
Issues of Advocacy and Community Life for African Americans in Ventura County

*Report on a survey and interview research partnership
between the Community Advocacy Coalition
and CSUCI Sociology Capstone Students, December 2020*



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Executive Summary:

Project Background: The research project represents a partnership in which Sociology capstone students worked with and on behalf of the Community Advocacy Coalition, an African American advocacy organization in Ventura County, to address questions of interest to them.

Methods: The research comprises two components: 1) a survey focused on issues related to quality of life for African Americans in the county, and 2) a series of micro-interviews with community leaders focused on experiences with law enforcement and with microaggressions.

Survey / Findings:

- Sixty responses were received from 550 surveys distributed. Seventy percent of respondents were residents of Oxnard or Port Hueneme; sixty-four percent were African American.
- Respondents indicated that they recognized a number of community issues as relevant and important for African Americans in the county; the most important were Social Justice, Racism, and collaboration with other marginalized communities.
- The dominant responses to an open-ended question about concerns in the community produced the following themes: Race relations, Health and environment, and Socio-economic issues.
- Respondents indicated that the most important thing that the African American community can do to make Ventura County a better place to live was greater engagement in the community and community events.
- A question about possible engagement with the CAC indicated significant interest, with 28% indicating that they would be interested in participating in CAC activities, and another 57% indicated that they *may* be interested.

Interviews / Findings:

- Brief interviews were conducted with African American community leaders identified by the CAC. Forty individuals were contacted; thirteen agreed to participate in the interview.
- Regarding interactions with law enforcement, the majority reported primarily negative interactions. When asked if they would hesitate to call law enforcement for help, responses were mixed, with about half indicating that they would have some hesitation.
- Two general themes emerged from suggestions about ways to reform law enforcement: the need for more cultural sensitivity training, and the need for greater community involvement on the part of law enforcement.
- Microaggressions emerged as a common experience among respondents. The context of those experiences were: public interactions, workplace, shopping, or traffic stops.
- Several themes emerged regarding changes necessary to improve African American lives in the county: increased political and community involvement; achievement of greater workplace equity; diversifying school curricula; and increased cultural activities/events.

Recommendations: The research provides a rich sense of the challenges facing African Americans in Ventura County. A key suggestion for improvement was the need for increased community engagement of all sorts. There was also significant interest among respondents in engaging with the CAC – a resource of which they should take advantage.

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Introduction & Background

This research was conducted as a community-based research (CBR) project by Sociology Capstone students at California State University, Channel Islands (CSUCI). The research was conducted on behalf of, and in partnership with, the Community Advocacy Coalition (CAC) of Ventura County. The CAC is a community nonprofit organization that serves as an advocate and positive change agent for the African American community in the county. (Information about the CAC can be found on their webpage: <https://the-cac.org/>.) In recent years, the CAC has organized its work around five themes: Economic Justice; Educational Justice; Health and Wellness Justice; Legal Justice; and Positive Circle (designed to “develop, empower, engage, and advance leaders within African-American and underserved cultures”). The CAC has engaged those areas by bringing the community together to meet and discuss critical issues (for example, in town hall-style meetings), and engaging in specific advocacy projects. The research is designed to help to identify issue priorities within the community in order to guide the CAC’s advocacy work. The goal is to assist the CAC to learn more about the specific experiences and perspectives of African Americans in Ventura County to allow the organization to more effectively serve the community.

This research project emerged initially as a request on the part of the CAC to CSUCI’s Center for Community Engagement in the summer of 2020 to identify a source of assistance to analyze a survey that the CAC had designed and distributed among community members to gauge perceptions of issues and challenges confronting the African American community in the county. The CAC lead on the project, Dr. Angela Timmons, was connected to Dr. Dennis Downey (Sociology Professor) who was planning to conduct a community-based research project with capstone students in the fall. It was agreed that the students would provide

assistance by conducting full analyses of the survey results, and generate a report summarizing findings. That research represents part one of this report.

Further discussions with the CAC leadership led to an agreement that students would also conduct a series of “micro-interviews” with community leaders to assess a narrow range of priorities in greater depth. The interviews focused on key experiences related to race in everyday life (including interactions with law enforcement and experiences with microaggressions) which students conducted and analyzed. That research represents part two of this report.

The main report presented here focuses on analyses and findings of both research components, and includes some basic methodological background. Additional methodological information (such as the survey instrument and interview guide, descriptions of coding categories for all survey and interview analyses, and the application for human subjects research to the CSUCI Institutional Review Board) are included in Supplementary Materials presented to the CAC, available as a separate report/volume.

PART 1: SURVEY RESEARCH

Survey Methods

The online survey was initially sent out by the CAC to 550 people in July of 2020. Sixty respondents completed and submitted their surveys. The student researchers received the results in September, and analyzed the data by compiling responses and reporting them in graphical format. Using descriptive statistics, we found the frequencies of each of the response categories for forced-choice questions. In addition, there were several open-ended questions that required coding based on categories developed inductively from responses. For those responses, we analyzed the data in a spreadsheet and coded responses into specific categories based on common themes we found. (All descriptions of coding categories, along with response codes, are presented in the supplementary materials.) For both forced-choice and open-ended coded responses, we created graphs to give a visual representation of the results. Each graph includes a key that defines the different terms used in order to have more context behind how we broke down our categories.

The graphical presentation of findings allowed us to identify the primary concerns of survey respondents. In addition to the graphs, we provided brief interpretations for each graph that summarize the main findings and identifies critical patterns.

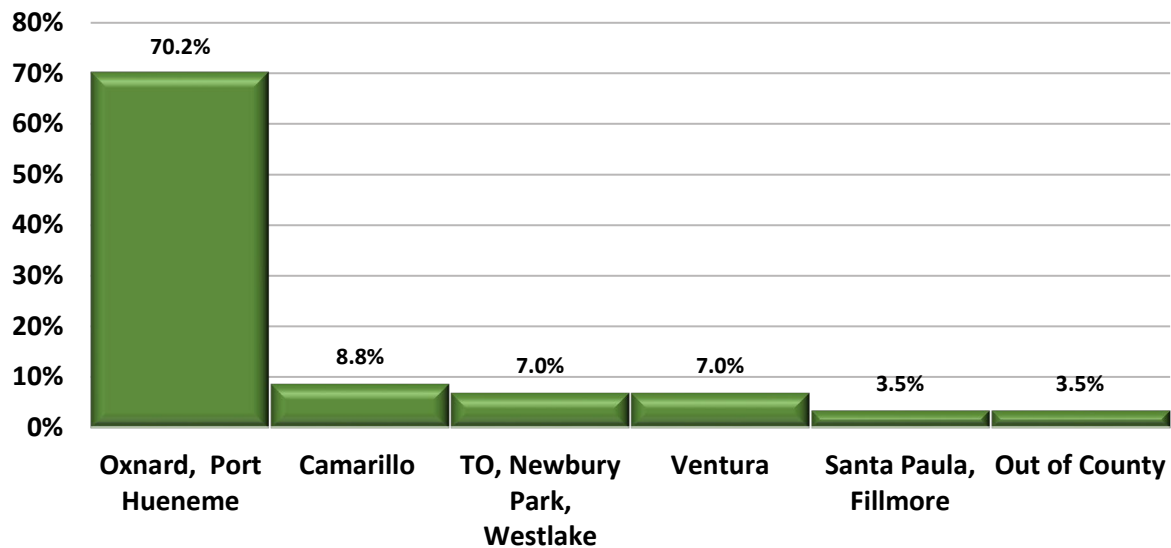
Survey Analysis

A. Demographics

The first section addresses respondent demographics, including: city of residence, gender, age, race/ethnicity, employment status, and household income. This is important information for the CAC to help determine the characteristics of its primary constituencies.

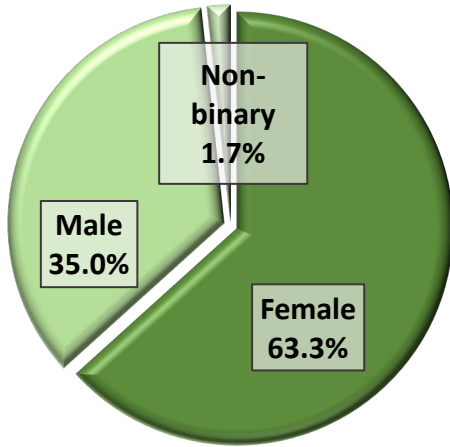
Figure A.1: Respondent City of Residence

Survey question: What is your Zip Code?



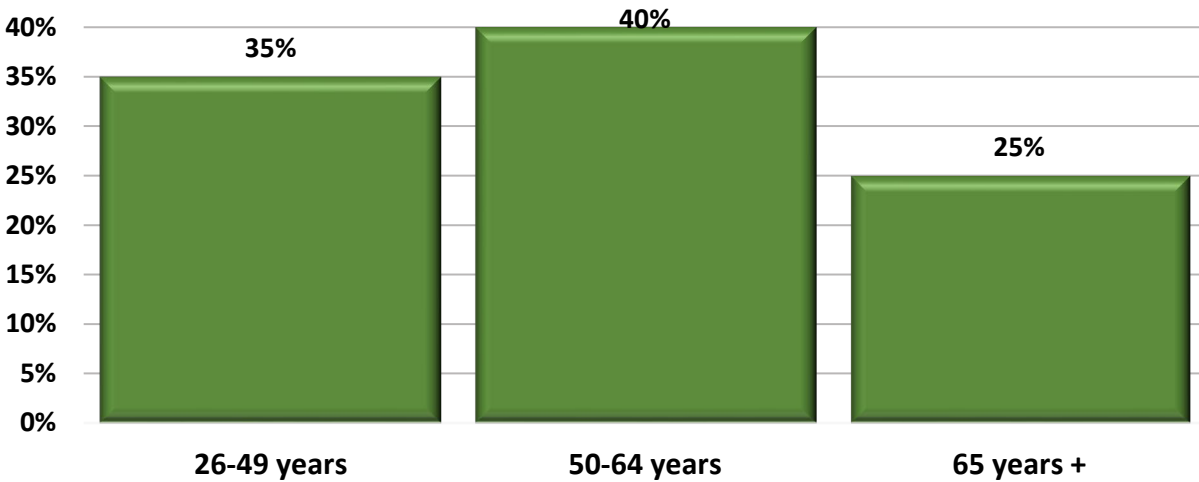
Participants were asked to provide their zip code, which was then used to determine the respondent's city of residence. As the graph above shows, the vast majority of respondents (70%) live in the Oxnard and Port Hueneme area. The remainder of respondents are scattered around the county (and a small number responded from outside of the county). The dominance of respondents from Oxnard is important to keep in mind in interpreting the rest of the data, since many of the issues and priorities identified will inevitably be shaped by the specific city of residence in the county.

Figure A.2: Respondent Gender
Survey question: What is your gender?



