Introduction

I interviewed Christine in her office between client meetings.[1] At the time of the interview, Christine owned her own business as an alternative medical practitioner and was engaged to marry a white man with whom she had been in a long-term relationship and with whom she had a son. Christine described how she started to feel more African American after she became a mother. She described having many white friends and knew many white families with whom she felt close and whose company she enjoyed, but after she became a mother, she found herself seeking out other African American middle-class mothers. Despite these close connections to a range of white people, during our interview, Christine easily rattled off a list of playgrounds that she no longer visited because of the cool reception she believed she received from the white mothers she met in these locations. She explained,

> The main thing about being a black mom that is probably important to say is not feeling included in white motherhood society. . . . It feels like when I go to the playground, there is the "them" and there is the "us." For the most part, black moms don't care about what other moms are doing, but I have friends who have left playgroups because the white women look at us funny or like you don't exist.

Christine never felt completely at ease or accepted when she visited parks in predominately white neighborhoods or participated in extracurricular activities comprised primarily of white mothers and children. At times, she even felt excluded and judged. Overall, Christine believed that white middle-class mothers distanced themselves from her and her son.

A key part of Christine's experience as a mother was feeling that motherhood was not an experience that transcended racial divisions; in fact, it reified those divisions and excluded her from the dominant white middle-class mothering experience. Christine's account illustrates the limits of existing research on middle-class families that focuses on how socioeconomic status impacts mothers' parenting practices without giving much consideration to how racial identity and gender further complicate those practices.[2] Based on Christine's experiences interacting with white middle-class mothers and her involvement in an African American middle-class mothers' group, Christine believed African American and white middle-class mothers had different parenting concerns, took different approaches to raise their children, and experienced motherhood differently.

Christine's account suggests how the intersections of race, class, and gender influence how mothers parent their children and how they navigate work and family. Christine's distinct parenting concerns resurfaced when she described how these three factors informed her approach to raising her son.

> I don't want his understandings of black folks to be from the media. You know, I want him to know black people as we are. [I also don't want him] growing up with that "black man" chip on the shoulder. Feeling we are weak. Whites have done something to us. We can't do something because of white people. I want him to understand racism in reality so when stuff comes up, we can deal with it, but I don't want him to go around looking for problems.

Despite being middle class and having plans to enroll her son in private school for his education, Christine felt limited in her ability to protect him from the realities of the intersection of racism and sexism—often referred to as gendered racism.[3] Her concerns focused on how her son would be perceived and received by society.

Christine's concerns are supported by research that demonstrates that African American children confront different treatment in school and

with law enforcement, which continues into adulthood, in workplace settings, often varying based on gender.[4] Sociologist Ann Ferguson, in *Bad Boys*, uses participant observation and interviews with African American boys, teachers, administrators, and relatives to provide insight into the dynamics of the school-to-prison pipeline.[5] Ferguson uncovers how racial identity, masculinity, and conforming (or not) to mainstream white middle-class institutional norms are implicated in how boys are labeled "troublemakers" and destined for jail or are labeled "school boys" and put on an academic path.[6] Indeed, scholars have consistently found that within schools, African American boys are more harshly disciplined and more often and more quickly labeled as aggressive and violent.[7] African American girls also confront negative assumptions about their behavior, including being viewed as aggressive, sassy, or unladylike.[8] This body of research has primarily focused on how educational institutions impact children and families from lower-income African American communities. Nevertheless, having additional resources did not remove these issues from Christine's parenting concerns, or from those of the other middle- and upper-middle-class African American mothers in my research. Christine worked to find ways to temper the impact of this societal reception on her son's self-concept and his ability to survive and thrive in life as an African American boy and future man.

When I asked Christine if she felt she had access to other African American middle-class mothers and families, she said, "Maybe not, I guess with my family and friends . . . but it seems like I have to search it out, and it doesn't seem like it is there. Like, I had to put it in my head that I wanted some black mommy-friends and I had to go find them." Christine's account underscores the invisible labor that she engaged in to gain access to other middle- and upper-middle-class African American mothers, families, and communities. Unlike white middle-class families that have a range of neighborhoods and schools that include other white middle-class families, African American middle-class families often have trouble finding middle-class communities that include a significant representation of people of color. This was true for Christine and the other mothers I interviewed for this research.

