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Paradigm Shift in African American Funeral Customs: Looking through the Lens of Oral History and Consumer Culture

Carol Thomas Williams

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PARADIGM SHIFT IN AFRICAN AMERICAN FUNERAL CUSTOMS: LOOKING
THROUGH THE LENS OF ORAL HISTORY AND CONSUMER CULTURE

by

CAROL THOMAS WILLIAMS

(Under the Direction of John Weaver)

ABSTRACT

This study explored the shift of attitudes and behaviors in African Americans' funeral customs and rituals. The study is a storytelling of a plotline woven around six elements. Those elements are religion, vestiges of African American funeral service funeral programs, visitations and wakes, burial societies vs. pre-need insurance, and cremation. Through the lens of oral history and consumer culture, this research investigated the impact of these competing forms on African American funeral service. This qualitative inquiry provided a narrative exploration of the historical aspects of African American rituals and funeral customs.

The narratives of eight participants in this study searched for influences that contributed to the transformational changes in those customs and rituals for the last fifty years. The stories that were told will become historical data for the funeral industry. African American funeral service must continue to care for the dead and serve the living in a way that enhances the dignity of humankind. It must meet the needs of the deceased and those who mourn. It is the responsibility of African American funeral directors to provide a funeral for the deceased that is appropriate to the culture of his or her community.

The participants in this narrative told their stories that would identify them as a culture. However, it is often difficult to identify a culture within a community. African American funeral culture is diverse within itself. When examining the narratives of this study, the findings will suggest that in spite of the cultural changes in African American funeral traditions, this study will portray a culture with essence.

This study constructed a timeline and graphs of the history of African American funeral service. Within this timeline, data is presented representing the paradigm shift in African American rituals and customs. The narratives and timeline of data should be shared with others who will begin a study on African American funeral service. This qualitative inquiry will contribute to other studies.

INDEX WORDS: African American funeral customs, Consumer culture, Funeral rituals and practices, Funerals and religion, Cultural studies, Homogenization

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THROUGH THE LENS OF ORAL HISTORY AND CONSUMER CULTURE

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CAROL THOMAS WILLIAMS

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DEDICATION

This document is dedicated to Anna Ridgell Hendrix, deceased, my maternal grandmother, who taught me to love and value education. She was the third oldest of 19 children and was only able to attend school one month out of the year. Her dream for her eleven children, and 30 grandchildren was that they each reach the highest level of educational attainment possible. Grandmamma, this is for you with love, respect and admiration.

This document is also dedicated to my grandchildren, Julia, Carlos, Emily, Janine, Arianna, and Ferrisho. Just as my grandmother taught me to value education, I too want you to reach the highest level of educational attainment possible. This is my oral history narrative to you. Continue to transcend it throughout generations. Nana loves you.

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To my family, thank you for allowing me to take this time to fulfill a promise that I made to Grandmamma as well as to myself. My husband (Carl), you have made many sacrifices for me to take this educational journey. Thank you for your patience and love. To the participants in this study, thank you. If it was not for your narratives, this study could not be completed. To my children, Carlos, Sr., Chante' (Ferrisho, Sr.) and Aaron thanks for sharing me throughout my educational career. To the staff of Carl M. Williams Funeral Directors, thank you for being there when I could not.

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CHAPTER 1

PRESENTING THE NARRATIVES

Let not the 12 million Negroes be ashamed of the fact that they are the grandchildren of slaves. There is no dishonor in being slaves. There is dishonor in being slave owners. But let us not think of honor or dishonor in connection with the past. Let us realize that the future is with those who would be truthful, pure and loving. For, as the old wise men have said, truth ever is, untruth never was. Love alone binds. And truth and love accrue only to the truly humble.

-MAHATMA GANDHI-

Introduction

Throughout the ages, the pattern of mortuary behavior in many cultures has been transformed despite the endurance of fundamental beliefs regarding death. In essence, “Funeral service is a tradition, but it is always in transition” (Professional Training Schools, 1994, p. 37). Recognizing that “oral history interviews are one of the most common interview formats in narrative inquiry” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 111), this study explored the transformation in African American funeral service as reflected in narratives. These narratives allowed me to look through the lens of oral history and consumer culture to gain insight into the factors that have led to a paradigm shift in African American funeral customs.

This inquiry explored the transformation of African American funeral service since slavery, focusing on the changes in rituals and customs that have occurred within

the past 50 years. These years were chosen as the focus on inquiry based on Strub and Frederick's (1989) observation that

the customs, usages and practices pertaining to death and the disposition of the body show marked development during recent years; in fact, the funeral today requires the considerations of details which were unknown and unthought of as late as fifty years ago. (p. 11)

Historically, very little has been written about the culture of funerals within African American communities. Rather, customs and mores have been passed down by word of mouth through the generations. Narratives are rich sources of the traditions of African American communities. Wright, Hughes, and Misiroglu (1996) explained, "Storytelling was one of the slave's most successful methods of maintaining their native language and remembering their customs" (p. 25). The authors elaborated:

The narratives related to burial customs and cemeteries most pointedly pay tribute to African American heritage. From stories of death are reflected stories of life. African Americans recall how they shed their identity during slavery; even in the postbellum years there remained uneasiness about oneself. The telling of tales, the belief in voodoo or hoodoo, the singing of spirituals: all were important ways of finding a comfort spot and assessing one's self-worth. (p. 31)

The author examined these narratives critically to determine how changing American culture transformed African American funeral customs. The author focused on six core elements to investigate the changes that caused this paradigm shift. One element is the program order of service. With narratives and data from funeral programs, the researcher explored any changing forms. The second element investigated vestiges of

African and/or African American culture (such as superstitions related to death) that are evident today in burial customs and traditions. A third element is the transition from a wake to visitations. This practice for African Americans is a ritual that usually takes place during the bereavement period before the funeral. “The old custom of watching over the body of a loved one from death until burial was not only a spiritual vigil but a practical one as well, since the “deceased” weren’t always dead” (Wright & Hughes, 2007, p. 423). Through narratives, I investigated if any changes occurred in this ritual of African American funeral customs. The fourth element is a growing assessment of pre-planning one’s funeral or the traditional burial insurance. Burial insurance and burial societies at one time was a way for African Americans to pay for their funeral expense.

Pre-planning one’s funeral allows a person to choose the service of their choice and than pay for it in advance. “Burial societies and lodges were important historically because they provided a major service to the community” (Wright & Hughes, 2007, p. 399). Within this element, the researcher through archeological data seeks to find the shift in the cost and method of payment for a funeral. The fifth element is the facility in which a funeral service takes place. This element examined if an attitude has shift in where African Americans hold their funeral services. Finally, the sixth element investigated the ideology of choosing cremation over traditional funerals and ground burials. “No study of the funeral customs and traditions of a society would be complete without the look at the change in cremation” (Professional Training Schools, Inc, 2002, p. 45).

This qualitative inquiry provided a narrative exploration of the historical aspects of African American rituals and funeral customs to identify the influences that

contributed to changes in those customs and rituals from slavery to the present time. This anticipated inquiry examined various components of funeral service through the archeology of African American culture as it relates to an understanding of what it means to be African American. This qualitative research examined how African American culture has been affected and scrutinized by humanity throughout history. There was an analysis of documents containing funeral programs, order of service and statements of funeral goods and services selected.

This qualitative inquiry explored the influence of religion on the traditions and rituals of African American funeral customs. The author investigated the similarities between African and African American ideas and traditions related to death that remain evident in current burial customs and traditions. The author determined how many of these vestiges survived and how those that remain were transformed through popular culture and influenced by consumer culture. This study examined the social ramifications of the transformation of customs and rituals within African American funeral service.

Statement of the Problem

Advertising for funeral service goods is becoming mainstream in the funeral industry. Funeral service manufacturers advertise their products on the Internet, on television, in newspapers, and in magazines. Funeral service goods and products can be purchased at any of these venues without professional sales assistance. Doody (1994) explained this development in *Reinventing Funeral Service*:

Just as the science of jet propulsion totally transformed the airline industry in the 60s and 70s, and the science of quartz crystals totally transformed the watch

industry in the 70s and 80s, the science of merchandising will totally transform the funeral industry in the 1990's and beyond. (p. 23)

By providing access to an enormous amount of knowledge and service, the funeral industry is encouraging consumers to mainstream their funeral rites and customs. Those new to American culture and rapid technological developments are confronted with many choices of funeral services and goods. These newcomers are encouraged or forced to abandon their own funereal traditions and rituals when continuously exposed to American consumerism. Williams (2007) further described these new consumers:

Who is the value driven consumer? He or she is the consumer created by the products, merchandising, marketing and branding prevalent in many of today's companies, such as Sony, Verizon, Wal-Mart, Harley-Davidson, and McDonalds. This is the consumer who has 500-plus channels on his or her satellite system, who gathers information from the Internet, carries cell phones and takes pictures all day long with digital cameras ... consumers who have to feel comfortable in knowing that the product or service they are about to purchase meets their particular needs.... Do you recognize this consumer? They walk through the doors of your funeral home regularly. (p.42)

This study investigated the means by which consumer culture created this new phenomenon. It delved specifically into how African Americans buy into a high-tech society that has its own set of rules for dealing with death. It explored why African Americans believe they must change or adjust their beliefs and behaviors to this new culture, and why, as Mamiya (2005) asserted,

In spite of the harsh realities of the American racial dilemma, the majority of African Americans have desired to be part of the American dream and to share more equally the fruits of their singular contributions to this land of opportunity. (p. 239)

In tandem with an exploration of the transformation of African American beliefs and culture, this study examined how the funeral industry has developed a consumer culture within its own culture. Doody (1994) argued that the “professional practice of funeral service is being transformed by new knowledge about model stock assortment planning, pricing, display, fixturing, merchandise presentation, lighting, and environmental design” (p. 108). Manufacturers establish trends by providing new funeral products and services, and advertising these products and services in a manner that reflects their ideology and culture. But whose culture is it? The author contends it is the culture that demands, controls, and maintains power.

All people are subject to trends, and African Americans are no exception. Lincoln and Mamiya (2005) maintained, “The majority of African Americans have desired to be part of the American dream and to share more equally the fruits of their singular contributions to this land of opportunity” (p. 239). African Americans want to be a part of the American dream that espouses that with hard work, all individuals can achieve their goals. African Americans have a history of hard work, but have been powerless to harvest the fruits of their labor, and continue to fight an uphill battle to achieve the American dream.

African Americans rituals and ceremonies have often changed to reflect mainstream culture. Funeral service is becoming homogenized within a society that

reflects many different traditions. This may be a result of services and products that are now customized to fit the needs of the individual rather than his or her culture. Through access to technology, consumers can obtain almost anything they need for funeral service: “The Internet provides consumers with an immediate source of information on funeral choices in the privacy of their homes ... consumers will see aspects of funeral service and products in ways only imaginable just yesterday” (Klicker, 2000, p. 33). Companies that serve the industry are beginning to use technology and advertising strategies based on popular culture to sell their products and services. Because the strategies of the new market continue to be dominated by the dominant culture, “some death historians worry that the American funeral could become less solemn if corporate culture and death culture ever become synonymous” (Wright, Hughes, & Misiroglu, 1996, p. 295).

Giroux (2003) confirmed, “Corporate culture becomes an all encompassing horizon for producing market identities, values and practices. The good life, in this discourse is constructed in terms of our identities as consumers” (p. 159). This new consumer culture makes it very difficult for society and the funeral industry to continue to provide traditional service. The dominant group has used technology to present its funeral traditions and rituals as the only acceptable traditions and rituals. Advertising and new media have given funeral service a completely new meaning and “the cultural effects of advertising are wide ranging. It facilitates, mediates and arbitrates society and culture” (Kenway & Bullen, 2003, p. 31).

Purpose of the Study

The funeral industry is becoming a big business in the United States. The companies that sell the most goods in the industry impact the culture of funeral service. Doody (1994) explained how the industry functions in his book, *Reinventing Funeral Service*:

Reinventing Funeral Service is not about merchandising's sake. It is not about making money for the sake of making money. And it's certainly not about how to get rich quick by taking advantage of the consumer. It is about generating the cash flow to provide the wherewithal to serve customers more creatively, employees more adequately and owners more advantageously. It is about generating higher profits in the long term because funeral home owners and managers have redefined their service and product offers to be more in tune with what the American public needs and wants. (p. 113)

The ideology of funeral service has transformed into a set of beliefs based on the dominant culture's power, mores, and traditions. Consumer culture as it manifests itself in popular culture provides avenues for the dominant culture to maintain power and to homogenize the industry. Joe Kincheloe (2002) elaborated,

Technocapitalism becomes increasingly multinational as technologies like satellite television and computers carry forms of mass consumer culture throughout the world.... Technocapitalism uses consumer goods, film, television, mass images, and computerized information to shape desires and consciousness through the world. (p. 94)

Companies that use consumer culture to sell their goods and services have gained control of the funeral industry. The media now educates the public in all facets of life—and death. Wolfelt (2003) maintained,

The media teaches us to value consumerism, as if we can somehow buy our happiness. Many children would rather watch TV than go for a walk in the woods. Some children and adults have been coerced by the media into believing they should meet every want, buy every product, and do it now. As the Nike commercial says, “Just Do It!” (p. 11)

The media promotes the idea that all can become and do anything their hearts desire. It brainwashes the public into believing that the ideal person is one who is able to buy the products and act in the manner way valued by popular culture.

In the past, the United States was called the melting pot. The author posits that it is now more analogous to a large garden salad in which each ingredient adds something unique to the flavor and enjoyment of the salad. Because different cultures are infused into the American way of life, funeral directors, as well as funeral service educators, should have an understanding of funeral traditions within those cultures. The notion of a dominant culture negates the garden salad metaphor. Kiernan (2004) agreed with the author when he stated, “As more cultures are melding in the American melting pot, funeral directors need to have a sense of the traditions important in these cultures” (p. 24). This inquiry critically examined how consumer culture manifests itself through popular culture to promote the ideology of a dominant culture. This study seeks to determine if funeral service is becoming homogenized through the influence of consumer culture.

Capitalism's control by the few destroys individualism and promotes *homogenization*, the transformation of many cultures into one dominant culture. It is not unusual for individuals who want to maintain current trends to form a new, homogenized culture. Kincheloe (2002) explained,

In an era when advertising and information production work to break down traditional beliefs systems, public expressions of scientific rationality and the grand narratives (such as religious traditions) by which people shape their lives, social analysts must develop a variety of interpretive schemes. (p. 179)

African Americans who want to live the American dream are abandoning traditions that have been passed down through the generations. History shows that African Americans believe that success comes when they become active participants in a homogenized society. hooks (2003) suggested, "The embrace of bourgeois and upper-class values by all black folks who allowed their worldview to be shaped by the class politics of television meant that a high value began to be placed on conformity of thought and action" (p. 102).

African American rituals and ceremonies have undergone paradigm shifts in order to become part of this new culture. Many African Americans have become oblivious to the significance and value of traditional funeral rituals. Alan Wolfelt (2003) concluded,

Our culture of immediate gratification, self-absorption, and deceit has confused us about what is right and wrong and good and bad. Many people don't have road maps for what family life should be like, let alone what a meaningful funeral should be like. (p. 11)

Homogenization is consistent with the enculturation process imposed on slaves as they became a part of plantation life. Funeral rituals and ceremonies are not the only aspects of African culture that have been diluted or homogenized by its American descendents. The purpose of this study was to scrutinize the paradigm shift in African American funeral service to determine whether this service is becoming homogenized within a society that should represent diverse populations.

African Americans are facing an enemy within. Because of the legacy of slavery, many find themselves living a double life (DuBois, 1906). Trying to keep up with the fast-paced pursuit of the American dream, African Americans often find themselves living in two worlds, maintaining both a public and private life. The public life is not who they are but simply part of a mask they wear because society has taught them to be ashamed of their authentic selves. They keep secrets about who they really are, much like the protagonist in Greenlee's (1969) novel "*The Spook Who Sat by the Door.*" They hide their true selves in order to belong and assimilate for the sake of survival. They hold their cultural values within because they regard those cultural values as enemies. DuBois (1903) supported this notion in *The Souls of Black Folk*:

From the double life every American Negro must live, as a Negro and as an American, as swept on by the current of the nineteenth while yet struggling in the eddies of the fifteenth century, from this must arise a painful self-consciousness, an almost morbid sense of personality and moral hesitancy which is fatal to self-confidence. The worlds within and without the Veil of Color are changing, changing rapidly, but not at the same rate, not in the same way; and this must produce a peculiar wrenching of the soul, a peculiar sense of doubt and

bewilderment. Such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double ideals, tempt the mind to pretence or to revolt, to hypocrisy or to radicalism. In some such doubtful words and phrases can one perhaps most clearly picture the peculiar ethical paradox that faces the Negro of today and is tingeing and changing his religious life. (p.143)

In 2008, African Americans continue to struggle with the quandary of identity and the history and the classification of the self. They often deny who they are to avoid thinking of a painful past. They reject the varied cultures of Africa. Indoctrination into the dominant culture has forced African Americans to wear the faces of the “other” instead of their own. DuBois (1970) explained,

Not only do white men but also colored men forget the facts of the Negro’s double environment. The Negro American has for his environment not only the white surrounding world, but also, and touching him usually much more nearly and compelling, is the environment furnished by his own colored group. (p. 176)

African Americans live in two worlds, within two cultures, but society makes them choose one. Just like much of their culture, African American funeral service has undergone a homogenization process. African Americans have to live within as well as outside of themselves. They choose the other because success only comes to the other.

Doody (1994) argued that, “There is a need to abandon the dichotomy of viewing funerals as ‘traditional services’.... In the future, there will be the need for many different types of service, including a large number of customized or individualized services” (p. 116). However, strictly traditional funerals no longer exist, and an infinite number of traditions in funeral service are changing every day. Doody elaborated,

The same knowledge, experience and information that is causing the consumer to demand quality automotive service—in an almost infinite number of variations—is going to cause the consumer to demand more complete and more imaginative funeral service—in an almost infinite number of variations. (p. 110)

Consumer culture reflects only limited facets of African American history. Its messages do not teach African Americans to think positively about their identity; rather, “their conception is that you go to school to find out what other people have done, and then you go out in life to imitate them” (Woodson, 2000, p. 138). This practice of imitation supports and sustains the requirement to live a double life. Woodson asserted that a large segment of African Americans have fixated on the history and status of other races. Knowledge surrounding the background and history of African people is considered unimportant. African American culture has never been valued in history because it holds little relationship to the American dream. The enculturation indoctrination has impacted African American culture in such a way that it is difficult to choose ancestry protocols in any given situation.

African Americans buy into this high-tech society with its own set of rules for dealing with death. To fit in, they must change or adjust to this new culture. They change their rituals and ceremonies to be part of this new culture. Companies that serve the industry are beginning to use consumer culture strategies to sell their goods and services. The strategies of the new market continue to be saturated by the dominant culture, which is embracing the information age to present its funeral culture as America’s only funeral culture. Continuous media coverage is giving funeral service a whole new look, perspective, and feel. Kammeyer, Ritzer, and Yetman (1994) explained,

The media of mass communications, especially television, movies, and radio, but also magazine and newspaper, convey thousands of visual, aural, and verbal messages each day. These messages are embedded in ... commercial advertising. In myriad ways these messages are defining social life for people of all ages; from childhood to old age, the media of communication are continuing the process of socialization. (p. 137)

Maintaining one's heritage is vital to one's being, enhances the identity of the self, and promotes positive images of a people. hooks (2003) affirmed, "When contemporary black people abandon the positive ancestral legacy wherein the cultivation of spiritual practice was a necessary component of self-development, they were and are deprived of a primary foundation for the construction of healthy self-esteem" (pp. 111–112). History tells us that when ancestors maintained a culture, a healthy self-esteem prevails.

Levine (1977) contended,

Upon the hard rock of racial, social, and economic exploitation and injustice black Americans forged and nurtured a culture: they formed and maintained kinship networks, made love, raised and socialized children, built a religion, and created a rich expressive culture in which they articulated their feelings and hope and dreams. (p. xi)

Developing and maintaining varied rituals for funeral service were part of that culture.

When major aspects of a culture remain in place, the recipients of that culture can examine their past, study their present, and plan for their future.

There is a need for African Americans to maintain their heritage and transfer their cultural values to their children and grandchildren. Knowledge of their past, present, and

future gives them identities as individuals. Weaver, Anijar, and Daspit (2004) agreed, “We can actively author the world which remembers the past and make the resources and potentials available to the present [and] in the process create new potential for the future” (p. 3). By examining the history of African American funeral traditions, students today can be educated to serve future generations.

Professional Training Schools (1994) defined culture as a system of abstract patterns of and for both living and dying which are learned directly or indirectly. A culture is a unique and distinctive way of life—a most complete pattern for the individual within that particular culture. It regulates his arts, laws, theories, beliefs, knowledge, morals and all basic patterns of living. (p. 5)

Kammeyer, Ritzer, and Yetman (1994) maintained, “Culture is the entire complex of ideas and material objects that the people of a society (or group) have created and adopted for carrying out the necessary tasks of collective life” (p. 61). These definitions imply that the loss of a culture is the loss of identity. If this is true, what happens to a culture that is steadily losing its identity because of the influence of consumer culture? What happens to a people’s basic beliefs, morals, values, and patterns of living?

Research Goals and Questions

The reasons for the African American funeral service and its survival into the 21st century are to care for the dead and serve the living in a way that enhances the dignity of humankind. It must meet the needs of mourner before, during, and after the time of death. Germino and Pittman (1994) explained,

Death and dying have held a fascination for human beings. Across historical time, this fascination has been manifest in song, poetry, drama, literature, sculpture, and dance. Life and death are the foundational themes of origin stories across cultures; the meanings attributed to them provide the basic belief systems of religious and societal traditions. Over the centuries, human groups have used a variety of social rituals and ceremonies to give meaning to their individual and collective experiences with loss, illness, dying, and death. (p. 3)

The goal of this study was to explore the impact of consumer culture on the changing rituals and customs of the African American funeral service. This inquiry seeks to determine to what extent consumer culture has contributed to the changing forms of the African American funeral service through examination of historical narratives.

Kenway and Bullen (2001) asserted,

Advertising, the media and other meaning-making (semiotic) practices are central to consumer culture. To put it simple, they remake the meaning of goods in order to sell them. The print media, then radio and TV and, more recently, the new ICTs [information and communication technologies] associated with computer networks have dramatically expanded the reach and power of the commodity form. (p. 9)

Consumer culture promotes a prototype of the ideal life. African Americans have been taught that the ideal life is different from that which their ancestors had to endure throughout the generations after the abolition of slavery. Disassociating oneself from the hard life of slavery is a step towards the American dream. The goal of this study was to identify positive as well as negative feedback on the cultural changes in African

American communities and the impact of these cultural changes in relation to funeral service.

As an educator within the funeral industry, the author has the responsibility to teach the varied customs and mores that students will encounter as they return to their communities to work. Funeral customs have changed a great deal within the last 50 years. Professional Training Schools (1994) confirmed the changes within the funeral industry:

In the past fifty years, the American society has been and continues to see rapid changes in our culture. These changes, needless to say, have a direct effect in funeral service practices and customs. There are many influencing factors that have contributed to the development of modern funeral service practices we have today. (p. 33)

Despite these changes, funeral-service school curricula have remained the same. Funeral service schools must critically examine these changes and design curricula that reflect them. I do not believe that the varied curricula of funeral service schools are meeting the needs of diverse populations. Her appointment on the American Board of Funeral Service provides her with an opportunity to begin the ideological shift necessary to develop a diverse curriculum. The funeral-service school curriculum needs reconceptualization; it is imperative to design a curriculum that is culturally relevant for all students that attend funeral service schools. It is crucial for students to learn and appreciate the diversity of the communities that they will return to serve. As a society, we can no longer accept the ideology that the dominant group's customs and mores of funeral service are valid for all Americans. Immigrants bring with them their own funeral customs and traditions. Is it fair to homogenize funeral service for these newcomers?

The overarching goal of this research endeavor was to examine the driving forces that promote the influence of consumer culture on African American funeral customs.

With this goal, the study addressed the following four research questions:

1. What are the driving forces that contribute to the paradigm shift in African American funeral service?
2. Has America developed its own unique funeral rituals and customs through consumer culture?
3. What influence has consumer culture had on the paradigm shift in African American funeral customs?
4. What are the social ramifications for African Americans if funeral service has become homogenized?

Definition of Terms and Concepts

The following terms were used throughout the study:

African Americans. Citizens of African heritage born in the United States.

Consumer culture. A culture that is saturated by “the availability of an extensive range of commodities, goods and experiences which are to be consumed, maintained, planned and dreamt about by the general populations” (Kenway & Bullen, 2003, p. 9).

Culture. A common, learned, representative system of values, beliefs, and attitudes that shapes and persuades awareness and behavior.

Death-care educator. An educator who teaches funeral service ideology.

Death-free society. A society in which family members no longer die at home but rather in hospitals, nursing homes, and hospice facilities. Because American society is a death-free society, few observe the process of death and dying.

Dominant group. The culture that maintains control through various means.

Folktale. A story or legend transmitted orally. It is a form of traditional narrative.

Funeral customs. Social behaviors practiced used by a culture to remember its dead.

Funeral beliefs and attitudes support traditions.

Homogenization. The mixing of varied cultures through cultural diffusion to form one culture.

National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA). An organization founded by White Americans to support the educational needs of White funeral directors and embalmers.

National Funeral Directors and Morticians Association (NFD&MA). An organization founded by African Americans to support the educational needs of African American funeral directors and embalmers.

Paradigm shift. A transformation from one way of thinking to another driven by a negotiator of change. This study will analyze the transformation in African American funeral service that has been driven by the negotiator of popular culture.

Popular culture. The result of the products of human work and thought that express specific individual and cultural beliefs and values, provide pleasure and enjoyment, and are accepted and approved by individuals or groups. It embodies popular objects or icons; heroes and heroines; and the rituals, myths, and beliefs surrounding them (Nelson, 1998).

Traditional funerals. Traditional funerals consist of a wake or visitation period that lasts from one to three days followed by a church service and burial in a cemetery. Today, few traditional funerals are conducted. Many are choosing funeral services that are reflective of the individual and fit the lifestyle of the family (Rodman Funeral Services, 1995).

Researcher's Perspective

I am an African American woman, educator, and funeral service educator, director, and embalmer. I am continuously involved with diverse groups of people on different levels. As such, I am constantly engaged in qualitative research. As a funeral service provider, I am under constant pressure to provide answers and solutions to the problems of death and dying. I must provide rationality, objectivity, and truth to situations that have none of these qualities.

As a qualitative researcher and funeral service provider, my daily activities are fluid and situational. Funeral directors and educators constantly hear the narratives of lived experiences, which Michael Connelly (personal communication, April 14, 2005) described as “detailed intimate telling[s] of experiences.” I am concerned with the opinions, experiences, and feelings of individuals and families. I can provide an experienced account of human experience.

