

# Understanding African Americans Homeschooling Movement in the United States through Social Justice and Equity, Postcolonialism and Critical Theory

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**Abstract:** A growing number of African Americans are homeschooling their children, which has drawn the attention of an increasing number of researchers and academics. Based on social justice and equity, Postcolonialism, and Critical Theory, this study examines the social connotations and implications of African American families' homeschooling movement. Previously, homeschooling was criticized as a tactic of neoliberal privatization that perpetuates social inequity. However, this study indicates that the homeschooling movement has a distinct significance for African American families. It combines Postcolonialism and Freirean Critical Theory to offer a more comprehensive analysis of the African American homeschooling movement in light of previous research on racial educational inequality. While the homeschooling movement as a whole can potentially lead to social injustice and inequity, the African American homeschooling movement thrusts them into dialogues about educational reform and the struggle of African American families for cultural identity and racial equity.

**Keywords:** African American homeschooling; Social justice and equity; Postcolonialism; Critical Theory.

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## 1. Introduction

The popularity of homeschooling has grown significantly in recent years in the United States (Puga, 2019; Mazama & Lundy, 2014, 2015; Ray, 2015). Indeed, homeschooling increased by 74 per cent between 1999 and 2007 (Mazama & Lundy, 2015), and there are an estimated two million children in the United States who are taught at home (Ray, 2015). Today, homeschooling is the fastest growing method of education in the United States (Ray, 2015; Kunzman & Gaither, 2020). As an alternative to the normative educational model, homeschooling is changing from a predominantly white trend to a multi-racial one (Mazama & Lundy, 2012, 2013, 2015). African Americans are homeschooling their children in numbers which are growing faster than any other minority group in the country, and by 2011, the number of African American families homeschooling their children had doubled (Mazama & Lundy, 2015). Many experts believe that the flight of African American families away from public schools and toward homeschooling constitutes a second massive exodus (Puga, 2019).

Homeschooling has gained academic attention and sparked a variety of debates. According to its supporters, it has the potential to challenge traditional public education, dismantle bureaucracy, and transform education into a truly humane practice as part of an educational revolution (Puga, 2019). Those who oppose the initiative claim that it is part of a broader anti-democratic trend that undermines the public-school system's survival and its attempts to provide equal opportunities and is an unmitigated failure (Riegel, 2001). Nonetheless, it is indisputable that most arguments both for and against homeschooling are framed through the lens of white Americans, whereas black Americans are marginalized and even ignored.

Lalonde et al. (2008) claim that African American parenting is remarkable since it requires parents to overcome several obstacles and cope with the daily racism and classism

directed at African American families in North America. Consequently, this paper aims to examine the African American community and conduct a comprehensive analysis of the African American homeschooling movement in the context of social justice and equality, postcolonial theory, and Paulo Freire's critical theory. This article asserts that the homeschooling movement among African American families represents a struggle for cultural identity, as well as a protest against racism, oppression and injustice.

### 1.1. African Americans Homeschooling Movement and Social Justice and Equity

To assess the African American homeschooling movement from social justice and equity standpoint, it is necessary to understand what justice and equity mean. There are several approaches to define social justice and equity. According to Rawls, social justice refers to the distribution of rights, obligations, and the social and economic benefits that result from social collaboration (Gewirtz & Gribb, 2003). However, the concept of justice should not be limited to distribution alone. As described by Gewirtz and Gribb (2003), the definition of justice can be expanded to encompass relational justice, which may lead to a more in-depth examination of the nature of relational justice and the development of social relations. Fraser (2005) describes the relational component as the manifestation of cultural justice, including cultural autonomy, recognition, and respect. Culture is a valid, even vital, site of struggle, but it is also a site of injustice closely linked to socioeconomic inequities (Keddie, 2012).