The extra and often invisible labor to create networks that include other middle-class African American families may be particularly salient

for mothers who live in large urban areas such as the San Francisco Bay Area, the location of my research. Richmond, Berkeley, Oakland, and San Francisco have all experienced a significant out-migration of African Americans to suburban areas, particularly among middle-class African Americans.[9] Indeed, the Bay Area, as an urban center, is not unique in facing this pattern; in recent years, many cities have established task forces to study the issue of the dwindling numbers of African Americans produced by out-migration.[10] This phenomenon is becoming common across the United States, as African Americans increasingly move from cities to suburban locales where there may be few other African Americans.[11]

The phenomenon of out-migration has left behind less robust African American neighborhoods in terms of population and a more residentially dispersed middle class. It has also produced heightened racial isolation for those African Americans who have moved to predominately white suburbs. Some scholars have referred to this phenomenon as a reverse migration, or the New Great Migration, relating it to the Great Migration of African Americans at the beginning of the twentieth century from Southern states to cities on the East and West Coast, and in the Midwest.[12]

To explain why having access to other middle-class African American families was important to her, Christine said,

> I want my son to be around black people. We have wonderful neighbors and friends who are white. . . . [But] I really didn't have any other black mother-friends who had kids the same age. I really want my son to be around black folks. . . . I have gone out of my way to find them, to make sure we see them frequently so he has black playmates.

Christine believed that providing her son with exposure to African American middle-class mothers and their children and families would help to support and develop his self-esteem and racial identity and increase his comfort level. It would also normalize his life experiences as "not unusual" because he is African American and middle class. On the one hand, Christine sought out African American middle-class mothers because she felt pulled toward these mothers based on cultural similarities, shared life experiences, and a desire to protect her son from racial bias. On the other hand, Christine also sought out these groups of mothers

because she felt pushed away and excluded in her interactions with white middle-class mothers.

Christine's vignette underscores that, for far too long, sociological understandings of the American family, motherhood, parenting, and the work–family conflicts and challenges that emerge from these understandings have been based on a reading of the experiences of white middle-class mothers and their families. The place of African American mothers and their families in this picture was viewed as a deviation from the norm based on class and poverty. Indeed, much of the research and popular depictions of African American mothers' experiences focus on working-class and low-income mothers.[13] In addition, with a few notable exceptions, this body of research often approaches African American families from a deficit perspective. It focuses on evaluating parenting behaviors or the negative impact of having lower-income parents on a child's prospects rather than on what these parents want for their children. This research also focuses on class differences rather than on how race and gender complicate parenting approaches at different socioeconomic levels.

Christine's comments illustrate how and why relying on white middle-class mothers' experiences to stand in for all middle-class mothers' experiences results in both unhelpful and misleading understandings of the challenges that different racial groups of middle-class mothers confront. Her identity as both African American and middle class were deeply implicated in Christine's experiences and perspectives related to family, work, and parenting. These experiences, however, are often not the focus of existing research on middle-class families. *Mothering While Black* intervenes into these discussions by focusing on the parenting and work–family experiences and strategies of African American middle- and upper-middle-class mothers and by demonstrating how these experiences and strategies are complicated by intersections of racial identity, class, and gender.

With this backdrop in mind, several questions animate my research. First, what parenting strategies do African American middle-class mothers use to raise middle-class sons and daughters in a racially unequal world? Second, how do these mothers make decisions and create strategies regarding work, family, and childcare? Third, with both of these questions in mind, what cultural, social, legal, and economic forces shape these strategies?

