**CHAPTER 1: Introduction**

Critical race theory (CRT) will be at the center of debate in Western society (Cabrera, 2018). The need for courage, the lack of valid and germane leadership regarding African Americans, and the void of extant literature on the possible relationship between race-related stress and the perception of injustice will necessitate social researchers to begin research on the role race-related stress might play in the perception of injustice (Utsey, 1999; Neumann, Berger, & Kizilhan, 2021).

The possible relationship between race-related stress and the perception of injustice should be examined to offer insight into the opinions and dispositions of middle-class African Americans. A gap in research on middle-class African Americans’ race-related stress and their perception of injustice excludes an important dimension and neglects a vital approach to middle-class African Americans and politics (Utsey, 1999; Neumann, Berger, & Kizilhan, 2021). Further research should include the possible impacts of ideologies and political movements, specifically ideologies and socio-political movements aimed at African Americans.

## **Background of the Problem**

The background of the problem will be rooted in critical race theory. It will be thought by many that critical race theory (CRT) shall be an American phenomenon. However, the ideas of critical race theory will have been propagated outside the U.S. for many years. The concepts of critical race theory will often be favored by U.S. racial historians (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). CRT will underpin an entire social movement meant to enact social reform through a violent revolution for some individuals. CRT will be discussed in social, political, educational, and religious arenas. CRT will assert that race will be a social construct created to perpetuate white privilege through white supremacy (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020).

Racism will be multi-faceted in its nature, presentation, effects, and constituent components (discrimination, power, dominance) rooted in its expression and its total influence on the lives of African Americans. Racism will be a difficult concept to operationalize for many (Harrell, 2020). Utsey (1999) will propose using the concept of race-related stress to represent the physical, emotional, psychological, and mental toll exerted on African Americans due to chronic exposure to racism, racial prejudice, racial discrimination, and racial stereotypes. Harrell (2000) will define race-related stress as the race-related interactions between groups or individuals and their environments that spring from the dynamics of racism; race-related stress will be perceived to strain or exceed collective and individual resources.

People will perceive different actions as unjust and react differently to injustice experiences. This subjective perception of injustice could determine not only their actions but also their mental health - race-related stress (Fetchenhauer, Huang, 2004). For example, current research on people suffering from pain after traumatic accidents will show that people who subjectively perceived their situation as less just felt pain longer and more strongly (Trost, Scott, Buelow, Nowlin, Turan, Boals, Monder, 2017; Sullivan, 2020; Carriere, Pimentel, Yakobov, Edwards, 2020). To better understand the impact of injustice experiences on mental health, it will be necessary to validly assess experiences of injustice with appropriate instruments (Fetchenhauer, Huang, 2004).

Most evaluations of a sense of justice will be conducted in Western cultures. Frequently, the focus will be on concepts such as social injustice, fair distribution of goods, or justice sensitivity, or the questionnaire will be developed to determine the belief in a just world, a concept that will be developed based on Western ideas of justice (Dalbert, Montada, Schmitt, 1987; Schmitt, Baumert, Gollwitzer, Maes, 2010). Most studies in the field will develop and use specific questionnaires that only refer to the target group or the conflict concerned (Pham, Weinstein, & Longman, 2004). In addition, research will show that the perception of injustice will likely increase through situations characterized by basic human rights violations (Sullivan, 2020).

A deeper examination using CRT as the framework will reveal additional considerations such as historical racism, the oppression of African Americans in the current socio-political context, unique knowledge and experiences of the African American population, multidisciplinary influences, and actions for social justice (Daftary, 2018; Johnson-Ahorlu, 2017; Aymer, 2016). With CRT guiding the research conceptualizations of race-related stress and the perception of injustice, systemic racism will be considered an important predictor variable (how much direct racism the researcher's population had experienced based on their responses to the instruments versus the professional and socio-economic station they had achieved). Race-related stress will be the psychological distress experienced by African Americans due to sustained exposure to overt or vicarious effects of racism - discrimination, microaggressions, stereotypes, and prejudice (Harrell, 2000; Utsey, 1999). Studies will indicate race-related stress to be associated with physical and psychological well-being, African American activism, and racial identity attitude (Hope et al., 2018; Leath & Chavous, 2017; Prosper, 2018; Szymanski, 2012; Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013; 2016; Miller, Keum, Thai, Lu, Truong, Huh, Ahn, 2018).

