SECTION II

COVID-19 and Institutions

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3. "God Is in Control": Race, Religion, Family, and Community during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Most research on COVID-19 and the black community focuses on health disparities (Dorn, Cooney, and Sabin 2020; Laster Pirtle 2020; Poteat et al. 2020; Yancy 2020). Fewer studies, however, consider how COVID-19 influences other aspects of their lives. This study examines the pandemic through the lens of race and religion.

Literature suggests the indelible role of religion for blacks (Barnes 2012; Du Bois [1903] 2003; Frazier 1964; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). Often differing in theologies and intensity, religion is also important to whites (Chaves 2004; Chaves et al. 1999; Pew Research Center 2014). Yet the COVID-19 pandemic has upended regular religious practices that are intrinsically and extrinsically important to adherents. This mixed-methodological, multigenerational case study is informed by a socioecological lens (Bronfenbrenner 1977, 1979, 1986), in-depth interviews, empirical data, and bivariate and content analyses. I focus on Christianity as the prevalent faith tradition in the United States (Chaves 2004) as well as on blacks and whites given their diverse histories of religious expression. Moreover, given the paucity of research on the black experience, the lives of a specific black family, the Marshalls (a pseudonym), are referenced to contextualize the following queries: How is COVID-19 influencing religion for white and black Christians? What are religious concerns and responses to the pandemic and do they vary by race? Findings will have scholarly and practical import to better understand how these two groups are navigating the pandemic.

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COVID-19 and Comparisons between Blacks and Whites

As a result of COVID-19, blacks are more likely to lose both their lives and their livelihoods (Boesler and Pickert 2020; CDC 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d; McNicholas and Poydock 2020). Findings by Yancy (2020) show that for majority-black counties in the United States, the infection and death rates are more than three- and six-times higher, respectively, than in predominantly white counties. Laster Pirtle (2020) details how racial capitalism fuels the pandemic by exacerbating existing racial inequities including historic, unaddressed inequality; homelessness; residential segregation; coexisting medical conditions; medical bias; and lack of access to requisite resources. Blacks who are poor, female, and/or disabled are even more vulnerable (American Psychological Association 2020; Gordon et al. 2020; Laurencin and McClinton 2020). Hardeman et al. (2020, n.p.) succinctly charge the following:

> Black communities bear the physical burdens of centuries of injustice, toxic exposures, racism, and white supremacist violence. . . . Racism is productive. . . . Any solution to racial health inequities must be rooted in the material conditions in which those inequities thrive. Therefore, we must insist that for the health of the black community and, in turn, the health of the nation, we address the social, economic, political, legal, educational, and healthcare systems that maintain structural racism. Because as the COVID-19 pandemic so expeditiously illustrated, all policy is health policy.

This summary suggests differential prevalence and effects of COVID-19 based on race and related factors (Poteat et al. 2020). However, religion has mitigated the full impact of certain negative outcomes for blacks in the past. Is this the case when COVID-19 is considered, and will outcomes and experiences differ for whites?

Socioecological Framework

A socioecological theoretical framework combines aspects of sociology and ecology to examine environmental factors that are historic and structural across time. Ecological theory suggests that individual and collective histories, social institutions, societal values, norms, systemic forces, and social networks influence individual behavior (Bronfenbrenner 1977, 1979, 1986). Ecology helps frame the pandemic's context and the Marshalls' place in it. A sociological lens is employed to consider the influence of religion, broadly defined, on beliefs and behavior based on race (Barnes 2005, 2012; Billingsley 1992; Chaves 2004; Du Bois [1903] 2003; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). This multidisciplinary

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framework provides a lens to assess whether and how space and place matter when assessing religion and race during the COVID-19 pandemic [see Barnes and Blanford-Jones (2019) for details on this framework].