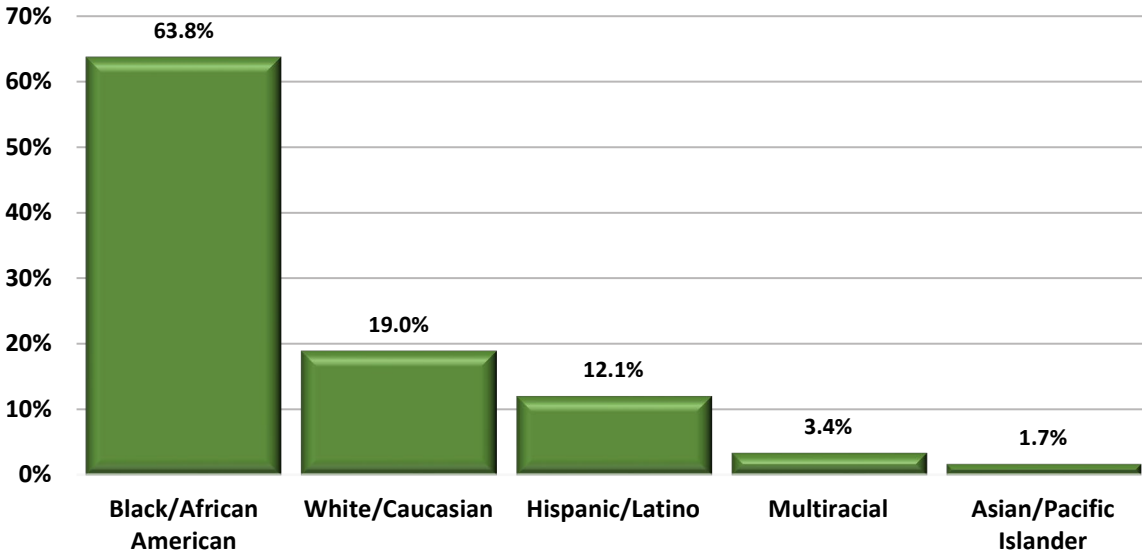
Most respondents were female, at over 63.3 percent, while male respondents trailed behind at 35 percent, and an additional 1.7 percent of respondents identify as non-binary.

Figure A.3: Respondent Age
Survey question: How old are you?



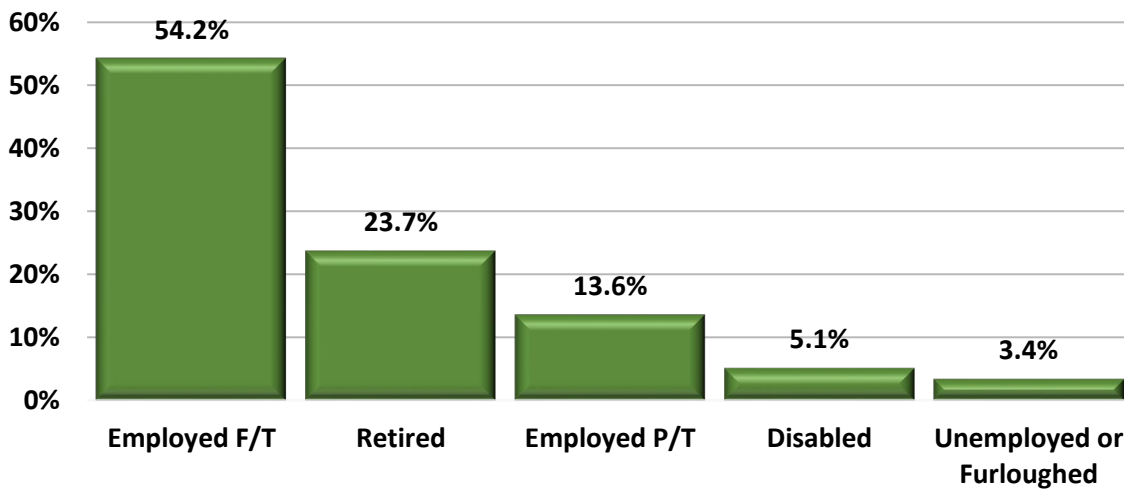
Most respondents were over the age of fifty, while only 35 percent of respondents were between the ages of 26 and 49.

Figure A.4: Respondent Race/Ethnicity
Survey question: What is your ethnicity/race?



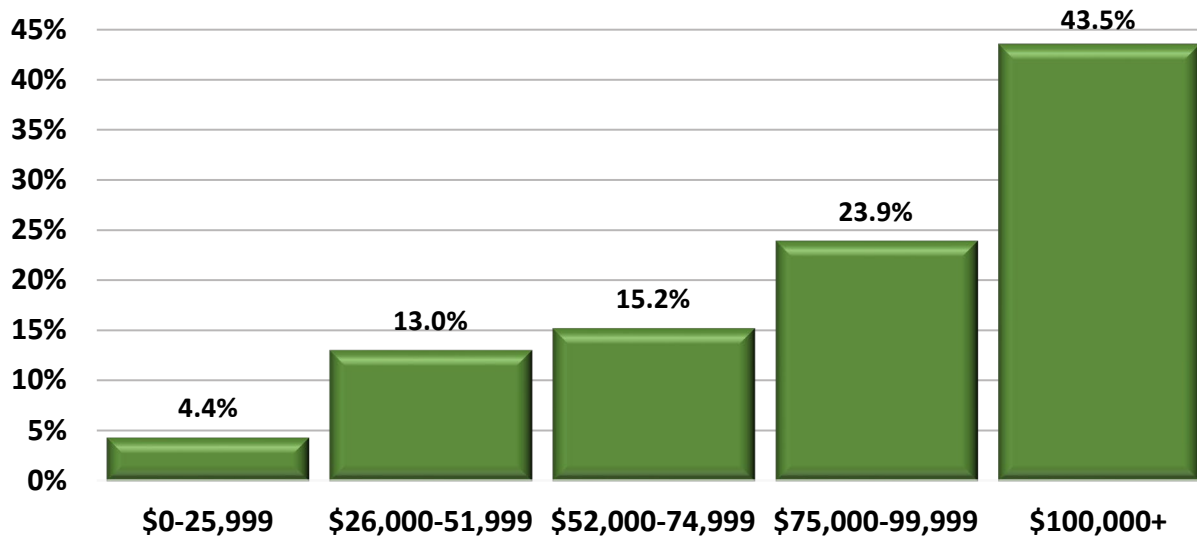
The majority of respondents' ethnicity and racial profile fell under the African American category, at over 63.8 percent. Following suit were respondents who identified themselves as Caucasian (19%), Hispanic and/or Latino (12.1%), multiracial (3.4%), and Pacific Islander (1.7%).

Figure A.5: Respondent Employment Status
Survey question: What is your current Status?



When it came to respondent employment status, over half of respondents were employed full time, while nearly a quarter indicated that they were retired.

Figure A.6: Respondent Household Income
Survey question: What is your household income?



Note: 12 of the 60 respondents selected that they either did not know or did not wish to answer a question regarding income. 2 other individuals skipped the question altogether. The statistics calculated within the graph account for the 46 respondents that did indicate their income on the questionnaire.

Household income varied between respondents; however, the majority of the respondents have a household income of \$75,000 or more. Of this majority, 43% of the respondents have a total household income of over \$100,000. While less than 5% of respondents made \$25,999 or less annually.

B. Issue Priorities for Respondents

This section of questions focuses on respondents’ primary concerns regarding issues that exist within the community, and amongst the African American population within the community. The questions also reveal what respondents feel is preventing a more diverse and cohesive community and how these issues can be overcome. This is important information for the CAC as it provides a manageable list of concerns to begin focusing on in order to improve community engagement and to make our community an overall better place to live.

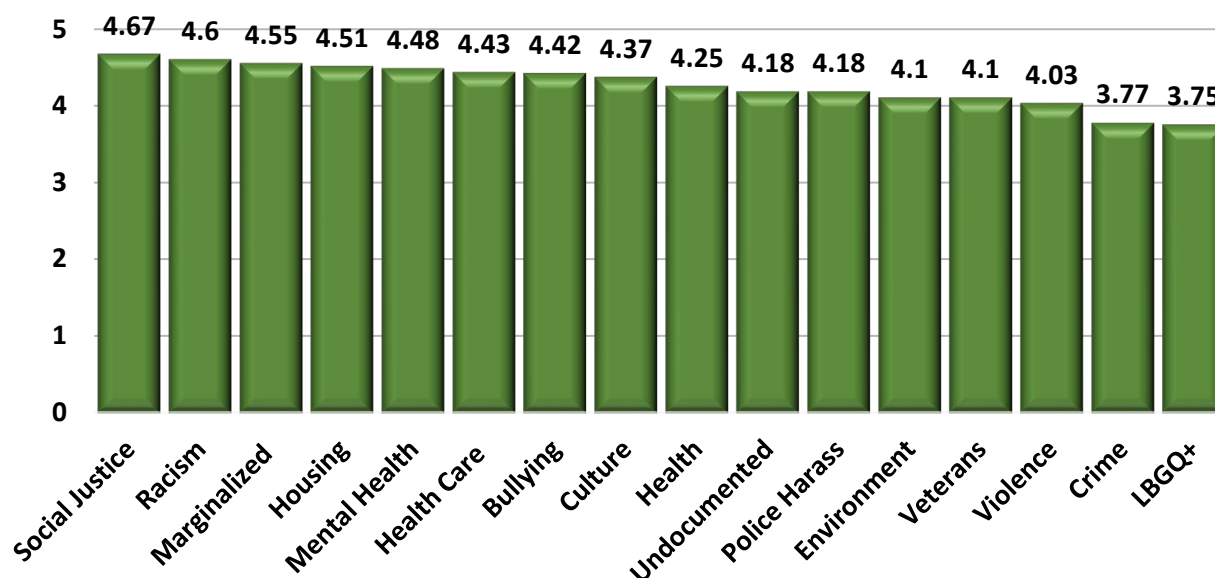
Figure B.1a & B.1b: Relevant Community Issues

Survey question: How do you rate the following issues in the Ventura County African American Community? Please tell us if you believe these concerns are yet relevant by rating each category from (strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)?

	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEITHER	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE
Need for more culture to enhance and promote a sense of community in Ventura County	4	0	3	16	37
Need for reduction in neighborhood crime	2	5	15	21	17
Need for affordable housing	2	1	4	10	42
Improve race relations in schools, judicial system and community at large	2	0	0	16	42
Improve healthy lifestyles	2	0	7	23	28
Need for enhanced mental health services for our community	2	0	3	17	38
Need to reduce school bullying /racism	2	2	3	15	38
Reduce domestic violence in our African American community	2	1	14	19	24
Need for improve access to healthcare services within marginalized communities	2	1	4	15	38
Initiate and advocate for environmental concerns	3	0	8	25	23

Reduce and eliminate police harassment in our community	2	0	6	29	23
Improve services for local US Veterans	2	0	13	19	25
Advocate for rights of undocumented populations	1	2	6	27	24
Improve relations with our LGBTQ+ community	5	1	13	26	15
Overall, what's your opinion about Social Justice Issues in Ventura County? Do you think it's important?	2	1	0	9	48
Improve collaboration and community relations with other marginalized communities	2	1	0	16	41

Figure B.1b: Relevant Community Issues (Average Response)



