a message of spiritual restoration, it has also had a multifunctional role

in the community. Many churches conduct clothing drives, provide food to the hungry and offer financial counseling to the community, and its members. Today, churches are working to channel young people’s energies in productive activities, providing supervision and adult role models.

In the book edited by Anne E. Streaty Wimberly, “Keep it Real: Working with Today’s Black Youth,” Maisha I. Handy and Daniel O. Black, wrote chapter 3 entitled, “Getting Real” highlighting youth, identity, culture, and the church. One enduring theme for the authors is, mentoring to Black youth. The authors relates to Proverbs 22: 6, “Train children in the right way, and when old they will not, stray.” In this verse, training has often been misinterpreted to mean that forceful lecturing of corporal punishment should be the approach to prepare children for right or principle life. In contrast, it should be interpreted as taking time need to instruct, communicate with, and guide a child into responsible living. This kind of preparation is at the heart of mentoring. Yet mentoring has become a profane word in many pockets of the black community. Our youth need wisdom, counsel, and nurture that come from wise adults who are willing to commit to being involved in the lives of youth on a consistent basis.

In addition, mentoring might also be objectionable to black adults because of the level of vulnerability it requires. Said differently, the survival motif among African Americans has often been to “suck up” hurt and get over it or “turn over to the Lord” instead of facing them for oneself. Consequently, the historical precedent established has been for black folk not to expose their hurting hearts either to the world or to one another. However, effective mentoring requires such exposure-especially with any, frustrated young people-rather than adults’ tendency toward superficial forms of relating that
disallow youths' "disturbance" of the walls of protection enclosing adults' fragile hearts.\textsuperscript{82}

Moreover, the author's position is: Our youth are crying out for more than what they describe as useless, ineffective Sunday school classes where critical life questions and topics they confront are considered taboo and are therefore ignored. They want more than the approaches to youth ministry that are considered by them to be a waste of time. There is a desperate cry of our young for real connection to the black church, its leaders, and its adult members. In far too many instances, it can be said that we are sending mixed messages and our children have found us out. They know what they need and they know that we can't-or won't face our own demons to provide it. In many instances, the black church has become a joke to black youth.\textsuperscript{83}

In reference to the black church, it is strongly suggested that A "Real" Vision for the Twenty-first century is the pathway for black youth and the black church. A strong powerful, effective twenty-first-century black church must drop the inhibition created in former years by those who feared difference. Black people today come from both wealth and poverty; conservatism and liberalism; and education and ignorance. And youth are even more diverse, for example, blond hair, is now mainstream, among a people who once laughed at it, as are hooped earrings for boys.

The vision for the black church now must be to stretch our belief systems and our hermeneutic in order to make sure the gospel speaks to "real" folks in the present "real"

\textsuperscript{82} Anne E. Streaty Wimberly, Keep It Real: Working with Today's Black Youth, ed., (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 44.

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 45.
world. Black church theology must evolve out of black people experiences instead of being limited to literal biblical textual interpretation. "Getting real" with the black youth demands its. Our youth must not be expected to go along to get along. They are far too desperate for that.84

84 Ibid., 63.
CHAPTER III
THE PROJECT TITLE

The Title of the Project is: BACK OF TRACK: The Epidemic of Violence among African-American Youth in the Gresham Park Community.

Key words: violence, epidemic, African-American youth

THE PROJECT OUTLINE

Implementation

There have been numerous efforts to identify and address the problem of African-American youth violence in the Gresham Park Community. The researcher will utilize the Logic Model Development Implementation Template as a model to maximize the effectiveness of the dissertation. The categories of this model are arranged in the following manner followed by a discussion of the same:

1) Resources
2) Activities
3) Inputs
4) Outputs
5) Short & long-term outcomes
6) Impact

Resources

In order for the researcher to identify the resources, the foremost issue is to identify the problem. The problem is: How will FSUMC become a vital congregation
through the an outreach ministry that is designed to reduce and transform African American youth violence within the Gresham Park community, while enlisting youth into membership. The needs of the community reflect an epidemic of violence among its youth. An ongoing crisis has developed in the process, and, a sense of urgency for faith base institutions to address the problem surfaced.

a) Information about the problem is primary. Resources such as books, articles, journals, and etc. are critical to comprehending how to address the problem, holistically. b) Identifiable and clear statistical data is a necessary resource, highlighting the magnitude of the problem. The data obtained served as a tool to analyze and measure primary player impact as team partners, with the pastor. c) The researcher co-partnered with DeKalb County, and, specifically, with the Gresham Park Community, the community at large, to engage, embrace, and execute identifiable methods of change. d) Finance is a necessary resource that will fund the implementation of the ministry, and properly allow the process to function.

**Activities**

To address the problem, FSUMC has co-partnered with Beyond the Bell, the State of Georgia, and Department of Health and Human Services to institute (PREP) Personal Responsibility Education Program. This program is designed to educate youth on life skills that would ultimately transform their way of thinking and make healthy decisions that would prepare them for adulthood. The target group is youth ages 10-15, with a maximum registration of fifteen. In addition, Cedar Grove High School, Decatur, Georgia, (CIS), Communities in School, co-partnered with FSUMC. This program is a school based, activist program, design to mentor, counsel, steer, and offer alternatives to
problem students as it relates to behavior. The target group is youth ages 10-15, with a maximum of fifteen. The intended results are to develop self-motivated students who engage in a structured mentoring program, enabling academic and behavioral disciplines, modes of thinking, and application.

The projected financial will include: Field trips, office supplies, donations to guest speakers, food, t-shirts, recreation, transportation, video productions, and miscellaneous. The financial resources will be in form of gifts, donations, and possible fundraisers.

The researcher joined forces with the DeKalb County Community. The criteria for deciding to utilize this group are due to the key roles they play in the community. The persons, agencies, and institutions are listed as:

1. The DeKalb County Police Department- Major Jones

2. Dr. James Price, sociologist PhD., Lay Leader Flat Shoals UMC

3. Sheriff Brown, DeKalb County, NAACP representative, SCLC, principals, clergy, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Center for Social Change, various United Methodist Churches, the ecumenical community, and Darly Jennings, President of Gresham Park Community.

4. The researcher will include activities such as: into the project to accomplish the desired result, set a manageable schedule for all participants, and construct an outline that ensures function and discipline to reach maximum efficiency. Preplanned activities, logs reports of activities, and good practice, will add to the effectiveness of this effort.
Inputs

There will be two sessions weekly, each lasting two hours, over a two month period. The groups will continue for an additional two months. The approximate date for the group session to register is May 2, 2013. The projected date for completion is October 1, 2013. The overall cost of the project is estimated is $2000.00.

Outputs

The researcher expected that once accomplished these activities would have produced the following evidence of service delivery. It is with prayerful anticipation that the target groups (PREP) and (CIS) will enter this project with the same hope outputs as the researcher. African American youth will find a rewarding, empowering, and effective approach to: making proud choices, develop skills and motivation necessary to reduce the risk of related behaviors, abstinence as the best way to prevent drug addition, alcohol, dating violence and etc. Furthermore, recognize church and family as primary educators in providing youth pathways to make healthy choices, prevention, relationship smarts, build skills and knowledge for forming emotionally, healthy, mutually respectful and ethical sound relations. Consider avenues for positive relations with the church, family, schools, and community, as alternative resources for the reduction and the prevention of violence.

