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## The Muzzled Hope: Utilizing Black Protest Thought to Examine African American Males' Identity Development and Academic Success in the Rural U.S. South

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THE MUZZLED HOPE: UTILIZING BLACK PROTEST THOUGHT  
TO EXAMINE AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES' IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AND  
ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN THE RURAL U.S. SOUTH

by

LATOYA D. JENKINS

(Under the Direction of Delores Liston)

ABSTRACT

The problems faced by African American males in the United States is often the result of misconstrued images and stereotypes that present this segment of the population in a distasteful manner. If one chimes in to various circuits of popular culture, glances over the latest headlines of newspapers, and/or listens to the confluent lyrics of hip hop that, eloquently, bridges life struggles with melodic hooks to expose the oppression faced by people of color, one thing becomes apparent: Social progression is dependent upon society's ability to magnify, listen to, and incorporate the voices of marginalized groups.

With the majority of educational research, in relation to African American males, focusing on the abandonment of Black boys in public schools and their lack of academic achievement, little attention has been given to the factors that promote success amongst this segment of the population. Utilizing Black Protest Thought (Watkins, 2005) as the theoretical framework in conjunction with qualitative methodology, the researcher deconstructed the existing stereotypes of African Americans by presenting counter-narratives of three African American males who have achieved academic success (which is defined as obtaining a doctoral degree). Demographic surveys were administered to gain insight on participants' household composition, socioeconomic status, educational history, and parents' educational

attainment. Moreover, semi-structured interviews were conducted to address one central question: How do African American males experience educational success despite issues associated with race and racism?

Although findings of the study mirror some of the existing literature, this work contributes to the discourse of education in significant ways. Identified themes derived from the study that influenced the academic success and identity development of African American males are as follows: a high level of self-esteem; the adaptation of the prove them wrong syndrome; the development and adherence to spirituality; understanding education's utilitarian value; participation in extracurricular activities; the prevalence of family support; and the presence of strong community mentors.

**INDEX WORDS:** African American males, Academic success, Male identity, Resilience

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by

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Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Alana Elise—my “beautiful oath of God”.  
Thank you for reigniting my desire to explore this world through a new lens.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*To whom much is given, much is required*  
*(Luke, 12:48)*

First, I would like to thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. For I know that it is through Him that all things are possible.

I would like to thank my parents (Peggy and Willie), sister (Kimberly), and Cedric—Your words of encouragement as well as your willingness to be a sounding board and a constant source of support have been invaluable in my pursuit of fulfilling God's purpose for my life. To my dear grandmother, Mary Lois—Thank you for encouraging me to go against the grain and follow my heart in all I do. Mr. Werd—Thank you for your insightful eye. It was (and is) greatly appreciated!

To the participants of this study—I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Your stories and exhibition of resilience are invaluable. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Delores Liston, my chair, Dr. Sabrina Ross, Dr. Ming Fang He, and Dr. Eric Hall for your endless encouragement and guidance. It was truly an honor to have such a wonderful group of intellectuals by my side during this endeavor!



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CHAPTER I  
AFRICAN AMERICANS:  
THE UNITED STATES' PERMANENT SECOND CLASS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON  
AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES  
"The Land of Opportunity"

The dilemma in which African American males find themselves, within the United States, is one commonly occupied with feelings of isolation, degradation, and a debilitating sense of hopelessness (Ferguson, 2000; Anderson 2002; hooks, 2004; Noguera, 2003). Similarly, in a society that prides itself in being the "land of opportunity," it is contradictory that African American males are, often, portrayed in a limited number of roles, "most of them deviant, dangerous, and dysfunctional" (Gibbs, 1998, p. 3). Mauer (2011) noted that 1 in 3 African American males will go to prison in his lifetime compared to 1 in 6 Latino males and 1 in 17 White males. This common misconception of African American males has led to this segment of the population being one of the most stigmatized groups in our society (Fashola, 2005; Jenkins, 2006; West, 1994; Tatum, 2005; Ferguson, 2000). Thus, it should be noted that the presence of misconstrued images of African American males held by the dominant society coupled with the lack of positive influences in numerous venues of society are powerful determinants for why Black boys and men dissociate from the prescriptions of White society.

Moreover, if one investigates the problems associated with African American males, it is evident that schools play a vital role in the formation of one's identity and, consequently, one's understanding of dominant norms and values (Delpit, 1988; Tatum, 1997). Furthermore, one could argue that the problems associated with this segment of the

population are heightened by educational experiences; particularly, when the learning environment does not reflect a multicultural curriculum that takes into account the diverse backgrounds of its most important stakeholders: The students (Perry, Steele, & Hillard, 2003; Kozol, 1991). It is my belief, that all children, regardless of race, social class, gender, or any other discriminatory trait, are capable of learning. However, education is a political entity that is often utilized, by the dominant society, as a tactic for social control in which the learner is taught the customs and values of White America, while simultaneously, limiting the integration of varied perspectives (Watkins, 2001; 2005; Kozol, 1991; Perry, Steele, & Hillard, 2003). Essentially, American education serves the purpose of conformity or creating a controlled society (Spring, 2008; Watkins, 2001), in which members of minority groups are forced to choose between their cultural practices and the “norms” of the environment in which he or she exists. Although studies are somewhat limited that focus on how African American males engage in the maintenance of one’s sense of self while, simultaneously, exuding the behaviors deemed appropriate by the dominant society, researchers are relatively consistent in identifying the factors that serve as barriers and challenges to most Black males. These barriers are, often, cited as: Stereotypes (Fashola, 2005; West, 1994; Jenkins, 2006; Tatum; 2005); maintenance of cultural identity (West 1994; Tatum, 2005); racism (Anderson, 2002) and expectations of others (Jenkins, 2003). Although many researchers have attempted to understand the educational experiences of African American males from that of a disadvantaged viewpoint, this study looked beyond the challenges of this group and focused on what factors promote academic success amongst Black males. Hence, the researcher’s purpose was to investigate how African American males reject notions of White hegemony in various social settings and what mechanisms are used to achieve academic

success. As indicative in the title, *The Muzzled Hope*, stories of African American males and their positive contributions to our society are often silenced by White America. Therefore, it was imperative that this research negate the majoritarian narrative held in our society with hopes of raising the critical consciousness of privileged as well as marginalized individuals.

For the purposes of this study, it must be noted that although African Americans are often viewed as a disadvantaged group, there has been some remarkable progress associated with this segment of the population throughout our country's history. In William Watkins' (2001) work, entitled *The White Architects of Black Education*, he reviewed the ideological and philosophical foundations of education in the United States and, consequently, the use of science and politics in the development of the mythical inferiority of Blacks established by White America. One area of interest in this work was that of the Eugenics Movement. Examining the works of scholars such as Carolus Linneaus, Ernst Haeckel, and Benjamin Rush, Watkins (2001) illustrated that misconceptions about African Americans began as early as the 17th century. In particular, these scholars suggested that Blacks lacked the determination and drive required for achievement in most aspects of life, that the color of Blacks' skin was a pathological disease, and that Blacks were developmentally below gorillas and chimpanzees on the evolutionary ladder (Watkins, 2001).

Similarly, Hornsby (2010) exhibited that following the emancipation of African Americans in 1863, many researchers and writers utilized their literary and scientific skills to project the "innate" differences that existed between the White and Black populations. For example, Hornsby (2010) noted that Daniel Brinton proclaimed that Whites and Blacks possessed different developmental patterns and physical features that innately suggested that "the European or white race stands at the head of the list, the African or Negro at its foot" (p.

5). Similarly, Francis Galton, in *The Comparative Worth of Different Races*, suggested that in comparison to Whites, Blacks were two degrees behind in the area of ability (Hornsby, 2010). Furthermore, Joseph Bardin, in 1913, maintained that the physical differences between Whites and Blacks inferred that neural variances existed between the populations; thus, suggesting that African Americans would never be able to compete with the creative and political capacities of their White counterparts (Hornsby, 2010). Most importantly, Watkins' (2001) review of the Eugenics Movement and Hornsby's (2010) review of African Americans in the post-emancipation South suggested that White scholars used their credentials as "educated and civilized beings" to project an "illusion" of Blacks that still holds true to many members of today's society. Race is one of our society's most powerful illusions. Montagu (1997) suggested that the "myth of race" utilized a population's physical attributes to justify a presumed difference in mental capacities and natural inferiority in comparison to their White counterparts. Similarly, one must note that although race is socially constructed, it is not individually controlled. One may govern how he or she behaves, but as social beings we do not define our racial identity.

In addition, Tatum (1997) noted that, in the United States, race played a critical role of constructing one's identity. Furthermore, individuals from minority populations learn, at an early age, that to be an American, essentially, means to be White (Watkins, 2001; Watkins, 2005; Tatum, 1997); thus, designating the African American community as a permanent second-class population. But what does the statistics of the 21st century suggest about the status of African Americans?

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012), in 2009, African Americans comprised roughly 13 percent of the U.S. population and earned 6.5 percent of doctorate degrees. In



addition, the percentage of African Americans receiving doctorate degrees, from 1990 to 2009, has more than doubled (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Likewise, the U.S. Department of Education (2013) projected a 25 percent increase, in post-secondary education enrollment, for students who are Black between 2010 and 2021 compared to 4 percent for White students. *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (2012) reported that, in 2011, African Americans made up 6.1 percent of doctoral recipients. Furthermore, it was noted that the number of African Americans earning doctorate degrees has been on the decline since its all-time high in 2009. However, over the past decade, there has been a 12.7 percent increase in Black doctorates or roughly 1,953 African Americans earning doctoral degrees. Moreover, the US Census (2012) reported that ninety-six African American males earned doctorate degrees compared to 801 African American females, 1,884 White males, and 1,093 White females.

Although the previous statistics refute the perspectives of those mentioned by Watkins (2001) and Hornsby (2010), this does not mean that the social and educational experiences of African Americans have trounced the preconceived notions developed and maintained by White society. And this is exacerbated in the case of African American males. U.S. Census (2009) statistics indicated that the achievement gap between African American males and females has widened from 0.4 percent, in 1970, to 1.7 percent in 2008. Additionally, in 2008, 18 percent of African American males received college degrees compared to 30 percent of White males, 55 percent of Asian males, and 21 percent of African American women. Mikyung Ryu (2010), a representative for the American Council on Education, reported that although African American males experienced an increase in college completion, they lagged significantly behind their social counterparts. Specifically, Ryu

(2010) concluded that when examining the college graduation rate over a six year period, African American males had a graduation rate of approximately 35% compared to White males (59%), Hispanic males (46%), and Black females (45%). Moreover, Carson and Sabol (2012) predicted African American males were six times more likely to be incarcerated than White males and 2.5 times more likely than Hispanic males. Alexander (2012) suggested that despite the election of President Barack Obama and the increased notion of colorblindness in the United States, the preceding statistics still hold true. In fact, Alexander (2012) argued that the U.S. criminal justice system thrived as a system of racial control; thus, targeting black males and confining them to a permanent second-class status.

Rejecting the focus placed on the negative performance and life chances of African American males, Akbar (1991) mandated that researchers must reestablish the emphasis of current investigations and; thus, examine the survival tactics and methods of Black men who exhibit resilience. In particular, Akbar (1991) stated:

The overwhelming evidence that we [Black men] continue to produce exceedingly effective human beings whose intellect, talents—and most importantly their human sensitivity and moral life—have remained intact is nothing less than clear evidence of Divine intervention in modern history. (p. viii)

Mirroring the ideology of Akbar (1991), Gibbs (1988) and Fashola (2005) argued that the plethora of attention given to African American males' social and educational pitfalls assisted in the perpetuation of the mythology of the Black man as a barbaric species incapable of embodying the principles of Western civilization. Thus, the authors suggested that the answer to the problem with Black men, in U.S. society, lies in acknowledging and examining: (1) their identity formation; (2) the cultural influences that shape their

understanding of reality; and (3) the mechanisms that African American males employ to maneuver, effectively, in a hostile society and reach academic success (Akbar, 1991; Gibbs, 1988; Fashola, 2005).

Hence, the researcher focused on African American males' experiences along their journey to academic success, which for the purposes of this study was defined as receiving a doctorate degree. As expressed, previously, the challenges that African Americans males face are evident. However, literature outlining the factors and influences that promote resilience and the ability to be successful are not clearly identified in the field thus, serving as the springboard in the researcher's desire to uncover the sociocultural factors that lead to Black males' academic achievement.

#### Raising Critical Consciousness

The plight of African American males in schools, particularly in the urban setting, has been well documented throughout educational research (Noguera, 2003; Ferguson, 2000; Lipman, 2004). It has been noted that in many large, urban school districts more than half of Black males drop out of school (Sharon et al., 2010). However, research on the learning experiences of African American males in the rural setting is sparse. Howley and Yahn (2014) maintained that there is a need for research that highlights the educational issues within rural settings. The authors noted that the scope of existing rural education research, although increasing, is lacking in both quantity and quality (Howley, Howley, and Yahn, 2014). Furthermore, the authors stated:

In 1987, DeYoung reviewed the scope of the existing rural education research and called for an increase in both the quantity and quality of such research...Dissertation studies are among those that rarely receive much notice, however. And yet, doctoral

programs are the venue in which contemporary scholars prepare future scholars for such work. (Howley, Howley, & Yahn, 2014)

Similarly, proponents of rural education research suggested that U.S. education initiatives, policies and funding have, predominantly, catered to the needs of urban communities (Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999; Harmon 2001). Furthermore, Johnson and Zoellner (2015) argued:

It is important to point out that policymakers often do not intend harm to rural schools; it is their ignorance of the unique assets and challenges of rural schools and communities that result in the unintended and often harmful policy outcome. (p. 6)

Contrarily others maintain that the lack of attention to the educational issues in rural communities cannot be, solely, blamed on policymakers, but can be attributed to the depletion of research on rural education policy as it relates to current political demands (Williams & Grooms, 2015). Therefore, this research project assists in lessening this burden by shedding light on the plight of rural students as well as what socio-cultural factors promote academic success. In particular, this study focused on a rural community in the Central Savannah River Area of Georgia, Wilkes County, and exhibited the educational experiences of three African American males who navigated their way through adverse conditions to obtain academic success. More precisely, this study addressed one fundamental research question: How do African American males experience academic success despite issues associated with race and racism? Additionally, five subsequent questions were investigated:

- How have majoritarian narratives pertaining to the “inabilities” of Black boys influenced the participants’ identity development and in what ways have the associated stereotypes impacted his academic performance?
- What personal attributes contribute to the resilience displayed by African American males who reach academic success?
- How are the stories of Black males who experience academic success being silenced by the dominant social group in order to prolong White hegemony?
- What educational factors (those related to the educational setting and/or school) influence African American success?
- What sociocultural factors shape African American males’ ideas of masculinity and academic success?

### Coming Where I Come From

This study focused on Wilkes County. Wilkes County is located in the Central Savannah River Area (CSRA) of Georgia and is known for its county seat, Washington (a small town that serves as home to approximately 5,000 people). As you drive towards its downtown, you will notice that the streets are lined with plush, green trees and antebellum homes. The town and its locals thrive on tourism and the notion of being the home to: Robert Toombs (the first Secretary of State of the Confederacy), the most antebellum homes per capita of its size, and the first free public library in the state of Georgia. However, there is much more to this picturesque place than a mere visitor will notice. If one travels into the town’s center, he or she will sense the eeriness of the town. It’s almost as if one has been submerged in a ghost town from the 1800s. Many of the buildings that line the streets are empty. Once a major industrial city in Georgia, Washington has experienced much economic

upheaval since the early 2000s. Factories that supported much of the town's economic development initiatives have closed, which has led to most of the population commuting outside of the county for employment with a mean travel time of 24.6 minutes (U.S. Census, 2012). As a result, the school boards and other local politicians have been in constant debate on how to generate more funding and alleviate the flight of individuals to nearby cities.

The town is racially segregated. It is the spring of 2016 and the town is preparing for its annual Tour of Homes, which showcases its plethora of antebellum homes. The local citizens are chatting about two murders in the usually quiet town and the mayor's proposal to eliminate its local police department; thus, allowing the sheriff department to patrol the entire jurisdiction. Many of the Black citizens find this move to be peculiar as they associated the development of the sheriff department as synonymous with the ideologies of the Ku Klux Klan (Chalmers, 1981; Wade, 1987). The tension between the Black and White populations is at a heightened state as many of the town's citizens feel that this move is largely due to the fact that the police chief is an African American woman and all of the sheriff deputies are White with the exception of one African American male. The lack of attention given to the murders, both of which were committed in Black neighborhoods, has reignited the racial divisiveness that has existed within the town since its establishment. Racially-infused disturbances at local city council meetings and school board meetings have gained the attention of surrounding media outlets and have led to the town being featured on local news stations consistently for the past month or two.

The estimated population, as of 2012, for Wilkes County was approximately 10,050, which is a 5% decrease from 2010 (U.S. Census, 2012). Whites comprise 55.4% of the population followed by Blacks (42.2%), Hispanics (3.7%), Asians (0.7%), and American

Indians (0.2%). The gender distribution for the county is 52.2% for women compared to 47.8% for men. Persons under the age of 18 compose 21.9% of the population whereas those 65 and above account for 20.3%. The remaining individuals (ages 18-65) comprise 57.8% of the population. According to a local study published on Wilkes County and surrounding counties, it was noted that Washington-Wilkes Schools have the lowest graduation rate in the CSRA. As of 2013, the graduation rate for Wilkes County's school system is 56.5% (a 4.37% decrease from 2012). The following table provides a snapshot of Wilkes County's school district as of the 2010-2011 academic school year<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> Data taken from *The Georgia County Guide*, compiled and edited by Kimberly Jenkins, 2012. The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension

Table 1.1: Wilkes County School System Profile

<u>Students</u>				
<b>Student Population</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Public</b>	<b>Private</b>	<b>Home</b>
<b>School (by schooling preference)</b>	1915	1,786	93	36
<b>Student Population</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>
	1,786	39.2%	50.7%	5.4%
<b>Student Retained</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>
	107	36.4%	57.0%	4.7%
<b>Student Retained (by gender)</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	
	107	41.1%	58.9%	
<b>Graduating Students</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>
	88	45.5%	47.7%	3.4%
<b>Graduating Students (by Gender)</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	
	88	47.7%	52.3%	
<u>Teachers</u>				
<b>Number of Teacher (PK-12)</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Minority</b>	
<b>Full time and Part-Time</b>	115	86.1%	13.9%	
<b>Number of Teacher (PK-12)</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	
<b>(by Gender)</b>	115	80.9%	19.1%	
<b>*Percentage of Teachers with Advanced Degrees</b>				73%
<b>*Average Years of Teaching Experience</b>				22.5 Years
<b>*Number of Students Per Teacher</b>				14
<u>Administrators</u>				
<b>Number of Administrators</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Minority</b>	
	15	93.3%	6.7%	
<b>Number of Administrators</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	
<b>(by gender)</b>	15	73.3%	26.7%	

Note. Data taken from *The Georgia County Guide*, compiled and edited by Kimberly Jenkins, 2012. The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension.

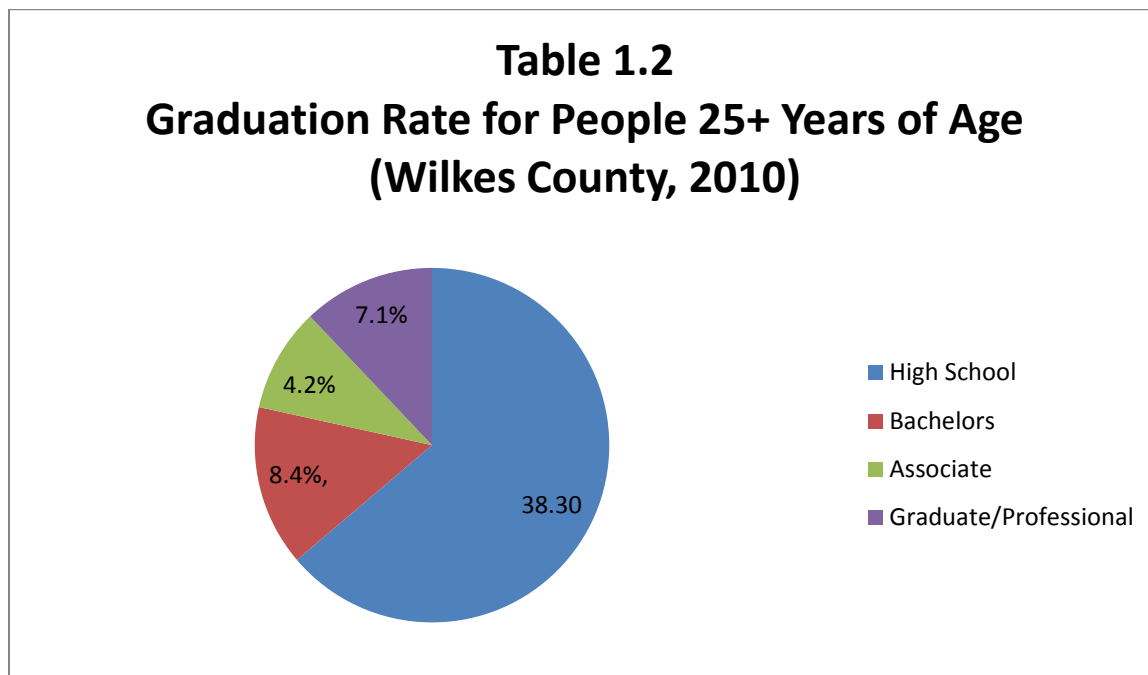


## Wilkes County School System Profile (continued)

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\*The average SAT score for Wilkes County is 958

\* 29.5% of High School Graduates in 2010-2011 entered college



Note. Data taken from *The Georgia County Guide*, compiled and edited by Kimberly Jenkins, 2012. The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension.

The data presented above exhibits the demographic composition and educational context for the following study. There were several points that piqued my interest when analyzing the data. First, African Americans comprised most of the student population, but only 13.9% of the teaching staff was from minority backgrounds. Second, African American students were retained at a much higher rate than their White and Hispanic counterparts. Third, the percentage of teachers with advanced degrees and the average years of teaching experience appeared to be relatively high, but the performance of students on the SAT as well as the percentage of students who entered post-secondary educational institutions suggest that there is a disconnect in the curriculum presented in classrooms and students' learning styles.

Finally, the information depicted in the pie chart suggests that roughly 58 percent of Wilkes county's population does not have a high school diploma or above.

### My Brothers' Keeper—Autobiographical Roots

As a youth, I grew up in a historical town in rural Georgia that prides itself on preserving the ideology of pre-Civil War America, which robbed me of my innocence at a young age. The frequency of racial slander and ridicule by White citizens towards African American residents was a constant reminder that I was Black and because of this singular characteristic, I was never to equate myself to my White classmates no matter how often we pledged to be "one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." It was this silenced but powerful sense of inequality that prompted my resilience as a student to strive for academic success. Moreover, I was reared in a familial setting in which women were the dominant figures of power and served as the beacon of hope for those individuals within the community. Men, for the most part, were absent from the home due to tedious work schedules. Both of my parents were blue collar workers and often expressed that initiative, determination and education were the essential components of achieving one's life goals.

As I embarked on my academic journey, I quickly learned that the key to educational success, at least for the Black female, required that one walk a fine line between maintaining the cultural identity needed for survival in the African American community while, simultaneously, learning the tactics and principles deemed appropriate for existence in White society. Therefore, school became a stage on which I found myself playing the roles of multiple characters based on the audience that I encountered at any given time. However, one thing was consistent: Because of my race, education was the vehicle to establishing a credible voice amongst my White counterparts as well as within the Black community.

Unfortunately, I soon realized that this was not the same for Black males within my family as well as the larger community. While observing the classroom behavior of African American males, it appeared that they had failed to effectively balance their cultural behaviors with those of the dominant society. Rather, they adhered to a counter-school attitude in which education is viewed as a forced pastime that stripped them of their cultural identity and imposed assimilation. One instance that stands out to me is a conversation that I had with one of my male cousins during my senior year of high school in which he expressed his concerns as a Black male in America and concluded that no matter how many minutes, days, hours, and/or years of effort he exerted towards academics, he would never experience success because society, both members of the dominant social group as well as individuals within the Black community, had demonized him due to his race and gender. It was at this moment that I decided that I wanted to obtain my doctorate degree, at that time in Sociology, with hopes of utilizing my resources to advocate on the behalf of disadvantaged groups. In particular, I became interested in the reasons that African American males dissociate from school. However, it wasn't until my tenure as a doctoral student in the field of Curriculum Studies that I began to understand the use of counter-storytelling as a tool to dismantle oppression, and, consequently, project the voices of marginalized groups to the forefront of curriculum inquiry. The notion of counter-storytelling as a method of social justice as well as my observation of hopelessness exhibited by Black males serve as motivation for this study.

In March 2009, I attended a forum on African American males' college experiences at Savannah State University in which Black males from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HCBUs) as well as predominantly White colleges and universities shared the struggles of Black males in the classroom. The final issue of the discussion session was

posed by a young, Hispanic male who asked a simple, but powerful question: What is the solution? Immediately, this altered the manner in which I approached the question. I was no longer interested in, solely, the predicament of African American males. Rather, I became engulfed in finding possible solutions and thorough accounts of Black males' successes that would provide insight on what sociocultural mechanisms promoted academic achievement. My research became that which acknowledges the importance of counter-narratives in the fight to dismantle the negative connotations associated with African American males and promotes social change. Change that could narrow the achievement gap between Black males and their counterparts. An investigative journey that could transform the way in which White America views members of diverse backgrounds.

### I'm Black and I'm Proud

This study utilized Black protest thought as its theoretical framework. Black protest thought, which was closely related to Marcus Garvey's Black Liberation Movement, the Black Feminist Movement sparked by Audre Lorde, and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, emerged out of the desperation of African descendants' attempt to maintain a sense of heritage and create an alternative to the colonial system and the norms of White supremacy (Robinson, 2000). Black protest thought was founded on the principle that education as a revolution "can awaken consciousness and empower people to act" (Watkins, 2005, p. 28). Hence, one must note that a discussion on the emergence of Black protest thought and its contribution to social awareness, as it relates to the United States' educational system, would not be complete without being attentive to two of its fortifying agents: Critical Race Theory and Resilience Theory.

### *Critical Race Theory*

One of the goals of this study was to shed light on the plight faced by African American males as a result of race and racism while, simultaneously, deconstructing the ideologies and stereotypes of African American males' academic abilities held by mainstream society. Watkins (2005) contended, "The purpose of critical race theory could be interpreted as twofold: to identify White supremacy in education; and to develop praxis to counter its hegemony" (p. 197). Critical race theory acknowledges that in order to gain an accurate account of social injustices, we, as active members within a pluralistic society, must heighten our critical consciousness and acknowledge the interconnection that exists between class discrimination and racism. More specifically, critical race theory, as geared towards examining social and school inequality, is based on three notions: (1) race is a critical factor in our society's inequity; (2) U.S. society is founded on property rights; and (3) the intersection of race and class creates an analytical sphere in which social inequalities can be better understood (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). In particular, there are five tenets of critical race theory, which include:

- *Counter-Storytelling* involves the depiction of stories that cast doubt on the validity of premises and "myths" upheld by a dominant social group. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002);
- *The permanence of race* or the understanding that racism is a permanent component of American life (Bell, 1993; Bell, 2004);
- *Whiteness as property*, which acknowledges that "due to the history of race and racism in the United States and the role that U.S. Jurisprudence has played in

reifying conceptions of race, the notion of Whiteness can be considered a property of interest” (Harris, 1995, p. 280; Bush, 2011; Garner, 2007; Lipsitz, 2006).

- *Interest Convergence*, which argues that Whites will support racial justice only to the extent that there is something in it for them (Bell, 1993; Bell 2004); and
- *Colorblindness*, which denotes that the belief that race is not a major social problem or the pretense that the ultimate goal in achieving social justice and/or equality can only be accomplished when we, as social beings, do not equate a person’s race as a precursor to his or her capabilities. Many CRT scholars argue that the notion of colorblindness fails to take into consideration the persistence and permanence of racism and the construction of people of color as others. Thus, critical race theory suggests that social justice is only reachable when color and the differences that exist between diverse groups are acknowledged, welcomed, and respected by the masses; particularly, Whites (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

Critical race theory’s purpose and contributions to scholarship is valuable in understanding the experiences of students who are members of marginalized social groups and the role standardization serves in the [hidden] curriculum (Watkins, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Critical race theory’s acknowledgement of the role of storytelling and the sharing of lived experiences supports Delgado and Stefancic’s (2001) argument that individuals’ ontological and epistemological perspectives are formulated through personal encounters and are based on social interactions. Similarly, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) noted that racism cannot be studied in isolation, “but is endemic in American life, deeply ingrained legally, culturally, and even psychologically” (p. 52). Likewise, the authors noted that critical race theorists, frequently, integrate personal narratives within their

scholarly works as a strategy to exhibit accounts of personal experiences and obstacles faced by marginalized individuals. Critical race theory's goal of incorporating the personal experiences, hardships and triumph of the Other in education with hopes of promoting social change appeals to my study. From my viewpoint, the critical race movement is crucial to the progression of education and, consequently, society because it challenges notions of colorblindness by noting that racism does exist and race is an integral part of the formation of one's identity and outlook on reality (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 52). Hence, one can conclude that critical race theory rejects traditional knowledge by engaging in critical examination of the methods and practices that dominant groups utilize to justify their role in racial subjugation (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

### *Resilience Theory*

Classified as a component of positive psychology, resilience theory, which emerged around the 1970s, is founded on the principle that examining the strengths of individuals and communities utilized to cope with as well as rise above adversity can be valuable to the resolution of social problems (Luthar, Doyle, Suchman, & Mayes, 2001; Rutter, 1985; Spencer et al., 2006). In particular, Yates and Masten (2004) defined resilience as a phenomenon that is "predicated on exposure to significant threat or adversity and on the attainment of good outcomes despite this exposure" (p. 522). Moreover, Masten, Best, and Garmezy (1990) suggested that resilience is a term that describes three significant social encounters: (1) the individual's ability to recover well after a traumatic event; (2) the ability for individuals of at-risk groups to exceed society's expectations; and (3) one's participation in positive adaptation within a hostile environment. Traditionally, resilience theory utilizes oral histories and life narratives to observe how individuals faced with hardships; particularly

during childhood, lead productive lives as adults. This form of theoretical framework is the center of research on survivors of the Holocaust (Moskovitz, 1985; Greene & Graham, 2009), sportsmanship and athletic performance (Mummery, Schofield, & Perry, 2004; Schinke & Jerome, 2002), the adaptation of war veterans (King, King, Fairbank, Keane, & Adams, 1998; Schnurr, Lunney, & Sengupta, 2004), and events such as the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center (Bonanno, Galea, Bucciarelli & Vlahov, 2007).

Furthermore, proponents of resilience theory believe that the development of traits such as adaptability and perseverance within individuals are formulated by several factors: (1) one's possession of high expectations and self-efficacy, (2) the degree of autonomy, (3) established meaning for life and locus of control, and (4) the ability to set goals and develop problem solving skills (Garmezy 1974; Bernard, 1991; Bernard, 2004, Brooks & Goldstein, 2004). Floyd (1996) suggested:

African American youth academic success is largely attributable to three protective mechanisms: a supportive, nurturing family and home environment; the youth's interactions with and the involvement of committed, concerned educators and other adults in their lives; and the development of two key personality traits—perseverance and optimism. (p. 181).

Likewise, Gayle (2005) noted that African American males who exhibit academic success, often, adopt a viewpoint in which schooling is considered to have a utilitarian value. In other words, education is the bridge from one's murky past to a bright future.

Overall, the intersection of critical race theory and resilience theory was determined to aid in depicting the duality that exists in the educational experiences of African American males. On one hand, critical race theory exhibits the persistence of White supremacy and the



issues that result from its continuation. On the other hand, resilience theory illustrates and/or provides concrete examples of how marginalized individuals cope with discrimination and succeed within a hostile environment; hence, re-establishing these individuals as competent and capable beings.

Watkins (2005) suggested that unlike many ideological perspectives, Black protest thought establishes education as a politically charged institution in which schools have, historically, served as arenas of oppression. In particular, Watkins (2005) stated:

Education has been at the heart of Black protest thought and activism from the plantation to the demand for integration onward to the demands for equity and access. Black educational protest has taken many forms including demands for inclusion, quality, equal funding and culturally sensitive delivery systems. (p.1)

Hence, one should understand that education is a powerful vehicle for the transmission and integration of social ideas and knowledge. Forging on the ideology of critical race theory, Black protest thought acknowledges the need to identify White supremacy in education. Nevertheless, Black protest thought, in conjunction with elements of resilience theory, understands that activism and personal action is necessary to counter undertones of White hegemony within schools as well as the greater society.

#### Forging the Path to Success

The preceding chapter served as an introduction to the study. The researcher introduced Black Protest Thought as the theoretical framework and argued that more attention needed to be geared towards the educational experiences of African American males in rural settings. Highlighting the social context of the study, the researcher pinpointed that the counter-narratives of three, African American males who exhibit academic success

(obtaining a doctoral degree) in the rural, U.S. South would be utilized to address one overarching question: How do African American males experience academic success despite issues associated with race and racism? Due to the lack of research on rural education, this study is significant as it will shed light on the issues African American males encounter within schools as well as illustrate what elements of the rural community can contribute to the academic success of its youth. The following chapter presents an overview of literature which examined: (1) The differing roles that education served amongst the White and Black populations in the United States; (2) The plight of African American males in U.S. schools; and (3) The socio-cultural factors that influence the educational experiences and academic achievement of Black males.