Data Collection

This project reflects a multigenerational case study about the effects of COVID-19 on three generations of a thirteen-person black family. A case study design is intentionally used rather than a survey or larger sample to perform an in-depth analysis about a specific black family, the Marshalls. The objective is not generalizability, but rather to allow this family's experiences to provide the ecological context for a broader study of race and religion during the pandemic (Yin 2017). The Marshalls consist of a matriarch (a widow), her children (four daughters and a son), and their seven children (two of whom are minors). Six of the seven grandchildren currently reside with their parents. This specific black family was chosen because multiple generations exist; each family member resides in a pandemic *hotspot* (i.e., a densely populated city in New York, Indiana, Georgia, and Illinois with a disproportionate percentage of COVID-19 cases and deaths among blacks); their profiles are diverse in terms of age, place of residence, education, and occupation; and, as these results suggest, many of their experiences illumine ways COVID-19 can be understood through the lens of race, religion, family, and community. The Marshalls were identified and recruited by community partners of the researcher. Individuals were not provided a monetary incentive to participate in this study.

Findings are based on quantitative and qualitative data. National statistics on the pandemic's effects by race as well as secondary academic and mainstream sources provide the backdrop for an examination of the virus' impact on the Marshalls. The qualitative analysis is based on in-depth interviews captured during May–June 2020. The sample (n = 11) consists of six females (ages 20–78 years old) and five males (ages 22–39 years old) (mean age of 41.5 years old). The family's educational portrait is as follows: some college (four persons); associate's degree (one person); bachelor's degree (one person); master's degree (four persons); and doctor of education degree (one person). Each person lives in a COVID-19 hotspot: Georgia (five persons); Indiana (four persons); Illinois (one person); and New York (one person). The rapidity of the pandemic's effects in the United States fostered the relatively short data collection period. Interviews lasted between thirty and ninety minutes and were audiotaped and transcribed by this researcher. Second interviews were performed with two family members to clarify several responses. In addition to individual and

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family demographics, a total of ten questions were posed to gather data about life before and during COVID-19; religious, academic, and employment experiences; beliefs about COVID-19; and strategies to navigate the pandemic.

Analytical Approach

During the qualitative phase, content analysis was used to identify the most common themes in the Marshalls' comments (Krippendorf 1980; Neuendorf 2002). Interview results were reviewed by hand by this researcher using two primary processes: open-coding, in which broad concepts were labeled and categorized, and axial coding, in which connections between common words were made and possible themes were determined. Line-by-line coding was used to identify frequently used language across family members (for example, pandemic-related experiences). This step differs from the earlier stage in its focus on longer phrases rather than on individual words. This process was continued in order to capture and confirm the most common patterns in these phrases. Representative quotes were also identified during this phase. Validity and reliability are not common criteria for qualitative analyses, yet the multiple analytical steps provide confidence in the recurring concepts and themes. The quantitative analysis (table 3.1) was based on national data by race collected from the *Atlantic*'s Racial Data Tracker (RDT) on May 21, 2020, which had been last updated at 3:13 p.m. that day (COVID Tracking Project 2020). The table compares percentages of infections and deaths for blacks and whites in select states where the Marshalls reside. The RDT also indicates when a percentage likely represents a racial/ethnic disparity. The RDT tracker flags a group's case or death proportion as suggestive of racial/ethnic disparity when it meets three criteria: (1) is at least 33 percent higher than the census percentage of the population; (2) remains elevated whether cases/deaths with unknown race/ethnicity are included or excluded; and (3) is based on at least thirty actual cases or deaths. I include these specific COVID-19 statistics because they provide the actual ecological context in which the Marshalls were living during their interviews. Statistical results, emergent themes, thick descriptions, and representative quotes are provided next (pseudonyms are used).

Contemporary COVID-19 Statistics in the United States by Race

Table 3.1 shows that blacks make up 14 percent of the population in Illinois but represent 27 percent of COVID-19 cases and 31 percent of COVID-19 deaths. Thus, blacks in Illinois experience almost twice as many cases and more than twice as many deaths compared to their population presence. Indiana reports

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TABLE 3.1: Selected states and the percentage of cases and deaths where race/ethnicity is reported

State	Cases that include race/ ethnicity data (%)	Deaths that include race/ ethnicity data (%)	Race	State population (%)	Reported cases (%)	Reported deaths (%)
Indiana	79	93	Black/AA	9	18*	16*
			White	84	58	70
Georgia	74	98	Black/AA	31	46*	49*
			White	52	34	44
New York	0	91	Black/AA	14	Not reported	25*
			White	55		34
Illinois	75	99	Black/AA	14	23*	31*
			White	61	27	43

Notes: The *Atlantic*'s Racial Data Tracker (COVID Tracking Project 2020). The tracker flags a group's case or death proportion as suggestive of racial/ethnic disparity when it meets three criteria: (1) is at least 33% higher than the census percentage of population; (2) remains elevated whether we include or exclude cases/deaths with unknown race/ethnicity; and (3) is based on at least thirty actual cases or deaths. Figures accessed at 3:13 p.m. on May 21, 2020. AA = African American.