Short- & Long-Term Outcomes

The researcher expected that these activities would lead to the following changes: Deeply rooted in this project is the hope for changes in FSUMC, African-American youth, Gresham Park Community, and DeKalb County. The short-term outcome is to
witness a model that is effective in transforming youth behavior when it comes to violence and other forms of negative behavioral pattern. In addition, this model will be realized as effective by January 2014. This ministry will continue and be ongoing is a short term outcome. It is the hope that statistical evidence will demonstrate a decline in an African-American youth involvement in violent behavior, and with this decrease, evidence could serve as a catalyst for FSUMC, faith base institutions, Gresham Park, and Dekalb County, as workable and reliable investment for change and transformation.

Finally, youth and families with join the church. The long term outcome is that change that will occur in youth and families, realizing that through Jesus Christ all things are possible. And, addressing difficult problems can become a reality when people work together. FSUMC would become a model of change, making a difference in the lives of others.

Impact

The researcher anticipated that if accomplished these activities would lead to following changes in 7 to 10 years: The primary impact expected by the researcher is: a) FSUMC will become a “Vital Congregation” by enlisting the African American youth within the congregation as full and active members, b) members of FSUMC will be different in their walk of faith in their perspective regarding youth violence in the Gresham Park Community. c) The initial target groups will become effective models (examples) for churches, institutions, and the community. d) Young person will witness, and embrace the redemptive power of faith found in Jesus Christ. FSUMC congregants, families, youth, and the community will be convicted that the church works and continues to be pivotal in reaching out to African American youth in the future.
The Project

The participants were from two locations: FSUMC in Decatur, Georgia and Cedar Grove High School in Lithonia, Georgia. Prior to implementing the project, a questionnaire and curriculum was developed in June 2013.

The questionnaires and the curriculums, (PREP Personal Responsibility Education Program) and (Youth Training Package) were developed to: discover and understand the youth preconception and conception of youth violence. In addition, the information gathered from the participants would provide a pathway by which to guide further interaction within the groups. The curriculum focus would embrace a structured pathway for youth to develop a strong awareness of violence, and, to develop a model of alternative behavior in regards to violence.

The session at FSUMC consisted of eight weeks in total. The researcher and target group met in one hour sessions, parents also participated as role models and interpreters of each youth progress. The target group sessions at Cedar Grove High School was held during the day, twice per week, one hour session, for a period of eight weeks, which is scheduled to continue into March, 2014. FSUMC realized a ministry with the youth and children of the community will demonstrate the priority of moral and spiritual development, as well as a deeper relationship with the church, families, and the community as a whole. Cedar Grove High School administration saw the potential for student development as it relates to the well-being and effectiveness of the participants. Therefore, this relationship flourished and discovered afresh new potential opportunities for with those participating.
The church co-partnered with Beyond the Bell, a cooperative with DeKalb County Board of Health, for the purpose of Adolescent Health and Youth development. A Summer Camp would provide the forum for this ministry. **PREP** (Personal Responsibility Education Program) initiative was the curriculum for the camp held June and July 2013. In addition, the **YSRQ** was given to the FUMC participants on September 2013. The **YSRQ** was administered to Cedar Grove in October 2013. The curriculums for the project would reflect the following objectives: See Appendices A, B, and C.

**Session I. Group Interview**

At the beginning of the session, a formal orientation was conducted to introduce the parents, participants, and the researcher. Prior to the session parents had signed a consent form. A listening session and a time of question and response were initiated to access tools and skills with regards to self-esteem, considerateness, social control, and anger. This served as individual and group measurements of personality, character, and methods of engaging in dialogue, discussion, and evaluation. The researcher gathered data and compiled the information for each participant profile. The profiles would be further categorized. These instruments would serve as the basis of testing and analysis. This method was utilized at FSUMC and Cedar Grove High School.

Self-assessment profiles were given to all participants at both locations. The assessments were to measure any change in self-esteem, youth decisions, comprehension, and application of materials related to violence. The self-assessment profiles were administered July, 2013 at FSUMC and at Cedar Grove High School in October 2013. However, the researcher also investigated as to whether there were any differences in study findings in regard to presenting information to the different groups. The intention
was to assess the impact of the sessions as to increases in modification of behavior in alternatives choices to violence. In addition, there was an interest in determining whether there was a significant decrease in change of the participants in the behavior and alternatives to violence, during the research. Mrs. Jasmine Byrd, teacher, FSUMC officers, and a representative from (CIS) Communities in Schools (Fulton and Dekalb County) served as consultants during the evaluation process.

Analysis of character development, comprehension, decision making, and application were determined by the means of YSRQ (Youth Survey Response Questions). This questionnaire was develop is used as a test to identify and determine if there is a statistically significant differences to responses between two different environments with similar participants. The YSRQ would offer a comparison between-group variance, in this case, faith-based and civic/ public environments.

Table-2 FSUMC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>race</th>
<th>boys</th>
<th>girls</th>
<th>age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11-14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Youth Survey Response Questionnaire was given to the children as a pre-and post-test. Eleven categories were administered to the youth from the YSRQ and eleven were utilized. See Appendix C. The eleven categories used were: school performance behaviors, early involvement in sex, crime against property/person, statues offenders, parental attachment, virtual supervision, Intimacy of communication, affection, identification, joint leisure involvement, family economic status, and deviant peer relationships. A description of each scale is listed below:

1. School performance behaviors: Measures risky behaviors that tend to develop failure and or negative habits of violence to self in public places.

2. Early involvement in sex: Sexual discretion as a lifestyle.

3. Crime against property/person: Personal and Social control as it relates to violations of others and self.

4. Status offenders: Understanding one’s how far one should go to avoid trouble, how to draw boundaries, and self-imposed violations.
5. Parental attachment/Virtual supervision: Relationship building such as trust, adhering to rules, order and structure.

6. Intimacy of communication: Learning to openly share thoughts and feelings, talking it over, seeking guidance and advice. Insights vs. Unawareness and Indecisiveness.

7. Affection/Identification: Developing an image of self, identifying, imaging, and defining the person.

8. Joint leisure involvement: Establishing the rules of engagement, associates, and the ability to choose wisely.


10. Deviant peer relationships: Sociability vs. Poor Peer Relations: Refers to the capacity to get along with others and groups. Example: Anger Control vs. Hypersensitivity.

The statistical findings from YSRQ indicate the following: FSUMC is identified as group A and Cedar Grove as group B. See table below.

**Table-4 Youth Survey Response Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistical Responses by Category</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Risk behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crimes of violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crimes against property/person</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Both group responses per category suggest some relativity for the categories (1-10). Responses to questions 1-71 varied among male and females at both locations. FSUMC target group, males and females responded to category (Crimes of violence and Crimes against property/persons) as a definitely no. Cedar Grove High School target group, 2 males responded to the above categories as yes and 0 females responded no. This would further suggest an individual approach (investigation) to identity the factors that relates to the profile of the participants.