However, the unavoidable truth is that Euro-centric culture, or Western-centrism, is seen as the standard and norm worldwide (Kerner, 2018). In contrast, the rest of the world is considered distinct and essentially different from the West, and accordingly they are presumed to be inferior (Hall, 2011). Consequently, the world is segmented into units based on the perspective and practices of Eurocentric cultures, and distinctions between these units are hierarchized (Kerner,

2018). Ultimately, this dynamic contributes to the development and reproduction of unequal power relations which are promoted by global capitalism, such as class oppression, racism, and others. Frazer argues that justice for all can only be achieved when economic institutions reflect an equitable distribution of scarce resources, status hierarchies reflect culturally sanctioned patterns of equity, and political space is constituted equitably (Keddie, 2012). Despite some theorists arguing that economic or cultural injustice is not associated with political injustice (Olsen, 2008), it is undeniable that a lack of cultural justice alienates or even marginalizes various ethnic groups, contributing fundamentally to racial injustice and cultural hegemony.

Racial injustice is a mechanism based on which the capitalist system is constructed and functions (Quijano, 2007). Mbembe (2003) suggests the phrase 'politics of death' to refer to a form of sovereignty aiming not at autonomy but at the violent methods of state politics used to defend the power structures of the state. Such action is a form of racism, "rejecting any connections between invaders and indigenous people from a racial perspective" (Mbembe, 2003, p. 24). According to Mbembe (2003, p. 17), race and racism remain "an ever-present shadow" in Western political theory and practice. Nevertheless, the consequences of racial injustice go beyond this; racial injustice is so deeply ingrained in society that it impacts every aspect of life, including educational institutions (Omer & Jabeen, 2016). Even though legislation in the United States and in Europe has found that schools that are segregated by race are inherently inequitable and discriminatory, there is a long history of - and support for - segregation in schools based on these arguments (Keddie, 2012).

African American homeschooling can be viewed as an act of protest against racial injustice and cultural hegemony. As in the broader societal sphere, many Western educational settings deny African Americans a voice, causing them to suffer injustice and inequity (Keddie, 2012). From a social justice and equity perspective, African Americans have been denied a position of cultural recognition. It is such recognition that grants or denies subjects access to normative value systems (Hesford, 2015). Education in the United States has never been centered on students; instead, it has been Eurocentric (Kumah-Abiwu, 2016). Eurocentrism is a concept that portrays the unique historical reality of Europe as the total of human experience. The resultant lack of African culture in the curriculum leads to widespread ignorance of and contempt for African Americans in schools (Puga, 2019). As a result of racial and socioeconomic disparities in philosophy and pedagogy across schools (Mazama & Lundy, 2012, 2013, 2014), social injustice is perpetuated. This institutionalized racial injustice and marginalization in the public education system have led many African Americans to opt for homeschooling (Puga, 2019). This perspective provides a more nuanced understanding of homeschooling as a reaction to social injustice rather than a perpetually privileged educational option that fosters social inequity.

In addition, generalizing the African American homeschooling movement's motivations and applying this argument to all homeschoolers may result in an overly broad characterization (Puga, 2019). In contrast with public education, homeschooling is primarily viewed as a private activity (Avery-Grubel, 2009), and the primarily white homeschooling movement is seen as having a more significant influence on the conventional educational system

and society (Reich, 2002; Lubienski, 2003). Several researchers have attempted to distinguish between the role of black homeschooling in society, and the role played by white homeschooling, suggesting that the latter has a greater influence on transforming the present social structure (Apple, 2013; Reich, 2002; Lubienski, 2003). In addition, African Americans who homeschool are disproportionately placed in a small fringe segment of the homeschooling community (Mazama & Lundy, 2012, 2013; Puga, 2019). Black homeschoolers have been identified as distinct groups that do not accurately reflect the broader influence of homeschooling (Apple, 2013; Reich, 2002; Lubienski, 2003). This attempt to conceptually categorize Black homeschooling into a marginal category among homeschoolers reflects the oppression of the Black experience and leads to the establishment of a hegemonic system of knowledge production (McKittrick, 2006, cited by Puga, 2019).

## **1.2. Homeschooling and Social Justice and Equity**

The practice of homeschooling may contribute to educational inequity and injustice in the United States. Numerous critics of homeschooling believe that it stems from the neoliberal ideology that underlies the concept of economic privatization, thus perpetuating social inequity in the public sphere (Puga, 2019). Even the most ardent supporters of homeschooling must admit that it may only be appropriate or even advantageous for a minority of children (Puga, 2019). There is no evidence that homeschooling will benefit children from impoverished and abusive homes, who are perhaps the most neglected by public schools (Apple, 2013). It is therefore a source of individual liberation for those who are already privileged, but is inadequate as a source of social emancipation.