I have been an educator and helping professional all my adult life. As an educator, I have contributed to the knowledge base of persons from the age of six months to 18 years of age. I have directed childcare facilities; taught children in elementary, middle, and high school; and taught adults at Gupton-Jones College of Funeral Services. My involvement in the funeral service industry is simply an additional avenue I have traveled as an educator. All my personal and professional growth has resulted from my direct contact with individuals and families. These experiences have provided me with the skills to collect qualitative data from personal interactions. I conducted this research according to Wright's (2004) model, as he elaborated it in the following passage:

I have a political decision to write in the first person and to insert personal anecdotes where appropriate in my own work because the project undertaken here is one which came to me in large part from my own experience as a student and later as an instructor in the classroom, as a participant at conferences, and as a means of undertaking an exercise that reflected my own (multiple) political concerns and position. (p. 18)

As a researcher and funeral educator, I have a vested interest in investigating the influences that are fostering cultural transformation in funeral service.

Until recently, funeral service was a male-dominated field. Currently, a growing number of women are finding their way into the funeral service field. Five years ago, I was appointed to serve on the American Board of Funeral Service Education. This was the first time since its inception that an African American was elected to serve on this board. Although I am the first African American, I am not the first woman to serve on the board.

The American Board of Funeral Service Education was established in 1946 as a joint committee on funeral service education with the International Conference of Funeral Service Examining Boards. The joint committee was composed of three representatives appointed by the National Funeral Directors Association (a White Association), three representatives appointed by the International Conference, and three representatives of schools and colleges. The main purposes of the American Board of Funeral Service Education are to set standards for funeral service schools, enforce rules and regulations, and develop curricula for schools and colleges teaching mortuary science. In 2002, the

National Funeral Directors and Mortician Association (a Black Association) finally received an invitation to join this Board.

Since my appointment to the American Board of Funeral Service Education, I have traveled throughout the country. In my travels, I have observed comprehensive changes in the traditions and culture of funeral service that vary from state to state. After talking with a diverse group of funeral directors over the last five years, I recognize the need for the development of a contemporary curriculum for mortuary students. My experiences with diverse student populations as a teacher at the Gupton-Jones College of Funeral Services solidify this view. Although my colleagues and I agreed upon several things, we most strongly agreed that funeral service has gone through an immeasurable transformation during the past half century yet funeral service school curricula have remained basically the same.

My research could not be conducted without looking at race as a factor because funeral service curricula continue to reflect the dominant culture's ideology. Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman (2000) argued,

In the United States the grouping of individuals into blacks and whites has been and continues to be central in shaping American society and the curriculum as well. It is impossible to understand curriculum without understanding the centrality of race in the construction of the American identity. (p. 317)

Funeral service education will remain static as long as educators ignore the diversity of the American population. With reference to the garden salad metaphor, educators represent chefs making a delectable garden salad. They must appreciate all the ingredients that go into that salad. Every ingredient contributes to the enjoyment of the

whole and nourishment of the entire salad. Just like a garden salad, all cultures should come together to make the American dream a reality for everyone.

What is the underlying principle behind this transformation in funeral service? What is the impact of this transformation on African American communities? What is the connection between consumer culture and modification of the traditional African American funeral customs? To find the answers to these questions, I used my skills as a funeral director, educator, and communicator to collect, analyze, and reach conclusions from the narratives in this research endeavor.

Outline of Chapters

This study consists of five chapters: an introduction, a review of related literature, a clarification of the methodology, an anthology and explanation of interviews that were conducted, and an analysis and interpretation of the research findings. Chapter One discusses the topic, research questions and goals, and significance of the study in a brief introduction and overview. Chapter One also discusses the limitations of the study. The limitations relate to its weaknesses and the scope and boundaries of the study.

Chapter Two provides theoretical and historical perspectives of the varied cultures associated with the paradigm shift in African American culture in the United States. A literature review provides background and support to this information. The literature review is based on critical narrative cultural studies that incorporate oral history, African American experiences in the United States, consumer culture, religion, funeral service culture, and African American funeral service culture. Chapter Three establishes the theoretical framework and method of inquiry for this qualitative study. This chapter presents the qualitative design of the researcher's methodology and discusses the

participants and the role of the researcher as a participant. Data collection methods, management, analysis, and verification of analysis are also included in this chapter.

Chapter Four provided detailed descriptions of the data collected from interviews, personal perspective, funeral programs and statements of funeral services and goods. Using narratives, participants will give their stories and the researcher will gather, analyze, and interpret them. This chapter identifies archeological data that supports this narrative research. Chapter Five discussed explanations, interpretations, domino effects, conclusions, and recommendations derived from the findings of this qualitative research. This chapter also discusses the social ramifications if the findings do indeed show a paradigm shift in African American funeral customs and evidence that a dominant culture, through consumer culture, has influenced the way African Americans memorialize their deceased.

Limitations

As an African American funeral-home owner, I have a vested interest in the outcome of this study. The experiences of the participants are also my experiences. As a participant and researcher, I benefited formally and informally. As an educator, the information gained from this research is a significant teaching resource for me. I carefully chose the participants; all were able to understand the relationship among religious beliefs, spirituality, and the varied vestiges of funeral service among African Americans. I had a large cadre of experts to tap for this research within the city of Atlanta. The boundary of this research is within the metropolitan area of Atlanta. The interviews were conducted in 2008.

Research was limited to the cultures of African Americans. I chose African American culture as the focus of research because she is an African American funeral home owner. Within the last 12 years, I have witnessed the changing rituals and customs of funeral service. Because only eight participants will be interviewed due to time constraints, the possibilities of finding diverse cultures within a culture will be limited. This study will be conducted within the confines of the city of Atlanta, a transit city consisting of citizens from around the world. Because American society is a death-free society, the participants must have some prior experience with the funeral service industry and knowledge of consumer culture.

Significance

I looked through the lens of oral history and consumer culture to assess their impact on the traditions of African American funeral rites. The readers of the narratives will be able to follow the transformation of African American funeral service from slavery to the present to forecast its transition in the future. The significance of the study lies in its ability to show that the effects of consumer culture and capitalism on even sacred traditions within American society. It will provide support to Holloway's (2002) assertion that

In the United States, the driving force of capitalism within the burial business imposed surprisingly similar structures on what were in effect discrete church traditions. The similarities between American death-ways are notable in a country of various ethnicities and cultures. What one discovers as homogeneity among these practices is the direct result of the influence of the funeral industry and the rituals that it influences, which confer social solidarity. (p. 151)

Capitalism is the fundamental source of the homogenization of funeral service in the United States. Capitalism works against multiculturalism, which promotes the identity of various cultures. Capitalism encumbers the promotion and enrichment of various cultures within a society. Giroux (2003) affirmed Holloway's assertion:

The cultural politics of capitalist globalization is not only evidence in the presence of media conglomerates such as AOL-Time Warner, Viacom, and Disney, but also in the massive advertising campaigns organized internationally by corporations such as Nike, McDonald's, and Reebok. Commercial culture, coupled with popular culture, has become the new transnational force used by global capitalism to both capture and open up markets, as well as to redefine the very nature of identity, needs, desire, and democracy itself. (p. 56)

This study surveyed the business practices within funeral service to determine whether these practices promote cultural homogenization within the industry.

Capitalism and consumer culture have a significant impact on African Americans and their culture. Because they live double lives, African Americans are always searching for something that is not their own. They value other cultures because society has taught them to give little value to their own. Society has taught them that assuming any culture other than African American culture will lead to progress. West (2001) explained,

The civil rights movements permitted significant numbers of black Americans to benefit from the American economic boom—to get a small, yet juicy piece of the expanding American pie. And for most of those who had the education, skills, and ingenuity to get a piece, mass culture (TV, radio, films) dictated what they should do with it—gain peace of mind and pleasure of body from what they could buy.

Like any American group achieving contemporary middle-class station for the first time, black entrée into the culture of consumption made status an obsession and addiction to stimulation to a way of life. (p. 55)

I assert that consumer culture has been a greater influence on African American funeral service than any other factor. My personal experience with consumer culture has led her to conclude that it has the greatest impact on cultural changes within every society, and the funeral industry is no exception. I conducted this research to confirm or disprove my belief.

As a death care educator and funeral director, I recognize the need for people of all ages and cultures to express their death beliefs. I am proud of the fact that I can provide the essentials of a meaningful funeral. Meaningful funerals connect individuals with their past, with those they love, and with the ideology of returning to God or a higher power. Rituals are important for celebrating a new life and making the transition into the next world. Traditional funeral rituals can provide meaningful closure to family members and friends. When a loved one dies, it is important to provide a meaningful ceremony that reflects the culture of the person that has moved beyond the physical realm to the spiritual realm of existence.

The study of religion is vital to this research effort. Religion is the foundation of African American funeral customs and rituals. DuBois (1903) maintained, “The Negro church of today is the social centre of Negro life in the United States, and the most characteristic expression of African character” (p. 137). The exclusion of religion and spirituality in any discussion of African American funeral customs would be difficult if not impossible. Eklof (1997) confirmed,

Most Pan-Africans find solace in their belief in the ancestral spirit world; they believe that death finalizes the human body and the spiritual souls live on in the ancestral kingdom of the Almighty.... Embracing their ideology of such spiritual powers most black people of Africa “worship” their ancestors and communicate with them through prayers, animal sacrifices, atonements, elaborate ceremonies, and rituals like libations. (p. 316)

Societal beliefs determine the culture of funeral rites and customs. Rites of passage are specific to individual cultures. Every aspect of the funeral service industry supports the notion that there is a religious and spiritual connection in the expression of funeral traditions and customs.

Williams and Dixie (2003) stated, “African religious philosophy clearly manifested itself in the Americas through three major systems of belief: Voodoo, Santeria and Candomble” (p. 17). The three systems created variations in funeral service among African Americans that endure today. The church and religion played a significant role in the life of African Americans before slavery ended. After slavery, the church became a source of positive and wholesome self-esteem among the people of African descent. During the Civil Rights movement, the church served as the social hub for decision making and soul searching. Indeed, “the Civil Rights movement was bringing the political struggle for equal rights from the streets to the church” (Williams & Dixie, 2003, p. 197) so that “Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights leaders also engaged faith to transform black identity. The damage done by slavery and segregation twisted the self-image of many black people” (p. 8). It was the church and the faith of its people that carried them through very difficult times.

Benefits of this study to the participants include an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the status of the funeral services industry in the African American community and to contribute to the telling of the story of their participation in the evolution of that industry. This opportunity includes relating how many of the rituals and customs that are prevalent in today's ceremonies were passed down from African and slave traditions. This research is significant because participants will also have a better understanding of cultural changes in funeral service. Participants will begin to understand the importance of maintaining funeral customs that are passed down through generations.

Benefits of this study to society include an understanding of how the transformation of African American beliefs and culture impact how the funeral industry has developed a consumer culture within its own culture. All people are subject to trends, and African Americans are no exception. African American rituals and ceremonies have often changed to reflect mainstream culture. Funeral service is becoming homogenized within a society that reflects many different traditions. This new consumer culture makes it very difficult for society and the funeral industry to continue to provide traditional service. This study will contribute the body of literature that looks at the ever changing funeral service industry.

It is the intent of this inquiry to investigate the influences that led to a paradigm shift in African American funeral customs. The research participants will share narratives that provide knowledge on the history of African American funeral customs. Their narratives will help determine which factors were most influential in the transformation of African American funeral service over the past 50 years.

Summary

Many African American rituals are disappearing due to the influence of consumerism. In spite of the influence of the dominant culture ideology, several traditions in funeral service remain. The call-and-response practice often heard in churches today between ministers and parishioners can be traced back to tribal customs in Africa. This call-and-response is done in some African American funeral services today. Merlin (1999) described,

The slaves' beliefs and superstitions which were brought from Africa are thus a very relevant piece of folklore; they are clear testimony of the Africans' collective experience in America.... This general belief in spirits expressed itself mainly in the importance the slaves accorded to the observance of funeral rites. (p. 31)

African American traditional funerals have always followed certain guidelines based on the religion or belief of the individual. However, more families are now creating different new funeral customs and traditions. Such traditions as remembering the welfare of the soul are often omitted when making arrangements for the deceased. Even though the remnants of some of the old African American funeral traditions remain, many have become homogenized. The problem with this homogenization is that it does not reflect African Americas' diversity and the traditions and rituals that identify them as a culture.

There have been many obstacles to sustaining the African American traditions in funeral customs that have been passed down through generations. The perception of taboos, superstitions, and myths within African American funerals rites has created a negative stigma. African Americans desiring to pursue the American dream are abandoning certain customs and rituals and will continue to do so until they transform

their perception of their kinship experiences. They must construct a lens through which they can see their African American family differently. They must overcome “the marks left on the psyche by the whip of slavery and the twin scourges of prejudice and poverty that continue to haunt our [their] families” (Robothan, 2003, p. xxii).

African Americans live with two selves, and, as DuBois (2003) wrote, “African Americans continue to struggle with identity.” They are living in a society shaped by the legacy of slavery that has affected them politically, socially, and culturally. Defining one’s culture identifies the customs and mores that will guide one’s funeral rites. Defining one’s culture will identify superstitions, myths, and taboos. Folklores, narratives, and traditions depend on strong family ties to continue to be handed down through the generations. Respect for the diversity of cultures has enhanced the African American transition from slavery into mainstream society. Of the many factors that have contributed to the paradigm shift in African American funeral service, consumer culture may have the greatest influence.

CHAPTER 2

OUTLINING THE NARRATIVES

*The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,
this longing to attain self-conscious manhood,
to merge his double self into a better and truer self.*

In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost.

He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa.

*He will not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of White Americanism,
for he knows that Negro blood has a message to the World.*

*He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American,
without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows,
without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face.*

-W. E. B. DUBOIS-

Theoretical Perspective

The theory of bell hooks, W. E. B. DuBois, and Cornel West, three critical African American theorists, provided the foundation for this study. This critical inquiry revealed the implications of a paradigm shift for committed action. Sirotnik (1991) asserted, "Participants in a critical inquiry must come to recognize that a problem exists and come to share a common perception of the problem" (p. 250). This study looked critically at African American funeral service to investigate which influences are the driving forces behind its transformation.

Critical narrative inquiry seeks to find answers through storied experiences. Narratives tell real stories of rituals and ceremonies of funeral service within African

American communities. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stated that as researchers, “we come to each new inquiry field living our stories” (p. 63). As an active participant, I looked for the influences on the changing forms of African American funeral customs. I used narrative, which “allows me [her] to bring my personal experience to bear on research, to embed research in participants’ daily lives to respect participants’ voices” (He, 2003, p. 19).

In this inquiry, participants will “tell remembered stories from earlier times as well as move current stories. All stories offer possible plotlines for our future” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 60). The narratives in this research provided plotlines for the future of African American mourning stories. Narratives preserved for the future will help keep customs and rituals of African American funeral customs active. Critical narrative is the bridge to connect a historical perspective with the participant’s perspective on the changing forms of African American funeral service.

Historical Perspective

Only limited literature is available on African American funeral service customs and the influence of consumer culture. This study will begin to fill the gaps in the literature. This literature review discusses the changing African American funeral culture by evaluating African American cultural studies that have been conducted previously. By examining historical narratives, it was my goal to identify the multiplicity of changes since slavery, including those changes that may not surface for decades.

hooks (2003) confirmed the importance of using a historical perspective when she stated, “When contemporary black people abandon the positive ancestral legacy wherein the cultivation of spiritual practice was a necessary component of self-development, they

were and are deprived of a primary foundation for the construction of healthy self-esteem” (pp. 111–112). The tradition of the home-going service is used to help characterize the funerals and memorializing of loved ones. This tradition was orally passed on from slavery to the present generation.

The tradition of what we call the “Home-Going” funeral service within the African American communities is used to help characterize funerals and the memorializing of loved ones. With the traditional “Home-Going” funeral service, African Americans participated in superstitious rituals that were narrative passed down through generations. Bishop Lymon Dlangalala (2005) sustains:

Looking back in time, African people always believed that life continued beyond death. Those who died were said to come back as spirits. Even if a person died away from home, a ritual was performed to ‘fetch their spirits’ and bring it closer to home. The living was therefore expected to show respect for the dead through burying them in dignity and observing the appropriate funeral and mourning practices (<http://www.diakonia.org.za/aids/funeral1.html>).

African Americans rituals upheld the belief that the deceased had gone home. Lives were not easy for slaves and now in 2007 African Americans continue to find life difficult.

Looking forward for a better life was embedded in the minds of most. The words, “Going-Home” were most appropriate because they never accepted the new world and dying was the only opportunity of going to a safe and better place. Stewart (1996) in his writing made a reference to the potential meaning of the words “Going Home” by saying:

African Americans who believed in a supreme God continued their West African burial practices well into the nineteenth century. Funeral rites involved a long period of

mourning and great feasting as Africans believed that upon dying one went “home”. Such view of death may have accounted for the frequency of attempted suicides on the journey to America” (p. 233). This is one analogy that can give some credence to the words “Going Home”. These worlds have been narrative transcended throughout generations within African American Funeral service.

Narratives have preserved linear ties from African to African American mourning stories and helped maintain African heritage. Davis (1991) elaborated,

Telling stories illuminates previously inadequate understanding. Stories also constitute reminders of what is known. They can never prove the correctness of this knowledge even though a dominant cultural empiricism tends to confer this power on them. Increased light, especially in long darkened space of experience, reveals that which has been obscured or hidden. Those stories require an investment in their hearers/readers. Understanding is the yield of the active engagement of mind with the narratives and their meanings. (p. 78)

Narrative folktales transformed and transcended African American culture throughout the generations. The varied aspects of African American funeral customs were the results of this transformation. Wright, Hughes, and Misiroglu (1996) emphasized, “There are many stories and folktales that have been carried down through the years. During the days of enslavement, the historical presence of Africa helped to insure the survival of families in the culture” (p.22).

Among African Americans, the concepts of religion and death are inseparable. Holloway (2002) explained, “Black culture’s stories of death and dying were inextricably linked to the ways in which the nation experienced, perceived, and represented African

Americans” (p. 32). Although all African Diaspora cultures contain beliefs about religion and death, beliefs about the soul’s destiny are quite diverse. Death and visits to the cemetery were common among slaves and ex-slaves. Holloway (2002) elaborated,

Instead of death and dying being unusual, untoward events, or despite being inevitable end-of-lifespan events, the cycles of our daily lives were so persistently interrupted by specters of death that we worked this experience into the culture’s iconography and included it as an aspect of black cultural sensibility. (p. 6)

African Americans rituals upheld the belief that the deceased had gone home. Life was not easy for slaves and continues to be difficult for their African American descendents. The idea of looking forward to a better life was embedded in the minds of most slaves. The words “going home” were the most appropriate to express the idea that dying was an avenue to a safe and better place.

I grew up in a small town in South Carolina. South Carolina is one of the southern states that have maintained the traditions and culture that are part of the African American ideology of death and dying to a great extent. Regardless of European influence, African Americans have been able to maintain part of their culture. Courlander (1996) affirmed, “Looking at the Western Hemisphere as a whole, it is abundantly evident that many tangible elements of African ways, customs, attitudes, values and views of life survived the Atlantic crossing” (p. 2). This study seeks to identify which of the rituals and customs that are prevalent in today’s ceremonies were passed down from Africa and slave traditions. It is imperative to investigate the vestiges that survived the voyage from slavery to the present and the impact of their transformation.

This inquiry was significant to me as an African American funeral director and death care educator. I have a need to understand cultural changes in funeral service and believe that others should have the same understanding. Students in funeral service schools should understand the importance of maintaining funeral customs that have been passed down through generations. African American history is a subject of denial and exclusion within the walls of America's educational institutions. The richness of African American heritage is either minimized or denied entirely. Pinar et al (2000) argued, "A democratic Afrocentrism would provide the African/African American democratic roots to promote democracy in the United States and throughout the world. Afrocentrism promotes educational and occupational excellence for all" (p. 352).

Students in funeral service schools come from various parts of the world, bringing with them their varied funeral customs and beliefs. The curricula should take advantage of the diversity in funeral service schools to enhance the interrelationships among students. In order for funeral service schools to serve their communities and constituencies successfully, students must be taught their customs and mores:" Education must be a multicultural education, by which one acquaints students with some fundamentals about the histories and cultures of many different groups" (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 68).

Critical Narrative

To study African American funeral service from a cultural perspective, it is imperative to take a critical narrative approach. Several researchers have reported on the importance of using narratives in critical analyses. In designing qualitative research, Marshall and Rossman (1999) maintained, "Life histories, biographies and

autobiographies; oral histories; and personal narratives are all forms of narrative analysis” (p. 5). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) asked, “What do narratives do?... With this sense of Dewey’s foundational place in our thinking about narrative inquiry, our terms are personal and social; past, present, and future; combined with the motion of place” (p. 50). This study on African American funeral cultures deals with the past, present, and future. It seeks to examine the past, define the present, and identify future implications for the changing forms of African American funeral culture.

hooks (1994) took a critical stance for using critical narrative when she asserted, To confront class in black life in the United States means that we must deconstruct the notion of an essential binding blackness and be able to examine critically ways in which the desire to be accepted into privileged-class groups within mainstream society undermines and destroys commitment to a politics of cultural transformation that consistently critiques domination. (pp. 147–148)

Pinar et al. (2000) agreed with hooks that “critical research tends to be identified with political discourse” (p. 57). The critical historical narratives presented in this study will identify the role of politics in the decision making of consumer funeral service and goods. It will determine the impact of politics when the discussion of funeral service is influenced by a dominant culture. Pinar et al. affirmed, “Research critically examines those aspects of the dominant social order” (p. 57).

Davis (1991) confirmed the utility of a critical narrative approach to inquiry. He upheld, Telling stories illuminate previously inadequate understanding. Stories also constitute reminders of what is known.... Stories of history are “thick.” They

enable the reader or hearer “to be there” with the narrator, to approximate the intimacy of witness to the actual events. (p. 78)

The many stories of African American funeral customs and rituals will enhance the author’s understanding of the paradigm shift in African American funeral service. She recognizes that “Storytelling was one of the slave’s most successful methods of maintaining their native language and remembering their customs.... The narratives related to burial customs and cemeteries most pointy pay tribute to African American heritage” (Wright, Hughes, & Misiroglu, 1996, pp. 25, 31).

This research critically scrutinized the narratives of African Americans to identify the influence of consumer culture. It explored how culture is constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed through consumer culture and the impact of constructivism on African American funeral service. Sirotnik (1991) maintained, “To be critical, an inquiry must also challenge directly underlying human interests and ideologies” (p. 245). This critical study challenged the underlying interest of a dominant culture using consumer culture to control the funeral service market.

Kincheloe and McLauren (2003) asserted, “Hegemony moves critical inquires beyond simplistic explanations of domination that have used terms such as propaganda to describe the way media, political, educational, and other sociocultural productions coercively manipulate citizens to adopt oppressive meanings” (p. 440). This study examined whether hegemonic control is changing the culture of African American funeral service. Use of a critical historical narrative approach in this research embraces DuBois’s theory of the double lives of African Americans and refutes the garden salad metaphor.

This study also explored the various vestiges that have survived the paradigm shift, some of which are evident in certain southern states. Wright, Hughes, and Misiroglu (1996) claimed,

Africanismsms involves a body of knowledge that is often passed down from the oldest living members of the community.... Many of the stories and superstitions relating to death and burials are still told and believed today, especially in the Southern United States. (p. 18)

The critical historical narratives presented in this study will tell personal stories that reveal the superstitious beliefs embedded in funeral service. Personal experiences will relate family histories of funeral service rituals and customs. As a participant, I will be able to add my personal stories to this inquiry.

Cultural Studies

An investigation into culture begins by examining the lives of groups of people. Culture is defined as “a system of abstract patterns of and for both living and dying which are learned directly or indirectly” (Professional Training Schools, 1994, p. 5). The way people live and think determines how culture is passed down from generation to generation. Professional Training Schools maintained, “It is important to remember that cultural patterns are created by the group in which he [the individual] is living and that they are imposed on every member of the group” (p. 5). Kincheloe and McLaren (2003) explained, “Cultural production can often be thought of as a form of education, as it generates knowledge, shapes values, and constructs identity” (p. 442). This study examined how culture is transformed and the influence of that transformation on other

cultures. More specifically, it examined the impact of the dominant culture's consumer market on African American funeral service.

African American culture contains aspects of many African cultures that have been blended to form a unique culture. West (1999) explained,

The trauma of the slave voyage from Africa to the New World and the Euro-American attempt systematically to strip Africans of their languages, cultures and religions produced a black experience of the absurd. This state of natural alienation in which Africans had no right to their past or progeny prevented widespread transmittance of tradition to American-born Africans. (p. 435)

“West Africans brought to America a variety of religious beliefs and practices, some of which were shared despite the diversity of African peoples who came to America” (Stewart, 1996, p. 233). Throughout the years, African American culture transformed as it interacted with mainstream American culture. Cultures that are inferior to the dominant culture lose control, succumb to the dominant culture, and eventually become part of it. Delpit (1995) confirmed, “The worldviews of those with privileged positions are taken as the only reality, while the world view of those less powerful are dismissed as inconsequential” (p. xv). The mainstream is the culture that controls the political arena, media, consumer market, and educational systems.

West (1999) added to the concept of cultural studies by articulating, “At a methodological level, whatever the geographies and histories at stake, cultural studies set great store on ‘situating’ particular objects for analysis” (p. 498). Handel and Wright (2004) agreed, “Cultural studies exercises are characterized by an emphasis on specific situations, to be conducted on issues with which the cultural studies worker is familiar

and already involved in, and to reflect the politics and position of the worker” (p. 21).

The author has great access to the situations in which African American funeral service occur and daily observes the impact of consumer culture on African American funeral culture and customs. As a cultural studies worker, her goal is to investigate the influence of the changing cultural forms of funerals service.

DuBois (1903) argued, “The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self” (p. 9). This study investigates the loss of cultural identity by focusing on the relationships among African American, funeral service, and consumer culture. This study seeks to determine if all three cultures play a critical role in the transformation of African American funeral service.

West (1997) proposed, “Culture is as much a structure as the economy or politics; it is rooted in institutions such as families, schools, churches, synagogues, mosques, and communication industries (television, radio, video, music)” (p. 19). Cultural differences play a vital role in the influence of consumer culture. When avenues to the dominant culture become accessible to people of African descent, the influence of their own culture is often minimized or denied. African Americans often believe they must live behind a mask that hides their true identity to be successful.

Looking through the lens of oral history and consumer cultures augments this inquiry and upholds DuBois’s belief in a double consciousness for African Americans. When African Americans find it necessary to assimilate into the dominant culture, a significant element of their history is lost. hooks (2003) verified, “As more black folks adopted middle-class values, often imitating the manners and mores of the white people

they denounced as racist, they became more concerned with the trappings of success than racial uplift” (p. 101). Similarly, West (1997) affirmed,

When you talk about mainstream America and all those titles to which everyone aspires, it means getting into White America and doing those things that White America will accept and approve of... Every step of the way, we have been free to deny more and more who we are and what we are as a culture, as a people, as a history, and as a race. (pp. 23–24)

West corroborated DuBois’s concept of African Americans as living in two worlds and having a double life. He related that African Americans must conform to the mainstream ideology of White America in order to feel successful and build self-esteem.