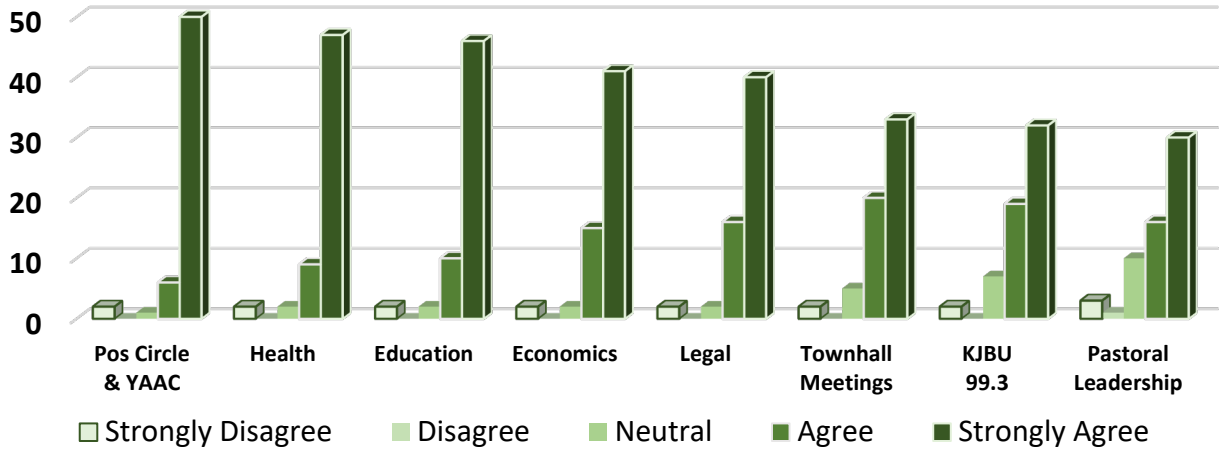
This question asks respondents to rate their level of agreement regarding relevant issues within the Ventura County African American community. The graph breaks down the frequency, or number of respondents that indicated each category (strongly disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree or Disagree, Agree, or Strongly agree) for specific named issues. The table below should be used as a key for the specific issues which are represented in the graph by number 1-16. The statistics revealed that over 40 of the 60 respondents Strongly Agree that social justice is truly relevant as well as issues regarding affordable housing, better race relations, and improved

community relations with other marginalized communities. Over 35 respondents also agree that the following issues are still relevant within the African American Community: Need for more culture to enhance and promote a sense of community in Ventura County, a need for enhanced mental health services for our community, the need to reduce school bullying, and a need for improved access to healthcare services for marginalized communities. Respondents felt some that indifferent towards the relevance of issues such as the need for reduction in neighborhood crime, improved services for local US Veterans, and improved relations with the LGBTQ+ community, as over ten respondents indicated that they neither agreed nor disagreed. There were far few individuals that strongly agreed that these issues were still relevant within the community. Overall, an overwhelming majority of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that most of the issues mentioned by the CAC were still relevant issues within the Ventura County African American Community.

When it comes to relevant community issues, most of the respondents agreed that societal issues such as the importance of social justice and race relations with both law enforcement and the community in general are relevant. Financial issues, including access to affordable housing and healthcare were also deemed relevant by respondents. The prominence of the bullying, violence, and crime categories also shows that safety is a major concern among respondents. With the least amount of strongly agrees and the most strongly disagrees, improving relations with the LBGTQ+ community seems to be the least relevant issue compared to the other issues listed.

Figure B.2: Current Relevance of Social Justice Movements

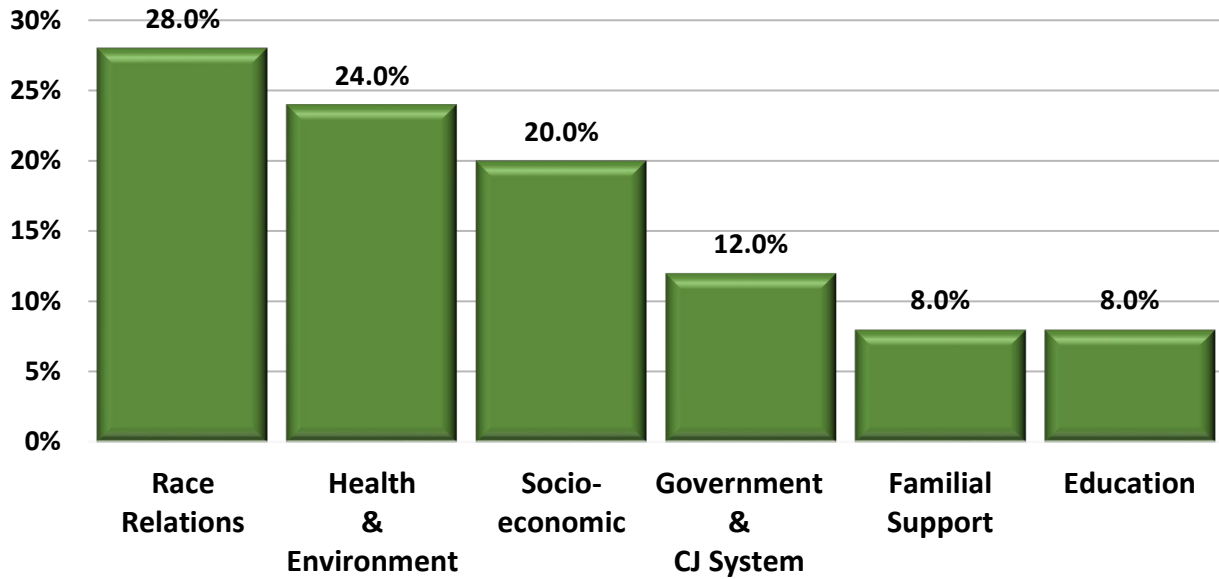
Survey question: The following social justice initiatives were identified over (5) years ago by CAC as relevant within the African American Community. Please tell us if you believe these concerns are yet relevant by rating each category from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree):



As for social justice initiatives, 85% of respondents strongly agreed that the positive circles and YAAC are truly relevant initiatives, which shows that a lot of people are benefitting from these social gatherings. With the most amount of disagrees/strongly disagrees, and the least strongly agrees, it can be said that pastoral leadership is not a relevant initiative among respondents. The KJBU radio station and town hall meetings also received fewer agrees/strongly agrees, showing that these initiatives are not as relevant as others. Legal and economics both fell in the middle for strongly agrees, which shows that these initiatives are not the most relevant, but still deserve attention.

Figure B.3: Other Concerns in the Community

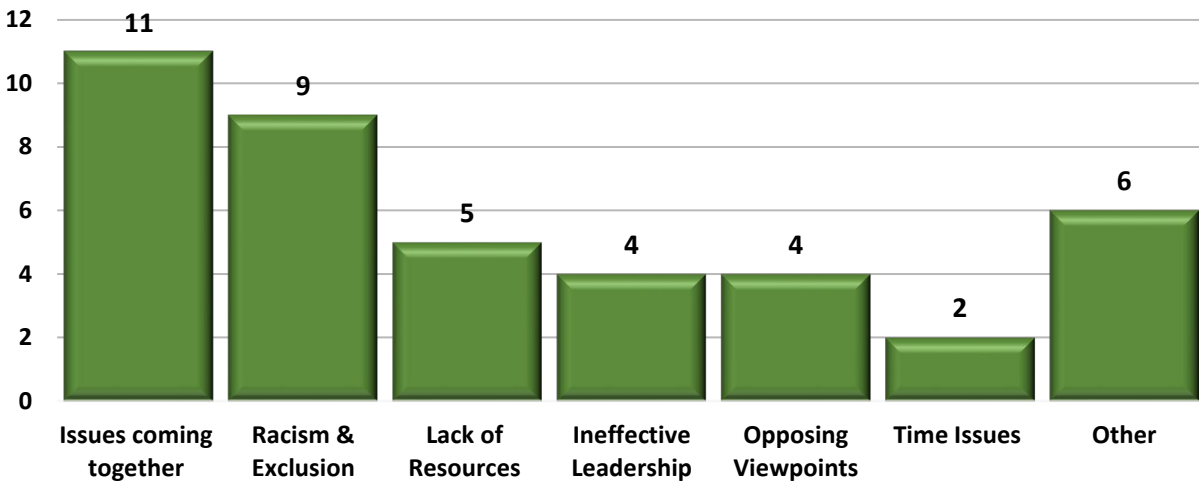
Survey question: OTHER areas I believe are of concern in our community: (categories developed by coding from open ended questions)



When looking at what other concerns people have, a little over half (52%) of the respondents feel that Race relationships, Health, & the environment are major concerns within the community. Socioeconomic concerns also proved to be a prominent issue, at 20 percent. Slightly over a quarter (28%) of the responses included concerns surrounding support for families, childcare, education, and issues within the government or criminal justice system. This data shows that both large-scale (Race relations, socioeconomics, government) and small-scale (education and childcare) issues are of concern among respondents.

Figure B.4: Roadblocks to Cohesiveness

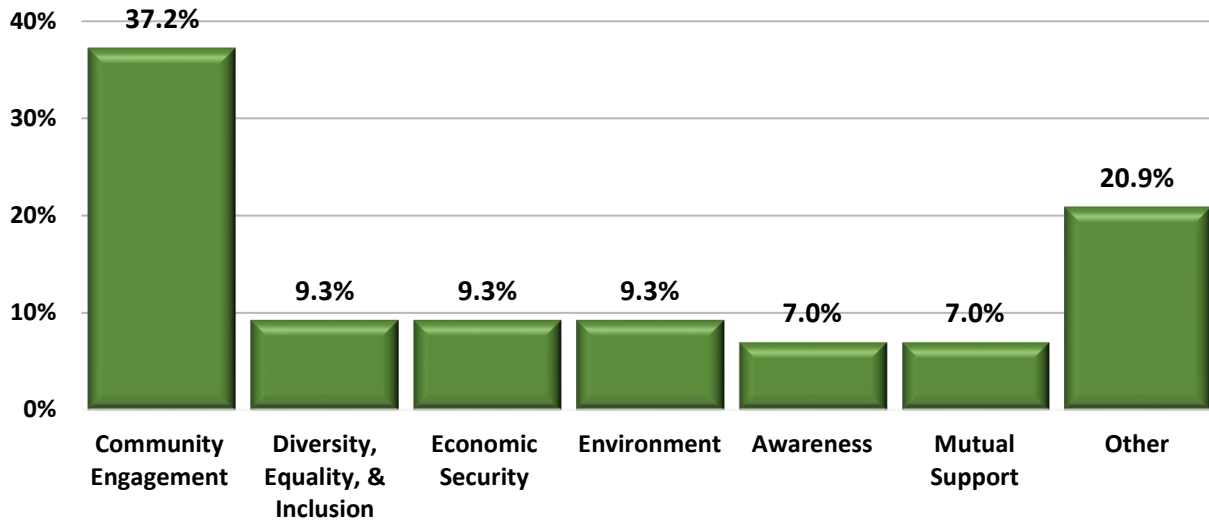
Survey question: What if any do you believe are roadblocks to our community cohesiveness?
(Based on student coding patterns)



Participants were asked what they believed were the roadblocks to community cohesiveness in Ventura County. This question was worded in a way that could have led to confusion for some respondents, leading to inaccurate data. It could either be interpreted as what are the problems African Americans face within their community throughout Ventura County, or what are problems African Americans face as citizens of Ventura County. Unlike the other questions that had responses participants could choose from, this question was a free-response question that allowed participants to fill in all issues they noticed. The most popular category we formed based on the responses was issues in coming together as a community with 11 responses. In a close second was racism and exclusion which included 9 responses that fell within this category. This could mean African Americans feel discriminated against by other racial groups living in Ventura County, depending on how the question is interpreted. A handful of respondents also felt that ineffective leadership as well as a lack of resources and economic divisions prevented strong community cohesiveness. One common theme within these different categories was that participants feel that they do not live in a community that hears their voices and instead silences them with racism.