Homeschooling can foster a tendency toward 'parentocracy', in which a child's educational accomplishments are determined more by their parents' economic and social status and education than by their own competence and effort (Riegel, 2001, p. 110). Homeschoolers are therefore exemplifying privilege, since educational opportunities outside the public-school system increase private advantages that are not available to those without comparable social, cultural, and economic capital (Puga, 2019). Hence, opponents assert that personal choices, such as homeschooling, exacerbate inequities in the public sphere, thereby maintaining class reproduction and inequity (Lubienski, 2003).

## **2. Understanding African Americans Homeschooling Movement through Postcolonial Theory and Critical Theory**

### **2.1. Through Postcolonial Theory: Theory and Understanding**

In postcolonial theory and research, identity is both the most contentious and the most consequential subject (Dizayi, 2019). Hall (2011) explains identity as the way historical, linguistic, and cultural resources are utilized in the process of becoming rather than being. In other words, a person's identity is shaped by his or her history, culture, and biology. However, it is never complete; rather it is a work in progress, and a performance (Al-Qahtani, 2021). The concept of

identity is often viewed as a relation between the self, the other and the external environment (Dizayi, 2019). Whether it is Fanon's divided sense of self or Edward Said's Orientalism, these concepts both highlight the identity crisis faced by colonized individuals on both a subjective and an objective level. As a foundation for postcolonialism, Fanon's concept serves as a starting point for this paper.

Colonialism, as described by Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*, has the following characteristics: 1) psychological impacts on colonies; 2) the identity crisis experienced by black colonized people (Al-Qahtani, 2021). In Fanon's view, the racism of colonialism leads to psychopathologies and the development of mental disorders (Sikuade, 2012; Carr, 2016). The colonized cannot form an independent sense of identity due to cultural assimilation or the replacement of their original culture with that of the colonizing states (Dizayi, 2019). Assimilation into white society and denial of black identity has far-reaching psychological consequences. Living under borrowed cultural circumstances or cultural conditions may result in dislocations (Mazama, 2001; Carr, 2016). Through suppressing the choices available to the colonized, colonialism demonstrated its fundamental dehumanization. *Black Skin, White Masks* is notable because it does not present a detached view of colonialism; instead, it elicits a direct response from black readers by asking them to act (Sikuade, 2012).

## 2.2. Postcolonial Theory and Homeschooling

From Fanon's perspective, African American families homeschooling their children in order to regain their cultural identity. Eurocentric norms and white supremacist ideologies create an oppressive educational environment for children of color (Angela Valenzuela, 2010, cited by Puga, 2019). In such learning environments, cultures and identities are fractured due to the formal and informative nature of education. This fracturing of identity, exacerbated by schools' habit of ignoring or marginalizing the culture and history of African American children (Mazama & Lundy, 2012), has a significant impact on young African Americans' judgments of their self-worth (Kirklin 1989, cited by Puga, 2019).

Public schools, therefore, to some extent, harm African American children's intellectual and emotional development. Research indicates that students' learning outcomes are often determined by their personal, peer, and staff relationships, as well as their perceptions of competence and culturally responsive learning environments, rather than by the emphasis placed by schools on exam-driven pedagogy (Wright, 2009). Consequently, African Americans have a challenging time protecting their children from damaging effects in schools (Fields-Smith & Wells-Kisura, 2013). African American parents have therefore increasingly chosen to remove their children from public schools and homeschool their children, in order to instill pride in their own culture and to develop a positive sense of self.