Frow and Morris (2003) explained, “Culture itself is imagined as a public medium that politically powerful social elites may rework and remold at will” (p. 490). African Americans are constantly reworking and reshaping their lives in order to be accepted and attain the American dream. Elaborating on the concept of culture, Denzin and Lincoln (2003) stated, “Culture itself is imagined as a plastic medium that politically powerful social elites may rework and remold at will” (p. 490). Frow and Morris (2003) agreed, “The importance of the media in debates about identity, place, and community highlights the second contextual feature of cultural studies that we want to emphasize” (p. 499). Kincheloe and McLaren (2003) posited, “Cultural production can often be thought of as a form of education, as it generates knowledge, shapes values, and construct identity” (p. 42).

Funeral service expresses culture in a unique manner. Within funeral service, cultural games are played using the consumer marketplace as a resource. Wright, Hughes, and Misiroglu (1996) predicted,

Corporations are busy buying up independent funeral homes, cemeteries, and mausoleums, pursuing the standardized, chain-store approach that has worked in everything from muffler repair to fast food. Can undertaking franchises outlets be far behind?... Some death historians worry that the American funeral could become less solemn if corporate culture and death culture ever become synonymous. (p. 295)

Will the day arrive when family members can call a funeral franchise for immediate delivery of a casket for a recently deceased love one in her favorite color?

Every society has a unique way of caring for and burying its dead that has been carried down from one generation to another. Irion (1966) explained,

The Freudian dictum that all behavior has meaning is equally applicable to individuals and societies. The way in which a social group meets the death of one of its members is not merely random behavior. There is a rationale in which guides the development of the rituals and ceremonies observed by a group in this crisis event. These rites convey the significant values of the culture and also, probably in somewhat lesser degree, influence the development of values within the culture. There is a real connection between a way of dying and a way of life. (p. 20)

What happens to a group of people when its expression of rituals and ceremonies becomes distorted? What happens to the significant values of their culture? Providing

rituals for the rites of passage for a deceased family member is an essential act that a culture provides for that person. A group's mores justify who its members are as people.

When identity is lost, a culture is lost. West (2001) asserted,

Culture is as much a structure as the economy or politics; it is rooted in institutions such as families, schools, churches ... and communication industries (television, radio, video, music). Similarly, the economy and politics are not only influenced by values but also promote particular cultural ideals of the good life and good society. (p. 19)

The African American Experience

The African American experience has always been difficult. From the very beginning, when the first slave was brought to the "land of the free," it has been an uphill battle: "Since before this country's inception, black people have struggled against deeply ingrained race-based expressions of power, privilege, and exclusion" (Bell, 2006, p. 49).

After slavery, life remained very difficult:

The emancipation of the slaves is submitted to only in so far as chattel slavery in the old form could not be kept up ... ordinances abolishing slavery passed by the conventions under the pressure of circumstances will not be looked upon as barring the establishment of a new form of servitude. (DuBois, 1935, p.136)

Indeed, a new kind of slavery began after freedom:

Though America has evolved somewhat, the legacy of slavery has a direct impact on current citizens of the United States-politically, socially and culturally.... The inequality that was created out of slavery remains. Racism and discrimination still exist. In spite the courageous fight for civil rights in the 1960s, social justice for

all still does not exist.... The institution of slavery may have been abolished in 1863, but more than a century later, African Americans are still treated as second-class citizens (Joiner, 2005, p. 52).

In spite of the hardships they have endured, African Americans built a culture upon a foundation that will endure for future generations. The historical experiences that led to enduring African American cultures and funeral rituals will be related through narratives in this inquiry.

Salvatore (2005) presented a different perspective:

Like the Israelites, African Americans were a covenant people, chosen by God and weighted with the responsibilities of that relationship, and they did inhabit a strange land. But the circumstances of their involuntary migration into another's Promised Land created a different historical experience. (p. 168)

It is without doubt the African American experience has been much different than that of any other race in America. Their experiences experienced a paradigm shift at the same time that "the slaves managed to hold on to African cultural rituals and to create new American ones, despite their continuing six-day-a-week ordeal" (Salvatore, 2005, p. 18). Courlander (1996) agreed, "Africans of common or similar ethnic backgrounds lived in close proximity and preserved some of the traditions, concepts and even institutions of their cultural past" (pp. 1-2). Americans must never forget that "The history of African Americans is the history of America. Slavery, segregation, and their legacies have meant that the issue of race has dominated American history" (Boyle, 2002, p. 6).

I investigated the cultural vestiges of funeral service that survived the paradigm shift as well as new elements that have been incorporated." The old custom of watching

over the body of a loved one from death until burial was not only a spiritual vigil but a practical one as well” (Wright & Hughes, 2007, p. 423) is one of the cultural vestiges that have followed a paradigm shift. Wright & Hughes continues with “Burial Societies and Lodges served as the precursors to modern-day insurance companies for America’s Black communities” (p. 304).

During her investigation, I analyzed archeological data that included funeral programs and statements of funeral services and goods to support a paradigm shift in African American funeral service. Paul Irion (1966) maintains that, “there seems to be a general agreement that in most communities the place of a funeral is shifting from the church to the funeral home” (p. 15). The paradigm shift in African American experiences in the United States has created diverse groups of African Americans. Within these diverse groups, DuBois’s concept of the double self continues to exist and assimilation into the dominant culture continues at a rapid pace. Frazier (1925) suggested that not only a double self but also a double society exists: “Negro society has been divided chiefly into the professional and the working classes.... While the professional class has imitated many of the traits of the white middle class, they have regarded themselves as essentially an aristocracy” (p. 333). Similarly, Graham (2000) reported, “Like many black families who moved to the suburban areas ... after the late 1950s, we encountered blacks who looked down on inner-city blacks with no ties to white America” (p. 25). Jacobs (1999) added,

For many black Americans, for whom traditional paths of assimilation have been blocked—first blocked by discrimination and then by a lack of jobs and funding for public education—resentment as being ridiculed as in isolated subculture runs

deep. In many poor black communities today, children who speak Standard English, or who embrace scholarship and the hope of upward mobility are derided by other kids for acting white. (p. 118)

African Americans are faced with a dilemma within themselves and their children continue the quandary of identity. DuBois (1970) maintained:

Not only do white men but also colored men forget the facts of the Negro's double environment. The Negro American has for his environment not only the white surrounding world, but also, and touching him usually much more nearly and compelling, is the environment furnished by his own colored group. (p. 176)

Mamiya elaborated:

Some scholars have viewed aspects of black cultural creations as aberrational attempts to mimic mainstream white culture. The Negro is only an American and nothing else. He has no values and culture to guard and protect. Such arguments seem willing to grant African Americans the minimum presupposition all other hyphenated Americans are permitted to take for granted, which is to say that their origins were elsewhere, and that coming from elsewhere, if they have a viable history, they must also have an effective culture.... Culture is the sum of the options for creative survival. Two hundred and fifty years of slavery were followed by one hundred years of official and unofficial segregation in the South and the North. (p. 3)

Because of this constant segregation, African Americans believed attaining a better life required abandoning their heritage.

African Americans have been denied a history by being forced to adopt the history of the dominant culture. Without narratives, African American history would be lost. This study will recount and record critical historical narratives to analyze and preserve African American mourning stories. It examined African American funeral culture to identify elements of the African American experience that led to a paradigm shift in the rituals and ceremonies of African American funeral culture. Baker (1980) upholds this thought with, “The status of black America as a collectively, however, has always been correlates with harsh codes designed by white America to ensure its power over black Americans” (p. 140). This experience also transpires in African American Funeral service. Funeral service laws and rules are often made without reverence to African American culture.

Consumer Culture

Consumer culture is manifested in popular culture. Consumer culture enters into this fast- paced society by way of advertising and mass media: “Advertising then is the art of social and cultural influence ... it plays an important role in identity development, in group formation, in distinctions, differentiation and relationships (Kenway & Bullen, 2001, p. 31). Giroux (2003) affirmed, “Corporate culture becomes an all encompassing horizon for producing market identities, values, and practices. The good life, in this discourse is constructed in terms of our identities as consumers—we are what we buy” (p. 159).

Consumerism and the American dream have a dark side. Solomon (1998) explained, “The American dream breeds desire, a longing for a greater share of the pie, and that in order to sell us products advertisements exploit this and other desires, fears,

and guilt we share” (p. 46). Wolfelt (2003) added, “The media teaches us to value consumerism, as if we can somehow buy our happiness” (p. 11). African Americans have struggled to achieve a lifestyle that the consumer marketplace promises will bring success and happiness. However, “The American dream, in order words, has two faces, the one communally egalitarian and the other competitively elitist.... The American dream breeds desire” (Solomon, 1998, p. 46). African Americans continue to desire to benefit from the promise that every free man was given: if you work hard and long, you will reap the benefit of your labor.

Although consumer culture has impacted society as a whole, the author posits that its greatest and most tragic effects have fallen upon African American cultural identity and self-esteem. West (2001) agreed, “The impact of the market culture on black life has been devastating” (p. 45). hooks (1994) affirmed,

The commodification of blackness strips away that component of cultural genealogy that links living memory and history in ways that subvert and undermine the status quo. When the discourse of blackness is in no way connected to an effort to promote collective black self-determination it becomes simply another resource appropriated by the colonizer. (pp. 149–150)

When African American consumers find it necessary to assimilate into the dominant culture to be successful, they lose their identity.

Kincheloe (2002) proposed,

In an era when advertising and information production work to break down traditional belief systems, public expressions of scientific rationality and grand

narratives (such as religious traditions) by which people shape their lives, social analysis must develop a variety of interpretive schemas. (p. 179)

The interpretation for African Americans is usually based on the dominant culture.

Giroux (2003) explained,

A politics of globalization linked to democratic struggles and values must also recognize that those pedagogical spheres—such as the media, schools, the advertising industry, and corporations—that convert culture into commercialism and important social and political issues into market spectacles read for instant consumption constitute a crucial site of political and cultural struggle. (pp. 222–223)

This study analyzed critical historical narratives to identify the participants' struggles to maintain their identity despite the pressure to succumb to a dominant culture ideology. West (2002) described their dilemma:

The civil rights movements permitted significant numbers of black Americans to benefit from the American economic boom—to get a small, yet juicy piece of the expanding American pie. And for most of those who had education, skills, and ingenuity to get a piece, mass culture (TV, radio, films) dictated what they should do with it—gain peace of mind and pleasure of body from what they could buy. Like any American group achieving contemporary middle-class station for the first time, black entrée into the culture of consumption made status an obsession and addiction to stimulation a way of life. (p. 55)

This research seeks to determine if consumer culture is the driving force in the transformation of funeral service. This study explored whether assimilation into consumer culture is an avenue for alteration in African American funeral service.

Popular Culture

Popular culture plays a significant role in cultural change. Immigrants often enter into a high-tech society in which “popular culture encompasses the most immediate and contemporary elements in our [their] lives—elements which are often subject to rapid changes in a highly technological world in which people are brought closer by the ubiquitous mass media” (Petraicca & Sorapure, 1998, p. 3). To fit in, they must change or adjust to this new culture:

Entering into America’s mainstream culture sometimes forces one to abandon their culture and adopt another.... This common culture based on movies, television, music, magazines and newspaper have profoundly altered our way of life and the very substance of our identities. (Earle, 2002, p. 122)

McLaren (1995) affirmed, “The pulsating beams from the T.V. screen become the shifting and perilous ground on which we form the judgments and decisions which forge our communal vision” (p. 60). Kenway and Bullen (2001) posited, “Advertising, then, is the art of social and cultural influence” (p. 31). Even more startling, hooks (2003) affirmed,

The culture of hedonistic consumerism did not place an emphasis on reading, writing, or critical thinking. As more black folks adopted middle-class values, often imitating the manners and mores of the white people they denounce as

racist, they became more concerned with the trappings of success than with racial uplift. (p. 101)

This study seeks validation for hooks' ideas on the changing African American culture.

hooks (2003) continued,

Living in a white supremacist culture, we as black people daily receive the message through both mass media and our interactions with an unenlightened white world, that to be black is to be inferior, subordinate, and seen as a threat to be subdued or eliminated. (p. 161)

Hollywood portrays African American according to White standards. For example, Elizabeth Taylor played Cleopatra, an Egyptian queen. (The Egyptians were the original developers of the techniques of embalming and preparing the human body for burial. Strub and Frederick (1989) explained, "Egypt, land of phenomenal ancient civilization, is credited with the discovery of embalming. The prehistoric peoples who preceded them are believed to have made feeble attempts at preservation of their dead, but they left no record of their achievement" (p. 23). hooks (2001) argued,

Think about how many times we sit in a movie theater and watch hateful racist images of black people depicted on the screen.... These images do not teach love.... When religious teachings form the core of our understanding of love, all black people were admonished to love themselves. The mass media teaches just the opposite (pp. 52, 67, 68).

Movies such as *Imitation of Life*, *Fighting Temptation*, *Boys in the Hood*, *Kingdom Come*, *Big Shot's Funeral*, *Six Feet Under*, and *My Girl* give different perspectives of funeral service. Although viewers get inaccurate views of the funeral industry from these

movies, they give a death-free society some image of what the funeral industry should be within a diverse population. Holloway (2002) elaborated,

Imitation of Life resonated throughout the African American community. It had publicly dramatized a private black narrative of passing.... The dignity and control that Juanita Moore brought to that deathbed scene and the ornate funeral that she had authorized and directed... visibly displayed the shared narratives of a culture's colored experience (pp.105, 106, 108).

Popular culture has portrayed reality differently through generations and made it difficult to determine what is real and what is fantasy. This study will seek to determine if popular culture contributes to a homogenized society.

Religion

An examination of religion in African American communities is pivotal to the investigation of the shift in African American funeral customs. Religion is defined as “a culturally entrenched pattern of behavior made up of sacred beliefs, emotional feelings accompanying the beliefs, and overt conduct presumably implementing the beliefs and feelings” (Professional Training Schools, 2002, p. 50). DuBois (1903) confirmed, “The Negro Church of today is the social centre of Negro life in the United States, and the most characteristic expression of African character” (p. 137). DuBois further state the church often serves as a conservator of morals, strengthener of family life, and the final authority on what is good and right due to the fact that “the Negro church came before the Negro home, it antedates their social life, and in every respect, it stands today as the broadest expression of organized Negro life” (1978, p. 224). In fact, DuBois (1978) maintained, “The Negro Church is the only social institution of the Negroes which in the

African forest survived slavery” (p. 204). Boyle (2002) agreed, “Religion was profoundly important in most slave communities. Many slaves held dearly to the beliefs and ... practice that is the root of many of today’s African American churches” (pp.18–19).

The majority of the rights of passage within African American communities continue to be guided by religious beliefs, and funeral service is no exception. Jackson (1966) elaborated,

When the church became an accepted institution, this dual ministration to the living and the dead was continued through the use of places of worship as places for entombment...There has always been a visible concern of the church for its members who have died. (pp. 4–5)

Williams and Dixie (2003) affirmed that even today “truly amazing is the reach of faith across lines in black America to this day. It is a binding force for the black American experience” (p. 9).

Religion provides the foundation upon which the rituals performed during a funeral are based. Eklof (1997) maintained, “Among African Americans, religion and concepts of death are inseparable. Although these united concepts also hold true for other African Diasporan culture, depending on the religious teachings beliefs in the soul’s destiny are quite diverse” (p. 329). Courlander (1996) elaborated, “African tradition and influence are found in baptismal, burial and mourning rites, in naming of children, attitudes toward elders and family” (p. 2). Lincoln and Mamiya (2005) proposed that religion infused all aspects of African American life:

The black sacred cosmos or the religious worldview of African Americans is related both to their African heritage, which envisaged the whole universe as

sacred, and to their conversion to Christianity during slavery and its aftermath. It has been only in the past twenty years that scholars of African American history, culture, and religion have begun to recognize that black people created their own unique and distinctive forms of culture and worldviews as parallels rather than replications of the culture in which they are involuntary guests. (p. 2)

When the religion of one culture is integrated into another culture, a new culture emerges. This study seeks to determine whether the integration of other cultures with popular culture leads to a homogenized culture. Idowu (1975) maintains, “Influences from other cultures and contacts with immigrant religions have brought, not only changes in the complexion of religion, but also modification of its tenets” (p. 203).

I recall my grandmother partook in a religious ritual before and after each task she completed, and that it was very important for my grandmother to give thanks for everything. hooks (1994) explained such behavior:

In the past, most folks both learned about and tendered the needs of the spirit in the context of religious experience, the institutionalization and commercialization of the church has undermined the power of religious community to transform souls, to intervene politically. (p. 247)

Religion has always played a political role inside African American communities: “The church, the major black social institution independent enough from white control to nurture children.... Since the days of slavery, the church was also a center of black social life, and a pattern of intense Sunday services” (Salvatore, 2005, p. 6). For most African Americans, religion was crucial for survival in a harsh society. Religion provided a place where hearts were shared and souls connected. As an African American female, religion

brings peace out of confusion to the author. Galland (2007) continues with, “A belief in the Ancestors was common to many religions, not only African ones, African American theologians have done pioneering research that shows that ancestors belief and practices have never gone anywhere” (p. 115).

This study investigated to what extent the rituals and customs of African American funeral service included and continue to include traditional African religious aspects. Williams and Dixie (2003) explained,

Despite the influence of Christianity on the customs and beliefs of slaves, West African rituals and philosophies remained deeply interwoven in their religious practices.... African retentions were evident in how slaves conceptualized and responded to death. For Africans, death symbolized a rite of passage, the mark of entrance into the next world. (pp. 32–32)

Franklin (2007) elaborated,

Slave religion was a complex fusion of at least four elements: African traditional religion, Catholic popular piety, Protestant evangelicalism, and Islam. The thought and practices of early black churches were a cultural gumbo of these and other elements that expressed both the creativity of the African population and the capacity of the American society first to tolerate, and later to celebrate, the complex character of black churches. (p. 107)

The study seeks to determine to what extent these funeral service rituals and customs of funeral have survived Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights Movement.

When a culture transforms, so do its funeral rites and customs:

What happens to cultures in general happens also to religions. There are religions which may be more closely related to what is known about their early forms than other religions, depending upon the historical and geographical circumstances of those who practice them. (Idowu, 1975, p. 110)

Franklin (2007) worried, “Although ‘faith and family’ continued to be important values for most African Americans....African Americans seemed to embrace an alternative set of values (uncritical assimilation and materialism)” (p. 18). The narratives that will be presented in this study will help determine the influence of religion on the African American experience and funeral service rituals and customs. “Some studies suggest that the materials used on African American graves symbolically incorporated religious beliefs from African culture such as Yoruba” (Wright & Hughes, 2007, p. 525).

Funeral Service Culture

Since the beginning of time, humans have had a unique way for caring for their dead; indeed, “Funeral customs are as old as the history of man” (Frederick, 1999, p. 10). According to Corless, Germino, and Pittman (1994), “Death and dying have held a fascination for human beings. Across historical time, this fascination has been manifest in song, poetry, drama, literature, sculpture, and dance.

Life and death are the foundational themes of origin stories across cultures” (p. 3). Jackson (1966) explained, “The funeral is a rite of passage. The funeral then is a form of group protection, in face of individual death, to affirm the values of life and the community, and direct future living toward these values” (pp. 14–15). Buenger (2004) added, “Funeral traditions help make up my sense of history and place, and my own sense of self” (p. 20).

When a community provides a funeral for a loved one that is suitable to its culture, it creates a sense of peace and serenity by the knowledge that it has done that which is expected according to tradition. Holloway (2002) described the historical background of such a service:

There were already habits of tradition in the 1900's that would follow the funeral business in America, which already had nearly a century of practice, into the next hundred years. The term *undertaker*, in reference to a skilled occupation, had appeared in popular usage sometime during the first half of the 1600s. (p. 18)

The rituals of funerals identify certain cultures: "The funeral reflects the values cherished by the culture, but we must not forget that the funeral also can exert an influence upon cultural values" (Irion, 1966, p. 44). When one explores beliefs and practices towards death and dying among different cultures, one comes away with the knowledge that many cultures share similar behaviors. This study investigated these shared behaviors and practices.

Because American funeral beliefs have undergone a transformation, it is enlightening to examine the changing pre- and post death customs and experiences among certain segments of American society. Two of the most significant social conditions or processes in this transformation are the growth of an urban mass society and the changing form and function of the American family, including the mobility of its members. Canine (1996) explained, "As with any culture, the customs of America society change with the needs and demands of the population.... Over time, people adjust their customs as they adapt to change, including those associated with funerary practices" (p. 225). Historically, the pattern of mortuary behavior in any society changes over time,

although some basic death beliefs remain basically unchanged (Klicker, 1999). Mortuary behavior in American society is no exception:

In the past fifty years, the American society has been and continues to see rapid changes in our culture. These changes, needless to say, have a direct effect in funeral service practices and customs. There are many influencing factors that have contributed to the development of modern funeral service practices we have today. (Professional Training Schools, 1994, p. 33)

In *Reinventing Funeral Service*, Doody (1994) asserted, “There is a need to abandon the dichotomy of viewing funerals as ‘traditional services’ on the one hand and ‘cremation services’ on the other. In the future, there will be the need form may different types of service” (p. 116). Mayer (2000) postulated, “In western culture, there is an attitude of denial and defiance toward death and dying. American culture in particular, places tremendous value on things that are new, shinny, and healthy while devaluing things that are old, dull, and dead” (p. 4). Canine (1996) supported Mayer’s statement:

Today, death is distanced, sanitized, and often sensationalized; since it is no longer part of the normal routine of our lives, we are less able to identify our authentic beliefs and feelings around it—less able to cope with it. Consequently, our present-day ideas regarding death are even more vulnerable to outside influences, such as might be received from institutions that deal with death, the media, our peers, and the funeral industry itself. . . . The result of these social and economic changes, along with the evolution of death, was an industrial commercialism that intensified the association of social status with the new type of services being provided by funeral businesses (pp. 54,180).

The ways in which consumers accept or reject funeral customs and products play a crucial role in the changing culture of funeral service. The marketing of new goods and services creates new markets and leads to the expansion of the American funeral industry. The companies that sell the most goods to the industry—the companies of the dominant culture—most influence the culture of funeral service. Funeral service therefore reflects the culture of the most powerful. Technology and popular culture provide avenues for the dominant culture to maintain that power. Companies that can use technology and popular culture to sell their goods and services gain control of the industry and produce the goods that they believe most suitable according to their ideology. Bates (2004) argued,

We can never go back to “similar funeral rules” for every client. Future funeral events will of necessity require arrangements to be more creative, work with fewer boundaries, apply the newest technology and keep evolving.... There will never be another “one size fits all” funeral; that day is gone” (p. 40).

As the small businesses that provided the foundation for providing traditional funeral service fail due to competition from larger, mainstream companies, aspects of African American funeral culture are lost.

Advertising for funeral service goods and services is evident in all media. Funeral service providers advertise their products on the Internet, on television, in newspapers, and in magazines. Because of this media saturation, “New laws and regulations are governing funeral service, new competitive structures are emerging and, most important of all, new consumer attitudes and values about funeral service are requiring us to do things quite differently” (Doody, 1994, p. xi). Canine (1996) added, “As our high-tech society promotes computer diagnosis of disease.... In addition, cartoons, films, books,

magazines, and even news broadcasts have used death to titillate and shock audiences, thus reducing death to a commodity” (p. 14).

Changes in funeral service reflect changes in society. Irion (1966) explained, The homogeneity and solidarity of town and country America is a generation ago afforded a structure in which the individual could find support of a community that shared his experience. But recent decades have wrought considerable changes. The rapid mobility of our population, the gathering into massive urban societies, the pattern less amalgamation of customs and traditions brought about an obliteration of meaningful forms for meeting the crises of death and bereavement (pp. 65–66).

At the same time,

the ethnic concentrations and economic levels in different sections of American cities cause a great deal of variations in the funeral rite. For example, the funeral rite in “Black Harlem” contrasts greatly with the funeral rite of a high income family living in the outskirts of New York City (Professional Training Schools, 1994, p. 23).

Traditional funerals follow well-defined guidelines. Rituals and ceremonies are based on the religion and beliefs of the individual. Mortuary students must be taught to appreciate and respect the diversity of the industry. Funeral directors must become cognizant of the varied cultures of their communities. They must recognize that there are both similarities and differences among the different cultures that they service and that all funeral rites should be valued. Indeed, “As more cultures are melding in the American

melting pot, funeral directors need to have a sense of the traditions important in these cultures” (Kiernan, 2004, p. 24).

African American Funeral Service Culture

History should provide a basis from which to examine African American perspectives on funeral service by providing a timeline of cultural changes within the various communities. However, very little has been written about the culture of funerals within African American communities throughout the centuries. African Americans slaves were not taught to read and write because such activities were prohibited. The rituals and ceremonies of African Americans funeral rites had to be transmitted orally from generation to generation. The tradition of the home-going service is often used to help characterize the funerals and memorializing of loved ones. Stewart (1996) enlighten readers with his historical perspective of African Americans funeral rituals by maintaining that, “funeral rites involved a long period of mourning and great feasting as Africans believed that upon dying one went “home.” Such a view of death may have accounted for the frequency of attempted suicides on the journey to America” (p. 233). March (1997) described other methods:

The act of preserving a deceased human being in order to conduct funeral services over an extended period of time and placing them in a container for burials is practiced all over the world as a way of remembering the life of a loved one. This method of commemoration was started by a people of color... From ancient Egypt to the modern day practice of mortuary science, black people have played a major role in caring for the dead and rendering services to bereaved families.

(pp.1–2)

The African slave traditions of funeral rites have survived through several paradigm shifts. With integration, the Civil Rights movement, and the use of technology, the customs and traditions of funeral service were transformed. Franklin (2007) explained that these customs and traditions came to the United States from Africa: “The cultural roots of the black church extend back to Africa. That makes them ‘quasi-African institutions.’ In order to understand the black church in America, it is important to understand the African roots of black church culture and spirituality” (p.106).

In his dissertation *Undertakings: The Politics of African American Funeral Directing*, Johnson (2004) gave a brief history of African American funeral directors. Johnson wrote,

African American funeral directors play a unique and complex role among black professionals. They are apt to provide more than just funeral merchandise and death care services. It often becomes their precarious and multifaceted duty to serve many essential needs in the African American community because funeral service “is nothing but a personal-service business ... particularly in our community. (p. 1)

Funeral directors must be familiar with the diverse African American cultures to fulfill the needs of the communities in which they serve while they “maintain a precarious role of being both an entrepreneur and a professional” (p. 5).

Connecting the church and community is another vital responsibility for funeral directors. Holloway (2002) stated,

As black mortuary and funeral directors’ businesses were formed, they emerged into communities that already had well-established church histories and practices.