Figure B.5: Community Improvements

Survey question: What do you see that we can do in our community to make it a better place to live? (Based on student coding)



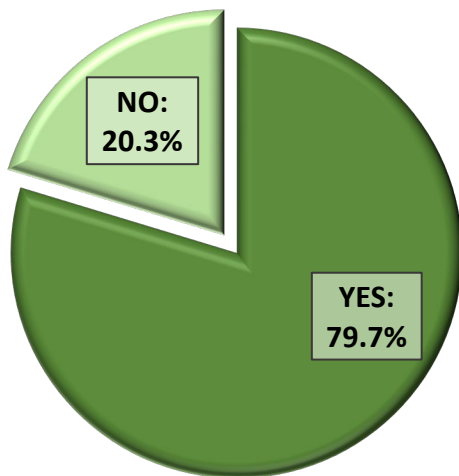
This question is related to the previous question as it asks how the community could be improved to make it a better place to live. Participants are once again allowed to write in whatever responses they feel relevant rather than having to choose from a list. The largest category was community engagement in activities and events at 37.2%. Some of the responses included more weekend activities for the family to attend and town hall meetings where citizens could gather to discuss their concerns. The responses given for this question varied widely, indicating that improvements in the community were needed in many areas such as equality, mutual support, increases awareness, greater economic security and engagement as well as with the environment itself. In order to yield a more accurate representation of we can do in our community to make it a better place to live we should provide a select list of possibilities and have respondents indicate which are most important or necessary.

C. Respondent Affiliations, Activities, and Information

This category of questions helps identify how involved respondents are within the community. Specifically, these questions reveal the different affiliations that respondent's value. The information revealed through this inquiry will assist the CAC in identifying not only further demographic detail of the respondents but also highlights the various avenues and institutions the CAC can approach in order to further spread their mission and support.

Figure C.1: Civic or Religious Affiliations

Survey question: Are you affiliated with any civic (club, fraternity, sorority, group) or religious organization in the Ventura County area?

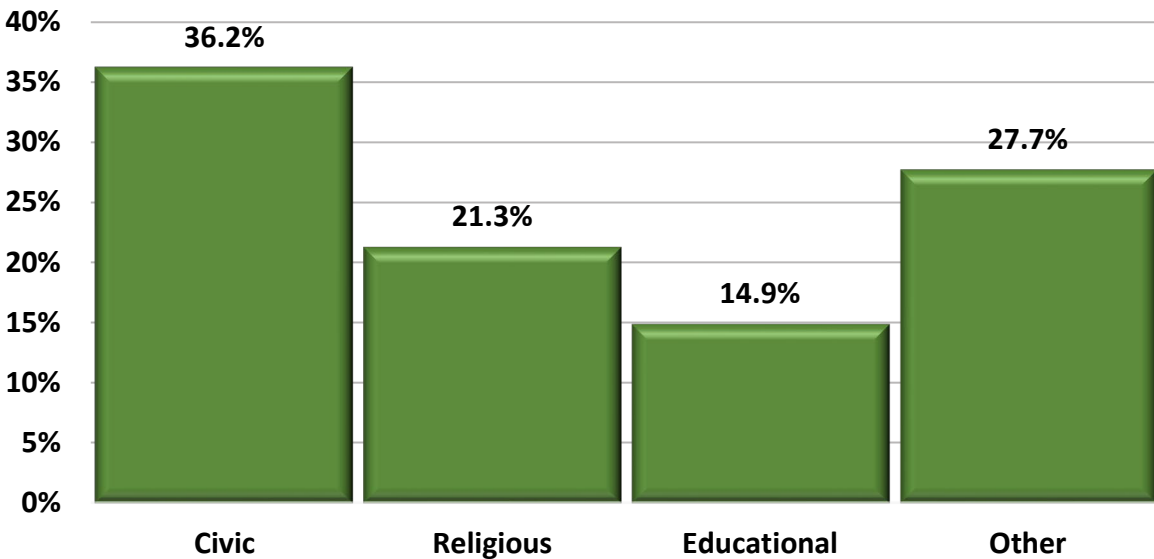


This question asked if participants were affiliated with any civic or religious organizations in Ventura County. Some of the examples included in the question were clubs, fraternities, sororities, or groups. The majority of the participants answered yes with 80%, while only 20% chose no. This question fails to show what kind of civic or

religious organization participants are affiliated with, but it shows that this sample of participants might represent how involved residents in Ventura County are within the community. This question also does not demonstrate how many different organizations these participants are affiliated with. Some participants could be involved with just one organization, while others are involved with multiple. The rate of involvement might be different from participant to participant as well. Some of these participants who answered yes might only attend meetings once a month, while others might attend a couple different meetings each week.

Figure C.2: Type of Affiliation

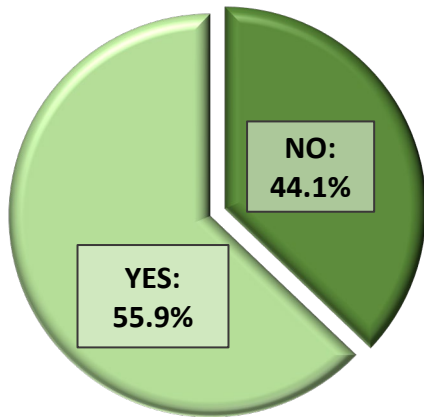
Survey question: If you answered yes to the question above (affiliated with any civic or religious organization in the Ventura County area), select all that apply:



This question was only for participants who only answered yes to the previous question asking if they are affiliated with any organizations in Ventura County. Out of the 80% who answered yes previously, 36% answered they are involved in a civic organization. Less participants chose religious organizations at 21%, and 15% chose educational organizations. Many respondents that indicated “Other” went on to explain that their affiliations fell within multiple listed categories and did not want to specify one in particular. Another common answer within the large “Other” category appeared to be affiliation with sororities and or mentorship. The data represented in this graph does not represent the total percentage of respondents, but it does represent the percentage of responses for each category. Either way, this question shows the division of affiliation is fairly spread out, although the number of responses in civic is more than double the responses in educational. Although the previous question gave some examples of what qualifies as civic and educational organizations, there is no way of telling what specific organizations have the most involvement.

Figure C.3: Community Activities Attendance

Survey question: Do you attend or participate in community activities more than two times per month?

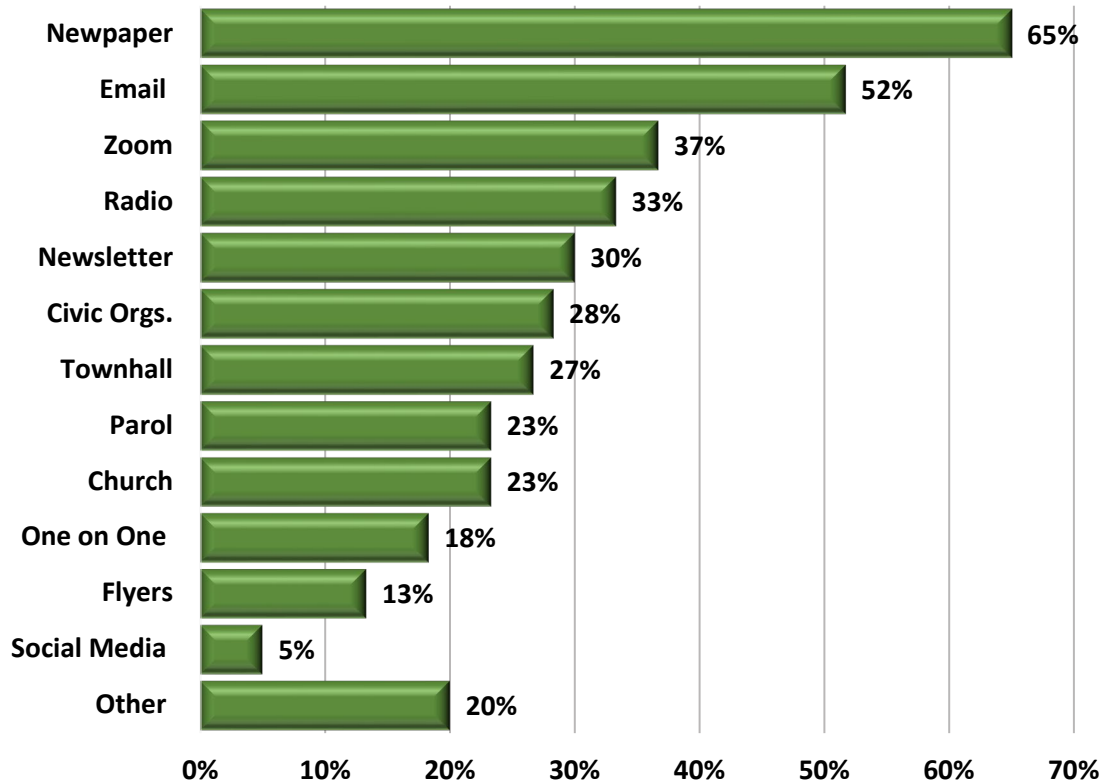


This question asked participants if they attend or participate in community activities more than two times per month. Although there is only a modest difference between 55.9% and 44.1%, the majority of participants answered yes. This gives a little more information for question seven that asked if participants are

affiliated with a community organization. Most participants are involved with community organizations and attend meetings more than two times per month in Ventura County. What this question does not show us is if these are meetings for different organizations or if they are for the same organization. This information also does not tell us if the same people who answered yes are attending virtual meetings since the pandemic started. There could also be a few people who chose no that may be attending more meetings now that everything is virtual, and people spend more time at home.

Figure C.4: How Households Could Be More Informed on Issues

Survey question: What are some ways in which your household can be more informed about issues in our community? Check only THREE (3) that apply:



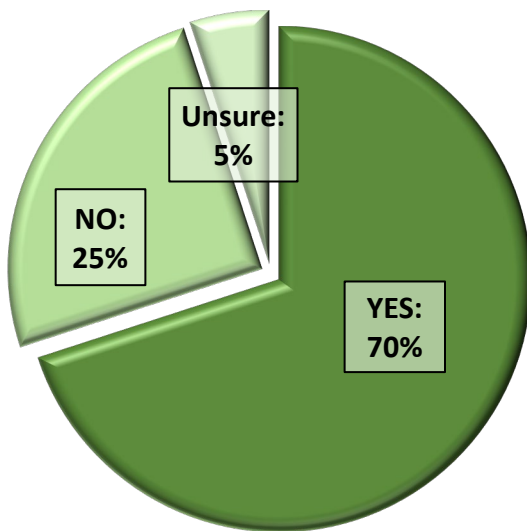
Nearly two-thirds of respondents preferred to have the newspaper as a primary source of notification of community issues, followed by email by over half of respondents. A third of respondents felt that the radio would be a sufficient medium to receive updates on issues in the community; about a quarter of respondents indicated a preference for each of the following methods as a preferred means of receiving updates regarding community issues: civic organizations, townhall meetings, church, and word of mouth. A fifth of respondents chose “other”, listing things like television ads as a potential outlet, and no face-to-face meetings being possible due to Coronavirus as an issue. The most interesting response is the lack of interest in using social media as a communication tool in today’s electronic world with only 5 percent of respondents choosing that as an option.

D. Knowledge and Interest in the Community Advocacy Coalition

The following questions are important to include as they provide the CAC with a means of understanding how well the community knows them and understands their mission within the community. The questions reveal the respondent's interest in the CAC itself as well as what respondents would like to see from the CAC to better understand and support them. This can be helpful to highlight so that the members can reintroduce themselves and provide more information to the community in order to gain a better backing and understanding of the community.

Figure D.1: Knowledge of the Community Advocacy Coalition

Survey question: Do you know about CAC?