The results of the finding demonstrated that behavior modification and alternative choices to violence was significant. The youth responses at FSUMC as compared to the youth at Cedar Grove High School were similar and well defined. The thinking, decisions, and behavior increase, however, the subtle difference is the setting. The church setting offered a spiritual and parental component. The youth at FSUMC demonstrated a definite profile that would choose alternatives to violence respectfully. The youth at Cedar Grove prove to be more contentious, questionable, and less serious, however, violence was not a reality of choice.
Certain inhibitors were identified indicating the needs of group A and group B for
nurture, care, direction, patience, evoking the need well-being and transformation.
Psychological inhibitors such as: fear of change, self-esteem/self-image, lost, innocence
was sited. Cognitive inhibitors included: unconnected, ruts and patterns, great leap
forward, and no case, also surfaced.

**Short- &-Long-Term Outcome**

The researcher observed that the model is effective in transforming youth
behavior when it comes to violence and other forms of negative behavioral patterns.
Ninety percent of the participant demonstrated the willingness to engage in change.
Considering the unknown factors modification did occur. However, the total outcome of
this model is difficult to realize due to the enormous task of molding and shaping youth.
Moreover, the timetable is a minimum of one year, given the proper resources and
activities. More research is warranted.

Without parental commitment, the success of youth transformation and change is
plausible. The outcome of youthful transformation hinges upon many factors, but the key
factor is parental support. With parental support the development of the target groups
will increase. Moreover, with the support of multiple civic and religious forces
consistently owning and reviewing the problem, committing to an action plan, combining
efforts and resources, the problem of Afro-American youth violence prevention and
alternative options will be more prevalent.

Finally, youth and families will join the FSUMC. The long term outcome centers
on change in youth, family, community, and the nation. Specifically, the church, as the
major player, will have to reassert itself with vigor and vitality, making a clear announcement; the gospel of Jesus Christ works. Hence, this work is crucial, necessary, and applicable to the transformation of youth as social agents of change, as it relates to violence.

**Impact**

The impact (results) of the findings comparing group A to group B indicated that there is no difference in the projection of one versus another. The significant element is the setting and location. Group A participated at FSUMC, and likewise, Group B participated at Cedar Grove High School. Group A accepted and participated with a positive attitude toward change, and increased in positive behavior. Group B, although increased, were less involved in the application of the curriculum. The role of faith in the church suggests, those who believe, accept, trust, and commit their hearts to Jesus Christ as Redeemer and Savior, will experience a transformation for the old person to the new. Ephesians 3: 10-12 says: “To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.” There is the answer to the question, “What is the role of the church in today’s society.” The answer is the same today as it was in the first century. We may have more gadgets. We may have more tools. We may have more modernization. We may have more ideas and programs. But...We still have the same role as the early church had. The role is the same because the need is the same because...Every society still needs God! Every society still needs Christ. Every society still needs forgiveness for their sins. Every society needs to be
added to the church! Every society needs has its downtrodden to be lifted up. Every society still needs to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus.” 2nd Peter 3: 18.¹

**How can FSUMC ensure long-term outcomes?**

FSUMC can ensure long-term outcomes by committing to: engaging, developing, and implementing a comprehensive ministry that is designed for black youth’s alternatives to violence and changes in the congregation this might require is encompassed in the following areas:

**Theologically**

While a black theology affirms the humanity of blacks in general, I would suggest that Flat Shoals give special attention given to the humanity of youth. The church must be cautious in making assumptions that do not factor positively in the black youth sense of humanity. The following suggestions are pathways for FSUMC theologically:

- Black young people are not in the process of becoming human; they are indeed human. They may be in the process of intellectual, psychological, and physical development, but they are no less human.

- Something is wrong with black youth. That error cannot be adequately analyzed in isolation from the reality of living in a racist, sexist, classist, imperialistic, militaristic, ageist society. Black youth are often merely victims of their circumstances. In other words, something is really wrong with the larger society, and that something is manifested in the particular experiences of young people.

¹ Church-What is the Role of the Church in today’s Society, Ephesians 3: 10, 1.
• Black youth ought to be black youth. They ought not, try to be (like) white youth. In fact, they ought, not even try to be adults-black or white-though some are plunged into early adulthood because of the demands of poverty existence. But they must affirm who they are as they make that critical group identification with black people.²

FSUMC must continue to embrace the idea that the problems with black youth ministry are essentially theological problems. The issues relate to the doctrine of humanity: racism, classism, and ageism. FSUMC and Black churches need to broaden the struggle for human dignity to embrace the concerns and needs of black youth. In a culture that yearns for youth yet hold little respect for them, black youth are doubly victimized. Consequently, the church must reinforce and celebrate the fact the black youth are persons too.

**Structurally**

The youth ministry is an inclusive title, encompassing all the concerns of the Church and all activities, with, and for youth. The title inclusive extends its ministry to include community, not only to the youth of the church. (Beyond the Walls) The coordinator of youth ministries and the youth council, when organized, shall be responsible for recommending to the church council activities, programs, emphases, and settings for youth.

The structural changes of FSUMC congregation that is required in order to bring about a change are:

✓ Commitment-Absolute dedication to the youth ministry, going the extra-mile, by any means necessary. Faithful volunteers who internalize the need with a clear understanding of the problem and a urgent mandate to seek change and transformation.

✓ Worship-Plan worship services surrounding youth and incorporate their ideas into worship, while making them active participants. Allow them to share their story in various styles.

✓ Stewardship-Listen, Share, Embrace, Encourage, Belong, Pursue, Talents, Service, Resources, Activities.

✓ Education-Education is the key. Coordinators should vigorously administrate, teach, and engage youth in applying learning to excellence. "Think outside the box". "What are the possibilities?"

✓ Finance-Create and design a comprehensive line item budget that will, identity all the necessary components in order to execute a youth ministry. Allow the youth to belong to overall the finance ministry.

✓ Evangelism/Outreach-A team initiative to recruit fellow youth.

✓ Groupthink-A necessary component of thought development, dialogue, processing, designed to enlist and encourage group participation in reaching the desired objectives.

✓ Multi-faceted Approach-Incorporate church and community as tools for implementing, guiding, and nurturing. For example, churches/ecumenical,
government, law enforcement, community activists, schools, businesses, parental/family, peers, and media.

Socio-politically

*Own the Problem*

The author is certain that African Americans did not create the problem, however, we must own it because we are inherently (linked) a part of problem. FSUMC will do well to revisit their understanding of the socio-political climate that serves as the backdrop (landscape) for the conditions that permeates the community with respect to violence, esp. youth violence, in the Gresham Park Community.

The poverty and powerlessness of black youth are inextricably linked to the safety of rest of society, since frustration-bred violence will ultimately spill over into the invisible wall of the community. The violence which black youth face now direct mainly against the black community (black-on-black) crime, against relatives and friends (homicide), and against themselves (suicide) will inevitably erupt and spread through urban and suburban American leaving behind damage, destruction, and distrust in its wake. In an anxious anticipation of the rising tide of rage, urban dwellers now up bars on their doors and windows, shopkeepers turn their stores and fortresses, and politicians build prisons. These causes of these anti-social behaviors are ignored, denied, or blamed on the black youth, who are written off as being intellectually deficient, culturally deprived, and pathologically deviant. Short-term remedies are devised for the consequences of their behaviors, with little understanding that these are band-aid
solutions are very temporary, very perishable, and very ineffective, to cure the underlying causes of frustration and anger in the black youth.