CHAPTER II  
THE CREATION OF AN ILLUSION: RACE AND THE IDENTITY FORMATION OF  
AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

The Myth of Race and its Correlation to Intelligence

This review of literature examines education in the United States; the plight of the African American community (particularly, Black boys) in education; and the factors that assist the Black male's identity development and, consequently, academic success. Although this literature review provides a limited sketch of the education in the United States, the reader should refer to the following sources for a more in-depth analysis: Watkins, 2001; Spring, 2008; Fraser, 2001; Tyack, 1974; Anderson, 1988; Kaestle, 1983. Hence, the purpose of this literature review is to investigate the existing works on African American males' social and educational experiences; thus, serving as a passageway for addressing the overall research question: How do African American males experience educational success despite issues associated with race and racism?

Meaningful dialogue about the hardship and triumph of African American males is impossible without first exploring the historical, as well as present, social context that surrounds the African American community. Large scale marginalization and isolation have defined the experiences of African Americans in the United States since the days of slavery. With the inhabitation of African Americans in the United States, Black identity as a community and on the individual level has largely been shaped by the standards of White society (Jenkins, 2003; Oliver, 1989).

Arriving in Virginia, circa 1619, Africans were introduced to colonial America as indentured servants and; subsequently, slaves. These individuals, quickly, discovered that they were no longer viewed as social beings that possessed the intellectual abilities

conducive to their native land, but imprudent objects to be controlled in a “new” world (Rome, 2004). Mirroring the plight faced by the indigenous people, later known as Native Americans, Africans were robbed of their triad of support: the family, religion, and their community (Fraser, 2001; Rome, 2004); thus, beginning the process of deculturalization (Spring, 2003). The quest for the reformation of Blacks by Europeans in the 17<sup>th</sup> century led to the creation of “the myth of race” and its claim that populations’ “physical differences are innately linked with significant differences in mental capacities” (Montagu, 1997, p. 44) which are reflected in cultural feats as determined by the dominant social group. Hence, the concept of racial identity was born and bred throughout the United States as a method of maintaining dominance and deferring the antislavery movements (Fredrickson, 1987). Focusing on physical attributes, White America, mainly slave owners, began to express the “natural inferiority” of Africans and their “innate aptness” for slavery (Fredrickson, 1987; Smedley, 1999). Chavez and Guido-DiBrito (1999) maintained:

As a biological category, race is derived from an individual’s physical features, gene pools and character qualities. Using these features as distinguishing characteristics, Europeans grouped people hierarchically by physical ability and moral quality, with Caucasians as the pinnacle, followed by Asians and Native Americans, and Africans last on the racial ladder (p. 40)

This new found identity inherited by Blacks began a societal struggle that would haunt them for the next 400+ years as they fought to regain control of who they were and, most importantly, what it meant to be Black in America.

As African Americans have struggled to gain the rights freely enjoyed by their White counterparts, the dominant society has actively served as gatekeepers that define and redefine

what it is to be a member of Black America. Following passage of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1865, Blacks realized that freedom, although legally rendered, still was not applicable to their lives. In the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision of 1896, the Supreme Court ruled that the notion of “separate but equal” was in accordance with the U.S. Constitution and agreed that states preserved the right to enforce racial segregation in public facilities (Medley, 2003; Fireside, 2004). Furthermore, the effects of this decision were felt for years to come as it served as a catalyst for an array of policies and procedures that limited social opportunities for Blacks. This was particularly true in the South.

Dierenfield (2008) stated:

In the Black Codes, lawmakers barred blacks from attending white schools, marrying whites, testifying in court, having a gun, or owning property. Southern states rewrote their constitutions to separate the races from birth to burial. (p. 10)

In addition, Blacks were denied equitable resources in the areas of healthcare, employment and education. Although Blacks were denied equitable education, they did not allow racism to deplete their efforts to learn. Exuding their creative yet resilient approach to educational equality, Blacks formed clandestine schools and petitioned for public funds to support Black schools since desegregation was not an option in the North or South (Watkins, 2005). Unfortunately, these efforts were met with great resistance and this did not end with the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, rendered in 1954, which refuted the constitutionality of racial segregation (Morris, 1984; Watkins, 2005). With an aim of destroying institutional racism and discrimination, the Civil Rights Movement in conjunction with the Black Power Movement focused their attention on the role that schools serve in cultural deprivation (Watkins, 2005). It was noted that schools in the United States, since

*Brown v. Board of Education*, failed to equalize the learning opportunities experienced by Black and White students. Thus, Black community leaders and professionals began to express concern about the disenfranchisement experienced by Black students as a result of second class education.

Although Whites and, some, Blacks would like to think that many of these issues have been resolved, if one engages in conversation with individuals in the African American community, it becomes apparent that many of the hardships faced before and during the Civil Rights Movement are still prevalent today; thus, illustrating the persistence of White hegemony. This is best summed in the words of William Oliver (1989) in which he explained, “Americanization of Africans in America has resulted in Blacks being locked into the role of America’s permanent outsiders” (p. 31).

#### *The State of Black America*

According to the U.S. Census (2012), African Americans’ educational attainment exhibited significant increase since 1980. As of 2012, the high school graduation rate for African Americans has increased (77.6%), while 14.6% of Blacks received a Bachelor’s degree and 4.2% obtained advanced degrees (Master’s, Professional, Doctorate). However, many researchers argued that although the African American population appeared to exhibit progress in education, other factors needed to be examined to get a more holistic understanding of the current state of the Black community. Hokayem and Heggeness (2014) noted that although African Americans comprised approximately 13.1% of the U.S. population, Blacks (27%) were more than twice as likely to live in poverty as Whites (13%). Similarly, the authors stressed that the two-to-one unemployment gap that sparked the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s persists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Likewise, the U.S. Census (2012)

purported that the unemployment gap appeared to be increasing between the White and Black populations, with the White unemployment rate dropping below seven percent and the Black unemployment hovering between 13-14 percent. It has been suggested, statistically, that African Americans lag behind other racial groups in some of the most important factors that contribute to social mobility.

The US Census (2012), also, reported:

- Only 27.4% of African Americans reported an annual income of \$50,000 or more.
- Annual median income of black households was \$33,321, in 2012, compared to the nation's average at \$51,017.
- African Americans were being incarcerated at nearly six times the rate of Whites.
- African Americans lagged behind all other races by 3.4% in regards to healthcare coverage.
- 35% of African American children grades 7-12 were suspended or expelled at some point in their school careers compared to 20% of Hispanics and 15% of Whites.

Based on the aforementioned statistics, the stratification of the United States, by race and social class, became evident. This is not a new phenomenon of the 21st century. For instance in the 1970s, the decade following the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement, Bailey (1971) argued that the African American community's lack of equal pay and sufficient healthcare coverage, increased incarceration rates, and frequent experiences of discrimination within schools contributed to the perpetuation of the slave mentality in which African Americans developed a sense of innate inferiority and reaffirmed White as the superior race.

The notion of inferiority, as it relates to African Americans, has been carried into the schools. Oakes (1985) argued that public education, in the United States, promoted

segregation to the extent that African Americans, especially Black males, were, often, placed in special education courses and vocational/nonacademic tracks. Therefore, suggesting that public schools, which are the “great equalizing agents” of our society, exhibited low expectations and promoted a sense of hopelessness amongst minority students.

This trend has remained true into the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Kunjufu, 2005). Kunjufu (2005) noted, “African American males make up only 8 percent of the public school student population but constitute almost 30 percent of the students placed in special education” (p. vi). Kozol (1991) suggested that schools were unequal to the extent that most African Americans were instructed by teachers who lacked motivation and enthusiasm; did not possess the skills and experience needed to interact with individuals from diverse cultures; and/or did not have the means to sufficient resources. Fashola (2005) as well as Landsman and Lewis (2011) noted that the circumstances that people of color; particularly, African Americans faced in relation to the diminishing ability of educators to effectively teach students in racially and economically disadvantaged facilities was a product of low expectations. Bowles and Gintis (1976) maintained that schools, historically, legitimated inequality through the reproduction of intergenerational poverty rather than the promotion of pure social mobility; particularly, in the case of African American males. Hence, the goal of education appeared to two-fold. On the one hand, education functioned as a mechanism of social assimilation or enculturation in which students were equipped with the skills and knowledge deemed appropriate by dominant groups in society (Callahan, 1962; Fashola, 2005). On the other hand, education served the role of entrapment in which individuals of marginalized groups were continuously oppressed and omitted from educational policies and curriculum due to ascribed and innate traits (Harlan, 1969; Watkins, 2005; Watkins, 2001; Grande, 2004).



## The Role of Education in the United States

Kliebard (1995) asserted that the common school movement, for Blacks, symbolized the hope for equality and social homogeneity of all individuals within the United States. Contrarily, from the viewpoint of White southerners, the common school movement of the 1830s and 1840s was, in part, “an attempt to halt the drift toward a multicultural society” (Spring, 2008, p.106). Cremin (1957) maintained that the notion of a public or common school and its implied feature as an institution for children of the poor or social “undesirables” long hampered the acceptance of the idea that publicly supported schools could and should exist for all children, regardless of social class, race, gender, religion, ethnicity, or country of origin. Tyack (1974) noted that “during the nineteenth century no groups in the United States had a greater faith in the equalizing power of schooling or a clearer understanding of the democratic promise of public education than did black Americans” (p. 110). For African Americans, common schools were viewed as the great humanizing and socializing institutions of society (Cobb & Jenkins, 2001); however, through the discriminatory acts of White school administrators, Blacks realized that “the educational system that was to homogenize other Americans was not meant for them” (Tyack, 1974, p. 110). Hence, African Americans adopted an appreciation of separate educational facilities for Black children by noting that same-race schools allowed their children to avoid encounters with White prejudice (Tyack, 1974; DuBois, 1994; Fraser, 2001).

According to Tyack (1974), White educational committees cited that “black might be beautiful, but black children didn’t belong in school with Whites...for there was an ineffaceable distinction in the physical, mental and moral natures of the two races” (p. 114). In other words, Blacks were thought to have innate mental, physical and moral capacities that

were subordinate to the fundamental ideologies and beliefs of mainstream [White] society (Dennis, 1998). Despite the apparent misconception of the intellectual capabilities of minorities through White individuals' persistent effort to keep Black children ignorant, Black citizens during the late 1860s and early 1870s, "formed a powerful alliance with Radical Republicans in some cities to win educational equality" (Tyack, 1974, p.115). However, these efforts were, often, met with powerful resistance from Whites; thus, resulting in the continuation of educational practices and policies to oppress Blacks (Watkins, 2005).

Through the formation of an unified assembly of political powers interested in the advancement of freedmen, Blacks and abolitionists used "moral suasion, lobbies, boycotts, and court action as the means of moving a reluctant majority" (Tyack, 1974, p. 115); thus, promoting education as a means to social progression and the alleviation of societal ills as it related to the presumed differentiation of the races (Dennis, 1998; Morris, 1981; Tyack, 2003). Numerous literacy programs emerged as result of African Americans' desire to read and write during Reconstruction, which began circa 1863. However, these efforts were halted around 1877 with the withdrawal of the Union troops and the reinstitution of segregated governments across the U.S. South (Fraser, 2001) Hence, one should note that while many of the public schools established to educate Blacks, under Reconstruction, still existed, they were ill-funded, oppressive corporations who survival only lasted until the middle of the twentieth century.

### *The Development of Black Education*

Blacks' campaign for first class citizenship was successfully undermined by federal and state governments as well as extralegal organizations and tactics (Anderson, 1988; Cobb & Jenkins, 2001; Bullock, 1967; and Parker & Stebman, 1973). Anderson (1988) stated:

Soon after the late 1870s, blacks were ruthlessly disfranchised; their civil and political subordination was fixed in southern law, and they were trapped by statutes and social customs in an agricultural economy that rested heavily on coercive control and allocation of labor (p. 3).

During as well as following the conclusion of Reconstruction, Black southerners existed in a social system that stripped them of their earned citizenship as well as labor and voting rights; therefore, reestablishing Blacks as social captives under a coercive political system (Tyack & Lowe, 1986; Watkins, 2005; Butchart, 1980, Cobb & Jenkins, 2001; Foner, 1988). It can be argued that “although Black southerners were formally free during the time when American popular education was transformed into a highly formal and critical social institution, their schooling took a different path” (Anderson, 1988, p.3).

Mirroring the philosophical underpinnings of existentialism, “the basic form, philosophy, and subject matter of black education reflected the ex-slaves' intent to restructure and control their lives” (Anderson, 1988, p. 3). Hence, utilizing their lived experiences as a catalyst for establishing truth and knowledge, African Americans embarked on a journey to develop an educational setting that was reflective of their reality in direct opposition of the false impressions of truth conveyed by White males (Takaki, 1993; Watkins, 2005).

“Believing that the right schooling could train laborers to be better citizens and more efficient workers, they [whites] viewed universal education as a sound investment in social stability and economic prosperity” (Anderson, 1988, p. 80). From the perspective of northern philanthropists, Whites and ex-slaves, was essential for the changing and modern political economy.

Hampton Institute, founded by General Samuel Armstrong and chartered in 1870, was critical in the development and yielding of teachers for Black schools and students with a background in industrial skills and trades (Spring, 2008). Similarly, Booker T. Washington emerged as a critical voice for the African American community and the role that education served amongst its constituents. Booker T. Washington contended that industrial education was vital to the survival of the newly freed Blacks and for economical progression (Spring, 2008; Fraser, 2001). Washington believed that Blacks, in an effort to gain freedom and autonomy, should have accommodated the White power structure; thus, noting “industrial training as the best intellectual and moral discipline” (Anderson, 1988, p. 36). Washington, like Armstrong, believed that the purpose of educating Blacks was to adjust them to a subordinate position in the New South (Anderson, 1988; Spring, 2008). Therefore, the teacher’s role in Black education was to stress the importance of hard work which was viewed as the first principle in civilized life (Spring, 2008).

Although proponents of the industrial education movement, such as Washington, viewed its tenets as the first step in presenting African Americans with increasing educational opportunities in the South, opponents such as W.E.B. DuBois believed that such notions were too accommodating to White society. DuBois (1903/1994) argued, “the industrial school springing to notice in this decade, but coming to full recognition in the decade beginning with 1895, was the proffered answer to this combined educational and economic crisis, and an answer of singular wisdom and timeliness” (p. 58). Hence, DuBois maintained that the essential step in catalyzing a movement for equitable educational experiences in the African American community was to develop an intellectual elite (Fraser, 2001). DuBois (1903/1994) argued that a “talented tenth” should be established amongst

African Americans. From DuBois' perspective, efforts would be made to ensure that this group of individual's received the best "classical" education and served as leaders in a campaign for Blacks' freedom (Fraser, 2001). In other words, the "talented tenth" would prove to White America that Blacks were just as competent as their dominant counterparts. DuBois' "Talented-Tenth" served as one of the first documented exhibition of "the prove them wrong" syndrome (Madison-Colmore, Moore, and Smith, 2003). Moreover, DuBois (1903) insisted that members of the Talented Tenth were not to learn the great works of Western civilization for the mere advancement of him- or her- self. Rather, this group carried the social responsibility of helping other African Americans achieve success.

DuBois (1903/1994) noted that there were four distinct shifts in the movement to educate African Americans<sup>2</sup>. From the end of the Civil War until around 1875, Freedmen schools were developed to assist White plantation owners in the chaotic social disarrangement of Reconstruction in which education was formulated on concepts of systemization and cooperation between the races. The next decade, 1875-1885 was geared at establishing and implementing complete school systems in the South. Likewise, between 1885 and 1895, the industrial revolution of the South emerged; thus, education was focused on preparing the freed Blacks for work, which was guided by the prejudices of the master or Whites. As a result, DuBois (1903/1994) concluded the following:

Negro colleges...were inadequately equipped, illogically distributed, and of varying efficiency and grade; the normal and high schools were doing little more than common school work, and the common schools were training but a third of the children who ought to be in them, and training these too often poorly. (p. 58)

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<sup>2</sup> Three of the four shifts are discussed in this section. The fourth movement is discussed in 20<sup>th</sup> century education.

## *20<sup>th</sup> Century Education*

In response to the educational plight of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, DuBois (1903/1994) proposed a two-fold process for improving the intellectual state of Blacks. First, he argued that the common school should be aimed at teaching all of its pupils to read, write and cipher the great works of western civilization. Second, higher education institutions had to be established to educate the teachers for the common schools. However, DuBois warned that the intermingling of the races was problematic in the educational development of the South; particularly, for the progression of Blacks. Hence, DuBois (1903/1994) proclaimed:

Then and now, there stand in the South two separate worlds...there is still enough of contact for large economic and group cooperation, but the separation is so thorough and deep that it absolutely precludes for the present between the races anything like that sympathetic and effective group-training and leadership of the one by the other, such as the American Negro and all backward peoples must have for effectual progress. (pp. 59-60)

Thus, by 1900, DuBois (1903/1994) concluded that African Americans, through the establishment of institutions such as Fisk University and Spelman Seminary, known today as Spelman College, routed on a journey “to furnish the Black world with adequate standards of human culture and lofty ideals of life” (p. 60).

From 1880 to 1920, the United States experienced a surge in diversity as many immigrants flocked to its shores in hopes of prospering in the “land of opportunity” (Fraser, 2001). However, this did not mean that the United States welcomed its new tenants with open arms. One must keep in mind that the United States was still engulfed in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) ruling in which the U.S. Supreme Court concluded that states had the

constitutional rights to segregate races in separate but equal facilities. For the next sixty years, this doctrine, of separate but equal institutions, legalized the oppression of minorities, particularly Blacks, in almost all areas of American life; thus, confining African Americans to substandard education in the North as well as the South (Watkins, 2001).

In an effort to offset the discriminatory acts inflicted upon minorities, in the United States, marginalized groups united to formulate the Civil Rights Movement. Contrary to America's depiction of the Civil Rights Movement as an offspring of the 1954 ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, the fight for racial equality in the United States had begun long before. In fact, the resistance to institutionalized White supremacy dated back to the formal establishment of segregation in the late nineteenth century (Watkins, 2001; Fraser, 2001; Spring, 2008). Although *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), legally, ended segregation in schools, Blacks soon discovered that this was far from reality. Hence, proponents of the Civil Rights Movement, particularly the NAACP, reignited their focus on schools as the passageway to equality in the greater society. Fraser (2001) stated:

Leaders of the civil rights movement of the 1950s believed that if the schools could treat children as equals—if segregation could end and a quality education could be provided for every child—then some large strides would have been made towards a larger society of freedom and justice for all. (p. 256)

The South remained the focus of desegregation efforts of the Civil Rights Movement until the mid-1960s when attention was redirected to the urban North (Joseph, 2007). Prompted by the women rights movement, the Civil Rights Movement, in the 1970s, began to expand its efforts to labor issues as well as reignited the fight of Latinos and American Indians in education (Spring, 2008; Fraser, 2001). Hence, some profound changes in education were

enacted. These include but are not limited to the Title IX of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1972, which required schools to provide equal opportunities for women (Fraser, 2001); Public Law 94-142, which provided equal opportunities in schools for disabled students (Zettel, 1977); and the institution of community controlled schools as displayed by the Rough Rock Demonstration School (Forbes, 1967).

The purpose of highlighting the early events of the common school movement and the debates that followed, regarding the education of African Americans, is to illustrate the deeply embedded threads of oppression that have existed since the 1600s. Although schools present the illusion of being less segregated today than in the past, the fight for true integration remains relevant; particularly for African American males. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2009), with the exception of Hispanic males and females, African American males exhibited the lowest percentage of educational attainment compared to White males, White females, Black females, Asian males, and Asian females. The plight of African Americans in public education is not a novice phenomenon; however, it has been long-lasting and its origins date back to the institutionalization of public schooling. Likewise, it can be argued that although the odds are against Blacks, particularly the males, education should strive to foster a willingness to learn amongst these individuals. This is synonymous with Woodson's (1933/1990) proclamation in which he stated:

The radicals bring forward, too, the argument that the Negro, being of a minority group, will always be overpowered by others. From the point of view of the selfish elements this may be true, and certainly it has worked thus for some time; but things do not always turn out according to mathematical calculations. In fact, the significant developments in history have never been thus determined. Only the temporary and



the trivial can be thus forecast. The human factor is always difficult for the materialist to evaluate and the prophecies of the alarmist are often upset. Why should we expect less in the case of the Negro (sic)? (pp. 188-189)

### The Predicament of the Black Male in Education

Mirroring the aforementioned quest of Black America to gain equality and equity in their educational experiences, the dilemma in which African American males find themselves within today's public education system is one, also, plagued by isolation (Kunjufu, 2001), degradation (Noguera, 2003), and an immense feeling of hopelessness (Ferguson, 2000). Noguera (2003) maintained:

In many school districts throughout the United States, Black males are more likely than any other group to be suspended and expelled from school. From 1973 to 1977 there was a steady increase in African-American enrollment in college. However, since 1977 there has been a sharp and continuous decline, especially among males. Black males are more likely to be classified as mentally retarded or suffering from a learning disability and placed in special education and more likely to be absent from advanced placement and honors courses. (pp. 431-432)

Similarly, the U.S. Census (2009) reported, in 2008, 18% of African American males received college degrees compared to 30% of White males and 55% of Asian American males. Thus, one may conclude that the state of African American males, in the United States, indicates a gloomy future of social and educational isolation as a byproduct of their cultural traits as well as the expectations and/or stereotypes that dominant groups in society possess about Black males.

Alfred Tatum (2005) expressed that several factors served as barriers to achievement for African American males. Internal factors included the active development of self-concept and the dynamic identity issues that emerge during adolescence. According to Tatum (2005), African American males often exhibited culturally specific coping mechanisms such as acting tough, avoiding self-disclosure, and dissociating from school. Tatum argued that these behaviors frequently led to the disproportionate grade retentions and suspensions of minority adolescents because educators and school administrators misinterpreted these behaviors as offensive and self-destructive. Moreover, Tatum demonstrated that external forces such as racism, community patterns, socio-cultural environmental factors, parents' educational attainment and socioeconomic status influenced the development of self-identity.

Cornel West (1994) expressed that the notion of "bad" in the African American male subculture inferred positive connotations because it subverted the language of the dominant White culture, but, also, imposed "an unique kind of order for young black men on their own distinctive chaos and solicited an attention that makes others pull back with some trepidation. This uniqueness acted as a form of self-identification and resistance in a hostile culture" (p.89). Although attempting to assert self-affirming identities in adverse environments, behaviors among African American males often fueled derogatory stereotypes that distinguished Black males as problematic and menacing members of society (Ferguson, 2000). Fashola (2005) argued:

African American males are probably the most highly stigmatized and stereotyped group in America. With exemplar images of African American males ranging from the super athlete, criminal, gangster or hypersexed male, society's view, as portrayed

in both empirical and conceptual reports of Black youth, are defined by these stereotypes. (p. 230)

It is this misunderstanding and stereotype of African American males and their behavior that has been displaced into the classroom and resulted in increased disciplinary action against this segment of adolescents as well as increased enrollment in special education courses (Pollard, 1993; Meier, Stewart, & England, 1989; Oakes, 1985; Milofsky, 1974).

The subculture formed by African American males and the need to exhibit masculinity, highlighted by West (1994), was similar to that of lads discussed in Paul Willis' work entitled *Learning to Labor: How working class kids get working class jobs*. As a result of social influences and the common misconception of behaviors, these young men dissociated from school due to intense feelings of inferiority. "The most basic, obvious and explicit dimension of counter-school culture is entrenched general and personalized opposition to 'authority' (Willis, 1977, p.11). Just as the lads, in Willis' (1977) work, many African American males viewed educators and administrators as individuals who utilized their self-imposed "superiority" to restrict one's freedom and creativity (West, 1994).

This restriction of freedom often led to adolescents participating in "deviant" behavior, which was met with severe repercussions (West, 1994). This is parallel with Willis' (1977) discussion of classroom dynamics in which he stated:

Discipline becomes a matter not of punishment of wrongs committed in the old testament sense, but of maintaining the institutional axis, of reproducing the social relationships of the school in general: of inducing respect for elemental frameworks in which other transactions can take place" (p. 66).

As a result, many of these adolescents became discouraged with school because it was no longer viewed as a sanctuary of intellectual development and creative freedom. Thus, these students began to find other outlets of expression and utilized education as a means to an end; in particular, employment. Similarly, Gibbs (1988) argued:

Black males are portrayed...in a limited number of roles, most of them deviant, dangerous, and dysfunctional...This constant barrage of predominantly disturbing images inevitably contributes to the public's negative stereotypes of black men, particularly of those who are perceived as young, hostile, and impulsive. Clearly, the message says: if they entertain you enjoy them (at a safe distance); if they serve you, patronize them (and don't forget to leave a tip); if they threaten you, avoid them (don't ride the subway). Thus young black males are stereotyped by the five "d's": dumb, deprived, dangerous, deviant, and disturbed. There is no room in this picture for comprehension, caring or compassion of the plight of these young black men. (p. 3)

This viewpoint still holds true, today, as African American males are often targeted by our judicial system (Alexander, 2012; U.S. Census, 2012) and are commonly placed in special education courses (Kunjufu, 2005) as well as punished at a higher rate than their White counterparts (Ferguson, 2000; Noguera, 2000; U.S. Census, 2012). With the recent killings of Trayvon Martin, Jordan Davis, Alton Sterling, and Philando Castile, it is becoming apparent that African American males, as a result of his demonized depiction, are in great danger.

With the majority of qualitative and quantitative research geared towards explaining and understanding why African American males actively engage in a counter-school culture,

little attention has been devoted to those individuals who exhibit academic success. Fashola (2005) noted:

So much of the attention given to this issue has been directed at documenting the failures and describing the endangered status of this species. In general, this literature is severely limited in its conceptualization of the issues and in its coverage of the range of adaptations, behaviors, characteristics, and conditions manifested in the lives of African American males. It is primarily a literature of Black male failures and dysfunctional behaviors and is most charitably described as a response to oppression and disadvantage...Gordon (1996) has referred to the 'African American male Problematique' to reflect the view that this generalized distortion of the conditions and status of Black males in the United States is an artificial or at best manufactured problem. Some African American males are in trouble, but the African American male condition is not one of universal failure. (p. vii)

#### Promoting Academic Achievement among African Americans

The social plight and, consequently, school dissociation of African American males has been well documented in the literature (Brown & Davis, 2000; Carter, 2003, Ferguson, 2000; Kunjufu, 2001; Noguera, 2003). Being African American and male, in the United States, entails complex and multifaceted issues associated with schooling, socialization and identity development (Fordham, 1996, Delpit 1988; Boyd-Franklin & Franklin, 2000). Davis (2003) asserted:

To be Black and male in American schools places one at risk for a variety of negative consequences: school failure, special education assignment, suspensions, expulsions, and violence. Rates of Black male school attrition, relatively poor academic

performance and college enrollment and persistence are seen, in part, as a function of Black males' inability or disinterest in fulfilling their roles as conventional learners in school settings. (p. 518)

Hence, it is noted that the Black man's unfavorable school experiences can be attributed to his adaptation of culturally-specific coping mechanisms, cognitive and social negotiations of masculinity, and his understanding of how he is seen in the eyes of others (Tatum, 2005; West, 1994; Ferguson, 2000). Researchers have concluded that Black males, as compared to Whites and Black females, in American schools are often at a higher risk for a number of negative consequences, which include but are not limited to special education assignment, suspension and expulsions, and, ultimately, school failure (Davis, 2003; Tatum, 2005; West, 1994). African American males' experiences within society as well as in the classroom, undoubtedly, requires an intense amount of cultural negotiation in which the individual actively seeks to balance his communal identity and the demands of the dominant society.

With the majority of literature on African American males and academic achievement presenting the Black man as a passive, victim of subjugation, there are a number of studies that examine the factors that African American males utilize to succeed academically. In my opinion, these works prove to be beneficial because they assist readers in "understanding how and why some black males avoid the pitfalls and hardships that beset others" and "may help us devise ways to protect and support more of them" (Noguera, 2003, p. 435). This is conducive with Floyd's (1996) argument in which she stated, "To focus primarily on the problems of any groups of people in isolation from data that highlight possible solutions to their problems is to promote distorted and negative stereotypes that perpetuate defeat and pessimism" (p. 181). Therefore, it is critical to the life chances of the African American male

population that stories of success and resilience be highlighted in the field as to act as a vehicle of hope and social support (Floyd, 1996; Garnezy, 1991). In particular, studies on Black males' success suggests that four factors influence academic achievement: (1) resilience; (2) neighborhood structure and collective identity; (3) spiritual, family, and peer support; and (4) mattering to others and the display of high expectations.

### *Resilience*

Floyd (1996) stated, "The difference between success and failure for these young people, both inside and outside of school, often boils down to the presence or absence of factors associated with a specific character trait: resilience" (p. 181). Resilience is a social phenomenon that occurs when an individual is able to utilize his or her differences, observe the surrounding environment, and develop new and/or use existing strategies to overcome adverse circumstances (Floyd, 1996; Gayle, 2005; McGee & Martin, 2011). Palmer and Johnson-Bailey (2005) suggested that the presence of structural, attitudinal, and personal factors impacted resilience and contributed to the social development of African Americans. Furthermore, African American students who displayed resilience possessed several attributes, which include positive interaction with others (Ballard & Cintron, 2010; Oddone, 2002), the ability to set goals and devise a plan of action to accomplish one's goals (Cappella & Weinstein, 2001, Oddone, 2002), a strong belief in the critical role that effort plays in completing tasks (Cappella & Weinstein, 2001; Gayle, 2005), and a strong display of trust and respect for others as well as one's self (Ballard & Cintron, 2010; Morales, 2000; Oddone, 2002). Similarly, Gayle (2005) inferred that in addition to the preceding factors, African American males demonstrated resilience when education was believed to have a utilitarian

value; particularly, the acquisition of social capital and social mobility. Specifically, in *Playing the Game and Paying the Price*, Gayle (2005) wrote:

For these youths, academic achievement was something that they did without circumscribing their sense of who they were...For these youths, the meaning of academic achievement was not an external reference point inconsistent with their ethnic or social class; this was not “acting white.” Instead, academic achievement provided a practical and internal reference point of upward mobility (moving out and up). (p. 259)

The notion of “acting White” in the African American community refers to the presumption that an individual who upholds the rituals, norms, and expectations of White society is a “sell-out” or disloyal to his or her culture (Fryer, 2006). However, this study illustrates that African American males’ pursuit of academic excellence does not mean that they have to lose their cultural identity. Rather, they must acknowledge the value that education has for improving life chances; thus, utilizing education as a form of resistance to stereotypes. Although studies inferred that personal resilience promoted academic achievement, the notion of maintaining one’s connection to his or her community was critical to the cognitive and social development of African American males and will be discussed in the next section.

#### *Neighborhood Structure and Collective Identity*

Much of the research on student’s level of academic performance has focused largely on individual factors such as race, gender (Cappella & Weinstein, 2001), social class (Howard, 2003), socioeconomic status (Floyd, 1996), locus of control (Flowers, Milner, & Moore, 2003), and personal aspirations (Kao & Thompson, 2003; Bohon, Johnson, & Gorman, 2006). However, the need to explore the influence that neighborhood characteristics



have on educational aspiration is gaining attention. Studies on communities suggested that like other social places and groups, neighborhoods were stratified by race as well as social and economic inequality, which influenced the occurrence of poverty, crime, joblessness, access to better schools, and quality of housing (Squires & Kubrin, 2005; Massey & Denton, 1993; Logan & Molotch, 1987; Stewart, Stewart, & Simons, 2007). One of the most prominent studies of neighborhood effect was presented by Williams J. Wilson (1996) in which he argued that the flight of middle class families from African American neighborhoods influenced the collective identity and socialization of youths by limiting the types of role models they were exposed to. While re-examining Wilson's (1996) work, Ainsworth (2002) added that the presence of middle class families served as a social buffer for neighborhoods because they provided financial and psychological resources that improved the quality of schools and social conditions for students. Stewart, Stewart, and Simons (2007) stated:

Wilson's theory of neighborhood effects indicates that adolescents from disadvantaged neighborhoods are likely to be exposed to a number of risk factors that can derail positive adolescent development and thereby lead to an oppositional culture that tolerates deviant values and behaviors. (p. 899)

Furthermore, it was suggested that neighborhood residents' sense of economic inequality as well as the prevalence of racial isolation negatively influenced educational and behavioral outcomes of African Americans (Crowder & South, 2003; Robinson & Biran, 2006; Stewart, Stewart, & Simons, 2007). In addition, it was concluded that one's sense of collective identity and connectedness with the Black community was positively related to academic achievement (Robinson & Biran, 2006; Irving & Hudley, 2008). More precisely, it was one's

sense of connectedness that integrated the influence of spiritual, family, and peer support on African American males' success.