Most of the respondents (70%) know about the CAC, while a small percentage of respondents either do not know (25%) or are not sure (5%). These results show that the CAC is known by most respondents, but there is still some work to be done in reaching their audience.

Nearly two thirds of the respondents who answered yes to the previous question stated that the reason they know of the CAC is because they had some link to a CAC member or were connected by or through community service members and volunteers in other organizations. Nearly 30% of respondents were either already involved with the CAC or heard about the CAC from attending a CAC event. This data shows that word of mouth is highly effective in spreading awareness about the CAC.

Figure D.2: How Respondent heard about CAC

Survey question (for those who responded “yes” to previous question): How did you come to know about CAC? (categories coded from open ended responses)

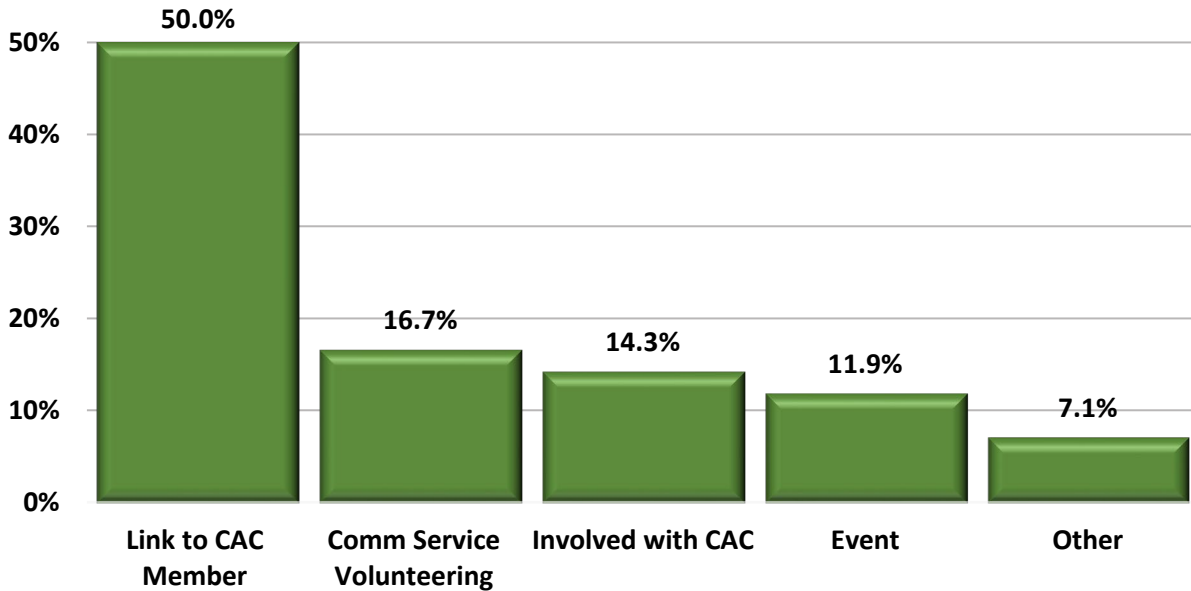
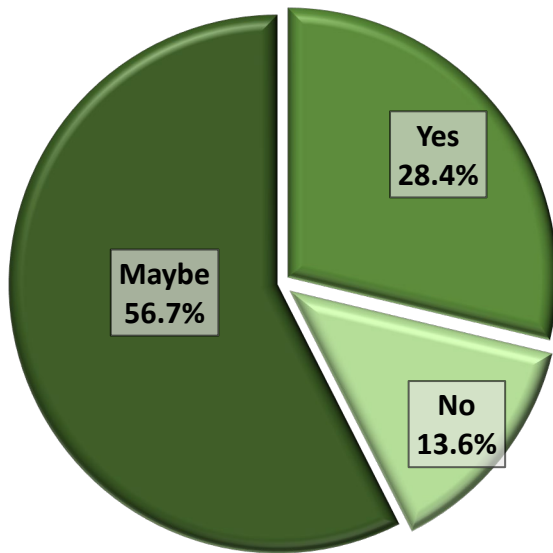


Figure D.3: Interest in Participating in CAC initiatives

Survey question: Are you interested in participating in any of the CAC initiatives?



When asked about being interested in participating in CAC activities, over half of respondents indicated that they may be interested, while over 13 percent indicated that they were not interested at this time. The remainder of respondents, almost one third, responded that they would be interested in participating in CAC initiatives.

Table D.4: Interest in Participating in CAC initiatives

Survey question: I would like more information about: (Based on student coding patterns)

Respondents Request for More Information:	
More info about CAC in General	21
How to become more involved with CAC	9
How to extend Financial Support to CAC	7
Other	3

Finally, when respondents were asked if they would like more information regarding CAC, near half of them responded that they would like more information about CAC in general, while a quarter of respondents wish to learn more about becoming more involved with CAC and nearly a fifth of respondents wanted to learn about how to become a financial supporter of CAC initiatives.

PART 2: INTERVIEW RESEARCH

Interview Methods

We conducted interviews with African Americans in leadership positions as recommended and identified by the CAC leaders. Using a brief interview format, we asked respondents about their experiences with law enforcement in our county, as well as their experiences with issues relevant to race and experiences with racism more generally. Upon completion, we analyzed response data to identify dominant themes.

The first step in carrying out the interview component of our research was to develop an interview guide based on the areas of interest identified by the CAC. Specifically, the interview questions were designed to expand our insight on important questions that emerged from the survey. After a draft of the interview guide was completed, the class met with CAC members in order to make sure that it sufficiently addressed the topics that the CAC was interested in further exploring. The CAC offered helpful feedback which was used to revise and create a final interview guide.

After the interview guide was approved by the CAC, the document was submitted along with all aspects of our research design to the CSUCI Institutional Review Board (IRB) for human subjects' approval. That approval was received prior to initiating any aspect of the research.

Our sampling frame consisted of a list of 40 community leaders provided by the CAC. Emails were sent out to each of the 40 potential interviewees inviting them to participate in our study. Out of the list of 40 individuals, 13 replied and participated in an interview. Due to COVID-19 precautions, all interviews were conducted via Zoom.

To conduct the interviews, all participants were sent a link to a scheduled zoom meeting. When the interviewees joined the Zoom link, they were greeted by a group of three students who were assigned to conduct that interview. The student who was assigned to lead the interview began by informing respondents of their rights as research participants. Interviewees were reminded that participation is voluntary and that they were free to stop the interview at any time. They were informed that confidentiality would be strictly protected, and that any responses used in final reporting will be divorced from any potentially identifying information. Once they were given that information, they were asked if they had any questions for us. Then they were asked to provide their informed consent to participate in the research, which all respondents did.

Once all the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed (initially through online transcription processes, followed by editing for accuracy). The full transcriptions were used for coding and analysis. Responses were put into an excel spreadsheet so that all responses to each question could be organized and analyzed. Specifically, each set of responses was thoroughly reviewed to identify themes that emerged across the full set of responses to each of the questions.

All coding was double checked by three additional students to identify any possible mistakes and to ensure informal intercoder reliability. If there was a disagreement, the example would be brought up in class to determine if the coding needed to be changed. When the coding was finished with no disagreements, we were then able to provide counts for each theme to show which were the dominant themes that emerged, and which were secondary themes. In presenting the interview data, we have reported those themes and provided some basic analyses to help make sense of the patterns that emerged among responses.

Interview Analysis

A. Significant Interactions with Law Enforcement

The first half of our interviews addressed respondents' interactions with law enforcement, so we started with a basic question to gauge the extent of those interactions. Specifically, we asked: "Have you experienced any significant interactions with local law enforcement agencies?" While the question was framed as a simple yes-or-no, it allowed us to follow up to ask about the nature of those interactions – for example whether they were positive or negative, the specific nature of the interaction, etc.

All thirteen of our respondents indicated that they had experienced significant interactions with law enforcement in the past. Of the total, seven participants reported mainly negative interactions, four participants reported a mix of positive and negative responses, and only two participants provided purely positive responses. Below, we present the positive interactions followed by the negative interactions. The predominance of negative experiences is perhaps not surprising given the high visibility of the most negative and violent sort of interactions nationally between law enforcement and African Americans. The interactions discussed by respondents with mixed experiences (both positive and negative) will be reported as either positive or negative interactions, as appropriate. While most respondents drew from their personal experiences with law enforcement, some also spoke about the experiences of people they know, such as families and friends. That makes it clear that for many of our respondents, their perceptions of law enforcement are shaped not by personal experiences, but by vicarious experiences as well.

The two respondents who reported positive experiences emphasized the essential role of policing was necessary in our local communities and suggested that some negative experiences are a natural outcome of that role. For example, one respondent said:

“Um, first of all of my experiences have been positive. I have been fortunate to not have dealt with some of the issues that most of our African American folks have had to deal with. Um, yeah, I feel like we need law enforcement in our communities. Just because there's some experiences that don't go very well, does not mean that all law enforcement folks are not good individuals.”

This respondent elaborated on needing law enforcement in order to keep society balanced and make sure everyone was safe.

The other respondent with positive experiences stated:

“We had more community policing, and so I was a part of D.A.R.E. [Drug Abuse Recognition Education Program] and G.R.E.A.T. [Gang Resistance Education and Training Program] back when I was in Orlando, Florida. You know, to be able to bring awareness and to, you know, show them the warnings and was put on with the Oxnard police program.”

The respondent shared that if there was more community involvement, there is less likely to be the kind of violent conflicts that have marred other communities around the nation.

Across the responses that focused on negative interactions, the dominant recurring theme was stereotyping by law enforcement. One respondent made clear his frustration at having been stopped extremely frequently by law enforcement simply because of the way he looks:

“But I got stopped 62 times in the first month and none of those stops did I get a ticket. There was purely harassment and over the years there have been incidents like that. I always seem to fit the description.”

We can only assume that the respondent gave that particular number for dramatic emphasis, but it is clear that he believed he faced excessive police stops.

The phrase used by the respondent above – that he “fit the description” – is one that we heard multiple times as a source of frustration and bad feeling. Another respondent talked about their friends or relatives’ experiences, including the following:

“And the reason why they got pulled over, was because they said the CHP said they fit a description. And the only description they fit was they were two black males. They were tall. They're six foot something, you know, both at the time we were college students. So definitely not in gangs. They don't even look like it, only when they think they wear bandanas or anything like that. So, it's just true harassment.”

Based on the frequency that African Americans are stopped for fitting a description, it is clear that a sense of harassment and profiling is a key contributor to why their experiences were negative.

Another common theme among those within negative experiences was the excess – or abuse – of power displayed by law enforcement. One respondent described the following situation in which law enforcement used a show of force at the time of a traffic stop that seemed entirely unnecessary:

“Not only did he ask for all of my things -- like from my license, registration. He also called for backup, which was like the scariest thing for me because I’m like

‘This all this for a taillight.’ I really didn’t do anything. So, I looked in my mirror and there’s three extra cars.”

This respondent’s experience demonstrates just how intimidating the police can be to the average citizen – and especially to African American citizens -- as simply having additional officers called to scene can create a sense of extreme danger, and have a negative impact on that person’s perception of the police (as well as those of their friends and relatives). Another respondent described another secondhand experience, which sou with tragic consequences. She stated:

“I’ve had family members that have had unfortunate encounters with our local law enforcement. So, um, I’ve had a number of family members that have gone through the system that have been harassed, that have been assaulted that now have developmental delays because of certain actions and behaviors of law enforcement back then.”