*Percentage likely represents a racial/ethnic disparity.

that blacks make up 9 percent of the state population but represent 18 percent of COVID-19 cases and 16 percent of COVID-19 deaths, demonstrating that blacks in Indiana experience twice as many cases and almost twice as many deaths compared to their population presence. In Georgia, blacks make up 31 percent of the population but 46 percent of COVID-19 cases and 49 percent of COVID-19 deaths. New York state, which includes the onetime pandemic epicenter New York City, reports that blacks make up 14 percent of the state's population but 25 percent of COVID-19 deaths. Overall, in the states listed in table 3.1, blacks are contracting COVID-19 at disproportionately higher rates as compared to their population presence, and these patterns likely reflect racial and ethnic disparities. But how do the experiences of the Marshalls as residents in these hotspots inform us about US trends around race and religion more broadly?

Navigating the COVID-19 Pandemic: Voices and Experiences

Narratives from the Marshalls and secondary sources suggest the following three themes about race and religion during the COVID-19 pandemic: (1) To meet or not to meet: corporate worship and loss of social support during COVID-19;

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(2) "It's my right": COVID-19 and heightened civil religion; and (3) This too will pass: religion as a pandemic mediator. The first theme focuses on tensions reconciling congregational gathering with social distancing edicts. The second theme considers how Christianity is being appropriated because of the pandemic in the form of civil religion. The final theme highlights usage of Christian tenets and practices to negotiate the pandemic.

THEME 1. TO MEET OR NOT TO MEET: CORPORATE WORSHIP AND LOSS OF SOCIAL SUPPORT DURING COVID-19

Corporate worship is a fundamental Christian practice (Chaves 2004; Du Bois [1903] 2003; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). The Black Church (I capitalize this term only when referencing the collective and otherwise use *black churches*) has historically been a safe haven and the central place for communal gathering, social support, and community action for blacks (Barnes 2005, 2008; Billingsley 1992; Frazier 1964; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). Yet the CDC reports that such congregating can trigger a chain of COVID-19 transmission (2020c). Theme 1 focuses on how some Christians have responded to being unable to congregate and differences based on race. Constance, a seventy-seven-year-old retired service provider with an AS in sociology and the Marshall family matriarch, expresses a common concern: "I can't go to church to meet other people and go to Bible study. And I help with the kids. I miss most being able to come together, just seeing people and talking to them. Now we have to take communion at home. You call them little things, but they are still important. . . . You have to look at Zoom for preaching, the Bible class and activities with the kids all happen on Zoom. You can't even go to the building."

Although the digital footprint of some black churches is low, Constance's church provides virtual worship (Carrega and Brown 2020). She notes both the possible spiritual and practical benefits of church attendance regardless of race, gender, class, and their intersection (Chaves 2004); however, online alternatives pale in comparison. Corporate worship fortifies many blacks against racial disparities and provides sanctuary against an often-unwelcoming society (Barnes and Blanford-Jones 2019; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). From an ecological perspective, the Black Church is considered one of the most important protective mechanisms for both black families and children (Billingsley 1992). Yet they are unable to experience this same support to combat COVID-19. As Keith, a fifty-two-year-old business administrator in Illinois with an MBA, explains, "My mind races now—church used to help calm me down. I'm worried about a lot—my Mom, who's recovering from a heart attack, COVID-19, and now George Floyd. He represents all those black people who have been killed—going back

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to Emmett Till. . . . I've been stopped by cops too many times to remember. I pray for the protesters every day. Sometimes I think, if Rona doesn't get us, the cops will."