### *Spiritual, Family and Peer Support*

The need to assist African American males in developing healthy racial identities and relationships with their peers; particularly of the same race, has been the focus of many studies (Grantham & Ford, 2003; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Gay, 2000). Cross (1971) noted that the development of Black identity was formulated through five distinct social events known as Nigrescence. First, the individual engaged in the pre-encounter stage, which essentially illustrated how he or she identified as a raceless being. Second, the individual entered the encounter stage during which he or she faced a situation that heightened his or her racial consciousness. Third, during the immersion-emersion stage, the individual strived to prove that he or she was Black while separating themselves from their White counterparts. Fourth, the individual entered the internalization stage. During this stage, the individual found comfort in his or her racial identity and rejoined society with a heightened interest in forming relationships with members from diverse backgrounds. Finally, the internalization-commitment stage involved the individual internalizing his or her racial identity and becoming an agent for social justice. It should be noted that as the individual progressed through life, he or she revisited the various stages with the intention of redefining his or her racial identity.

Cross' (1971) theory of Nigrescence inferred that the problem of African Americans' identity formation was not totally founded on issues of racism from the dominant society, but, greatly, influenced by how they viewed themselves in relations to their social counterparts following an adverse situation. Franklin (1998) noted that African American

males experienced an inner struggle for personal identity following racial encounters from White society as well as the Black community. Tatum (1997), also, argued that African American males experienced great difficulty in fitting into society because they were often demonized by the Black community as social failures (Tatum, 1997). Interestingly, those individuals who did exhibit success (through means other than sports or venues related to popular culture) were often labeled as traitors of the Black community or accused of “acting White” (Gay, 2000). According to Fordham and Ogbu (1986):

Black students’ academic efforts are hampered by both external factors and within-groups factors...schooling is perceived by Blacks, especially Black adolescents, as learning to act White, or as trying to cross cultural boundaries. And, importantly, school learning is viewed as a subtractive process. In our view, then, the academic learning and performance problems of Black children arise not only from a limited opportunity structure and Black people’s response to it, but also from the way Black people attempt to cope with the “burden of acting White.” (p. 201)

However, Ferguson (2001) offered an alternative explanation in which he suggested that Blacks developed an oppositional culture that helped them to maintain a collective identity, which rejected White hegemony. In essence, he stated:

Among its essential features is the drive to maintain a shared sense of African American identity that is distinct from (that is, in opposition to) the Other...the Other is not White people, especially as individuals. Instead, the Other is the cultural system of White superiority within which negative racial stigma is kept alive and out of which insinuations of Black inferiority and marginality emanate. Black racial solidarity serves as mechanism of mutual validation and a shield...any apparent

attempt by a Black person to escape the stigma of race by joining the Other—by speaking and behaving in ways that appear to seek an exemption from the stigma while leaving it unchallenged—may meet the accusation of acting White. (Ferguson, 2001, pp. 377-378)

On the other hand, some studies reported that in an effort to avoid criticism from their racial peers, African American students engaged in the development of a raceless identity in which they distanced themselves from Black culture (Murray & Mandara, 2003; Arroyo & Zigler, 1995; Fordham, 1988). Additionally, a select group of African American males adopted a more holistic understanding of society, in which they understood the social stigma associated with being a Black man in America as well as the usefulness of principles presented by White society in the quest for disproving the generalizations forced upon them (Madison-Colmore, Moore & Smith, 2003). Thus, it can be concluded that the first step in developing a healthy identity amongst African American males is allowing them to dissociate from being categorized under the restraints of being a “Black male” (meaning seeing themselves as a minute part of a larger group) and to recognize their role as a transmuting individual (Madison-Colmore, Moore & Smith, 2003). Second, society has to recognize that as social beings, our essence is developed through active, cultural maintenance (Harper, 2006).

Harper (2006), who studied the influence of acting White and its impact on African American males’ college success, explained:

Peers played a significant role in the high-achievers’ collegiate success. No participant reported social ostracism or feelings of alienation from other African American students. Instead, they all described how peer support significantly enhanced the quality of their experiences as high-achievers in predominantly White

learning environments... Other participants indicated that they would have accomplished less without the support of other African Americans. When asked to whom they would attribute their college achievements, the high-achievers consistently replied: (1) God, (2) themselves, (3) their parents, and (4) their peers—almost always in that order. (p. 347)

These findings were, also, supported in a study by Dancy (2010) in which it was concluded that spirituality was the primary source of support amongst African American male, college students. Similarly, it was noted that participants pinpointed spirituality as the foundation and guiding factor of one's identity. Furthermore, Wilson-Sadberry (1991) reported that the presence of the father and peer support were crucial in the academic performance of African American males in college. Interestingly, one should note that this finding does not imply that individuals whose fathers are absent from the home will not be successful. Rather, the presence of the father in the household increased the likelihood of academic success (Wilson-Sadberry, 1991). Floyd (1996) found that a supportive, nurturing family and home environment was conducive to the development of resilience amongst African American males. In addition, Young (2007) concluded that family and peer support as well as the role of the mother as the first teacher played a significant role in enhancing the academic achievement of African American male, college students. In other words, the manner in which the mother reared the child had a significant influence on how he or she learned in the classroom. Although one's support system seemed to be a potent factor in African American males' academic achievement, success in school was linked to high expectations.

### *Mattering to Others and High Expectations*

The notion of “mattering to others” has been documented in educational research as having a significant influence on Black males’ academic success. Tucker, Dixon, and Griddine (2010) noted:

African American males’ experiences of mattering to others at school, being supported by family members, and experiencing a personal drive to do well academically and professionally seem to be the main factors that the participants identified as important to their academic success. (p. 141)

For years, research has documented that the notion of mattering to others is linked to one’s mental well-being in that it gives the individual a sense of belonging and the feeling of being special to others (Patrick, Knee, Canevello, & Lonsbary, 2007; Elliott, Colangelo, & Gelles, 2005; Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981; Marshall, 2001; Schicman & Taylor, 2001; Connolly & Myers, 2002). Furthermore, current work regarding mattering suggests that the climate of the school is greatly related to the occurrence of academic achievement; particularly, for marginalized groups such as African American males (Chen, 2007; Stewart, 2007).

Researchers such as Allen and Boykin (1992), Delpit (1988), and Ogbu (1991) found that students excelled in academics when the school environment was nurturing and welcomed diversity. Thus, one may conclude that the role of caring mentors, educators, and administrators is a central component of a student’s perspective of education and the purpose it serves in his or her life (McGee & Martin, 2011; Noguera, 2001; Conchas & Clark, 2002; Gordon, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts, & Boyd, 2009; Bailey & Paisley, 2004). Similarly, the role that expectations play in students’ academic success infuses the literature on Black males’ educational performance.

Finn (1972) maintained that there were a number of expectations that influenced one's perception of self and his or her level of ability. Finn (1972) stated that researchers should recognize "the complexity of the network of expectations in which the child is enmeshed, including those expectations held by his culture" (p. 395). Moreover, the author suggested that self-expectations, and consequently, achievement were a direct result of one's cultural traditions and demands, which he insisted influenced the development of peer-, parent-, teacher-, and social expectations of the individual. Similarly, Izzo, Weissner, Kaspro, and Fendrich (1999) found that parental involvement and parental expectations, positively, affected the academic engagement of students. Recent research concluded that parents of successful Black students were more likely to exhibit higher levels of social interaction with their child(ren) and with teachers and school administrators (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Bailey & Bradbury-Bailey, 2010). Hence, African American males' sense of self-empowerment is dependent upon their view of others' expectations as well as their perception of mattering to those individuals who are important to them.

Moreover, Tucker, Dixon, and Griddine (2010) suggested that African American males' academic success was largely dependent on the teachers', counselors', and principals' exhibition of high expectations. In a study conducted by Strayhorn (2008), it was noted:

Teachers have lower expectations for Black men when compared to their White male and Black female counterparts...20% of Black men reported feeling put down in class by their teachers (compared to 4% of White men and 4.8% of Black women).

Hence, one may infer that the expectations of others play a significant role in one's outlook on education and the development of self-efficacy. The history of American education and its acceptability of African American males have been limited, to say the least (Bridges,

2011). African American males are the most stigmatized population in the United States; consequently, resulting in heightened levels of stress due to racism and oppression (Noguera, 2003). Noguera (2003) maintained that the development of masculinity and racial identity, in relation to African American males, depended on their ability to adequately resolve the racial attitudes of society and to understand the values of the dominant society as well as those of the Black community. Failure to do so, resulted in identity diffusion (Noguera, 2003; Phinney et al., 1990). Corbin and Pruitt (1999) argued that the notion of masculinity, for Black men, and their identity development was inhibited when the individual accepted and believed in the stereotype. Unlike their female counterparts, African American males struggled to redefine themselves within the greater society (Tajfel, 1978) as they were, often, forced to choose between being Afrocentric and American (Kambon & Bowen-Reid, 2010). While African American males were expected, by dominant society, to navigate through a competitive society that stressed individualism, they were, simultaneously, expected to adhere to the social demands of African American culture, which was laced with communalism and a sense of interdependence (Corbin & Pruitt, 1999). Hence, in order to maintain a sense of what it meant to be a Black man in America, African American men often “over-identified with African American culture to minimize any loss of self-esteem resulting from comparisons with the dominant group” (Bridges, 2011, p. 153). This phenomenon led to fragmentation in the Black male’s sense of belonging in dominant society and his connectedness to the African American community.

#### From Illusion to Disillusion

The development of African Americans’ identity in U.S. society (and education) has been one of many shifts. This was especially true for the Black male. Although endless



research has been conducted to examine the negative experiences of African American males in education, there appeared to be a rise in studies to understand what personal and social factors promoted academic success. In particular, research suggested that resilience amongst African American males was enhanced when several components were promoted: (1) a heightened sense of belonging (Bohon, Johnson, & Gorman, 2006; Squires & Kurbin, 2007; Stewart, Stewart, & Simons, 2007); (2) the presence of family, spiritual, and peer support (Gay, 2000; Ferguson, 2001; Murray & Mandara 2003; Harper, 2006); the perception of mattering to others and the exhibition of high expectations (Tucker, Dixon, & Griddine, 2010; Patrick, Knee, Canevello, & Lonsbary, 2007). This study expanded on the preceding research by providing insight as to what socio-cultural factors promoted academic success amongst three African American males within adverse environments; particularly, the rural, U.S. South.

CHAPTER III  
INTERWINING BLACK PROTEST THOUGHT AND CRITICAL NARRATIVE  
INQUIRY TO INVESTIGATE AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES' ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Education as Politics

This qualitative study explored the experiences of three African American males as they navigated through informal and formal educational experiences and identified factors that may contribute to resilience and, consequently, one's academic success. For the purpose of this study, academic success was defined as individuals who have attained a doctoral degree. Utilizing Black Protest Thought, which focuses on ideological and organizational responses to oppression, as the theoretical framework, and Critical Narrative Inquiry as the research methodology, the researcher investigated how one's social and cultural experiences, particularly race and racism, influences African American males' identity development as well as achievement. In particular, this study addressed one central research question: How do African American males experience academic success despite issues associated with race and racism?

Previous research conducted on the educational status of the Black male has indicated the need for change in the American educational system (Noguera, 2008). The driving force behind this study was one often exhibited in Black educational protest literature in which it is noted that "education is politics" (Watkins, 2005, p. 2). Politics in its basic form is the practice of influencing individuals and, thus, the governance and control over a human community (Watkins, 2005). Therefore, educational reform can only be achieved when research and policies incorporate the perspective of the school's most important stakeholder, the student, and how his or her identity, especially as it relates to the intersection of race,

class and gender, is constructed within as well as outside of the school and how one's identity affects his or her attitude towards school and what constitutes learning.

Due to the fact that research on the issue of Black males' academic abilities and experiences, frequently, focuses on the negative encounters and lack of achievement, this work utilized a qualitative approach to provide counter-stories that depict the competencies of this segment of the population. Qualitative research allowed the investigator an opportunity to collect detailed accounts of the participants' lived experiences in hopes of providing a better understanding of what socio-cultural factors influence the academic success experienced by Black males. Furthermore, one must note that research aimed at uncovering the tools needed to project a positive educational experience to marginalized groups provides insight that can assist parents, teachers, school administrators, and other members of disadvantaged groups in recognizing the importance of incorporating diverse, lived experiences in the classroom; thus, making learning more conducive to the needs of all students.

The following segment provides a general overview of the manner in which the research was conducted. Topics such as the research questions, the research design, participant selection and profiles, data collection methods, data analysis and data reporting are reviewed.

### Filling the Void

This study addressed one fundamental research question and five subsequent questions: How do African American males experience academic success despite issues associated with race and racism?

- How have majoritarian narratives pertaining to the “inabilities” of Black boys influenced the participants’ identity development and in what ways have the associated stereotypes impacted his academic performance?
- What personal attributes contribute to the resilience displayed by African American males who reach academic success?
- How are the stories of Black males who experience academic success being silenced by the dominant social group in order to prolong White hegemony?
- What educational factors (those related to the educational setting and/or school) influence African American success?
- What sociocultural factors shape African American males’ ideas of masculinity and academic success?

This trajectory of questions was generated as the result of reviewing and analyzing existing work on the educational experiences of African American males and their plight in the United States; particularly, within the school. Since there appeared to be a lack of work that focused on providing an in-depth look at what techniques and attitudes adopted by African American males promote educational success, it was vital that these questions were addressed.

#### Qualitative Research as a Means to Uncovering Resilience

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) noted that qualitative research addresses how a social phenomenon occurs and what meaning it has on the individual’s epistemological, axiological, and ontological viewpoints. Utilizing means such as interviewing and observations, qualitative research posits that the goal of the investigator should be to bring the experiences of an individual and/or a group of individuals to life in a way that expands

their needs beyond racial, socio-economic, gender, and cultural boundaries and provides insight on the daily hardships and triumphs experienced by the participant(s). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003), Watkins (2001), Sherman and Webb (2001), and Padgett (2004), it is imperative that qualitative research along with its design and questions be centered around avoiding the mere postulation of existing ideologies and radiate the need to uncover new insights on social issues. Therefore, the purpose of utilizing qualitative inquiry; particularly, critical narrative inquiry, highlighted the researcher's intent to address how, why, and what socio-cultural factors influence African American males' identity and academic success.

### *Critical Narrative Inquiry*

Critical narrative inquiry was the research method that guided data collection and analysis of this study. If one examines the various bodies of literature in the field, he or she may notice that many of the works, largely, support the majoritarian narrative of the Black male and his inability to adequately perform in schools. However, it was the goal of this study to utilize in-depth interviews as a means of constructing counter-narratives that will not only unleash the social muzzle that has silenced marginalized populations, but, also, re-establish the student as the center of exploration. In a discussion on the cross-cultural use for narratives, He (2003) noted:

The reason for telling and retelling narratives are to search for their cultural roots, to reflect upon their background and experiences, to examine their values and beliefs in order to understand the ways in which their personal histories, cultures, and experiences affect who they are, how they perceive the world, and how they interact with others in an increasingly diversified world. (p. xix)

Thus, it becomes apparent that the study of experiences and the representation of counter-narratives is a crucial component of the drive for social justice. According to Solorzano and Yosso (2002), a counter-narrative is “a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society). The counter-story is, also, a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (p. 32). More importantly, counter-narratives are conducive with the central tenets of Black Protest Thought because their ultimate use is to serve as a catalyst for social justice, to challenge the ideology of dominant groups in society, and to reject the notion of universal knowledge by highlighting the critical role that personal experiences serve in one’s perception of reality and what constitutes truth (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Delgado, 1989). Furthermore, Delgado (1989) suggested that counter-narratives:

Can open new windows into reality, showing us that there are possibilities for life other than the ones we live. They enrich imagination and teach that by combining elements from the story and current reality, we may construct a new world richer than either alone. (pp. 2414-2415)

One common phenomenon in the African American community utilized to pass information from one generation to another is storytelling. As a type of narrative inquiry, storytelling is a form of communication through which the individual or storyteller is able to relive and share events that he or she considers to be worthwhile and influential factors in his or her personal development. Exhibiting the powerful role that storytelling plays in critical race theory, Black protest thought, and social justice, Delgado and Stefancic (2001) noted:

Stories also serve a powerful psychic function for minority communities. Many victims of racial discrimination suffer in silence, or blame themselves for their

predicaments. Stories can give them voice and reveal that others have similar experiences. Stories can name a type of discrimination; once named, it can be combated. If race is not real or objective, but constructed, racism and prejudice should be capable of deconstruction; the pernicious beliefs and categories are, after all, our own. Powerfully written stories and narratives may begin a process of adjustment in our system of beliefs and categories by calling attention to neglected evidence and reminding readers of our common humanity. (p. 43)

Delgado and Stefancic (2001) maintained that counter-stories can be powerful tools for social change in that they, frequently, expose mainstream society to the plight of others. Essentially, these stories assist one in understanding that as social beings, our worldview is largely shaped by our lived experiences; thus, noting the need to dismiss whiteness as normative or the standard by which various social groups are judged (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Moreover, Delgado and Stefancic (2001) suggested that people of color should not be compared to their White counterparts as their lived experiences are not equivalent. However, each individual, regardless of race, should be considered an indispensable component of society, which indicates that the inclusion of Others' perspectives is critical to encouraging social justice. Similarly, King and Horrocks (2010) maintained that narratives, particularly those collected through interview, require the researcher to engage in reflexivity due to his or her ethical and social responsibility "to present their work in ways that are understandable, useful, and accountable" (p. 139). Thus, the process of storytelling was presented as one that required not only the storyteller to recall events that have shaped his or her epistemological, axiological, and ontological viewpoints, but, as one that forced the researcher to re-evaluate his or her values and preconceived notions of what constitutes knowledge, truth, and reality.

### Research Site and Participant Selection

The study took place in Wilkes County, a rural area in Georgia's Central Savannah River Area (CSRA). Wilkes County has a population of approximately 10,050 residents (U.S. Census, 2012). Whites comprise the majority of its population (55.4%) followed by African Americans who account for 42.2% of its total population. However, African Americans are the majority of the student population (50.7%) while the faculty is, mostly, comprised of Whites (86.1%). The high percentage of African Americans in Wilkes County schools is the result of White flight, in which White parents who live in the county send their children to a nearby, all White private school. Furthermore, it should be noted that 58 percent of the population does not have a high school diploma; thus, rendering this county as having the lowest graduation rate in the CSRA. Racism is a social construct that plagues the community and often leads to Blacks expressing a depleted sense of belonging amongst their White counterparts. Although much attention has been given to the academic achievements and hardships of minority students in urban areas, the educational experiences of students in rural communities is vital to the development of educational policies and practices as well (Howley, Howley, & Yahn, 2014). Thus, this work examines how three African American males engaged in identity formation and exhibited academic success (as defined as obtaining a doctorate degree) in the racially infused, U.S. South.

All three of the participants attended the same high school and displayed academic success (the attainment of a doctorate degree). Due to the fact that individuals who met this requirement were limited, the participants were derived from snowball sampling and researcher networking. Snowball or chain referral sampling is a method utilized in qualitative research, particularly in the field of sociology, that "yields a study sample through referrals



made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest” (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981, p. 141). In addition, snowball sampling has been proven most effective when attempting to derive a study sample from “hidden populations” such as members of oppressed groups, individuals who struggle with abuse and/or addiction of any kind, and illegal immigrants (Noy, 2007). In relation to this study, it must be noted that all participants graduated from the same high school but attended various post-secondary educational institutions. In addition, none of the participants, in this study, received athletic scholarships but were admitted to postsecondary institutions as a result of academic achievement.

As discussed previously, participants were selected on their willingness and ability to take part in the study. Initially, there were four participants for the study. However, due to the fourth participants’ concerns surrounding issues of sexuality and the hardships of African Americans in the greater society, he declined to partake in the study. The remaining participants decided that their involvement in this study was beneficial to the advancement of their hometown for three reasons: (1) Their stories would project the struggles that African Americans, particularly Black males, faced in the local school system as well as the community; (2) Their counter-narratives might offset the preconceived notions of the African American community and Black males held by their White counterparts; and (3) Their stories could serve as a beacon of hope for the community’s youth; thus, allowing each participant to serve as a role model for future generations. A brief description of each participant is listed below<sup>3</sup>.

*Jamison.* Jamison was in his early 60s at the time of the study. He was born during segregation to a mulatto mother and a fair complexion, Black father. He attended segregated

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<sup>3</sup> Table 4.16 (p. 82) represents a visual synopsis of participants’ demographic profiles.

schools for his entire secondary educational tenure. Jamison credited his father as the most powerful example of an African American male and highlighted that his father pushed him to perform well in education in order to experience better career opportunities as well as security for his family. Jamison, at the time of the study, was married with two children. He indicated that, during his career as an educator and administrator, it was his social responsibility to present students with a learning environment that was conducive to their needs primarily through producing a faculty that reflected the composition of the student populace. Currently, Jamison is retired and serves on the local board of education. He received his undergraduate degree, in Social Sciences, and a master's degree, in Education Administration, from a historically, Black college. He completed his terminal degree in Education Leadership from a predominantly, White public university.

*William.* William, who was in his early 50s, at the time of the study, entered school shortly after desegregation in Wilkes County. As a human rights activist and full-time pastor of his own church, William prides himself of raising the critical consciousness of the African American community as well as projecting the issues of marginalized groups to the larger society. At the time of the study, William was divorced and had one child. William noted that his grandmother served as the greatest influence over his academic success. He received an undergraduate degree, from a historically black college, in Religion and Philosophy. He completed his master's degree, in Divinity, from a historically black college as well. For his doctorate degree in Sacred Theology, he chose to attend a predominantly, White university.

*Harper.* Harper was in his early 40s during the study. He is married and has two children. He currently serves as an assistant principal at a predominantly, Black high school in rural, southeast Georgia. He acknowledged his mother as being the driving force behind

his heightened self-efficacy and academic achievement. However, it was his encounters with intra-racism in the African American community that forced him to question his position in society. Thus, he noted that the lack of positive role models in the lives of his African American students as a major concern and he serves as a basketball coach for the high school's male basketball team. He believes that students perform more effectively and efficiently in education when they have educators who look like them and understand their cultural background. He received his bachelors and master's degree in Special Education from a predominantly, White private university before completing his doctorate degree in Education Leadership at a predominantly, White public university.

### Critical Narrative Inquiry and Data Collection

#### *Data collection process*

Critical narrative inquiry infers that we, as social beings, construct our understanding of reality and give meaning to our lives through story (Trahar, 2009). With the approval of the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher utilized a demographic questionnaire as a method of data collection due to the need to become familiar with the background of the participants and highlight common themes. It must be noted that demographic surveys can be powerful research tools in that they uncover trends that give us a deeper understanding of our complex society (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Also, semi-structured, open ended, interview questions were used to allow each participant the opportunity to provide a comprehensive account of his reality and journey through society as well as the educational system. Moreover, the researcher chose to conduct semi-structured interviews because it is a technique that entails minimal control over the participant's response in a time dependent study (Bernard, 19985; Galletta, 2013).

Utilizing the work of Anne Galletta (2013) as a guide for the development of the semi-structured interview questions, the researcher formulated nineteen questions to ask participants. Topics addressed by the interview questions included: Stereotypes faced by African American males, the influence that race and gender had on identity development and perception of self, reasons for pursuing an advanced degree, challenges faced in schools as well as society, coping mechanisms, participants engagement in cultural maintenance, and the socio-cultural factors that greatly impacted the participants' learning experiences. A recording device was used during each interview. During the interviews, the role of the researcher was simply that of the facilitator. The researcher guided the interview process and, only, interjected with follow up questions when needed in order to uncover the meaning and implications of the participant's social experiences. Interviews were transcribed. Following the transcription of each interview, the researcher engaged in member checking (Creswell, 2007) during which each participant received a copy of his interview and provided feedback. In particular, the researcher verified the accuracy and meaning of each participant's story as well as ensured that the experiences that were vital to the participant's identity development were efficiently highlighted.

#### Data Analysis

The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim to maintain the integrity and accuracy of the study as well as avoid misinterpretation. Once the interviews were transcribed, the researcher scheduled and completed follow-up sessions with participants to review answers and to gain clarification of responses that were not clearly defined. Next, the researcher coded the transcripts with the intent to locate patterns in behaviors, levels of motivation, and belief systems shared by the participants; thus, assisting in inferring what

modes of life greatly influence the academic performance and social development of African American males. Most importantly, the process of coding required that the researcher examine descriptive relationships and view all data from an experiential perspective (Saldana, 2012). Using thematic analysis, the researcher categorized factors found to influence social development and academic success into the three main contexts noted in Black educational protest literature as being the most influential on students' academic success: (1) home; (2) school; and (3) community. Also, the researcher cross-referenced the interviews from the participants to note similarities and differences in experiences.

#### A Charge for Social Justice

The significance of this study rests in filling the void of current literature on the educational experiences of African American males by uncovering the silenced stories and conversations of their successes. Too often, studies on the academic performance of Black boys paint a gloomy picture of hardship, hopelessness, and isolation. However, the failure to acknowledge the diverse needs and concerns that exist between and amongst members of U.S. society will lead to social devastation; particularly, in the realm of education. Thus, the researcher's goal was to present a work that addressed the challenges of this segment of the population and provide others with insight on factors that promote academic success amongst this group.

The efforts of the researcher, in the study, represented an endeavor to assist in identifying factors that can contribute to curriculum reformation and pedagogical practices that result in the inclusiveness of African American males in education. Ultimately, this work's purpose was to aid in the movement for social justice by presenting the counter-narratives of African American males with hopes of offsetting the negative stereotypes

assigned to this group and empowering this segment of the population as well as other marginalized groups with a sense of hope; thus, linking inquiry and social change. This is synonymous with the work of He and Phillion (2008) in which the authors stated, “The explicit aim of democratic and social justice oriented work is to engage with oppressed groups and individuals and empower them to take effective action toward more just and human conditions”. (p. 268)

#### Limitations of the Study

As with any study, there are limitations that affect the impact of the reported findings. In particular, this study was designed to provide the perspectives of three academically successful, Black men and findings should not be considered universal to all African American males; thus, noting that the results of this study may not be generalized to others with similar or different profiles. In addition, it should be noted that the results of this study may be skewed due to geographic location, school personnel, and participant’s perception of the researcher’s intent and the purpose of the study. Finally, despite efforts to ensure accuracy, this study relied heavily on self-reported data of participants’ educational experiences, which may cause readers and other researchers to question its validity.

#### Uncovering Patterns of the Self

In all, this study examined how three African American males developed a sense of identity and how one’s perception of self, individually and collectively, influenced academic achievement. The researcher utilized a qualitative methodology for this study. Critical narrative inquiry served as a guide for collecting and analyzing in-depth interviews and demographic questionnaires. Once the recorded interviews were transcribed, follow up sessions were conducted with participants for the purpose of member checking. During these

sessions, participants were able to review a transcript of their responses for accuracy and further clarification (if needed). Finally, the researcher examined the collected data for descriptions, patterns and relationships amongst the participants with the intent of pinpointing the socio-cultural factors that influenced identity development, resilience, and academic success of African American males.

CHAPTER IV  
UNLEASHING THE MUZZLED HOPE: PRESENTING THE SILENCED STORIES OF  
AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES' ACADEMIC SUCCESS AND RESILIENCE

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings for this study. The researcher displays participants' responses to the demographic questionnaire in the form of text and a table (pp. 78-84).

Utilizing semi-structured interviews, the researcher collected the counter-narratives of three African American males to investigate the socio-cultural factors that influence the resilience and academic success of Black males in the rural, U.S. South. In particular, this chapter exhibits the researcher's analysis of the demographic questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, which were conducted face-to face, in a quest to answer the overarching research question: How do African American males experience academic success despite issues associated with race and racism? In addition, five subsequent questions are explored:

1. How have majoritarian narratives pertaining to the "inabilities" of Black boys influenced the participant's identity development and in what ways have the associated stereotypes impacted his academic performance?
2. What personal attributes contribute to the resilience displayed by African American males who reach academic success?
3. How are the stories of Black males who experience academic success being silenced by the dominant social group in order to prolong White hegemony?
4. What educational factors (those related to the educational setting and/or school) influence African American success?



5. What sociocultural factors shape African American males' ideas of masculinity and academic success?

#### Demographics of the Home Front

As with any study, the demographic composition of participants is critical in the reporting of findings as they may provide insight on the individuals' familial background, educational attainment, and household configuration. The following names are used to identify the participants throughout the remainder of the study: Jamison, Harper, and William.

#### *Participants' Current Family Structure*

At the time of the study, participants reported the following demographics related to their immediate household structure. The three participants differed in age by approximately 10 years. For instance, Harper reported his age range at 40-49; William specified his age range at 50-59; and Jamison identified his age range at 60-69. This lends itself to suggest that participants will report a difference in social events and circumstances based on the time period in which they navigated through the educational system. These differences will be discussed in the Research Questions Analysis in chapter 5. Furthermore, all three participants have been married with one reporting his current marital status as divorced. Each participant has 1-2 children (Jamison—2 children; William—1 child; Harper—2 children) and all three reside in Georgia. Tables 4.1-4.4 display the frequency distribution of participants by age, marital status, number of children, and current residential location.

#### **Table 4.1**

##### *Frequency Distribution of Participants by Age (N=3)*

<i>Demographic Variable:</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Number</i>
	29 or younger	0

30-39	0
40-49	1
50-59	1
60 or older	1

**Table 4.2***Frequency Distribution of Participants by Marital Status (N=3)*

<i>Demographic Variable:</i>	<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Number</i>
	Single/Never Married	1
	Divorced	0
	Widowed	0
	Separated	0
	Married	2

**Table 4.3***Frequency Distribution of Participants by Number of Children (N=3)*

<i>Demographic Variable:</i>	<i>Number of Children</i>	<i>Number</i>
	No Children	0
	1-2	3
	3-4	0
	5 or more	0

**Table 4.4***Frequency Distribution of Participants by Current Residential Location*

<i>Demographic Variable:</i>	<i>Residential Location</i>	<i>Number</i>
	Georgia	3
	Other	0

*Participants' Childhood Family Structure*

As it relates to the composition of the family during the participants' childhood (represented in Tables 4.5-4.9), Harper and Jamison were reared in a household with both parents present. Unfortunately, Harper's father died when he was sixteen years old. William was raised by his grandmother and never met his biological father. In terms of the participants' mother's educational attainment, all individuals reported that their female

guardians obtained a high school education. On the other hand, the participants' male guardian's attainment varied. Harper indicated that his father received a high school education. Jamison's father obtained a bachelor degree. William reported that he did not know his father's educational attainment. Harper and William grew up in lower-class households while Jamison was reared in a middle-class family. Tables 4.5-4.9 represent the frequency distribution of participants by parents' marital status, rearing parent(s), female guardian's highest level of education, male guardian's highest level of education, and family socioeconomic status.

**Table 4.5**

*Frequency Distribution of Participants by Parents' Marital Status (N=3)*

<i>Demographic Variable:</i>	<i>Parents' Marital Status</i>	<i>Number</i>
	Single/Never Married	1
	Divorced	0
	Widowed	1
	Separated	0
	Married	1

**Table 4.6**

*Frequency Distribution of Participants by Rearing Parent(s) (N=3)*

<i>Demographic Variable:</i>	<i>Rearing Parent(s)</i>	<i>Number</i>
	Mother	0
	Father	0
	Both Parents	2
	Other	1

**Table 4.7**

*Frequency Distribution of Participants by Female Guardian's Highest Level of Education (N=3)*

<i>Demographic Variable:</i>	<i>Female Guardian's Highest Level of Education</i>	<i>Number</i>
	Less than High School	0
	High School Diploma	3
	Associate's Degree	0
	Bachelor's Degree	0

Master's Degree	0
Specialist's Degree	0
Doctorate's Degree	0

**Table 4.8**

*Frequency Distribution of Participants by Male Guardian's Highest Level of Education (N=3)*

<i>Demographic Variable:</i>	<i>Male Guardian's Highest Level of Education</i>	<i>Number</i>
Does Not Know (Parent Was Not Present)		1
Less than High School		0
High School Diploma		1
Associate's Degree		0
Bachelor's Degree		1
Master's Degree		0
Specialist's Degree		0
Doctorate's Degree		0

**Table 4.9**

*Frequency Distribution of Participants by Family's Socioeconomic Status (N=3)*

<i>Demographic Variable:</i>	<i>Family's Socioeconomic Status</i>	<i>Number</i>
Lower class		2
Middle class		1
Upper middle class		0
Upper class		0

#### *Participants' Educational Attainment*

All participants attended a private institution for their undergraduate degree with Jamison and William attending the same private, historically Black college and Harper attending a predominantly White, private university. For their undergraduate degrees, Jamison majored in Social Sciences, Harper majored in Special Education, and William focused on Religion and Philosophy. For their master's degrees, William and Jamison attended private, historically Black colleges (although they were not the same institutions) and Harper attended a predominantly White, private university. Their concentration areas were as follows: Jamison received a degree in Educational Administration, William received

a degree in Divinity, and Harper received his degree in Educational Leadership. All participants attended different predominantly White, public universities for their doctorate degrees. William completed his terminal degree in Sacred Theology while Jamison and Harper received doctorate degrees in Educational Leadership. Tables 4.10-4.15 provide the frequency distribution of participants' type of institution attended as well as the area of study for their undergraduate, master, and doctorate degrees. Likewise, Table 4.16 serves as a visual synopsis of participants' responses to the demographic questionnaire.