In addition to the consistent role of the preacher in the black church as arranger of funerals and burial services, the especially traumatic and frequent situations of African American death and dying and the vigorous presence of the black church community in offering solace on those occasions paved the way for an intimate association between the church and these black businessmen. Indeed, the fact that many black funeral homes were themselves owned and operated by preachers indicated the degree of intimacy the institutions shared (p. 22)

The church once played a critical role in African American funeral rites and rituals. Because of the many changes that have occurred in African American communities, the church no longer plays a leading role in developing rituals and customs for funeral service. Paul Irion (1966) sustains that there are several elements that have undergone a paradigm shift in African American funeral service. Those changes include a growing observance of viewing or visitation hours when friends and relatives call at the mortuary to view the body of the deceased, the practice of holding a memorial service in lieu of a funeral, the cost of funerals and a change in having the deceased “laid out” in the family home where friends and relatives came to call and cremation” (pp.17, 51, 55, 200, 208).

Funeral service now follows the dictates of leaders. Who are these leaders?

Fitzgerald and Bobrow-Williams (2006) argued they are not African American:

America, often called a “nation of immigrants,” heralds the contributions of those who, fortified only by culture and family, created something from nothing; those inspiring immigrants demonstrating integrity and perseverance in pursuit of the American dream. However, black Americans-namely, African slaves and their

descendants-are perceptually excluded from the American immigrant legacy. (p. 145)

African Americans have often been excluded from funeral service decision making in the United States because “racism is, at least for African Americans, the most pervasive problem. For many of us, it remains not only unresolved but it often quite subtle, thus all the more pernicious” (Felder, 1991, p. 2).

African American funeral service must continue to care for the dead and serve the living in a way that enhances the dignity of humankind. It must meet the needs of the deceased and those who mourn. It is the responsibility of African American funeral directors to provide a funeral for the deceased that is appropriate to the culture of his or her community. However, it is often difficult to identify a culture within the community. This study constructed a timeline of the history of funeral service to follow the paradigm shift in African American funeral service. (Appendix D) The study presented the history of African American funeral rituals and customs as described in narratives that have been passed down for generations.

Summary

Doody (1994) stated, “The same knowledge, experience and information that is causing the consumer to demand quality automotive service—in an almost infinite number of variations— is going to cause the consumer to demand more complete and more imaginative funeral service” (p. 110). Funeral service is becoming personalized within a society that reflects many different traditions. Services and products can often be customized to fit the need of the individual but not his or her culture.

With access to the Internet, consumers can buy almost anything they need and desire for funeral rites and rituals. Companies that serve the industry with goods and services are increasingly using technology and marketing strategies to increase their sales. With the increasing influence of popular culture and technology, the funeral industry is finding it very difficult to provide traditional service. The dominant group is embracing technology to present its culture as America's funeral culture. These developments have led African American funeral service to undergo a paradigm shift over the past 50 years. This study determined the factors that were most influential in this transformation.

CHAPTER 3

DEVELOPING THE NARRATIVES

We Wear the Mask

*We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.
Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask.*

*We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
We wear the mask!*

-PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR-

Theoretical Framework

Paul Laurence Dunbar's poem evokes recollections of a Southern childhood. Growing up in the American South of the 1960s, African Americans were forced to wear a mask and lead a double life. Such necessities were the results of entering the United

States after a journey of denial, deception, and identity theft. Lincoln and Mamiya (2005) argued, “Some scholars have viewed aspects of black cultural creations as aberrational attempts to mimic mainstream white culture. The Negro is only an American and nothing else. He has no values and culture to guard and protect” (p. 3). With this ideology, the dominant culture believed it had a duty to control African Americans from the day they arrived in the United States: “Nothing retains dominance better than a slave-mentality.... The slave mentality is the acceptance of personal inferiority as the norm and thus accepting the domination by another” (Olds, 1995, p. 103). Ladson-Billings (2003) added, “The hegemony of the dominant paradigm makes it more than just another way to view the world—it claims to be the only legitimate way to view the world” (p. 399).

How do African Americans view themselves under the mask? Lincoln and Mamiya (2005) posited,

In spite of the harsh realities of the American racial dilemma, the majority of African Americans have desired to be part of the American dream and to share more equally the fruits of their singular contributions to this land of opportunity. (p. 239)

This study investigated the influences that have transformed African American funeral culture. The author conducted qualitative research that will be “pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 2). This study conducted pragmatic inquiry informed by cultural studies in its collection and analysis of oral historical narratives.

This study is a cultural study that examined the African American, funeral, consumer, and popular cultures in their various forms. Wright (2004) described the form and purpose of cultural studies:

Cultural studies exercises are also supposed to be characterized by an emphasis on specific situations to be conducted on issues with which the cultural studies worker is familiar and already involved in, and to reflect the politics and positions of the worker. (p. 21)

This qualitative inquiry characterized funeral service in its changing forms. The uniqueness of varied situations was analyzed through the lens of oral history and consumer culture to identify aspects of control by the dominant culture. This analysis includes an archeology study of data that will identify various paradigm shifts in African American funeral customs. This study seeks to determine if the transformation of African American social practices by the dominant culture has distorted and reshaped African American culture.

I was a participant in this study because she is part of the political process that is changing the curricula in funeral service school to reflect the diversity of the industry. As a funeral home owner, I am an active participant in the politics of the rules and regulation of the funeral industry. As an African American, my diverse experiences and personal stories are essential to the research. According to Wright (2004), “The use of the first person and the overt implication of my [her] position on the issues illustrate my [her] long-term involvement and the position on the issues involved in this project” (p. 21) and will further augment this qualitative inquiry.

This study was based on a critical theory foundation. Sirotnik (1991) affirmed, “Communication—moreover, competent communication—is the hallmark of a critical inquiry” (p. 248). Critical inquiry was a process used to look through the lens of oral history and consumer culture for answers: “Critical inquiry is dialectical, dialogical, and deliberate” (p. 247). The personal narratives in this study related aspects of the participants’ daily lives and their historical memory to explore the paradigm shift in African American funeral service. African Americans are slowly losing their identities and traditions, including their hallmark funeral traditions. This inquiry determined whether consumer culture has had the greatest influence on this loss of identity in African American funeral service and if indeed “many African Americans sell their inheritance or heritage for a small bowl of acceptance in a society never designed for them” (Olds, 1995, p. 113).

The ideas of bell hooks, W. E. B. DuBois, and Cornel West, three critical theorists, provided the foundation for the study. These African American scholars can share their cultural experiences as well as provide a theoretical basis. Critical inquiry was conducted to reveal a paradigm for committed action. Short (1991) explained, “To be critical, an inquiry must also challenge directly underlying human interests and ideologies” (p. 245). This study challenged the influence of consumer culture on African American funeral culture. DuBois’s ideology of a double consciousness is not understood as a “pathetic state of marginalization and exclusion, but rather as a transcendent position allowing one to see and understand positions of inclusion and exclusion, margins and mainstreams” (Billings, 2003, p. 403).

African Americans are living in a society where assimilation is more important than remaining in a culture that is often denigrated by mainstream society. They find that “the eclipse of hope and collapse of meaning in much of black America is linked to the structural dynamics of corporate market institutions that affect all Americans” (West, 2001, p. 27). African Americans want to be accepted by the dominant culture in order to achieve success, but in order to become part of that culture, they must often remain silent and minimize or reject many of their traditions. hooks (1995) theorized, “Black people remain rather silent about representations of whiteness in the black imagination. As in the old days of racial segregation where black folks learned to ‘wear mask,’ many of us pretend to be comfortable in the face of whiteness” (p. 37). This study explored the effects of wearing such a mask.

Research Methodology

Critical research “attempts to expose the forces that prevent individuals and groups from shaping the decisions that crucially affect their lives” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003, p. 437). All individuals have the need to belong and the desire for respect toward their ethnic, social, economic, and cultural practices. McNeill (2001) explained, “A positive sense of ethnic identity has generally been linked to high levels of self esteem, self-concept and psychological adjustment” (p. 284). Critical pedagogy seeks to develop multiple literacies that recognize the importance of cultural differences and communication across social, cultural, and political borders by addressing issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and language.

Sardar and Loon’s (2001) affirmed, “Culture includes the organization of production, the structure of the family of institutions, which express or govern social

relationships, the characteristics forms through which members of the society communicate” (p. 3). The slave traditions were passed down through songs, dance, and drawings, much as popular culture is transmitted orally today. Slave narratives are an important aspect of African American heritage: “Those stories require an investment in their hearers/readers. Understanding is the yield of the active engagement of mind with the narratives and their meanings” (Davis, 1991, p. 78).

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) supported the use of critical narrative research informed by cultural studies when they wrote,

The notion that culture is all pervasive is often called anthropological, and, as Renato Rosaldo (1997) points out, one way of understanding cultural studies is to the product of a “rapid diffusion” of this notion “from anthropology to literary studies, law, social history, communication, business, media studies, and more. (p. 49)

This study critically examined the narratives of African Americans to determine the influence of consumer culture on African American culture. This qualitative inquiry explored the destruction of one culture and the construction of a new culture favorable to the dominant culture.

The tradition of the home-going service is used to help characterize the funerals and memorializing of love ones. This tradition is a form of narrative passed from slavery to the present generation. Narrative transformations show connections between African and African American mourning stories. Narratives help individuals to remember who and what they are: “Every group in every culture has found it necessary to perform certain rituals at the time of the death of its members. Why? For one simple reason: They

do it for themselves” (Jackson, 1966, p. 23). A funeral, as a public community rite, “touches every participant at the point of his own feelings toward death and toward the dead of his own relationship” (Irion, 1966, pp. 95–96). Traditions create the legacy of a culture. When the legacy is transformed through consumer culture, the traditions of a culture are transformed.

Participant narratives told real stories of rituals and ceremonies in African American communities. Consumer culture was scrutinized to determine if it contributed to the changing ideology of funeral service, and if indeed, “any African American who watches television for more than a few hours a week is daily ingesting toxic representations and poisonous pedagogy” (hooks, 2003, p. 221). African Americans did not record their traditions because they did not have access to even basic communication technology and practices. Because teaching slaves to read and write was prohibited, most knowledge of the rituals and ceremonies of African Americans funeral services had to be transmitted orally. Because “telling stories illuminates previously inadequate understanding. Stories also contribute reminders of what is known,” (Davis, 1991, p. 78), this study explored these stories.

Although there is little literature on African American funeral service customs, those sources that can be located will be evaluated. Both the literature and narratives will help identify the influences that promoted the transformation of African American funeral customs. Doll (2000) posited, “With help from literal writers of literal prose works, I suggest that a more metaphoric —indeed, a more playful—understanding of clothes can unzip possible selves” (p. 116). D Wear (1997) also validated the use of literary inquiry in pedagogical practices:

I believe literature provides stories of imaginary people in their everydayness that may lead readers toward empathically identifying with real people. I, along with others in the medical humanities, think that our disciplines are an especially good place to do such knotty, imaginative, intellectual work. (p. 88)

After replacing “medical academia” with “mortuary academia,” this quote directly applies to this study. Examining resources such as funeral programs and statements of goods and services from the last fifty years should give some insight on a shift in African American funeral service.

Researcher’s Role

I strongly agree with Clandinin and Connelly (2000) that “the stories we bring as researchers are also set within the institutions within which we work, the social narratives of which we are a part, the landscape on which we live” (p. 64). As a female African American researcher; educator; and funeral service educator, director, and embalmer, my participation and narratives can add greatly to this study. I am already a qualitative researcher engaging in cultural studies. As a qualitative researcher and funeral service provider, the context in which I conduct my profession is fluid and situational. Funeral directors and educators have daily exposure to the narratives of lived experiences, the “detailed intimate telling of experiences” (M. Connelly, personal communication, April 14, 2005), which allow them to provide experienced accounts of human experience.

I have been an educator and helping professional all of my adult life. As an educator, I have taught children from 6 months to 18 years of age in childcare facilities and elementary, middle school, and high schools. I believe that my teaching of adults at Gupton-Jones College of Funeral Services has been an extension of my role as an

educator. All of my personal and professional growth has been aided by my direct encounters with individuals and families. These experiences have equipped me with skills to collect qualitative data through personal interactions. As I collect narratives, I will constantly return to my own story with a critical view.

As a death care educator and funeral director, I recognize the need of people of all ages and cultures to integrate their death beliefs into this society. I understand that the funeral is a rite of passage. It reaffirms the social character of human existence. The funeral then is a form of group protection, in face of individual death, to affirm the values of life and the community, and direct future living toward these values. (Jackson, 1966, pp. 14–15)

I am proud of the fact that I can provide the essentials of a meaningful funeral. Meaningful funerals connect us with our past, those we love, and the ideology of going home to be with God or a higher power. Rituals are important in celebrating a new life and making the transition to the next life. Traditional funeral rituals provide meaningful closure to family members and friends.

Research Participants

Eight participants and I related our accounts of the paradigm shift in African American funeral culture. The eight participants are African Americans who live within a large Georgia Metropolitan area. The participants were selected based on their ability to provide reminiscences of African American funeral service and discuss various changes over the past fifty years. The participants were able to discuss transitions within African American funeral culture by attending, participating in and or directing funerals. A discussion on the familiarity with funeral service was the mechanism to determine their

participation in this research. The funeral directors will be chosen by their experience of funerals and their participation in funeral service in the metropolitan area in which the research will take place.

I used my funeral home facility to casually talk with fifteen lay persons to seek participants for this research. Four of the participants will be funeral directors. Four participants will be individuals who have attended a multiplicity of funerals over the past 50 years. In some cultures there are persons who attend funerals as social events. For this inquiry, these participants were called lay people. The participant's narratives informed a historical consciousness of funeral cultures within African American communities and the influence of technology and consumer culture. The participants discussed influences, if any, on their personal beliefs in traditional funeral rites and rituals. Subjects participated in voluntary audio taped interviews.

All eight of the participants were over the age of fifty; therefore each of them personified over forty years of experience in African American funeral service. Four funeral directors, four lay persons, my personal narrative, analysis of funeral programs and statements of funeral service and goods will be integrated in the collection of data. All participants were identified by their first name. I chose the title lay persons to distinguish them from funeral directors or from persons who work in the funeral industry. Within the past 50 years, these lay persons have a familiarity with funerals by attending and/or being in charge of making arrangements for deceased relatives.

The choice of participants was based on the strength of the author's relationship with them because she believes, "Qualitative approaches to research are premised on an honest and open working relationship between the researcher and the participants in the

research” (Cheek, 2003, p. 100). The experiences of the participants will first be analyzed individually then compared to identify relationships and disparities because “narrative inquiry is relational. They [researchers] must become fully involved with their participants, yet step back and see their own stories in the inquiry, the stories of the participants, as well as the largest landscape” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 81).

The participant’s narratives will inform a historical consciousness of funeral cultures within African American communities and the influence of technology and consumer culture. The participants will discuss influences, if any, on their personal beliefs in traditional funeral rites and rituals. Through this recounting

the central task is [will become] evident when it [the narrative] is grasped that a person is both living their stories in an ongoing experiential text and telling their stories in words as they reflect upon life and explain themselves to others.

(Connelly & Clandinin, 1991, p. 128)

Storytelling is a custom still prevalent in all African American communities. The author often relates stories to her grandchildren that she learned from her grandmother. In particular, “the narratives related to burial customs and cemeteries most pointedly pay tribute to African American heritage. From stories of death are reflected stories of life” (Wright & Hughes, 1996, p. 31).

Data Collection Methods

The interviews and dialogues were audiotape, transcribed, and reviewed by the researcher. Each interview was a semi-structured one-on-one, face-to-face, audio taped session designed to provide interviewees an opportunity to talk about their lives,

experiences and understandings of the transition. The sessions took place in a quiet, private location convenient for the interviewee. I developed a set of questions to help organize the interviews to keep the dialogue moving.

Data collected is stored in a secure location in my home. Documentation, archival records, observation notes and retrospective researcher reflections are stored in the research site. The audiotape of interviews is stored in my home. Transcriptions were made and saved on my personal computer. By examining the transcriptions, I identified contradictions among the participants. Such a process is important because as the participants look through the lens of oral history and consumer culture, they may see distorted reflections of history and tradition. Copies of the transcripts were reviewed with the participants before the final copy of the study was prepared. This allowed the researcher and participant's time for reflection and clarification and allows the researcher to insert her own reflections and narratives into the transcribed materials.

This anticipated inquiry also examined various components of funeral service through the archeology of African American culture as it relates to an understanding of what it means to be African American. This qualitative research examined how African American culture has been affected and scrutinized by humanity throughout history. There was an analysis of documents containing funeral programs, order of service and statements of funeral goods and services selected.

I interviewed the participants over two sessions that were scheduled to take place at their homes at their convenience. The narrative consisted of one-on-one interviews with the participants and the experiences the authors will share during the interview process. I recognize that "narrative inquiry characteristically begins with the researcher's

autobiographically oriented narrative associated with the ... research question” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 41). I used a tape recorder to record the interview and later transcribe the conversation from the recording. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended audiotaping and transcribing interviews as part of the data collection process. A set of guiding questions were used to encourage participants to articulate their thoughts and experiences regarding the paradigm shift in African American funeral service (see Appendix B & C).

Before the interview, the participants received and signed an informed consent form. (See Appendix A) There were two interviews with each participant. The first interview was an informal meeting in which the author and the participants become acquainted. The second interview was investigating the participants’ experience with the paradigm shift in African American funeral culture. The participants were asked questions in reference to the influences they believe have played a critical role in the transformation of African American and funeral service culture. In particular, they were asked how their funeral customs differ from those of their parents. After the interviews, their responses were evaluated to identify themes and to draw conclusions.

Thoughts, stories, and reflections related to the author’s experiences as an African American death-care educator and funeral director will be incorporated throughout this study. Marshall and Rossman (1999) confirmed, “Self-reflection notes can serve as rich data to use in the analysis of qualitative research” (p. 106). Sharing stories is vital to this inquiry, and He (2003) described how “narratives allow me to bring my personal experience to bear on research, to embed research in participants’ daily lives, to respect participants’ voices, and to validate cross cultural experiences” (p. 19). The data obtained

from the participants', author's statements, and achievable records were analyzed along with the research literature to determine the effect of consumer culture on African American communities.

I examined 50 funeral programs searching for style and order of service that have changed within the last 50 years. I also scrutinized 50 statements of goods and services within the last 50 years. The data obtained from these items were analyzed to determine the transformation that has transpired in African American funeral service.

Data Analysis

The interviews and dialogues were audiotaped, transcribed, and reviewed by the researcher. By examining the transcriptions, I identified contradictions among the participants. Wolcott (1994) advised, "Another strategy, implicating a more sophisticated level of observation, is to look for contradictions or paradoxes" (p. 162). Such a process is important because as the participants look through the lens of oral history and consumer culture, they may see distorted reflections of history and tradition. Copies of the transcripts were reviewed with the participants before the final copy of the study is prepared. This allowed the researcher and participant's time for reflection and clarification and allows the researcher will insert her own reflections and narratives into the transcribed materials.

I recognized that "interpretation offered within a told story certainly may not be interpreted accepted by the hearer/reader. Nonetheless, without interpretation, an asserted history fails" (Davis, 1991, p. 79). Historical narrative interpretation must be clear and precise to ensure accuracy. To aid in this endeavor, the factors were be categorized as (a) the African American experience, (b) the funeral service experience, (c) the use of

consumer culture, and (d) influences on funeral ritual and customs. I took analytical notes to help identify dualistic positions and multiple views. This careful attention to documentation ensured that readers of this study will be able to hear each participant's voice because "in narrative inquiry it is important that the researchers listen first to the practitioner's story, that it is the practitioner who first tells his/her story" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1991, p. 127).

African Americans funerals can be the most expensive purchases ever made. A traditional funeral, including a casket and vault, can cost from \$5,000. With extras like flowers, obituary notices, limousines can add thousands of dollars to the bottom line. Funerals cost over \$10,000. I used a timeline to identify the shift in cost of merchandise and goods. This timeline identified fee structures and types of service and merchandise chosen. The chart illustrated the analysis of funeral programs and confirms the modification in the order of service in the funeral program. Chapter four was organized in such a manner as to identify the time line of components of the paradigm shift. These components include funeral programs, order of service, statement of services and goods, and noteworthy information gathered during interviews.

Summary of Methodology

Holloway (2002) wrote in *Passed on: African American Mourning Stories*,

When Du Bois wrote of his son's passing as "liberation" and that his child as "Not dead, not dead, but escaped; not bond, but free," he made a critical and essential association between his individual, familial loss and the experience of collective community of blacks in the Americas. In creating this nexus between a

black family's grief and African America's national experience, he revealed the cultural dimension of black America's experience with death and dying. (p. 6)

Because of the degradation and hardship they suffered, funeral rites and customs became an important part of slaves' lives. Funerals were among the very few events at which slaves could gather for a substantial period of time. Because of the misery they endured, slaves put more emphasis on the spiritual rather than physical life and took comfort in the Christian religion.

My small community in South Carolina has been able to maintain traditions and practices that reflect the African Americans ideology of death and dying to some extent. In particular, my community maintains the narrative tradition that has been passed down for generations. I agree that "for many black Americans our country within the country is the rural South. It can be urged that the loss of land and rural life in general cuts deeply into the foundation of black American sustenance and identity" (Fitzgerald & Bobrow-Williams, 2006, p.147). I can also observe the enculturation that is occurring as a result of the transition from rural to urban life.

Bell (1996) stated, "History has convinced me that the rights and even lives of black people, even as citizens, have always been a commodity subject to barter by white people for their own needs and self-interest" (p. 17). Though this study of critical historical narratives, I will investigate whether the changing culture of African American funeral service is indeed the result of manipulation by the mainstream community. By identifying the factors in the paradigm shift in African American funeral service, this study can help identify the means of maintaining the rich African American cultural heritage.

CHAPTER 4**VIEWING THE PERSPECTIVES**

The Legacy of Our Ancestors

Continue the legacy of our ancestors

To those who are the conveyors

Be who you are and not assimilators.

Teach habits of respect to each generation

Striving to fortify families without hesitation

Have an urge for existence

Not a desire for complacence

Uphold the thrust of custom crest

Respecting it when giving our best

Commitment and service build character with courage

Teach legacies the traditions so to flourish

A Pledge to be true to ourselves, a key for success

Commitment to goals matter more than the rest

Grandparents and parents teach narration of importance

Sharing knowledge without avoidance

Sadness comes when history will not transcend

Customs for future generations to extend.

-CAROL THOMAS WILLIAMS-

Introducing the Participants

The purpose of this study was to scrutinize the paradigm shift in African American funeral service to determine whether this industry is becoming homogenized within a society that should personify a diverse population. I believe this study is imperative because there is a need for African Americans to preserve their heritage. It is important to transfer cultural values to future generations. The above poem signifies my position of what it means to preserve and edify a culture and its ethnicity.

Four funeral directors, four lay persons, my personal narrative, an analysis of funeral programs and statements of funeral service and goods were integrated in the collection of this research data. The four funeral directors are James, Frances, Juanita, and Carl. The four lay persons are Ann, Alma, Manona, and Robert. I chose the title *lay* persons to differentiate funeral directors from those participants who do not work in the funeral industry. Within the past fifty years, these lay persons have a familiarity of funerals via attending and/or were in charge of making arrangements for a deceased relative. Funeral directors are those members of the funeral profession that arrange details and handle the logistics of funerals. They meet with family members to discuss their wishes about the final disposition of the deceased and to discuss what type of service to be performed. The participant's first name is used in this research to allow their stories and experiences to resonate as well as to help with the flow of the narratives. Each participant gave permission to allow the use of their first name when sharing their narratives for this qualitative research.

Carl M. Williams Funeral Directors, Inc. was the facility used to conduct interviews for selecting participants for this study. The aforementioned lay persons have extensive

knowledge of funerals and funeral protocol via attending and/or arranging services for deceased human beings. It is not outside the norm in African American communities to have members of a community to attend funerals as a social event.

Within the last forty years, the funeral directors that are presented in this study, have worked, attended and serviced clients as a daily routine. The four funeral directors were chosen by their experience of funerals and their participation in funeral service in the Metropolitan area in which the research took place. They are members and actively participate in various funeral service organizations. Those organizations are National Funeral Directors and Mortician Association, Inc., Academy for Graduate Embalmers, and the National Funeral Directors Association, Inc. They are active leaders in the communities in which they work and live. One of the funeral directors interviewed in this study is my husband. Akin to the other interviews, the interview with my husband was conducted in the same conversational tone at the designated location.

Data collection was done individually and transcribed for analysis. The purpose of individual interviews was to substantiate the ideology of a paradigm shift in African American funeral service. Funeral experiences of African American customs and rituals were the focal point of the interviews. Connelly & Clandinin (1991) in *Forms of Curriculum Inquiry*, reinforce my belief in developing interviews for a narrative inquiry. They assert, “Another data collection tool of narrative inquiry is the unstructured interview” (p.130).

There were two interviews with each participant. All of the lay person interviews were done in the interviewees’ homes. Three of the funeral directors interviews were done in the funeral homes in which they work and own. One of the funeral directors

interview was done in her home because she is retired. The first interview for the participants was informal. That time was provided for me to develop a familiarity with the participants and for the participants to become familiar with me. We began our discussion on funeral service in general. The first three questions for this study were discussed during this first meeting. The second interview began my investigation on the participants' experiences with African American funeral culture and to identify any probable shift. The participants discussed and answered questions relating to any influences they believe contributed a critical role in the transformation of African American funeral service.

Within the next pages, I presented written narratives that will tell stories of African American funeral service. These stories collectively recognized changes that have occurred within African American funeral service within the last 50 years. The 50 years timeline was considered because of the rational age of the participants. This timeframe was appropriate to enhance the memory of the participants. The data examined also coincides with this timeframe. As a researcher, I remember some of the oral history I have heard through narratives that are associated with death and dying. I heard so much of it during my childhood that the remembrance of those stories is entrenched in my mind.

It was my goal to create a narrative inquiry that was three-dimensional. "One of the dimensions the personal and social a second dimension, and a place a third" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p, 50). Throughout these qualitative narratives, my intent was to make a strong connection between the participant's personal stories about varied social events within African American funeral service past, present and future. The

stories beyond this page were woven together to give a history of a culture that has been forgotten due to a melting pot society. I decided to weave the words of Robert Wright and Wilbert Hughes throughout this inquiry in that their expressions echo many of the participants' thoughts. This literature not only supports the narratives, but adds focus to the inquiry.

Presentation of data for each participant is given in the category of funeral directors and lay persons. Funeral directors are licensed professionals in the funeral industry and lay persons are non-licensed persons who are familiar with the funeral industry. The narratives are listed in the following manner: Ann, Alma, Manona, Robert, James, Frances, Carl, and Juanita. Each participant responded to a sequence of the same questions. For some participants, there were follow-up questions to clarify initial responses. The interviews were transcribed and documented the exact way the participants spoke. Therefore, grammatical errors appear within the text. To keep the flow, the correctness of some errors is recorded in a bracket after the errors. I was an active participant. My reflection is noted throughout the narratives. "We and our participants live and tell many stories. We are all characters with multiple plotlines, who speak from within these multiple plotlines" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 147). Before I began the narratives of African American mourning stories, I will give a brief exposé of each participant.

