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The Voice of Choice: An Examination of African American Parents' Choice of Charter Schools

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THE VOICE OF CHOICE: AN EXAMINATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN
PARENTS' CHOICE OF CHARTER SCHOOLS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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In the early 1990s the first charter school laws were established. Over the past two decades, charter schools have emerged as school of choice for many families, especially poor and minority families. The concept of having a choice in education is an important component to consider when examining the reasons that parents choose charter schools; especially for families that have not had a choice in the past.

Seeking a choice in education is not a new phenomenon. Magnet schools and voucher programs existed prior to charter schools. However, charter schools are a relatively new phenomenon in the field of education. Over the past two decades the charter school movement has continued to grow to over 4,000 charter schools nationally that serve over 1.2 million students.

A large number of the 1.2 million students that attend charter schools are poor and minority students. This study seeks to contextualize African American families' choice of charter schools by framing this choice within a historical and contemporary context. Articles and interviews were examined to cultivate the historical context. Questionnaires and parent interviews were conducted to comprehend the contemporary context. The articles, interviews, and responses to questionnaires were examined through the lens of Critical Race Theory.

There are central themes or tenets within Critical Race Theory. For the purposes of this study, the common nature of racism, property rights, and interest convergence are the main tenets that provide a framework for contextualizing the historical and contemporary experiences of African American's experiences with education and choice.

This question of why African American families are choosing charter schools needs to be considered within a historical context. The answer to this question of charter school choice is not simple or straight-forward. In the United States, African Americans have struggled to receive a fair and equal education. This question needs to be considered within this historical context. To understand the present, the past needs to be considered.