**Table 4.10**

*Frequency Distribution of Participants by Type of Undergraduate Institution Attended (N=3)*

<i>Demographic Variable:</i>	<i>Type of Undergraduate Institution Attended</i>	<i>Number</i>
	Public-Historically Black College and University	0
	Private- Historically Black College and University	2
	Predominantly White Public College or University	0
	Predominantly White Private College or University	1
	Online Institution	0

**Table 4.11**

*Frequency Distribution of Participants by Area of Undergraduate Study (N=3)*

<i>Demographic Variable:</i>	<i>Area of Undergraduate Study</i>	<i>Number</i>
	Education	1
	Sciences	1
	Liberal Arts	1
	Other:	0

**Table 4.12**

*Frequency Distribution of Participants by Type of Masters Institution Attended (N=3)*

<i>Demographic Variable:</i>	<i>Type of Masters Institution Attended</i>	<i>Number</i>
	Public-Historically Black College and University	0
	Private- Historically Black College and University	2
	Predominantly White Public College or University	1
	Predominantly White Private College or University	0
	Online Institution	0

**Table 4.13**

Frequency Distribution of Participants by Area of Masters Study (N=3)

<i>Demographic Variable:</i>	<i>Area of Masters Study</i>	<i>Number</i>
	Education	2
	Sciences	0
	Liberal Arts	1
	Other:	0

**Table 4.14**

Frequency Distribution of Participants by Type of Doctoral Institution Attended (N=3)

<i>Demographic Variable:</i>	<i>Type of Doctoral Institution Attended</i>	<i>Number</i>
	Public-Historically Black College and University	0
	Private- Historically Black College and University	0
	Predominantly White Public College or University	3
	Predominantly White Private College or University	0
	Online Institution	0

**Table 4.15**

Frequency Distribution of Participants by Area of Doctoral Study (N=3)

<i>Demographic Variable:</i>	<i>Area of Doctoral Study</i>	<i>Number</i>
	Education	2
	Sciences	0
	Liberal Arts	1
	Other:	0

Table 4.16. Visual Synopsis of Demographic Questionnaire Responses

<b>Demographic Variable</b>	<b>Jamison</b>	<b>William</b>	<b>Harper</b>
<b>Age</b>	60-69	50-59	40-49
<b>Marital Status</b>	Married	Divorced	Married
<b>Number of Children</b>	1-2	1-2	1-2
<b>Residential Location</b>	Georgia	Georgia	Georgia
<b>Parents' Marital Status</b>	Married	Never Married	Married
<b>Rearing Parent</b>	Both parents	Grandmother	Both parents
<b>Female Guardian's Highest Level of Education</b>	High School	High School	High School
<b>Male Guardian's Highest Level of Education</b>	Bachelors	Does Not Know	High School
<b>Childhood Socioeconomic Status</b>	Middle-class	Lower-class	Lower-class
<b>Type of Undergraduate Institution Attended</b>	Private-Historically Black College and University	Private-Historically Black College and University	Predominantly White Private College or University
<b>Area of Undergraduate Study</b>	Social Sciences	Religion And Philosophy	Special Education
<b>Type of Master's Institution Attended</b>	Private-Historically Black College and University	Private-Historically Black College and University	Private-Predominantly White College or University
<b>Area of Master's Study</b>	Educational Administration	Divinity	Education Leadership
<b>Type of Doctoral Institution Attended</b>	Public, Predominantly White College or University	Public, Predominantly White College or University	Public, Predominantly White College or University
<b>Area of Doctoral Study</b>	Educational Leadership	Sacred Theology	Educational Leadership

## We Shall Overcome: Black Male Counter-Narratives

### *Jamison*

Born in 1952, Jamison (who is the second oldest of five children) entered a segregated world confined by the “separate but equal” doctrine upheld in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision and perpetuated through Jim Crow laws. Racial tension was high in Washington, the economic center of Wilkes County. The divisive nature of the Black and White populations was evident in the zoning of the city’s communities. Main Street, a road that ran down the center of the town served as a metaphorical divide that mimicked the sentiments of the dominant groups in the United States, which highlighted that Blacks and Whites could not coexist as a unified population. In essence, the majority of the Black population lived on the west side of Main Street, in the communities of Baltimore, Lexington Road, and Whitehall while Whites occupied the eastside of the city.

Jamison and his family grew up in the Whitehall community. Jamison’s mother was a mulatto and his father was a fair-skinned African American. His father received a Bachelor degree in education from a historically Black college while his mother received her high school diploma and focused much of her attention on being a homemaker. His family was well-known within the African American community as Jamison’s father, John Michael, served as a principal at Washington Central High School, an all-Black school in Wilkes County, and his mom, Dorothy, was a part-time teacher at Mt. Nebo Baptist Church, which served as a school for the younger, Black children of Metasville (a nearby community). As noted in the literature review, it was common for the African American community to utilize churches as schools to educate its youth as means to offset the resistance to integration by the White community. Jamison stated:



I grew up in rural Georgia and experienced segregation firsthand. Considering the area that I was raised up in, I realized at an early age that by being African American, you had numerous drawbacks in the greater society. I grew up in a society that was segregated where you had to drink out of colored only water fountains and restrooms and things of the nature. (August 18, 2016)

Jamison, unlike many of his Black friends, grew up in a middle class household. Jamison and his family lived in a three bedroom, one bathroom bricked home and both parents had their own cars. This is crucial to the time frame because bricked homes, during Jamison's childhood, represented a higher socioeconomic status. Despite Jamison's prestigious upbringing within the African American community, he recalled his father experiencing many hardships during his tenure as principal at Washington Central High School and noted that even after the illegalization of segregation, circa 1954, his father received death threats. In particular, Whites disclosed their distaste with desegregation and warned that if Jamison's father allowed the Black students of his school to enroll in the White school, he and his family would be at great risk. It was at this moment that Jamison witnessed the unwavering resilience of his father. He noted that his father never viewed his race as a personal hindrance nor did he let the threats diminish his efforts to equate the educational experiences of White and Black students throughout Wilkes County.

Race was a topic, rarely, discussed in Jamison's home. However, his parents informed him and his siblings of their perceived subordinate position within the larger society while, simultaneously, highlighting education as a means to overcome oppression. Although Jamison was aware of the hardships faced by African Americans at a young age, he, also, noted that there was one aspect of his identity that set him apart from other Blacks:

His skin complexion. Jamison, along with his four siblings, was light complexion with straight hair and, often, “passed” for White within the community. Although Jamison attended all-Black schools during his secondary educational tenure, even after the legalization of desegregation, he did have encounters with White teachers. He maintained that Black educators, particularly Black men, served as role models for him and, frequently, expressed the potential that they saw in him. They, often, expressed that hard work and education were the means to gaining equality in a racially divided society. However, it was his interaction with White teachers, particularly during his teenage years, that highlighted race’s presumption of one’s physical appearance as a determinant of his or her learning ability. He recalled many of his African American classmates being disciplined and, academically, demoted at a more frequent rate, than him, by White educators. He exclaimed:

I felt an advantage over others because I was the only Black that looked like me in many of my classes. In addition, I was of very light complexion, so I blended in easily with Whites in the community. White students, from neighboring schools, went out of their way to be fair and nice to me. Even some instructors, I felt, paid special attention to me. (August 18, 2016)

Furthermore, Jamison noted that the preferential treatment that he received from teachers, particularly White educators, caused a rift between him and some of his African American classmates as they often accused him of acting White.

Growing up during the formative years of the Civil Rights Movement, discussions of racism and its various forms of oppression were rampant amongst the African American community. Jamison recalled watching the news coverage of the Civil Rights Movement and the comments from White interviewees. He noted that Whites would refer to Martin Luther

King, Jr. as a nigger and monkey, describe Malcolm X as a devil with a hidden tail, and infer that the United States would be better off if the two were dead. This display of hatred was sickening for Jamison. Frustrated with White America's detestation for Blacks and their desire to keep African Americans as second class citizens, Jamison along with several of his classmates, orchestrated a student walkout in 1967.

The goal of the walkout was to bombard the local board of education office and pressure the White superintendent to provide African American students with equitable resources and the learning opportunities afforded to White students. He noted that African American students were tired of the secondhand resources offered in Black schools and believed that as citizens of the United States, also known as "The Land of the Free", they should be given the same opportunity to succeed as their White counterparts. When reminiscing on the walkout, Jamison recalled:

The night before the walkout, I remember my parents sitting at the dinner table. My dad expressed his concern for the safety of the Black students while my mother, repeatedly, told me, my brothers and sister that we better not walk out of our classes because it would be disrespectful to my father. Little did they know, I was one of the masterminds behind the whole thing. We had decided that the walk out would take place at noon. We chose noon because students would be on their lunch breaks and most teachers would be in their planning period during this time, which would mean little resistance from authority. I remember sitting in my mathematics class taking a test. The clock ticked, loudly, as students gazed at each other. At exactly 11:59, students began to pack their bags and proceeded to walk out of the school. I was amazed at the number of people who participated. It had to be at least 100 students.

But even more, there were teachers who walked out and community members waiting outside to join in the protest. And when I looked back at the crowd behind me and the other five students who started this, I saw my father at the top of stairs leading to the school's entrance. He simply gave me the thumbs up and never spoke about it to me, again. I don't think that my mother ever found out that I was involved. If she did, she never said anything to me. (August 18, 2016)

He continued:

That day we were met in the streets by an army of Whites who called us the N-word and bastards, threw rocks, water, and other things at us. But we kept going. We were determined to get an answer. Even if his response was no, we wanted to show that we were not going to sit peacefully. We wanted change. Although the walkout had little impact on getting up-to-date resources, it had a lifelong impact on me. It was the moment I decided to become a teacher for change. (August 18, 2016)

For Jamison, the walkout changed his perception of self in three ways: (1) It equipped him with the courage to stand up for what he believed in; (2) It allowed him the opportunity to hone his social skills and strengthen his bond with the Black community; and (3) It highlighted his desire to be a proponent of social change. Hence, Jamison began to look at education from a different perspective. Education, in his opinion, became a passageway to escaping oppression. He stated:

That's why White people did not want us to have the same education. When I was in school, we had secondhand books and resources. This was just another way of gatekeeping. Their motto was: If we can keep them behind us when it comes to reading and writing, they will never surpass us. (August 18, 2016)

Hence, Jamison decided that he wanted to be a teacher because he felt like it was the avenue through which he could have the biggest impact on future generations' outlook on life.

By the time that Jamison graduated from high school, in 1970, he was aware of the utilitarian value that education had to offer for the Black man. He noted that as a Black man, in the United States, he was often stereotyped as not being as smart as his White counterparts and aggressive. However, it was his father, who served as the prominent role model for how he should conduct himself. Jamison argued:

These stereotypes really didn't hinder me as far as my educational goals were concerned. I was motivated to excel because of my father's expectations and witnessing his desire to provide a better life for my mother, brothers, sister, and me.

(August 18, 2016)

Jamison's parents made him aware that his race could serve as a hindrance in his social mobility but highlighted that education was the key to escaping oppression. This was evident in his parents' commitment to ensuring that each of their children acquired a post-secondary education. Therefore, Jamison, following the footsteps of his father, decided to attend a historically Black, private college in Georgia's Central Savannah River Area and embarked on the journey to pursue a degree in Social Sciences. During his undergraduate years, Jamison insisted that he experienced little discrimination in education. He acknowledged that this could be in part because the faculty was, largely Black, with a limited number of White instructors. He participated on the college's basketball team and, also, became a member of the student's acting club during which he was featured as Abraham Lincoln in a televised production about the former President's life. Jamison maintained that it was activities such as sports and clubs that helped him build his perception of self through interacting with

individuals from diverse backgrounds. He noted that being accepting of differences is something that has helped him in his personal life as well as his career.

In the fall of 1973, Jamison met with one of his former teachers and mentors, an African American male by the name of Eddie Finnell. Mr. Finnell, a Black male respected in the African American community for his high expectations of its youth and firm approach to mentoring, spoke with Jamison about his future endeavors; specifically, how he planned to utilize his degree. At that moment, Jamison expressed an interest in returning to his hometown to teach. Mr. Finnell spoke with a principal, Ms. Janet Dehil who was one of Jamison's high school teachers, and returned two weeks later to inform Jamison that he would be hired for the 1974-1975 school year. In the spring of 1974, Jamison completed his degree in Social Sciences and returned to his hometown to serve as a second grade teacher. At this time, schools were completely desegregated in Wilkes County. However, Jamison noted that the idea of Whites and Blacks receiving the same education was not fully accepted by Whites; thus, acknowledging that true integration was still lacking from schools. This was evident when he mentioned:

In the 1970s when I was a classroom teacher of Social Studies, I can remember a few White parents who came to the school and expressed their desire for their children to have all White teachers. Of course, this was not said to the African American faculty or students, but being a lead teacher, it was implied that this was the case. Thus, the administration would remove the students from class to another teacher for obvious reasons. They (administrators) wouldn't state the reason but I gathered that it was because of race. (August 18, 2016)

However, Jamison, mirroring his father's dedication to equating the educational experiences of all students, decided that these discriminatory actions would not influence his outlook on his ability as a teacher and thus, he decided to pursue a master's degree in Education Administration, in 1977. He contended:

This [discrimination] motivated me to prove to any and every one that I am just as intelligent as anyone else and capable of any job and be good at it. And that's what I dedicated myself to throughout my 34 years in education. I wanted to prove that I was better than my coworkers and always strived to be the very best that I can be because I didn't want to uphold the negative connotations associated with being a Black male. And the key is to work hard to prove everybody wrong. But not only that. It is about providing equal opportunities; especially in the classroom, for all students regardless of what they look like and where they come from. (August 18, 2016)

Jamison explained that he chose to pursue a degree in Education Administration for two main reasons. First, a degree in administration allowed him to gain credentials that most of his coworkers did not have; thus, resulting in the possibility of vertical mobility on the career ladder. Second, he felt that an advanced degree would strengthen the credibility of his voice amongst constituents of the White community. Furthermore, Jamison realized that in order for social change to take place at the local level, a diverse body of individuals needed to penetrate the administrative positions. However, Jamison soon found out that this would not be an easy task.

Jamison returned to the same historically Black, private college that he attended during his undergraduate years. He insisted that he did not experience much discrimination as most of his instructors were African Americans. As far as his job, he was reassigned as a

Social Studies teacher at the high school in the fall of 1978. Jamison noted that his experiences at the high school level brought about different concerns as it pertained to the integration of White and Black students. He explained that sex; particularly, between Black males and White females was an issue commonly discussed at teacher orientation. If one was to chaperone a school event, administrators stressed that he or she needed to direct special attention to ensuring that Black males and White females did not intermingle with hopes of alleviating the occurrence of teenage pregnancy but, most importantly, minimizing the creation of a biracial population. It was during orientation that he met a fellow teacher by the name of Donna whom he married in 1980. In 1981, he and his wife welcomed their baby girl, Elise, and three years later, a son, Noah. It was a new sense of family and responsibility that further fueled his desire to exceed academically and professionally. He stated:

Another stereotype of the African American male is that we are lazy. In so many African American families, the male is not the head of the household and I felt like it was my job and obligation to provide for my family which is very important to me.

(August 18, 2016)

Jamison completed his master's degree in 1984. Due to the fact that he worked during the day and took evening classes as they were offered in his field, it took him a little longer to finish his degree. Upon completing his degree, he began to apply for administrative positions to no avail. He was often told, he needed more continuing education courses and, in some instances, that he should just be content with the position of a teacher because the White community members and students would undermine his authority due to his race. However, this did not discourage Jamison. He started taking continuing education courses and speaking, regularly, at the local board of education meetings about the struggles of Black



educators. In 1992, he decided to pursue a doctorate in Educational Leadership at a predominantly, white university in southeast Georgia. It was during this time that Jamison learned how deeply Whites wanted to minimize the academic accomplishments of the Black male. He recalled:

I remember it like it was yesterday. I entered Dr. Haynes' classroom. He was an elderly, White man who was very frail looking. He had a hump in his back. I was the only man in my class. But more importantly, I was the only Black man. And Dr. Haynes had it out for me from the first day that I entered his class. And I had him for two out of three of my classes that semester. Needless to say, no matter how much effort I put towards assignments, he would fail me. And without explanation. I talked with the department chair who insisted that I should just stick it out. I ended up failing both of his classes. Not horribly, but with a 69. And when I asked why I failed or what I could do to improve my grades, Dr. Haynes would say, "Jamison, according to the syllabus, you failed". This was horrifying to me because I knew that he, only, failed me because I was a Black man and I did not know if other professors held the same biases. (August 18, 2016)

Jamison later met another African American male in the same program who expressed that Haynes exhibited similar racially, laced behavior towards him; thus, highlighting that racism existed at all levels within education. In his opinion, this was nothing new. The Black male, in the United States, had been targeted by White men of power since the days of slavery. Jamison indicated that he, eventually, took the two courses that he failed under Haynes' tutorship, from another professor. Moreover, he completed the remainder of his coursework without making a grade lower than an "A".

In 1993, nine years after he started pursuing administrative positions, Jamison experienced a breakthrough and was hired as an assistant principal at the local high school. In this position, he served as the disciplinarian in the school. In essence, he was responsible for reprimanding students who misbehaved while at school. Moreover, Jamison served as the liaison between parents of “troubled” students and teachers. Jamison mandated that it was during this position that he fully grasped education’s position in prolonging racism through the manner in which White teachers and administrators viewed Black students. He noted that Black female students were often referred to his office for wearing short dresses and shorts. They were seen by White teachers as promoting promiscuity. However, he noticed that White females would, often, wear the same attire and it would go unnoticed by White teachers. Similarly, Black boys and White boys would engage in identical behaviors, but White teachers would refer the Black male to his office on the pretense of being insubordinate. For Jamison, it was these encounters that assisted him in understanding the unparalleled experiences of African American students and their White counterparts.

Although this position allowed Jamison the opportunity to hone his perception of and relationship with the student populace, it did not give him the platform to promote the change that he wanted to in the school’s structure; particularly, the incorporation of diverse perspectives. In 1997, he completed his doctorate in Educational Leadership. What was supposed to be a glorious occasion and distinguished achievement did not earn him much admiration from his coworkers; particularly, those individuals in administrative positions. He explained that, for five years, he applied for local principal positions. However, each time he was overlooked with no explanation. He stated:

However, career wise, I did experience adversity in terms of promotion. I was often overlooked for the job of high school principal (although I served as assistant principal for numerous years). Many Black parents felt that I was overlooked for the position due to my race and I felt the same way. Before me, the school district never had a Black principal at the high school. And I realized that three men were brought in to serve in this capacity before me, all of whom I had more qualifications than. Matter of fact, I was not considered for the principal position until my 29<sup>th</sup> year in the educational school system.

Mirroring the resilience displayed by slaves, in the South, as well as African Americans during the Civil Rights Movements, Jamison's declared that his faith and religious background kept him motivated during difficult moments. Jamison proclaimed:

However, when I was faced with difficult experiences, I would ask God for guidance and was assured....For instance, when I did not get promoted to principal, my faith assured me that it would happen one day because God has a way of putting something on your heart and you know that it is coming from Him. So, I kept performing my job as assistant principal until my day came. Like I said, faith wise, God revealed to me and this may sound weird to anybody else, but he revealed to me that I would become principal one day but I just didn't know when. Like people say, you never know when God will show up but he will show up, eventually, and he will show up on time.

(August 18, 2016)

In 2003, Jamison became the first and last, African American high school principal in Wilkes County and served in this position until 2008. One of his biggest concerns, during his tenure as principal, was to accommodate the needs of the student populace; particularly, African

Americans. He felt that providing students with teachers and role models that looked like them, learned like them, and could relate, culturally, to them would enhance the discourse between the teachers and pupils. He explained:

Our school system is 52% African American with the majority of the teachers being White. The Black students need role models and this includes both Black females and Black males. During my tenure as principal, I was successful in making sure that there was a significant increase in the number of African American teachers hired. In particular, the faculty went from having 6 African Americans to 23. That's half of the faculty, by the time that I left. This is an issue that is still dear to me. Even after my retirement.

Jamison, now, serves on the local board of education and remains dedicated to promoting equal learning opportunities for African American students. He maintained that success, in its basic form is nothing, if it does not work to promote social change. He quoted James 2:14-- *What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?*—as the spiritual prototype of his life's story. He argued that it is not enough to pinpoint a problem. Rather one must believe in its solution. Then work to obtain it.

### *William*

William was born, in 1966, to a teenage mother, but was reared by his grandmother, Helen. Unfortunately, he never met his biological father who relocated to another state upon hearing that his mother was pregnant. He grew up in a Black neighborhood on the west side of Wilkes County known as Baltimore. William explained that from a young age, he was aware of his subordinate social status due to the fact that he was from a lower class family and he was an African American. With the Civil Rights Movement in its peak, the issues of

racism were prominent and many Blacks felt like schools served as centers of control dominated by Whites. He noted that out of fear for his safety, his grandmother withheld him from entering public school and he, actually, started school a year later than children his same age. He explained that his grandmother, who had witnessed segregation and the fight for desegregation, was skeptical of Whites and feared that they would inflict physical harm upon him and thus, she enrolled him in school at a local Black church known as Mt. Carmel Baptist Church.

For William, the church served as a social hub in his community. It was a place where Blacks would gather to educate its youth of the plight associated with being African American, encourage the development of spirituality, discuss different agendas to alleviate oppression, and promote a sense of connectedness amongst members of the community.

William noted:

It was the church that first introduced the idea of resilience in my life through the development of spirituality... You will not be successful in this world without some sense of spirituality whether you call him God, Jehovah, or Buddha; you have to have that spiritual component. This is so important to have as a young child because the spiritual component can be a powerful cornerstone of education. When you feel discouraged it keeps you motivated. (August 22, 2016)

Religion played such a critical role in William's life, that he dedicated himself to Christ, at the age of eight, and began to shadow his pastor, Reverend Lamont Davenport. Furthermore, the church assisted in promoting a heightened sense of self-confidence in William through its abundance of role models, specifically his Sunday school teacher, Ms. Minnie Evans to whom he credited with honing his leadership skills.

Upon entering public school, William inferred that he did not fear his White counterparts. Matter of fact, he implied that he never felt inferior to his White classmates because his grandmother, who he named as his biggest source of support, always expressed his innate ability to excel at whatever his heart desired. However, as early as the fifth grade, he observed that teachers, particularly Whites, exhibited a preferential disposition towards White students, but noted that he, rarely, was affected by it because he was well-behaved and his grandmother was heavily involved in his learning experience. He noted that his grandmother made biweekly visitations to his school to have meetings with his teachers during which she inquired about his behavior and academic performance.

Although William experienced racism indirectly in his classrooms, it was not until he entered ninth grade, circa 1971, that he encountered racism firsthand. William stated:

They didn't have AP, so back then you had what they would called English 1, 2, 3, and 4. English 4 was remedial. English 3, you were border line. English 2, you were okay. English 1, would be what AP is today. And they were trying to put me in English 4 and my grandmother came to the school and talked to principal...She came to him [the principal] and said William is just as smart as anyone else in his class. So they put me in Ms. Francis Duke's English 1 and I will never forget because I take it with great pride. We had to quote Shakespeare, 'Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears. I come to bury Caesar, not praise him'. All the White kids just knew it and my grandmother was like, 'That's what you have to study. William you have to know it'. I came back the next day and killed it and Ms. Duke [my teacher] had so much respect for me. (August 22, 2016)

William expressed that at the time, he did not know that this was a form of racism (relegating Black boys to lower level classes without the exhibition of a learning disability) as many of his friends had been placed in remedial courses; however, his grandmother did. William noted that his grandmother was a very wise woman and, often, noted that how one presented himself before the rest of the world was critical to his life chances. William stated that when they watched news coverage of the Civil Rights Movement, she, constantly, reminded him that stereotypes existed but it was his choice as to whether he perpetuated them or redefined himself as a Black man. In particular, William stated:

Some people would say that they couldn't watch the news coverage of the movement but my grandmother would say that you need to watch it to see what they are saying about you. How they are painting you so that you can be the opposite. A great lesson that I learned from my grandmother is that you can never control what someone says about you but you can control whether or not it is true. This is even true today with the recent shootings of African American males by police officers. That's the bottom line. You cannot stop anybody from lying. You have to watch what the media is saying and how they are portraying us. If you do not, you might fall into the stereotype. (August 22, 2016)

In essence, William's grandmother and the news projection of Blacks during his adolescence encouraged William to develop the "prove them wrong syndrome". This was especially true as it related to his academic performance.

He expressed that during his high school years, he notice a difference in motivation provided by teachers of various races. For instance, Black teachers challenged him and, regularly, reminded him that in order to achieve academic success, he had to work twice as

hard as his White classmates. On the other hand, White teachers isolated him from other Black students. They often told him that he was different than other Black boys. He noted that this was similar to tactics utilized during slavery when masters would isolate field slaves from house slaves; thus, creating a latent form of divisiveness amongst Blacks. He recalled, “It was like they were saying that I was safe and that they could work with me” (William, August 22, 2016). This act, in return, caused other African American students to accuse William of acting White and inferred that he believed that he was more entitled due to his reputation as a teacher’s pet. However, William did not allow his peer’s perception of him to stall his involvement in academics as well as extracurricular activities.

William was member of the high school’s basketball and football teams. He maintained that his participation in sports taught him discipline, problem-solving skills, and how to be part of a team, which he found to be beneficial throughout his educational journey and during his career. Although William excelled academically, he was not certain if he wanted to attend college and, initially, considered enlisting in the military. He explained:

I wanted to go to the Army to get money to help my grandmother because she had been so good to me. But Ms. Reid, one of the African American teachers, counseled me and said that the best way that I could help my grandmother would be to go to college. So that final person to push me to go to college was Ms. Reid. She was patient and pushed me. She told me that I could not be average. (August 22, 2016)

Hence, in 1984, William began his freshman year at a historically Black college that was located about forty miles, east of his hometown. The location of his college was critical as it afforded him the opportunity to travel home to visit his grandmother on a weekly basis. Although William did not participate in any sports or clubs, during college, he did join a



Black fraternity. He acknowledged that the sense of belonging generated in this organization provided an element of motivation that he longed for in the absence of his family and hometown community. It was during his interaction with his “brothers” that he was introduced to Sociology and encouraged to take a course in the genre.

For William, Sociology enlightened him on the plight of the Black man in America (even in comparison to the African American woman). This is evident when William expressed:

I was exposed to the hardships of Black men during early college because when you are taking Sociology and looking at these different trends and you start reading these statistics, you are like Oh My God, they are treating the Black man like an endangered species. He’s not going to make it and the odds are stacked...Even in comparison with African American women. It kind of goes back to slavery, segregation, and integration. The White man has always placed the Black woman a rung higher [than the Black man]. Whether that goes back to sexual needs. Whether that goes back to serving them or raising their children. But they never saw the Black woman as a threat. They always saw the Black man as a threat...And again, it’s almost like the field negro versus the house negro where you play one against the other. But at the end of the day, we are all in the same boat. (August 22, 2016)

Despite the negative images of African American males, William excelled, academically, and, in 1988, graduated with a degree in Religion and Philosophy. Following his graduation, he met Dr. Charles Spencer Hamilton who served as the senior pastor of a large African American church near his college. Dr. Hamilton was the only African American man, outside of William’s uncle Terry (who received a doctorate in computer science in the early 1980s),

that William had the privilege of establishing a personal relationship with. Serving as William's mentor, Dr. Hamilton expressed to him that he could not end his academic career with a bachelor degree. Rather, Dr. Hamilton encouraged William to pursue an advanced degree. He maintained that attaining an advanced degree would be beneficial in his future endeavors, especially as a Black man, for two reasons. First, it would provide many career opportunities as well as give him the credentials to have a valued voice in the Black community; particularly, if he desired to lead a church one day. Second, it would equip him with a more acceptable persona amongst Whites, which he noted as a challenge due to our country's underpinnings of racism. Hence, in 1988, William decided to pursue a master's degree at another historically black college. During this time, William relocated to Atlanta, Georgia which was approximately two hours away from his hometown and made his commute back home to visit his grandmother more infrequent.

William maintained that he never experienced discrimination while working on his master's degree. This was due to the fact that all of his professors were African American. However, he was reminded, frequently, that as a Black man, race as well as racism would forever play an integral role in his identity and his understanding of the world around him. Thus, he credited his journey through his master's degree with teaching him how to process racism. Even though Atlanta was known for its diverse culture and array of social opportunities, William inferred that undertones of racism still existed. He shared:

But even as someone who had a degree, I could go to certain parts of Atlanta and little, White ladies think that I worked at the grocery store. They would ask me questions like what aisle is this item on and I would say, "I don't know but when you

find out, you let me know”. You know...so, you still dealt with the racism but you knew how to process it better. (August 22, 2016)

More specifically, William noted that one coping mechanism that he utilized during difficult times was the idea of compartmentalization. Compartmentalization, as he explained, involved one’s ability to recognize the issues that he or she faced, conceptualize the situation, and develop a strategy to overcome it. He found this to be extremely useful during his second year in graduate school when he married. Along with the responsibility of family, William, also, became the pastor of a small church in Locust Grove, in 1989, and was hired as the chief of staff for a Senate Majority Leader. Once again, racism reared its ugly head. He exclaimed:

As a Black man, you are never away from racism. You have to know how to process it. And then some Whites are accepting of you or at least pretend to be. It would kill me when I worked at the Capitol and they would say things like, well you are not like the other ones. Now, they have separated you into these subcultures. Like this Indian caste system where you are educated and your subject-verb agree. In their minds, somehow you are not as bad as the one’s in the hood. (August 22, 2016)

Although many would say that this was a compliment to William’s character, he felt as though it was a slap in the face. An act that reminded him that he was still being judged by the color of his skin rather than his competency; thus, causing remnants of his teenage experiences in school to resurface. Rather than become discouraged by discrimination, William adopted a competitive attitude in which he set out to prove his capabilities to others.

For the next two years, 1989-1991, William worked to build a repertoire of issues in the Black community by traveling around the state of Georgia and inquiring about African

Americans' hardships and concerns. He joined neighborhoods in Atlanta to save schools in the Black communities, established the Augustus Kids After-School Program, and assisted government officials with the development and implementation of Georgia's Hope Scholarship (launched in 1992 under the governance of Zell Miller). William exuded a sense of pride when discussing his involvement in the Hope Scholarship because he felt that it provided immense opportunities to children from lower income families who were academically successful, but lacked adequate financial support. William, continuously, highlighted the utilitarian value of education and referred to it as "the international passport to the world" (August 22, 2016).

Like proponents of the Civil Rights Movement, William acknowledged that White culture dominated the majority of pedagogical practices and the curriculum utilized in U.S. schools. He maintained:

I understand that education is the quintessential cornerstone for development of self and empowerment. White people understood this... So if you do not have an education, you are controlled by some system and unfortunately, for us [Blacks], it is becoming the prison system. (William, August 22, 2016)

In 1993, William and his wife welcomed their daughter, Joy. Furthermore, William completed his master's degree of divinity in 1994. This process was prolonged due to his time consuming occupation at the state's Capitol and his commitment to social change within his community. However, the next two years, 1995 and 1996, were difficult for William. His beloved grandmother died, he filed for divorce from his wife of six years, he became a single parent, and he was reassigned as pastor to three different churches. Thus, William entered a phase of depression. He proclaimed:

Do not let anyone tell you that depression is not real. It is. As a Black man, you feel like you have to achieve so much to be success. I had the family, the home, and the job. I was well known in the community. And then all H.E.L.L. broke out. You feel hopeless. You just want to give up. This is what a lot of the youth in our society face; especially, Black boys. You already have society beating up on you. Then, your very own people start pointing the finger. But like I had to re-establish my faith during this time and focus on what was most important: My daughter, we have to teach Black boys the same. No matter how unfavorable the outlook appears to be, you must keep P.U.S.H.ing...Praying Until Something Happens. Now that does not mean that you sit around and wait on opportunities to fall upon you. You have to work hard until the sun shines again. (August 22, 2016)

Therefore, William reintroduced the coping mechanism of compartmentalization and began on a journey to re-establish himself. William noted that the years 1996 to 2011 were a blur to him as he devoted himself to his ministry, his daughter, and his career. Moreover, William noted that everyone's testimony entailed a test and this was his crossing to a revelation. Hence, William knew that his story needed to be told and he embarked on a journey to write his first book as an inspirational work that expressed the need for people to embrace their hardships on the path to success. He contended:

Writing my first book served as a cathartic process for me. It allowed me to get my emotions out in a non-aggressive way. It was a release. But it was, also, a way of me serving as a role model of hope for others who were experiencing lows in their lives. Kind of like your research. Sharing experiences with hopes of overcoming the doubt and the setbacks. (August 22, 2016)

In an effort to establish a more credible voice, William decided to return to school to pursue a Doctorate of Sacred Theology from a prestigious, White private university. The same year, 2011, he decided to retire from his job at the state's Capitol and founded his own church. He found this move to be of benefit because it allowed him to re-engage with his community and intertwine the voices of African Americans within the discourse of America's political forum.

