

A PILOT STUDY ON FAITH AND FORTUITY: CONSIDERING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHURCH AND EDUCATION OUTCOMES IN AFRICAN AMERICANS

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ABSTRACT

The adverse effects of gentrification on Black churches in Washington, D.C., are a cause for concern, as renovating an area for higher-income residents displaces these institutions from their cultural and historical identities. This pilot study explores the relationship between churches and education in African American communities through symbolic interactionism theory. The pilot collected quantitative data on 156 participants' religious composition, religious activities, and educational attainment levels in different areas. Descriptive statistics were analyzed to examine the relationships among these variables. The study supports the hypothesis that African Americans residing near churches obtain higher educational outcomes. Furthermore, individuals with higher academic achievements were found to participate regularly in religious services or activities. As such, the study contributes to future research that promotes socioeconomics within the African American community through the targeted incorporation of religiosity.

KEYWORDS

gentrification; church closures; African Americans; symbolic interactionism theory; education

1. INTRODUCTION

Gentrification, the process in which an area undergoes renovation to cater to higher-income residents, is causing problems for Black churches in Washington, D.C. Churches are facing difficulty in maintaining their presence in areas that are being gentrified, leading to their displacement (Johnson 2022). Many church leaders claim that their communities are being pushed out of the area by rising housing costs, leading to a loss of churchgoers and financial instability. Additionally, limitations on parking spaces, noise pollution regulations, and zoning restrictions make it challenging for Black churches to function in gentrified areas. As a result, some churches have been forced to relocate to other areas or close altogether (Johnson 2022). This has added to the challenge of preserving the cultural and historical significance of Black churches in D.C. Organizations are struggling to provide support and resources to help maintain these churches in gentrified areas.

The current state of Black churches in African American communities is alarming, as they face disproportionately high levels of closure. A study released by the Brookings Institute revealed that during 2013-2019 New York City witnessed disproportionate numbers of church closures occurring in areas with high concentrations of African Americans (Ransome et al. 2022). A shocking number of these locations had previously served as COVID-19 testing sites. This demonstrates an unacceptable disparity among different races and highlights potential issues within urban healthcare access. As population changes, gentrification, and real estate pressures rise, the closure of churches is an increasingly common - yet profoundly impactful - occurrence. These closures mean that marginalized groups have fewer places to turn for health resources and community services in their time of need (Ransome et al. 2022). Not only does this threaten

access to healthcare and social services for many marginalized populations, but it also presents serious economic concerns that must be addressed through future research.

Symbolic interactionism theory suggests that churches and religious buildings are not just physical structures but also carry symbolic meanings and values (Smith & Bugni 2006, 123–55). According to this perspective, individuals interact with these spaces and objects, imbuing them with personal significance and understanding. For example, the cross or altar within a church may represent a deep spiritual connection to God for some individuals. The theory also emphasizes the role of language and communication in shaping these meanings, as individuals may negotiate and construct their ideas of what these religious symbols and spaces signify. This theory challenges scholars to consider how the physical and symbolic aspects of churches and religious buildings are inter-connected and shape a shared understanding and experiences of faith.

As such, this pilot study elucidates the relationship between churches and education in African American communities. This study collected quantitative data on participants' religious composition, religious activities, and educational attainment levels among African Americans in different areas. Descriptive statistics analyzed the relationships among these variables. This pilot study is not meant as a comprehensive study of the intricate relationship between religion and socioeconomics in the Black community. This work's findings and review of relevant literature can provide the groundwork for future research focusing on the determinants of educational outcomes among African Americans. A comprehensive examination of the complex interplay of religion and socioeconomic development has the potential to contribute significantly to shaping city planning and interventions that promote social equity, economic development, and educational attainment within the African American community through the targeted incorporation of religiosity.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Religious institutions have played a significant role in shaping the socioeconomic outcomes of African Americans who are affiliated with them. This literature review provides insights into the intricate relationship between these institutions and their surrounding community. These insights can support future research aimed at promoting the progress of religiously affiliated African Americans by identifying the factors that shape their experiences. It is essential to recognize the diversity within these groups, as different communities may face unique challenges and opportunities. Understanding the intricate interactions between religion and socioeconomic status is crucial for developing effective interventions and policies that advance these communities.