It is the suggestion of the writer that, FSUMC must be reminded of the political climate which formed the existing problems for black youth into a conservative political climate in this country. Framing this rationale is, policymakers have shifted the emphasis from the goal of providing all citizens with a decent standard of living through federally subsidized health and welfare programs to the need to blame the poor and disadvantaged for their perceived lack of motivation, their “dysfunctional” family systems, and their dependency of welfare programs. By shifting the focus from society’s responsibility for its most vulnerable citizens to an emphasis on the so-called “social pathology” of minority youth and their families, advocates of this view quite deliberately and effectively transformed the national debate from a proactive emphasis on policies of prevention and early intervention to a reactive emphasis on retrogressive policies and punitive programs. As a result, politicians who support cuts in social programs aimed primarily at disadvantaged and minority youth families have found increasing favor within the last 20 years; as a result minority youth have been impacted tremendously.

The writer’s emphasis on the socio-political climate that surrounds FSUMC is indicative of the conditions that the embraces America on all levels. However, given the magnitude and the proliferation of violence of African-American youth in the Gresham Park Community, the pooling of all resources, coupled with a method of restoration, is a launching pad from which to assist in bringing youth into transformation and change. Collectively, the church and community will be able to positively affect one youth’s life, and this change will support the notion that hope can be restored when we actively
participant together. "Self-Help and Empowerment" Taking ownership now, and helping oneself now, is a direct attack to the problem, while the government is wrestling with the policies that effect minority youth and Black people in general.

**Our heritage, Our Strength**

The foundations of our African heritage were the glue that held us together during slavery. There was no difference between the sacred and the secular. African cosmology signified that man and woman live in religious harmony with all of God’s creation. FSUMC must bring forth the values that that may be buried within the historical context of our heritage because they are germane to our survival. We must question ourselves in today’s modern society, have we lost our sense of community? If we answer honestly, the resounding answer is yes. But that does not mean we can’t recapture that which have lost.

**Is the congregation committed to doing so?**

The answer is yes. FSUMC has long been established as a mission church and has the spiritual attitude to see that the church’s objective is to carry out, the “Great Commission”, to make disciples in and thru Jesus Christ, for the transformation of the world. Steeped in this tradition FSUMC is connected to the community in all facets of community life. The church is vital, to the development of the community, due to its longstanding heritage and history of service. The congregation needs vital leadership and congregational commitment to the ministry in order to remain effective. Total commitment is the only option, FSUMC has demonstrated this well within the life of the church and the community.
FSUMC must realize as we walk through our journey as a church, self, community, and society; we must inspire our youth to walk that journey with us. If our children and youth are to overcome the troubles of this world, the church must learn to incorporate the valuable lessons of the past into their vision for the future. Encouraging our children to work side-by-side in our movement toward change will strengthen our bonds with them. The author feels that the majority of young people have no problem articulating their desires to participating adults in their lives. Moreover, as FSMUC incorporate the youth in a critical reexamination of our history, theology, and cosmology, we will make them stronger in their own pursuits for liberation throughout the rest of their lives. \textit{They will know, beyond a shadow of a doubt: that they are resting on a foundation of strength.}

Findings suggest that FSUMC will be different due to the relative nature of the impact of youth, who decided to make a change in the perception of violence and attitudes of behavior. In addition, FSUMC will be at a greater advantage of being and becoming a “Vital Congregation”, as a result of prioritizing the enlistment of African American youth into full and active members among the existing constituents. Secondly, the communities’ well-being becomes productive and redemptive as visible change occurs, and, as a consequence, conviction will evoke hope. The results further indicated that youth at faith-based institutions produced answers that are more in line with spiritual formative tendencies, perhaps because of the setting, and parental involvement. The school participants produced responses that indicated a more civic and secular minded base of thinking. However, spiritual factors were important and valued.
Personal

The researcher as interviewer, evolved with an acute sense of urgency to the magnitude of the problem of violence, and, heartfelt empathy surrounding African American youth plight and dilemma. Moreover, the reality of the enormous task before the FSUMC, churches, and society was recognized anew, due the scale of the problem. As one who is proud to be an African American, the proud history, heritage, and, struggle as African Americans in America, cannot be forgotten, by any means. The existence of a people must not end or reduce, due to the ongoing impact of racism, classism, nor any form of injustice, is violence in some form. The uniqueness of a people to live and prosper is a God given reality, to survive and thrive in a society, according to character and life skills only.

The researcher's greatest fear and concern in the African American dilemma at large is: the fear of genocide. Black on Black crime is humiliating, degrading, and ineffective in building relationships. The hypothesis is: a nation or group of people who murders or maimed its own, hinges of insanity. Given the understanding that all races at some point in history commit violence acts of aggression amongst its own, at some point genocide (violence) must stop, reduced, or eliminated, so that the entire race will not suffer needlessly. The results are detrimental such as becoming handicapped, destroyed, or eradicated slowly. As one who observed, questioned, steered, probed, analyzed, and critiqued, the problem of violence, the researcher walked a way with a picture of how significant African American youth are to God, and the possibility of the tremendous impact that could be made by those who are involved as active participants in addressing the problem. It is the belief that African-American youth must be given roots (substance)
and wings (hope), coupled with an invitation to the kingdom of God. When such consideration is offered, a revolution may occur.
CHAPTER IV

IMPLICATONS FOR MINISTRY AND CONCLUSION

Implications of the project for the future ministry of the researcher suggests the project has positive potential to curve and alter African-American youth toward a pathway that lead to transformation. Exploring various theories and sorting out specific variations will enlighten and strengthen the project focus, purpose, and intent. There are schools of thought offered by scholars (theorist) who analyze, probe, and critique various theories related to youth violence. In Danielle C. Kuhl article, Segregation, Racial Structure, and Neighborhood Violent Crime, uses the System theory as a mechanism to suggest insights in African-American youth violence. The article draws on the literature on concentrated disadvantage and resulting dislocations and scholarship on structural racism in the United States to posit a broad role for city-wide racial residential segregation as a contributor to levels of criminal violence in urban neighborhoods. The author theorize that city segregation contributes to neighborhood violent crime indirectly, through the way it produces isolation and structural disadvantage in predominantly minority areas, and directly, by making it difficult for separate and unequal groups to work together to foster common goals and solve shared problems.  