Ann is a 106 years old African American female. She refers to herself as 106 and counting. Ann is very alert for her age. I had the opportunity to sit and talk with Ann for a couple of months. I realize that this was a little unusual, but when you have this much history right at your finger tips, one has to take advantage of every opportunity. Of course

we handled the business that was needed for this qualitative research, however, the dialogues kept me coming back for more. I was indisputably zealous about everything she talked about. The stories of her experiences left me wanting more. I felt right at home when I began the audio taping and she began her narratives.

Alma is a 78 years old African American female. Her experiences with funerals and mourning stories come from the perspective of being an African Methodist Episcopal Minister's daughter. Her life long experiences included attending funerals and living the changes. These experiences directly influenced her decision to attend mortuary school. We met at her home and the delight she displayed in telling her narratives kept the conversation alive. She spoke on the childhood she had as a minister's daughter. We talked briefly about her belief in the importance of spirituality and the reality that every aspect of her childhood had religious undertones. After all, she was the Bishop's daughter. In Alma's life, it was unthinkable to do anything without including religion, in particular funeral service. "The historic tradition of black churches being involved in all aspects of the lives of their members, including political, economic, educational, and social concerns "(Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990, p.13) is a good way to describe Alma's experiences as a minister's daughter.

Manona is a 76 years old African American female. She attends funerals quite often. Over the years, I named her the "The Great Funeral Attendee". When the idea of this qualitative narrative came to my mind, so did this participant. The first time we met at her home, Manona pulled out a suitcase full of funeral programs. The programs dated from 1968 to the present time. During our first visit, we looked at a minimum of 200

programs. Manona's narratives were captivating. With every breath, she spoke with passion as she gave complete particulars on the varied funerals she attended and planned.

Robert is a 76 years old African American male. He was the first and only male of the lay participants that I interviewed. In my attempt to find participants for this research, I found that women outnumbered men in attending funerals. Robert is known by close friends as the "Funeral Planner and Evaluator." He attends quite a few funerals and will give minute-by-minute description of every aspect of the services he attended. His detailed analysis of funerals includes the musical key that was played for every hymn that was rendered for a funeral.

James is a 72 years old African American male. He grew up in South Georgia but all of his active funeral service years were spent in the Metropolitan area. He is what we call in the funeral industry, a trade embalmer. The majority of his formal learning of funeral service was primed through experiences he received from one of the oldest funeral establishments in the Metropolitan area of this research study. His narrative brings fifty years of experience to this qualitative research.

Frances is a 68 years old African American female. She was also born and raised in South Georgia. She once was a funeral home owner. Most of her funeral experiences began after graduation from mortuary school, living and working in funeral service in the Metropolitan area in which this research was done. She is now retired and utilizes her time in giving help to various funeral homes whom lack personnel. Our meeting was in her home. Frances's narrative brings forty-five years of experience to this qualitative research.

Carl is a 58 years old male. He is the youngest of the funeral directors. Carl

moved to the Metropolitan area in 1975 with his wife, the researcher. When speaking to students and other funeral directors, he often speaks of himself as the apprentice to owner. The funeral home he now owns was home for him while he was attending mortuary school. Ivey Brothers Funeral Home, later named Carl M. Williams Funeral Directors, Inc. was established in 1912. For the last thirty-five years, Carl has served families throughout the Metropolitan area, as a funeral director and embalmer. The funeral home he owns along with his wife, Carol, is a family-owned business pledging to continue the tradition of caring and reliable service delivered to customers in the most dignified manner. Before his tenure at Carl M. Williams Funeral Directors, Inc., Carl moved from South Carolina with his family. He worked in funeral service in high school. His narrative brings forty-three years of experience.

In the same vein that moves me to embalm and prepare final service for a loved one, I chose to use the same emotional separation in order to interview Carl. His narrative is important to this research because he worked for and now owns the oldest funeral home in the Metropolitan area and he is the only funeral home owner in the Metro area that services his clients and does his own embalming. Both interviews were done at the funeral home.

Juanita is an 80 years old African American female. She is the owner of one of the oldest African American funeral homes in the Metropolitan area. Her funeral home was established in 1939 and provides service across the spectrum of pre-needs, at-needs, and aftercare. It is a family owned business. Our interview was held at her funeral home. We both felt very comfortable because we were sitting in proverbial surroundings, the arrangement office. We made several attempts to meet in her home because she is semi-

retired but, business always came first. The funeral home was convenient for both of us. Juanita narrative brings a lifetime of experiences to this qualitative research. I must confess Juanita is my funeral service role model. She was once an educator. I am an educator. She was a college professor. I am a college professor. We both own and operate a family-owned business in the funeral industry. We both have funeral directors and embalmers licenses.

Collecting the Stories

This chapter will take the readers through the pages of narratives that participants' shared with me about their experiences with African American funeral service. This chapter reiterates the research questions for this qualitative inquiry through evaluation and elaboration on the responses of the participants. I begin each interview with general questions to get an appraisal of the participant's experiences of funeral service. With the lay persons, we began our narratives with a discussion on their first experience with death. Ann replied, "*...oh my goodness my fist experience was probably I think when my mother died. She died January 10 and my birthday was January 9, and there I was mother dead and I don't think we had experienced any thing like that before. I was ten years old.*" Alma said, "*First experience with death was really when my father died. And that was in 1951 or 1950.*" Monona stated, "*When my neighbor died and they brought them to Ivey Brothers Funeral Home. I was ten years old.*" Robert continues with, "*I guess it was when my great uncle died, in 1945. I was fourteen years old at the time.*"

I began the narratives with the funeral directors with a discussion on their funeral experiences. It is important to this study to identify the professional experiences of the funeral directors. I first asked, "How long have you been a funeral director? James

maintained that, *“He has been a funeral director for fifty years. All this time was in the Metropolitan area.”* Frances stated that, *“I’ve been a funeral director since 1977.”* Carl mentioned that, *“I was first licensed in South Carolina in 1976 and then Georgia in 1977.”* Juanita remarked, *“I have been a funeral director since 1967.”* The answers to this question authenticated this oral narrative research with one hundred and fifty four years of experience in African American funeral service.

Then we talked about their first experience with death. This is essential because we must keep in mind that we are funeral directors and embalmers, but we all have personal lives. We must face and deal with the deaths of our love ones the same way our clients deal with it. James sustains, *“I took a trip to North Carolina to make a removal. I rode with a friend picking up remains that was my first experience with death. I was nineteen.”* Frances said sadly, *“1950, when my mother suddenly passed away. I was seven years old. Being with her and expecting the motherly love and she died that night when the clock struck 11:00 pm.* Carl concluded this question by saying, *“I was a kid. It was my great aunt’s husband, my Aunt Katie’s husband. That was when they were bringing bodies back to the house.”* Juanita with assertiveness said, *“Yes I can; as a youngster I remember the death of an aunt and we had her funeral because she was a huckabee and had outlived her peers. We had her funeral in a house in the living room of a house. And which was unusual but not too unusual for that period because at that time we took bodies back home. But the interesting thing about it was all of the little children and I was one of them was sitting there quietly but a cat came through and rubbed against our legs and somebody screamed out and that was a disruption in the funeral.”*

All participants experienced death at an early age. I listened with a disquieted mood because as each of them shared their stories, my memory of my first experience with death became alive again in my mind. I was experiencing their grief. My first recollection of death was of an uncle. I was eight. I did not understand what was going on, but one thing I do remember is the sadness that came from my grandmother, mother and other relatives. I began to recognize that through conversations and life experiences, we are taught at an early age how a culture deals with death.

To help solidify the qualification of the funeral directors, we continued our discussion on the funeral profession. We shared the first experience we had in making funeral arrangements with the family. James said, *“The first funeral arrangements were for my wife. That was in 1963. It was an experience—on the job training. I learned it from being in the presence of Mrs. Haubanks (pseudonym). I tried to emulate her.”* After listening to James, I thought to myself, I could not do that for my first experience. Then I thought again, “Yes, I can. I did the exact same thing for my mother.” Frances had no response. Carl replied, *“No, I really can’t remember it. It has been so long ago.”* Juanita maintained, *“The very first experience making personal funeral arrangements for a loved one would be for my father. I helped my mother in making those arrangements. And I was an adult, a married adult and that was actually the first time that I had personally participated in making arrangements. That was in 61; so we are talking about more than 40 years, about 47 years ago. The very last time that I made a funeral arrangements was about 2 years ago almost to the date and that was for a granddaughter.”*

Each funeral arrangement is unique in itself. There are no two arrangements alike. Families come to the arrangement office with diverse backgrounds and varied ideology

on what a funeral service should look. I asked the funeral directors to tell me their feelings on their experiences in making those funeral arrangements. James said it was, *“Strange because it was my wife. I embalmed her also. I wanted to make sure that it was done right.”* When he completed his statement, again I thought I definitely cannot do that. I would have to let someone else do that. Frances had no response. Carl had no response. I asked the same question a little differently to Juanita because of her answer to the previous question. Was there a difference in the order of service for sixty-one years old forty-seven years ago and a child two years ago? Her reply was, *“Basically, the type of service, the music was different, but the music would have been different because of the two people involved a child ten years old and a man sixty-one. But the music was different. Basically the people who spoke had different approaches there were more humor and comments. For example, the people who spoke gave comments and for my fathers funeral the funeral was very, very straight, formal and sophisticated. It is because of the time and how people acted in 1961. They give [gave] tributes and the way people reacted to death in 1961 as opposed to 2006. We are talking about a grown man and a young child.”*

All of the lay persons did not play a role in making the final arrangements for their first experiences with death. The funeral directors’ responses were the same with the exception of James. The three funeral directors maintained that they did not have an input in making final arrangements. James response was, *“For that part (removal of those remains) I did not play any role; just assisting another person with the removal. I was about 20-22 years old. Now I am 72 years old.”* His first experience with death was as an adult. The other participants were much younger. It was interesting to hear the

differences in responses between the lay participants and the funeral directors when I asked the next question. “What was the funeral experience like for you?”

Ann declared, *“You wouldn’t believe but they did not have funerals like they have now. You know you did not embalm anybody so my first experience was my daddy had come stumbling down. My mother had gone out in the neighborhood to thank people for Christmas gifts. And I have never learned how they got my mother home from her little trips around in the neighborhood and you know when I say neighborhood I mean a good distance. All I remember about that is that my daddy came stumbling down the steps. And said, well whenever anything was unusual they would shut us off in the kitchen to ourselves. All I can remember that day is my daddy came stumbling down the steps where we were all shoveled up together in the kitchen and all he said was she dead, mama died. Well it was the bereavement times were all shoveled up in the kitchen. It was right around Christmas time and I had on this blue calico dress and they had to bury her right away cause they did not embalm anybody. Well I got to where they were burying momma and I looked down and they had grease up and down the middle of the dress and I said here we are burying momma and I got on a dirty dress and I turned to my older sister and say I got on a dirty dress. My sister said it was dark and people could not see. I was embarrassed. She said it was dark and we could not see. To this day no one has ever told me if they saw that dirty dress at my momma’s funeral.”* She began to shed tears.

Ann narrative was so genuine. I can envision myself being there almost ninety-six years ago. I became a little emotional as well.

Alma whispered, *“It was so surreal. It seemed like it was not real... I could hear my mother hollering and screaming and she was saying Ruby, Ruby, Ruby, that’s my*

mother sister. She had died like six months before my mother died. So I got in the house and I realized that something was really wrong. But still I did not take it as being truthful because I think these people had got my father mixed up with someone else. My father was dead.”

Manona said, *“A lot of loud noise, like yelling, crying, screaming, running. To me it was a bad experience...for a ten year old.”*

Robert sustains that, *“It was a traumatic experience. They carried him to Detroit to the Henry Ford Hospital and he died in Detroit and we did not see him until they brought him back to Georgia for the funeral. Funeral cost us no more the \$600 for shipment on the train, casket and service. That was one of the first metal caskets used in the Metropolitan area.”*

James maintained, *“My first funeral experience was exciting. I became interested in the prep/embalming room. I noticed the embalmer embalming and it fascinated me, and I thought to myself, I can do that. And that was really my first experience that made me interested. I attended the funeral and I drove the limousine and went inside at the funeral.”* His response was from a funeral director’s perspective.

Frances passionately proclaimed, *“It was a service that I saw a lot of caring from the funeral director, she and her husband Mr. and Mrs. McBean (Pseudonym). It was an experience of where did all these people come from because somebody was dead. I did not realize at the time it was because they were paying their respects to the dead. And it was really a warm feeling to see all these people as they came around and I was thinking that these people must really like my mother; the reason they were in the church. There were a lot of people there.”* Frances was giving me a personal perspective as well as a

professional perspective. She stepped outside of her personal feelings and took a professional look at the funeral directors and the service they rendered.

Carl in his guileless tone responded, *“We did not go. We were not allowed to go to the funeral. We were at home. I remember when we got to my great aunt’s house on that Friday night, and my uncle and her husband’s body was all laid out. There was this thing called a jack-in-the-box, which was the backdrop for the casket. It looked like the curtains on a stage, except the casket was in front of it. I remember seeing the lights of the cars coming up. I remember seeing the cars drive off to go to the funeral. Children didn’t go to the funeral. We didn’t go to sleep that night.”*

Juanita quietly said, *“Yes, it was sort of comforting to be in the living room of a home that you were constantly visiting, and then the only difference was that the aunt was in a casket in the room. So actually, I found that the experience a little more comforting than any other innate place of which I was unfamiliar.”* While listening to Juanita, my thoughts were focused on one of the questions I will ask her later. That question would be in reference to a wake vs. visitation. Should I ask her now or wait. I decided to wait until that question came around.

We began our narratives to investigate a paradigm shift in African American funeral service and what driving forces contributed to this shift. I began with the following statement and question. Traditional funerals have always followed certain, well-defined guidelines. Rituals and ceremonies were based on religion and individual belief. At some time in history, it is my belief that African Americans abandoned the positive ancestral legacy of funeral service rituals. Do you agree or disagree with this?

Ann assumed a sad thoughtful posture and said, " *No it's been so long since I heard about any kind of sacred funerals. I imagine they're just over and done with. Gloria, when I say Gloria I mean Ed's wife, she did not want to go all the way out to southwest to visit her daughters. She was one of the first blacks out there at West View. Because she did not want to go far to visit her daughter, she wanted her daughter buried close by. She wanted to cut down on her driving. She wanted to go visit her daughter close so she can take her flowers and stuff out to her grave. So she won't have to go all the way out to the south. There were certain cemeteries blacks cannot go. When it got to a point that we can go, we forgot about our cemeteries. We wanted to follow the White folks. That is when it changed. In fact, when I was coming along, we went to the cemetery; you didn't go to the undertaker. We went to the cemetery. There were [was] no service that I can remember. We just prayed.*" Listening to Ann reminded me of my readings of the slave burials. The ceremonies were all done at the cemetery. I was thinking about Ann's age. During her childhood, African Americans did not have churches as we have today. Graveside services would be the only option.

Alma answered, "*At the time my father died it was a ritual. All the Bishops got up and spoke. It was very, very religious with singing, psalms and everything. It was certain songs, it was very very religious even on his casket a saying "those who work for the Lord there be a good servant unto the lord". It was placed there because he loved that psalms.*"

Manona answered, "*I agree. People have become so scarce over the years. When I was a little girl, the folks at the cemetery stayed around and fixed up the cemetery, the gravesite. Now, you all just go out there say a few words and leave them there and go*

home. They used to fix up the cemetery; fix up the flowers help put the dirt on them. They stayed till everything was over. It looks like they don't care about people anymore."

Robert answered, *"I have not thought a whole lot about that. It has change, I mean, I don't know to what extent. I just know that it is different."*

James answered, *"The church rituals are about the same; they are just about the same really. We still go to the church; at one time they used to have services at home overnight...that have passed. We still have wakes."*

Frances replied, *"To an extent I agree that some of the rituals have been abandoned. It could be due to economics. It could be due to we have so many funerals to do so we expedite time. And it could be due to so many family members don't live close to the deceased as they did many, many years ago. So consequently almost like a quick duration and its finished, and a lot of the funeral directors have so much to do sometimes so many funerals. Cause way back when my mother passed away, it wasn't hardly heard of doing more than one funeral in a day. It was maybe like one a week; twice a month but two or three in one day and I think that has a lot to do with the abandoning of some of the rituals that we are accustomed to."*

Carl upholds, *"Kind of sort of. Everything changes. Basically I think they have held on to the majority of them. We have to realize that there are different cultures in the black communities. Just because you are black, it does not mean you have the same background. You have the Gullah people on the South Carolina coast and you have the Pentecostal, AME, AME Zion, and Church in God in Christ, Holiness, they are all somewhat different."*

Juanita sustains that, *“I agree with that, I sincerely think that we decided that we wanted to be different, we wanted not to deny our heritage but...and not desert it, but just not do it. I’m not sure it was deliberate. I think society dictates the way we were brought up and what have you and we didn’t have that influence in that period; the early periods of the funerals in the 60s and the 70’s of that African American flavor.”*

I agreed with most of the statements made by the funeral directors. We have an opportunity to witness a diverse assembly of funeral rituals and customs. There is an array of cultures within a culture. It is very difficult to determine what customs and rituals belong to what group. One thing I can be sure of, there are certain aspects of an African American funeral that sets it apart from other groups. The rituals and customs often differ from other groups.

Growing up in South Carolina, I can relate to certain superstitious act one of my family members participated in. It is imperative to this study to see how much of it has survived the paradigm shift. So, I asked the participants, *“Can you name any customs of rituals (vestiges) of African and/or African American culture (such as superstitions related to death) that are evident today in burial customs and traditions?”*

Ann looked me straight in the eyes and answered, *“I do not remember anything like superstitions because grown folks did not talk about dead people in front of children. We were not allowed to be in grown folks business. I do remember the covering of the mirror, but I never known why they did such a thing. You always wore black for a whole year. Anytime you are walking down the street and you see a hearse, you turn your back. This is all hearsay, we never believe in such foolishness.”*

Alma uncomfortably replied, *“My father kept us in church. They did not talk*

about things like that in front of us.”

Manona said very frankly, *“I do not know anything about that. My mamma always said to believe in God and don’t worry about such nonsenses. So, that is what we did.”*

Robert response was, *“If a person died at home, they would take the bed down and put it outside or have the bed redone. Or, if there was a mirror in the room, they would cover the mirror with black cloth so that the image of the dead person does not stay in the mirror.”*

James stated, *“I have never heard of any prior; I learned most after I got into funeral services; when you come in the doors when making a removal most of the mirrors in the house would be covered. You don’t see that now. Most of the deaths now occur in the hospital, and you don’t have time for that now.”*

Frances began to discuss a list of changes and vestiges in African American funeral services. *“Some of the changes are reading of the eulogy, I’m sorry reading of the obituary. After the eulogy, of course there is viewing of the remains. And you had a longer trip to the cemetery, a longer service at the cemetery, and a longer disposal at the cemetery. It has been shortened the time has been shorter. Those are some of the changes I have seen and have experienced down though the years. In funeral service, we hardly ever read the flowers anymore. That was a ritual that was almost standard and recognized by people who worked on the funeral. You had to wear black. If a person died with their eyes open you suppose to use a coin to close their eyes. I heard that if you are afraid of the dead, rub your hands over the face three times and you will not be afraid*

anymore. This was in 1951 when I heard that. My sister was afraid of my mother and someone told her to do that. Funerals were very emotional during that time.”

Carl trying to remember finally said, *“You know in your area of South Carolina, they continue to pass the baby over the grave. Don’t ask me what it means. I have to think hard about superstitions because I am not into superstitions. In some areas, there are door badges placed on the doors when there is a deceased person at the house. They don’t do that in the Metropolitan area anymore. It is mostly done in smaller areas. Every now and then we will take a body back to the house for a wake. That was done quite often at one time. You very seldom get that request anymore. Time has changed because economics have changed. Geographies have changed. Families don’t live close to each other anymore. Back in the day, most funerals were held in the churches, now they are held just about anywhere.”* Wright & Hughes (2007) writes about the passing of the baby over the casket or grave. *“Passing a child over the open casket and/or grave would ensure that the child would not be afraid of the dead person’s spirit”* (p. 483). I agree with Carl. In our home state near the coastal region, this practice continues today. I heard of people stopping the clock when someone dies in the house. This could keep the spirits from going from house to house.

Juanita with sincerity and great concern, *“I think basically at one point we were imitators of the culture around us; because as you know a few years back black wasn’t beautiful; but now black is beautiful. In other words, we really take more pride in our heritage or we have taken more pride in our heritage that we did some years ago. We didn’t want to act black, look black, culture black years ago but now we decided that was*

great. We are black and we are proud of it, so now we have found our African American clients basically are turning towards that heritage.”

Keeping all of the participant’s responses in mind, I asked another question that I thought might give insight of a paradigm shift in African American funeral service. “What changes can you describe in guidelines, rituals and ceremonies from our ancestral history of African American funeral service?”

Ann replied, *“No, we never got out and went to funerals. All I remember about my momma, we went to where they were to be buried and I said to my sister is that my dress isn’t clean and she said it was dark and we couldn’t see. So that blue calico dress sticks with me at my momma’s burial. We went to the cemetery; you didn’t go to the undertaker. We went to the cemetery.”* After this question, I noticed that Ann was repeating herself. She was getting tired. It was amazing to me that she could remember so much about her mother’s funeral. Her mother’s death was sketched in her mind. I brought back those memories. I also brought back the memories of my mother’s death. I was much older than Ann when my mother died. She was a 10 years old child and I was a full grown adult working on a doctoral degree and I didn’t feel good about my mother’s funeral either. This was not a good day to continue the questions. We finished our work for the day. It was time to take a break. We talked on other things, ate coffee cake and sipped a cup of tea. I left and scheduled another appointment for the next week.

Alma responded slowly as though she had to think for a minute.” *Well I feel they are not traditional anymore you know it’s not very religious anymore. It is just something that the person goes through and they just bury them and forget about them.”*

Manona replied, *“They had a period of mourning maybe six months – one year whatever. Now they just forget about you. In the church we have a period where they have forgotten you in six weeks. If you weren’t active in the church they really don’t care. It’s not the same when you were cared about. The ritual back then was they used to bring the bodies back to the house and sit up all night. But we become so cold intentionally. We going to have an hour wake then we went home.”* I said to Manona, “Do you think families forget about the deceased or they just do not make use of the same amount of time for their funeral services? Manona continues with, *“I think they just don’t care about each other like we use to.”*

Robert answered back, *“They used to bring the dead home the night before the service. Now they don’t do that anymore. As children we were afraid to sleep when they did this we were too scared to sleep.”* I started to elaborate on Robert’s response, but I decided to wait because his answer coincides with one of the other questions I will be asking him later.

In this study it was one of my goals to investigate the role religion play on African American funeral service. It is my belief that religion plays a major role in all rites of passage in the African American communities. What part do you think religion play in the rituals and rites of African American funeral service?

Ann stated, *“Yes, it was at the cemetery where our minister lived. It was in a park in Nashville, Tennessee. Our minister and his wife lived there. That’s all I can remember. We did not have church funerals during that time. There were not a whole lot of churches during that time. You only had a few churches. They did not have funerals in them. Most of them were done at the cemetery. I walked behind my mother and all we did was say a*

prayer and that was it.” Ninety-five years ago, Ann gave me a vivid account of funerals during her childhood. She remembers that there were no formal places set aside for funerals. Majority of the funerals were held at the gravesite. She remembers a prayer was given if nothing else. Religion always played a vital role in African American mourning stories. “Eklof (1997) maintained,” Among African Americans, religion and concepts of death are inseparable” (p. 329). “Many of the graves in cemeteries express some Christian affinity...Some studies suggest that the materials used on African American graves symbolically incorporate religious beliefs from African cultures” (Wright & Hughes, 20007, pp. 524-525).

Alma said that, *“Usually it gives you a backbone to go on with it will be able to grieve and get over the bereavement part of the funeral because of your belief and your religion.”*

Manoma answered, *“I believe that if you have a faith to live by, you go to church you or that person is well taken care of in the after life. The funeral directors are more in tuned to what the needs are as a family. Now the old ones were more efficient, but they had more love for the family and their work. Now they are through and the go home everyday. Funeral directors use to live in the funeral homes. Today the funeral directors are cold and none caring. I cannot think of having a funeral without anything religion. I have gone to some funerals that did not have church music. But I would think that it had what the family wanted, especially, if that person did not go to church. Everybody do [does] not go to church”*

Robert response was, *“It depended on the deceased’s religion, pretty much a great deal.”*

James gravely stated, *“It is supposed to be a sacred thing now I can’t think; I don’t know they are just not into it. Everybody wants to hurry. The old times used to have church service. I believe we are losing our culture, from our standpoint as a funeral director. It is not sacred really to us anymore. It is a thing you just do and get it over with.”*

Frances articulated that, *“A great role I think because the ritual for the service is carried out due to their religion. For an example, I had experience a service of another race. They did not dare go back into the church. It was like part of the African American ritual to go back into the church because of our religious ceremony according to the religion as opposed to our counterparts who wouldn’t dare have a church service. They would just have a chapel service or graveside service. And that’s another change I’m seeing is African Americans are having more chapel services. And I think it is because of the economy and easier on the family instead of moving the body around so much.”*

Carl distinctly said, *“It plays a very important role. Even though a person is not a member of a church, families still want to have some type of religious service. That lest you know right then that it plays a vital role.”*

Juanita with affirmation said, *“I think it plays a major role in the service itself. I think that the church family, the churches play a major role. But, they too are based on the rituals of African American and it plays a major, major role in the way that the funeral is handled the choice of music even the tributes the formats definitely a major role.”* I asked, *“What about church? Were most of the funerals you attended in a church?”*

Ann sustains, *“When Aunt Joyce died, well let’s see, she was a member of the church. We came to the house, and we lived right down the street from the church. We belong to the Christian church. We were all from different roots. Christian Taylor, I think they had been boyfriend and girlfriend from school; she was laid out at home. That was the first church funeral I had been to. You would, you would hear about somebody dying or died and my father went to the funerals. We didn’t go. We had more graveside funerals if you would call them funerals. All can remember is a prayer and maybe one or two songs. I remember that dirty dress I wore at my mother’s funeral.”*

Alma said, *” Most of the funerals I have attended where church funerals. Over the years I have attended one that was none religious and it was Monica, for my friend in New York. These friends got up and spoke and read poems that they knew you like. The body was not there. It was in another state”*. I told her the proper phrase for that was a Memorial Service. I asked her, *“Have you gone to many memorial services?”* She replied, *“Not many. That is something new on the scene.”*

Manona responded with, *“Most of the funerals were held at the church. And the others who couldn’t were held at the chapel. If you were a member of the church, that [was] where your funeral will be. If you weren’t a member, it would be in the chapel. My going back in history that’s why they brought bodies home is because they did not have a chapel. So they took them home and have a sitting at the house.”*

Robert replied, *“Church and chapel also graveside services.”*

James stated, *“About half and half; about 30 years ago they were more in the church. But now they are more half and half; due to the times where people don’t attend church.”*

Frances stated, *“Most of the services that I attend even today are in the church.”*

Carl confirmed that, *“Most of them are held in churches.”*

Juanita acknowledged, *“Most of the funerals I have directed were in a church. I would say the majority where in a church and second to that would be a funeral home chapel. And then we would go to graveside. Yes and no, when I was growing up it was not a usual thing that you would have a funeral in the living room of a home but it was not that unusual or out of step. On the other hand we used to take bodies home and have wakes at home. So it was not that unusual.”*

The church has always played a pivotal role within African American communities. Churches help foster cultural identity within those various communities. “The historic Black Church was a gathering of families worshiping in a sanctuary they themselves erected, and buried in due course in the churchyard that was already hallowed by the generations it enshrined” (Lincoln & Mamiya, 2005, p. 402). As for my perspective, I do not recall anyone in my family was buried any where other than the church cemetery. It was an unheard phenomenon to bury any other place than a church cemetery. When I think about it more, there was no other place to bury African Americans in the community I grew up in. The only other choice was the city cemetery and it was for White’s only.