Hence, William returned to the community to assist with alleviating problems associated with racism and embarked on the re-introduction of himself as a human rights activist. He established the Augustus Math and Reading Summer Camp and served as a political analyst for a radio station in Atlanta, Georgia. Likewise, he returned to his hometown to assist with police racial profiling cases and issues faced by African American children in the school system. In 2015, William completed his degree, published his book, and was acknowledged for his contribution to his local community by having a day named after him. During his appreciation speech, he contributed his success to hard work and his commitment to his community. This is best summed when he stated:

You have to work hard. The only place success comes before work is in the dictionary because "s" comes before "w". It's just that simple. It is like the words of Ruyard Kipling—*If you can walk with kings and not lose the common touch*— As Godly beings, we should never outgrow our community. Our accomplishments should be stepping stones for communal advancement. From our birth to our home-going, one should live to give back. Not in any prescribed way but in a unique form. To live, to succeed, to be great, simply means you have to remember your roots and you have to give back. (August 22, 2016)

*Harper*

In 1976, Harper was born to Margaret and John Holms. Harper's mother worked at a local textile plant while his father was a construction worker. The Holms family resided in a small, wooden home located in Rayle (a city positioned in the northwestern corner of Wilkes County). Rayle was highly populated by Blacks who relocated from Washington, the county's economic center, to focus on farming. Harper acknowledged the involvement of his family and his neighborhood, at large, played a significant role in his development at young age. In particular, Harper recalled:

When I grew up most people had to work long hours to provide for their families. I remember being about five. I would only see my parents on the weekends for the most part. My sister and I would stay at a neighbor's house at night because my parents had to be at work before we got up for school and they would return right before dark. Therefore, Black families would plant gardens, raise animals, and look after one another's children. Farming was big in my city. However, most of the women in my neighborhood were teachers that taught at the all-Black school before desegregation. So they, along with my parents, kept me and my sister in line and focused on our education. Back then, it really took a village to raise a child. (August 28, 2016)

At this time, the United States was still experiencing the remnants of President Nixon's War on Drugs. This legislative act was initially enforced to combat the prominence of drug abuse in the United States but it reflected undertones of racism; particularly in regard to African American males (Chin, 2002). Mirroring these sentiments, Harper maintained that the War on Drugs, in the 1970s, was just a continuation of the "War on Blacks" (Harper, August 28,

2016). Harper maintained that his exposure to racial discrimination started at an early age. He stated that the local police and sheriff departments, commonly, terrorized African American neighborhoods, which led to the disproportionate conviction of poor individuals and people of color during the 1970s and early 80s. Harper recalled:

The War on Drugs was a big thing when I was growing up. But people in my community called it the War on Blacks. I remember being about four or five years old. The police would stop you for nothing and ask you where you are going and what you are doing. If you were going in a store, they figured that you were a thief. They would call you weed heads and things like that. This is before crack became popular in the 80s. I know for a fact the police would plant weed on people. I have seen it with my own eyes. In instances, some of my older cousins and their friends were arrested for crimes that they didn't even commit. But that's how the police were back then. They were bad news. It got so bad that we became afraid of the police. Every time we saw them, we would run because we knew that they would harass us. (August 28, 2016)

Due to unfavorable run-ins with law enforcement as well as other discriminatory acts projected by White America, family members, frequently, reminded Harper to be careful when out in public due to the stereotypes associated with Black men in the United States. For the most part, Harper expressed that Whites classified Black boys as deviant hoodlums who terrorized White America and inferred that interaction between the two races should be kept to a minimum. This was no different in his school experiences.

From kindergarten to eighth grade, Harper noticed that most of his White teachers often placed him in the rear of the classroom and exhibited little to no interaction with him



and other African American students. He noted that White teachers would often downplay African American students' academic competency. In particular, his eighth grade literature teacher even told him that he would make the perfect basketball player because Black boys who were dark and tall were known to excel in sports. On the other hand, his African American teachers would often encourage him; particularly, those educators who experienced segregated education, firsthand. He proclaimed:

They knew the importance of education. And they knew the importance of trying to do right. They stressed staying out of trouble and telling you that you can do this and that you can do that. Just telling you not to worry about things when you have been stereotyped. They motivated you more in terms of academics than Whites. (August 28, 2016)

From Harper's perspective, a key component of feeling confident in one's ability entailed that one be presented with an environment in which he or she was accepted regardless of his or her presumed flaws. Although Harper's self-efficacy was not compromised as a result of the stereotypes that Whites held of Black boys, he noted that intra-racism, greatly, impacted his desire to succeed.

Harper, as long as he could remember, looked different from his peers and most family members. He was tall with unusually long limbs and had a very dark complexion while most of his family members were petite and possessed a lighter skin tone. He noted that family members and people in the community would often call him "First Man" (comparing his physical appearance to that of an ape) and, constantly, tell him that he was not attractive and would not accomplish much due to his appearance. Similarly, he explained

that although he was well-behaved, people in the Black community would often label him as deviant because he was an African American boy. In particular, he stressed:

I, really, never had problems with self-concept or how I felt about myself as a youth because my mother always told me who I was and I always knew where I was from...However, the only time I really had to prove others wrong is when I had to prove my own people wrong because a lot of them felt like you weren't going to do this and you weren't going to do that. You're just going to be an alcoholic like your daddy or you're not going to college unless you play sports. They would even say, you're too Black to do anything in reference to my dark skin tone. They stereotype you as well...you know Black people. Just because you were a Black boy, they looked at you as deviant. Especially older Black people. And don't get me started on having a darker skin tone. Dark skin in our community equates to an innate disability almost. They call you Sambo, ugly and dumb and a lot of hurtful things. I look different from my family. They are light-skinned and short. I guess that I got my genes from my ancestors. I am tall, with very long arms and legs and very dark. My family and people out in the streets would call me First Man when I was growing up. They said that I looked like an ape with my long arms and dark skin. It's a shame that your own race will stereotype you, also. In my opinion, they will stereotype you more than another race will. And that bothers you more because you expect that from another race because they don't understand your culture and they do not understand where you are from or what you feel and what you go through. But when it comes from your own race, that's when it has an impact on you. (August 28, 2016)

In addition to disproving the preconceived notions held of Black boys by the African American community, Harper suggested that his mother served as the most powerful source of inspiration for his academic success. During the interview Harper spoke little of his father's involvement in his identity formation. However, he disclosed that his father had a substance abuse problem and died at an early age. Furthermore, he maintained that it was his supportive home environment and his mother's high expectations of him (and limited tolerance for excuses) that prompted him to perform well in school.

Despite the isolation that Harper experienced in the classroom from kindergarten to eighth grade, he suggested that his high school years were pleasant. He noted that even though he was a star basketball player, he was aware that his talents would not afford him a scholarship to college and that his only means to acquiring a post-secondary education was through his efforts to exhibit supreme academic performance. However, Harper explained that his participation on the high school basketball team introduced him to a man that would forever change his life: Mr. Eddie Williams. Harper expressed:

In 1991, I met Coach Eddie Williams. Mr. Williams was a special education teacher and my basketball coach. He taught me what it was to be a man. He taught to be to be a leader yet a team player, to remain calm yet forceful in my values and beliefs, to respect my peers yet demand the same. He stepped in as my father. He was a mentor and a friend. He told me that college was the only option. And that's when I knew that I wanted to go to college and that I wanted a special education degree. (August 28, 2016)

Harper explained that although his father was living in his home, they had a strained relationship as he had become a victim of alcoholism and neglected his familial duties. He

succumbed to his habit, in 1992, when he passed from cirrhosis of the liver. Harper stated that although this was a difficult experience for him, Coach Williams uplifted him and kept him encouraged, particularly, in academics. In 1994, Harper enrolled at a private yet predominantly, White university in middle Georgia. He explained that his freshman year was the first time that he questioned his ability to achieve. Harper recalled:

When I got to college, it was a little different. I was pretty much the only male in a lot of my classes but most importantly, the only Black male. So it was a little harder for me and the teachers had different expectations for me. For some reason, most of them were a little harder on me. (August 28, 2016)

In addition, he disclosed that most of his White counterparts questioned his intentions for majoring in Special Education. He noted that they, often, pondered over his sexuality and/or whether he was a pedophile. He even had professors tell him that he would be more suitable in the field of Physical Education. The perception of his peers and instructors proved to be disheartening for Harper. The isolation that he encountered during his freshman and sophomore years became so overwhelming, he convinced himself that college was not for him and decided that he return to his hometown after the completion of spring semester. Two months prior to the end of the semester, Harper met with his academic advisor, Dr. Reynolds, a White male in the education department. During this session, Harper shared his experiences with White educators and his plan to discontinue his educational endeavor at the university. It was his advisor, Dr. Reynolds, who persuaded him to stay and complete his undergraduate degree. He revealed:

I was about to quit and one of the professors, my advisor, which was a White man, asked me, “Are you going to let a bunch of little, old White ladies make you quit”?

This gave me the motivation that I needed to complete my degree and I did in 1999.

(August 28, 2016)

Following the completion of his degree, Harper began working as a Special Education teacher at a rural school district in southeast, Georgia. He was greatly affected by the lack of resources available to the students; particularly, children from marginalized social groups and those with special needs. He stated, “I realized that the only way that you can make a difference is really by getting an advanced degree” (August 28, 2016).

In 2000, Harper married his wife, Sharea (with whom he has a nine year old daughter, Jasmyn, and two year old son, Harper Jr.). As the head of his household, he noted that advancing his education would be beneficial for two reasons: First, an advanced degree would equip him with a credible voice to promote change within the school. Second, continuing his education would contribute to his family’s security because, at that time, teachers’ salaries were commensurate to their educational attainment and training. Hence, in 2003, Harper returned to the same university to pursue a master’s degree in Educational Leadership.

This time, his experience was different. During the junior and senior years of his undergraduate tenure, he actively worked to build relationships with a number of the faculty members; thus, he developed a reputation in the department as a responsible and hardworking student. He began to attend educational conferences and, soon, developed an appreciation for networking and making positive relationships with other educators throughout the United States. Once, he completed his master’s degree in 2006, he went directly into the doctoral program for a degree in Educational Leadership, which he completed in 2012. His dissertation focused on the underpinnings of racism in education’s

policies and practices in the United States and the need for the integration of a multicultural curriculum. However, it was at this point that he realized that an advanced education does not always mean that one will be more acceptable amongst his counterparts. In particular, he mandated:

When you get an advanced degree, people look at you differently, which I do not like. But they do. They have more expectations of you. I think that I have been stereotyped more with doctor in front of my name than I have without it in front of my name. Because people are afraid of you when they think that you are more intelligent than they are. But it gives you a lot of opportunities to grow as an individual. (August 28, 2016)

This was even more evident as it related to his career endeavors. Following the completion of his doctorate degree, Harper began to apply for administrative positions in his local school district as well as surrounding counties. However, he was met with great resistance. He explained:

Well, when you are a Black male and, for example, I apply for a Special Ed job, you get plenty of offers. But when you are a Black male and you want to go into a leadership role, you do not get the offers. You do not get the call backs. You, just, don't get the phone calls. It is just, totally different...I had someone tell me that I need to learn how to play the game and that I need to understand that White people control this and that. But anyway, that's the mentality. That Whites control public education and that you should just be happy for what you have. (August 28, 2016)

Although this time was discouraging for Harper, he purported that his faith assisted him in displaying resilience; particularly the act of prayer. Like many Black southerners, Harper's

mother introduced him to church and, subsequently, religion at a young age. Sunday after Sunday, he witnessed preachers, deacons, and various congregations engage in prayer and worship as a means to obtain spiritual fuel to propel them through the week ahead. Prayer played a cathartic role in Harper's life as it was an avenue through which he could release his stress but, also, assured him that there was a divine power that was working things out for his greater good. Prayer assisted him in avoiding the engulfing effects of stress. Thus, he remained focused on enhancing the learning experiences of his students through his pedagogical practices and by becoming involved in extracurricular activities at the school. Following in the footsteps of his biggest mentor, Harper became a basketball coach at the local high school. He asserted:

One of the key advantages to coaching is that you get to be a role model, share your experiences, and act as a living billboard for resilience. That's what life is about. I want to be a beacon of hope for others. (August 28, 2016)

Likewise, Harper noted that one thing missing from the educational experiences of the minority students that he served was the inclusion diverse experiences as well as the exhibition of positive role models within the classroom. He purported:

Ninety-percent of the students in my school are Black and the majority of the educators are White. We may have three or four Blacks. Then, the state wonders why students do not perform well on tests or in the classroom. It because they do not relate to the teachers and the teachers do not understand their culture. Our children need more of us in education. But it is hard when it is controlled by Whites. (August 28, 2016)

Harper, also, expressed that with the recent shootings of African American males, educators need to provide a learning environment that encourages open dialogue about the social issues that plague marginalized groups. More precisely, he noted that students needed to feel like they matter to their teachers and, in return, teachers must acknowledge that their pupils are more than empty receptacles into which they pour prescribed knowledge. Rather, educators must recognize that students come with their own unique perceptions of truth. Therefore, he, often, shared his experiences with racial profiling as a youth as well as an adult to illustrate the permanence of discrimination in the United States. In particular, he recalled an incident that he experienced at the mall two weeks prior to this interview. He explained:

We were in Sears and we bought some batteries and some more stuff and the lady [cashier] said to just put it in the bag with the rest of our stuff. So we put them in the bag and we were walking out of the store and this lady, comes running and grabbed me off of the wall...And she starts yelling, "I got him. I got him". She had been watching us the whole time. She said, "He put the stuff in the bag". You see racial profiling is protected by the law. They had a right to check me to see if I had stolen something. They were already stereotyping me while I was walking around. I think that I had on some shorts and one of my basketball t-shirts from college and they assumed that I was stealing batteries. All of those people were in the mall but they were watching me. (August 28, 2016)

Harper shared that many of his Black students recognized their race as a doomed fate; however, he explained that as Blacks, one must acknowledge that it is critical, in a society such as the United States, to present him- or her-self better than their White counterparts in terms of dress, vernacular, and effort. Most importantly, he believed that racism was a



permanent mechanism of stratification in our society; however, as free thinking individual, each person possessed autonomy in how he or she processed it.

After two years of rejection, in 2014, Harper acquired an administrative position as an assistant principal at a predominantly, White high school. He, soon, found that despite his academic accomplishments, Whites still held preconceived notions of him as a Black male. He stated that in this position, his supervisor who was a White woman, constantly kept checks on him and made him log when and why he was leaving his office. He noted that this was not a practice that she enforced with his White coworkers. Furthermore, White coworkers would, often, characterize him as angry or hostile and when he voiced his dislike about the educational experiences of African American students, he was described as being Pro-Black. Not happy with the working environment that he found himself in, H began to apply for other jobs throughout the state and, in 2015, became the assistant principal at a school that was predominantly Black. He, instantly, noticed a difference in his professional experience. He explained:

I have poor eyesight. Therefore, a lot of the time, I squint my eyes when trying to see things. So at my last job, I was stereotyped as an angry Black man for this. They [Whites] said that I was on edge all of the time. They made this connection without even talking to me. Just off of my appearance. One day, I was called in and asked, “How are things at home?”.... However, when a White man frowned, you know...there’s nothing. But when I got to my new job, I was told, “All you do is smile”. But I am surrounded by a lot of Black people at my new job. Working around White people, they always think that you are angry and they think that you are hostile. They just treat you differently. They are afraid of you but at the same

time...you have to be real careful because they look at it as if you have too much power. And they don't like that. (August 28, 2016)

Moreover, he noted that there are two major drawbacks associated with being an educated, Black male in the United States. First, Harper explained that being an educated Black male presented one as more of a threat to Whites; particularly, White men. He noted that it was the notion of the educated Black man as threat to the White patriarchal structure of our society that resulted in African American males' experiences of greater resistance in the workplace as well as other social institution in the United States. Second, he professed that achieving academic success may result in members of one's own race dissociating from him or her because they believe that he or she has turned their back on Black culture. Harper mandated that his faith played the biggest role in helping him deal, effectively, with these two phenomena. This is bested summed when he declared:

Luke 12:18—*To whom much is given, much is required*—is my life's motto. I acknowledge that as a Black male, in the United States, one's encounter with race is inevitable. But, whether it is traditional forms of racism or racism within a race such as lighter Blacks versus darker Blacks, discrimination is only powerful when a body of people chooses to validate its principles. In a society, such as ours with an umbrella of cultures, it should be a central goal to promote social change and this begins with reviving education. (Harper, August 28, 2016)

#### Unleashing the Muzzled Hope

The preceding counter-narratives illustrate the key components within as well as outside of formal education that have impacted the lives of three African American males who display academic success as defined by receiving a doctorate degree. Although the

participants differ in background as it relates to parental structure, household socioeconomic status, careers and post-secondary educational institutions attended, there are marked similarities in their quest to academic achievement, which will be discussed in greater detail in the Research Questions Analysis. Emerging themes from the interviews include: a high level of self-esteem; the development of *the prove them wrong* syndrome; the adaptation and adherence to spirituality; understanding education's utilitarian value; participation in extracurricular activities; the prevalence of family support; and the presence of strong community mentors. These themes were reflected in all participants' responses during the interviews.

Although every participant was impacted by the remnants of segregation, Jamison was the only individual to witness education through the transition from segregation to desegregation, which is, commonly, used interchangeably with integration in the interviews. Following desegregation, schools were purported to afford all students the right to equal and equitable educational experiences; however, the participants in this study reported that this was not the case. Participants stated that they were aware of Black males' inferior role in society at a young age. This was, particularly, true in the educational realm as White teachers, often, treated African American students different than their White classmates. As participants' observed the media's coverage of social events such as the Civil Rights Movement, the War on Drugs, and the recent shootings of African American males in various parts of the United States, it is clear that White America has viewed and continues to display Black men deviant and destructive to the progression of U.S. society.

However, the misconstrued images of African American males displayed by popular media circuits did not hinder the self-development of the participants. Rather, participants

made a conscientious decision to combat the negative stereotypes of African American males by actively pursuing an advanced education. Education, for the participants, served a number of roles in the enhancement of life chances such as providing an avenue for financial security, promoting occupational mobility, gaining the respect of one's White counterparts, and ensuring a more promising future for their children. Although participants attained academic success through the completion of a terminal degree, one thing remained constant: The participants of this study never, fully, overcame the stereotypes of African American males held by mainstream society.

The participants reported incidents of racial profiling, difficulty of receiving promotions in their careers, and being viewed as socially handicapped as the lingering effects of racism. While William recalled instance of Whites' ignorance or failure to acknowledge his accomplishments as a Black man, Jamison and Harper evoked the powerful influence that race and racism had over their career advancement. Each participant reported that these occurrences were, largely, the result White America's, particularly White males, perception of African American males as a direct threat to the White patriarchal structure of society. Thus, resulting in Black men's prolonged position as second class citizens in the United States. This is evident in the use of the dominant group's representation of Black men in media outlets.

It is argued that the media serves an important role in silencing positive stories of African American males as such outlets, frequently, uphold the ideology of White hegemony by presenting Blacks in a limited number of roles, which are often deviant and/or dehumanizing (Rome, 2004). All participants argued that these depictions of African American males coupled with latent forms of racial discrimination in the community as well

as school caused them to develop *the prove them wrong* syndrome. Madison-Colmore, Moore, and Smith (2003) proclaimed that this social phenomenon served as a method of intrinsic motivation because it propelled African American males to engage in behaviors conducive to that of the dominant society in an attempt to demonstrate that they were just as intelligent and capable as their White counterparts. However, it should be noted that all participants' display of this act was not always geared towards Whites. Harper noted that intra-racism was just as influential in his understanding of what it meant to be a Black male in society. Hence, he argued that the stereotypes of Black males perpetuated in the African American community is just as damaging as the negative connotations expressed by White America.

Although the above factors are crucial to the academic success of African American males, the researcher concluded that the determining factor in promoting academic performance amongst this segment of the population is simple: Education must reflect true integration. One in which all stakeholders are afforded the opportunity to engage in free thinking and develop a sense of connectedness to not only their peers but their educators, the administrators, and the curriculum. Mirroring the philosophical underpinnings of existentialism, all participants acknowledged the principle of free thinking as an attribute that separated them from Black males who were locked behind the gates of White hegemony. Each participant defeated the fate of racism, in education, by understanding the power that one possesses in determining his development. In other words, the participants recognized that the key to success was learning how to conceptualize one's experiences, even those related to racism, and transform them into tenets of motivation; thus, unleashing the muzzled hope.

## CHAPTER V

### TRANSCENDING BOUNDARIES: A REFLECTION OF EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES AND FUTURE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FIELD

This chapter provides an overview of the study in its entirety. Furthermore, the researcher utilizes this chapter to present the research questions analysis, conclusions, implications for future studies, and recommendations.

#### Overview of Study

The plight of African American males is well documented in educational research.

Nedhari (2009) argued:

Within the cultural framework of America, the systemic structure is characterized by male patriarchy that allows for Black males to have the ability to negotiate the way in which they have been socialized and institutionalized to think, act, and behave because they are men. However, the reality of race and the lack of diversity in the purest sense, impedes upon this effort and cripple's the black male's ability to truly transition into manhood. He is left to constantly struggle and fight for an identity for power, for respect, and for understanding of who he is versus what he is projected as: nigger. (p. 1)

Although research paints a grim outlook on the educational and social experiences of African American males, this is not a universal truth.

This work presented a qualitative study grounded in Black Protest Thought in which the researcher utilized a demographic questionnaire and semi-structure interviews to construct the counter-narratives of three African American males, from the rural, U.S. south, who exhibited academic success (defined as obtaining a doctoral degree). Due to a limited sample, participants were acquired utilizing snowball sampling. In particular, the researcher

addressed the question: How do African American males experience academic success despite issues associated with race and racism? Moreover, the interviews provided insight to five subsequent questions:

- How have majoritarian narratives pertaining to the “inabilities” of Black boys influenced the participants’ identity development and in what ways have the associated stereotypes impacted his academic performance?
- What personal attributes contribute to the resilience displayed by African American males who reach academic success?
- How are the stories of Black males who experience academic success being silenced by the dominant social group in order to prolong White hegemony?
- What educational factors (those related to the educational setting and/or school) influence African American success?
- What sociocultural factors shape African American males’ ideas of masculinity and academic success?

Interviews were conducted in-person and lasted approximately one hour. During the interviews a mechanical recording device was used to ensure that the collection of information was as accurate as possible. The researcher engaged in member checking in an attempt to present the counter-narratives of each participant in a precise manner. Participants’ responses to the demographic survey were presented in text as well as tables. Transcripts of the semi-structured interviews were coded and analyzed to determine the socio-cultural factors that promoted academic success for the three participants.

### Research Questions Analysis

The imagery of African American males in the United States is, largely, portrayed by the media as that of deviant, destructive, and indolent (Gibbs, 1998; Rome, 2004). These misconstrued images have resulted in African American males being labeled as a hindrance in society. With the senseless shootings of Trayvon Martin, Jordan Davis, Alton Sterling and Philando Castile, it has become apparent that this segment of the population is in dire danger. Hence, the need for research to combat negative stereotypes is crucial to the social justice movement.

This section addresses the five sub-questions presented by the researcher. In particular, the researcher poses each question, individually, followed by detailed insight on what personal as well as social attributes and factors contributed to the resilience and, consequently, academic success of the three, African American males examined in this study. *Sub-Question 1: How have majoritarian narratives pertaining to the “inabilities” of Black boys influenced the participant’s identity development and in what ways have the associated stereotypes impacted his academic performance?*

All participants noted an early awareness of what it meant to be a Black man in America. Often, family members informed them of their marginalized position in society as a cautionary act. Regardless of whether the participants experienced segregated or desegregated education, one thing remained consistent: White America’s projection of African American males was that of socially handicapped individuals who lacked the competency and social skills deemed appropriate for the progression of U.S. society. Hence, the dominant culture utilized education as a means for ingraining the notion of Blacks as second-class citizens. Furthermore, the participants explained that Whites, largely, displayed their dominant role in society by exhibiting control over African Americans in the workforce



and schools. The most common misconception of African American males during adolescence, reported by the participants, was that they were, innately, less competent than their White counterparts. However, each participant insisted that the negative stereotypes of African American males, rarely, influenced their self-perception for two reasons. First, the participant's family, frequently, reassured him of his competency. Second, the participant engaged in activities that provided a strong sense of connectedness to their community. These activities included sports, attending church, and, actively, seeking role models.

William asserted:

Unlike a lot of African American males, I had such a strong figure with my grandmother, I always thought that I belonged. I never asked for permission, I would just do it... I took that to mean that I have to work hard. (August 22, 2016)

Likewise, Jamison noted, "Any negative discussions of Black males motivated me to prove to any and every one that I am just as intelligent as anyone else and capable of any job and be good at it" (August 22, 2016). However, Harper noted that the African American population played an active role in upholding the negative stereotypes of African American males and, often, engaged in intra-racism. The participants reported that their African American peers often accused them of "acting White" and rejecting Black culture when they displayed strong academic performance. Hence, the exhibition of working hard and *the prove them wrong syndrome* (Moore, Madison-Colmore, & Smith, 2003) were prevalent in each participants' identity formation.

The participants explained that as a Black man, in the United States, one is born into a system that, immediately, labels him as deficient. In other words, the odds are stacked against him. Thus, education served as a utilitarian force in which the participants were able to

dismantle the preconceived notions of Black men, which alleviated some elements of social oppression. In essence, education became a means for democracy. This is best summed in the words of William (2016) in which he stated, “I understood that education was the quintessential cornerstone for development of self and empowerment” (August 22, 2016).

Although all participants attended school in the same geographical location, the narratives highlighted the differences in educational experiences during segregation and desegregation. Based on the stories of the participants, it appeared that segregated education provided less adversity in the school setting when compared to desegregated classrooms. Jamison, whose entire secondary education was in segregated academic settings, inferred that his interaction with teachers, both White and Black, yielded little to no discrimination. On the other hand, William and Harper, both of whom entered school after desegregation, described instances in which White teachers and/or administrators isolated them, exhibited minimal interaction with them, and judged them as academically inadequate simply because they were Black boys.

Due to their experiences with racism, all three participants noted that a driving force in their desire to attain an advanced education was an underlying sense of social responsibility within the African American community. For each participant, their advanced degrees would allow them to acquire a credible voice in society as serve as activist on the behalf of marginalized groups.

*Sub-Question 2: What personal attributes contribute to the resilience displayed by African American males who reach academic success?*

For most African Americans, the notion of race and, consequently racism, are engrained in one’s epistemological, axiological, and ontological viewpoints at a young age.

However, unlike most children who were concerned with recess, what was for lunch, and what activities the teacher had lined up for the day, the participants, of this study, were engaged in a revolution. One in which they made a conscientious decision to partake in resilience and utilize education as a way to escape poverty and oppression; therefore, empowering themselves to combat the negative stereotypes of the Black male. McGee and Martin (2011) maintained that resilience is a social phenomenon in which an individual is able to utilize his or her differences, observe the surrounding environment and develop new and/or use existing strategies to overcome adverse circumstances. The researcher, of this study, found that four factors contributed to the resilience of academically successful African Americans males: (1) The display of a heightened sense of self-esteem; (2) the development of *the prove them wrong* syndrome; (3) the adherence to a spiritual foundation; and (4) the understanding of education's utilitarian value.

#### *Heightened Sense of Self Esteem*

Mizzell (1999) argued that high levels of self-esteem in individuals were often the product of an internal locus of control and results in individuals being less likely to be influenced by the viewpoints of others. Blake and Darling (1994) inferred that high levels of self-esteem were critical for successful African Americans to combat racism and other forms of oppression. For all participants, in this study, a heightened sense of self-esteem was vital for academic achievement. Jamison stated, "During my educational tenure, I felt an advantage over others because I was the only Black male in so many classes" (August 18, 2016). In addition, William (2016) noted:

I always thought that I belonged. I never asked for permission, I would just do it. It's kind of like you do it and ask for forgiveness later. So I never had an issue of feeling inferior but I would see the racism. (August 22, 2016)

Similarly, Harper exclaimed:

It [racism] had no impact on me because I knew who I was as I was growing up. I had a strong, religious family and at that time, I just thought that was how it was... But I knew the way that they felt about me was not going to define me. (August 28, 2016)

Rather than perceive their race and gender as limitations, this group of individuals developed a heightened self-esteem. Each participant noted that stereotypes did not impact their sense of self and viewed themselves just as capable as their White counterparts. The researcher found that two factors, significantly, influenced participants' self-esteem: (1) The exhibition of high expectations by their legal guardian and (2) an enhanced sense of belonging or connectedness to one's peers and/or community. All three participants noted that despite their subordinate position, in society, and unfavorable rank in the educational realm, their guardians expected them to perform, efficiently, in school. This observation supported Izzo, Weissner, Kaprow, and Fendrich's (1999) argument that parental involvement and parental expectation, positively, influenced the academic engagement of students. Most importantly, the participants' guardians worked as advocates on their behalf and were, actively, involved in their learning experiences.

Furthermore, each participant displayed a strong sense of belonging or connectedness to their community and/or peers. This was achieved by adopting role models and/or mentors to serve as positive examples of successful African American males. Examples of positive role models included African American teachers, coaches, parents and church leaders. In

addition, the participants noted that participation in extracurricular activities such as sports and clubs enhanced communication skills, assisted in the development of leadership skills, and honed problem solving skills; thus, empowering participants with the tools needed to pursue social progression.

Munford (1994) argued that when African American males felt connected to their environment, they were more likely to understand their racial and cultural identity within mainstream society as well as develop higher levels of self-esteem. In particular, each participant inferred that their family, community, and the church played vital roles in their identity development. However, the reoccurrence of discrimination at the hands of White America coupled with the Black community's assistance in perpetuating the stereotypes of Black males, forced the participants to engage in activities and behaviors that disproved the connotations of African American males. This phenomenon is known as *the prove them wrong* syndrome (Madison-Colmore, Moore, & Smith, 2003).

#### *Prove Them Wrong Syndrome*

The United States' history is laced with various accounts of prejudices, which include social events such as slavery, the Trail of Tears, and the continual struggle for women to enjoy the liberties freely given to men. The experience of African Americans in relation to education has, largely, reflected two facets: (1) The denial of access to post-secondary education and (2) a lack of self-efficacy in African American's educational attainment due to the negative stereotypes associated with the race's competency (Allen, 1992). Steele and Aronson (1995) maintained that stereotype threat and the acknowledgement of stereotypes by African Americans had the ability to lower academic achievement. Thus, it is not surprising that those individuals who wish to exude academic success adopt "the prove them wrong

syndrome”. This phenomenon dates back to W.E.B DuBois’ (1903/1994) decree for the formation of a “Talented Tenth”. In essence, W.E.B DuBois (1903/1994) argued that a tenth of the African American population needed to attain an education that was equitable to that of White America; particularly, learning the classics of Western civilization. In return, it would be the social responsibility of the “academically successful” to serve as a beacon of hope for other African Americans as well as assist in social change that results in his or her fellow man’s success and empowerment.

In a study conducted on African American males (majoring in engineering) in a predominately White institution (PWI) located in the southeastern part of the United States, Madison-Colmore, Moore and Smith (2003) observed that a key component of African American males overcoming racism in education was the development of the *prove them wrong* syndrome. In particular, the participants noted that self-motivation often resulted from a desire to disprove the negative connotations of Black males held by mainstream society. This phenomenon held true in the current study. Jamison and William proposed that it was the need to overcome racism and the discrimination exhibited by Whites that motivated them to delve into education. In particular, Jamison stated:

Any negative discussions of Black males motivated me to prove to any and every one that I am just as intelligent as anyone else and capable of any job and be good at it. And that’s what I dedicated myself to throughout my 34 years in education. I wanted to prove that I was better than my coworkers and always strived to be the very best that I can be because I didn’t want to uphold the negative connotations associated with being a Black male. (August 18, 2016)

However, Harper suggested that the intra-racism and the hardships that he encountered from Blacks in his community motivated him to perform well in education. Harper (2016) noted that African Americans have the ability to uphold the negative stereotypes of Black males presented by White America; thus, adding an tiered element to the racial encounters that this segment of the population experiences on a daily basis. Even though all three participants successfully defeated the White opposition in educational realm, it was not an easy feat and they turned to their religious upbringing to reinforce resilience in adverse circumstances.

### *Spirituality and Religion*

Since the integration of African Americans into the U.S. society, religion has played an integral role in the solidarity of the Black community (Ellison, 1993). This is especially true in the U.S. South. In particular, participants expressed that a belief in a higher being contributed to academic success in two major ways. First, one's religious affiliation provided guidelines on how one processed and conducted himself in stressful circumstances. In particular, Jamison noted that his parents stressed religious concepts such as agape love and mutual respect for all individuals regardless of social status. Second, religion provided an avenue in which the participants were able to form a personal relationship with a divine being. For the participants, this led to the belief that the adversity faced in education (and the workplace) would yield a greater good. In return, this relationship prompted the participants to maintain a level of hope in discouraging circumstances. William, who preached his first trial sermon in the church at the age of 12, maintained that success whether it was in school, the workplace, and/or at home was not attainable without spirituality; thus, noting that religion and the development of spirituality served as a cornerstone in our informal and formal learning experiences. This is synonymous with Ruekberg's (2006) argument that:

The social network and support found within the African American church improves self-confidence and provides examples of successful role models for young African American males. This translates to higher levels of educational and occupational attainment and higher levels of self-esteem. (p. 13)

Numerous studies, in education, have highlighted the role that religious affiliation and spirituality plays in academic achievement (Ellison, 1993; Harris, 1994; Graham, 1994; Ruekberg, 2006). Similarly, attention has been directed towards the purpose that educational attainment serves in the enhancing the life chances of students (Gayle, 2005).