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Research results indicate the critical role of citywide segregation confirm that this factor has broad effects on neighborhood violence, above and beyond its contributions to structural disadvantage. Higher levels of segregation are associated with higher level of violent crime regardless of the racial/ethnic composition of neighborhood residents. Even the most privileged groups (i.e., whites) are unable to avoid the criminogenic consequences of segregation by living in separate neighborhoods within highly segregated cities. Yet, segregation is not the only higher-level contextual condition that sets the stage for violence at the neighborhood level. Places with fewer manufacturing, jobs also have considerably higher violence rates. This effect is consistent with the arguments regarding the consequences of a weak macroeconomic climate for local violence and communities. The fact that greater neighborhood structural disadvantage is associated with higher levels of violence will not come as a surprise.88

Susan D. McMahon explores the Social Cognitive Theory, in the article, Community Violence Exposure and Aggression among Urban Adolescents: Testing a Cognitive Mediator Model writes: past research has shown that exposure to violence leads to aggressive behavior, but few studies has examined theoretical models illustrating the mediating social cognitive processes that explain this relation with youth exposed to high rates of violence.89

88 Ibid., 1792-1793.

Understanding the mediators between exposure to community violence and aggressive behavior has implications for prevention, intervention, and social policy (Colder et al., 2000). The results from the study can be used to inform primary, secondary, and tertiary approaches to prevention and intervention. McMahon’s finding suggest that exposure to community violence triggers a process that has a significant impact on how youth think, feel, and behave. Victimization is indeed an important factor in the cycle of violence, and primary prevention efforts need to be directed at reducing violence, poverty, drugs trade, and racism; strengthening community support, and opportunities to develop self-efficacy, and they lead to positive beliefs toward oneself and others (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkin, 1998; Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray, & Foster, 1998).90

In addition, in order to have impact on inherent beliefs systems, we need to address school climates that tolerate aggression, parental messages to aggress when provoked, and the code of the streets. Obtaining impact and buy-in from and providing opportunities to the most at-risk youth, even those who are considered leaders that perpetuate negative behaviors in their neighborhoods, may constitute beginning steps to changing the code of the streets to become more positive. Intervention programs need to integrate the contextual realities (e. g., shooting, gang violence, burglary, police brutality) that urban at-risk youth face to teach skill that can work in urban environments. Evaluations should target the impact of theoretically based program components and

90Ibid., 906.
contextual factors on the cognitive and behavioral processes and outcomes that urban youth display.\textsuperscript{91}

In sum, theoretically based, empirical research is necessary to better understand the processes that lead to at risk youth to experience and perpetrate violence. Targeting the intermediate cognitive processes, such as retaliatory beliefs about aggression and self-efficacy to behave non-aggressively, has the potential to reduce the impact of exposure to violence on aggressive behavior. However, we cannot ignore the larger systems-level issues that contribute to the cycle of violence. Violence and poverty in urban America need to be addressed through multifaceted, multidisciplinary research, prevention, and treatment efforts to support the optimal development of all African American youth and youth in general.

In the article, \textit{Evaluating the National Outcomes: Youth--Social Competencies; Adolescent Relationships}, Roselyn K. Polk, says, violence committed by adolescents is neither a new, nor a, new phenomena. Although predominate stereotypes place the focus of most violence within poverty stricken, drug-dominated inner-city neighborhoods and schools, violence among adolescents spans all ethnic groups, socio-economic levels, all lifestyles, and exists within both urban and rural communities. The Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSASP) defines violence "as any act that cause psychological, emotional, or physical harm to individuals and/or communities, or causes damages to property" (Gardner & Resnik, 1996). Theories such as culture of violence theory (Felson, Liska, Sourth, & McNulty, 1994), psychopathology theory (Lewis, Shanock, Pincus, & Glasser, 1979), social cognition theory (Markus & Zajonc, 1985), drive theory (Dollard,

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 907.
Doob, Miller, Mowrer, & Sears, 1939), instinct theory (Freud, 1950; Lorenz, 1966; McDougall 1908; Trotter, 1916), social learning theory, (Bandura & Walters, 1959), conflict theory (Dahrendorf, 1968), and impression management theory (Felson, 1981, 1982; Mason, 1998) have all attempted to explain the mechanisms that form the foundational basis for violence. However, no single theory has yet been able to explain the multi-faceted components of the social, psychological, biophysical facets that appear to be intertwined within violent behaviors.92

**Transformative Learning Theory**

The primary purpose of Christian Education is to make disciple or learners of all ages. Christian teaching must empower the people and help them to flourish by bringing honest dialogue and relevant teaching to the Christian Education setting. We must meet students at their level of need. Christian Educator LaVerne Tolbert call this transformation teaching, and the goal is to teach the word of God so that lives and minds are changed. She says: The type of teaching that causes transformation occurs when learners replace bad habits with biblical ones, when godly thought processes result in right actions. As teachers we partner with the Holy Spirit in this transforming process.93

Moving from the practical to the theoretical, it is crucial to be cognizant of the **Core Concepts of Transformation Theory** by Jack Mezirow. Mezirow emphasizes “meaning making” as a learning process. He strongly believes that adult/youth learning

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emphasize contextual understanding, critical reflection on assumptions and validating meaning by assessing reasons. The justification for much of what we know and believe, our values and our feelings, depends on the context—biographical, historical, cultural in which they are imbedded. The aforementioned learning emphases are integral if we are to engage youth in holistic ministry. Holistic ministry is the loving service that we provide others in the name of Jesus Christ by attending to their intellectual, emotional, physical, cultural, social and spiritual growth and development in order to prepare them for productive adulthood.94

As we consider the essential practices of transformative pedagogy, Edward W. Taylor model- The Theory and Practice of Transformative Learning-A Critical Review highlights the following conditions as fundamental for fostering transformative leaning:

- Ideal learning conditions promote a sense of safety, openness, and trust
- Effective instructional methods that support a learner-centered approach
- The importance of activities that encourage the exploration of alternative personal perspectives, problem posing and critical reflection.

From an African-American Christian perspective, transformative learning requires that church leaders believe that education is vital to the life of the church; have a commitment to build a ministry that reflects excellence in its execution, and are dedicated

94 Ibid., 2.
to the development of a body of Christ that is well-equipped to understand and embrace its “African, African American and Christian” heritage.95

**Story-linking**

This model was created and developed by Anne E. Streaty Wimberly, a contemporary of Christian Education (Bible Study) from the African-American perspective. The foundation of the model draws on Christian Education approaches during slavery. It entails a teaching/learning process focused on liberation and vocation. Story-linking is a process where people connect components of their everyday life stories with the Christian faith heritage stories of African Americans found outside the scripture. The intent is for African Americans to be encouraged and inspired by the lives of persons who faced life circumstance with which they can identify. Story-linking engages persons in a process that is aimed toward liberation and vocation from a Christian perspective. The model has been adapted for use with African American youth. Story-linking engages them in narrative model of teaching that will help them to critically reflect their life stories in light of the Christian faith story.96

**Group Investigation Model**

This model develops a community of learners. John Dewey developed the idea and teachers, theorists extended and refined it. The model leads students to define problems; explore perspectives on the problems and study together to master information, ideas and skills while simultaneously developing social competence.