2.1. Theoretical Framework

Symbolic interactionism is a micro-level theoretical perspective that illuminates how society emerges from repeated individual interactions. It has roots in various areas, including Scottish Moralists and American Pragmatist philosophers, with George Herbert Mead (1934) being its greatest proponent. Symbolic interactionism responds to the mainstream perspectives on society; it rejects dominant positivist approaches that examine society from the "top-down," focusing on how macro-level institutions and social structures constrain individuals. Instead, symbolic interactionism examines the operation of society from the "bottom-up," studying micro-level processes that emerge during face-to-face encounters to explain the operation of society (Mead & Morris, 1934). Central to symbolic interactionists is the idea that individuals use language and significant symbols in communicating with others. Rather than the shared perspectives, symbolic interactionists concentrate on interpreting subjective viewpoints and how individuals make sense of their unique perspectives.

Symbolic interactionism emphasizes the role of symbols and interactions in shaping human behavior and society (Littlejohn & Foss 2021, p. 438). In the context of religion, symbolic interactionism theory posits that religious beliefs and practices are socially constructed and negotiated and significantly impact individual and collective behaviors and attitudes (Weaver & Agle 2002, pp. 77–97). David A. Snow, a renowned professor of sociology at the University of California, Irvine, has identified four fundamental principles that form the basis of symbolic interactionism. These principles include human agency, interactive determination, symbolization, and emergence. Symbolization is essential to these principles, as it underscores the role of meaning in shaping human behavior (Snow 2001, pp. 367–77). According to this principle, individuals assign meanings to various objects, influencing their behavior and decisions. As such, the study of symbolic interactionism is fundamentally concerned with understanding how people assign meaning to their environment and how this meaning shapes their actions and interactions.

Symbolic interactionism provides a unique lens through which human behavior can be understood in studying the complex dynamics between individuals in societal contexts. As Carter (2015) notes, this theoretical framework prioritizes the subjective meaning of interactions between individuals over any objective social structures that may also be at play. By honing in on these repeated, meaningful exchanges between people, symbolic interactionism can voice the nuances of human interaction that might be overlooked. Scholars can gain a deeper understanding of religious practices and beliefs and their impact on society by applying symbolic interactionism. Ultimately, the insights provided by symbolic interactionism offer a clear lens through which to explore the relationship between religion and socioeconomics.

2.2. Empirical Review

The significance of the role that religion plays in the lives of African Americans has been well-documented, with the church historically serving as a primary social institution and a source of support and comfort for Black communities (Billingsley 1992; Cone 1997; Lincoln & Mamiya 1990). However, empirical research on the determinants of socioeconomic outcomes in African Americans has typically neglected the influence of religion, giving rise to a need for investigating the effects of religious symbolic interaction on these outcomes among African American communities. The current state of the research field contains considerable work on the church's social, political, and cultural influence within African American communities (Ellison & Sherkat 1995; Paris 1995). However, more investigation into the potential impact of religion on educational outcomes is needed. While religion has been seen as a possible source of social capital, fostering trust and cooperation among church members (Putnam 2000), the connection to tangible economic and educational benefits remains underexplored.

One emerging hypothesis suggests that adults' religious involvement positively influences children's educational outcomes through social networks, parental involvement, and children's participation in church activities (Regnerus 2000, pp. 363–70). However, other researchers argue that the relationship between religious involvement and educational outcomes may be mediated or even obscured by other community-level factors, such as the strength of the local economy, the availability of support services for families, and local educational policies (Ellison & Henderson 2011; Jeynes 2003). A controversial debate within the research field concerns the potential role of religious denomination and group affiliation as mediating factors in determining the impact of religion on economic and educational outcomes. For instance, Pattillo-McCoy (1998, p. 767) has argued that African American congregations with a more middle-class orientation may demonstrate more favorable patterns of socioeconomic achievement compared to churches with predominantly working-class or poor parishioners. However, the complexity of religious identity makes it challenging to draw clear conclusions.

The empirical evidence on the effects of religion on socioeconomic outcomes is mixed, with some studies indicating positive, negative, or null effects. Some scholars argue that religious

beliefs and practices can promote socioeconomic well-being by fostering social capital, promoting moral values, and creating networks of trust and mutual support (Ebstyn King & Furrow 2004, pp. 703–13). Other scholars suggest that religion can also be a source of social conflict, inequality, and exclusion, mainly when used to legitimize certain power structures or justify discriminatory policies (Lichterman 2008). One empirical study that focuses on the relationship between religion and socioeconomic outcomes is the Pew Research Center's (2012) report on the “Global Religious Landscape.” This report examines the religious affiliations and practices of people worldwide and their attitudes toward social and economic issues. Some of the key findings of this report include the following:

1. Religious affiliation is strongly correlated with education and income levels, with Muslims and Hindus having lower education and income levels than Jews and Buddhists.
2. Religious affiliation is also related to attitudes towards gender roles, with Muslims and conservative Protestants having more traditional views of gender roles than Jews and Buddhists.
3. More religiously committed people (i.e., attend services regularly and pray more often) are more likely to support conservative social and economic policies, such as banning abortion or reducing welfare spending.