#### *Education's Utilitarian Value*

The notion of education being the universal mechanism for upward mobility has been well documented (Gayle, 2005). Gayle (2005) inferred that in addition to the preceding factors, African American males demonstrated resilience when education was believed to have a utilitarian value; particularly, the acquisition of social capital and social mobility. By the same token, William stated:

Education is an international passport. You have to learn to read, write and communicate.... I understood that education is the quintessential cornerstone for development of self and the empowerment. White people understood this.... So if you do not have an education, you are controlled by some system (August 22, 2016).

For all participants, academic achievement was viewed as a method of escaping social discrimination and providing new avenues of social mobility for not only their individual goals, but the well-being of their family, the African American community and marginalized students. Jamison highlighted that his family served a key force in propelling his academic success when he noted:



I was the head of my household and wanted to excel to provide a better life for my children. In so many African American families, the male is not the head of the household and I felt like it was my job and obligation to provide for my family which is very important to me. (August 22, 2016)

Harper and William shared similar sentiment. However, the one attribute that stood out the most in every participant's response was his commitment to the social responsibility of empowering the African American community. In essence, all three of the participants utilized their academic success to promote social change and improve the experiences of other marginalized groups through actions such as serving as mentors, altering the faculty composition within schools to reflect the demographics of student populations, or assisting in the development of legislation that would improve the opportunities for all members of society regardless of race, gender, religion and any other discriminatory factor.

Overall, it is evident that intrinsic motivators such as a high level of self-esteem, the need to prove one's ability to others, one's sense of spirituality, and one's understanding of education's influence on life chances have a major impact on academic performance.

Although most research focuses on the limitations of African American males in schools, the drive to understand the factors that promote academic success amongst Black males is on the rise. Thus, there is a need to dismantle White hegemony and present positive stories of African American males.

*Sub-Question 3: How are the stories of Black males who experience academic success being silenced by the dominant social group in order to prolong White hegemony?*

Each participant agreed that research such as this study would be beneficial to unleashing the stories of successful African American males with the hopes of dismantling

the negative viewpoints held by mainstream society. The media has played, and continues to hold, a significant role in the manner in which African American males are portrayed in society as well as prolonging White hegemony (the social, cultural, ideological, and economic influence exerted by the dominant culture). Participants reported that images displayed during the Civil Rights Movement, the War on Drugs, and today's society often present African Americans as trouble makers who disrupted the progression of the U.S. social structure. Likewise, Rome (2004) maintained that contemporary media (as it relates to hip hop, reality crime shows, and the news) have limited the notion of crime to the Black face. In essence, African Americans; particularly, Black men, are depicted as menacing members of society. The misconstrued images of Blacks have, often, led to their permanent role as second class citizens in the United States.

All three participants noted that the media; particularly the news, was the most influential source utilized to uphold the negative stereotypes of Black men in a quest to maintain a society based on White patriarchal ideology. Harper (August 28, 2016) provided the most passionate response during which he expressed:

The news will tell you how we are depicted. They depict you the same way the administrators depicted me....angry, upset, hostile.... Look at the media, you do not see many of us with shirts and ties that are doing the job that I am doing, getting killed. All those that are getting harassed are being stereotyped. They look the same. They are on the corner selling DVDs. They are selling cigarettes. They are pulling them over. Think about it. They all look the same. Some have guns on them. Some do not. But it is just a legal way to lynch. Being Black in America right now...A Black male...You are just trying to survive. (August 28, 2016)

Whether we choose to believe in the stereotypes, portrayed through media, or not, the majority of the United States citizens associate African American men with deviance. The negative representations of African American males conveyed to the masses through textbooks, magazines, music videos, and the growing prevalence of reality television as well as social media are imperative in the formation of racial attitudes. Rome (2004) argued that White society utilized the media to unleash misperceptions of Blacks and perpetuate divisiveness amongst the races. Rather than adhere to the images of African Americans; particularly Black males, exuded through the media, the participants decided to focus on those individuals in their immediate community to become successful.

During early childhood years, the participants noted that their parents and/or legal guardian served as the most influential images of African Americans who displayed resilience. However, as they navigated through adolescence and adulthood, African American educators and community leaders (i.e., coaches and church officials) were, also, viewed as positive role models. Hence, until we, as social beings and active members of society, infiltrate the media circuits with positive images and stories of African American males, the future of Black males remains gloomy in the United States.

*Sub-Question 4: What educational factors (those related to the educational setting and/or school) influence African American success?*

The presence of Black role models/educators and one's involvement in extracurricular activities appeared to be the common educational factors that promoted academic success amongst the study's participants. The need for positive role models and mentors, of the same race, appeared in all of the participants' responses. For the participants, effort accounted for a portion of the success that they acquired while the presence of mentors

filled the remaining void. This is synonymous with Noguera's (2015) discussion of grit and agency.

Noguera (2015) maintained that although students' success was determined through his or her display of grit (or effort), agency (how one views his or her autonomy in life changes) plays a central role in achievement and is developed through observing others and engaging in discourse with role models and mentors. In particular, he stated:

Unlike grit, agency is about empowering young people to use education to take control of their lives. As they come to understand that knowledge is a source of power, students become more invested as learners and more able to see the relevance of school in shaping their future outcomes. (Noguera, 2015, para. 19)

For the participants, role models ranged from parents and religious leaders to coaches and teachers. All respondents indicated that the presence of African American teachers during their educational experiences heightened self-esteem. William stated, "Black teachers always told me that I could not be average. White teachers never told me that... The Black teachers kept saying that I have to be twice as good" (August 22, 2016). Similarly, Jamison and H (2016) utilized their position, as administrators in schools that were predominantly Black, to highlight the need for a teaching composition that reflects the school's student population. Both participants believed that when students are presented with role models who look like them, think like them, and learn like them, they are more likely to succeed in school. The participants' charge for multicultural role models, in education, mirrored the decree of Baruti Kafele (2012) in which he declared:

Although there are many strategies that good teachers of any gender and ethnicity can implement on a classroom level to support the success of black male students, I

believe that to maximize our classroom efforts, we must ensure that young black males have opportunities to learn from role models whom they can identify with. (p. 70)

Moreover, the most influential educator and, consequently, role model in each participant's learning experiences was not a formal teacher. Rather, most of the ideologies that carried the participants throughout their education were presented in the home. Hence, it must be noted that parents are students' first teachers. This is of importance to the success of any population because it depicts that home and schooling are inseparable; therefore, educators need to recognize that each student, regardless of race or any other divisive characteristics, needs to experience the incorporation of his or her informal experiences within the curriculum exhibited in schools.

Although educators who serve as role models are important to the development of a student's learning, research suggests that extracurricular activities play a vital role in the development of one's identity; particularly during adolescence (Lamborn et al., 1992). Furthermore, Finn (1993) found that extracurricular activities such as clubs and sports reinforced lessons taught in the classroom, which in return afforded students the opportunity to apply key concepts in a real world context. All participants, in this study, mentioned that sports played an integral role in their learning experiences. In particular, they suggested that sports fostered social and leadership skills, promoted a sense of belonging and concept of togetherness, and stimulated their academic performance. Mirroring the assertions of sports-based youth development programs (Perkins & Noam, 2007), William (2016) reported that sports, which he participated in during all four years of high school, fostered concepts such as discipline and focus while; simultaneously, teaching him how to be part of a team. Harper

(2016) highlighted his participation in sports, during high school, allowed an avenue to, positively, release his aggression and frustration. Moreover, sports assisted him in recognizing the importance of effective communication. In addition to sports, the participants reported that their involvement in clubs (i.e., fraternities and acting organizations) were beneficial to their learning. Harper (2016) recognized that clubs provide an opportunity to engage in networking (a skill that he has found to be beneficial in his professional endeavors). Similarly, Jamison (2016), who played basketball and joined an acting club during college, mimicked these sentiments, when he stated:

These activities not only helped develop my personality but they helped shape my identity as a man. I developed notions of what it meant to be a leader but, also, a team player. The activities helped to improve my communication skills. It taught me that learning goes beyond the classroom.

*Sub-Question 5: What sociocultural factors shape African American males' ideas of masculinity and academic success?*

The participants reported that three socio-cultural factors impacted academic performance: (1) Family Support; (2) Religion; and (3) Community Mentors. The role of family in promoting academic success is well documented in educational research. Floyd (1996) found that a supportive, nurturing family and home environment was conducive to the development of resilience amongst African American males. In addition, Young (2007) concluded that family support as well as the role of the mother as the first teacher played a significant role in enhancing the academic achievement of African American male, college students. Floyd (1996) and Young (2007) findings were supported by this study. Two of the three participants reported that maternal figures played the most significant role in their

formation of resilience and, consequently, academic achievement while one participant suggested that the male guardian served as the primary motivator for educational performance. Both Williams (who never met his father) and Harper (whose father died when he was sixteen years old) disproved the notion that two parent households yield the most academically inclined students. William (2016) recalled:

I cannot buy into the argument of a kid failing because they do not have a mother or real father. I have never met my father. My mother got pregnant with me at the age of nineteen and my grandmother raised me. So that is not an excuse. (August 22, 2016)

When reminiscing on what individuals greatly influenced his academic achievement, Harper affirmed, “My mother. Hands down my mother. I came from a praying family. So, my family structure was extremely strong. In my opinion, that is what is wrong with a lot of Black men today: The family is not strong” (August 28, 2016). Furthermore, Jamison reported that the family served as the cornerstone for his development of identity in a variety of ways.

Specifically, he indicated:

These included my mother who taught me how a man should treat a woman and to love all, my three brothers- who taught me the importance of comradery, my father- who taught me the importance of education and the family” (Jamison, August 18, 2016).

Hence, the findings, of this study, support Ruekberg’s (2012) argument in which he concluded:

An African American male’s sense of belonging is affected by the proximity of his family and the level of support the family provides. When they live in supportive

family environments, they are more likely to display high levels of self-esteem and to maintain high levels of academic self-concept. (p. 12)

In relations to familial concepts, the projection of religion or the development of spirituality appeared to be vital in understanding Black males' learning experiences.

Wood and Hilton (2012) maintained, "Although the concept of African American spirituality has been investigated in the psychological and healthcare literature, the postsecondary research on this topic is near silent" (p. 29). All participants, in the study, identified religion and the belief in a spiritual being as pertinent to academic performance. In particular, participants reported that spirituality, positively, affected how economic, political, educational, and social experiences were perceived and often served as "an emancipatory force for academic empowerment" (Wood & Hilton, 2012, p. 29). Jamison (2016) declared, "When I was faced with difficult experiences, I would ask God for guidance and was assured" (August 18, 2016). Furthermore, Harper (August 28, 2016) noted that prayer or engaging in conversation with God was his way of coping with difficult situations.

Historically, the U.S. South is known for its adherence to religious underpinnings in nearly every aspect of its existence (Harvey, 2004). However, as it relates to the African American community, religion has influenced its social existence, in the South, in three major ways . First, during the introduction of slavery, evangelicalism was forced upon Blacks as a form of deculturalization and as a justification for its continuation. The gospel as presented by slave-owning ministers stressed moral discipline and the obedience of slaves to their masters with the promise of spiritual equality appealing to the broken souls of Blacks (Roboteau, 1978). Second, following the Civil War, paternalistic White supremacy was deemed the "southern way of life" (Wilson, 2004) and the South experienced a surge in



utilization of religion to uphold acts of discrimination. Hence, White churches cited biblical scriptures as divine support for the perpetuation of Jim Crow laws, segregation, withholding African Americans' right to vote, and an array of racist acts (Wilson, 2004; Harvey 2004). Third, with the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement of 1960s and 70s religion was utilized as a means of resilience by Blacks, particular, in the South (Harvey, 2004; Marsh, 1997; Newman, 2001). Wilson (2004) maintained:

The civil rights movement was a central moral landmark for the South. African American church leaders, such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Fred Shuttlesworth, and Ralph David Abernathy, emerged as the leading edge of reform, and local congregations provided the foot soldiers for the movement's nonviolent protests and boycotts. The protests drew from principles of nonviolence that King learned from Indian leader Mahatmas Gandhi, but equally significant sources were Christian teachings on social justice and the heritage of the southern black church's witness against the evils of segregation. The civil rights movement made the end of Jim Crow segregation a compelling moral challenge to the white South. (para. 36)

Lastly, William maintained that his success was not attainable without some form of spirituality and proclaimed it as the "quintessential cornerstone to compliment education (August 22, 2016)

Overall, participants' responses indicated that spirituality served three distinct functions in their educational attainment. First, spirituality allowed participants to develop a sincere relationship with God in which they were able to engage in dialogue about personal hardships and receive divine guidance. Second, spirituality was viewed as a source of endurance when participants felt like giving up on academic goals. Third, spirituality assisted

participants in defining and pursuing their life's purpose. In addition to family support and the presence of spirituality, community mentors, also, played a significant role in African American males' identity development.

There is a popular saying in the African American community, which states that "it takes a village to raise a child." For the participants in this study, this held true. Participants reported that the church was the hub of social life for their communities. Two of the three the participants reported that the church provided an array of mentors, particularly Black males, who influenced their academic achievement. These individuals ranged from Sunday school teachers to deacons to the pastor. Noguera (2003) mandated that organizations such as the church have the potential to provide African American males with substantial academic support because its members, particularly older Black males, can "affirm the identities of Black males by providing them with knowledge and information about African and African American history and culture and by instilling a sense of social responsibility toward their families and communities" (p. 451).

In all, participants reported that community mentors served three distinct functions: (1) To provide advice in regards to career decisions; (2) To serve as an example of a successful African American male or someone that the youth could look up to for inspiration; and (3) To assist the mentee in understanding the relevance of cultural maintenance. This is best summed in the words of William (2016) in which he stated, "They [his mentors] taught me how to move in different environments...But mostly, how to give people what they want without losing who you are. Without being a sell-out" (August 22, 2016).

### Discussion of Research Findings

While the findings of the study had several similarities with the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, some gaps and contradictions were evident. Livingston and Nahimana (2006) inferred that African Americans who were reared in fatherless and impoverished households are more likely to develop a sense of hopelessness that results in lower expectations, higher probability of not completing high school, and higher rates of delinquency. Contrarily, the results of this study, based on the counter-narratives of three African American males, suggested that although the presence of the father and socioeconomic status are influential components of one's identity formation, they had little to no impact on academic success. Only Jamison reported growing up in a "middle class" household while William and Harper purported that they were reared in a "lower class" family. Similarly, Jamison was the only participant who was reared in a two parent household while William never met his biological father and Harper's father died when he was just a teenager. Hence, the findings in this study were congruent with that of Myers (2004) who proclaimed that the family structure, although important, did not hinder the development of self-esteem as long as one was able to capitalize on intrinsic motivators while performing the societal roles expected of them.

In addition, Zimmerman (2000) argued that there was little evidence to prove that religious participation (the notion of spirituality) had a significant impact on the academic achievement of African American males. Findings from this study revealed that the development of spirituality and the adherence to one's religious beliefs played a significant role in the academic success of the participants. Wood and Hilton (2012) noted that "African American spiritual beliefs and values impact their interaction in and perceptions of all societal sectors (e.g., healthcare, business, government, education)" (p. 29). This is no

different for African American males. As noted in the findings, religion, particularly in the South, has historically played a critical role in the resilience displayed by African Americans. Participants reported that a strong sense of spirituality equipped them with the foundations of cultural maintenance and, in essence, afforded them the opportunity to logically negotiate, view, and engage themselves, positively, in adverse environments.

Moreover, research on African American males appeared to highlight racism as a phenomenon in which the dominant society, actively, seeks to keep this segment of the population defined as second class citizens (Gibbs, 1998; Noguera, 2003; Alexander, 2012). However, this study purported that the occurrence of intra-racism had a significant impact on the identity formation of African American males. Harper noted that he experienced the perpetuation of negative stereotypes from his own race more than his White counterparts. Although studies examining intra-racism do exist, their focus is, often, confined to physical attributes such as the experiential differences of individuals with varying skin complexions (Leland, 2013). This research suggests that attention needs to be given to examining the manner in which the African American community assists in the demonization of Black males. It is believed that the notion of intra-racism may have a more profound impact on academic achievement because it depletes the sense of connectedness that African American males feel within the Black community.

Based on the results gathered from this study, it appeared that African American males were more likely to exhibit academic success when education was viewed as self-rewarding (also known as intrinsic motivation). Intrinsic motivation is defined as psychological factors that promote internal reward or the quest for competency (Herron-McCoy, 2009). On the other hand, extrinsic motivators are factors that present external

rewards such as the praise of others, trophies, and money (Herron-McCoy, 2009). Each participant reported that internal factors such as a high level of self-esteem; the development of *the prove them wrong* syndrome; the adherence to spirituality; and understanding education's utilitarian value defined their resilience toward academic success, cultural maintenance, and career advancement. Although these individuals experienced academic and professional success, the notion of gatekeeping, particularly as it relates to career mobility, was, frequently, mentioned during the interviews. Harper (2016) noted:

Well, when you are a Black male and, for example, I apply for a Special Ed job. You get plenty of offers, but when you are a Black male and you want to go into a leadership role, you do not get the offers. You do not get the call backs. You don't get the phone calls. It is just totally different. (August 28, 2016)

Likewise, Jamison (August 18, 2016) recalled his experience as a seasoned educator and school administrator who attempted to transition into the role of a high school principal. He explained that even though he had combined 29 years of experience in the classroom as well as in administration, acquired advanced degrees, and had been in the same school system for his entire career, he was overlooked several times for the position. William (August 22, 2016) did not highlight gatekeeping as being an integral component of his career experiences due to the fact that he left the public sector and founded his own church in which he is the full-time, senior pastor. However, he pinpointed that success did not alleviate the racial undertones of corporate America. Rather than accept Black males for their competency, he noted that White America, inherently, relegated African American male's achievements as differences that set them apart from other Blacks; thus, isolating them from their ethnic roots.

Hence, one can conclude that although African American males can achieve in academics and occupational endeavors, racism haunts their routine experiences.

#### Integration: A Dream Deferred

The findings of this study illustrated the permanence of race and racism and the long-lasting effect that each have on African American males regardless of educational attainment and occupational position. Although research contends that the experiences of African Americans, in education, are improving, findings suggested that the notion of integration in schools is farfetched. This is, especially, true for African American males. In an attempt to combat the negative stereotypes associated with Black males, this study utilized Black Protest Thought, as the theoretical framework, coupled with counter-narratives to illustrate the social means African American males incorporate in developing resilience and empowerment in adverse environments. Contrary to most research, which presents African American males as passive, prisoners to the system, this work denoted the will that each individual (regardless of race, gender, or any other discriminatory facet) embodies in formulating his or her personal development; thus, intertwining undertones of existentialism.

Furthermore, this study exhibited the permanence of race in the United States; hence, arguing that success is predicated on African American males' ability to recognize their role in the conceptualization of racism and the autonomy that they exude as they progress through it. Lewis (2009) maintained:

A Black man must realize that professional skills and attributes such as, integrity, persistence, perseverance, organizational skills, etc. should be part of his portfolio, but it doesn't end with those items. If one doesn't have the ability to cope in a hostile environment, garner the support of black as well as White colleagues, treat people

with respect and dignity regardless if that treatment is reciprocated, and possess a special skill that enables him to respond to and protect oneself from underlying racist behaviors, he will not be successful. (p. 106)

Hence, the major aim of this work was to promote social justice by awakening the consciousness of the African American community; particularly, Black males, and empowering people to act. Most importantly, this work projected education as a catalyst for social change in that it has the ability to alter the discriminatory attitudes adopted by mainstream society through its curriculum, instructional practices and policies. This is best summed in the words of former United States Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan (2009) in which he declared:

Education is the civil rights issue of our generation. And if you care about promoting opportunity and reducing inequality, the classroom is the place to start. Great teaching is about so much more than education; it is a daily fight for social justice (A Call to Teaching, October 9, 2009).

### Implications

This study has implications in the field of education, and society as a whole, because it provides insight on what personal and social attributes assist in the development of African American males' identity and the enhancement of this group's academic performance. With most research focusing on the difficulties that African American males face when moving through the educational pipeline, an enhanced understanding of the Black male's development of resilience in education and society can better inform institutional policies and practices. It is this notion of providing enhanced understanding with hopes of improving services that has driven this project. Consequently, by introducing services that are conducive

to the needs of this segment of the population, schools, the government, and other social institutions can create a more supportive environment that heightens self-efficacy and fosters a sense of connectedness in African American males.

Precisely, this study has the potential to assist in the social justice movement in that it conveys an alternative story that rejects notions of White hegemony. He and Phillion (2008) argued, “The explicit aim of democratic and social justice oriented work is to engage with oppressed groups and individuals and empower them to take effective action toward more just and human conditions” (p. 268). In particular, the researcher exhibits the counter-narratives of three African American males who reached academic success (defined as attaining a doctoral degree) with the aim of acquiring more credibility for the voices and concerns of Black men in the United States. Too often, White America, particularly, the media, silences the voices of African American males who defy the stereotypes. Thus, this study illustrates that African American males are just as capable and resilient as their White counterparts and this acknowledgement must penetrate the popular circuits to offset the demonization of this segment of the population.

No research is beneficial if it does not contribute to the empowerment of the community in which its participants originate and/or reside. This study provides a sense of hope for the African American community in that it sheds light on what communal factors can propel its youth. One issue that needs to be brought to the forefront of the Black community’s consciousness, as a whole, is the practice of intra-racism. Therefore, this research calls for the African American community to eliminate the notion of hate amongst its constituents and develop an understanding of connectedness that can withstand the brutality of White hegemony.



### Recommendations for Future Research

No study is successful if it does not provide a path for future research endeavors that seek to alleviate the social problems that exist within the current social structure. The following segment presents the recommendations for this study.

First, the researcher proposes a study that compares the experiences of African American males, who grew up in the rural, U.S. south to that of African American males who were reared in the urban, U.S. south as they navigated the educational pipeline to academic success (defined as attaining a doctorate degree). One must note that geographically, the study will be confined within the U.S. south. However, the study would highlight the effects that community type plays on the educational experiences of African American males. As noted in the literature review, research in the field of education has, largely, focused on the issues of urban schools. Therefore, a project such as this will note the similarities and differences that African American males experience in society as well as shed light on what communal factors promote and hinder African American males' identity formation and academic success. This could be beneficial in the creation of educational policy because it will assist policymakers in effectively distributing resources in correlation to the varying needs of students' communities.

In addition, the incorporation and comparison of African American males and African American females, who are academically successful (defined as attaining a doctoral degree) in the rural, U.S. south could prove to be beneficial in the field of gender studies. The U.S. Census (2012) indicated that African American females experience academic success at a higher rate than their male counterparts. However, this correlation does not hold true in terms of African American women experiences in the workforce (Evans, 2007). Evans (2007)

argued, “Although Black women earn more college degrees than Black men, this has not translated into equitable faculty appointments or comparable rank and tenure awards” (p. 136). Hence, comparative research on the experiences of African American females and males who experience academic success could assist in the fight to dismantle the presence of racism, sexism and classism as it relates to African Americans’ experiences and navigation through U.S. society.

Expanding the boundaries of racial/ethnic lines, a study on the experiences of Hispanic males who have reached academic success (attaining a doctoral degree) would be valuable to the field of education. According to research, Latino males’ presence in the American educational system as it pertains to post-secondary education is minimal (Yosso & Solorzano, 2006; Castellanos, Gloria, & Kamimura, 2006) Furthermore, Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) maintained:

Even as the number of Latinas/os attending college has actually increased steadily over the past few decades, the proportional representation of Latino males continues to slide relative to their Latina female counterparts...In general, proportionally fewer college-age males are actually enrolling in college than in years past and the degree attainment gaps between Latino males and females is widening. (p. 54)

Noguera (2004), highlighted that like Black males, Hispanic men are, frequently, stereotyped as menacing members of society with the exception of being hard workers (which is contrary to White America’s portrayal of African American males as lazy). Thus, a study that examines the plight and triumphs of academically successful Hispanic males could prove beneficial as it would shed light on Latinas/os’ understanding of education’s purpose in the enhancement of their life chances. Likewise, insight on the culturally specific attributes that

propel academic success amongst this segment of the population could be critical in the development of a multicultural curriculum that entails true integration.

Moreover, this study can be expanded by observing Black males, in the U.S. south, who obtained terminal degrees in other disciplines such as business, chemistry, and medicine. One must note that participants, in the current study, highlighted that the perception of Whites and the role of African Americans in the educational pipeline differed depending on their degree type. Madison-Colmore, Moore, and Smith (2003) found that African American males who received terminal degrees in engineering felt a heightened sense of disconnectedness to educators and peers in the discipline due to the field being dominated by White males. Thus, one may ask: Are these findings similar or different for Black males who acquire doctorate degrees in medicine? Thus, a study that focuses on doctoral degree type might uncover how the historical foundation, of various disciplines, influences the educational experiences of minority students.

Finally, the need for a study on intra-racism in the Black community is necessary for the enhancement of this populace. As a community, we cannot expect the dominant society to welcome us or give our voices value if we belittle and stigmatize ourselves. Thus, by exposing the processes that African Americans utilize to perpetuate stereotypes, research in this area can prove valuable in the empowerment of this minority group and assist in offsetting racism's core.

#### Where Do We Go From Here?

Overall, it is my belief that research which unveils the dilemma of minority individuals, that are by all societal means considered successful, can assist in exposing the rhetoric of White hegemony; thus, heightening the critical consciousness of the masses.

Social justice is not achievable without exposing the flaws of dominant society. It should be noted that researchers, as agents of social change, need to intentionally explore the experiences, challenges, and successes of underrepresented groups. Thus, the previous recommendations will not only add to the field of education by uncovering the issues that plague marginalized groups, it will assist in providing viable solutions for individuals from diverse educational backgrounds and socio-cultural experiences. More importantly, we, as contributors to the development of a holistic educational experience must pose key questions. These include but are not limited to: How does the permanence of race and racism influence the educational experiences of students, teachers, and administrators?; How do we accomplish true integration in a pluralistic yet racially divided society?; and What is (or should be) the underlying purpose of education in the United States? The goal to provide solutions to the predicaments of various groups in our society should guide all research. This is conducive with the words of the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr (1957) in which he proclaimed that “an individual has not begun to live until he can rise above the narrow horizons of his particular individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity” (para. 10).

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APPENDIX A  
INFORMED CONSENT



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM, FOUNDATIONS, AND READING

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### INFORMED CONSENT

My name is Latoya Jenkins and I am a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University. I am conducting a study to finish my educational requirements for the degree. Dr. Delores Liston, Professor in the Curriculum, Foundations, and Reading department at Georgia Southern University, will serve as the advisor for this study. Dr. Liston received her Doctor of Philosophy degree from the University of North Carolina, Greensboro and research interests include: curriculum studies; philosophy of education; feminism; gender studies; joy in education; ethics and education; and sexual harassment in schools. The purpose of this study is to examine how African American males exude resilience while exhibiting academic success in adverse social environments.

Participation in this research will involve completing a demographic questionnaire and participating in two, one-on-one interviews. A mechanical recording device will be utilized during the interviews to ensure accuracy of transcription. The first interview will be for the purpose of answering 15-20 questions and the second will be for the purpose of member checking during which the participant will clarify responses and/or additional feedback. It should be noted that the risks involved in this study are minimal such as requiring the participant to revisit sensitive issues or experiences and embarrassment. However, if you do experience emotional distress as a result of this study, please utilize the SAMHSA National Hotline, 1-800-662-HELP, for finding low cost and free assistance to address your needs. Deidentified or coded data from this study may be placed in a publically available repository for study validation. Although breach of confidentiality is a possible risk in this study, the researcher has taken measures to minimize its occurrence. The following steps will be taken to protect the participants' confidentiality: 1.) Alternative names will be utilized to identify participants; 2.) The digital recording device as well as any paperwork related to the study will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home; 3.) Transcriptions, notes, and other documents will be secured on the researcher's personal computer with password protection to prevent unauthorized users; 4.) Audio files, notes, and transcriptions will be destroyed after three years.

The estimated total time of commitment is approximately 3 hours to consist of 15 minutes for demographic questionnaire, 1.5 hours for the semi-structured interview, and 1 hour for follow up interview (member checking).

The findings of the study may assist educators, parents, and individuals from other marginalized groups in identifying factors that influence African American males' identity formation as well as what strategies, within as well as outside of the classroom can promote academic success amongst this segment of the population. These findings may help deconstruct the negative connotations held against African American males in our society.

Keep in mind, participants have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher named above or the researcher's faculty advisor, whose contact information is located at the end of the informed consent. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University's Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-478-5465.

There is no compensation for your participation in this study. Please note that your willingness to participate will not jeopardize any future relations with Georgia Southern University. You are not required to participate in this research and you have the right to end your participation at any time by informing the principal investigator or, simply, by abstaining consent. As a participant, you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. There is no penalty for not participating in this study.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below. Each participant will be given a copy of this consent form for his personal record. This project has been reviewed and approved by the GSU Institutional Review Board under tracking number H16444.



Title of project: "THE MUZZLED HOPE": UTILIZING BLACK PROTEST THOUGHT TO EXAMINE AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES' IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN THE RURAL, U.S. SOUTH.

Principal Investigator: (Latoya Jenkins, 304 Seven Oaks, Washington, Georgia, 30673, 706-401-6356, [ljenkin8@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:ljenkin8@georgiasouthern.edu))

Faculty Advisor: (Dr. Delores D. Liston, Curriculum, Foundation, and Reading, P.O. Box 8144, Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, Georgia, 30560, 912-478-5382, [listond@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:listond@georgiasouthern.edu))

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

APPENDIX B  
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

“THE MUZZLED HOPE”: UTILIZING BLACK PROTEST THOUGHT  
TO EXAMINE AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES’ IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AND  
ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN THE RURAL, U.S. SOUTH

**Demographic Questionnaire**

**A. Personal Information**

1. **What is your age?**
  - a. 29 or younger
  - b. 30-39
  - c. 40-49
  - d. 50-59
  - e. 60 or older
  
2. **What is your marital status?**
  - a. Single
  - b. Divorced
  - c. Widowed
  - d. Separated
  - e. Married
  
3. **How many children do you have?**
  - a. None
  - b. 1-2
  - c. 3-4
  - d. 5 or more
  
4. **Do you still reside in Georgia?**
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

**B. Educational History**

5. **What type of undergraduate institution did you attend?**
  - a. Public-Historically Black College and University
  - b. Private- Historically Black College and University
  - c. Predominantly White Public College or University
  - d. Predominantly White Private College or University
  - e. Online Institution
  
6. **Provide area of study for undergraduate degree: \_\_\_\_\_**
  
7. **What type of graduate institution did you attend for your Master’s degree?**
  - a. Public-Historically Black College and University
  - b. Private- Historically Black College and University
  - c. Predominantly White Public College or University
  - d. Predominantly White Private College or University
  - e. Online Institution
  
8. **Provide area of study for Master’s degree: \_\_\_\_\_**



**9. What type of graduate institution did you attend for your Doctorate's degree?**

- a. Public-Historically Black College and University
- b. Private- Historically Black College and University
- c. Predominantly White Public College or University
- d. Predominantly White Private College or University
- e. Online Institution

**10. Provide area of study for Doctorate's degree: \_\_\_\_\_****C. Parental History****11. Parents'/Guardians' marital status:**

- a. Never married
- b. Divorced
- c. Widowed
- d. Separated
- e. Married

**12. With whom did you reside as a youth (18 and under):**

- a. Mother
- b. Father
- c. Both parents
- d. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**13. Highest level of education received by female guardian**

- a. Less than High School
- b. High School Diploma
- c. Associate's Degree
- d. Bachelor's Degree
- e. Master's Degree
- f. Specialist's Degree
- g. Doctorate's Degree

**14. Highest level of education received by male guardian:**

- a. Less than High School
- b. High School Diploma
- c. Associate's Degree
- d. Bachelor's Degree
- e. Master's Degree
- f. Specialist's Degree
- g. Doctorate's Degree

**15. What was your household socioeconomic status?**

- a. Lower class
- b. Middle class
- c. Upper middle class
- d. Upper class

APPENDIX C  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

**1. RESEARCH QUESTION: How have majoritarian narratives pertaining to the “inabilities” of Black boys influenced the participant’s identity development and in what ways have the associated stereotypes impacted his academic performance?**

- a. What stereotypes of African American males did you encounter throughout your educational tenure?
- b. How did stereotypes of African American males impact your sense of self?
- c. When did you first know that race was a vital factor in how individuals in the greater society view you?
- d. Research suggests that African American females have a more positive experience in the educational realm than African American males. When did you first discover that your gender was a critical component of your identity?
- e. How did the previous experiences (discussed in questions 1a and 1b) influence your perception of self?

**2. RESEARCH QUESTION: What personal attributes contribute to the resilience displayed by African American males who reach academic success?**

- a. When and why did you decide to pursue an advanced education?
- b. In your opinion, does education play a significant role in the enhancement of your life chances? Why or why not?
- c. Throughout your educational experiences, what type of adversity did you experience?
- d. When faced with these difficult experiences, how did you cope to overcome adversity?
- e. Now that you have reached academic success, are the same coping mechanism (discussed in question 2d) applicable to life, in general, or do they differ? If so, in what manner?