Through in-depth interviews with sixty middle- and upper-middle-class African American mothers, I examine these questions. I was consistent in the questions and topics I covered with each mother, but I also had some flexibility that permitted each mother to explore topics of her choosing. I conducted these interviews without assumptions about the societal expectations that would influence participants' accounts. Participants were recruited through the use of modified snowball sampling techniques. Study announcements were sent via email to African American and predominately white professional women's and mothers' organizations. The study was also announced at a range of other civic, business, religious, and social organizations. After their participation in the study, respondents were asked to refer others as potential participants. All of the interviews were conducted in person at a location of each participant's choosing. It is important to note that these interviews were conducted between 2009 and 2011. Barack Obama had become the first African American to be elected as the president of United States, and this may have influenced some mothers' perspectives and outlooks regarding race and gender.

Through analyzing these mothers' accounts, I revise existing theories and map out alternative theories related to motherhood, family, and parenting. In doing so, I identify additional factors that influence African American middle- and upper-middle-class mothers' decisions related to work, family, parenting, and childcare. I also explore the societal expectations against which these mothers justify their decisions and how they make those justifications.

Existing research often focuses on how differences in economic resources explain mothers' decision-making.[14] However, my interviewees' accounts demonstrate how racial identity, class, and gender work in tandem to produce a different set of default expectations against which mothers must negotiate in their daily decisions. Using the analytical lens of intersectionality, *Mothering While Black* examines how the interplay of these intersections with other institutions across society has important theoretical and empirical implications for African American middle- and upper-middle-class mothers' beliefs, practices, experiences, and decision-making.[15]

As a middle-class African American woman and a mother, I share demographic characteristics with the participants of my study. I did not offer that I was a mother, but when asked, I answered honestly and then

redirected the interview back to the respondent. Sharing these characteristics with my participants seemed to help build rapport and to create an environment in which people seemed willing to share the details of their lives. In general, respondents readily shared concerns about racial identity and racism and, at times, were more reticent about discussing class divisions or distinctions among African Americans. Despite the benefits of this "insider status," I worked to ensure that I refrained from making assumptions about shared understandings. For a more detailed discussion of the methods, please see the appendix.

DOMINANT IDEOLOGIES OF MOTHERHOOD AND PARENTING

Christine's account mentions the "white motherhood society" from which she felt excluded. In doing so, she was referencing two dominant ideologies, or frameworks, of motherhood and parenting and their related practices and expectations. Both ideologies are widespread in society and are the focus of discussions and critiques in family and work–life scholarship. The first ideology privileges economic resources and status in determining parenting beliefs and practices.[16] The second ideology privileges the private sphere: the realm of homemaking and caregiving in the lives of "good" mothers.[17] Indeed, scholars suggest that when mothers do not conform to the prescribed practices of these ideologies, they often feel compelled to explain their noncompliance.[18] These two ideologies are described in more detail in the next two sections.

MIDDLE-CLASS PARENTING: CLASS TRUMPS RACE

Middle-class Americans are often envisioned as having access to a range of privileges and amenities, such as neighborhoods with low crime rates, increased personal safety, high-quality recreational resources, access to better schools, and greater occupational and residential opportunities. The first ideology of motherhood and parenting assumes that material resources and, specifically, class status determine parents' approaches to raising their

children and play the most significant roles in determining an individual's life experiences and trajectory.[19] Annette Lareau suggests that middle-class parents from different racial backgrounds share common concerns about their children's life trajectories, a common outlook about what is best for their children, and a common approach to parenting their children and organizing family life.[20] Children from these families lead highly sched-uled lives that are filled with structured extracurricular activities, such as Little League, soccer, dance classes, and music lessons. These activities are aimed at enriching children's education and helping them acquire specific cultural, economic, and social capital that will enable them to reproduce their parents' middle-class status and successfully navigate middle-class lives as adults.[21] These parents view educational settings as places that should make every effort to meet their children's needs, and they encourage their children to adopt the same service-oriented view of these settings.[22] However, this focus on class-reproduction strategies through material resources downplays other parts of parents' identities that may influence parental decision-making or their efforts to influence a child's racial or gender identity and expression. It also downplays the challenges that par-ents from different racial backgrounds may face as they attempt to reap the benefits of their middle-class status.