For Keith, church attendance helped him process the myriad challenges he faces as a black man; this loss of social support has resulted in emotional and psychological trauma. At present, he is attempting to reconcile, alone, an oppressive past (i.e., murders from Emmett Till to George Floyd) and current problems (i.e., COVID-19 and police brutality) that are disproportionately impacting the black community as well as his own family concerns (i.e., his mother's health) (Brown et al. 1990; Chen 2020; Hardeman et al. 2020; Hubler and Rojas 2020). Yet tensions exist about invisible (i.e., *Rona*, shorthand for the coronavirus COVID-19) and visible (i.e., racist police and concerns for protestors) dangers he believes blacks continually face (Gordon et al. 2020; Laster Pirtle 2020; Wells-Barnett 2014). Per members of the Marshall family, past marginalization as well as contemporary racial and political unrest mean that more is at stake for many black Christians than their white peers when members of the former race are unable to meet for sanctuary and support (Barnes and Blanford-Jones 2019; Billingsley 1992; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990).

Like Constance and her son Keith, black and white Christians value church attendance, but participation often has different meanings and motivations based on different histories and experiences (Chen 2020; Pew Research Center 2014). Greater percentages of blacks than whites attend church, pray frequently, read the Bible, and believe in God (Chaves et al. 1999; Earls 2018; Pew Research Center 2014). News sources show racial differences in how Christians rejected social distancing decrees. For example, certain church leaders, both white and black, initially downplayed the virus' severity, defied stay-at-home orders, and continued to hold church services (Woodward 2020). Black and white Pentecostals and evangelicals were more apt to defy such orders than their non-Pentecostal and nonevangelical peers (Djupe 2020; Woodward 2020). COVID-19 cases followed, particularly for blacks, some of whom believed their faith in God would protect them from infection (Boorstein 2020; Carrega and Brown 2020; Gutierrez and Helsel 2020). However, conservative white pastors were more apt to tell parishioners it was their duty to attend church despite stay-at-home edicts and to sue the state for violation of their First Amendment rights (Andone and Moshtaghian 2020; Jackson 2020; Orso 2020; Rubin 2020). Thus, underlying political motivations for whites differed from those of their black counterparts.

It appears that most churches eventually adhered to social distancing edicts; many implemented virtual services. Lauren provides pros and cons of her

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Black Church experience before and since the onset of the pandemic: “To a certain degree I miss going to church and to a certain degree I don’t. Our church service is extremely long. But since we’ve been streaming, it’s exactly an hour. . . . Church will open again soon, but I won’t take my family” (forty-seven-year-old teacher, MS in public administration). Two songs, announcements, and a sermon have replaced the usual three-hour worship service that Lauren does not seem to miss. Concerns about her children and elderly mother mean she won’t return immediately once the church reopens (Koenig 2020). Unlike Lauren’s church, when racial differences are considered, some traditional black churches do not have the virtual infrastructure that many white churches have largely because of an emphasis historically on meeting collectively and economic constraints apparent via the digital divide (Carrega and Brown 2020; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). Levi, a twenty-four-year-old college sophomore in psychology, defines the church and corporate worship differently, saying “I work in campus ministry. . . . I know I’m making a difference. The kids need a voice. . . . The virus has showed me what church is all about. I knew it wasn’t just a building. . . . It’s meeting up with people and discipling. It’s benefited my relationship with God. Anyone can go to church on Sunday—like on Easter Sunday when you see people you’ve never seen before. But now you can’t just perform your faith. No one sees it ’cause you’re at home. So are you really what you claim to be at home?”

The pandemic has strengthened Levi’s faith. He questions the preoccupation with being present in an edifice over evangelizing, supporting younger Christians, and authentic godly living (Barnes 2005, 2008; Wimberly and Parker 2002). For Levi, failing to meet may have an unanticipated intrinsic benefit if persons use the time to fortify their Christian beliefs. Levi’s comment also parallels reports that more blacks than whites note that their faith has been strengthened by the pandemic (Gecewicz 2020).

White and black Christians are attempting to reconcile the benefits of collective worship with the drawbacks of potentially contracting or spreading COVID-19 (Andone and Moshtaghian 2020; CDC 2020c; Mazzei 2020; Vigdor 2020; Wolford 2020; Woodward 2020). For seemingly different reasons, both black and white protestors of stay-at-home measures yearn for communal worship and the social support it can provide. Responses range from defying court-ordered sanctions to, for some white churches, suing their states. Moreover, reported reasons vary by race, with blacks citing the need for congregational support to help weather challenges and whites citing more political, nationalistic reasons (Jackson 2020; Orso 2020; Rubin 2020). Yet concurrent health and social disparities mean black Christians are more vulnerable to COVID-19 than their

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white peers (Boorstein 2020; Carrega and Brown 2020; Gutierrez and Helsel 2020; Poteat et al. 2020; Woodward 2020).