In thinking about African American funeral cultures and rituals in your childhood, young adulthood and now in your golden years, what can you remember about the traditions of African American funerals? Is there anything specific that stands out in your memory that you would like to share?

Ann maintained, *“I don’t remember anything. But, what made it easier for us was because we belonged to a church, and went to Sunday school and everything at that church, and the minister’s home was in the cemetery where they lived. I know this sounds harsh, but our minister lived in the cemetery, but all of us belonged to that Christian church right off 8th Avenue. Irene my cousin who I lived with after my mother died taught school worked at the 8th Avenue public house. We made everything they used at the church. I grew up in that kind of life. The woman they had piles and piles of paper because we made candles and everything for the A.M.E church. When we stop having funerals at the cemetery, we started having funerals in the church. When someone died, people will come from everywhere. Because transportation was limited you know most of the people that came stayed all night. The preacher will preach and the singing looked like will never end.”*

Alma answered, *“Procession and at the procession it is the way the minister gets up and acknowledges the dead and then we have a song and it is very very quiet not a whole lot of hollering and screaming in my church.”*

Manona replied, *“They were loud, they cried, people didn’t have a faith to live by. They would drop and carry on and they were crying and yelling and running. Now they don’t care, you die, you go; goodbye. That’s just the way it happened.”* I thought about it and I replied, *“I think it depends on the church. Some churches and families are more emotional than others. Sometimes you have different behaviors in the same family.”*

Robert answered back, *“Funerals lasted longer about 2-3 hours, now they have them quicker and shorter and bury you quick and fast.”*

James said, *“The actual service has not changed that much.”*

Frances maintained, *“I think about things like the gathering of the family. The community gathered around to help that family immediately and brought foods and drink for the family; to make it easier on the family so that they don’t have that to worry about. Cause you know they gonna have folks coming from out of town. So traditionally with African Americans we gather immediately to help serve that family along with the funeral director. We used to make sure that the family coming from out of town had somewhere to stay. We would say let some of them come to stay at my house.”*

Carl maintained that, *“I don’t know whether White Folks carried their bodies back at home or not but we did. In our traditions we have flower ladies but White’s do not. African Americans use limousines, Caucasians do not. I don’t think White Folks have repast. I don’t think they know what repast is. I know that they serve light snacks but not a complete meal as we do.”*

Juanita said that, *“Well I think basically uh having the body brought home and having the wakes at home is one that I know of. And as a child as a funeral directors daughter, I can remember so well a situation. I can remember it like yesterday. We were at church, routine Sunday church, but this particular person; Mr. Randolph, I can remember the house, the street and the people, and he was as they say ‘laid out’ at his home. And my father got a call and he grabbed the children and we rushed over to Mr. Randolph’s house and he had purged. So my father busily got his handkerchief out and worked on Mr. Randolph. And I can remember that like yesterday. And now that would not be done today, because they don’t take bodies back to the house. They can’t accommodate them because of the types of caskets and such. In my adult experience, I have a friend who always say a few years ago, had her people brought home, always; she*

kept that tradition going but, basically no to answer your question. That's one definite change no wakes at home. People have their wakes at the funeral home and they are very creative, in what they have done even in the selection of the music. And they have changed the names to visitation to where the families will receive friends. It was once called sitting up and they meant sitting up where folks will sit up all night long. And in my professional career which started in 67 or 65, I know of a family that we never brought the body to the funeral home, the body was embalmed at home. But that was not the rule that was the exception. But nevertheless that family held to it to the very end. We always went to the same house and did the body there."

My understanding as a funeral director dictates to me that White Americans do not have funeral programs. They have funeral cards and bookmarks. Very few families in the White American communities use limousines. Limousines are part of African American funeral customs. This custom started when families did not have transportation to attend funerals. Funeral homes provided that service to those families. Now families have their own transportation. Limousines are a part of African American funeral customs that funeral homes managers are trying to change. Thus far, we have little success in doing so. It will definitely help with the financial bottom line.

The releasing of the doves is something new that is done today at the gravesite. Often a minister will use the releasing of doves as a symbol for the soul of the deceased is returning home after a life that was visiting on this earthly home. The tradition of what we call the "home-going service" is used to help characterize funerals and memorializing loved ones in African American communities. Do you know where the expression "Home Going" came from?

Ann quickly replied, *“I don’t know. You hear it sometimes but I have no idea.”*

Alma answered, *“I think the service, the African American service. The preaching when you get ready to open the funeral in the church it used to be like you were so concerned. It really was a funeral. Everybody acted like they were at a funeral. Now they go and say a few words he is gone and that are it. Just accolades and it don’t seem like they mean it. They just bury him. The time element has changed. People used to bury on Saturday where everyone could come to the funeral. They never used to bury during the week. They had family to come along time, now it done change. They don’t care if the family there or not. They are going to bury at the same time. I feel like it has been negative. The funeral used to be more intense. The people used to care like the person is going to be missed and I feel that has changed.”* Alma continued her narrative from the previous question. I asked her the question about “Home Going” again. I never got a direct answer.

Manona response, *“It came from the Baptist faith; like you were going home to be with God. I always thought that it was the Muslim faith to bury folks with their head to the west.”*

Robert replied with a simple *“No.”*

James upholds that, *“I don’t know where it originated from. But, I heard from the elders that it is according to the way a person lived. They were going home to be with the Lord. And some of that originated from that.”*

Frances said, *“I don’t know that I really know where it came from. I have heard almost every minister that did the eulogy talk of the home-going and a lot it may have come from the songs that we used to sing the old Negro spirituals. A lot of Africans*

thought that thru death that was their freedom, their home-going. As far as changes...we don't take as much times as we used to in trying to get everybody to the cemetery for the burial. A lot of the people are pretty much left on their own. They are told and given instructions and follow the procession and get to a light and they don't know they can go...they just stop. The expediting of time has a lot to do with that.

Carl thought for a moment and said, "I have no idea. In my memory, that was something used recently. Casket companies and suppliers use it in their marketing strategies. It works because funeral service is becoming personalized and the phrase is often used there. The companies are focusing on a variety of concepts, home-going, celebration of life and several others. The cremation rate in African American neighborhoods has increased. That is one major change. I remember back in the ninety's, we may have one to two cremations a year. In the late ninety's, it increased from two cases in one year to about ten cases the next year. Funeral Directors had to strategize to figure out how money can be made with this new concept of cremation."

Juanita just simply said, "I don't know. I never thought about where home-going came from. It has always being there. African American funeral service has evolved in so many ways. People can afford more, so they do more. It depends on the economic status of a family that determines the type of service they want for their loved one. Caskets stores are beginning to develop in various communities especially, in the metropolitan areas. Such things were never heard of back in the day. People had faith in the funeral home they chose and the funeral homes serviced the communities. There was a certain trust. You don't see that as often in these days. As far as the term "home-going," ministers often use it in their eulogies."

I have always heard the phrase “Going-Home.” I never thought about it until I began this qualitative research. Growing up in South Carolina, you are taught about the history of slavery from the elders. I was told through narratives that “Going-Home” from a religious stance meant that this home is not your home. It is a stop on your way to your final home and your final home is your heavenly home. When death comes, you are going home to live with God. Wright and Hughes (2007) add their viewpoint to the phrase “Going Home.” They uphold that, “Going Home” was going to a place where there is no more hardship, grief, or disappointment, but where we walk the streets of gold in a land where God has promised man we would be eternally happy and free” (p. 482). The new phrase “Home-Going” has been changed to assist in advertising within the funeral industry. This marketing strategy favors African American consumers.

As I walk the halls of the college I teach and sit in the chairs for meetings at various association meetings, I see funeral service changing everyday. This research question is seeking to examine through narratives, if America has developed its own cultural traditions in funeral service. If so, what elements foster these changes and under what conditions those changes were made. Any order for anything to change, something or someone would have to give up something. Has America developed its own unique rituals and customs through consumer culture? Can we discuss development of any unique rituals and customs of African American funeral service?

Ann upholds that, *“No it’s been so long since I heard about any kind of sacred funerals. I imagine there just over and done with.”*

Alma remembering, *“Not necessarily, I think that the funeral service today is orientated into the lifestyle that you lived. People don’t have the time or don’t take the*

time. And it has changed because of the cost. And people have insurance but don't use the insurance money to bury you. They bury people for less than they getting. Then they take the other part. Our culture has changed a lot since integration has come in. I think it's bad because everybody should have their own culture."

Manona response was, *"Back then, they did not do birds and carriages. Now everybody tries to out dress each other. It is just a business venture, like when you go to church. It's just a business it seems like."*

Robert at first did not respond. After a short pause he began with, *"We are beginning to see a variety of funeral programs. People are telling more life stories. You see videos. That was something you did not see until recently. You see birds at the cemetery. Some funerals are big social events."*

James said, *"Most people have computers and funeral programs are different. They are more colorful. The order of service have not changed that much. They not as loud as once were."*

Frances state, *"There are some changes. Everything changes depending on whose funeral you attend. I have gone to some services and you would think that you were back in the day. You go to others and they are so sophisticated. Money changes the way we do things. Sometimes I hear family members telling other family members not to get up there with all that hollering. I don't know why because that is our tradition. We are emotional people."*

Carl sustained, *"We are doing more repasts at the church than at the home. People are not staying at the cemetery as long. At one time, African Americans use to stay at the cemetery until the grave is covered. Now they don't do that as much. They*

hardly do it at all. African Americans do not do wakes as often as they use to. Funerals are becoming more personalized. We offer doves at the gravesite. Funerals are done according to a person's career and life style. There was a death recently whereas a person's request for his body to be standing in a corner at his home for people to come and view. There is a series called "Big Mama's kitchen, where you have décor that represents a mother who's favorite past time is cooking in the kitchen. All of this is the results of advertisement. This is where African Americans want to be a part of and if they can afford it, they will buy it. The young people like the T-Shirts with their homey pictures on them. In fact they wear jeans and the T-Shirt to the funeral. Girls and boys wear them. They buy arm bands, especially if it is a gang related death. Sometimes they can turn a funeral service into a circus if you are not careful. Sometimes you need security during some of the wakes. Especially if it is gang related. That was something you would not think of twenty years ago. I am noticing the young do not dress for a funeral. I guess it goes hand and hand with church. Many of them don't dress for church. Many of them do not go to church."

We both agreed that time has certainly brought about a change. These various changes that are constantly developing have transformed certain aspects of African American funeral service. Fifteen years ago the idea of wearing t-shirts to a funeral was not an option. Wakes were considered a social gathering. The thought of having security for protection at wakes or visitations has definitely brought about a change in African American funeral service. Wright and Hughes (2007) uphold, "Social customs and cultural attitudes toward death continue to evolve, even in our more enlightened, less

superstitious age. Three significant issues, cultural, environmental, and business concerns affect the day-to-day and long-term operations of burials (p. 421).”

Juanita replied, *“Let’s see...I think there is more freedom exercised in the rituals because now people are very creative. They do what they want to do. They might have tributes and some people might do a dance at a funeral. I was growing up, that was unheard of. I have had people to do a dance on my funerals. And people pay tribute in different ways than they used do early on; so the formats have changed some.”*

What about funeral programs? In researching data, I cannot find any evidence of funeral programs fifty years ago. Can you remember the first funeral programs and how have they changed throughout the years? Ann trying to remember, *“I don’t remember when funeral programs first started. All of a sudden you will go to funerals and there you had programs. We have not always had funeral programs. They are nice to have.”*

Alma said, *“I remember having a program at my father’s funeral. He was an AME preacher. The church did a lot for us at that time. They paid for my college education after my father’s death.”*

Manona response was, *“I didn’t really go to many funerals when I was young. My mother did and that was the early 50’s. When I started going to funerals I got programs. They are beautiful now. Then we just had a paper. We did not have pictures and poems. They have pictures that show the deceased enjoying life. Back then they could not do that. The Baptist preachers also had a piece of paper with the order of service that they followed.”*

Robert replied, *“You did not have funeral programs until about the late 50’s early 60”s. The first programs used to be typed on stencils and memo graphed. They are more*

elaborate and classy today. It shows how things have changed due to money. People could not afford to make programs. They could barely bury their folks.”

James said, *“No, it had to be back in the sixty’s. They have changed a lot since then.”*

Frances noted that, *“It was probably in the seventy’s.”*

Carl said, *“The first funeral programs that I can remember was back in the late sixty’s or early seventy’s. Before then only the minister and sometimes the funeral director had the order of service. The minister will read the obituary if asked by the family. Funeral programs changed during the beginning of the funeral age. African Americans are the only ones that mainly do funeral program. The other groups just do a card. I notice within the last couple of years, a few of them are slowly getting into funeral programs, especially those who bury blacks.”*

Juanita replied, *“We had funeral programs in the sixty’s. Everyone didn’t get them because they could not afford them. We had programs for my father’s funeral.”*

Funeral programs were black and white made on regularly white paper. The front of the program had a dove or a cross. As time past, pictures were put on the front and later pictures were in color. The programs now are made to illustrate in bi-folds, tri-folds and booklets with several pictures. Most of the funeral programs tell life stories of the deceased. When we talk about funeral programs telling a life’s story, in the past narratives were told verbally during wakes at the deceased home or the funeral home. Those life stories have now being converted into funeral programs and videos. We began a discussion on the shift that has occurred in reference to a wake or visitation in the

African American communities. As a funeral director, I have witness a change in the way we have wakes or visitations.

Ann answer was, *“You used to have wakes. Like somebody died everybody would go there sitting there all night that’s a wake. You go to a wake sitting up with folks who had death in the family. Yes, I brought A.D.’s (my husband) body to the house. I lived right up the street. My children said momma you can’t do that. Clara the funeral director said you can do anything you want. So they brought my husband body here. He was laid out in the living room all night. Yeah that brought the family closer together and the neighbors came, that was helpful.”* I asked her, *“Do you think it is a good thing to bring the body back home?”* Ann replied, *“Yes indeed. You have all your friends here. And you have your husband right in the other room. We laid him out right there (she points to an area in the living room). It made you feel like people cared about you.”*

Alma sustains, *“Well the wake is usually for the black people and where your close friends go and stay with the body all night long. They cut that out because the funeral homes are open. They have certain closing hours and opening hours. It used to be where they took the body to the house and people in that neighborhood could visit all night and they used to have a person there from the house.”*

Manona states that, *“Wake is where you go see the family because nine out of ten times you could not make it to the service. A visitation is letting the people know you came. It’s now one and the same. Before at a wake you sat there all night; nobody went to bed. Now at the visitation at the funeral home, you go there then you go home. It was a celebration back then. It was more of a concern for the family. You stayed there all night. Now we have become so sophisticated and educated.”*

Robert upholds, *“Before folks stayed up with the body for twenty-four hours. There was a night watchman. The Power/Harris family all buried by Clara Ivey were embalmed at home. Those younger ones that were embalmed at the funeral home were carried back to the house and placed in their bed.”*

James said, *“When you used to do wakes it was a time for feasting. We used to do fish fry’s, eat and fellowship. Now when you do visitations, we come and sit and very rarely speak to the family until you are ready to leave, and now you just get up and leave. Now they don’t take the body home. We now take it to the church. We don’t have the time for death, just get it over with.”*

Frances stated, *“Changes I’ve seen as a lot of the wakes, where held at the home as opposed to the funeral home. Now the wakes which are called visitation kind of consist of almost like programs which is why it has to do with the funeral itself and why they don’t last as long because folks felt like they have already visited with the family and said good things about the person. That’s why they are not as traditional. Most wakes were held at home. People sat up all night with the family and remains; long ago they brought the remains back home all night. I think the change has to do with the protection of the funeral director and the public. So many things we have encountered in the cause of death. We have to take precaution as to where we are going to place this body and whose gonna be around this body. Depending on what the person died from. And also we have more money and younger people making the funeral arrangements and they are not in the tradition. They are not gonna do what their grandmother did. They are not gonna want the body brought back to the house.”*

Carl said, *“Basically they are the same. Looking at it technically, a wake is more formal. A wake is when there are speeches and sometimes a ceremony. A visitation is mainly done at the funeral home. This is when friends come and sit and visit with the family. Historically a wake is considered a process where you sit with the family all night. In the beginning wakes were done at the home. The body was taken back to the home. There were some families that did not let the body leave the home. Embalming, dressing and lying out were all done in the home. The body left the home when it was time for the funeral and burial. People will come and sit at the house with the family and they will stay up all night eating, drinking and talking.”*

Juanita said, *“Let me see now. There have been a variety of changes in our services I really don’t know where to start. Since integration, we had changes in every aspect of our lives. We began to realize what the other cultures were doing so we decided we want to do what they do. We are cremating more and at one time that was not heard of such a thing. Money is allowing one to do more things. Our clients watch television and go to the movies and we become imitators. If our money can buy it we get it. It has nothing to do with traditions. If you ask the young people about a wake at the home, they would not know what you are talking about. If they did not see on a movie screen, they would not know what you are talking about. In today’s society we have visitation instead of a wake.”*

Burial insurance at one time was a way for African Americans to pay for their funeral expense. Pre-planning one’s funeral allows a person to choose the service of their choice and than pay for it in advance. Is there a transition from burial insurance to pre-

planning funerals in African American communities? If so, how does it affect rituals and customs of African American funeral service?

Ann said, *“No I don’t know anything about you know the cost or anything. I didn’t pay attention. There was no need to know about the cost. Nobody paid any attention to that. I mean anybody my age did not have not anything to do with it. I know when my husband died the sheriff said you could not bring his body up here. But Clara, Clara, her parents had buried all the folks before. She said you can do anything you want; bring him in the house anywhere you want. Folks talk about you can get the casket up the driveway and all. Her parents have been the burials all along. Clara took over and said you could do anything you want. She brought that body right on up here and thought nothing of it. And when the funeral gathered we got ready to go to the church she was right there with police protection and everything. We trust the funeral home and they did everything and we paid what for what we ask for.”*

Alma states *“Later they had life insurance back then you could be buried for 50-75 dollars. You know and people with polices would have a \$300 policy and if you had a \$500 policy you will have money to bury you. There are more upscale than they used to be. They cost more that they used to be and people are more conscious about the caskets. Not necessarily, cause if they ain’t got no money to buy it they aint going to by it anyway. The older people are more traditional and because of integration and the different values and the mixing of people the culture and other people values have changed. Well I think for me, it is bad because they do not have the sense of black culture any more. They are not taught the fundamentals of black history so therefore they don’t know anything about the culture.”*

As I reflected on Alma response, I ask, “Do anyone teach black culture everyday?” Do we teach black culture to our children everyday?” The teaching of cultural is not in your everyday school. The one month that is set aside for black history is not recognized across the board in this country. As I walk the halls of the college where I teach, students are not taught the traditions of African American funeral service. “Who will teach African American culture if it is not taught in the schools at regular intervals?” “How will they know what customs and traditions belong to what culture?” Alma and I both hunched our shoulders and said, “We do not know.”

Manona said, *“Not really, because all folks want to take care of their loved ones. Some of the old folks had burial insurance. Back in the day blacks could not afford to buy a whole funeral. All they wanted was their money. Times have changed, the economy changed. Rules changed, the government changed. Sometimes it is good to have the insurance.”*

Robert had no opinion on burial insurance vs. pre-need insurance.

James said with authority, *“Now it is the burial plan was more like a society. A group of people would buy into that just like they do insurance today but with pre-need it is all about economics. In the older times, the funeral homes and churches were mostly involved with the societies. Now, it’s really with the pre-need the funeral homes are still involved. Now, people have a choice. Back then, people did not have a choice. Most of the time, burial insurance was not enough to bury anyone decent.”*

Frances upholds that, *“I used to hear about burial insurance but not a lot. I look at it as an organization that prepared you to pay for your funeral but then when you passed on years later it was not enough. But now we have pre-need service which when it*

was taken care of, it was taken care of. Everything is paid for and families do not have to worry about money when that person dies.”

Carl sustains that, *“There were strict rules with burial insurance. They were controlled by various lodges, burial societies or funeral homes. It was just enough money to insure that a person had some money for burial and to get the family in the doors of the funeral homes. Burial insurance usually includes a cheap casket and with bare minimum for a funeral service. It was good at that time and it served its purpose. Pre-planning is completely different. People have the opportunity to come into a funeral home and pick out a complete funeral service of their choice and know how they will pay for it.”*

Juanita said, *“The burial insurance was like nickel and dimes. It was a little bit before my time and I guess it worked at least for something. I can remember seeing in mother’s handwriting a ledger, and she might have had a family name and ten dollars and a date. So I guess that was some type of accounting for a preplan or burial insurance. And of course, in the smaller rural town, that was a big thing. I think that legally there was some things wrong with it. It opened up some fraud some unscrupulous dealings. Pre-arranging is a better thing because people can plan for themselves. Families are protected by the government with pre-need laws.”*

Government laws are good because they protect both the consumers and the funeral homes. Laws keep the profession honest. There are so many changes in the laws of funeral service. Let’s switch subjects and move on to a subject that I feel is catching on in the African American communities. What can you tell me about cremation in the

African American communities? Do you think African Americans are moving towards more cremation? If so, what do you think is the reason for this change?

Ann replied *“Oh yeah. Well, a lot of folks believe in cremation all along. I hadn’t thought of it that way. But a lot of folks preferred it that way than anything else, especially now. Cause you get cremated and they put their ashes out there in South View and that was it. All of it was under my old minister’s supervision; he lived in Greenwood Park his home was there. Yeah I’m sure many folks were cremated but you know there has to be a place for that in south view. You did hear much about it. They would say what about the funeral and you would say he was cremated. People would ask, but what about the service? Sometimes you have no service. You put him in a box out there in that great big beautiful place out there now. You had no service, just bury them. I don’t think we had cremation for long.”*

Alma said, *“Well cremation in African American communities, hum. Well, because, before when I cremated my husband that was in 1960 1965, I would not have thought about cremation. I cremated him because when I came back from my mother’s funeral there was a telegram in the door from Bollard Funerals Home telling me that my husband passed. Yeah and I did not know that he had passed because we were divorced. But his sister in New York City, she tried to take the body and bury him because I was divorce from him. But the people from social security said no, because I have children by him and I have to act on behalf of his children. No not back then because they did not look at it at a positive thing. It was a sign of you burning the body in hell. Like black people when you divorce it looked like you disliked the person so much that you where trying to put them in hell. Cremation is on the rise now because it is the most economical*

thing and its most sanitary way to bury somebody and its more time implement It's because of time and change and money. Consumer related."

Of course I had to smile when Alma told her narrative on cremation. I asked her, "Are you trying to tell me an untold story in why you cremated your divorced husband. She replied with a smile, *"I think we both know what I mean. Let's just keep it like that sweetie."*

Manona maintained, *"We used to feel I don't want my body burned, but is the most economical way to go now. I don't understand most people going to get cremated now trying to save money. If you dead, how you going to save money. I don't believe in putting all my money in the ground is all you hear now. I don't think God wants me to be burned up. Have a nice service. Some religions don't believe in cremation."*

Robert continues, *"That is a new trend that started in the late 70's early 80's. Blacks folks did not believe in burning."*

James said, *"It's based on economics; we find that we can do this and it does not cost as much as would a traditional funeral. Now that we have learned to cremate, we now know how to have memorial services. It was due to a myth that you would not be burned twice. They thought you would burn up the soul. But now they realize you can't burn the soul."*

Frances said, *"There are [is] more of it now than it used to be. A lot of them still don't believe in cremation, cause they don't think they are gonna go to heaven, cause their bodies would not be in such that they can return from whence they came. I think it's a good thing. Mainly, because, it is what I want. But I think because of their religion and traditional beliefs of funerals and burials should be carried out that a lot of them are not*

going to turn to cremation. I think geographically of families not being near the cemetery of where they may be buried or less and less family may not be able to go to the cemetery. It's like this thing in your heart of knowing where this person is and a lot has to do with the upkeep and cost of having that person buried. Economics got a lot to do with it."

Juanita had a lot to articulate about cremation among African Americans, "Now it has become like the exception, it's not the rule yet. But out of 4 cases you may have 1 cremation, and when I say cremation, I mean a direct cremation, where the remains are never embalmed. Where the remains go directly from the funeral home to the crematory; and then the cremains are brought back to the funeral home and the arrangements are made. I have some families who I would like to say like the best of both worlds. One example is to have a service with a rental casket and then to have a cremation as the burial or disposition of the body, that's one way. And then the other way is to have the direct cremation but 2 have a big creative beautiful celebration as the memorial service, and I just had one. It was quite something. So you have people having the best of both worlds. Cremation after burial and cremation before services, there is a third one I cannot think of right now. I think the people, first of all the cost. The people just feel it's not worth all the money they put into a traditional burial. I think cost might be one of the main issues with most people. Now with some people it's a tradition. Now I have a family that they cremate everybody; and you know that when you get the call; you know it's a cremation. And what they do afterwards is to be seen. So you have the traditional family that believes in cremation. Then you have that family that says we just can't do it. Then there is a generation coming up that has a different attitude to life and death.

Whether it's good or bad I can't evaluate yet. But basically some of them feel its over, its over, so why bother. And I have people to come and say I don't want anything, nothing, no service, and no nothing. But it just depends on the family. But you have more cremating now than ever, ever before and I think it is going to increase. First of all when they come to you they have x number of dollars, but you have a cemetery cost, you have to buy a grave, you have to pay for open and closing of the gave, you have to pay for a vault. That is three separate costs; right there. And you have families that say you mean there is more. So people are just being realistic; they are being more frugal and they are not going to invest that much in anymore."

Carl said, *"It has increased. At one time, blacks did not believe in cremation. It was not part of their religious belief. It could be because they knew little about it. They saw little advertisement of it in the beginning. One of the reasons I think, is the increase in the cost of traditional funerals. It is all about economics. Another reason is the social relationships with other groups and it is has become acceptable within the groups. Some of the old myths have faded away. Myths such as not wanted to burn twice and their religion does not accept cremation. At one time Catholics did not recognize cremation as a disposition of the human remains. That rule has changed. Cremation is now accepted within the Catholic Church. Also you have advertisements that advertise created ways to dispose of the cremains and you have an assortment of urns. You have clocks, jewelry boxes, vases, and etc."*

Juanita puts it exactly the way I would explain cremation in African American communities. There is a sundry of rationalizations in why various members within African American communities choose cremation. Wright and Hughes (2007) support

that, “Cremation, now the choice of 28 percent of Americans, has been gaining on traditional burial for three decades” (p. 451). Wright and Hughes also sustain that, “The low cost-less than \$1,000, according to consumer groups –has been cited as the primary reason for this shift. But simplicity isn’t the hallmark of all cremation.” (p. 451).