Another empirical study examining religion's effects on socioeconomics is “The Role of Religion in Economic Life” (2003, pp. 175–207) by Lisa Keister and Darren Sherkat. This study explores the relationship between religion and various economic outcomes, including income, wealth, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement. Some of the key findings of this study include the following: (1) Religion can be a source of social and economic capital, as religious networks and institutions often provide resources and support for entrepreneurs and community projects; (2) Religious beliefs and practices can also shape attitudes toward economic success and wealth accumulation. Some religions emphasize the importance of hard work and material success as a sign of divine favor. However, religion can also be a source of social conflict and inequality, mainly when used to justify discriminatory practices or reinforce existing power structures.

Overall, the insights provided by symbolic interactionism offer a clear lens through which to explore the intricate relationship between religion and socioeconomics. Empirical research suggests that religion can have both positive and negative effects on economic outcomes, depending on various factors such as the level of religious commitment, the type of religion, and the social and cultural context in which it operates. To fully understand the complex relationship between religion and socioeconomics, further research is needed that considers these various factors and their interplay.

2.3. Symbolic Interaction Theory and Architecture

Smith & Bugni (2006, pp. 123–55) investigates the relationship between architecture and the social interactions that occur around buildings. Within this context, the authors discuss the topic of churches and socioeconomics. The study argues that the design of a church can communicate powerful symbolic messages to the surrounding community. For example, the grandiose architecture of a church can imply a sense of wealth and status. This may be particularly relevant in neighborhoods with high levels of socioeconomic inequality. In such areas, churches may be designed to project an image of prosperity and power, potentially serving as a source of societal legitimization for the dominant class.

On the other hand, designing a more humble and welcoming church space can promote a sense of community and belonging. These spaces may communicate a message of acceptance and inclusiveness, aiming to foster a sense of unity and social harmony. Smith & Bugni emphasize the need for architects to pay closer attention to the symbolic dimensions of their designs. Additionally, they call for sociologists to incorporate architecture as an important field of study

within symbolic interactionism. They argue that by understanding the symbolic dimensions of architectural design, architects and sociologists can work together to create more inclusive and socially just built environments.

2.4. The Black Church as a Symbol

Angela Calhoun-Brown (2022, pp. 169–74) explores the crucial role that the church played in the nonviolent protests of the Civil Rights Movement. Calhoun-Brown notes that the church served as both a spiritual and organizational center for the movement, providing a moral framework for nonviolent resistance and serving as a hub for organizing and mobilizing activists. Through archival sources and interviews with participants in the movement, the author highlights how the church provided necessary resources and support for activists. This support varied from providing training in nonviolence to offering safe spaces for organizing and planning protests. The author also discusses how the church's involvement in the Civil Rights Movement was not without tension and conflict. While many churches supported the movement, some were wary of political involvement, and others saw nonviolent tactics as insufficient in the face of violent opposition. Overall, Calhoun-Brown argues that the church played a crucial role in the Civil Rights Movement, transforming the political landscape of the United States.

Key publications suggest that the church has played a significant role in the African American community, symbolizing hope, resilience, and empowerment. Taylor et al. (1987, pp. 123–38) emphasizes the historical and contemporary impact of the church on the social, economic, and political development of black communities. When it comes to the impact of the church on Black American life, there is no denying its profound influence. Over the years, the church has played a key role in shaping Black communities' social, economic, and political fabric. From slavery to the Civil Rights movement, the church has been a steadfast pillar of strength for many African American individuals and families. Scholars such as Drake and Cayton, Frazier, Morris, Woodson, and Young have all documented the crucial role that the church has played in African American history. One of the reasons the church has been so important to Black Americans is because it has often been one of the only institutions they could rely on in times of crisis. Whether for spiritual guidance, social support, or political empowerment, the church has been there every step of the way.