95 Ibid., 3.
96 Ibid., 12.
Grant Shockley's Intentional Engagement Model

Grant Shockley, a trailblazer in the area of Black Christian religious education, created a model for social justice that is useful in Black churches and relevant to the larger Christian community. His Intentional Engagement Model employs six distinguishing characteristics: conceptualization, awareness, analysis, reevaluation, praxis and community. Shockley’s discipleship model demonstrates how Black experience is integral to Christian education practices, and his work is foundational to the development of a Wholly Hip-Hop Pedagogy because it highlights the centrality of the experiences of those being educated.97

Working with Black youth and their understanding of contemporary Hip-Hop culture is crucial. Daniel Black and Maisha Handy assert that because African-American youth embrace Hip-Hop culture, we as educators “must not shun Hip-Hop culture. Rather we must find ways of embracing and integrating it with other cultural strands. Therefore, a paradigm shift is needed in how the church views and implements ministry for, with and by youth. Grant Shockley’s theoretical convictions included the discovery and creation of a Black model of Christian Education. This model introduced a theoretical framework for ministry with Black youth based on understanding “the religious developments, cultural changes and social forces which influenced the black...church {and} which impacted the black experience and affected black youth.” It seeks to engage youth living in Hip-Hop culture in critically analyzing what they see and hear. By doing this, the intent is to provide “real” ministry with them. One of the

essential and most important lessons that Christian educators and youth ministers must consider is "real" ministry that is "real" to them, when working with Black youth.\footnote{Ibid., 10.}

\textbf{Yolanda Smith Triple-Heritage Model}

Yolanda Smith has "reclaim the spirituals" as a new possibility for African-American Christian education. Her work stems from her own desire to learn more about God in light of her African American heritage. Smith's triple heritage model is designed to aid African-American churches in reclaiming their full heritage as Africans, African American and Christians. Because of the centrality of her approach, her model lays the groundwork for another pedagogy rooted in an African American musical genre.\footnote{Ibid., 10.}

\textbf{Reflections}

As African-American Christian educators we must continue to embrace a non-traditional approach to Christian education with African-American youth that uses 21\textsuperscript{st} century youth culture to inform the urgency of our teaching and understanding. In addition, it is imperative that the church and community highlight the need for young people to see that adults care about them, that we take them seriously and that we want to hear what they have to say. African-American Christian education must continue in its effort to connect culture (e.g. Hip-Hop Culture) and other extensions to make teaching and learning relevant for those who are its constituents. It cannot remain alienated from 21\textsuperscript{st} century culture, wherein our youth ministries think they are protecting our youth from evil and offensive influence of society, when, in fact, youth are experiencing and
being shaped by cultural influences daily. There is a deafening cry for Christian education to be real! Doing the opposite will bring death. Christian educators must engage the cultural effects of the whole youth living a challenging world. This engagement will allow us to live out the will of God as Jesus prayed the night before his death. While we no longer belong to the world, we continue to live in the John 17: 1-25 (New International Version)

Continuing the driving agenda of Christian education, we must continue to understand that Christian education is that which undergirds the church and community. Therefore, in order to keep African-American youth on Track, or to get them on Track, is not to escape the relevancy of Christian education in times like these, and the days/generations, to come.

Despite the pessimistic overtones of much research and the media, programs are being developed by academians, researchers, and medical and health professionals in the hope of stemming the tide of adolescent violence. Congress recently appropriated $95 million for crime prevention programs for children at risk. Among the school-based, family-based, and community-based programs aimed at reducing violent behaviors are prevention and intervention programs focusing on anger management, conflict resolution, interpersonal problem solving skills, dating violence, those designed to raise self-esteem, and general violence prevention (Powell & Hawkins, 1996; Haugen, 1997). Anti-social behaviors are often the result of the perceived lack of alternatives that allow adolescents to achieve their goals through pro-social means and they may view violence as the only available means of power to which they have access. Most prevention specialist now believe a multi-level approach is needed that incorporates the adolescent, family, school,
and community, all the social contexts within which the adolescent lives, if we are to experience a reduction in the prevalence and acceptance of violence among our nation’s young people.\textsuperscript{100}

In order to get African-American youth and the black American \textit{back on track}, Dr. Melody T. McCloud, an Atlanta-based OB-BYN, who delivered the researcher’ son says: seventy-two percent of black babies are born to unwed mothers. High school and college graduation rates for black males are at an all-time low. Black-on-black crime appears to be soaring. Young males seemingly can’t go to a house party without someone getting shot or killed. It is disgraceful and inexcusable. Some blame these current ills on slavery, and excuse the actions of uneducated and criminally-minded blacks as if they don’t have a choice in how they conduct their lives. It’s 2013. They do.\textsuperscript{101}

Whites also have ills: Whites male are angry. Some commit mass murders. Whites often use methamphetamine, commit suicide or die from anorexia or the “choking game”. While some black cry racism too often, whites don’t own or acknowledge it enough. Too many blacks eagerly embrace what I call “Black Slack.” They take the path of least resistance. Proper attire has lost out to thug wear; biomedical engineering to basketball; romantic lyrics to vile hip-hop’ civility to criminality. Learning proper English is trumped by “ebonics.” A black person who encourages education and personal responsibility is often called a traitor. That is nonsensical irresponsible and

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 64.

ignorant. The foolishness adopted by many black youth (and some parents) needs to stop. It's inexcusable.\(^{102}\)

There are simply too many black children born out of wedlock and too many absentee fathers. There must be a restoration of black families that consist of married mothers and fathers. There are too many black children born out of wedlock and too many absentee fathers. Civil rights leaders fought, and some died, so blacks could have their rightful, fair chance at the American dream. Many honored those efforts and became dedicated company employees, professionals and entrepreneurs. But in recent decades, too many have squandered previous advances.

Today there's no insistence on education, proper language skills, attire, morality, decency or respect for life-one's own or anyone else. Black women need to respect themselves. Stop having babies without the benefit marriage. There are too many (poorly raised) children having children. Likewise, black girls need in-home, responsible fathers so they don't seek "love" from sex-crazed boys, get pregnant, and continue the cycle of fatherless, undisciplined and poor-achieving offspring.

The black family needs: men and women, who know how to lead, read, respect and protect. The black community has self-inflicted internal bleeding. Hemorrhage. The prescription is one of tough love. But without remedying the above-mentioned ills, the patient, in this case the black community will remain in grave condition.\(^{103}\)

\(^{102}\)Ibid., 2.