After listening to the narratives on varied elements to determine the change in African American funeral service, I asked the participants, how are African American funeral services similar to or different from non-African American services?

Ann says, *“No, no, I have never been to anything but black funerals, but I heard that some of them would be so sacred. Some would be outside and some would be in that beautiful chapel. They are put in boxes and had horse drawn carriages. Their graves were designed that you can see their faces in it. You could still go out there and ask to look at the folks.”*

Alma said that, *“I went to a catholic service. It was a White Catholic service. Their service was very to do. They said and did things that I could not understand. It was strange to me. I compare it like less demonstrative. You do not get the yelling and the screaming.”* I asked her, “Can she compare African American services to any of the Catholic services. Her reply was, *“I have not gone to a Black Catholic service. I grew up in the AME church. Our service is not as loud as some Baptist and the Pentecostal churches. When my father died, it was very sophisticated. All the bishops came to speak. Most funeral services are changing. It depends on what the family wants.”*

Manona stated, *“Not too many differences. It is a lot of difference from when I was a little child. People cared. It’s not much difference when you go to one. They are*

cold people; they don't show emotion like Black people do. If they show emotions it is probably privately. We (blacks) were emotionally people. Life has changed our services."

Robert maintained, "White folks usually bury their dead within two days of death/dying. Whereas, blacks tend to hold a body out longer, usually upwards of a week. Money also plays a factor in when a black service will be held as opposed to a white service. Also whites would not think twice about burning their folks up whereas, blacks would not want to do that as a first choice."

James sustains, "Let's say, we go into an African American church we still have the church services and rituals. The Non African Americans that I have attended, there is a song a prayer and a eulogy. This is another thing we don't use properly. African Americans think the eulogy is the preaching which it is not. I can't remember because when I came into funeral service there were always funeral programs and that was back in the 50's."

Frances said, "We have services that are held longer. We have limousines. We have flower ladies, flower attendants; casket burials that are a lot of our counterparts don't do. They just give a time when they are gonna be at the graveside services as opposed to the African Americans who have a specified time to line up and a place to meet and getting everybody in attendance in the service to be there. A lot of African Americans are getting like them and it has to do with the younger generation as they come along. A lot of their jobs keep them so busy and they have lost the tradition of African Americans funeral services. A lot has to do with interracial marriages that we did not have when I came along. We were strictly African American tradition as opposed to today."

Carl expressed, *“Non-African Americans funerals are more on a high military service, very formal, very strict. At White funerals you tend to have a lack of emotions. Black funerals seen to be more informal and you also have more emotions. For Black funeral goers, most of them will wear their Sunday best whereas; Non-White funeral goers have a mixture of Sunday best and everyday clothes. This is the exception with our younger generations. Black funerals are more like a social gathering. Non-African Americans service is strictly for the service and that’s it. Very rarely will they have a repast at the church. If they had one, it would be at the home and not the church. Ninety percent of the time, African Americans will have a repast at the church after the service. Non-White is about ten percent. African Americans appear to be more emotional than Non-African Americans.”*

Juanita articulated, *“Even the formats are different; First of all in some of the services that I have attended, the family has a family section and that section was a bit cut off from the main sanctuary, especially in a funeral home chapel. This means that that family had some privacy in their grief and they were not staring in the eyes of their people. And the people that came to comfort them. But I have also noticed that people want people; they want that comfort of people sitting next to them with the tears in their eyes and the arms rubbing them and hugging them; people want that. When I had a choice to build a funeral home chapel, I did not have a section for the family, and that was a recent thing when section for the family was very popular. They said we needed it and I said no we don’t need it. They want to feel the warm and comfort of the people and they may want to show out for people. I think it is very cultural, because with the Caucasian funeral, they never communicate with the people. They come in a different*

way. They are seated separately; don't come down the aisle with other folks. They leave separately and then they file in their cars and go and then the other people get in their cars and they leave. And you really miss some of that contact and that is true with the Caucasian funerals which I have attended. And in Seattle Washington, I had that same experience in a funeral when my brother in law died and it's something that I had missed that meeting and comfort of the people."

I continued our conversation with the ideology of America becoming a melting pot for various cultures. America has developed its own set of rules for funeral service. Do you think African Americans are buying into this melting pot scenario? Are we changing the culture of African American funeral service?

Ann with great conviction, *"We are beginning to have more dignified funerals. People are able to pay for more. I guess they see more and they want to do more. People get around a lot more than they use to. Everyone wants to do what other people are doing. We always want to be doing what the white folks are doing."*

Alma thought about the question for a minute and responded with, *"Well what brought about the change are the economy and the way people lifestyles. And another time is people don't have the time they used to have anymore because everything is body specific and based on income because if you don't work you don't get paid and if you don't get paid you can't pay your rent. So the economy is tied up in everything in your rituals and the way you do things. Money is the same for everyone, white folks and black folks."*

Manona very frankly replied, *“We want to be like the white folks. Everything they do, we want to imitate them. Sometimes we begin to think what we are doing is wrong and that’s not right.”*

Robert simply said, *“You know we think that the other folks water is colder than our.” I think it go half and half. Families use to care more for each other. There ceremonies meant more to each other. The order of service for the funeral meant more; therefore the service was more traditional. Now it s more like imitators, do as the others do. That is the correct way to do.”*

James said, *“In a sense, we still have our traditions. There are certain things we do that other folks don’t do. Some of our funerals are still emotional. Now certain laws keep up from doing some of the old things. That can make our services a lot like the others. Also, you have to look at our vendors. They sell to everyone therefore they give everyone the same ideas. A lot of the ideas sound good and funeral homes are keeping up with the trends. I asked him, “Had he ever thought about whose trends were portrayed with these vendors.” His response was, “I never thought about it.”*

Frances said, *“Yes, I think so. We see other people doing things and we want to do the same thing, whether it is black or white. When you look at funeral programs, if you go to a funeral and see a program you like, you try to get the same thing when something happens in your family. That if you can afford it. And we again need to think about it has to do with the counterpart taking over a lot of the African American funeral establishments. And if they are the owners, you do what they say do. When you are in Rome, you do what the Romans do”*

Carl said, *“Non-African Americans funerals are more on a high military service, very formal, very strict. At White funerals you tend to have a lack of emotions. Black funerals seem to be more informal and you also have more emotions. For Black funeral goers, most of them will wear their Sunday best whereas; Non-White funeral goers have a mixture of Sunday best and everyday clothes. This is the exception with our younger generations. Black funerals are more like a social gathering. Non-African Americans service is strictly for the service and that’s it. Very rarely will they have a repast at the church. If they had one, it would be at the home and not the church 90% of the time. African Americans will have a repast at the church after the service. Non-White is about 10%. African Americans appear to be more emotional than non-African Americans. I can safely say for the most part we are continuing some of our traditions. There are certain aspects within the industry that are similar because we all are members of the same associations. We learn from the same speakers and vendors. Remember at one time, we were not all a member of the same association. Blacks belong to their groups and whites belong to their groups.”*

Juanita hangs on to the idea that we continue a lot of our traditions. But as time passes we move into new traditions. She said, *“I see African Americans continuing some of the old traditions but I can also see new traditions interfacing with old traditions. We must also remember that as African Americans, we have always had a diverse set of traditions. It depends upon the area of the country you migrate from.”*

Throughout the narratives, participants spoke on the varied transformation within the African American funeral service. I finally decide to ask the question that is the driving force of this dissertation. “What influence has consumer culture had on the

paradigm shift in African American funeral customs?” This question is the focus of this research and it is my belief that consumer culture plays a vital role in the paradigm shift in African American funeral service. What has influenced changes in the way African Americans funeralize their loved ones?

Ann whispered, *“I don’t know, I hadn’t thought about it. But, I used to sit there and you know the white cemetery used to be like no one other than that group can go in there. You never see that anymore. All the big folks pass by and you never see any blacks. Whites had police protection and everything, but you never saw it with the colored folks. I have seen some of the biggest white folks go by there with police protection. I think color folks use to want the same thing. They want the protection too. Color folks either had to be buried in South View Cemetery or at some other colored cemetery.”*

Alma at the beginning had no response. After a quiet moment, she replied, *“Time brings about a change. Everything changes. Black people want to change with the time. We do not want to stay the same. We want something better.”*

Manona answered back, *“Money.”*

Robert replied, *“Basically, they used to hold you (the dead body) out forever. Now they do like the white folks and bury you real quick. Because some blacks have the money to afford funerals now, so they feel that they can go on and get it over with.”*

James said, *“It is the signs of the times; let’s get through it in a hurry lets get it over with.”*

Frances maintained, *“People change. They are mixing with other people more, therefore they see more. We use to not mix with other cultures like we do now. We work together and some even go to church together. We sort of learn from each other. So sometimes we share”*

Carl said, *“Economic is one and new religions is another. Advertisement has played a vital role. At one time people did not see advertisement. There was no advertisement other than fans and calendars. Now they see funeral service all over the place. Television, Internet, Radio, at one time there were no advertisements.”*

Juanita sustains, *“Let’s see...it think there is more freedom exercised in the rituals because now people are very creative they do what they want to do. They might have tributes and some people might do a dance at a funeral, and when I was growing up that was unheard of. I have had people to do a dance on my funerals. And people pay tribute in different ways than they used do early on; so the formats have changed some.”*

It is my belief that the funeral industry is becoming a big business in the United States. The companies that sell the most goods in the industry impact the culture of funeral service. Companies that serve the funeral industry are beginning to use consumer culture strategies to sell their goods and services. What is your opinion on the advertisement of funeral service and goods?

Ann answered, *“About somebody being dead and what. No I don’t remember anybody advertising the sale of caskets and anything; however there was one right up the street, but we knew the undertakers and we who sold caskets we knew everybody; so when you got ready for a casket all you do was let Ivey Brothers Funeral Home know and your love ones were there at Ivey Brothers Funeral Home and others.”*

Alma response was, *“Well I never really thought about it because ah to me it just like anything else that you selling stuff in order to make the funeral better. I feel like it is a good thing.”*

Manona responded with bluntness, *“I have not seen any advertisement.”*

Robert reply was, *“It can be helpful to the business and family. Letting them know what’s available. You have to pick your advertisements; don’t have nothing tacky/messy. Everyone needs a good public relations person.”*

James responded, *“Most of us can’t sell ourselves. We have been into doing our best.”*

Frances said, *“I don’t regard it that highly because traditionally in the African American community the funeral services had been...um down through the years family’s use of funeral homes have been because the funeral home has buried your mother or father. All know that word of mouth is the best advertisement. And somebody to be picked up a poster board makes you... are you dealing with death on do you just want to advertise and makes you look like you are advertising to make money. I don’t have a lot of positive feeling about advertising on the funeral services because it’s something that we are gonna use, and to me it’s more if a personal thing for the family using that. They can pick up the yellow pages and find a funeral home. It has to do with the counterpart taking over a lot of the African American funeral establishments.”*

Carl said, *“I think it is good. Advertisement is the way to go. You will be surprise about the things people do not know. An example is pre-need. People won’t know about pre-need if it was not for advertisement. That is the best way to go People gets to know who you are, especially in a competitive world.”*

Juanita said, *“Yes there is more; yes I guess when you stop and think about it; I don’t know when that happened though; but all of a sudden we have bill board advertisements, we have had people on the radio and we have people doing seminars; and so all of this is a part of getting the funeral home advertise; but at the same time they*

are playing a role of education. If we have a certain role that we want to play to educate the grieving public, so we can tell them don't do this or do that a certain way by having a grief seminar; so yes I guess it's a good form of advertisement and it can be positive. I do not approve professionally of advertising costs. I think it is ok to say this that we have a reduced priced if it is needed but to give a dollar amount in the advertisement is bad. I'm old fashioned, but I think it is a positive thing to advertise the services, because that's where it is at the services. Years ago about 25 years ago I said to the funeral directors that one day that Sears and Roebuck will have their caskets out on the sidewalks with prices on them and they laughed me under the table. But now Sears and Roebuck aren't doing it, but we have the casket stores. So I'm not surprised. I predicted it; because the reason I predicted it is because we emphasize the caskets as funeral directors instead of the services we provide. So this casket and service is \$3500.00. Now since the federal trade commission a few years back we itemize. So I think that it was a blessing in disguise. Because we were blessed with forcing discipline on every funeral director and to make them itemize and to be very conscious on selling services, on services are being provided. So actually if you are doing a good job as a funeral director and counselor it does not matter where that person goes and gets that casket, because the casket is only one item of the service."

The strategies of the new market continue to be saturated by a dominant culture, which is embracing the information age to present its funeral culture as America's only funeral culture. Advertisements are a new market for funeral directors. I asked the funeral directors who controls the advertisements we see in the funeral industry.

James said, "Never thought about it, funeral homes I guess."

Frances said, *“Owners control advertisement. Everyone who owns something controls their own method of advertisement. Funeral homes control their advertisements and so do casket factories and suppliers. They advertise their own products to fit their needs.”*

Carl clearly stated, *“White folks control advertisement. That’s who owns the radio stations, TV Stations. You can get better advertisement for your business if you use the internet because there is less control. White folks determine what type of ads that are presented on TV and for most part on the radio.”*

Juanita thought for a moment and then responded with, *“People who owns and control the goods. The funeral industry is no different than any other industry. If you have the money, you develop a product and you advertise that product the best way you know how. If you are African American, you market to that group. If you are non African American, you advertise the best way you know how. The problem is that our people believe that the non African American advertisements are the American way of life. We become imitators.”*

If we are imitators and assimilators, has the buying power of African Americans in purchasing funeral service goods and merchandise impacted the cultural changes in their funerals?

Ann says in a matter of fact manner, *“Now if someone dies and we go out there to south west and bury them and then you go home, of course you are sad then. You have seen all of your friends everybody has done all they are going to do, no more remembering anything. It has taken a lot away from funeral because it uses to be a gathering of friends. I wouldn’t say that it needs to be continued. I don’t think that you go*

out to just bury them and that's it. It helps to lighten the sadness of the family to have all of the others and friends together, you may say well I didn't know she had died. So yes I think those social get together were helpful. I can't see buying things will have anything to do with that."

Alma said, "Yes it has increase because African Americans now have insurance. In 1960 black people did not have any insurance to bury people in the first place in the 60's cause blacks did not get any insurance. Your family buried you. They got contributions from different people in the family to bury you. Now if they have the money to buy more, they buy what they see. If they see it on a television show and if they can buy it, they do it. I don't see nothing wrong with that."

Manona replied, "The way I look at it, they are trying to outdo the other one and each other. They want the birds and the carriages and all that other stuff. They see friends going to another funeral or from word of mouth."

Robert comment was, "Yes, more blacks can afford more services and goods."

James maintains, "It has changed the buying power but not in the clients minds. Well yeah; we are really unable to purchase what we want. We have to take what we get. It does not affect the ritual even if we can buy more."

Frances declared, "Yes I think it has. Years ago I guess a person used insurance to pay for a funeral. It wasn't much. Now funerals are more expensive. It's almost like they know they got to have insurance or some means of finance in order to have the type of funeral they se in advertisements."

Juanita expressed, "I think absolutely, absolutely, the buying power is elevated. In other words, years ago, our people could not afford the x number of dollars, but now they

work, they have insurance; they look far in advance to realize that they need some sort of life insurance. There are very few people who come to us now who have no kind of benefits. They can have it on their jobs. They are very few people. Now some come because they have had some policies lapse or some sort of unfortunate experience. But by large many more people have some sort of mechanism in place to afford to purchase the goods and services that we offer.”

Carl voiced, *“I would think so because people are making better salaries therefore we are able to sell better merchandise and services. People who make better salaries are able to vary from traditional service. Just like anything else, money gives them the opportunity to buy a service that is fitting to their wants.”*

What are the social ramifications for African Americans if funeral service has become homogenized? It is my belief that African Americans are losing their identity in African American funeral customs and rituals. I believe that knowing and participating in customs and rituals of one’s culture keeps that person in tune to who they are as an individual. These customs and rituals separate them and enhance one to identify and show reverence to that culture. It is that rite of passage that gives a person a sense of self worth. Do you think change in African American funeral service has been a positive or negative change for African Americans?

Ann spoke with a lot of conviction, *“Changes have been good for us, or how else would we know how good Christian funerals would be. The preacher and his wife lived in the park, and they lived there despite everything. I had an aunt that took me in after my mother died, and when I got married she had a social affair at the park where our minister lived.”*

Alma replied, *"I guess it can be a good thing. When we change from bad habits, we sometimes change for the good. Some of the way we do things can be kind of backwards."*

Manona said in a matter of fact tone, *"People change, the world changed everything changes. Fifty years ago everyone loved each other, now people don't speak; people afraid to speak; now you have and uptight world. We have regressed."*

Robert stated, *"It's a positive change. People don't need to do things they use to do anymore."*

James said, *"It's negative because we don't pass our culture on. Get the kids to transpire into the transition now. They instill in the children's mind that's funerals are bad. You don't want to touch that [the body]."*

Frances declared, *"Some of the change is positive when it comes to helping the family. Some of them may be negative when it comes to the law for funeral services. I think some of the FTC [Federal Trade Commission] rulings I think that have played a part and we have had to cut out some rituals because of that. And some have been cut out due to liability and finances of the family and some of the laws of funeral services have had to do with it. A lot of the things that have taken place such as casket stores have a lot to do with it."*

Carl proposes that, *"It depends on the standpoint you are looking at. As far as cost of a funeral, it is good for funeral homes and families if they can afford it. If you again look at cremation, at the beginning of the increase, it was bad for funeral homes. They were not making as much money. As time went along, the industry figured out a way for cremation to become a win- win situation for everyone. Change can always be positive. I wonder how many of our people can keep up with this rapid change. When the*

economic is the way it is change can be negative. When you really think about it, do people know when change occurs? It happens so fast and often, do we really know what is traditional? Life is a circle, what happened fifty years ago, will become someone's new idea next year. We easily forget.

Juanita articulated, "In some ways it can be positive and in some ways it can be negative. There is good in bad in everything. When you look at progress for African Americans, you see something positive. We don't want to go backwards when it comes to economically being able to do some of the things we could not do in the past. It becomes negative when we forget who we are. Somehow we lose a sense of being. When you look at our African American youths, some of them do not know who they are. Funeral service is the same way. Many young people do not know anything about traditional funerals. All they know is what they see on TV. This is what they are taught."

We have shared a rich history within the last couple of weeks. Within our conversations, I can identify a shift in the customs and rituals within African American funeral service. Is there any thing you would like to share about your experiences with the funeral service industry that I did not ask about?

Ann with assertiveness said, "After I am buried, I don't see any point in anything else. You have done everything you could for me once I have been sitting here, and as you know this has been the house beside the road. This has been what I would call a real gathering place. I would never think of celebrating. (Laughing) A Service with dignity, like Clara had done a classmate, a church member of mines had died and I went to the funeral home and sat there till all had done. A lot of people don't come to the funeral

home anymore like they used to. I sat there until everything was over. It could have been a good crowd but all the people did not show up.”

Alma said, “Not necessarily I think that the funeral service today is orientated into the lifestyle that you lived. People don’t have the time or don’t take the time. And it has changed because of the cost. And people have insurance but don’t use the insurance money to bury you. They bury people for less than they getting then they take the other part. Our culture has changed a lot since integration has come in. I think it’s bad because everybody should have their own culture.”

Manana sorrowfully said, “You covered it all, people change, the world changed everything changes. Fifty years ago everyone loved each other, now people don’t speak; people afraid to speak; now you have and uptight world we have regressed.”

Robert said, “They used to have funeral parties; selling foods and drinks to raise money to pay for the funeral and bury relatives. You don’t hear about that tradition anymore.”

James said, “The order of service has not changed from what I can remember. The services are shorter; they used to have down home church. The change of times, fast moving society most of the people you talk to say let’s get it over quickly. They have traditional songs and prayers and that’s it, a quick service.

Frances said with great convictions, “My hat’s off to African Americans professional funeral directors and their continuous contribution to traditions. It means a lot to me because I’m older. It means a lot it’s like something I look at other races and other cultures. Regardless of what changes are made, they stick to their culture and I would like to see that happen in the African American culture. That we stick to some of

those things without changing. When I think back on the years from when my mother was buried and when my father was buried even when I lost my husband. And it goes back to the melting pot of culture of all the culture that we have the African Americans gives up their traditions quicker in order to fit in with the American way or their American counterparts so they keep moving. We look at other culture and its like come along now or get left behind. From slavery we had to follow their guidelines and trends even as funeral directors we had to go along with it. We are still fighting battles now of laws that have changed. It's a way of eliminating the small African American funeral homes."

Carl spoke with a serious tone, *"I would like to see funeral directors to continue the tradition of being professional instead of choosing funeral service as a trade. When students treat funeral service as a trade instead of a profession, something is lost. Service is not the service it should be. Tradition is no longer tradition because a trade takes away the tradition. A profession continues the traditions."*

Juanita said, *"The one thing I would like to say in closing is that one can get over there involvement emotional in funeral service and it can be a double edge sword sometimes. For example, once we had built a new chapel and I was really so proud of it and my first funeral in there I shall never forget. Because when the people came in they were very emotional they went almost under the casket; and this one lady kicked her heel; she had a pointed heel; and kicked into the wall and put a hole into my new wall. Now I found that very distressing. I went up to my office and cried. And as I got over it and thought about it, I was ashamed of the fact that I was annoyed that she had done that. And so as life goes one is able to experience how you can change emotionally; don't get so involved with any of it that you lose how a person feels whose in grief. The person*

in grief who is in grief is the most important or should be in the funeral directors mind. And if we lose sight of that, we might as well close the door, lock the door and throw away the key. And as I have grown in funeral services and I am getting ready to go into retirement, I want folks to keep that going; don't get caught up into whether they are kicking in the car; urinating on the floor. They are in pain and we are there to help them; and if you help them sincerely, everything falls into place. The money comes in and everything works fine. It's all about service."

After my interviews and the sharing of our narratives, I went back to the funeral home and began my examination of funeral programs. I had over one thousand funeral programs at the funeral home that I could begin by research data. The participants of this inquiry, had funeral programs that I scrutinize before, after or during our interviews. The funeral home had over ten thousands statements of funeral services and goods. All of the data examination of the statements of services and goods came from Carl M. Williams Funeral Home. The funeral home data dates back to 1912. Ivey Brothers Funeral Home was established in 1912. My husband (Carl) and I bought this funeral home in 1994. Upon the death of the owner Clara Ivey Wilson in 1992, Carl served as President of Ivey Brothers until we purchased the business from Clara Ivey Wilson's estate in August of 1994. The funeral home new name became Ivey-Williams Funeral Home for one year. The Ivey name could only be used for one year of transition. In 1995, the business was renamed to Carl M. Williams Funeral Directors, Inc.

Part of this data analysis seeks to find the beginning of the use of funeral programs in the Metropolitan area. I looked for style and order of service for the funeral that might have changed within the last fifty years. I also scrutinized statements of goods

and services within the last fifty years. The data obtained from these items were analyzed to determine the transformation that has transpired in African American funeral service. I developed a timeline of the results of the paradigm shift of African American funeral service in the Metropolitan area where this study took place. The elements on this timeline follow a paradigm shift in funeral programs or folders. This timeline will also include a paradigm shift in statements of services and goods and other noteworthy information. The range of the time line is from 1940-2008. The timeline is divided into decades. This time line appears in this research as Appendix D. Appendix E shows a graph of the results of this data analysis of the paradigm shift in African American funeral service.

After I began my investigation on the data, I discovered that I was basically looking at the same information on most of the programs and statements of services and goods. To save time, I decided to pick a certain number to scrutinize. Files were randomly sampled from the beginning of the decade, the middle of the decade and the end of the decade. This method gave verification to changes occurring within a decade.

Accumulating Archeological Data

Just for my own verification, looking through records from 1920-1940 at Ivey Brothers Funeral Home, Inc., there were no significant changes in funeral service. Funeral service cost did not increase any more than five to ten dollars. It appears that funeral service was no more than providing a service to the community. The cost was kept to a minimum. All records are kept in a bind book. Twenty statements and goods files were examined for the decade of 1940-1950. There were no significant changes from 1920-1940. Data does not show any evidence of family or funeral homes providing

funeral programs during this timeframe. There is nothing written down in data about the order of funeral service. Oral narratives from participants maintained, "The order of service for each funeral was done by the minister and the family of the deceased." The eulogists had the only copy and acted as a Master of Ceremony." The average cost of funerals was \$349.91. Sixteen were paid by cash and four were paid by insurance and cash, but mostly with cash. Cremation and funeral programs were not listed as an option. The average cost of caskets was \$250.00. Out of twenty files examined, seven were church services, eight were chapel services, four were graveside services and one service was held at the home of the deceased.

Twenty files of data were examined during the decade of 1950-1960. The data proved that funeral cost increased about one hundred dollars. Prices began to reflect an increase in service. One change is a charge for transportation. Fourteen of the data researched had evidence of payment plans. All records are beginning to be kept in file folders. Data does not show any evidence of a formal funeral program during this time frame. There is some evidence of a minister providing an order of service. Obituaries were read by the minister or officiate of the service. There was nothing written down about the order of service in data researched. The average cost of funerals was \$497.97. Nineteen were paid by cash and one was paid by insurance. Cremation and funeral programs were not listed as an option on the service and goods form. The average cost of caskets was \$275.00. Out of twenty files examined, twelve were chapel services and eight were church services.

Twenty-five files were examined for the decade of 1960-1970. There was an increase on the average of funerals of \$200.00. The cost of caskets reflects the reason of

the increase of funeral cost. There was no increase in the cost of service. The increase was in merchandise. All records were kept in file folders. There was no evidence of a formal funeral program. Nothing written down about order of service in data researched. The average cost of funerals was \$804.17. All twenty-five funerals were paid by cash. No evidence of burial insurance. The average cost of caskets was \$427.55. Out of twenty-five files examined, ten were chapel services and fifteen were church services.

Twenty-five files and thirty funeral programs were examined for the decade of 1970-1980. There was a \$1,000.00 increase in the average cost of funerals during this time period. It appears that funeral service is evolving during this time period. Payment plans show evidence of a beginning of pre-planning funeral arrangements. Evidence of the funeral program emerges. Thirty programs were used for data in this timeframe. They were basic black typed on white paper. In 1974, black and white pictures of the deceased are placed on the front of the funeral programs. The usage of a cross and praying hands signify a religious service. Most of the programs indicated that they were reproduced with a ditto machine. Four of them had the name of a printing company indicating that these programs may have been professionally printed. Instead of obituaries giving the bio of one's life, many of the programs used poems. Funeral programs indicated that the order of services was long and short. It depended upon the person's station in life.