Theme 2. "It's My Right": COVID-19 and Heightened Civil Religion

This second theme documents the impact of secular-based beliefs among whites on the religious beliefs and behavior of blacks like the Marshalls. COVID-19's influence on race and religion is also manifesting in increased emphasis on civil religion among whites. Broadly defined, civil religion is an ideology that ascribes religious features to US nationalism (Bellah 1967; Demerath and Williams 1985; Woodrum and Bell 1989). Christian tenets such as prayer and the Bible are supplanted by patriotism, the American flag, and a focus on citizen's rights. According to Demerath and Williams (1985, 164–65), civil religion "has become again a religious nationalism, justifying and legitimating the status quo. Conservative Protestantism has articulated its political demands in nationalistic terms linking the a priori approval of the Almighty with the actions of the American body politic." Fueled by the current political climate, civil religion tends to manifest today in protests by heavily armed whites upset about declining national strength and white Christians similarly concerned about constitutional rights (Woodrum and Bell 1989). Donald, a twenty-three-year-old with a BS in criminal justice, describes this dynamic at his workplace:

> Customer's behavior was different at first. There were lots of arguments because everyone was trying to fend for themselves. Nowadays, they seem like they are pretty much ignoring the virus. Even though we have a six-foot rule, people ignore it and in the checkout line, people are right up on each other's backs. They've reverted back to shopping like they did before the virus. Now I'm seeing a lot of customers with no mask or gloves. Save Mart will allow you in without a mask. I've just been asking God to protect me and my family from COVID, but I was already doing that before COVID. I asked God to protect us no matter what the danger.

As an essential worker at the discount store in a predominantly white area, Donald is concerned by many white customers who ignore PPE (personal protective equipment) protocols that put him and, by extension, his family at risk (De La Garza 2020). However, he relies on prayer for protection. For Donald, this important Christian ritual fortifies him at an often racially charged workplace. His cousin Lyle, a twenty-two-year-old junior studying electrical engineering who is also an essential worker, details this phenomenon:

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> I miss my girlfriend a lot, but the hardest thing is getting the strength to go to work. The people that come into the store, don't really follow any rules. Some have their face masks cover their mouths, but not their noses. Most of the time, I'm there all day with people who don't follow the CDC rules. They keep saying, "It's my right as a US citizen to not wear a mask." . . . I don't want to put my family at risk. I don't want to put my girlfriend at risk because she has diabetes, so she's at higher risk.

Lyle describes nationalistic rhetoric (i.e., "it's my right") indicative of civil religion used to justify PPE noncompliance and the associated trauma he feels for himself (i.e., "getting the strength to go to work") and his girlfriend with a preexisting medical condition whom he now sees only via Facetime (American Psychological Association 2018; Blazer 2020; Gordon et al. 2020; McNicholas and Poydock 2020; Resnick 2020). Like Donald and Lyle, blacks and other minorities are more apt to hold "essential" jobs and, often for economic reasons, continue working (Alleyne 2020; De La Garza 2020; Gordon et al. 2020). And as these two young men suggest, exposure to white expressions of civil religion can necessitate reliance on Christian rituals for solace and strength.

Keith describes similar experiences: "For me social distancing is good in a way. . . . It means I don't have to physically deal with my coworkers. When something about race happens, all you hear are crickets. But when they feel offended, all hell breaks loose." Like his nephews, Keith has witnessed white privilege and entitlement in the workplace (Beckett 2020; Blumer 1958; Feagin 2008) that have caused him to welcome being sequestered. Contemporary civil religion seems to reflect an appropriation of Christianity for certain whites in both church and nonchurch spaces in ways not espoused by blacks (Demerath and Williams 1985; Woodrum and Bell 1989). This disparate pattern illustrates how factors like race can affect how biblical dictates are understood and lived out. Moreover, the exclusionary beliefs and behavior typically associated with civil religion (i.e., us vs. them) counter Christian tenets that encourage inclusivity and community building across differences.