\(^{103}\)Ibid., 3.
The researcher concludes that during the duration of this project empowering (relationships) promoting positive alternatives to African American youth violence have been realized. These relationships created opportunities that evolved into a significant union, clearly, demonstrating the need for a multifaceted approach to addressing youth violence. Furthermore, this approach is in keeping with the researcher's motif; "it takes a village to raise a child." The following is evidence of that union: 1) Dekalb County Authorities: renewed coalition with Dekalb County Sheriff's Department, Sheriff Brown, Major Jones, Dekalb County Police Department, Dekalb County Judicial System, and, Fulton County Restorative Justice Board. 2) The Dekalb County Board of Education: (CIS) Communities in Schools welcomed the volunteer mentoring process to the school environment at large. Moreover, the researcher as a certified CIS volunteer came to the conclusion that, mentoring is significant, positive, and necessary within the Dekalb County School System. The mentoring process produced sensitivity to, an acute awareness of, nurturing, embracing, and addressing young person behavioral issues. Issues that are connected in some form to violence; spiritual, emotional, physical, mental, domestic, academic, and, or communal. 3) Cedar Grove High School: realized the relationship between the principal, assistant principal, and researcher as pivotal, and served as the foundation for implementation of the project. Resources were provided, efforts were combined, and assistance with an action plan was implemented to impact, augment, and rehabilitate student behavioral issues related to violence. The eight week sessions at (FSUMC and Cedar Grove High School) provided new evidence of the need for schools and church/community to unite to impact youth development. 4) Beyond the Bell, (PREP) Personal Responsibility Education Program remains a vital participant with
The Gresham Park Community: Daryl Jennings, president, has committed afresh to the watch care of African American youth and has realigned the organization for the reduction and transformation of violence, in conjunction with FSUMC. 6) Local Community: for example, Gresham Walmart, (MADD), Mothers against Drunk Driving, McNair Learning Academy, all have made a commitment and sustains a relationship with the researcher and FSUMC. 7) Ecumenical Community: First Baptist, Beulah Baptist, Kelly Chapel United Methodist Church, Clifton United Methodist Church are co-partners in the pursuit of modifications to violence. 8) FSUMC is stronger and more equipped in addressing the problem of violence among African American youth. Results indicate that FSUMC have developed plans designed to effect moral behavior and decision making such as; Youth Empowerment Summit, Save the Children Ministry, Camp Glisson, (Day Camp for Children/Youth Christian Development), FSUMC (GED) Learning Academy, one on one mentoring, inclusive of parents and volunteers. These ministries will continue on a year to year basis with emphasis on a (quadrennial) 4 year review of goals and objectives.

In sum, with a strong and honest commitment (integrity) the researcher is certain that change can occur in a more dramatic fashion, and, African American youth will be able to find their way to address problems related to violence. With God and a coalition of others, future impact will occur in a schedule time frame by faith and perseverance. It is the contention of the researcher that moral character, better decision making, and personal responsibility, was realized among the participants within both groups, FSUMC and Cedar Grove High School. The researcher gleamed for the participants the willingness to unite with the church and to (personal) self-development, although this is a
nurturing process. The project is ongoing and focused to achieve greater results. Working together as a (TEAM), "Together Everyone Achieve More", will be the key factor that will impact and address the urgent concern of the African American youth violent dilemma for the future. The love of God and the Kingdom's mission continues to motivate the researcher and the project. The ultimate agenda is to ensure that a vital relationship with God and church is realized, and thus, complete transformation will become a rebirth of African American youth hopes, dreams, wholeness, and health, as persons within the Gresham Park Community.

The project acknowledges the inherent dignity and worth of all human beings. In the narratives, Christ's ministry, is portrayed as telling his disciples eight times" You shall love your neighbor as yourself." In this ethic the worth and dignity of our neighbor are equal not greater or less or less than our own. It affirms fair treatment of people in social relations and institutions. The love ethic of equal regard has crucial relevance for domestic and violence in general. This love ethic should not only restrain all violent acts in the name mutual respect, but it should function to empower the weak to demand that they be treated as children of God and never as a means of exploitation.

The researcher is in agreement, African-American youth are in a place of victim and perpetrator, in many cases due to no fault of their own. A critical element to African-American youth wholeness is who and what they surround themselves. The "Incarnation" gives of a glimpse of God, through Jesus Christ, entering our situation and identify with our pain, suffering, hopes and dreams. The researcher's motive is to reach out to all youth, and pray that all would come to know Christ in a real way. Hence, new turning points will arise, justice, equality, and liberation will emerge. New forms of expression
will give rise to new answers to old questions. The love ethic remains a significance element in human development and transformation. The writer incorporates Dr. King's theology into the African-American youth's experience within the Gresham Park Community, for the hope is rooted in faith in God to achieve his purpose among humankind within history. Hearing the cry of the oppressed moves the writer to sensitive to the marginalized, a dominant theme, realized by the call to freedom and wholeness, as all persons are precious to God. In God, there remain reasons for hope and change.

There is no place in the world that one can go. No country, place, religious order, governmental structure—where violence does not have deep roots. As a global village, we have not done a good job at loving the neighbor—our–neighbor within ourselves, our faith or secular communities. We use to make excuses of difference to assault others. Our need to acquire power gives us permission to access greed, to manipulate, disrespect, and control others. Or we control and abuse ourselves and others through our actions and words. One of the greatest weapons is the tongue. Our fears of others fear of difference, and our insecurities allow us to embrace necessary violence. Violence seems to be inherent to the very fabric of most cultures and communities. Before we can change anything with the preponderance of violence, we must admit it exists. We must name it and claim our participation before we can transform violence and create a better world.104

Awareness of the dynamic of life, the importance of total health, and the devastation of unnecessary violence calls us to embrace a vibrant, integrative theology and responsive. The researcher believes that violence does not have to be overwhelmed

our communities and the world; yet, choices have been made so it does. Only when enough people get sick and tired, and have and have the courage to sit together with shared power and compromise, can we hope to become more conscious of the violence and decide to live our lives differently. If we fail to make some changes, we may not have to worry about getting along, because we will destroy each other, desecrate the planet, and cease to know one another as human beings.\textsuperscript{105} In short, the African-American violent dilemma is truly is a community issue. \textit{The Child that fights needs a Savior.}

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 84.
APPENDIXES
APPENDIX A

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY EDUCATION PROGRAM (PREP)

Making proud decisions

➢ Intended to reach middle school and high school students in a community-based environment that informs alternatives to violence.

➢ Decision making

➢ Understanding that love of self can open the door recognizes the value of others

➢ Designed to help adolescents develop skills and motivation necessary to reduce risk related behaviors, presents abstinence as the best way to prevent HIV infection, and other STDs and unplanned pregnancy.

Making a Difference

Recognizing that families are the primary educators of moral, sexual, and family values and aims to provide the tools children and youth need to make healthy choices by teaching them about prevention and their bodies.

Reducing the Risk

➢ Unplanned violence activities

➢ Unanticipated sexual disease and pregnancies

➢ Failure in academic pursuits; such as dropping out and

➢ Reducing the lack of self-esteem, identity, purpose, and direction
Be Proud! Be Responsible! Be Protective

- Reflects that the church, family, and communities are the primary education of personal values and moral a conduit for effective maturity and growth

Relationship Smarts

- Build skills and knowledge for forming emotionally, healthy, mutually respectful, and ethically sound relationships as it relates to violence
- Covered topics on: maturity, identifying values, peer pressure, attractions and infatuations, building blocks for positive relationships, nature of true intimacy, realistic concepts of love, how to break up, conflict skills, and dating violence prevention
1. Curriculum Outline

The curriculum will cover the following areas:

A. What is violence?

B. What are specific contributors to violence?

C. Value Clarification

   1. Decision Making
   2. Problem Solving

D. Respect (property, other, self)

E. Development of compassion, kindness, and virtue Self-control/Self discipline

   1. Honesty
   2. Trustworthiness
   3. Self-Control

F. Self-esteem

   1. Uniquely made by God
   2. Self-Love and care
G. Family, School, Community, Church

(Session will last for approximately 45 minutes)

**Session I  Group Interview**

The youth will interview each other as investigative reports at a press conference. The youth will interview in order to determine what they know and think about violence, value clarification, respect, development of character, compassion, kindness, and virtue, self-esteem, family, community, and church. The following questions plus other questions generated by the reports will be:

**What is violence?** What causes youth violence?

1. What is your experience with youth violence?
2. What are alternatives (choices) to violence?
3. Do you think nonviolence can be successful in changing youth?
4. Do you see yourself as being nonviolence?
5. What have your parents told you about violence and nonviolence?
6. Does good character play a role in good decisions making?
7. Do your friends or peers influence you to react violently?
8. What is the best way to avoid conflict?
9. Do you know anyone who makes good choices relating to violence?
10. Do you believe in God?
11. Do you believe in the Bible?