Giger et al. (2008, pp. 375–83) and Samuels (2011) highlight the role of the church in improving the health status of African Americans, particularly the underserved aged population. However, this overlooked influence could be a critical factor in improving the health of African Americans (Samuels 2011). Healthcare practitioners, including nurses, are now realizing that the church is vital in optimizing the health status of individuals in the African American community. In recognizing the historical lack of access to quality health care for African Americans, it becomes clearer how essential the church's involvement is (Giger et al. 2008, pp. 375–83). By offering health care services within the church and promoting a culture of health, the African American church is uniquely positioned to improve its congregations' overall health status.

The literature asserts that positive interactions accessible through religious buildings can assist in shaping individuals' identities and behaviors. Based on this assertion, the present study investigates the potential relationship between religious engagement and educational status among African Americans. Specifically, the study addresses the research questions: Is there a relationship between living near a church or religious building and increased educational achievement for African Americans? Does this relationship strengthen when considering the regularity of religious activities or services individuals attend?

3. RESULTS

The findings support the hypothesis that African Americans residing near a church or other religious buildings would have higher educational outcomes than those who do not live near a church. This hypothesis stems from the symbolic interactionism theory, which highlights the importance of social interactions and symbols in shaping identities and behaviors. Through these interactions, individuals are exposed to positive role models and are encouraged to prioritize education and pursue their goals. While more research is needed to understand the relationship between religious buildings and educational outcomes fully, these findings offer a glimmer of hope for those seeking to improve educational outcomes for African American youth.

Table 1 and **Table 2** provide the results of the multiple linear regression for the variables proximity to a church or religious building and education outcomes in African Americans. The Model Summary provides the R² and adjusted R² and the standard error of the estimate, which can be used to determine how well a regression model fits the data. A moderate level of prediction, as shown by an R-value of 0.256, is neither exceptionally good nor exceptionally poor. The R² value of 0.66 indicates that the in-dependent variables explain 66% of the variation in the dependent variable, which is significant. This value can help better understand the strength and significance of the model's relationship between the dependent and independent variables. The ANOVA results in Table 2 show that the independent variables statistically significantly predict the dependent variable, $F(1, 154) = 10.798, p < .001$.

The previous finding suggests a potential relationship between proximity to religious buildings and educational outcomes for African Americans. The hypothesis that this relationship strengthens when considering the regularity of religious activities or services attended is supported. Frequencies and percentages are presented in **Table 3**. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for Q7 "How often do you participate in religious activities or attend religious services?" split by Q3 "What is the highest level of education you have attained?" The most frequently observed category of Q7 within the Less than high school category of Q3 was Less than once a month ($n = 2, 40.00\%$).

The most frequently observed category of Q7 within the High school diploma or GED category of Q3 was Every week ($n = 12, 34.29\%$). The most frequently observed category of Q7 within the Some college or Associate's degree category of Q3 was Never ($n = 17, 30.36\%$). The most frequently observed categories of Q7 within the Bachelor's degree category of Q3 were Every month and Never ($n = 12, 26.09\%$). The most frequently observed category of Q7 within the Graduate degree (e.g., Master's, Ph.D., etc.) category of Q3 was Every week ($n = 7, 50.00\%$). These findings spotlight the importance of community and faith in fostering educational success for African American individuals. It is an encouraging indication that more research can be conducted better to understand the relationship between faith and educational achievement.

Table 1. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.256 ^a	.066	.059	.95915
a. Predictors: (Constant), How close do you live to a church or other religious building?				
b. Dependent Variable: What is the highest level of education you have attained?				

Table 2. ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	9.934	1	9.934	10.798	.001 ^b
Residual	141.675	154	.920		
Total	151.609	155			
a. Dependent Variable: What is the highest level of education you have attained?					
b. Predictors: (Constant), How close do you live to a church or other religious building?					

Table 3. Frequency Table

Variable	Q3					
	Less than high school	High school diploma or GED	Some college or Associate's degree	Bachelor's degree	Graduate degree (e.g., Master's, Ph.D., etc.)	Missing
Q7						
Every day	1 (20.00%)	4 (11.43%)	10 (17.86%)	6 (13.04%)	1 (7.14%)	0 (0.00%)
Every week	1 (20.00%)	12 (34.29%)	16 (28.57%)	7 (15.22%)	7 (50.00%)	0 (0.00%)
Every month	1 (20.00%)	6 (17.14%)	8 (14.29%)	12 (26.09%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)
Less than once a month	2 (40.00%)	4 (11.43%)	5 (8.93%)	9 (19.57%)	5 (35.71%)	0 (0.00%)
Never	0 (0.00%)	9 (25.71%)	17 (30.36%)	12 (26.09%)	1 (7.14%)	0 (0.00%)
Total	5 (100.00%)	35 (100.00%)	56 (100.00%)	46 (100.00%)	14 (100.00%)	0 (100.00%)