HOW RACE AND GENDER MATTER
FOR MIDDLE-CLASS PARENTING

Academic and popular depictions of middle-class mothers have largely focused on the experiences of white mothers and their aims for their chil-dren as adults.[23] The works of Patricia Hill Collins; Suzanne Carothers; Katrina McDonald; and, more recently, Riché Barnes represent notable exceptions.[24] Carothers examines how mothers who perceived themselves to be middle class taught their daughters the meaning of mothering and work.[25] Collins's scholarship draws on a variety of sources to examine the diverse standpoints of all black women and mothers on a range of issues.[26] McDonald examines the historical bond of African American women across class groupings and how increasing class divisions are weakening those ties.[27] Last, Barnes's research examines African American middle-

class women in Atlanta who have reduced their commitments to their careers to prioritize their commitments to their marriages.[28]

Despite these exceptions, scarce attention has been paid to the lives of middle- and upper-middle-class African American mothers.[29] Yet these mothers often experience different social contexts and have different resources than both white middle-class mothers and poor and working-class African American mothers. In the contemporary era, African American middle-class mothers navigate a social and cultural context that has shifted to include increasing class divisions within African American communities, new neighborhood and educational constraints and opportunities, and postracial perspectives on identity that have not fully been considered in previous research.[30]

Scholars have questioned the idea that class is more important than racial identity by pointing out persistent challenges middle-class African Americans encounter across a range of social contexts, despite their additional resources.[31] African Americans' access to middle-class privileges is mediated through their racial and gender identities, which often prevent them from reaping the full benefits of their educational and economic resources.

When African Americans possess markers of middle-class status, such as a college education, a good job, and a decent income, those markers are often not accompanied by the same material benefits or security as they are for their white American counterparts.[32] Middle-class African Americans continue to confront both explicit and implicit discrimination and, as a group, their economic, occupational, social, residential, and educational opportunities are substantially different from those of middle-class whites.[33] African Americans with similar credit histories and financial profiles as whites, for example, face additional hurdles when seeking mortgages.[34] Indeed, the lives of middle-class whites have often been underwritten by the economic wins of previous generations, which include, for example, parental assistance with educational costs, contributions to down payments for first-time home purchases, or inheritances.[35]

By contrast, scholars suggest that middle-class African Americans are more likely to be asked to give financial assistance to, rather than receive it from, their parents.[36] They also are more likely to live in neighborhoods with fewer resources than those in which poor whites live.[37] And when

they do move into predominately white middle-class neighborhoods, research demonstrates that they face challenges such as feeling less welcome, experiencing additional surveillance when using neighborhood resources, and managing stress related to encounters with racism.[38] Thus, even when they physically occupy the same spaces as middle-class whites, middle-class African Americans' experiences of those contexts are very different due to their distinct societal reception.[39]

Where intergenerational economic mobility and class retention are concerned, the futures of African American middle-class children are far from certain. Patrick Sharkey points out that nearly 50 percent of these children experience downward mobility, as compared with 16 percent of their white middle-class counterparts.[40] As a consequence, the reproduction of middle-class status cannot be taken for granted within African American families, and this uncertainty may impact parenting practices and priorities.[41]

A number of scholars who study middle-class parents have identified differences between what African American and white parents emphasize to their children,[42] how they approach discipline,[43] and what they identify as their current and future parenting concerns.[44] The practices of African American middle-class families may differ from those of lower-income African Americans, but their practices may also differ from white middle-class parents whose children do not have to learn how to navigate racial stigma.[45] Researchers have also found diversity in how African Americans approach the racial socialization of their children and the extent to which gender influences how they socialize their children.[46] In the contemporary era, African American middle-class families continue to experience racism, with their children beginning to have such encounters at an early age.[47]