THEME 3. THIS TOO WILL PASS: RELIGION AS A PANDEMIC MEDIATOR

The most common responses to COVID-19 among the Marshalls focus on how the pandemic has increased their faith in God, their thankfulness, and their involvement in prayer and Bible study. Their experiences also parallel literature indicating that blacks are more likely than whites to engage in such practices (Barnes 2004, 2005; Diamant 2018; Earls 2018; Pew Research Center

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2014). Also, blacks are more apt than whites to say their faith has increased as a result of the pandemic (Gecewicz 2020). According to the family matriarch, Constance:

> When I go to bed, I pray. You still thank the Lord that in the middle of the pandemic, you still have a lot to be thankful for. It could be worse. It's just trying times. People have lost their jobs and people are standing in line for food that have never done that before. It's just hard on people. . . . It confines you. It feels like you aren't free. But the Bible says that God hasn't given us a spirit of fear. . . . But you have to have a sound mind and use common sense to deal with Corona. And I never did think something like this would happen in my lifetime. But my pastor preached about plagues that have killed lots of people that I had never heard of.

The above remark references economic problems exacerbated by the pandemic (Boesler and Pickert 2020; Brown 2020; Romm 2020). Despite concerns about social distancing, Constance paraphrases 2 Timothy 1:7 to encourage fearlessness and logical decisions to avoid contracting and spreading the virus. Constance's comment also suggests reliance on prayer and scriptures for solace. Moreover, evidence of God's historic provisions during similar trials (plagues) bolsters her current confidence (Ferraro and Albrecht-Jensen 1991). Lola, a fifty-six-year-old marketing analyst with an MS in business, acknowledges increased religiosity as a result of COVID-19, saying, "It has improved my religious life because we have a prayer ministry every Sunday at 8 a.m. . . . I listen to multiple churches and to Tony Evans [a popular black televangelist]. It has increased my spiritual life because I'm praying more and I read my Bible more. I've always done it, but I do it more. 'There's going to be hundreds and ten thousand that fall by my side.' I know this sounds bad, but He has me."

Lola details her religious practices (i.e., prayer, watching online church services, and Bible study) and suggests that the pandemic has stimulated an already strong Christian commitment (Earls 2018). Similar to her mother, Lola paraphrases Leviticus 26:8 that assures her of God's protection from enemies—in this instance, COVID-19. A common mediating approach among the Marshalls is referencing scriptures that assuage fears, foster confidence despite seemingly insurmountable odds, and result in unwavering faith in God (Barnes 2005; Brown et al. 1990; Wimberly and Parker 2002).

Two members of the Marshall family, Claudia and Charles, lost their jobs as a result of COVID-19. In the following two quotes, each describes corollaries between the pandemic and religion. Claudia, a twenty-year-old college sophomore studying psychology, explains that "my supervisor was trying to reassure

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me that I'd have a job, but I knew. . . . They didn't want to let us go. . . . I realized that I needed this time to work on my family and to work on me. In the long run, it has helped me. I realized that God is very powerful and He's with us no matter what. It's forced me to become stronger in my faith, pray more, and depend on Him. And I hadn't realized that I had stopped doing that for a while."

In the remark above, Claudia now sees benefits in being furloughed because it has provided time to improve herself and her religious practices. A recommitment to Christianity has strengthened her faith, prayer life, and reliance on God (Barnes 2008; Ecklund and Coleman 2020; Wimberly and Parker 2002) and parallels Pew findings about racial differences in religiosity for millennials: "About six-in-ten black Millennials (61 percent) say they pray at least daily, a significantly higher share than the 39 percent of nonblack Millennials. . . . [N]early two-thirds (64 percent) of black Millennials are highly religious . . . which includes belief in God and self-described importance of religion, in addition to prayer and worship attendance—compared with 39 percent of nonblack Millennials" (Diamant and Mohamed 2018).

To the degree that these patterns persist today, younger blacks like Claudia are expected to rely on such religious practices and beliefs to help navigate the pandemic. Yet her older cousin, thirty-nine-year-old Charles, a construction worker who attended college but didn't graduate, provides a contrasting view: "My religious life is the same. Everything that happens in life is spiritual if you have foresight and hindsight. If you pay attention. A personal relationship with my Creator is based on my daily building upon it, so it [the pandemic] has not affected me differently. It has just given me something else to address. I'm not three times more spiritual nor have I been shaken. It's the same because the next time it's going to be another thing. I didn't change nothing because COVID came."