**3. RESEARCH QUESTION: How are the stories of Black males who experience academic success being silenced by the dominant social group in order to prolong White hegemony?**

- a. How do you feel that African American males are depicted in our society? And Why?
- b. At any point in your life, were you impacted by negative stories pertaining to African American males and how did these stories assist you in pursuing your academic goals?
- c. In your opinion, how were you able to stay committed to your cultural roots and succeed in a realm that is largely dominated by White America (also known as cultural maintenance)?

**4. RESEARCH QUESTION: What educational factors (those related to the educational setting and/or school) influence African American success?**

- a. Who were your most influential educators? And what was it about these particular individuals' instructional practices that ignited your interest in learning?
- b. What were your experiences with White educators? Did they differ from that of African American educators?
- c. Did you participate in extracurricular activities (i.e., clubs, sports, fraternities, sorority, and community organizations)? If so, what role did these activities play in your educational experiences?

**5. RESEARCH QUESTION: What sociocultural factors shape African American males' ideas of masculinity and academic success?**

- a. What are the key sources in your life, outside of education, that helped shape your understanding of what it means to be a Black man in America?
- b. During your development of identity, what avenues did you take to nurture your sense of masculinity? And why?
- c. Which individuals, outside of the education arena (i.e., parents, community leaders, religious figures, peers), contributed most in the development of your identity as a Black man? And how did their influence assist you in your navigation through society and the educational system?

APPENDIX D  
PARTICIPANT 1 INTERVIEW

August 18, 2016  
Transcript

**Research Question #1**      **How have majoritarian narratives pertaining to the “inabilities” of Black boys influenced the participant’s identity development and in what ways have the associated stereotypes impacted his academic performance?**

*Latoya*      *1a). What stereotypes of African American males did you encounter throughout your educational tenure?*

Jamison      During my education tenure, I felt an advantage over others because I was the only Black that looked like me in many of my classes. In addition, I was of very light complexion, so I blended in easily with Whites in the community. White students, from neighboring schools, went out of their way to be fair and nice to me. Even some instructors, I felt, paid special attention to me. This caused other black students not to like me and they said that I acted White because I did well in school and White teachers liked me. A lot of them were punished and demoted by white teachers. But the stereotypes of African American males is basically hear-say and not factual. In fact, many say that we are not as smart as Whites. My mother was a mixed woman and my father was light skinned, so me and my brothers and sister could pass for white in the community. Also, my dad worked as a principal at the black high school and my mom was a part time teacher at Mt. Nebo Baptist Church in Metasville. We grew up on Whitehall in a bricked home with three bedrooms and a bathroom. Both of parents had cars, so we were seen as prestigious in our community.

*Latoya*      *1b). How did stereotypes of African American males impact your sense of self?*

Jamison      These stereotypes really didn’t hinder me as far as my educational goals were concerned. I was motivated to excel because of my father’s expectations and witnessing his desire to provide a better life for my mother, brothers, sister, and me. In so many African American families, the male is not the head of the household and I felt like it was job and obligation to provide for my family which is very important to me. And I was raised that way by my parents where the male’s primarily role is to be able to provide for his family because my father was a Principal and my mother was a stay at home mother that raised five children. So the male was the one who had to work and provide for the family. Therefore, this example of family life offset the stereotype of African American males as being *lazy* and *incapable* into an image of the African American male as an intellectual and hard worker.

*Latoya*      *1c). When did you first know that race was a vital factor in how individuals in the greater society view you?*

Jamison      We didn’t talk about race much at home but my parents let us know that white folk saw us as beneath them on the social ladder. I grew up in rural Georgia and experienced segregation firsthand. Considering the area that I was raised up in, I realized at an early age that by being African American, you had numerous drawbacks in the greater society. I grew up in a society that was segregated. Where you had to drink out of colored only water fountains and restrooms and things of the nature. We had second hand books and a lower experience in school compared to Whites. I remember viewing

news coverage of the Civil Rights movement. White people would call MLK a nigger and a monkey. Malcolm X was a devil with a hidden tail. And they would always say the world would be better if they were dead. I remember after desegregation was legal in Washington, Whites would call my dad and make death threats. They didn't want him to let black students come to the white school. They threatened to hurt our family. But he didn't stop standing for what he believed in. He wanted all students to be equal. This was absurd to me. How could people hate us so much as a race. This kind of stuff went on all the time. My friends and I got so tired of it that we staged a walkout in 1967. That's right the Principal's kid staged a walkout. The night before the walkout, I remember my parents sitting at the dinner table. My dad expressed his concern for the safety of the Black students while my mother, repeatedly, told me, my brothers and sister that we better not walk out of our classes because it would be disrespectful to my father. Little did they know, I was one of the masterminds behind the whole thing. We had decided that the walk out would take place at noon. We chose noon because students would be on their lunch breaks and most teachers would be in their planning period during this time, which would mean little resistance from authority. I remember sitting in my mathematics class taking a test. The clock ticked, loudly, as students gazed at each other. At exactly 11:59, students began to pack their bags and proceeded to walk out of the school. I was amazed at the number of people who participated. It had to be at least 100 students. But even more, there were teachers who walked out and community members waiting outside to join in the protest. And when I looked back at the crowd behind me and the other five students who started this, I saw my father at the top of stairs leading to the school's entrance. He simply gave me the thumbs up and never spoke about it to me, again. I don't think that my mother ever found out that I was involved. If she did, she never said anything to me. That day we were met in the streets by an army of Whites who called us the N-word and bastards, threw rocks, water, and other things at us. But we kept going. We were determined to get an answer. Even if his response was no, we wanted to show that we were not going to sit peacefully. We wanted change. Although the walkout had little impact on getting up-to-date resources, it had a lifelong impact on me. It was the moment I decided to become a teacher for change. And I realized in the 1970s. In the 1970s when I was a classroom teacher of Social Studies, I can remember a few White parents who came to the school and expressed their desire for their children to have all White teachers. Of course, this was not said to the African American faculty or students, but being a lead teacher, it was implied that this was the case. Thus, the administration would remove the students from class to another teacher for obvious reasons. They (administrators) wouldn't state the reason but I gathered that it was because of race. The parents only wanted their students to go to White teachers for some reason or another. Also, when I was working on my last degree, I had a racist professor. I remember it like it was yesterday. I entered Dr. Haynes' classroom. He was an elderly, White man who was very frail looking. He had a hump in his

back. I was the only man in my class. But more importantly, I was the only Black man. And Dr. Haynes had it out for me from the first day that I entered his class. And I had him for two out of three of my classes that semester. Needless to say, no matter how much effort I put towards assignments, he would fail me. And without explanation. I talked with the department chair who insisted that I should just stick it out. I ended up failing both of his classes. Not horribly, but with a 69. And when I asked why I failed or what I could do to improve my grades, Dr. Haynes would say, “Jamison, according to the syllabus, you failed”. This was horrifying to me because I knew that he, only, failed me because I was a Black man and I did not know if other professors held the same biases. Another Black guy in the program told me that he did this to him. But I kept going. I had to take the classes again from someone else. I passed everything else with As. This is why I wanted to get a degree in Education Administration. It would allow me to have credentials a lot of my peers in the school didn’t have and advance in my career. It also would give me a more prominent voice in the White community. If I got in an administrative position, I could get more Blacks in higher positions.

**Latoya** *1d).Research suggests that African American females have a more positive experience in the educational realm than African American males. When did you first discover that your gender was a critical component of your identity?*

Jamison Throughout the history of America, African American males were more of a threat to Whites than females. If you go back to the slavery days in America, most of the females were treated a whole lot better than the males. The (Black) females were allowed to work in the house in the deep South during the slavery period whereas the (Black) males were kept out in the fields. So there was a keen difference between Black male and Black female. The biggest concern during discussions in schools during integration, from my experience, was that a Black male would date a White female. In fact, the meltdown of the White race was a popular discussion during those times. It was, also, discussed behind closed doors with some of the administrators and educators that I worked with in the 1980s. This was most noticeable when we went on trips. Chaperones would often strategize on how to keep the Black males and White females separated because they did not want them to engage in romantic relationships nor did they feel that it was proper for these two groups to reproduce.

**Latoya** *1e).How did the previous experiences (discussed in questions 1a and 1b) influence your perception of self?*

Jamison This [discrimination] motivated me to prove to any and every one that I am just as intelligent as anyone else and capable of any job and be good at it. And that’s what I dedicated myself to throughout my 34 years in education. I wanted to prove that I was better than my coworkers and always strived to be the very best that I can be because I didn’t want to uphold the negative connotations associated with being a Black male. And the key is to work hard to prove everybody wrong. But not only that. It is about providing equal opportunities; especially in the classroom, for all students regardless of what



they look like and where they come from. Much like President Obama did. He proved that an African American could effectively serve as President of the United States.

**Research Question #2** **What personal attributes contribute to the resilience displayed by African American males who reach academic success?**

**Latoya** ***2a). When and why did you decide to pursue an advanced education?***

Jamison The walkout helped me to see that I wanted to stand for a change. Also, the walkout showed me the value of strong social and communication skills and the need to stand up for what I believe in. Basically, I chose to pursue an advanced education because I came from a family in which learning and education were cornerstones. My mother was a teacher at a church. During my early years, the church served as the school for African American children. My mom taught at Mt. Nebo Church in Wilkes County. My father went to Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. He became a principal in Washington, Georgia. So our father made sure that all five of his children, four brothers and a sister, attended a college. So, we all attended Paine College in Augusta, Georgia. I remember some of the programs at the end of the year and the school motto was *Education is the Key to Success*. And this was something that our father instilled in us at an early age. Because of the high expectations of our parents, we all attended a four-year college.

**Latoya** ***2b). In your opinion, does education play a significant role in the enhancement of your life chances? Why or why not?***

Jamison It has played a very important role in my life and it has definitely enhanced my life. Because of my education, I was able to return to my hometown and became a teacher. I started off at the Primary level and taught second grade. Matter of fact, I was hired before I even completed college. Interestingly, my high school principal was serving as principal of the primary school at the time. And because the school was saturated with all females, she felt a dire need to incorporate a male into the school's environment. That was a great experience for me. Athletic wise and academic wise, I was able to identify with the young men at the school. Education was the key to being able to return home and acquire a job that was largely dominated by Whites.

**Latoya** ***2c). Throughout your educational experiences, what type of adversity did you experience?***

Jamison Throughout my education experiences, I really did not have much adversity. It could have been because I was of a lighter skin complexion or the fact that my father served as a principal. I guess that you are referring to racial problems. However, I really did not have many because I loved to talk and mingle with people of all races. So I was able to exhibit positive social skills and was easily promoted throughout my educational experience. At the college level, I talked about Dr. Haynes. Career wise, I did experience adversity in terms of promotion. I was often overlooked for the job of high school principal (although I served as assistant principal for numerous years). Many Black parents felt that I was overlooked for the position due to my race and I felt the same way. Before me, the school district never had a Black principal at the high school. And I realized that three men were brought in to

serve in this capacity before me, all of whom I had more qualifications than. Matter of fact, I was not considered for the principal position until my 29th year in the educational school system.

**Latoya** *2d). When faced with these difficult experiences, how did you cope to overcome adversity?*

Jamison There were a few things that occurred during my time as an educator. When I was faced with difficult experiences, I would ask God for guidance and was assured... For instance, when I did not get promoted to principal, my faith assured me that it would happen one day because God has a way of putting something on your heart and you know that it is coming from Him. So, I kept performing my job as assistant principal until my day came. Like I said, faith wise, God revealed to me and this may sound weird to anybody else, but he revealed to me that I would become principal one day but I just didn't know when. Like people say, you never know when God will show up but he will show up, eventually, and he will show up on time. James 2:14 summarizes my life especially in these dangerous time. Nothing is given to you. So you have to focus on what you want or the problem, construct your solution, and work to obtain it. No matter how hard it is.

**Latoya** *2e). Now that you have reached academic success, are the same coping mechanism (discussed in question 2d) applicable to life, in general, or do they differ? If so, in what manner?*

Jamison Basically, they are the same. I always rely on my faith to guide me during any time of adversity. Right now, I am serving on the local Board of Education. I retired from the school system. God placed on my heart the need to express the necessity of African American teachers in our school system. Our school system is 52% African American with the majority of the teachers being White. The Black students need role models and this includes both Black females and Black males. During my tenure as principal, I was successful in making sure that there was a significant increase in the number of African American teachers hired. In particular, the faculty went from having 6 African Americans to 23. That's half of the faculty, by the time that I left. This is an issue that is still dear to me. Even after my retirement. For example, when I was growing up, I would often visit businesses with my father. In the majority of these businesses, the owners were White, the employees were White. However, if you did see anyone Black working, it was often in a tedious position that required a lot of physical labor. So, it was my understanding at a young age that Blacks were built to work hard. However, if I had more advanced role models outside of my father to offset this image of Blacks, it would have been more beneficial to my self-development. I say all this to say that my faith and mentors were often the source of coping that I used (and still depend on today) in difficult circumstances.

**Research Question # 3**      **How are the stories of Black males who experience academic success being silenced by the dominant social group in order to prolong White hegemony?**

*Latoya*      *3a). How do you feel that African American males are depicted in our society? And Why?*

Jamison      I think that people do see African American males as “different”. If you watch the news, it seems like African American males are committing the crimes. However, that is not a reflection of all African Americans. And that’s why I feel that a study like yours is so important. I don’t feel like African American males behave worse than any other group in our society. It is just the images that media shows. Media that is controlled by White America chooses to show. As a Black man, I feel that we are born with the same capabilities of anyone else. It is my belief that your depiction does not have to be your definition. In other words, just because someone presents you in a particular manner that does not always mean that it is true and it is up to each individual to show their uniqueness in this world. Therefore, we should recognize all people in this country as equals and stop singling out particular groups to belittle.

*Latoya*      *3b). At any point in your life, were you impacted by negative stories pertaining to African American males and how did these stories assist you in pursuing your academic goals?*

Jamison      I really did not hear a lot of negative stories, at home, because our parents never focused on the “inferiority” associated with being Black. However, I did grow up in a society in which African American males were treated like second class citizens. But it was parents who instilled our value in us at an early age. My mother and father set high expectations for me and my siblings. Excellence was expected from each of us. I attended Paine College to get a degree in Social Sciences and then returned for a master’s degree in Administration before getting a degree in Educational Leadership. Therefore, negative stories had little impact on my life.

*Latoya*      *3c). In your opinion, how were you able to stay committed to your cultural roots and succeed in a realm that is largely dominated by White America (also known as cultural maintenance)?*

Jamison      When I look at the time period in which I was raised, there was a lot of racial tension in the greater society. However, it was my family that emphasized our cultural roots. The family was core of my being. Secondly, I went to a private, predominately African American college (but most of the faculty was White). It was here that I found the need to be proud of cultural background. I, also, found that in this environment in which everyone was similar in background, there was little room for discrimination. Therefore, my family and attending a local HBCU were critical in maintaining my cultural identity.

**Research Question #4**      **What educational factors (those related to the educational setting and/or school) influence African American success?**

*Latoya*      *4a). Who were your most influential educators? And what was it about these particular individuals’ instructional practices that ignited your interest in learning?*

Jamison The most influential educator in my life was my father for the most obvious reason: I lived with him. He was my motivator because when it came to education, we had no option but to perform well or else. Mr. Eddie Finnell, my Social Studies teacher, was influential as a mentor. He set high expectations for me and served in my church as the chairman of the deacon board. Everything that Mr. Finnell does is righteous. He is well respected in the White and Black community because he treated everyone the same. But they, also, illustration what a man should be. They demanded respect but knew how to relate to students on a personal level. They were able to bridge learning with everyday life.

**Latoya** *4b). What were your experiences with White educators? Did they differ from that of African American educators?*

Jamison Most of my educators in the years before college were Blacks. I did have some White teachers. Although they didn't mistreat me in class, it was an obvious difference in how they treated some of the other Black students in the school. White and Black teachers were difficult on (Black) students but for different reasons. Whites wanted to keep Black students in line (controlled) so they cracked the whip for anything that they viewed as being disobedient. Black teachers were tough on Black students because they wanted us to act right but to excel in academics. From an administrator's point of view, White teachers that I have supervised have often exhibit discriminatory behavior against Black students (although it was not overt). I have noticed, in my administrative role, that African American teachers are more nurturing to the needs of African American students and are able to motivate as well as relate to them in ways that are in alignment with their cultural background. Also, Black students are disciplined by White teachers more. For instance, Black and white girls could both have on short dresses and skirts, but only the Black girls were sent to my office for inappropriate attire. Likewise, Black boys could do the exact same thing as white boys and White teachers would send them to my office for insubordination. There is a clear difference with the White and Black experiences in education. My job as the assistant principal allowed me to see this. But this position allowed me to build a solid relationship with the students. Not only was I the disciplinarian in the school, I was also the advocate for a lot of Black students and their parents when it came to handling issues with White teachers.

**Latoya** *4c). Did you participate in extracurricular activities (i.e., clubs, sports, fraternities, sorority, and community organizations)? If so, what role did these activities play in your educational experiences?*

Jamison It is very important for each of us to be involved in extracurricular activities because they help develop social skills. In college, I played basketball and participated in acting. I, even, played the role of Abe Lincoln on a televised production while at Paine College. These activities not only helped develop my personality but they helped shaped my identity as a man. I developed notions of what it meant to be a leader but, also, a team player. The activities helped to improve my communication skills. It taught me that learning goes

beyond the classroom.

**Research Question #5** **What sociocultural factors shape African American males' ideas of masculinity and academic success?**

**Latoya** *5a). What are the key sources in your life, outside of education, that helped shape your understanding of what it means to be a Black man in America?*

Jamison I would give my father most of the credit for instructing me on how I should conduct myself as a young man. My father, John Michael, was an educator (as I mentioned earlier) who attended Morehouse College. He would often tell me the things that I should not do once I became a teacher. I remember that he told me that once I started my career, it would not be good to hang on The Block, which is a local spot in Wilkes County that consists of nightclubs and lounges. It was not a good image to project to students as well as coworkers. He never spoke of the disadvantages of being Black that often. He did not want us to think that our race determined our future. Therefore, our skin color did not predict our future nor should it hold us back. He wanted us to know that we were not any different than Whites in terms of our ability to perform in academics or any other task.

**Latoya** *5b). During your development of identity, what avenues did you take to nurture your sense of masculinity? And why?*

Jamison I think a lot of times when you are a Black male and you talk about your sense of masculinity, you have to find role models who project what you would like to embody as an African American male. This is something that I did. I, purposely, found Black men in my community who exhibited the characteristics, morals, values, and work ethic that I wanted to acquire. These included my mother who taught me how a man should treat a woman, my three brothers- who taught me the importance of comradery, my father- who taught me the importance of education and the family, and Mr. Eddie Finnell- who taught me the importance of self-respect and equality. If I could pattern myself after anyone, it would be these three people.

**Latoya** *5c). Which individuals, outside of the education arena (i.e., parents, community leaders, religious figures, peers), contributed most in the development of your identity as a Black man? And how did their influence assist you in your navigation through society and the educational system?*

Jamison There are a number of individuals that I can mention here. First, Mr. Finnell. Not only was he my teacher and career mentor, he went to my church. He helped me to get my first teaching job by talking with the White Principal at the primary school. He was very interested in what I wanted to do in my future and how I planned to use my degree. Not only was I allowed to see him in the formal or professional role, but I was able to see him interact with his family and many members in the community. He is easy to talk to and respects everyone that he encounters. Although he endured more racism that I did, he taught the importance of faith in your everyday life. We often joke that although we (Blacks) received secondhand material in school, we were able to produce geniuses in and outside of the classroom. He teaches me that one way to navigate through this society and educational system is to be light-hearted in that you are slow to anger. It helps to make logical decisions

during stressful situations. My mother was influential in my development as she taught me to be kind and to love everyone regardless of who they are. I remember an incident when my sister was catching a bus from Paine College and a White soldier talked to her and bought her a soda. And my sister talked to my mother about it because she was shocked that a White man bought a Black lady an item from the store. However, my mother explained that this was probably due to her lighter skin complexion and that he had probably mistaken her for a White woman. However, my mom stressed that my sister should not be baffled for being treated decent by a White person because after all God expects us to love all people and she was no less deserving of love and respect. My pastor, Reverend Moses E. Lee- the leader of Springfield Baptist Church in Washington, Georgia for over twenty five years—was influential because he taught that we should love regardless of our differences.

APPENDIX E  
PARTICIPANT 2 INTERVIEW

August 22, 2016

Transcript

**Research Question #1** How have majoritarian narratives pertaining to the “inabilities” of Black boys influenced the participant’s identity development and in what ways have the associated stereotypes impacted his academic performance?

*Latoya* **1a). What stereotypes of African American males did you encounter throughout your educational tenure?**

*William* Umm, that for some reason, we were not as smart. I think that the most glaring example that stands out for me is back in high school. They didn’t have AP, so back then you had what they would called English 1, 2, 3, and 4. English 4 was remedial. English 3, you were border line. English 2, you were okay. English 1, would be what AP is today. And they were trying to put me in English 4 and my grandmother came to the school and talked to principal...She came to him [the principal] and said William is just as smart as anyone else in his class. So they put me in Ms. Francis Duke’s English 1 and I will never forget because I take it with great pride. We had to quote Shakespeare, ‘Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears. I come to bury Caesar, not praise him’. All the White kids just knew it and my grandmother was like, ‘That’s what you have to study. William you have to know it’. I came back the next day and killed it and Ms. Duke [my teacher] had so much respect for me. And each year, I took English level 1. I went on from that to Ms. Cowan in the eleventh grade and 12<sup>th</sup> grade Ms. Chandra Adkins. I didn’t understand it was racism at the time, but my grandmother did ...you know. So that was my first encounter. That for some reason, we were supposed to be inferior in terms of the learning model and it was ironic because I was the first and the only classmate in the class of 1984 , black or white, to graduate undergrad in four years. So, it happened in high school and when I first noticed it because I would have been relegated to the lower level English. You see, so many of my black classmates experienced being assigned to remedial courses and without having a learning disability. Then when I would succeed, I was acting White or entitled. It’s a tough space for Black men in the U.S. And guess what became part of my double minor was English and History because I did Religion and Philosophy so that correction in ninth grade has carried me on to write my first book, carried me to be a blogger and a writer. Just think what would have happened to me had I not have a grandmother who came to that school and said that he is not dumb. And here is the tragedy, had she not fought for that, I would have gotten caught up in a pattern. I would have been around kids who didn’t push me to be my best.

*Latoya* **1b). How did stereotypes of African American males impact your sense of self?**

*William* Unlike a lot of African American males, I had such a strong figure with my grandmother, I always thought that I belonged. I never asked for permission, I would just do it. It’s kind of like you do it and ask for forgiveness later. So I never had an issue of feeling inferior but I would see the racism and it came from my grandmother and other people in the Baltimore community. Little ladies like my Sunday School teacher, Ms. Minnie Evans. They would



always tell us that you have to be twice as smart as White kids. So, I took that to mean that I have to work hard. So, even now, that has stuck with me at the age of fifty. Every night, before I go to bed, I read five newspapers. And I will show you that I am not exaggerating. Every night I read The Atlanta Journal Constitution, Los Angeles Times, New York Times, US Today, and The Washington Post. I was taught that education, especially reading, is the international passport. So, I didn't feel inferior at all, I just saw this as a way for me. I love competition and education is the greatest arena on Earth.

**Latoya** *So would you say that you developed a “prove them wrong” attitude*

William Oh yeah, oh yeah, oh definitely

**Latoya** *1c). When did you first know that race was a vital factor in how individuals in the greater society view you?*

William I was exposed to the hardships of Black men during early college because when you are taking Sociology and looking at these different trends and you start reading these statistics, you are like Oh My God, they are treating the Black man like an endangered species. He's not going to make it and the odds are stacked...Even in comparison with African American women. It kind of goes back to slavery, segregation, and integration. The White man has always placed the Black woman a ring higher [than the Black man]. Whether that goes back to sexual needs. Whether that goes back to serving them or raising their children. But they never saw the Black woman as a threat. They always saw the Black man as a threat...And again, it's almost like the field negro versus the house negro where you play one against the other. But at the end of the day, we are all in the same boat. The college enlightenment made me see it more because there was not a lot of overt racism in Washington. But even as someone who had a degree, I could go to certain parts of Atlanta and little, White ladies think that I worked at the grocery store. They would ask me questions like what aisle is this item on and I would say, “I don't know but when you find out, you let me know”. You know...so, you still dealt with the racism but you knew how to process it better. So, when you are in your formative years, you are trying to understand how this works and then later, you process it. And this helped me when I started working at the State's Capitol. Because you had Black, White, Hispanic, but you had positions that were always held by White people. As a Black man, you are never away from racism. You have to know how to process it. And then some Whites are accepting of you or at least pretend to be. It would kill me when I worked at the Capitol and they would say things like, well you are not like the other ones. Now, they have separated you into these subcultures. Like this Indian caste system where you are educated and your subject-verb agree. In their minds, somehow you are not as bad as the one's in the hood. Racism comes in different forms. Some is subtle, some is very overt. But again, I think that because we push this thing called diversity, some people are more embracing now but it is still a tinge of racism. You look at Donald Trump's campaign; it is, mostly, fueled by White people who want to take their country back which means let's go back to the 60s. And then what Trump says out of his mouth the other day about Black people

being poor, they don't have jobs. So the rhetoric only heightens the racial tension. He is saying what a lot of them want to say. So again, it goes back to knowing how to balance it. You know, I'm blessed to be able to balance it

**Latoya**

***Id).Research suggests that African American females have a more positive experience in the educational realm than African American males. When did you first discover that your gender was a critical component of your identity?***

William

Ummm, college as well. The collegiate years because you gotta kind of go back to slavery, segregation and integration. The White man has always placed the Black woman a ring higher. Whether that goes back to sexual needs. Whether that goes back to serving them, raising their children. But they never saw the Black woman as a threat. They always saw the Black man as a threat. So this elevation in society of the Black woman. Lets see, I started to notice that too during the collegiate years. And that is no fault of the Black woman. And again, it's almost like the field negro versus the house negro where you play one against the other. But at the end of the day, we are all in the same boat.

**Latoya**

***Ie).How did the previous experiences (discussed in questions 1a and 1b) influence your perception of self?***

William

It only increased that I have to succeed. It was instilled in me as a child by my grandmother. You know, I skipped kindergarten because she feared the notion of desegregation and thought that whites would cause physical harm to me. So she played catch up with me with ABCs, reading and writing and enrolled me in school at Mt. Carmel Baptist Church. She told me that these are things that you must master now because this is what will determine your future. And she was involved. She visited my school at least one time every two weeks. So, I understood at an earlier age the value of an education. You know, it kills me with these kids...the Black boys with their pants hanging down, showing their underwear, wanting to be cool and have a mouth full of gold and there is no education involved. I often say when I am lecturing to young kids. What do drug dealers retire on? There is no 401K for a drug dealer. My grandmother's push has helped me a lot and she has been dead since 1995. (Shows pictures of grandmother). Every time I walk in my office, I'm looking at who pushed me towards education. Of course, I had great teachers like Mrs. Finnell. White teachers too like Ms. Duke and Ms. Cowan. My Counselor, Ms. Reid. But my grandmother was the first one to push into me that idea of an education. So, it greatly enhanced the value of my self. In any arena, I always feel like I can compete.

**Research Question #2**

**What personal attributes contribute to the resilience displayed by African American males who reach academic success?**

**Latoya**

***2a).When and why did you decide to pursue an advanced education?***

William

Dr. Charles Spencer Hamilton...I met him while I was in college. He was the pastor of the largest Black church in Augusta...Tabernacle Baptist Church. He was classman with Martin Luther King, Jr. I went to Paine College, so I had to decide what church I was going to be a part of in Augusta. I joined him and he began to talk about a master's degree. He began to talk about a

doctorate. I postponed going back to get a doctorate until 2011. I always knew I needed to do the terminal degrees. Because he said it would benefit me farther down the road. It opens up so many other doors. So having him as a male mentor when I was 18 years old. He was the first person I met outside of my uncle Terry (he had a doctorate in computer science in the early 1980s). But in terms of someone that I was with every day of my life, Dr. Hamilton was the inspiration for my advanced degrees. He told me that an advanced degree would open more doors in terms of my career and that it would make me more presentable amongst White. He said this would be hard because racism was not easy to overcome. But for him, an advanced degree would help me be a leader especially if I wanted to be a pastor one day. And I found this to be true. I started my own church in 2011 and I believe that my doctorate in Sacred Theology helped me to build my congregation and get the support that I needed from community leaders.

**Latoya** *2b). In your opinion, does education play a significant role in the enhancement of your life chances? Why or why not?*

**William** Oh my God, it is a quintessential cornerstone. I tell these kids at my church all the time that education is an international passport. You have to learn to read, write and communicate. You cannot go on the internet without being able to type. You know, to put together a sentence. You know, they always get on me about making sure that their subject-verbs agree. When they say had-went, I go crazy and say it is had-gone. You know, even women that I have dated over the years. They split a subject-verb at dinner and I cringe and I bring it up lightly, eventually. Of course, I get ranked and profiled as a nerd and I always tell kids that it is cool to be a nerd. I understand that education is the quintessential cornerstone for development of self and empowerment. White people understood this... So if you do not have an education, you are controlled by some system and unfortunately, for us [Blacks], it is becoming the prison system. Because you cannot read and write, you eventually become a criminal. You become a criminal, eventually, you go to jail. That's why they came up with poll tax. So that if you couldn't write, you couldn't vote. If your grandfather couldn't vote, you couldn't vote. So they always wanted to deny us. Even Catholic church sin in that area because they only allow the Priest to read the Bible. That's my favorite question that you've asked so far. I push that... education.

**Latoya** *2c). Throughout your educational experiences, what type of adversity did you experience?*

**William** Competing with myself. I'm a person that does many things. Church, politics... so fighting off procrastination. Fighting off laziness. I had no frustrations of doing the work. I had no frustrations of wondering if I was smart enough because I've always believed that I belonged in the area. So sometimes motivating yourself. It was then that I learned what I believe every Black person should learn: Compartmentalization. You have to learn to compartmentalize. At that time, I was going through a divorce. My grandmother died. I was a single parent. I put my daughter in one box. I put the divorce in one box. I put pastoring in another box. I put my job at the

state capitol in one box. So, I learned compartmentalization which kept me and helped me overcome out of depression, panic and frustration. Do not let anyone tell you that depression is not real. It is. As a Black man, you feel like you have to achieve so much to be success. I had the family, the home, and the job. I was well known in the community. And then all H.E.L.L. broke out. You feel hopeless. You just want to give up. This is what a lot of the youth in our society face; especially, Black boys. You already have society beating up on you. Then, your very own people start pointing the finger. But like I had to re-establish my faith during this time and focus on what was most important: My daughter, we have to teach Black boys the same. No matter how unfavorable the outlook appears to be, you must keep P.U.S.H.ing...Praying Until Something Happens. Now that does not mean that you sit around and wait on opportunities to fall upon you. You have to work hard until the sun shines again. Compartmentalization taught me great strength.

**Latoya** *2d).When faced with these difficult experiences, how did you cope to overcome adversity?*

**William** Compartmentalization. Because when you compartmentalize, you learn to prioritize. What is most important? What is least important? What is in between? You can't get to everything in one day so you compartmentalize. You align things (goals, experiences) in the order of importance. Also, I wrote my first book. Writing my first book served as a cathartic process for me. It allowed me to get my emotions out in a non-aggressive way. It was a release. But it was, also, a way of me serving as a role model of hope for others who were experiencing lows in their lives. Kind of like your research. Sharing experiences with hopes of overcoming the doubt and the setbacks. In college, I joined a fraternity, so that sense of connectedness that I found amongst my brothers, helped me succeed when I did not have the direct support of my family and community. They were the ones that introduced me to Sociology. Also, in my later years, while working on my master and doctorate degrees, I became involved in the community. I developed an after school program and a summer program for children of marginalized groups. I served a political analyst on a radio station here. I traveled all over Georgia to learn about the issues that African Americans faced. I worked with school initiatives and led the fight to save the school right across the street. I worked with government officials to implement legislation that would help minorities. I worked with Zell Miller on the HOPE scholarship. I felt that it was a critical piece of legislation because it helped smart people who did not have the financial resources to get an education. All of this did not go unnoticed though. The community displayed their appreciation by naming a day after me. So the greatest way of coping with adversity is becoming a proponent of social change

**Latoya** *2e).Now that you have reached academic success, are the same coping mechanism (discussed in question 2d) applicable to life, in general, or do they differ? If so, in what manner?*

William They are heightened depending on what I am dealing with. Because I always believe this, there is more in becoming than there is in being. What I mean by that is if you think that you have already achieved and gotten to where you need to be, then that is not good. You have to keep pushing. So I am always pushing to do better. Like I just showed you, I read five newspapers a night. I want to know what the New York Times says about an issue versus the LA Times and Washington Post. So, to me, it is an ongoing process. It does not stop until your dead. So you are always learning. Kids often come in my office after church and they ask, "Pastor, what are these dots on your globe"? I explain that these are different countries and cities that I have visited in the world. From Africa to Brazil. All across this country. And education has been the key to open those doors. You know, some kids just came back from South Africa and I overheard them in conversation. I immediately entered the conversation and told them 10 things about South Africa. They said that they did not know that I visited South Africa and I point to that dot. It is a lifelong process. You get a degree, but the key is how you apply it to life. The degree prepares you for the arena of life, but now how do you function in that arena.