Despite evidence of clear differences in how society responds to middle-class African Americans as opposed to middle-class whites, research on families often focuses on how individual characteristics such as income, educational attainment, culture, and family structure impact life outcomes. Although these are important, this scholarship fails to consider how certain kinds of social status constrain or empower the deployment of resources and how mothers and families respond to those constraints. Part of the explanation for the absence of this analysis is that when the experiences of middle-class families are considered, that consideration is

often limited to white middle-class families, which have not been impacted by histories of residential segregation and related processes, such as racial discrimination in lending, redlining, racial steering, and school defunding.[48] Part of the experience of being white middle-class parents is not having to regularly or explicitly think about racial identity or how racial identity informs parental concerns or decision-making. Conversely, as Margaret O'Donoghue points out, African American middle-class parents do not generally share the luxury of *not* thinking about racial identity, racism, and gendered racism and how it informs their and their children's experiences, decisions, and opportunities.[49]

Part of unpacking and understanding African American middle-class mothers' approaches to raising their children requires examining how these families are received differently, or at least how they perceive themselves to be received, in the broader mainstream and largely white society. Diversity in families and their structures is, in part, produced by how intersections of racial stratification and cultural factors constrain and empower their resources.[50]

In addition to addressing concerns related to racism, African American middle- and upper-middle-class mothers' parenting practices provide insights into the diverse micro-level processes related to racial formation theory.[51] Michael Dawson suggests that African Americans view their fates as linked because of shared cultural, economic, and political perspectives and shared experiences of discrimination.[52] Mary Waters comes to a similar conclusion regarding this linked-fate orientation, but she attributes it to American society giving African Americans no alternative other than to identify as a racial group.[53] Recently, however, this linked-fate orientation has been questioned. A report produced by the Pew Charitable Trust Foundation revealed that 40 percent of African Americans perceive an expanding gap in the values of middle-class and low-income African Americans, such that African Americans can no longer be viewed as one undifferentiated racial group.[54] African Americans at the economic extremes—highest income and lowest income—most strongly held this belief of an expanding gap in values. Research conducted by Karyn Lacy also underscores how some middle-class African Americans choose to highlight their racial and/or class identities depending on their social context.[55] This scholarship suggests there is both increasing diversity in how

middle-class African Americans choose to identify and enduring shared concerns that traverse class background. Even so, it fails to examine how gender further complicates these identity processes. In addition, this research has not fully explored the motivations that middle-class African American mothers have in fostering specific versions of African American middle-class identity in their children.

CHALLENGING THE GOOD MOTHER– GOOD WORKER PARADIGM

Despite recent Bureau of Labor Statistics data demonstrating that 67.9 percent of married mothers and 76 percent of unmarried mothers participate in the labor force, the second ideology related to motherhood and parenting assumes that, in the American context, there is widespread acceptance of the idea that being a good mother requires women to focus primarily on their children and families.[56] This perspective is derived from two related ideologies—separate spheres and the cult of domesticity—that emerged during the Industrial Revolution. The separate spheres ideology emphasizes that women should dedicate themselves to the private sphere of home and family, and that men should dedicate themselves to the public sphere of work and wage earning.[57] The cult of domesticity, as a complementary ideology, emphasizes four key virtues of "true womanhood": piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity.[58] These ideologies assume the superiority of the nuclear and self-sufficient family in accomplishing the needs of the family.

Although these ideologies emerged more than a century ago, they continue to shape dominant views of the family in both mainstream and academic discourse. Two contemporary academic iterations of separate spheres and the cult of domesticity dominate family and work scholarship. The first is the intensive mothering ideology, which envisions mothers as ideally committing enormous financial and emotional resources to their children and being intimately involved in all aspects of their development.[59] The second iteration is the competing devotions framework, which views mothers who allot more time to work as having a stronger "work devotion," and those who allot more time to family as having a stronger

"family devotion."[60] Both of these ideologies also privilege the nuclear family form. Although these ideologies of motherhood have been critiqued by a range of scholars—including the scholars who identified them—they still retain their hegemonic influence on many American mothers' decisions regarding work and family.[61] Indeed, when mothers combine work and family, whether by necessity or choice, they are said to experience internal conflict and feel compelled to justify their decisions in relation to these ideologies.[62] Much of the scholarship that focuses on middle-class mothers suggests that all mothers make decisions in light of the same default cultural expectations, supports, and constraints and must seek out alternative cultural reference points and resources when they veer from the more traditional paths. However, as discussed in the next sections, scholars who examine the intersections of race, class, and gender have challenged the universality of these ideologies regarding work, family, parenting, and motherhood.[63] Indeed, there is good reason to believe that these perspectives neither apply to nor are embraced by all mothers.