## 2.3. Through Critical Theory: Theory and understanding

Critical theory's primary objective is to identify what is wrong with today's repressive societal reality and to identify the most influential players who can contribute to its transformation while giving clear normative direction and achievable, practical objectives for society's liberation (Govender, 2020). Although Freire's critique in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is essentially educational, when considered as

a microcosm of society, Freire's pedagogy represents the oppressor-oppressed dialectic (Govender, 2020). As a complete practice of social liberation, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* provides a strategy for overcoming a situation of social oppression (Thomas, 2009). Critical theory seeks to abolish oppression, such as racism and classism, among others (Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002), as part of a broader effort to achieve social justice, equity and liberation (Thomas, 2009). Freire's critical theory, therefore, provides a broader context for examining the reasons for African Americans' withdrawal from public education and embrace of homeschooling.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire interrogates the themes of oppression, conscientization, humanity, the banking model of education, and problem-posing education. Freire argues that the banking model fails to develop the critical skills necessary to confront the existing social and political order, yet aims to maintain the organization of oppression and rule in society (Thomas, 2009). Education plays a crucial role in sustaining oppressive conditions and catalyzing changes toward a more liberal and democratic society. According to Freire (2009), the oppressed's conscientization of their oppression is not the sole significant result of problem-posing education. Since the oppressed are familiar with the oppressors' dominant methods, they must lead the process of social liberation and humanization (Freire, 2009). Freire suggests that problem-posing education can achieve this conscientization of the oppressed (Govender, 2020).

## 2.4. Critical theory and African Americans homeschooling

Freire states that education can never be value-neutral and is internally politicized (Freire, 2009; Riegel, 2001). Valuing non-dominant or peripheral cultures could undermine the prevailing social structure, resulting in systems of inequitable status (Keddie, 2012; Carr, 2016). Therefore, the public education system and its agents in the United States are seen as contributing to the continuation of racism and oppressive social structures (Mazama & Lundy, 2012). In the United States, education for children of school age allows for little discussion regarding race and class and even excludes such debate, under the assumption that the negative consequences of dehumanizing race-related behavior can be minimized if they are not acknowledged (Mazama & Lundy, 2012; Carr, 2016). Even as a means of silencing criticism, public schools teach a reduced perspective on democracy, obscuring the role of higher power mechanisms and the economic inequities experienced by racial minorities (Darder & Orelus, 2012). Thus, public education may be considered a mechanism that perpetuates racism and defends the interests of the white ruling class.

Homeschooling may be viewed as a liberating practice by African American families. African Americans' homeschooling highlights the effort and agency involved in identifying racial marginalization and institutional hegemony (Darder & Orelus, 2012). Eurocentrism has resulted in epistemic ide or the murder of knowledge among subjugated cultures (Santos, 2017). African American families have nevertheless worked to reclaim their children's intellectual development and conscientization through homeschooling. Conscientization can be maintained through homeschooling and serves as a means to access another potential source of knowledge within a counter-hegemonic framework (Santos,

2017). During this process, knowledge related to the liberation of African Americans is generated through an Afrocentric understanding. Afrocentrism is not the result of hegemony but, rather, heightens African Americans' awareness of oppression and emancipation (Kumah-Abiwu, 2016). Progressive students and educators may strive to expose hidden racism, but those who wish to preserve the status quo, especially the ruling class, may attempt to curb this endeavor (Darder & Orelus, 2012). However, this passion is critical to achieving revolutionary change, from Freire's perspective. While some opponents of homeschooling argue that it reinforces social injustice (Riegel, 2001), a reinterpretation of homeschooling as an act of protest creates a metaphorical connection channel between conventional educational beliefs and their critique. In this way, such protesting is a form of liberation (Puga, 2019).

### **3. Comparison between Postcolonial Theory and Critical Theory**

#### **3.1. Postcolonial Theory Advantages and Limitations**

Postcolonial theory, by challenging Eurocentrism and white supremacy in long-standing aspects of politics and culture, unavoidably addresses the deficiencies of dominant forms of knowledge about the world (Seth, 2013). This essay utilizes Fanon's concept to logically explain the educational challenges facing African American families. Moreover, postcolonial theory provides an extensive theoretical analysis of African American families' withdrawal from the public education system and acceptance of homeschooling.