**Research Question # 3** **How are the stories of Black males who experience academic success being silenced by the dominant social group in order to prolong White hegemony?**

*Latoya* **3a).How do you feel that African American males are depicted in our society? And Why?**

William First and foremost, the media is the most powerful mechanism of presenting blacks as criminals. I remember during the days of the civil rights movement and the news coverage back then. A lot of Blacks did not want to watch it. Some people would say that they couldn't watch the news coverage of the movement but my grandmother would say that you need to watch it to see what they are saying about you. How they are painting you so that you can be the opposite. A great lesson that I learned from my grandmother is that you can never control what someone says about you but you can control whether or not it is true. This is even true today with the recent shootings of African American males by police officers. That's the bottom line. You cannot stop anybody from lying. You have to watch what the media is saying and how they are portraying us. If you do not, you might fall into the stereotype. You have multiple views. The negative view is the thug, street guy, lazy, does not want to work, and wants to steal. Basically a career criminal. And unfortunately, we do a lot to reinforce those stereotypes. Most of the robberies in Atlanta are African American. The drug dealers are mostly African American. Then, you have the positive ones. You have the educated, the articulate...umm...the person who is trying to save their community. However, we keep looking at athletes to be role models. But what about that Black principal. Andrew Jackson was the first black high school principal in Washington's history. He followed in the footsteps of his father who was principal during segregation. So you have the positive stereotypes too. What the media focuses mostly on is the negative. So the White community at large sees the negative. Then, of course, with the police

shootings...umm...they say well if the kid hadn't been out, they wouldn't have gotten shot. But he still has rights. So, the issue is violating rights. So you have both of those stereotypes. You have the positive and the negative. When I grew up in Washington, the church was the social hub of the community. Black people would come to educate kids on social issues and how to behave in public. They would talk about the civil rights movement and how to overcome discrimination. It was the place where you came to strengthen your spirit and connect with others like you. So I think that in this age of mega-church. In this age of prosperous gospel, we have to get back to the basis of investing in our children. The school system cannot raise a child. The school is designed to educate the child. These stereotypes are drawn because of poverty, fear, and success. So there are both sides. It is a two sided coin.

**Latoya** *3b). At any point in your life, were you impacted by negative stories pertaining to African American males and how did these stories assist you in pursuing your academic goals?*

**William** No because of the way I was raised. The way I was raised, I was taught to think better. It determined my morals. I often say to my congregation, especially the young people because I don't want them to think that I have it all together. The only negatives that I have made in my life is when I have gone opposite of how I was raised. I think that the environment in which you are raised makes the quintessential difference. One thing that is disheartening to me when I do come back to Washington is that little corner over there by Sam Flint's old place. You see the same people doing the same thing. Year after year. Some are my classmates and that's why I cannot buy into the argument that of a kid failing because they do not have a mother or real father. I have never met my father. My mother got pregnant with me at the age of 19 and my grandmother raised me. So that is not an excuse. Many of the kids that I know that had both parents in the house, Black or White, they got messed up, it took them forever to graduate from college or they didn't go to college. Some are still trapped by that corner. So, I think that what happens is the stereotypes are out there but sometimes we reinforce the stereotypes. But then you have other Black men who are successful who defy the stereotypes. And this goes back to how you were raised, in my opinion. You cannot control where you were born. But you can control how you react to it. I cannot understand kids thinking that they have rights today. Whatever my grandmother said was the law, you did not have an opinion. But now we live in a whole other society. So how you raise that child makes the difference. I have to often say to people when I'm introduced by people. They will say, "He's from Washington". Others will say, "The State or our Capitol". I will respond: Washington, Georgia. The first city in America named after Georgia Washington and incorporated in 1783. So how we are raised makes the difference. I didn't fall into those traps because the fear that I had from my grandmother to do what was right. That became the priority. Now for the second part of the question... It goes back to earlier and because I understood the importance of education. My grandmother taught me first.

Then, the Sunday school teacher reinforced it and then the Black men in the community and then my teachers in high school. They reinforced education. That is the key that opens the door.

**Latoya** *3c). In your opinion, how were you able to stay committed to your cultural roots and succeed in a realm that is largely dominated by White America (also known as cultural maintenance)?*

**William** Going back to those days in Washington, Georgia. You have to be two times better. You have to work hard. I was, also, told when I was young that a poor person with no education would have a better shot at a job than me as a Black man if I had no education. So, I understood that it was not about the fact that I was smart but I had to get something on paper to prove that I was. Education becomes the quintessential international passport. But you must remember that your hard work does not go unnoticed. In 2015, the community named a day after me. In my appreciation address, I explained that the only place success comes before work is in the dictionary because “s” comes before “w”. It’s just that simple. It is like the words of Ruyard Kipling—If you can walk with kings and not lose the common touch— As Godly beings, we should never outgrow our community. Our accomplishments should be stepping stones for communal advancement. From our birth to our home-going, one should live to give back. Not in any prescribed way but in a unique form. To live, to succeed, to be great, simply means you have to remember your roots and you have to give back

**Research Question #4** **What educational factors (those related to the educational setting and/or school) influence African American success?**

**Latoya** *4a). Who were your most influential educators? And what was it about these particular individuals’ instructional practices that ignited your interest in learning?*

**William** Mr. Eddie Finnell, Mrs. Francis Duke, Ms. Ellen Cowan. First though is my third grade teacher who scared me to death. I often go back to visit her when I am in Washington. Ms. Francis Fair. I never forget the book was called, “Shining Bridges” and I was acting like I couldn’t read. She closed “Shining Bridges”. It was a beige book and she threw that book and it hit me. I have been reading ever since. So Ms. Francis Fair. Mr. Finnell, Ms. Duke, and Ms. Chanda Adkins, they made me fall in love with literature. I have a double minor in English and History. I can take you through all of Shakespeare because they laid that foundation for me. I took a course in Shakespeare in undergrad. So, reading was just so fundamental. It was an escape. They taught me through reading, you can go to these different places. Quite frankly, every image that I saw of Africa in Washington, in primary school, was men running through the forest with the ring through their noses and a spear. I went to Africa and it was totally different. So differentiating what is told to you versus what you live teaches you to reconcile your world. These educators pushed that point. It is funny that you ask this question because Ms. Reid, she died of cancer as I was graduating. I wanted to go to the Army to get money to help my grandmother because she had been so good to me. But Ms. Reid, one of the African American teachers, counseled me and said

that the best way that I could help my grandmother would be to go to college. So that final person to push me to go to college was Ms. Reid. She was patient and pushed me. She told me that I could not be average. This was similar to all of my Black teachers. They pushed me.

**Latoya** *4b). What were your experiences with White educators? Did they differ from that of African American educators?*

**William** Black teachers always told me that I could not be average. White teachers never told me that. The White teachers respected me because they saw me as smart. The Black teachers kept saying that I have to be twice as good...that I have to study twice as hard. You have to read. You have to write. They pushed me. Pushed. Pushed. Pushed. Grades 5-8, you could tell there was a preferential disposition towards White students. When they began to see that I was as smart as some White kids, they treated me different. They treated me better. They promoted me. Ms. Adkins, Ms. Cowan and Ms. Duke just absolutely fell in love with me. They even helped me get elected as class president my senior year of high school. They respected me because I did all assignments on time. They treated me better when they saw that I was not a trouble maker. They labeled me as different that some of the other Black kids. It is almost like they were saying that I was safe and that they could work with me. They were inspirational but in grades 5-8 that was not the case. In grades 9-12, they saw me as a leader.

**Latoya** *4c). Did you participate in extracurricular activities (i.e., clubs, sports, fraternities, sorority, and community organizations)? If so, what role did these activities play in your educational experiences?*

**William** Football and basketball. They taught me discipline, focus, I learned be part of a team. I can be very independent so being in a team environment taught me to work well with other people. This served me well because every position that I have held whether it be in government or the church, I have had to work with other people. It provided a sense of belonging.

**Research Question #5** **What sociocultural factors shape African American males' ideas of masculinity and academic success?**

**Latoya** *5a). What are the key sources in your life, outside of education, that helped shape your understanding of what it means to be a Black man in America?*

**William** Spirituality. My spirituality. Without the church and I didn't really like church growing up because my grandmother made me go all the time. You know in the country, the church only meets one Sunday a month but because my grandmother CME raised me, I went to church with her twice a month. My mother was Baptist so I went to church with her twice a month. So, almost every Sunday, I was in church or Sunday school. But I began to understand the importance of spirituality. The greatest influence in church was not my pastor but my Sunday school teacher: Ms. Minnie Evans. The way that she taught Sunday school and she eventually allowed me to teach the class. And I later became a preacher. But that spirituality. It was the church that first introduced the idea of resilience in my life through the development of spirituality... You will not be successful in this world without some sense of spirituality whether you call him God, Jehovah, or Buddha;



you have to have that spiritual component. This is so important to have as a young child because the spiritual component can be a powerful cornerstone of education. When you feel discouraged it keeps you motivated. Furthermore, media, travel, and speaking in different environments. Especially the media and the travel help me understand what it means to be a black man in America. We only do ourselves a disservice if we only see the world through the lens of how America sees it. I never forget when Obama was running for President in 2008. I was in France and they had a billboard of him with the hope sign and you cannot vote for him in France. But when I am walking downtown Paris and these white people say you are going to vote for Obama and Blacks that live there say you are going to vote for Obama. This was the killer, I get off the plane in Romania and my driver, I had on a different Obama shirt, and this guy, a White guy starts cheering “Obama, Obama, Obama”. He asked if he could buy the shirt from me. I gave it to him. It just amazing how Black men are perceived in different parts of the world versus America. And mostly in America, it is stereotyped as a result of segregation in the south. The whole Civil War was wrapped up in slavery.

**Latoya** *5b). During your development of identity, what avenues did you take to nurture your sense of masculinity? And why?*

William Sports. Particularly, basketball. Even now, I challenge the younger guys to basketball at the age of 50. It builds a competitive attitude. It fosters communication and leadership skills, but also lets you know that it is okay to be submissive in some circumstances. I am very competitive and I think that is a great driving force in masculinity.

**Latoya** *5c). Which individuals, outside of the education arena (i.e., parents, community leaders, religious figures, peers), contributed most in the development of your identity as a Black man? And how did their influence assist you in your navigation through society and the educational system?*

William Senator Charles William out of Augusta, Georgia. He introduced me to politics by a chance meeting on an airplane in 1989. That’s how I got into politics. Then reading about Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., one of the three people in my dissertation. Knowing that this man was a genius as a pastor and congressman. We give Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X all of this credit for Civil Rights. But all the marching a Martin and Malcolm means nothing if you don’t have someone in Congress who can pass up the laws. Adam carried the great society of Lyndon B. Johnson and much of Kennedy’s before he died. So, Adam Clayton Powell, Senator William, and of course, on the spiritual side, Dr. Charles Hamilton of Augusta. Those three Black men greatly influenced me. They kind of helped shape me. Again, they reinforced the importance of education. They taught me how to move in different environments. Even when we were about to change the flag in 2001 and 2002, under Governor Barnes, I had to work with Republicans (even though Democrats were the majority to party) to get the votes to change the original flag. Using the model that these men set before me, I was able to effectively work in a stressful environment. But mostly, how to give people what they want without losing who you are. Without being a sell-out.

APPENDIX F  
PARTICIPANT 3 INTERVIEW

August 28, 2016

Transcript

**Research Question #1**      **How have majoritarian narratives pertaining to the “inabilities” of Black boys influenced the participant’s identity development and in what ways have the associated stereotypes impacted his academic performance?**

*Latoya*      *1a). What stereotypes of African American males did you encounter throughout your educational tenure?*

Harper      Like through high school, college or all of it?

*Latoya*      *All of it*

Harper      Well in middle school through high school...ummm. I guess growing up in a small town, we were all stereotyped as hostile, thieves, hoodlums. When White people would see you, of course, if you were on the same side of the street, they would go to the other side of the street. When I got to high school, it actually improved a little bit because I was friends with some of the White kids that went to the private school. However, most of them did not go to the school with us in the public school. The War on Drugs was a big thing when I was growing up. But people in my community called it the War on Blacks. I remember being about four or five years old. The police would stop you for nothing and ask you where you are going and what you are doing. If you were going in a store, they figured that you were a thief. They would call you weed heads and things like that. This is before crack became popular in the 80s. I know for a fact the police would plant weed on people. I have seen it with my own eyes. In instances, some of my older cousins and their friends were arrested for crimes that they didn't even commit. But that's how the police were back then. They were bad news. It got so bad that we became afraid of the police. Every time we saw them, we would run because we knew that they would harass us. So I dealt with all types of stereotypes. When I got to college, it was a little different. I was pretty much the only male in a lot of my classes but most importantly, the only Black male. So it was a little harder for me and the teachers had different expectations for me. For some reason, most of them were a little harder on me. I was about to quit and one of the professors, my advisor, Dr. Reynolds, which was a White man, asked me, “Are you going to let a bunch of little, old White ladies make you quit? This gave me the motivation that I needed to complete my degree and I did in 1999. So they really didn't expect us to finish college. But overall, I have dealt with a lot of stereotypical issues. I can go on and on about that. Especially when you are a Black man.

**Latoya** *1b).How did stereotypes of African American males impact your sense of self?*

Harper It had no impact on me because I knew who I was as I was growing up. My parents were both industrial workers and taught me the value of hard work. I had a strong, religious family and at that time, I just thought that was how it was. You know that you're Black growing up in a small town and many felt like you weren't going to do anything. You were going to be a drug addict or sale drugs and I just thought that was the way it was. But I knew the way that they felt about me was not going to define me. You have some of us that failed but me, personally, it didn't really bother me.

**Latoya** *1c).When did you first know that race was a vital factor in how individuals in the greater society view you?*

Harper As long as I can remember. I've always known. As long as I remember. I mean growing up in the late 70s and 80s. And, also, your family members would tell you be careful because of how society views you and how White folk view you. This is how they feel about you just because you are Black and a male. So, just as far as I can remember. And it is still the same. Not much has changed. I tell my children that their race has the ability to limit their experiences. But only if they choose to allow it to. You know, ninety-percent of the students in my school are Black and the majority of the educators are White. We may have three or four Blacks. Then, the state wonders why students do not perform well on tests or in the classroom. It because they do not relate to the teachers and the teachers do not understand their culture. Our children need more of us in education. But it is hard when it is controlled by Whites

**Latoya** *1d).Research suggests that African American females have a more positive experience in the educational realm than African American males. When did you first discover that your gender was a critical component of your identity?*

Harper When I got to college, it was a little different. I was pretty much the only male in a lot of my classes but most importantly, the only Black male. So it was a little harder for me and the teachers had different expectations for me. For some reason, most of them were a little harder on me. But I really noticed it when I was at Mercer going through the educational program. Black women have it hard also. But from the educational standpoint if you are a Black male, a lot of the time, they want to know if you are gay or what's your reasoning for wanting to go in that field of special education. I remember

working on my classes and being the only male in a lot of my classes. They would wonder if you were gay or if you like children. They weren't expecting a lot of Black men, especially, to go into special ed. They figured that we would just go into P.E. But if you were going into Elementary Ed or Special Ed, they would kind of look at you funny and try to figure out what your motives are.

**Latoya** *1e).How did the previous experiences (discussed in questions 1a and 1b) influence your perception of self?*

Harper Ummm...It made me realize that I am a Black man, but it really didn't impact my self-esteem. I, really, never had problems with self-concept or how I felt about myself as a youth because my mother always told me who I was and I always knew where I was from...However, the only time I really had to prove others wrong is when I had to prove my own people wrong because a lot of them felt like you weren't going to do this and you weren't going to do that. You're just going to be an alcoholic like your daddy or you're not going to college unless you play sports. They would even say, you're too Black to do anything in reference to my dark skin tone. They stereotype you as well...you know Black people. Just because you were a Black boy, they looked at you as deviant. Especially older Black people. And don't get me started on having a darker skin tone. Dark skin in our community equates to an innate disability almost. They call you Sambo, ugly and dumb and a lot of hurtful things. I look different from my family. They are light-skinned and short. I guess that I got my genes from my ancestors. I am tall, with very long arms and legs, very dark. My family and people out in the streets would call me First Man when I was growing up. They said that I looked like an ape with my long arms and dark skin. It's a shame that your own race will stereotype you, also. In my opinion, they will stereotype you more than another race will. And that bothers you more because you expect that from another race because they don't understand your culture and they do not understand where you are from or what you feel and what you go through. But when it comes from your own race, that's when it has an impact on you. And it can be a negative impact, also. The only time I feel like "ahhh-ha I made it" or "I proved you wrong" is with my own race.

**Research Question #2** **What personal attributes contribute to the resilience displayed by African American males who reach academic success?**

**Latoya** *2a).When and why did you decide to pursue an advanced education?*

Harper In 1991, I met Coach Eddie Williams. Mr. Williams was a special education

teacher and my basketball coach. He taught me what it was to be a man. He taught to be to be a leader yet a team player, to remain calm yet forceful in my values and beliefs, to respect my peers yet demand the same. He stepped in as my father. He was a mentor and a friend. He told me that college was the only option. And that's when I knew that I wanted to go to college and that I wanted a special education degree. My dad was in the home, but we weren't that close. He drank a lot and wasn't home much to help my mom. When, I lost my dad, in 1992, to cirrhosis of the liver, it was Coach Williams who kept me motivated to do well in school. However, I knew I wanted an advanced degree when I graduated from Mercer and started working in education in a rural school in the southeast region. I worked with special needs children. This school was poor and lacked resources. I realized that the only way that you can make a difference is really to advance by getting an advanced degree. And, also, at that time, there was the financial incentive to pursue an advanced degree. However, I knew that I wanted to advance and get my Master's degree. And while working on my master's degree, I decided that I would try to work on the leadership side of it. So, I continued to work on that and I had a friend who recommended that I go as far as the doctoral degree. The doctorate would help me in terms of being a more powerful figure among coworkers. So I went ahead and pursued that. So, it was probably when I graduated from Mercer.

**Latoya** *2b).In your opinion, does education play a significant role in the enhancement of your life chances? Why or why not?*

Harper Ummm... yeah it does. It does. Especially, the experiences that you go through when you are an undergrad. Are you speaking of an undergrad level or advanced degree level?

**Latoya** *Both*

Harper From an undergrad level, it is the people that you meet and the relationships that you form. I teach my kids that is all about making positive relationships. I worked hard my junior and senior years to network with professors and establish myself as a hard worker amongst them. I was able to make some positive relationships at Mercer that helped me to get my first job and helped me to meet some important people. Of course, when you get an advanced degree, people look at you differently, which I do not like. But they do. They have more expectations of you. I think that I have been stereotyped more with doctor in front of my name than I have without it in front of my name. Because people are afraid of you when they think that you are more intelligent than they are. But it gives you a lot of opportunities to grow as an

individual. And, also, ummm....then when the younger generation look at you, they can say, “Well he’s a Black man. If he made it out, I can make it”. So it gives you many opportunities. You can be a role model. I tell my kids, all the time, you need to go to school because it is all about meeting people and networking. That is what it is all about now. Because you can get a job now based off of who you know. If I didn’t have my degrees and didn’t meet certain people, I don’t think that I would be in the position that I am in.

**Latoya**

***2c).Throughout your educational experiences, what type of adversity did you experience?***

**Harper**

(Laughs) Oh God! Umm.... Well, when you are a Black male and, for example, I apply for a Special Ed job, you get plenty of offers. But when you are a Black male and you want to go into a leadership role, you do not get the offers. You do not get the call backs. You, just, don’t get the phone calls. It is just, totally different...I had someone tell me that I need to learn how to play the game and that I need to understand that White people control this and that. But anyway, that’s the mentality. That Whites control public education and that you should just be happy for what you have. But when you are a Black male, you are stereotyped for being...For example, I have poor eyesight. Therefore, a lot of the time, I squint my eyes when trying to see things. So at my last job, I was stereotyped as an angry Black man for this. They [Whites] said that I was on edge all of the time. They made this connection without even talking to me. Just off of my appearance. One day, I was called in and asked, “How are things at home?”.... However, when a White man frowned, you know...there’s nothing. But when I got to my new job, I was told, “All you do is smile”. But I am surrounded by a lot of Black people at my new job. Working around White people, they always think that you are angry and they think that you are hostile. They just treat you differently. They are afraid of you but at the same time...you have to be real careful because they look at it as if you have too much power. And they don’t like that. For example, I had to tell my superintendent everywhere that I went and as an administrator, I never had that to happen before. She wanted to know everywhere you went , why you went and you had to tell her every single thing. She was tougher on me than any of the other principals. And I can say that because another Black male principal said that he went through the same thing. As a matter of fact, she rode him to. They just ride you. And after I finish my time in the system, I will work to fix some of that and try to bring some attention to it. However, if I do it right now, I will not have a job. And you know as a Black man, you are supposed to be thankful for your job. You’re supposed to be thankful for what you have and you shouldn’t say

anything so...because you know when you are working in small towns, it's hard to get in the system anyway. Like I will tell you again, it is all about who you know. I tried to come back to Lincoln County where I reside, and I had to interview to try to get in the elementary school (and I wasn't asking for an administration job) and one of the main questions that I was asked was, "Why do you want to work here". I was like, I live here. They make it hard for us. And they did it to me again when I applied a year ago to come back here. I was going to humble myself and go back into the classroom, but they do not want you in those positions. The prime example is that Lincoln county just had its first Black assistant superintendent over at the board office. The first Black to work over there in a leadership role. And that is ridiculous because it is 2016 but that's how it is in a lot of places. If you put a Black man in position, you know one that cares about the children, we are going to go in and we are going to work because we know how hard it was to get there. So you have to be real careful because they look at it as if you have too much power. And they do not like that. They do not like that.

**Latoya** *2d).When faced with these difficult experiences, how did you cope to overcome adversity?*

Harper Well, prayer for one. But you have to have the right support system and you have to learn to fight your battles. And with fighting any particular battle, you have to learn to fight it the right way. A lot of the times, you have to be intelligent because we can't. I mean look at the news. You know. You can't lash out. There are repercussions whenever we try to... you know. We have to be real careful on how we handle situations out there because I had a friend who is now an administrator and he is being blackballed right now in a nearby county. It's just awful. For me, Luke 12:18—To whom much is given, much is required—is my life's motto. I acknowledge that as a Black male, in the United States, one's encounter with race is inevitable. But, whether it is traditional forms of racism or racism within a race such as lighter Blacks versus darker Blacks, discrimination is only powerful when a body of people chooses to validate its principles. In a society, such as ours with an umbrella of cultures, it should be a central goal to promote social change and this begins with reviving education.

**Latoya** *2e).Now that you have reached academic success, are the same coping mechanism (discussed in question 2d) applicable to life, in general, or do they differ? If so, in what manner?*

Harper The same coping strategies...Like I learned this year—only speak out when it is necessary. If you cannot do anything positive or change what's going on,



it's best not to say anything. It is best not to complain. You know. Go to work and do your job. Take care of the children. The main thing is the kids anyway. As long as you stay focused on them, everything else will fall into place. I talk to my wife. But I focus on the children. When I see things in the school getting bad, I start focusing on the students. I started coaching basketball. One of the key advantages to coaching is that you get to be a role model, share your experiences, and act as a living billboard for resilience. That's what life is about. I want to be a beacon of hope for others. So you have to remember that education is already political.

**Research Question # 3**      **How are the stories of Black males who experience academic success being silenced by the dominant social group in order to prolong White hegemony?**

*Latoya*      *3a).How do you feel that African American males are depicted in our society? And Why?*

Harper      Look at the news. The news will tell you how we are depicted. They depict you the same way the administrators depicted me....angry, upset, hostile. Some of that is the way that we display ourselves to people. I do not do it. But if you look at the way that we dress now. The way that we wear our hair. So that gives them a reason to feel that we are hostile and that we are angry. And a lot of times, especially in the White community, if you are a Black man in education, you are already viewed as just angry. If you voice your opinion, you are angry about something. You are pro-Black. You cannot stand up for what you believe in without there being repercussions.

*Latoya*      *3b).At any point in your life, were you impacted by negative stories pertaining to African American males and how did these stories assist you in pursuing your academic goals?*

Harper      Not really. The reason that people stereotype you is because they do not understand you. They are pretty much basing it on the way that they were brought up and their culture. And when you start dealing with stereotypes, we all have stereotypes. It is the way that we look at people based on experiences and what they see in the media. And the media is portraying us in a certain way. When you look at these people getting killed by these police right now. There is no excuse for killing someone who is not armed. But they are being stereotyped. I was in Augusta mall. I came home from Macon and I went to Augusta mall with a friend of mine. At that time, I forgot what they called it...racial profiling. We were in Sears and we bought some batteries and some more stuff and the lady [cashier] said to just put it in the bag with

the rest of our stuff. So we put them in the bag and we were walking out of the store and this lady, comes running and grabbed me off of the wall...And she starts yelling, "I got him. I got him". She had been watching us the whole time. She said, "He put the stuff in the bag". You see racial profiling is protected by the law. They had a right to check me to see if I had stolen something. They were already stereotyping me while I was walking around. I think that I had on some shorts and one of my basketball t-shirts from college and they assumed that I was stealing batteries. All of those people were in the mall but they were watching me. I have been through that a lot. Black women have it even harder. Because they already feel that the woman is inferior. Then you are Black on top of it. So, it is harder for you to advance anyway.

**Latoya** *3c). In your opinion, how were you able to stay committed to your cultural roots and succeed in a realm that is largely dominated by White America (also known as cultural maintenance)?*

**Harper** Sort of like we were talking about the other day. You see, I went to church, Thursday night, and I was thinking to myself, this is all that I know. So, it is all based on how you are brought up. It is all based on what you believe about your culture and how you are raised. And when you get older, you go back to that. I mean, I have always been taught to treat everyone the same and do not worry about racial stuff. That is just the way it is. If you look at the tv and these town hall meetings, it quite simple. People are going to believe what they want to believe. It is all about how you are brought up and what you feel is right and what you feel is wrong. So the way that people have stereotyped me over the years, it's just how it has been being a black male in a small town. We had enough and just accepted it (racism). Others stereotyping because you are Black. It has just been that way. And it is that way now in 2016. So what does that tell you? It is not going to change anytime soon. And I am telling you. A Black woman is a bigger threat than a Black man in education.

**Research Question #4** **What educational factors (those related to the educational setting and/or school) influence African American success?**

**Latoya** *4a). Who were your most influential educators? And what was it about these particular individuals' instructional practices that ignited your interest in learning?*

**Harper** Most were those old school people when I was little. Those that grew up in the 50s and the 60s and worked at the predominantly Black schools. They knew the importance of education. And they knew the importance of trying

to do right. They stressed staying out of trouble and telling you that you can do this and that you can do that. Just telling you not to worry about things when you have been stereotyped. They motivated you more in terms of academics than Whites. But mainly those old school teachers to be honest with you. Then when I got to high school, I had a few teachers that made sure that I kept my mind right. Mainly those that told you to dream and follow your dreams. Like I teach my children to dream, set goals, and stick with it. And don't let nobody stop you from doing it. Because if you listen to that...you are going to have that negative side that tell you that you can't do anything and if that is what you focus on, that's what you are going to do. It is a choice. It's a choice of what you believe and how you are brought up. Like a lot of kids say, "the White man is trying to bring me down" and I tell them, "there you go buying into that stereotype". Do not buy into that. Just go out there and do what you are supposed to do. You have to get it done.

**Latoya**

***4b). What were your experiences with White educators? Did they differ from that of African American educators?***

Harper

From K-8, my White teachers separated Blacks from Whites. Blacks would be in the back of the classroom and they paid little attention to us. They didn't think we were smart. One of my English teachers told me that I would be a better basketball player than student. She said that because of my dark skin and height, that made me more appealing. In high school it didn't. In high school, they had all of the same expectations. I was blessed because our county's high school at the time was pretty good. I was a basketball player but I knew that my talents would not get me to college. My coach, Mr. Williams helped me to see this. Academics were my only means to college. In college, there was a difference. At Mercer, most of the teachers were fine but I was at a predominantly, White school and some of them expected you to fail. However, most of them expected you to do well, so you did well. It was pretty much like it is when you're raising a child. You are going to do what is expected of you. For the most part, I was expected to do well and the people who raised me were all teachers. It was practically a whole street full of teachers. Maybe that is why I decided to go into education.

**Latoya**

***4c). Did you participate in extracurricular activities (i.e., clubs, sports, fraternities, sorority, and community organizations)? If so, what role did these activities play in your educational experiences?***

Harper

Sports. I played basketball in high school. I did not deal with a lot of stereotypical things there. And clubs didn't have a lot of experience there. I liked attending conferences during my undergraduate and graduate years. It

helped me to see the value in networking and effective communication. But it was, also, the display of expectations. It was all about expectations. I hope that I answered that right.

**Research Question #5**      **What sociocultural factors shape African American males' ideas of masculinity and academic success?**

*Latoya*      **5a). What are the key sources in your life, outside of education, that helped shape your understanding of what it means to be a Black man in America?**

Harper      I guess my mother and the way that I was raised and I try to pass that on to my children. You just cannot make excuses. You do not make excuses. You can pretty much try to be what you want to be. Like my daughter wants to go to Georgia Tech. I told her that it is something that she can do if you put your mind to it. But I worry about my son. You know being Black...you have to be real careful about being a Black male because, right now, police are killing us. And if you are smart enough, that is another way of lynching. I try to tell my kids that at the school. You see when I was growing up, as a Black male, when we saw the police, we ran because we knew they were going to harass you. If they caught you, they were going to harass you. What are you doing? Where are you going? And now the kids, they don't care about the police. So now when the police pull them over, they say things like, "What you want"? They are looking foolish and their hair is looking foolish. Their pants are hanging down below their waist. So, they are shooting them. Look at the media, you do not see many of us with shirts and ties that are doing the job that I am doing, getting killed. All those that are getting harassed are being stereotyped. They look the same. They are on the corner selling DVDs. They are selling cigarettes. They are pulling them over. Think about it. They all look the same. Some have guns on them. Some do not. But it is just a legal way to lynch. Being Black in America right now...A Black male...You are just trying to survive. Right now being a Black male in America is not as easy as we make it seem. A lot of time we cannot give into stereotypes because we all know stereotypes exists. But you just cannot give into it. But most of all, we need to talk about this with our youth in the classroom. I, strongly, believe in sharing my personal hardships with my students because I think it makes me more relatable.

*Latoya*      **5b). During your development of identity, what avenues did you take to nurture your sense of masculinity? And why?**

Harper      I had uncles that helped me. My dad was around until I was sixteen when he died. But he spent most of his time work. So it was like only having my

other. I had uncles and grandparents. So I knew in watching them. They went to work, came home, and took care of family. They didn't worry about how they were being stereotyped, they just took care of family. So that helped shaped me as a man and I will pass that on to my little man. It is all about how you were raised.

**Latoya**

***5c). Which individuals, outside of the education arena (i.e., parents, community leaders, religious figures, peers), contributed most in the development of your identity as a Black man? And how did their influence assist you in your navigation through society and the educational system?***

**Harper**

My mother. Hands down my mother. I came from a praying family. So, my family structure was extremely strong. In my opinion, that is what is wrong with a lot of Black men today: The family is not strong. When I grew up most people had to work long hours to provide for their families. I remember being about five. I would only see my parents on the weekends for the most part. My sister and I would stay at a neighbor's house at night because my parents had to be at work before we got up for school and they would return right before dark. Therefore, Black families would plant gardens, raise animals, and look after one another's children. Farming was big in my city. However, most of the women in my neighborhood were teachers that taught at the all-Black school before desegregation. So they, along with my parents, kept me and my sister in line and focused on our education. Back then, it really took a village to raise a child. But if I could say three things that assisted me the most in my navigation through life it would be: My mother, my religion, and my strong connection with my extended family and community.

APPENDIX G  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD LETTER

Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs		
<b>Institutional Review Board (IRB)</b>		
Phone: 912-478-5465		Veazey Hall 3000
Fax: 912-478-0719	IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu	PO Box 8005 Statesboro, GA 30460

**To:** Jenkins, Latoya  
Liston, Delores

**From:** Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs  
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees  
(IACUC/IBC/IRB)

**Initial Approval Date:** 7/14/2016

**Expiration Date:** 6/30/2017

**Subject:** Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research –  
**Expedited**

After a review of your proposed research project numbered **H16444** and titled **"The Muzzled Hope: Utilizing Black Protest Thought to Examine African American Males' Identity Formations and Academic Success in the Rural, U.S. South"** it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable. You are authorized to enroll up to a maximum of 3 subjects.

*Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research. Description: This study examines identity formation and academic success of three, African American males. The study asks the question: How do African American males experience educational success despite issues associated with race and racism?*

If at the end of this approval period there have been no changes to the research protocol; you may request an extension of the approval period. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, **whether or not it is believed to be related to the study**, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator **prior** to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a *Research Study Termination* form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,

  
Eleanor Haynes  
Compliance Officer