BRINGING RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER COMPLICATIONS INTO MOTHERHOOD

Intersectional scholars have underscored that the ideologies and related practices of separate spheres and the cult of domesticity, and their contemporary iterations, were based on research that primarily focused on the perspectives of white middle-class mothers and their families, or included too few participants from other racial groups to adequately analyze possible distinctions based on racial and class identity.[64] However, not all groups of mothers were encouraged by society to adopt these ideologies and practices.[65] Indeed, as Bonnie Thornton Dill underscores, cultural pluralism and shifting economic terrains demand diverse family forms, which some may view as subordinate to other family structures.[66] This body of scholarship that focuses on the family and motherhood has often downplayed or ignored the diversity in mothers' experiences in relation to these ideologies.[67] When nonwhite mothers and families are included, scholars often prioritize analyzing distinctions based on class status over racial identity, even when such distinctions are evident in the data.[68] When race is

examined, it is often viewed through a lens of cultural difference instead of as a component of the societal structure that shapes social interactions.[69] Implicitly, this suggests that the experiences of white mothers and their related worldviews can be generalized to all women.

Long-standing differences in the cultural beliefs, practices, and material conditions between African American and white women date to the era of slavery and challenge the universal dominance of these ideologies among today's African American women and mothers.[70] Although African American middle-class mothers have been exposed to these dominant ideologies, they have historically been structurally, culturally, and economically excluded from embracing their practices and/or internalizing their beliefs. To the extent that African American and white families encounter similar pressures, they may respond in the same way—but historically they have often faced different realities.[71] As a group, African American mothers have had a different relationship to paid labor, both legally and based on their economic circumstances, which has had important implications for African American middle-class mothers and their children.[72] This different relationship has also played a part in producing a sense of value in mothers' contributions in the public sphere and a different perspective on work within the home.[73]

In the contemporary era, African American middle-class mothers' parenting practices and opportunities continue to be shaped by economic, cultural, and structural resources that are different from those of white middle-class mothers at both the macro and micro levels.[74] Their practices and opportunities are shaped not only by characteristics that are internal to their families but also by external constraints they confront when deploying their resources in the broader society.[75] Taking an intersectional approach, scholars have underscored that although the majority of white middle-class mothers have internalized the ideologies identified above, mothers of other racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds have generally not been encouraged to embrace and internalize them.[76] Indeed, partially in response to negative societal evaluations of their worth and value, and a negative societal reception in the form of discrimination, African American women and mothers have proactively created and reproduced beliefs and practices related to motherhood, parenting, and childcare that differ from their white counterparts.[77] As a consequence, African American mothers

are often influenced by and feel beholden to distinct ideologies that reflect their own daily experiences and the needs of their communities.[78] Indeed, even when these mothers decide to conform to traditional approaches to mothering, the logic behind those decisions may be framed by different motivations.[79]

THE ROAD MAP OF *MOTHERING WHILE BLACK*

This section explains the layout of this book. Part I, "Cultivating Consciousness," includes four substantive chapters and examines how African American middle- and upper-middle-class mothers approach parenting. Existing scholarship often asserts that class status trumps the importance of racial identity in decisions related to parenting.[80] However, the accounts of these mothers illustrate how intersections of racial identity, gender, and class influenced their parenting practices, their motivations, and the specific version of racial identity they sought to foster in their children. These mothers used typical middle-class parenting strategies, but they also modified them and used additional strategies to address concerns related to the different societal reception they believed that they and their children would confront based on racial identity, class, and gender. Rather than only occasionally coming into play in specific situations, these three factors had a persistent and continuous impact on these mothers' everyday experiences, decision-making, and parenting practices. They used specific strategies to maintain their sons' safety and prevent them from being criminalized as "thugs." They had other practices for protecting their daughters' self-esteem and fostering their independence, self-worth, and self-sufficiency. Their parenting strategies were often motivated by a desire to foster specific versions of African American middle-class identity in their children that were influenced by different orientations to racial identity and middle-class status. Their accounts add to existing scholarship by examining the increasing diversity in African American middle-class racial identity and by revealing that some study participants believed their children had a broader range of identities from which to choose than "just black."