Postcolonial theory provides a comprehensive explanation of African Americans' withdrawal from public education and subsequent adoption of homeschooling through the lens of race. Fundamentally, African Americans were at one point removed from their history and traditions and placed on the periphery of European civilization (Kumah--Abiwu, 2016). In a Eurocentric education system, African American children are viewed as the other and aggressively dehumanized by white supremacist institutions. This illustrates the unique challenges and difficulties African Americans face in the public-school system. Additionally, since postcolonial theory emphasizes colonized people's sense of self and cultural identity, African Americans' withdrawal from the American public-school system and favoring of homeschooling may be interpreted as an effort to preserve future generations' cultural identity. Homeschooling offers African American families the opportunity to learn about their own cultural history and traditions, thus promoting a positive sense of self.

Postcolonial theory, however, has certain limitations. The term "post" refers not to the period following the colonial era or the deconstruction of the West in terms of Eastern cultural theory, but to how that era shaped our world (Seth, 2013). Postcolonial reflection tends to focus on the authoritarian rule prevalent in the era under study (Dizayi, 2019), disregarding the history and experience of the colonized people; instead, it focuses on colonialism's aftermath. It provides critical analyses of certain cultural ideologies' hegemonic dominance and assimilation, but does not provide advice on how to oppose such dominance. Thus, postcolonial theory can only be viewed as a framework for examining the reasons behind African Americans' withdrawal from public education and homeschooling. Furthermore, while postcolonialism complements marginalized histories within the dominant

narrative, it cannot be applied or appreciated simply in this context (Bhambra, 2011). In order to critically approach the current situation, a more fundamental critique of Eurocentrism is required, one that moves beyond deconstruction or simple pluralism (Bhambra, 2011). Therefore, postcolonialism provides a context for African Americans to embrace homeschooling in order to instill a sense of self-worth in their children, but it cannot alter the white-centric structures of the current American educational system or racial inequality. Postcolonialism, as such, can be viewed as an interpretative theory.

#### **3.2. Critical Theory Advantage and Limitations**

Critical theory, as embodied in Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, provides an alternative perspective on African American families' acceptance of homeschooling through the lens of oppression and revolution. The acceptance of homeschooling by African Americans constitutes a protest against cultural hegemony.

Initially, Freire uses the concept of bank deposits as a metaphor for the position of oppressive society as a whole, stressing that education is inherently political and primarily serves the oppressor's interests (Freire, 2009). As a result of cultural Eurocentrism, public schools in the United States ignore the history of African Americans and leave them in a state of oppression and dominion, both mentally and culturally (Thomas, 2009). Since institutionalized educational systems could not be altered, homeschooling became the preferred educational method as a form of protest by African Americans. In addition, critical theory emphasizes the humanizing power of education and liberation, and that the purpose of education consists in empowering individuals to develop their own practices through their conscientization and understanding of the world (Freire, 2009). Based on Freire's critical theory, African Americans homeschool their children to cultivate conscientization and cultural pride. This acts as an emancipatory process intended to counteract the effects of cultural oppression by instilling an independent sense of humanity and identity into future generations.

Freire's critical theory, however, is not without its limitations. According to some critics, defining oppressed and oppressor in binary terms risks obscuring the complexity of power and dominance among contemporaneous and linked identities (Sanders, 2020). In other words, African American identity is not static, but is rather a dynamic process of change and contestation within power balances. This dynamic of change and equilibrium cannot be understood only through the lens of oppressor and oppressed, which disregards several other factors, such as gender and religion, among others. Furthermore, Freire's emphasis on groups, especially the oppressed and the oppressors, which he regards as homogeneous groups of people, overlooks the individual's distinctiveness and originality (Sanders, 2020). In other words, not every African American family chooses homeschooling based on racism or oppression, and nor does every African American family afflicted by racism or oppression withdraw from public schooling. This is another limitation of Freire's critical theory.

#### **3.3. Comparison and Argument**

African American parents may homeschool their children as a protest against racism and oppression. Both postcolonial theory and Freire's critical theory can be used to explain the

prevalence of homeschooling among African American families, as well as to analyse the theoretical foundations of this phenomenon in a way that can provide a more comprehensive understanding of African American homeschoolers.