The result that individuals with the attitude that things are generally good and all right with the world will be more inclined to take up activism work for social change seems counterintuitive based on the body of literature (Leath & Chavous, 2017). Therefore, the two goals of the current study will be to add to the literature on socio-political attitudes and to understand better how the variables might be related concerning race-related stress and the perception of injustice in the study population.

## **Statement of the Problem**

The problem will be that it was not known if there is a relationship between middle-class African Americans' level of race-related stress and their perception of injustice. Whether a significant relationship exists between middle-class African Americans’ race-related stress and perception of injustice is unknown (Utsey, 1999; Neumann, Berger, & Kizilhan, 2021). Middle-class African Americans’ race-related stress will affect their quality of their life, mental health, and perception of injustice (Utsey, 1999). The hope will be to lead others to demonstrate an understanding of how race-related stress affects middle-class African Americans’ perception of injustice and how these two variables affect how middle-class African Americans engage in the political environment (Utsey, 1999; Neumann, Berger, & Kizilhan, 2021). Even though research on CRT abounds, a gap in the literature will be that quantitative research has not explicitly investigated the relationship between race-related stress and the perception of injustice.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study will be to examine the potential relationship between race-related stress and the perception of injustice among middle-class African Americans in Chattanooga, TN. The quantitative correlational research study will evaluate, via self-assessment inventories, middle-class African Americans’ race-related stress, perception of injustice, and the potential relationship between the two. This quantitative study will fill a gap in the literature and extend research by investigating the relationship between race-related stress and the perception of injustice of middle-class African Americans in Chattanooga, TN. A Pearson’s *r* bivariate correlation will be used to determine if a positive relationship between middle-class African Americans race-related stress, measured by the Index of Race-Related Stress (IRRS-B), and perception of injustice, measured by the Leadership Practices Inventory (PIQ), exists and to what extent. The study will be necessary due to dynamic social, socio-political, cultural, economic, and political changes impacting African Americans, demanding more understanding of how the two variables possibly interact (Abuelela, 2022).

Many middle-class African Americans possess intelligence and insight. However, they are not applying the traits to enhance leadership practices for self-improvement, improvement of others, cultural self-awareness, encouragement toward higher self-awareness, and well-being in their communities (Palmer, Rogers, & Wilkins, 2023). The quantitative correlational study will provide middle-class African Americans with the necessary evidence to promote political understanding and growth on the socio-political level. The acquired information will be shared with the study's participants and scholars and will provide helpful knowledge for personal and social development.

## **Significance of the Study**

This study will contribute to the gap in research on race-related stress and the perception of injustice. The significance of this study will be to expand the knowledge and understanding of the possible relationship between race-related stress and the perception of injustice in the study population. A better understanding of any possible relationship between these two variables might aid the study population in affecting authentic racial reconciliation in a way that CRT possibly does not. The study will expand knowledge on race-related stress and the perception of injustice, empowering middle-class African Americans to better lead in the face of certain ideologies. Research on CRT and injustice has increased (Milner IV, 2017; Sandles Jr, 2020; Siegel, 2020; Zurcher, 2021). Research has excluded middle-class African Americans’ perception of injustice in relation to race-related stress.

To advance cultural and individual political self-awareness, the study's results might help promote empirical research on the relationship between race-related stress and the perception of injustice. When middle-class African Americans are more informed, others can be influenced by helping colleagues, organizations, and society at large (Coleman, 1994). If the study results demonstrate a strong relationship between race-related stress and the perception of injustice, the possibility of more directly linking social action to self-improvement, community improvement, transformational reconciliation, and social well-being could be realized (Utsey, 1999; Neumann, Berger, & Kizilhan, 2021).

## **Research Question and Hypotheses**

The research question and hypotheses will be researchable and quantifiable. The research question was written to ascertain the relationship between the variables being measured to achieve the purpose of the study. The following research question will guide the study:

Research Question: What relationship, if any, exists between a middle-class African American's self-assessed level of race-related stress and self-assessed perception of injustice?