Chapter 1, "Creating Racial Safety and Comfort: Class-, Race-, and Gender-Based Parenting Concerns," outlines how study participants

integrated aims for their children's achievement with creating racially comfortable spaces for their children in their daily parenting decision-making. These decisions included, for example, their children's schools and extracurricular activities. This chapter also describes how racial identity and gender together impacted the worries that these mothers had for their children and outlines different strategies mothers deployed to ensure their children could successfully inhabit and reproduce a middle-class status.

Chapter 2, "Border Crossers: Understanding Struggle," introduces a group of mothers who aimed to ensure that their children were fluent in all parts of the African American community and in cultures of privilege. Border crossers defined authentic African American racial identity as understanding socioeconomic struggle and possessing "street smarts." They wanted their children to be at ease in their interactions with African Americans from a range of social and economic positions. These mothers tended to be among the first generation of people in their families to reach middle-class status. Typically, they had been raised by working-class or poor parents (or grandparents) who did not have college degrees. This orientation to identity was strategically important to these mothers and their children, as they continued to need the skills to navigate social contexts marked by different levels of racial and economic privilege.

Chapter 3, "Border Policers: Finding Our Kind of People," discusses mothers who wanted their children to feel at ease in a variety of middle-class and elite social settings but did not have the same inclination to ensure that their children felt comfortable in poor African American communities. Border policers defined African American racial identity as largely disentangled from firsthand knowledge of economic struggle. They made efforts for their children to have access to middle-class African American peers and families and social, cultural, and political organizations. For these mothers, being authentically African American meant understanding the cultural, political, and historical contributions of the African American community, but they were less concerned with providing their children with direct contact with economic struggle, in part because it was less relevant to their daily lives. Border policers were often raised in middle-class households in which at least one parent had a college degree. Often their families had been middle class for several genera-

tions and connected to middle-class or elite social, economic, and political institutions within the African American community and the broader mainstream white middle-class community.

Chapter 4, "Border Transcenders: Challenging Traditional Notions of Racial Authenticity," describes mothers who wanted their children to be free to embark on lives that were not principally defined by racial identity. These mothers did not want to push a particular way of identifying on their children. Border transcenders worked to ensure their children's access to diverse groups of middle-class peers in which no racial, ethnic, and/or religious group dominated. Border transcenders came from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds but shared a common experience of now belonging to racially diverse communities because of romantic relationships, their extended families, or peer groups. Many of these mothers also had gained exposure to different ways of thinking about racial identity through regular travel to predominately black countries in the Caribbean or through travel to African or European countries during formative periods of their lives.

Part II, "Beyond Separate Spheres and the Cult of Domesticity," shifts the focus to how African American middle-class mothers approach combining work, family, and childcare. It also examines the social, cultural, legal, and economic forces that influence these mothers' beliefs, experiences, and practices. Its three chapters examine the differing cultural expectations these mothers confront in the African American community and the white mainstream society. These chapters show how African American middle-class and upper-middle-class mothers encounter different societal receptions and cultural expectations that influence their decision-making on combining work and family.

Chapter 5, "The Market-Family Matrix: The Social Construction of Integrated and Conflicted Frameworks of Work–Life Balance," describes the social and historical construction of dominant ideologies of "good" motherhood and how African American women have been culturally, economically, legally, and socially excluded from their scope. I present a new framework, the market-family matrix, to analyze work and family. This matrix describes different possible characteristics of the family and the marketplace and, thus, different possible relationships between the two. I argue that the specific characteristics and configurations of the family and

the marketplace can produce a market_family matrix in which mothers who work outside the home experience conflict or integration.