Since both postcolonial and critical theories focus on marginalized people's sense of self, both use a dualistic framework to explain their ideas, but they differ in various ways, including their political and theoretical contexts (Kerner, 2018). First, postcolonial theory presents a diverse range of positions, concepts, and insights, including diverse and rich histories, oppression, and marginalization, which are helpful as a background, archive, and potential starting point for critically examining the practices of revolution and emancipation in critical theory (Kerner, 2018). Without postcolonial theory, critical theory's concepts of revolution and liberation would be devoid of historical foundations. Second, postcolonial theory is concerned with the social and political functions, impacts, and roles of theory and other modes of knowledge creation and, as such, encompasses a broad spectrum, a comprehensive approach that is unique to critical theory (Kerner, 2018).

Furthermore, postcolonial theory's critical reflections on history and reality demonstrate its critical nature. However, postcolonial theory acknowledges the historicity of knowledge without instrumentalizing it (Kerner, 2018). In this respect, postcolonial theory is an interpretative theory that lacks the revolutionary and liberating spirit of critical theory. As a result, postcolonial theory is a form of critical theory in and of itself to some extent, while simultaneously providing a historical and practical context for liberation and revolution as advocated by critical theory, which forms a symbolic reference to postcolonial theory.

Therefore, critical theory is a more practical approach to understanding the homeschooling movement among African American families. The racial injustice that African Americans experience in education in the United States is a societal problem that dates back to colonial times. According to Fraser (2005), culturally-based groups typically derive from a single culture, and one of the most common examples of such groups is the racial group. In contrast, political economy-based groups are those based on political economy, and the most prominent model for such groups is class (Gewirtz & Gribb, 2003). Even though race has had a more significant impact on Western political theory and practice than class has (Mbembe, 2003), history has been shaped by an ideology of class warfare (Kerner, 2018), and racism is also an essential element of this warfare (Darder & Orelus, 2012). Therefore, racism results from economic systems and hierarchical disenfranchisement (Carr, 2016). A discussion of race or even racism which does not acknowledge economic concerns or more profound class conflict is incorrect (Darder & Orelus, 2012). As Kerner (2018) argues, overcoming Eurocentrism will require increased attention to processes of racism and racial difference in critical social and political theory in the future. Critical theory, which has up until now placed a strong emphasis on class issues in terms of oppression, can be definitively pushed in this direction, and can also systematically make use of colonialism. Therefore, critical theory can provide more complete theoretical justification and support for African American families' movement towards homeschooling.

## 4. Conclusion

According to Nieto and Bode (2012), social justice is defined as a philosophy, a method and a way of life that emphasizes equity, decency, and charity towards all. However, global society is currently defined by global inequity, which poses an enormous challenge to the global community (Kerner, 2018). Social inequity is influenced by institutional, structural, sociocultural, political, and economic factors that are deeply rooted (Carr, 2016). Social justice and equity, thus, becomes a vital concept as a result of people's struggles against injustice and inequity through this process.

Although individual and community identities are shaped by education, social class relations, and various experiences, the history of recent times has made race and class inseparable and significant components of society's collective consciousness (Carr, 2016). In our society, such prominence is inextricably linked to the pursuit of greater social justice, equity, and democracy (Carr, 2016). From this sense, homeschooling among African Americans is not only a challenging but courageous attempt to reclaim their cultural identity, but also a form of protest against racial injustice and social oppression.

Despite this, the homeschooling undertaken by African Americans does not alleviate the fundamental problem of racism and oppression. Henry and Tater (2009, cited by Carr, 2016) conceptualize how racism is codified in democratic society. Educational institutions and laws are established from a white perspective, thus creating a normative, hegemonic foundation for society, causing racism and oppression to become normalized (Henry & Tator, 2009, cited by Carr, 2016). As a final point, democratic racism and oppression permits the acceptance of social inequity and injustice as common sense (Carr, 2016). Thus, one of the most important contemporary social challenges is that lawmakers, political leaders, educators, and other society leaders fail to accept the existence and consequences of racism and oppression (Dei, 2009). Due to this, education must become more inclusive, critical, and oriented toward solving social inequity across racial, socioeconomic, and other barriers (Carr, 2016). Furthermore, the future of the African American community depends on a concerted effort to effect structural change in order to ensure social and political inclusion and that exclusion and oppression will not recur in the future.

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