4. METHODOLOGY

Symbolic interactionism has long been mischaracterized as a perspective that re-jects quantitative research. However, research by Jeffery T. Ulmer and M.S. Wilson (2003, pp. 531–52) reveals that the rich conceptual tradition of symbolic interactionism allows for extensive use of quantitative data and statistical analysis within pragmatist epistemology. The principled, critical use of quantitative research can strengthen the perspective rather than weaken it. Researchers can use quantitative data and methods to address six core symbolic interactionist concerns: frequency, meaning, variation, comparisons, situations, contexts, and probability. This approach is particularly beneficial when combined with qualitative data, highlighting the versatility of the symbolic interactionist approach within research. The methodology employed in the present study involved conducting a multiple linear regression analysis to examine the relationship between proximity to a church or religious building and education outcomes in African Americans. To accomplish this, data was collected from a randomized sample of 156 participants, while limited in size, provided a preliminary basis for understanding the relationship between the variables of interest. Respondents were asked the following questions via an online questionnaire: (1) What is your age? (2) What is your gender? (3) What is the highest level of education you have attained? (4) Which religious denomination do you identify with? (5) How close do you live to a church or other religious building? (6) How often do you participate in religious activities or attend religious services?"

Regression analysis was used to examine how the independent variable of proximity to a church or religious building predicted the dependent variable of education outcomes in African Americans. This test was chosen because it is an appropriate statistical measure for assessing the strength of the relationship between an outcome variable and predictor variables. The degree to which the model fits the data was evaluated by examining the R² and adjusted R² values, which indicated the proportion of variation in the dependent variable that the model could explain. Further assessment of the model's predictive power was conducted using ANOVA analysis, which examined the statistical significance of the independent variables in relation to the dependent variable. The independent variable was an ordinal measurement with three response options: Within 5 Miles, Within 10 Miles, More than 10 Miles. This approach allowed for the determination of whether the independent variables, namely proximity to a church or religious building, significantly predicted the dependent variable of education out-comes in African Americans.

Additional data analysis involved the calculation of frequencies and percentages for each level of educational attainment and frequency of religious service attendance. Their highest educational attainment was categorized into five groups: Less than high school, High school diploma or GED, some college or Associate's degree, Bachelor's degree, and Graduate degree (e.g., Master's, Ph.D., etc.). Participants were also asked to indicate their frequency of religious service attendance through a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "Every day" to "Never." The frequencies and percentages were calculated separately for each education bracket, which allowed for an analysis of the relationship between educational attainment and religious participation.

5. DISCUSSION

Hunter (2022, pp. 246) explores the physical buildings that became homes for the people and hosts of their events, highlighting the design and construction of church houses as an exercise of creating architectural placemaking and defining and applying the term “sacred space.” For African Americans, the church has been the focal point of their communities for centuries. It is where they gather to worship, socialize, and engage in activism. However, what about the actual buildings that house these important events? We often do not think about the architecture of these buildings or how they reflect the community’s values and culture. Black churches were more than just places of worship; they served as symbols of strength and resilience for a community that had endured unimaginable hardship. What is fascinating is how enslaved and free persons of color were able to construct these buildings, which became the cornerstones of their lives. From the late 18th century to the present, Black churches have been creating architectural placemaking, defining “sacred space,” and providing the physical embodiment of faith, resilience, and hope (Hunter 2022, p. 246).

A church’s physical location can significantly impact educational outcomes, especially for African Americans. This study found that those who lived within five miles of a church or other religious building within their residential neighborhoods were more likely to have completed high school and college than those who lived further than ten miles from a church or other religious building. The pilot study’s findings suggest that physical location matters regarding educational success for African Americans. One possible explanation is that individuals are more likely to be involved in church-sponsored activities and programs promoting education when a church is located within the community. African Americans who lived within five miles of a church had access to resources, support, and social networks that could have contributed to their academic achievements. Additionally, churches can serve as safe spaces for young people to spend their time away from negative influences, thus limiting their chances of becoming involved in risky behaviors. Many churches offer mentorship programs where young people can connect with older, more mature individuals who can provide guidance and support for their education and overall development.