12. Do you believe that following God and the Bible will guide youth nonviolent patterns of living?

Closing (by a youth)

Session II What is Character, Faith, and

A. The youth will learn what character and how to develop more (lecture 15 minutes)

B. Small group activity

1. Write a rap song about alternatives to violence (15 minutes)

2. Perform the song (15 minutes)

3. Closing (by a youth)

Session III Developing Good Judgment

A. The youth will role play the following and decide how best to resolve the dilemmas

1. A family friend runs through your house and destroys your parents’ television. What would you do?

2. A friend borrows your new jacket and refuses to give it back. What would you do?

3. A friend steals your parent car and you see it happening? What would you do?
4. A friend has a gun at school and comes to your house to show it off. What would you do?

Session IV Trustworthiness

A. The youth will examine what it means to trust God, others, and their importance.

1. The youth will have a 15 minutes presentation on trustworthiness

2. The youth will role play as to how to react when given an object to hold and to give back later

3. The youth will discuss the role playing, and what they learned about the importance of trustworthiness.

Session V Self-Respect/Self-Esteem

A. The youth will have a 15-minute presentation on self-respect

B. The youth will write a short paragraph about respecting themselves using the following components:

1. Choosing to like yourself and others

2. Showing respect through

3. Taking care of home, school, and neighborhood

4. Not letting others control your emotions

5. Closing (adult leader)
APPENDIX C

YOUTH SURVEY RESPONSE QUESTIONS (YSRQ)

Measurements Instruments & items

I. Risk Behaviors

Personal and School performance problems

YSRQ

1. Have you ever gotten into trouble because of attendance, that is, not going to school when you are supposed to be there?

   Sometimes/Often

   Never

2. Have you ever had to repeat a grade because you cut school or didn’t go to class?

   Yes

   No

3. Have you ever had to repeat a grade because you failed?

   Yes

   No

4. What are your grades like in school; Mostly...

   F’s/D’s

   C/B/A’s

5. Do your grades reflect your most sincere efforts?

   Yes

   No

6. Have you ever been expelled from school that is, forced to leave the school for good, not allowed back to that school?

   Yes

   No
7. Actively defies or refuses to comply with adults' requests
   Yes  No

8. Argues with adults

9. Disobedient at school

10. Gets into many fights

11. Have you ever had a drink of beer, wine, or liquor, not just a sip of someone else's drink

12. Do you use tobacco products? (i.e. cigarettes, cigars, chewing tobacco, snuff)

13. Have you ever tried any of the following drugs not for medical reasons?
   A. Inhalants, like glue
   B. Marijuana or hashish
   C. Other drugs

14. Uses alcohol or drugs for non-medical purposes

**Early involvement in risky sex**

15. Have you ever had sexual activity with someone more than kissing or hugging?

**II. Delinquency**

**Crimes of violence**

16. Have you ever mugged anyone?

17. Have you ever shot at anyone with a gun?

18. Have you ever robbed anyone using a weapon such as a gun or a knife?

**Crimes against property/person**
19. Have you ever “shook-down” other kids for money, shoes, jacket(s), etc.?

20. Have you ever stole or tried to steal a bicycle?

21. Have you ever stole or tried to steal a motor vehicle such as a car or a motorcycle?

22. Have you ever shoppedlifted?

23. Have you stolen from school lockers, cash registers, mailboxes, vending machines, or places like that?

24. Have you ever snatched purses or picked pocket?

25. Have you ever broken into cars?

26. Have you ever broken into buildings, homes, or businesses?

27. Have you ever seriously hurt someone?

28. Have you ever set things or property on fire?

29. Sets fires

30. Steals at home

31. Steals outside of home?

**Status offenses**

32. Have you ever stayed out all night without permission?

33. Have your parents ever been asked to come to school because you missed school or misbehave?

34. Runs away from home

35. Have you ever sold drugs?

36. Have you ever bought drugs for someone else?

37. Were you ever paid in money, gifts, or drugs, for delivering?
38. Were you ever paid in money, gifts, or drugs, for keeping or holding drugs for someone?

**Parental Attachment**

**Virtual supervision**

39. Your mother trusts you

40. Your father trusts you

41. When you leave the house during the day, how often do you have to tell anyone where you're going and when you'll be back?

42. When you leave the house at night, how often do you have to tell anyone where you're going and when you will be back?

43. Do you have to be home by a certain time at night?

**Intimacy of communication**

44. You enjoy talking things over with your mother

45. You share your thought and feeling with your mother?

46. You can go to your mother for advice and guidance

47. Your mother praises you or tells someone about it when you do something well

48. You enjoy talking things over with your father

50. You share your thoughts and feelings with your father

51. You can go to your father for advice and guidance

52. Your father praises you or tells someone about it when you do something well

**Affection & Identification**
53. Would you like to be the kind of person your mother is when you’re grown up

54. Your mother understands your problems

55. Your mother is too strict

56. Your mother is always picking on you

57. Would you like to be the kind of person your father is when you’re grown up

58. Your father understands your problems

59. Your father is too strict

60. Your father is always picking on you

**Joint/leisure involvement**

61. About how often does your family sit down and eat dinner together? About how many days per week or month is that?

62. About how often do/do your parents(s) take you out just for fun or recreation, like to a park, a movie, to eat out, to a sports event, or some other amusement? About how many days per week or month is that?

**Family Socioeconomic Status**

**Parental education**

63. What was the last year education that you completed?

Professional Degree=1

Four-year College Graduate=2

One to three years college and business school=1 or 3

**Deviant Peer Relationships**

**Associations with deviant peers**
64. Have any of close friends ever been expelled from school
   Yes  No

65. Have many of your close friends have ever “took” other kids for money, shoes, jacket(s), etc.?
   Yes  No

66. How many of your close friends have ever stolen or tried to steal a bicycle?

67. How many of your friends have ever shoplifted?

68. Have many of your close friends ever paid in money, gifts, or drugs, by a drug dealer to watch for the police?

69. Have many of your close friends have ever shot a gun at anyone?

70. Have many of your close friends have ever robbed anyone using a weapon such as a gun or knife?

71. Hangs around with others and get into trouble?

Closing (by a youth)
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


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Easley, Christopher Anne. *Our children our Responsibilities: Saving the Youth we are Losing to Gangs.* New York: P. Lang. 2012.