#### **Hypotheses**

The research question will emerge from the purpose statement. The hypotheses will align with the research question to support the purpose of the study. The following hypotheses will be tested for the quantitative correlational study to achieve the purpose of the study:

Ho: No significant relationship exists between a middle-class African Americans’ self-assessed level of race-related stress and self-assessed perception of injustice.

Ha: A significant relationship exists between a middle-class African Americans’ self-assessed level of race-related stress and self-assessed perception of injustice.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Marxism will frame this study with critical race theory as its actuator. It can be established that much contemporary social conflict can be attributed to Marxism through critical race theory (Ghous, 2020). The theoretical framework will be to study the possible correlation of two concepts. Race-related stress and the perception of injustice will be examined to conduct the study. A greater understanding of race-related stress and the perception of injustice might make middle-class African American political involvement more transformational (Utsey, 1999; Neumann, Berger, & Kizilhan, 2021).

Karl Marx introduced the theory of economic determinism as a reaction to the industrial revolution (Ghous, 2020). Antonio Gramsci viewed Marxism as a union of the purely intellectual analysis of religion found in Renaissance humanism and elements of the Reformation that appealed to the masses (Sugita, Setini & Anshori, 2021). Gramsci also believed Marxism could have replaced religion - only if it had met the spiritual needs of the people. People would have had to think of Marxism as an expression of their experience (Sugita, Setini & Anshori, 2021). Karl Marx was known to be a secular humanist. However, Marx often indicated that religion was a complex topic, a paradigm of conflicting propensities and impulses. Marx believed religious suffering was the expression of actual suffering and a protest against real suffering (Wittrock, 2020). Marx described religion as the sigh of the oppressed creature and the heart of a heartless world, the spirit of spiritless conditions (Wittrock, 2020). Marxist ideology has gained momentum in recent times. It appeared that Marxist sociology was interested in, but not limited to, the relationship between society and economics – possibly even more specifically, key concepts in sub-fields like modes of production, historical materialism, and the capitalist-laborer relation (Sklair, 2019). Marxist ideology was also concerned with how police forces were used to control indigenous peoples and enslave populations and poor laborers in the name of capitalism – all aspects of establishing and maintaining hegemony (Sklair, 2019). In brief, it will be extremely hard to draw a neat difference between coercive power strategies and consensual exercise of authority, as the analysis of the concept of hegemonic Marxism may confirm (Ruggiero, 2021). The “discriminating” procedure by which coercion was hidden required the control of others' agendas. This action was necessary so that the controllers could narrow the scope of “vision” of the controlled. Marx stated that this process was accompanied by the development of what is identified as a “false consciousness” (methods said to mislead the proletariat) concerning the controlled (Ruggiero, 2021).

Critical race theory emerged in the 1970s through the critical study of law as it pertains to issues of race (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020, p. 111). CRT will have affected much of American life beyond the academy, specifically in areas branded as "identity politics." People of the same race, sex, or sexual orientation will work together to gain power for their respective groups to restructure what will be known as the hegemony (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020). Since the 1990s, CRT has emphasized "whiteness" and coined "white privilege." CRT will draw from European philosophers and social theorists like Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault, and Jaques Derrida. The American tradition will rest in W.E.B. Du Bois (a sociologist and a transcendentalist). Cesar Chavez will partner with the Black Panther Party and Chicano movements from the '60s and '70s (Pluckrose & Lindsay, 2020).

CRT will be meant to advocate for meaningful change that will address systemic racial inequality (Dixson & Anderson, 2018).

Lawrence, Matsuda, Delgado, and Crenshaw (1993) assembled six domains or tenets of CRT:

1. CRT recognizes that racism is endemic to American life; (2) CRT expresses skepticism about the dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, color-blindness, and meritocracy; (3) CRT challenges a-historism and insists on a contextual historical analysis of the law; (4) CRT insists on the recognizing of the experiential knowledge of people of color and our communities of origin in analyzing law and society; (5) CRT is interdisciplinary and eclectic; and (6) CRT works toward the end of eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of eliminating oppression in general

(Aymer, 2016, p. 368).