This participant’s answer was shocking, as it demonstrates just how negatively someone can be affected by negative interactions with law enforcement, and underscores how perceptions of law enforcement can be shaped by the experiences of others.

The fact that the negative responses outweigh the positive responses help us determine that there is a negative majority in how African Americans perceive law enforcement and police. The responses show us that there is a likelihood that African Americans are going to have a negative perception of law enforcement, and many of them may have had experienced their own negative interactions with the police. On the other hand, the fact that we received some positive responses also indicates that these experiences need to be better understood on a case-by-case basis. By that, we mean that it may be important and significant to consider just how biased

some second- or third-hand experiences may be. We created a crosstabs tabulation table to compare the positive and negative from first-hand and second -hand experiences. We found that eight respondents said that they had positive first-hand experiences while zero had positive second-hand experiences. Also, there were seven negative first-hand experiences reported while five had negative second-hand experiences. We found that all second-hand experiences reported were negative. This fact appears to be an important variable in whether or not an African American individual is going to have a positive or negative reaction of police and law enforcement as a whole.

B. Hesitation in calling Law Enforcement

In an effort to understand the African American population's perceptions of and experiences with local law enforcement agencies, we asked our thirteen respondents how they would feel about calling law enforcement should they be in a position in which they felt like they needed assistance. Specifically, we asked: "If you found yourself in a position in which you felt like you needed the assistance of law enforcement, you would have any hesitation about calling based on the recent police brutality incidents?" We encouraged respondents to provide specific feedback on why they would or would not feel any hesitation when reaching out. Based on the recent political turmoil and controversy surrounding policing practices which prompted the mobilization around Black Lives Matter, we would expect that the majority of our interviewees would feel at least some hesitation when reaching out to law enforcement. Five individuals responded that they would definitely have some hesitation when calling for help, and another two individuals mentioned that they might have at least some hesitation within certain situations. We grouped the "yes" and "maybe" responses together as one in order to accurately represent the

number of respondents that felt they may have at least some hesitation in certain situations when calling law enforcement. It is also important to note that six respondents expressed that they would have no hesitation to call law enforcement, as we discuss below.

For those who expressed that they would hesitate, the supporting reasons fell within three general themes: fear of police violence (three respondents); previous experience with law enforcement (two respondents); and possible discrimination against African Americans (two respondents).

Three respondents explained that their hesitation stems from their fear of police violence. One respondent noted that changes in policing practices within recent decades has increased their fear of law enforcement: "I think policing has changed in one way over the years that they have become a lot more violent." Another individual alluded to similar fears and uneasiness, as indicated in the following concern: "I don't know how they can react, will they come after me?" The third respondent within this theme explained that his hesitation in calling law enforcement stems from the current social climate within the country. He clarifies that although he had not had any negative experiences himself, he still worries about other people being harassed. The respondent referenced an experience in which he avoided calling law enforcement for fear of how they might treat the people that he was reporting:

"I didn't want them to go in there. Beating anybody up. Picking people up who didn't need to be picked up or maybe without papers or whatever. So, I hesitated."

The interviews revealed that the fear of negative reactions, and even possible violence or brutality towards themselves or others, causes significant hesitation in their willingness to call law enforcement agents.

Another supporting reason for hesitation to call law enforcement was the fear of possible discrimination against African Americans. Respondents explained that they felt racial discrimination still exists within our society and can be seen clearly within our law enforcement agencies. One individual referenced the war on drugs and explained how he felt that society translated that into war on people of color. He mentioned, “I still have hesitations because I know certain people with certain records and how they look like me.” His response emphasizes his fear of being discriminated against based solely on the color of his skin due to the stereotypes that law enforcement places on individuals that share the same skin tone. Another respondent described his distrust of law enforcement in the following terms:

“I think there is a bias against, you know... like, people are African Americans, whatever you want to call it. It's almost like we're guilty before anything.”

This respondent explained that he worried about whether law enforcement would even believe him, or his concerns based on recent discrimination against African Americans.

Multiple interviewees also explained that their hesitation stems from fear of possible discrimination and the fear of possible violence but emphasized their own firsthand experience with this type of mistreatment. One respondent explained that his past interactions were not pleasant, indicating that law enforcement had disregarded his concerns and made him feel badly about calling for help. He continued:

“Just how they've made me feel in the past when I've called them for something as simple as asking a question. And it's like, when I get on the phone with them -- I get off the phone feeling worse than when I initially called in.”

Another individual explained that he would only call law enforcement if he “really, really” needed them. Describing his upbringing in Los Angeles, he notes “the hostility, the bad talk, the dirty blames that they would use.”

From the seven responses that indicate some hesitation when calling law enforcement, we can see that the fear of -- and past experience with -- being rejected, ignored, or mistreated by representatives of law enforcement plays a major role in an individual’s ability to comfortably reach out to law enforcement in a time of need. It is apparent that race plays a major role in shaping these very perceptions and experiences and thus we should recognize this finding as a major point of concern within our community.

While over half of the respondents indicated some hesitation when calling law enforcement, the other six respondents indicated that they would not have any hesitation at all when calling. With the highly visible and violent experiences of African American interactions with law enforcement of recent years, it is worth focusing on why some continue to feel perfectly comfortable requesting their assistance. Given that our sample consisted of community leaders, we might attribute at least some of this confidence and trust to our respondents’ status and connection with the community. In fact, as we report below, many of those who feel comfortable reaching out to law enforcement for help do so because they have personal connections with officers or leaders on the force. We might expect our results to be much different within a population of African Americans that are not as well connected within the community as the leaders that we interviewed.

Three of the six respondents that explained they would not have any hesitation at all also indicated that they value and encourage relationships with law enforcement or even share interpersonal relationships with certain individuals within law enforcement itself. That, they

noted, has helped establish their trust for local law enforcement agencies. For example, one respondent said:

“I’m very comfortable with them. I also have a relationship with the Sheriff. And so I feel very comfortable with Ventura County Sheriff’s Department. So I have no problem reaching out to them or any other jurisdiction.”

The respondent went on to describe his relationship with the Oxnard Chief of Police. Another interviewee also described their connection with the Chief, explaining that he is both a friend on Facebook and a familiar judge in the annual speech Expo for Black History Month. Within this same theme, the third respondent highlighted the importance of establishing connections with local law enforcement, indicating that both he and his children value the relationships they have created in the community. Simply knowing or hearing from a law enforcement agent that you feel you can trust can completely reshape your perception of law enforcement. It is important to consider this finding when establishing reforms and efforts to amend the relationship between law enforcement and the community.

The other three respondents who indicated they would not hesitate when calling law enforcement provided a wide range of supportive reasoning, including their personal experience, the area they live in, and the fact that they feel that not all law enforcement agents are bad. One individual explained:

“My personal experiences have been a lot better than most. And so, I don’t . . . I still don’t carry the same amount of fear that I know a lot of other people would.”

The respondent also mentioned that her experience and level of concern may be much different if she lived in an area with a higher percentage of people of color. Although nearly half of the respondents indicated that they do not personally feel any hesitation when reaching out to

law enforcement many of them also acknowledge that other African American who do not have relationships with law enforcement or who possibly live in more diverse areas may feel more reluctance when reaching out for help.

C. Recommended Reforms in Local Law Enforcement

While one of the main goals of this research is to deepen our understanding of the relationship between African Americans and law enforcement in Ventura County, the ultimate goal of the CAC is to advocate for solutions to improve that relationship. Consequently, we asked all respondents to share any ideas that they might suggest for reforms in local law enforcement practices. Specifically, we presented them with the following prompt and question: “There has been a lot of discussion recently at the national level about potential reforms in law enforcement institutions and practices. Would you favor or recommend any specific reforms at the local level?” All eleven of our respondents favored/recommended some type of reform at a local level.

Before reporting on the suggested reforms, it is important to point out that three respondents said they were already involved or had previously been involved in a local reform: two respondents were involved in panels with the Oxnard Police Department that allowed for more communication within the community.

Across all responses, there were two general themes that all addressed: the need for more frequent cultural sensitivity training, and for more community involvement on the part of law enforcement. Seven out of thirteen respondents suggested that there should be more cultural training in hopes that police officers are better prepared for any type of scenario that may arise. Four respondents recommended greater community involvement on the part of law enforcement

officers in order to form more personal relationships with African Americans in Ventura County. In addition to those themes, two of our respondents suggested other reforms -- social media checks and an assessment of job duties officers are not adequately trained to perform – which we will address below.

Cultural training was the reform suggested most commonly. With the increased visibility of policing practices highlighted by the Black Lives Matter movement, it is clear that the standard training is not effective. Respondents noted that law enforcement officers do not have sufficient quality of training to keep up with the different social issues that have occurred these past few months, such as the Breanna Taylor case. A suggestion would be providing training that is more suitable for handling community-based fears that have recently been brought to the community's attention. One of the respondents suggested: "I would like to see more training for police officers in cultural sensitivity." He/she believes that having cultural sensitivity training would help police officers realize every action they take affects all cultures within Ventura County, especially the ones that are underrepresented.

A second respondent explained that their hesitation came from the fact that a lot of law enforcement officers live outside of the community - so they have little understanding of the community. One respondent suggested a way to familiarize officers in new territory:

"I feel that we're trying to infiltrate the training of officers right? Be more diverse. Because the problem is officers are not coming from the area -- they are coming from over the hill.... They don't know anything about the culture. So I think there should be a big focus on diversity training."

If police officers have more frequent and thorough cultural sensitivity training, they will be taught to handle situations with groups and cultural understandings with which they might not be familiar.

Another respondent explained that training police officers using an approach differently than what has previously been used would be beneficial. He suggested this by saying:

“The community needs to go back to policing the police like kind of like the Black Panthers. Like what we had to do in order to ensure that you weren't harassing, and properly arresting our people so they need police. And it doesn't need to be on a government structured agency, it needs to be a contracted agency, a Greenleaf nonprofit or something to be able to police and train these, these officers in cultural diversity.”

When understanding why the current system has flaws, this respondent believed it was important to compare current methods to previously used methods. After making this comparison, the respondent believed we should revert back to previous methods, such as how the community policed the law enforcement, because the community had more control over how officers treated the citizens and what type of training should be emphasized. The theme of cultural training is important to take into account when establishing reforms that would help relationships within the community.

The second theme that emerged from the responses came from four respondents who suggested that police officers need to have more community involvement. These respondents spoke of a barrier that prevents police officers from fully engaging with citizens in Ventura County – especially African American citizens. If this barrier were lowered, or removed, they suggested that African Americans wouldn't fear law enforcement and respect their authority.

One way a respondent explained that relationship between community involvement and respect for law enforcement was by stating the following:

“Like when I was in, like I said, high school and middle school -- even elementary school -- they knew more about you as a person. And it wasn't as if we're just here to make sure nothing bad happens, but like you actually feel like they're your friend, in a sense, and they're not faking it. As if, they actually care.”

Another respondent echoed that sense of value in community involvement with a similar recollection:

“The reason most of the policemen knew us was because they were involved in the community. They were out meeting people; they were out at sporting events. They were coaching, so they got to know us.”

This respondent reflected on ways the police department was involved with the whole community, and the difference that made in relationships. By reflecting on how things used to be, the respondent also indirectly notes there has been a significant change.

Two final respondents brought up additional suggestions. The first of those respondents suggested that checks should be conducted on officers' social media pages to identify any links to or support for groups that are racist or otherwise antithetical to community service. That respondent reported that he found it necessary to patrol personal social media pages in order to identify those in law enforcement positions who may have ties to white supremacist groups in particular. The respondent felt it was necessary “to ensure that they don't have white supremacy leanings – and, if they do, to get rid of them.”