Charles considers himself more spiritual than religious; his resolve has not wavered during the pandemic. He considers COVID-19 one of a plethora of challenges he and other people will face designed to foster wisdom and fortitude. Rather than become distressed (American Psychological Association 2018), Charles is using this unemployment period to earn job certification. Applying existing research on religious differences based on the intersection of race and gender suggests that Charles' female family members would tend to be more religious than he; yet he is likely more religious than white men and women (Cox and Diamant 2018; Pew Research Center 2014). As noted by most of the Marshalls, like many other black Christians, their religious faith has been strengthened during the pandemic (Gecewicz 2020).

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Discussion and Conclusion

This study examines the implications of COVID-19 through the lens of race and religion. Informed by the experiences of the Marshalls, a multigenerational black family residing in several pandemic hotspots, this analysis considers religious life for white and black Christians. Findings illustrate the relevance of a socioecological lens for illuminating links between families, communities, and the pandemic (Billingsley 1992; Bronfenbrenner 1977, 1979, 1986). Scholarship, mainstream reports, and family narratives suggest that both white and black Christians are employing religiosity to mediate the pandemic's effects. Yet certain motivations and behavior differ by race. Literature on the relatively greater religious attitudes and behavior among blacks suggests the likelihood of greater reliance on religiosity to help negotiate COVID-19 than whites. Remarks by the Marshalls illustrate both COVID-19-related problems and religious responses. These findings do not mean that religion isn't important among whites but rather highlight how it is intricately embedded in the lives and lifestyles of blacks (Barnes 2005, 2012; Chaves 2004; Du Bois [1903] 2003; Ecklund and Coleman 2020; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Pew Research Center 2014).

It seems that many conservative black and white church leaders behaved similarly when defying social distancing orders. Moreover, evangelicals, both white and black, were more supportive of defying social distancing than non-evangelicals (Djupe 2020). Such church leaders often assured congregants that God was more powerful than the virus (Nexstar Media Wire 2020; Woodward 2020). However, white church leaders were more apt to sue their states to remain open (Andone and Moshtaghian 2020). Yet more cases and deaths among black Christians than white Christians have been reported (CDC 2020a, 2020d; Boorstein 2020; Garg et al. 2020; Laster Pirtle 2020; Pilkington 2020; Raifman and Raifman 2020; Severino 2020). There is also evidence of heightened civil religion among whites who deify nationalism, claim violations of their First or Second Amendment rights, and often refuse to adhere to pandemic mitigating steps (Bellah 1967; Woodrum and Bell 1989). Other studies suggest such sentiments are driven by white privilege and entitlement linked to systemic racism (Beckett 2020; Blumer 1958; Demerath and Williams 1985; Feagin 2008). A failure to comply in workplaces puts essential workers, like several Marshall family members, at high risk of contracting COVID-19; moreover, several mid-career members of the Marshall family describe social distancing as a respite from workplace racism with religious, emotional, and psychological benefits (Chen 2020; Resnick 2020).

Churches have historically been sanctuaries in the black community to help negotiate disparities; ordinarily, they would likely have played an important role

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as blacks navigated the pandemic and protests about police violence. Thus, for some blacks, closed churches may be just as damaging as opened ones (Ecklund and Coleman 2020; Hubler and Rojas 2020). Ways in which today's churches may help combat health issues, foster activism against social problems, and placate followers should be examined (Barnes and Blanford-Jones 2019; Ferraro and Albrecht-Jensen 1991). Studies must also consider the implications of COVID-19 on the aging populace in mainline white and black denominations (Chaves 2004; Ferraro and Albrecht-Jensen 1991; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990) and ways to protect them in such spaces (Koenig 2020). The current endeavor focuses on black and white religious dynamics. It will be important to extend this work to include other ethnic groups, other religious and/or spiritual groups, and to confirm mainstream reports on this subject. This research illustrates how race, space (i.e., hotspots), and place (i.e., churches) can affect adherents' abilities to negotiate the COVID-19 pandemic as well as how religion can inform, equip, and empower individuals during such challenging times.

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