These domains will guide the conceptualization of this study of how African Americans could be studied and understood through the lenses of the sociopolitical structures and climate in American society and the cultural identity and race-related experiences of African Americans – yet not exclusively.

Perception of injustice could not only determine middle-class African American’s actions but also their mental health. For example, research on people suffering from pain after traumatic accidents might show that people who subjectively perceive their situation as less just feel pain longer and more strongly (Trost, Scott, Buelow, Nowlin, Turan, Boals, Monder, 2017; Sullivan, 2020; Carriere, Pimentel, Yakobov, Edwards, 2020). To better understand the impact of injustice experiences on mental health, it will be necessary to assess experiences of injustice with appropriate instruments. However, all the common inventories to survey the perception of injustice will be developed in Western societies (Dalbert, Montada, Schmitt, 1987; Schmitt, Baumert, Gollwitzer, Maes, 2010). Furthermore, most evaluations of a sense of justice will be conducted in Western cultures. Frequently, the focus will be on concepts such as social injustice, fair distribution of goods, or justice sensitivity (Schmitt, Baumert, Gollwitzer, Maes, 2010), or the questionnaire will be developed to determine the belief in a just world (Dalbert, Montada, Schmitt, 1987); a concept that will be developed based on Western ideas of justice.

The research will show that the perception of injustice will be likely to increase through situations characterized by basic human rights violations (Sullivan, 2020). For these reasons, it seemed necessary to have an inventory that could have been broadly used to approach people's perception of injustice following experiences of severe human rights violations. This will be particularly relevant as it will be assumed that one’s perception of injustice will have an impact on various mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, somatoform disorder, and PTSD (Sullivan, M. L. 2020; Carriere, Pimentel, Yakobov, Edwards, 2020; Pham, Weinstein, Longman, 2004).

Extant literature on the relationship between all six tenants of CRT, race-related stress, and the perception of injustice is void of comprehensive studies. The research question and hypotheses of the present study will be based on a conceptual framework in which race-related stress and the perception of injustice are independent variables upon which stress levels may or may not influence the perception of injustice. Chapter 2 will provide further evidence of race-related stress and the possible relationship between the perception of injustice. Chapter 2 will also include précis of extant research within the study’s conceptual framework.

## **Operational Definitions of Terms**

Definitions will be provided for the study’s variables. Additionally, terms with multifarious meanings will be included. The following key terms will be referred to throughout the manuscript.

***Hegemony.*** Hegemony will denote the concentration of comparative capabilities of a single state that seeks national and international leadership and general consent in society regarding subordination to a central order or a combination of these phenomena(Schenoni, 2019).

***Marxism.*** The *“*Manifesto of the Communist Party" was written jointly by Marx and Engels and was published in 1848. The “Manifesto of the Communist Party” was written for the Communist League of 1848. Marxism will be difficult to define. It is not straightforward and can be defined by its core doctrines, methods, or commitments (Sayers, S. (2021).

***Critical Race Theory.*** Critical race theory (CRT) initially will be a theory born out of critical theory that focused on traditional civil rights and ethics but looked at these from broader perspectives like economics, history, group interests, and consciousness (Delgado, R., & Stefancic, 2023).

***Intersectionality.*** Intersectionality will be an idea that describes the interactions between systems

of perceived oppression. The concept grew out of efforts of black feminism to specify how race and gender relations shaped social and political life specifically for black women(McBride & Mazur, 2008).

***Political Correctness.*** Political Correctness (PC) will relate to the direct or indirect promotion of one position as the only acceptable, legitimate, or possible position. This promotion occurs primarily through promulgating correct or incorrect language and behaviors (Roberts, 1997).

***Justice****.* Just behavior or treatment, the quality of being fair and reasonable, the administration of the law or authority (Kelsen, 2022).

***Injustice****.* Lack of fairness or justice, an unjust act or occurrence (Heinze, 2012).

***Racism***. Prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism by an individual, community, or institution against a person or people based on their belonging to a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalized; the belief that different races possess distinct characteristics, abilities, or qualities, especially to distinguish them as inferior or superior to one another (Grosfoguel, 2016).