The second final respondent recommended a detailed assessment of job duties expected to be fulfilled by law enforcement officers. They believed officers were not adequately trained to

deal with situations that may require dealing with those experiencing a mental health issue. That argument is one that is now commonly associated with demands to “defund the police.” His belief was that officers were trained not to diffuse situations, but to respond with physical force:

“They have too wide of a spectrum of duties. We expect too much of them; to be mental health social workers and social worker cops.”

His concern was that officers were expected to take on more roles than they can properly manage. Therefore, they are unable to deal with high tension situations without reacting to them with the “warrior” mentality first.

Both themes – cultural sensitivity training and community involvement – suggest that African Americans in the county want to feel like their law enforcement officers know and understand them, and that they have significant interpersonal relationships within the community that they are serving. We found that the majority of respondents felt as if law enforcement officers needed to have more thorough training in African American culture and the fears citizens’ have towards law enforcement. They feel African Americans need to be better understood and officers need to maintain better relationships within their various communities. Recurring training in cultural sensitivity is imperative to stay connected to the continuous changes occurring within Ventura County. It was believed that community involvement should be a priority in order to maintain relationships so African Americans feel better connected and protected. Job duties need to be assessed and current law enforcement officers need to be patrolled as well in fear of having connections with hate groups that can lead to police brutality. After combining these reforms, it is believed they will add value to the quality of life of all African American residents of Ventura County.

D. Frequency and significance of experienced microaggressions

While African Americans can experience overt and intense expressions of racism, it is much more common to experience more subtle and smaller acts which can individually be less calamitous but which have a cumulative effect that does significant damage to one's quality of life and sense of self. Such microaggressions can be a critical and negative experience in the lives of African Americans, and therefore important to assess. This section provides a general sense of respondents' experiences of microaggressions in their daily lives in Ventura County. To assess that information, we asked respondents: "How often do you experience microaggressions, and how do they impact your daily life in Ventura County – specifically, those that affect your self-worth, self-esteem, self-confidence as a whole?"

For the purpose of this interview, we used the definition of microaggression as: *"Exposure to interpersonal social hostility and negation directed at individuals of color. Microaggressions can include microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations."* Such experiences can have an important impact on the psychosocial well-being of members of the African American community. And it is important to recognize that such interactions may seek to stigmatize African Americans, or deny the consideration offered to others, or even translate to a potentially life-threatening situation to people in the African American community.

We note that while our question addressed microaggressions specifically, many of the responses would not fit the definition – and instead rise to something larger and more overt than microaggressions (such as workplace discrimination or racial profiling by law enforcement). We have included all responses, whether they fit the technical definition or not. We have done so because it will help us to understand how African Americans perceive microaggressions, and

perhaps clarify that there is less of a distinction made between different types of discriminatory behaviors by those who are confronted with them.

Frequency of microaggressions:

Starting with the frequency with which respondents reported experiencing microaggressions, we coded them as occurring *often*, *sometimes*, or *never*. By “often” we mean several times a week to daily. By “sometimes” we mean once to a few times a week. And by “never” we mean no microaggressions were experienced. Of the nine who responded to that question, most respondents expressed experiencing microaggressions often (45.5%), while a slightly smaller number stated that they experience microaggressions only once a week (36.4%). Only 18.1% stated that they have never experienced microaggressions.

At one end of the frequency spectrum are those who experience microaggressions frequently – often with a long history of such exposure. A high frequency of microaggressions can have a lasting effect on the overall mental health based on responses from our participants. One respondent recalls a lifetime of microaggressions, and how he chooses to react to them, by stating the following:

"Obviously, I have had a history of being in various situations and the microaggressions have some of the most challenging to deal with. Because it involves personal interactions in most cases and I'm one who will confront or make a statement if someone says something that I feel is inappropriate. The impact of microaggressions particularly over a lifetime are very harmful and it is . . . I'm of the mindset, now that I'm so glad we're, we're in the times we're in -- because I think it's way overdue – a time to have dialogues about race. Throughout my life, race has been very difficult to discuss particularly with

white people and they get very defensive and in general. But I think that's the way you counter those kinds of comments is to point it out that the first time you encountered”

As stated above, the respondent has described a consistent frequency of microaggressions throughout his life and how he chooses to respond to them. This displays an obvious struggle that microaggressions have made on his everyday life and how grateful he is that time has progressed to encourage discussions about race and how oftentimes the best way to do that is by countering microaggressions head on with the aggressor.

Another respondent spoke about how even infrequent microaggressions can have a critical effect on one’s well-being – in this case, to give a sense of indirect discrimination she faces at the workplace.

“I see some of that microaggression, per se, through my work. I'm a salesperson, and I'm the only for the most part, the only black in this field within Ventura County. So, I see it, and I feel it. I'm not gonna say quite often”

In that quote, the respondent is quite clear that she faces microaggressions and feels as though it is partially, if not wholly, because of being the only African American salesperson in her field.

As noted, the overwhelming majority of respondents described microaggressions as being experienced sometimes or often, but two stated that they never experienced them in Ventura County. The following response describes that she does not personally experience microaggressions and recognizes it as very fortunate.

“I don't know [you know] what I don't have any. I've been blessed. I don't have any issues that I've had to face in regards to feeling any type of way [...] And it's not like I'm blind to the fact that things don't happen to other folks because I do have eyes, and I do, I am able to see and I am able to listen and I do know that there's folks that are not in my

same situation that do have issues, um you know? That they have to be faced with, but I'm a proud citizen of Ventura County and so far I have had a good life here. A good upbringing and so that's about where I'm at.”

This respondent admits while she doesn't personally have a history of microaggressions which she is able to recall, she admits she is not “blind to the fact” that others do indeed face daily challenges regarding their race and microaggressions.

Discussions about race and facing microaggressions varied from respondent to respondent. Their experiences with how to deal with these interactions varied as well. For many who claimed that microaggressions took place “often”, they were also more likely to state that they would be outwardly verbal towards their aggressors. Conversely, the respondents who verbalized that their experiences with microaggressions happened only “sometimes,” it was less likely that they mentioned if or how they reacted to microaggressions.

As seen in the section above, microaggression frequency can vary from person to person. The next part of the question asked respondents to self-report how microaggressions affect their self-esteem, self-worth, and self-confidence. Most respondents did not specifically address this portion of the question. Among the four respondents (31%) who did address it, all four stated that their experiences with microaggressions have not had any effect on them. In fact, many respondents who felt that they experienced microaggressions spoke about their effort to make sure that those experiences did *not* affect them in any way. The following respondent explained that as almost a sort of strategy for responding to microaggressions:

"I've gone to the hotels and restaurants here and it's like, 'Okay, I've been here waiting longer than you have. But they go ahead and seat you because you fit a certain profile and I don't fit that same profile.' And so, you know, you experience these little things. I could

get upset and bent out of shape but a lot of times, you know, I'll tell my wife or, you know, I would tell my kids, 'Hey, just let it go. We're going to get seated and we're going to enjoy the food, just like everybody else'."

In the previous quote, the respondent acknowledges microaggressions exist around him. Therefore, he is conscious that he is receiving unequal treatment from others. Instead of giving it importance, he renounces the issue and maintains a calm demeanor. This shows how microaggressions occur in our community and the strategy of responding by consciously trying not to let those actions have any effect – a strategy that in this case was presented as instructional to the family. Of course, the cumulative impact of having to expend energy to make sure that they have no effect has its own detrimental impact on those who have to do so.

The following respondent explains a different response strategy to deal with microaggressions. She believes that explicit acknowledgement of what is happening and direct communication about it is essential.

"I'm in a totally different mindset. I understand human behavior that understands the mind psychologically and how beliefs, and generational beliefs, can be powerful through experience. I am now at a place where I will call it out, you know, if I feel that something is inequitable or unfair. If I feel like I am being somehow put in a place where I feel less than I am. If I am talked to in a way that would make me think a person thinks I'm less I'll bring it up, you know, I will talk to them because communication is key. I'm big on communication. It wasn't always like that. I would keep that in, I would hold it in and it [would] develop into a rage and an anger and it will come out in other ways, you know, so now I'm able to control it, because I know I control my behaviors I control my actions and what I receive and what I take in and you know and what I refuse to take in."

This quote conveys how this respondent has learned to control her inner emotions. She uses her psychological perspective to educate people rather than allowing her anger to take control of her. This growth stems from the respondent's knowledge of human behavior and how to manage her own emotions despite being faced with inequity over the course of her lifetime.

Contexts of microaggressions:

In the process of discussing microaggressions, many respondents talked about the context of where they have encountered microaggressions here in Ventura County. Consequently, we are able to assess the social contexts where most microaggressions were reported to occur. We believe that discussion is particularly useful for trying to eliminate that sort of behavior – or advocacy to do so. Of those respondents who stated that they have experienced microaggressions, five (38%) took place during public interactions, four (31%) of them in the workplace, three (23%) of them while out shopping, and two (15%) of them during unnecessary traffic stops (which took place primarily in Ventura and Simi Valley). We coded public interactions separate from the other contextual experiences because they took place in public places but did not have recurrent responses among respondents; as such responses in the public interactions' category range from dining experiences, to movie theater outings, and interactions in other public spaces not described. Two additional responses (15%) did not fit into any of the categories.

The most common examples of microaggressions provided by respondents took place during public interactions. Respondents noted that such experiences can be subtle, and perhaps even unnoticed, but underscored how frequently they occur in routine public interactions. As the respondent states:

“It's subtle things that you pick up like even just making eye contact with the person and saying, hello, it's people just they look at you they walk right past you. But then I want to say hello or letting you go first in the mind, or, you know, and these little things you catch every single day.”

This displays how minor actions that many people may not notice as malicious or even intentional may be understood to be a microaggression to the target. This further exemplifies the extent to which microaggressions have an effect on the psychosocial well-being of African Americans.

One of the respondents spoke out about having to speak up for herself while shopping at the grocery store by stating the following:

"Just even basic things like if I go to the grocery store and I'm in line and someone cuts in front of me. And it's not because and you kind of have to go, you know you don't want to. Is it because I'm black, you know, but I wonder if I was white, would a white woman have cut in front of me? And I don't think they would, to be honest. And I will tell you, I'm very quick to go 'oh, excuse me. No, ma'am. I was there.' You know, and I have no problem exerting myself because I know that people will just kind of run over you and take advantage.”

This respondent felt that even during visits to the grocery store, she was being mistreated by some of the customers due to being African American. She verbalized the importance of not allowing herself to be treated any differently.

Another respondent shares a much more serious experience where his life could have been endangered simply by participating in his daily routine.

"[W]hen I lived in Camarillo, you know, I went jogging one morning at five o'clock, and there was a white girl who was also jogging in front of, you know, she was in front of me a little bit of a distance and I noticed that [she] look[ed] back and she saw me. And then she looked back as we were jogging on, keep going. And I'm still like I'm behind her, but I'm not really you know we're going the same direction. But I'm not trying to get her anything else but you look back a second time. And I thought to myself, hmm. You know what I'm going to turn around and I'm going to go the opposite direction. Because she's looked back twice, and I don't know if she has her cell phone. I don't know if she's gonna call. I don't know what she's going to say, but I know that the officers are going to come up here and see me and see her. And what it is they're going to go with, and it's completely innocent and I'm not doing anything wrong, but for my own safety and for and for my own time. Now I'm not caught up wasting my time arguing with people and try[ing to] explain myself. I'm just going to go off to the other direction and jog and that will end that."