Chapter 6, "Racial Histories of Family and Work: Paid Employment Is a Mother's Duty," examines the default cultural expectations that African American middle- and upper-middle-class mothers describe navigating when making decisions about combining work and motherhood. It also explores the meanings these mothers attach to their decisions. Their accounts underscore that these cultural expectations related to work and family derive from both the broader, predominately white society and the African American community. Such expectations create different pushes and pulls that encourage African American mothers to combine work and family and to stigmatize those who do not. When participants made the decision to reduce their commitment to work to spend more time with their children or to be exclusively stay-at-home mothers, they encountered assumptions about their class status—that they were poor—in their inter-actions with the broader mainstream white society. They also described encountering attitudes from the African American community that they should be engaged in paid employment to contribute to the economic resources of their family and to retain their self-reliance. These partici-pants' decisions to reduce their commitment to work were radical acts that challenged the expectations of their families and communities.

Chapter 7, "Alternative Configurations of Child-Rearing: Supporting Mothers' Public-Sphere Activities through Extended-Family Parenting," describes a different orientation to, and configuration of, the family. Raising children continues to be a mother-centered activity, but kin and community members also serve as important support systems. Ideally, extended family and community members were regular and continuous participants in the lives of my respondents' children. In addition, kin and community members were viewed as the preferred source of childcare in the absence of mothers. Although one might assume using kin and com-munity members for childcare is primarily related to a mother's economic resources, my data suggest that it was also influenced by cultural motiva-tions and expectations within families and cultural and social constraints in the broader society. Kin and community caregivers were also key sources of advice to mothers on raising their children. Indeed, rather than

primarily optimizing their caregiving abilities through studying the advice of experts in the latest parenting books, these mothers often sought out the experience-based knowledge and wisdom from other mothers in their families and communities.

The final chapter, "Conclusion and Implications: Navigating Race, Class, and Gender in Motherhood, Parenting, and Work," synthesizes parts 1 and 2 of the book, as presenting a series of departures from dominant discourses of middle-class mothers to discuss the intersections of racial identity, class, and gender and how they connect to societal institutions. Through several contemporary news stories, I revisit topics discussed in the chapters and explore their theoretical and practical significance. In doing so, I uncover the assumptions and normative expectations regarding parenting and family functioning that undergird these discussions. Although it would be easy to think of African American middle-class mothers as an exception to the norm, I argue that these findings make a more significant impact on how scholars should approach research on the family. Rather than explaining an exception to the norm, the norm itself becomes particularized as something that has been produced by a specific set of circumstances and societal reception, not something shared by all mothers and families. The appendix provides a more detailed description of how I conducted the study, an explanation of my research methodology, and the overall characteristics of the sample.

Ultimately, through analyzing the accounts of these African American middle- and upper-middle-class mothers, this research offers a crucial corrective to the understandings of the formation of cultural ideals of parenting and motherhood by challenging the idea that all middle-class families can be viewed as largely interchangeable based on their resources. It expands on and revises existing theories related to middle-class parenting, racial identity formation, and family and work conflict/integration by demonstrating that the frameworks typically deployed in research on (mostly white) middle-class mothers and their families do not adequately capture the beliefs and experiences of African American middle- and upper-middle-class mothers. Instead, these mothers' approaches to work, family, and parenting are influenced by distinct cultural expectations, derived from both inside and outside of their immediate families and

communities, which are supported by specific social, economic, and structural circumstances. These mothers' accounts provide additional evidence of the racially uneven acceptance of these ideologies of motherhood and parenting by exploring the different cultural, economic, and structural pushes and pulls that African American middle- and upper-middle-class mothers experience when making work, family, and parenting decisions. Indeed, African American families that are characterized by different intersections of racial identity, gender, and class encounter a different societal reception that requires distinct strategies to achieve similar aims as compared with white middle-class families.