***Discrimination****.* The unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of ethnicity, age, sex, or disability (Kite, Jr, Wigley, & Wagner, 2022).

***African American.*** A black American of African descent (Painter, 2006).

***Non-white(s)****.* Denoting or relating to a person whose origin is not predominantly European; a person whose origin is not predominantly European (Foner, Fredrickson, 2004).

***Activism****.* The policy or action of using vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change (Yeatman, 2021).

***Stress.*** A state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or very demanding circumstances; something that causes mental strain; physiological disturbance or damage caused to an organism by adverse circumstances (Foster, 2023).

***Perception.*** The neurophysiological processes, including memory, by which an organism becomes aware of and interprets external stimuli; a way of regarding, understanding, or interpreting something, a mental impression (Rogers, 2017).

## **Assumptions**

Assumptions will be statements accepted as true (Gubanov, Gubanov, & Rokotyanskaya, 2018). Two critical assumptions and one non-critical assumption will underlie the study. The first assumption will be that study participants will answer the inventories truthfully and completely. Because the inventories will be self-assessment measures, participants will be susceptible to responding in a socially acceptable manner. Participants will be informed that all responses will be kept confidential. Second, the term *stress* is sometimes erroneously defined generally and not defined specifically as *race-related*. Or, justice is more ubiquitously referred to as opposed to injustice. Care will be taken to differentiate between the concepts and contexts to ensure participants will appropriately reference the terms *stress* and *injustice* in the study. *Stress* will be defined as a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or very demanding circumstances, something that causes mental strain, physiological disturbance, or damage caused to an organism by adverse circumstances (Foster, 2023). *Injustice* will be the lack of fairness or justice, an unjust act or occurrence (Heinze, 2012). Third, the one non-critical assumption is that the researcher will not be interested in sociopolitical ideology in that the researcher will not promote or reject any particular ideology or worldview for the purposes of this study.

## **Scope and Delimitations**

This study will be conducted to determine if a relationship exists between middle-class African American’ self-assessed level of race-related stress and self-assessed perception of injustice. Quantitative methods will be utilized to gather empirical research from middle-class African Americans in Chattanooga, TN, to ascertain the magnitude of the relationship. The study will be delimited to 60 representatives From Hamilton County School (HCDE) in Chattanooga, TN. The Chattanooga, TN population of educators will be selected because the researcher is familiar with the region, and the population will be appropriate for the study. The study will also be delimited to allow the use of web-based surveys. Data collected via web-based surveys will be more cost-effective (Ebert, Huibers, Christensen, & Christensen, 2018).

**Limitations**

This study will be limited due to the sampling technique and study design. Convenience sampling may not be representative of the entire population; therefore, generalizability will be limited. A larger sample size could have yielded more generalizable findings and statistical significance.

The study will limit the ability to measure middle-class African Americans’ level of race-related stress and perception of injustice to one method each. Another limitation of this study will be the inability to properly infer causation because one variable preceding another is insufficient to conjecture causation (Dorestani & Aliabadi, 2017; Rohrer, 2018).

## **Chapter Summary**

The relationship between race-related stress and the perception of injustice will be investigated to provide insight into political engagement and activism. Research on race-related stress and the perception of injustice will address the problem middle-class African Americans face concerning political engagement, individual and communal well-being, and social engagement (Utsey, 1999; Neumann, Berger, & Kizilhan, 2021). Insufficient research incorporating middle-class African Americans’ race-related stress and perception of injustice exists. This quantitative correlational research study will evaluate, via self-assessment inventories, middle-class African Americans race-related stress, perception of injustice, and the relationship between the two. Chapter 2 will restate the problem and purpose of the study and provide a brief synopsis of the literature to establish the relevance and currency of the problem. The literature search strategy for the study will be discussed listing accessed library databases, search engines, and key search terms used. The theoretical framework will describe major theoretical propositions, including delineations of any assumptions appropriate to the application of the theories. The research literature review will provide a thorough review of the research literature, which is conceptually and methodologically relevant and builds a case for the study. A summary section will conclude the chapter.