This respondent's experience shows the fear which going for a simple run in Camarillo caused him. Despite being a part of his typical routine, the underlying fear that comes with the passing glance of a jogger in front of the respondent and not knowing how that jogger is going to respond to an African American man jogging behind them. He explains that instead of continuing along his jogging path, he simply turns around and returns home to prevent possible police involvement.

Another quite common social context in which microaggressions were presented to us took place in the work environment. This comes as no surprise, as work environments are often somewhat hostile, even without microaggressions, per se.

One respondent recalls an attempt to seek out a higher position which he was qualified for, and despite his attempts to get the position, he was often blocked by upper management.

“As I said, I was in [the] field [of] customer services and sort of a hybrid position that was in the Union, which is still a supervisor position. Okay. And that's what I was seeking because I didn't want to lose the protection of the Union. I had some managers who I know they'd have gotten rid of me if I didn't have that protection. Okay. But there they had what they called dimension interviews. Which were very subjective in the grading and I always seem to come out for a very long time. I seem to come out second in the interviews every time. Knowing that I could do the job and I had much greater knowledge and experience than the person [who was] given the job, and they knew I could do the job because while the vacancy occurred, they would upgrade me to do the job. Okay. Every time and so it wasn't until one of the managers retired that I actually got the promotion.”

This respondent shows frustrations about being prevented from receiving a promotion which he was qualified for despite his various attempts at being promoted. He verbalizes significant frustration in regard to always coming in second in the interview process and only finally being qualified for the job once someone else retired. This also illustrates how some respondents interpreted illegal discrimination through the prism of microaggressions.

Two respondents mentioned significant experiences involving traffic stops. (These experiences link to other parts of the interviews concerning law enforcement interactions.) One respondent recalled significant interactions in both Ventura and Simi Valley.

“I've been stopped by the police in certain areas, and I know going to Simi [and] I know certain parts of Ventura, you get stopped, and I'm very cooperative and I know that

sometimes when these things spin up is because you say things under your breath. And so I had to teach my kids don't make any comments to yourself. In other words, yeah, they told you, and you say, yeah, yeah. You did it. You know, and you're whispering something under your breath. And of course, the officer hears it and it causes things to escalate up. And you don't need that. Just keep your mouth shut. Think it in your head and let it go. And you can walk away and tomorrow. You can go after and file a complaint. Everything else because you're still alive and you haven't been beat up and you haven't had them slammed to the ground or put their knees on your back and all those other kinds of things that do happen.”

The respondent shows fears of driving in both Simi Valley and Ventura as a result of how impulsive their police have been known to interact with African Americans in the community. The respondent also explained the thoughts that go through his head during a traffic stop and how he has taught his children to avoid escalation during traffic stops. He closed by stating that if you comply and don't talk back to the officer involved, at least you'll be alive at the end of it all.

Among the responses which were unable to be categorized in the themes already discussed, one respondent verbalized being terrified of going to Ventura to consume alcohol, repeatedly referring to the city as “Ventucky” (a local phrase that links Ventura to some of the regional cultural patterns associated with Kentucky) throughout their response.

"So when I go to Ventura to eat, I eat. I don't drink in Ventura, okay? I don't drink in Ventura [...] So remember, if you're drinking age already and you go to Ventura have some water. Drink water, don't drink booze cause Ventura has a tendency to be a little bit,

little bit more, or in the city of Ventucky a little a little more forceful okay because of this. Because of this, okay.”

This respondent verbalizes a generalized fear of drinking in Ventura because of experiences they have had with police on several occasions. So due to the high volume of historical episodes with police in Ventura, they choose to not drink while they are in the city – a behavioral change to avoid racist treatment.

The other response in the undefined category mentioned the final presidential debate between President Trump and now-President-Elect Biden, noting that it was not necessarily a direct microaggression towards the respondent but that they felt the same inner response as they would had it been a direct microaggression. The respondent mentions the following:

“When someone makes a statement like President Trump made about he was the least racist person in that room. Though those kinds of statements are a tell. If you had to say that then it's likely that you are racist.”

This respondent brings up a different type of microaggression by mentioning President Trump claiming that he is the least racist person in the room. While this is not a direct microaggression targeted at the respondent, it is still a valid point to be made in regards to the discussion surrounding microaggressions and even the involvement of mass media such as a televised debate where something like this was said. Does this still qualify as a microaggression, or has it escalated up to a “macroaggression”?

E. Changes Necessary to Improve Life of African Americans in Ventura County

Our final question was designed to elicit an understanding of how the African American residents of Ventura County think that their quality of life could be improved, both individually

and as a community. Specifically, we asked the following question: “Finally, what changes would you like to see in any aspect of life in Ventura County that would enhance and add value to the quality of life of African Americans, individually and as a community?” We identified four themes that emerged in the responses.

In the first theme, respondents gave an ample amount of attention to increasing political and community involvement. A key aspect of that engagement would be having more African Americans running for office to begin to bring about greater representation in the county. The following respondent suggested that Oxnard should actively seek out that representation, across all communities: “If Oxnard really ensures and wants to be that place of diversity, then they need to ensure that every diverse culture is represented in our city council in our county.” Another respondent suggested that the same push for diversity should occur in other venues as well, such as in school advisory boards and teaching/counseling positions. According to this respondent:

“Are you ensuring there is an African American face in there? Because no one else can tell the plight of African American, but an African American. And so, if you don't have the people at the table. How are you showing diversity?”

A related concern was representation for the purpose of developing better relations across communities in the county. One respondent specifically mentioned the need for more African Americans running for office in order to speak up for bringing their community together with Latinas/os. The respondent went on to say: “I would like to lessen the stress between African American and Latino communities, because we are all in the same fight.” That type of coalition would be particularly effective in addressing different forms of racism and oppression, which is the main target of that common fight.

The second theme, Equality in the Workplace, was brought up by three respondents. The main focus was the low representation of African Americans in the local workforce, as well as the prevalence of discrimination against them. One respondent spoke to underrepresentation with the following observation: “I walked into Smart and Final on Oxnard Boulevard and I didn’t see any black people working in there.” That same respondent went on to mention how that is common in many stores throughout the county. He suggested that lack of representation may be the reason African Americans get discouraged and do not apply for jobs. That is, they feel like they won't be hired because there are no other African Americans working there.

A similar concern about discrimination against African Americans was that it prevents them from getting hired for the jobs that they do apply for. As she observed: “I don't want to make it about race, but I have to say I'm overqualified for positions that I applied for, and I don't get them within the county.” Although this respondent has an A.A., B.A., and a Master’s degree, she still finds it hard to get by as an African American living in Ventura County. The issue of discrimination was brought up by another respondent who expressed that many African Americans experience some sort of discomfort within the workplace, and that discourages them and prevents them from succeeding. She brought up a recent high-profile example to illustrate her point:

“This happened recently, a few years ago, with the Chancellor of the Community College. She was very smart, effective. But again, she was made so uncomfortable that she eventually left. And, of course, they gave her a monetary going away present not to talk about it.”

Each of these respondents disclosed how African Americans suffer from discrimination and mistreatment in the local workforce, and as a result they are not widely represented, get paid

less than white workers, and generally get treated unfairly just because of the color of their skin. All respondents who brought up these issues emphasized that this situation needs to be changed.

For the third theme, three respondents expressed Expanding Schools' Curricula so that it does not focus solely on white/Anglo-American history but incorporates African American history as well. A couple of respondents mentioned how schools should make students aware of Black history, and not only during Black history month or around Martin Luther King Jr's birthday. One respondent explained the positive effect that such a change would have in the community:

"I believe that if our history was actually taught correctly and incorporated into the curriculum that we study every day, that would initiate a change, that would, you know, go from the, the Kool Aid jokes and the stereotypical jokes into, you know, being serious and respecting one another, and giving us the respect that is needed."

By incorporating the study of African American history into the curriculum, students of *all* racial backgrounds would be educated on the history of African Americans and not just the short snippets of history we get by learning the same thing every year during a single month. Another respondent suggested that incorporating African American studies at the elementary level would be most beneficial because students at that level will be impacted most and it will make them reconsider what they are being taught at home. By doing so, the respondent suggests that this will lessen the tension and stereotypes toward the African American community.

Moving along to the fourth theme, two of our respondents brought up increased cultural activities and events as a way to improve life for African Americans in the county. Respondents suggested that culture (in the sense of the arts) can make an important contribution to quality of

life – not only by bringing African Americans together as a community, but by connecting more deeply with other communities as well. One of the respondents explained that in the following terms:

“I’d like to see more arts and culture here in the city and the county in general...

So you know those little things like that, I think, are what make it [life] better.”

The respondent even acknowledged how the Performing Arts Center of Oxnard is in bad shape and needs to be updated to better serve the community to host cultural activities and events. The respondent also addressed culture in terms of its ability to bring the African American community together, specifically talking about going to Los Angeles (which is an hour drive) to visit other African American cultural events. This is important because it illustrates how African Americans feel isolated in the county due to the fact that there is not a large, centralized African American community.

Responses addressing culture not only focused on the unifying effects of African American cultural events, but also highlighted the lack of cultural events in the county to bring African Americans together with other communities. One respondent noted one exception, and used it to highlight a broader need:

“Yeah there’s the Jazz festival here in Oxnard, but I would like to see more events held by the black community . . . throughout the year – and not just put together by African Americans, but by a lot of different folks to come together and have a good time.”

Making events culturally diverse makes a great way to bring other communities together and allowing for a stronger sense of community in general.

There was one final response that did not fit into any of the previous themes. This respondent's main concern was with the presence of more data when it comes to making decisions about social change. Specifically, the respondent expressed a need for empirical data to help justify certain initiatives that are being put in place within the community. According to the respondent: "It's very important to us to have empirical data so that when we try to make changes in a certain area that we will have some data to back it up."

One of the things that is clear throughout all the themes is the need not only for strengthening *intracommunity* relationships, but also for strengthening *intercommunity* relationships – especially with the Latina/o community. That suggests that the question of improved quality of life for African Americans in the county depends not only on a strong African American community and culture but having deeper and stronger relationships with other groups in the county.

Conclusions & Recommendations:

This research provides a good window into issues affecting the quality of life of African Americans in Ventura County, as well as priorities concerning foci for advocacy. Our hope is that it can be used to more effectively advocate for action and policies that will address those issues. It is critical to remember that the research was conducted at the peak of the Black Lives Matter Movement, and that the issues at the core of that movement were central to this research. It was a time of more open consideration of the differential treatment of African Americans in our society, especially as that relates to interactions with law enforcement. As such, it offers a focused perspective on those issues at a time when they were being considered most deeply and broadly.

Among the important suggestions for improvement, it is clear that there is a strong sense of the need for increased community engagement. That includes a sense that greater engagement on the part of the African American community in intra- and inter-community events, as well as encouraging greater engagement in political leadership. A mirror image of that perception is the suggestion that one way to improve police-community relations would be greater community engagement on the part of law enforcement.

While there are a number of possible recommendations that may be drawn from the research, the one that stands out most clearly concerns the CAC itself. The survey research indicates that across the community (or, that sample represented by respondents) there is significant interest in participating in CAC events and engaging with the CAC. That is a valuable resource that the CAC should pursue in the future. That can be done by finding ways to activate greater engagement, and to use that to help to address the many issues identified in the research

that will contribute to an increase in the quality of life for all African Americans – and other communities – throughout the county.