Another reason proximity to a church is important for African Americans is the strong sense of community that permeates the church culture. Churches often center on community activities such as food drives, health initiatives, and other community-based programs. These activities foster connections between individuals and strengthen relationships, creating a sense of accountability and responsibility toward educational success. Furthermore, churches offer a platform for civic engagement and advocacy. Through church-sponsored programs such as voter registration drives, African Americans can become more politically active and better equipped to advocate for policies that promote educational equity, providing resources and opportunities to their community.

The findings presented in Table 3 shed light on the relationship between educational attainment and religious participation. Individuals from a range of educational backgrounds were asked to respond to Q7, which inquired about the frequency of participation in religious activities or attendance at religious services. Interestingly, the results reveal that respondents with higher educational attainment reported higher frequencies of participation. Specifically, Less than once a month was the most commonly selected response among individuals without a high school education. This result indicates that individuals with lower educational

attainment are less likely to participate in religious activities or attend religious services regularly. In contrast, respondents with a high school diploma or GED generally responded with Every week. This finding suggests that individuals with a high school education or GED are more likely to engage in regular religious practices.

However, respondents with Some college or an Associate's degree had contrasting results, with Never being the most popular response. This result indicates that individuals with some college education may experience a decline in religious participation, perhaps indicating a shift towards secularism or a detachment from traditional religious practices. It is worth noting that the reasons for this may vary, and further exploration is necessary to understand the relationship between higher education and declining religious participation. Interestingly, respondents with Bachelor's degrees most often selected Every month or Never, while those with Graduate degrees primarily chose Every week. This finding suggests that individuals with higher levels of educational attainment may have more nuanced relationships with religion, with some choosing to participate at a moderate level. In contrast, others engage in regular religious practices.

Overall, the results of this study suggest that the relationship between educational attainment and religious participation is complex and warrants further exploration. Higher educational attainments are associated with more frequent participation in religious activities or services. However, other factors, such as cultural background, may also shape an individual's relationship with religion. Future studies should consider these factors to develop a more nuanced understanding of this relationship. It is important to note that this study has some limitations that should be considered. For instance, the study only provides preliminary evidence. Future research could consider controlling for individual and neighborhood characteristics in a larger sample size to further elucidate the link between religion and educational outcomes in the African American community. Secondly, the survey was designed to capture only quantitative data on education outcomes. As such, it did not account for important contextual and socioeconomic factors that may influence the relationship between denominational affiliations and education outcomes.

While these findings may be limited due to the pilot study's sample size, they raise important questions about the intersection of faith and societal structures. How much of an impact do these beliefs have on our economic circumstances? Furthermore, how might education outcomes shape religious beliefs and practices? Therefore, further re-search with a larger sample of African Americans is warranted to understand better the associations between religious affiliations, education outcomes, and income. Nonetheless, this study highlights the potential role of religion in promoting educational success and mitigating economic disparities in the African American community. African Americans who live near a church can more easily participate in after-school programs, tutoring services, mentorship programs, and community-based initiatives such as voter registration drives. These resources, support, and social networks can help children grow and excel academically and safeguard their educational future. As such, churches must be strategically located within residential areas to help promote equity among African American communities.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Black churches continue to face disproportionate closures. The literature suggests that church closures in African American communities are a cause for concern, as these institutions serve as a vital resource for marginalized groups. Symbolic interactionism theory offers a promising framework for understanding the relationship between religion and socioeconomics. Additionally, it provides valuable insights into how religious beliefs and practices shape attitudes toward issues such as education, income, gender roles, and social and economic policies. Empirical studies have examined the relationship between religion and various economic outcomes, including income, wealth, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement, providing insights into how religious beliefs and practices can shape attitudes toward educational achievement and wealth accumulation.

In closing, this pilot study has shed light on the relationship between religion and socioeconomics in African American communities. The findings suggest that living near a religious building could positively influence educational outcomes for African American individuals. The study also underscores the importance of community and faith in fostering educational success within the African American population. This research is a starting point for future studies exploring the complex relationship between religion and socioeconomic development in minority communities. A comprehensive investigation that controls individual and neighborhood characteristics could provide deeper insights into this relationship. By understanding the functions of religious spaces and their impact on the African American community, city planners and policymakers can take targeted steps to improve social equity, economic development, and educational attainment. Investing in the education and economic growth of a community yields greater benefits for the economy than constructing exclusive, high-cost buildings that only a small percentage of individuals can afford to access. By prioritizing the development of a knowledgeable and prosperous population, we can create a more sustainable and equitable society.

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