All programs had prayer and scriptures from the old and new testaments. The order of service on the funeral programs indicated that there were remarks made about the deceased from one to two people. The average cost of funerals was \$1,980.64. Twelve of the contracts had a payment plan. Ten were paid for by insurance and three were paid by cash. The average cost of caskets was \$755.02. Embalming cost and

service began to see a slight increase. Funeral programs were listed on the statement of services and goods. Cremation was not an option on service and goods forms. Out of 25 files examined, eight were chapel funerals and sixteen were church services. Out of 30 funeral programs examined from this time period, 24 were church services and six were chapel services.

Twenty-five files and fifty funeral programs were examined for the decade of 1980-1990. In all the data examined, this time frame data shows the first sign of cremation. Out of the 25 files and 50 funeral programs examined, one cremation was noted. This was direct cremation with no sign of ceremony. The average cost of funerals increased \$600.00. Funeral programs are in varied sizes. (11x14 as well as 8_{1/2}x11) The funeral programs varied in color ranging from your basic black and white to pictures of the deceased and religious epitaph. Quite a few of them had obituaries telling the life's story instead of poems. The order of service had no significant change from previous time frame. The average cost of funerals during this time frame was \$2,678.23. Twelve of the service and goods examined were paid for with cash and insurance. Eight were paid for in cash and five were paid with insurance only. The average cost of caskets was \$1,459.00. Cremation and funeral programs were options on the service and goods forms. Out of 25 services and goods examined, 16 were church services, eight were chapel services and one was graveside. Out of the 50 funeral programs examined, 45 were church services and six were chapel. There was one cremation.

Twenty-five files and 50 funeral programs were examined for the decade of 1990-2000. All indication of this time frame depict that African American funeral service were focusing more on the deceased and providing services for the families. The general price

list was beginning to include charges for personal time and basic service. The cost of funeral programs began to get higher as the demand came in the late ninety's to personalize the programs more. Evidence of data proved that there were direct cremations in the early ninety's and this trend moved in the late ninety's to cremation with a memorial service with a religious tone. Funeral programs continue to evolve but a little more sophisticated. This time period began to show a storytelling of the deceased life. Obituaries were longer.

In 1995, more color can be seen and deceased pictures are in color. Paper sizes show bi-folds, tri-folds and collages of pictures telling the life of the deceased. During this time period, some programs remained basic because of costs. Some data continued the standard black and white typed on plain white paper. Funeral programs continue to indicate the order of service long and short, depending upon the station in life of the deceased. Out the fifty programs examined, 27 of them had a picture of the deceased and the other 23 had either praying hands or a cross. In 1995, color pictures were beginning to evolve on funeral programs. The average cost of funerals during this time frame was \$4992.49. Eighteen of the services and goods examined were paid by insurance, three by insurance and cash, and four by cash only. The average cost of caskets was \$1,925.60. Cremation and funeral programs were options on the services and goods form. Out of the twenty-five services and goods files examined during this time frame, ten were chapel services, ten were church services, two were graveside services and three were direct cremation. Out of the 50 funeral programs examined, 43 were church services, six were chapel services and one was graveside.

Twenty-five files and 50 funeral programs were examined for the decade of 2000-2008. This data brings us up to the present time. Funeral data proved a shift in funeral service from 1940 to the present time. The average cost of funeral service increased from \$349.91 to \$7,663.36. This is a 210% increase. Looking through the data of funeral programs, statements of funeral services and goods, there were increases in the cost of services and goods across the board. Within the time frame of this table, data authenticated that funeral homes were offering more goods and services to their consumers. Each itemized service had its own cost. Which will explain the increase in funeral cost over the past 68 plus years? Data also confirmed that consumers were able to pay for the services and goods that were offered. Paper type varied from program to program. There were plain paper, Decca edge paper, and glossy paper ranging in a variety of sizes. There were bi-folds, tri-folds, booklets, single pictures, collages of pictures, all telling the life story of the deceased. The order of services did not vary from if the funeral was done at a church, funeral chapel or a college campus.

All order of services examined had the basic standard guidelines: Processional, prayer, hymn, scriptures, tributes or remarks, eulogy, acknowledgements, and recessional. This is true for the first program I examined up to the last. Appendix F and G illustrates the order of service that continued throughout the decades. Each varied according to family's preference. The average cost of funerals during this time frame is \$7,663.36. Six of the services were paid by insurance, eight were paid by cash, and four were paid by insurance and cash. Two had a payment plan and five had pre-arrangement plans. The average cost of caskets was \$2,017.50. Cremation, funeral programs and other services were options on the services and goods forms. Out of 25 services and goods files

examined, 22 were church services. Two were chapel services and one was direct cremations. There was one cremation that had a church service. Out of the 50 funeral programs that were examined, 46 funerals were held at a church, three were held at a funeral home chapel and one was held on a college campus. See graph on Appendix E.

Summary of Findings

This ends the narratives from a group of participants that shared their stories on the paradigm shift in African American funeral service. The plotlines of this narrative inquiry enhanced my awareness of African American mourning stories. There was so much to the story of African American funeral traditions. Some I have forgotten and some I did not know. It was rewarding to hear the passion in the participants voice when they told their narratives about the various wakes they attended. I knew about wakes. I heard stories about wakes but not in such a fashion. When I think about the poem that I wrote at the beginning of this chapter, the narratives helped me to realize that we are continuing the legacy of our Ancestors when we take the time to narratively tell our stories and transcend them through history. This study gave the participants and me the opportunity to tell our stories for future generations.

We shared our stories and our time together became a social event. I was energized when I approached the funeral homes and homes of the participants. As I began my routine field notes and began to transcribe the interviews, I realized that the sharing of African American funeral service narratives was significant to me. It is my passion. I believe in this passion because it is ninety percent of my life; I live it everyday.

When I listen to the participant's narratives, I came to realize that their narratives were similar to my narratives. We were different but yet the same. We all shared a culture

but through narratives there is evidence of diversity in each participant's unique way.

Lawrence W. Levine (2007) quotes W.E.B. DuBois in "*Black Culture and Black Consciousness*":

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, -this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face (p. 136).

When I read the transcripts and studied the field notes of this qualitative research, I wondered if W.E.B. Dubois' prediction in his writing is true. He wrote in the early 1900's. A hundred years later, African Americans continue to struggle with identity.

The transformation of culture within African American funeral service did occur. I was seeking to find within the narratives of the participants and the data analysis if the six core elements played a significant role in this transformation. After listening to the narratives and the study of the field notes, I found that the main element that transformed African American funeral service was not part of this study. This element is integration. When African Americans integrate with other cultures, they began to assimilate the dominant one and lose their own culture. African American funeral service coincides

with other industries that have gone through a shift in customs and rituals when integration becomes a part of that culture.

CHAPTER 5

INTERPRETING THE NARRARIVES

The Narratives of African American Funeral Service

Let's tell the narratives of a culture

A culture that's been lost but kept its composure

A culture that Ancestors savored

Ritual and customs that are flavored

A culture that has been ignored

A culture that has been adored

Those who wears the mask

Are ready to take on any task

Let's tell the narratives of a culture

A culture of funeral service that needs its nurture

Understanding the needs of a person in grief

Funeral directors need not to be brief

A child yearning for a parent's lost

Providing service no matter the cost

A service that is fitting for any society

African American traditions with all of the deity

A worthy race that has lost their ethnicity

Working to make this country shine without notoriety

Let's tell the narratives of a culture

One who wears the mask without notice or posture

*To a country that have forgotten who they are
To continue the stride with dignity near and far.*

-Carol Thomas Williams-

Narratives in Full Circle: Viewing the Perception

This study explored the paradigm shift of African American funeral customs and traditions. It investigated behavioral changes in the attitude among African Americans in reference to rituals and customs of funeral service. The narrative inquiry explored the historical aspect of African American rituals and funeral customs that have transcended down from generations. The goal of this study was to explore the impact of consumer culture on the changing rituals and customs of African American funeral service. This study also looked at societal beliefs in determining the culture of African American funeral rites and customs. Rites of passage are specific to individual cultures.

Traditional funeral rituals can provide meaningful closure to family members and friends. When a loved one dies, it is important to provide a meaningful ceremony that reflects the culture of the person that has moved beyond the physical realm to the spiritual realm of existence. Every aspect of African American funeral service supports the notion that there is a religious and spiritual connection in the expression of funeral traditions and customs. Changing forms demonstrated in this study identified possible changes in African American funeral service and some elements that fostered those changes.

Findings

This research is a narrative on the history of funeral service and followed a paradigm shift seeking a transformation of African American funeral customs within the

last fifty years. The research encompasses the past, present and future of African American rituals and funeral customs that are narratively transcended through generations. The study extended the research on the history of African American cultures as it relates to funeral service. After a review of the narratives, I recognize that the questions I was asking in this study had several highways to travel. I kept the narratives on the highway in which I had designed the road maps. This inquiry enhanced my awareness that African American funeral service is a diverse culture and change occurs frequently.

The findings of this study indicated that there is a paradigm shift in African American funeral service. I investigated the influences that contributed to the changes of customs and rituals within African American funeral service. Through narratives and surveying of data, religion and consumer culture were also a factor explored in this research as possible factors in the changing forms in African American funeral service. This study had four research questions. After completing the questions in this qualitative narrative, all of the participants agreed that African American funeral service had gone through a transformation within the last fifty years.

The research questions were, “What are the driving forces that contribute to a paradigm shift in African American funeral customs?” “Has America developed its own unique rituals and customs through consumer culture?” “What influence has consumer culture had on the paradigm shift in African American funeral customs?” and “What are the social ramifications for African Americans if funeral service has become homogenized?”

In addition, this study focused on six core elements to explore the changes that caused this paradigm shift in African American funeral service. One element was the program order for the funeral service. With narratives and data from funeral programs, I surveyed and looked for changing forms. The second element was seeking to find if African Americans were continuing to participate in vestiges of African and/or African American culture (such as superstitions related to death). Narratives explained that there is evidence in today's burial customs and traditions. The third element of this study investigated the disparity of a wake and visitations. This practice for African Americans is a ritual that usually takes place during the bereavement period before the funeral. Through narratives, I was able to look into changes that occurred in this ritual. The fourth element looked into the attitude towards pre-planning one's funeral vs. the traditional burial insurance. Burial insurance at one time was a way for African Americans to pay for their funeral expenses. Pre-planning one's funeral allows a person to choose the service of their choice and then pay for it in advance.

Through archeological data from the participants, as well as data from Carl M. Williams Funeral Directors, Inc and Sellers Brothers Funeral Home, the focus of the fifth element of this study was to explore the places African Americans have funerals. Does religion play a vital role in the decision making? It is my conviction that there is something about African American religious rituals that separates us from other races. The singing and praises are upbeat and the emotions are high pitched. When a family recesses from the service, the director must believe that the service definitely gave assistance to the deceased person getting into heaven. Narratives and data show that there is a shift in this element. Finally, the sixth element was to find if African Americans were

choosing cremation over ground burial. Data shows that cremations have increased, but African Americans continued to prefer traditional burials over cremation. (See appendix E).

The participants were selected based on their ability to provide reminiscences of African American funeral service and discuss various changes over the past fifty years. The participants were able to discuss transitions within African American funeral culture because they attended participated in and or directed funerals. The funeral directors were also chosen by their experience of funerals and their participation in funeral service in the Metropolitan area in which the research took place. I was able to reflect as a researcher and revisit my experiences as a child and later as an adult. As an adult, I see new perspectives with the additional knowledge I received through the background of this research.

The participants in this study had an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the status of the funeral service industry in the African American community and to contribute to the telling of the story of their participation in the evolution of that industry. The opportunity includes relating how many of the rituals and customs that are prevalent in today's ceremonies were passed down from African and slave traditions. This research was significant because participants gained a better understanding of cultural changes in funeral service. Participants also received a better understanding of the importance of maintaining funeral customs that are passed down through generations.

When I began this study, I thought I knew the answers. Through this study, I realized that nothing is in black and white. There are some gray areas. When I asked the varied questions to participants, I was surprised of some responses. Since everyone was

African American, I assumed we were looking through the same lens. There were some commonality among our responses but there were also differences. All of us understood the importance of African American funeral service. All of us agreed that African Americans have a culture that is different from other cultures. It is a culture that had its beginning when the first slave was brought to this land of the free and the brave.

Lawrence C. Ross, Jr. (2003) says it better when he asserts, "It is a cultural inheritance that was paid for in blood" (p. xiii). It is a cultural inheritance that has been lost in a paradigm shift within this American dream. This transformation of cultural inheritance has been transformed to assimilate a dominant culture.

Consumer Culture

The title of this qualitative dissertation is, "*The Paradigm Shift of African American Funeral Service: Looking Through the Lens of Oral History and Consumer Culture.*" The reason why I chose this topic was because it is my belief that one of the main wheels that is the driving force for the transformation of African American funeral service is the way consumers select goods and services for funerals. Much of that is done through advertisements of those services and goods. It is my thinking that advertising for funeral services and goods are beginning to be part of the norm in the funeral industry. Funeral service providers advertise their products on the Internet, television, newspapers and magazines. One example is casket sells. Casket salesman and suppliers advertise to funeral directors, consumers and students. One of the rising costs in funeral service is due to the casket sales. (See Appendix E)

Many funeral products can be found on the Internet and television advertisements. With this infinite possibility of knowledge, consumers are being

Americanized to funeral rites and customs. As new comers enter into America's fast pace of technology, they are confronted with many choices of funeral services and goods. Over and over again they are forced to abandon their own traditions and rituals because America has developed its own rituals and customs of funeral service. Joe Kincheloe (2002) proposes that, "In an era when advertising and information production work to break down traditional belief systems, public expressions of scientific rationality and grand narratives (such as religious traditions) by which people shape their lives, social analysis must develop a variety of interpretive schemas" (p. 179).

When I asked the participants about advertisements of funeral service and goods, the lay persons had to think about what I was saying. Most of their responses were not what I was expecting. In fact, most of them had not thought about advertisements one way of the other. After I asked the questions on advertisements of funeral goods and services, I wonder if my questions had enough detail on advertisements. I limited the way I asked the questions because I was careful in not persuading the participants to give answers the way I thought they should be giving. The lay participants had very little opinion on the subject. In fact, all of the lay persons did not look at funeral service advertisements at all.

The funeral directors looked at advertisements differently. All of the funeral directors thought that advertisements were good for business. Advertisement is good when they are in control. Funeral homes use advertisements to advertise their pre-need programs, cremation options and casket sales. When I ask, "Who controls the advertisements in funeral service?" With consensus all said the ones who own the radio stations, television stations and the companies that supply the goods. Those individuals

are not people of color. Funeral Directors also maintained that they do get the opportunity to pay for advertisements in their communities and the use church bulletins. When I compared the responses of the funeral directors and lay persons, I came to realize that lay persons place a certain trust in funeral directors. The advertisements they see come primarily from funeral homes. If funeral homes claim a product or service is good, consumers will try it if money can afford it. If suppliers tell funeral homes that a product is good, they will buy it, if they think that their clients would buy it.

In compiling the information from my field notes and transcribed notes, I acknowledged the fact that I should have continued the questioning about advertisement with funeral directors. I needed to know if they were aware that funeral homes are advertising casket companies and suppliers idea of funeral service. In fear of trying to persuade them to my way of thinking, again I asked the questions the way I designed it. I believe that everyone wants to keep up with the trends and African Americans are no exception. They want to be a part of this American dream. Their rituals and ceremonies often change in order to be part of this new culture. Funeral service is becoming personalized within a society that reflects many different traditions. Services and products can be customized to fit the need of the individual not their culture. With the use of computers, consumers can get just about anything they need for funeral rites and rituals. Companies that serve the industry with goods and products are beginning to use technology and pop culture strategies to sell to consumers.

Funeral directors response to these beliefs was positive. They assume that advertisement supports their businesses and informs the public of the various products they offer to the consumers. My thinking was the same until I began my doctoral studies

at Georgia Southern University. The courses I had during this process have given me a different view of the world. I am looking through varied lens and my perspective of this society has changed. In my readings, I was able to relate what I've learned and came to the realization that consumer culture is alive and well in the funeral industry. Kenway and Bullen (2001) propose that, "Advertising, the media and other meaning-making (semiotic) practices are central to consumer culture. To put it simply, they remake the meaning of goods in order to sell them (p. 9)." Funeral suppliers and casket companies advertise their products and goods to attract the consumer. When consumers pay attention to advertisements and have money to buy what is advertised, traditions are set aside for new and innovated methods of during funerals. Consumer culture has made it very difficult for society and the funeral industry to provide funeral service much like it has been done in the past.

The dominant group is realizing that this is also a new opportunity to embrace this new informational age by presenting their culture as America's custom of funeral traditions and rituals. bell hooks (2001) argues that, "Mass media tends to ignore the diversity of black experience (p. 4)." The black experience in funeral service is seldom displayed in advertisements of funeral services and goods. Consumer culture and new media have giving funeral service a whole new meaning. All funeral directors buy into this new phenomenon including African American funeral directors. The funeral directors in this qualitative inquiry agreed that advertisements were good for business. Advertisements inform the consumers of the goods and services that are available.

Religion vs. Non-Religion Ceremonies

All participants agreed that religion played a vital role in African American funeral service. I was not surprised because religion is the foundation in ninety-eight percent of African American rituals and rites of passage. Through the narratives of the participants, every aspect of the funeral service industry supports the notion that there is a religious and spiritual connection in the expression of funeral traditions and customs. The discussion of religion was vital to this research effort. Eklof (1997) maintained, "Among African Americans, religion and concepts of death are inseparable. Although these united concepts also hold true for other African Diasporan culture, depending on the religious teachings beliefs in the soul's destiny are quite diverse" (p. 329). Manona added in her interview that she cannot think of having a funeral without anything religious.

When I began my evaluation of religion vs. non-religion, I found through the participants narratives; religion plays a vital role in the life of African Americans. You see religion in everything we do. I was taught as a child, that you do not do anything without praying. In Dr. Sandra Nettle's book (2001), "*Crazy Visitations*", she sustains that during her illness, "I'd say a prayer or think of Christ on the cross, and I thought about my angel and the presence that assured me: everything is all right (p. 105)." All of the narratives emphasized that a majority of the funerals they attended was in a church. Ann added to the narratives on religion when she maintained that she did not remember anything about the tradition of African American funeral service but what made it easier for her was they belong to a church. They did everything in the church. Nick Salvatore (2005) upholds the religious aspect of African Americans by saying:

So they should sing-to recognize themselves as a group, to develop perspective, to organize to change the very society that oppressed and, just maybe, the oppressor. It was a strange land, but it was their land nonetheless. He knew that to sing of what might not yet be possible to say would bring the day much closer when that metaphorical chariot of many meanings would, indeed, “swing low for me”(p. 168).

All of the participants agreed that religion played a role in African American funeral customs and rituals. They differ to what extent on how much religion played on this transformation. The graph on Appendix E points out that many African Americans use churches for funeral services. This graph indicates that religion indeed is a component in determining the type of service African Americans will have for their deceased love ones.

In today’s society, families are given more choices. They have options to choose where their services are held. More and more African Americans are not attending church, so they are electing to hold services in other places. Data that was examined show that the shift change from graveside services, to church services to a combination of church services and chapel services. Some services were held other places. In the decade of the sixty’s, chapel services were more of an option. Later years the order of services for varied funerals, including church, chapel or graveside, ninety-nine percent were religious.

The narratives of the participants also indicated that when a person did not belong to church, the family included religion in their ceremony. This can also validate the “Home Going” phrase. Throughout history, the concept of going home has always being an ideology of African American funeral service. All of the participants did not

know the origin of the phrase “Home Going”. They were aware of the phrase and used it from time to time. Most of them sustains that the phrase represented the idea of when you die you are going home to be with God. Death is seen as a passage to everlasting life.

There is a story I hear at many funerals that relates to dying as the way to eternal life.

Wright and Hughes (2007) validate this with:

Everyday on a city bus the driver stops at a cemetery and this old lady get off and walk through the cemetery. One day a man asks the bus driver, why does the old lady gets off at the cemetery? What can she be possibly doing in that cemetery? The bus driver pulls the bus up a few feet and asks the man if he sees the chimney on the other side of the cemetery. He continues by saying that old lady has to walk through the cemetery to get home (P.482).

Since becoming a funeral director, I often hear of the minister using the same metaphoric story. This story represents the belief that when you die, you are buried. In order to get to the heavenly home, death has to occur.

Religion is an aspect of African American funeral service that has not gone through a transformation. Religion has been a major force with the slaves and has followed certain guidelines through generations. Ann, 106 years old can remember at the age of 10 a prayer for her mother’s graveside service. Religion has survived the paradigm shift. Jackson (1966) upholds:

When the church became an accepted institution, this dual ministration to the living and the dead was continued through the use of places of worship as places for entombment...There has always been a visible concern of the church for its members who have died (pp. 4-5).

This research through participant's narratives investigated the influence of religion on African-American experiences. The participants told their historical narratives of religion as they relate to their knowledge on funeral service rituals and customs.

Funeral Programs

Funeral programs are becoming big business in African American communities. The price of funeral programs can range from \$100.00 to \$4,000. They vary from all types, size and colors. When I asked the participants how far back they can remember funeral programs, they had a range of answers. None of the participants, those who could, can remember funeral programs in the forty's. Data does not show any signs of funeral programs or anything written down in reference to the order of service. Two of the participants remember funeral programs in the fifty's. They did not have any to show nor could I find any evidence of funeral programs in the data I scrutinized. Through data and narratives, funeral programs emerged in the seventy's. The first funeral programs were simple. They had no eye appeal. Looking at examples of funeral programs I examined, I could safely say that they were used for information only. Appendix F and Appendix G show examples of two funeral programs. 1970 is one of the first funeral programs and 2007 funeral program shows the advancement of funeral programs.

As time progressed, so did funeral programs. All participants agreed that funeral programs changed throughout the years. Funeral programs changed the face of African American funeral services. They went from plain to classic and elaborate. Funeral programs were bought and sold according to what money can buy. The ideas of funeral programs bought a new dimension to African American funeral service. They began to tell narratives about the deceased person's life. The programs included

obituaries, collages of pictures, poems that were written by the deceased, family or friends.

The order of service within the funeral programs did not change much through the decades. From the beginning of the documented data, the order of service was done according to the person's station in life. As programs became more elaborate, so did the order of service. Funeral programs in the year of 2000 began to appear on videos.

Vestiges of African and/or African American Culture Transformed

The conversation of vestiges and superstitions brought quietness among the participants. I was surprised of the quietness because I have heard of vestiges and superstitions about death all of my life. It was astonishing to me that all of the participants were older than I and I could not understand why this question was so complex. After a moment of quietness, each one of them shared their narratives. In the Metropolitan area where this study took place; there are limited familiarity on the vestiges and superstitions of funeral service, at least on the surface and among the participants of this study. I am surprised because in my home state of South Carolina it is alive and well, especially around the coast and Gully Islands.

One of my students from South Carolina asked me about the passing of the baby over the deceased body. I knew the answer. There was one reason only that I knew the answer. I had begun my comprehensive exams for this doctoral study. My emphasis area question was, "Describe at least three vestiges of African and/or African American culture (such as superstitions related to death) that are evident today in burial customs and traditions. Consider in your answer how some of the vestiges have survived or were transformed, and identify some of the struggles Black people have undertaken to

maintain a distinct heritage of funeral customs.” I had begun my research so I was able to answer that question for my student. Before this study, I had not heard of this ritual. “Passing a child over the open casket and/or grave would ensure that the child would not be afraid of the dead person’s spirit” (Wright and Hughes, 2007, p.483). This story throws a link from the past to the future. Because of this research, I understood what it means to pass the baby over the deceased body. I was able to link the passing of the baby over the body to its meaning.

One superstition several of the participants mention was the covering of the mirror when someone dies. That is the one ritual that is often done in the Metropolitan area. As funeral directors, you hear new vestiges from time to time. Funeral directors often come in contact with varied superstitions about death. Last year after a funeral, I drove the family to the cemetery. It was a wet and rainy day. The daughter of the deceased woman said, “This is a good day because it is raining. Rain is a good sign. I know now that mother got into heaven.” It brought back memories for me from my childhood. Grandmamma sustained that rainy days before a funeral is a sure sign that the deceased will go to heaven. She further maintained that thunder after a funeral meant that the deceased had reached heaven. We were sitting in her backyard for the repast after one of my uncle’s funeral. All of a sudden there was a flash of lighting and a loud thunder. Immediately my grandmother yelled, “Hallelujah.” We all knew exactly what that meant. My grandmother was celebrating my uncle’s soul getting into heaven.

My personal experiences that include working in the funeral industry allow me to examine closely the superstitions and myths that are associated with death and dying. This inquiry confirms the existence of African traditions in relation to African American

funeral customs and mores. Evidences through narratives indicate that a paradigm shift has occurred in the traditions of vestiges of African American funeral service. Many of the mores and customs that were performed fifty years ago or earlier no longer exist among the participants in the Metropolitan area where this study took place.

Wakes vs. Visitation

The participants maintain that in some instances a wake and visitations can be one of the same. The only difference is what it is called by the family. There were some distinction in what a wake use to be and what a wake sometimes call visitation is now. All participants, lay persons and funeral directors agreed that the wakes back in the day were social events.

A commonality among the responses of the participants united when they shared their narratives on wakes and visitation. They all agreed that it was an African American ritual. They all agreed that it was a social event. They all agreed that when wakes occurred, it was a sign of family and friends caring about each other. It was a time for fellowship. The wake was considered a celebration. The deceased was brought back to the house and everyone stayed up all night. It was a time for feasting.

When the term visitation became the norm, it took away the meaning and the event became formal. They were no longer done in the home. They were done mostly at the funeral homes. There was no social event. Several of the participants assert that visitation became sophisticated. Alma gave another viewpoint on why the change has occurred from wakes to visitation. Her view was a health issue. She believed change was because funeral directors need to take precaution because of the cause of death. Funeral directors have to protect themselves legally and it is their job to protect the public. They

have to be careful that no one would get sick from the bodies brought back to the house. I disagree with that perception. I do not know of anyone getting sick by bringing an embalmed body to the house. Now in the cases where the bodies were embalmed in the house, that is another story. At a time when wakes were very popular, you also had bodies that never left the house until the day of the funeral. Bodies were embalmed, dressed and casketed in the homes. The term wake is one element in funeral service that has undergone a major paradigm shift. This is one element that participants can really identify a change in African American funeral traditions. This change has caused great concerns.

Burial Insurance vs. Pre-Need

Many people are making the decision to pre-arrange and pre-fund their funerals before the need arises. Pre-need insurance is payment for funeral expenses. You can now preplan your funeral and pay for it through several insurance options. No one will be turned down. The insurance benefits are equal to the cost of the funeral plan. You name your own beneficiary. The insurance can be paid for in three, five, ten, or twenty years. When the pre-need burial insurance is paid in full, you are set for life. This is an advertisement that you will see at most funeral homes that sells pre-need insurance.

When looking at the data that was presented in this study, the cost of funerals began to increase when funeral homes offered pre-need insurance. At one time families could barely pay for funerals. Data examined showed that the average cost of funerals began in 1940 at a minimum of \$350.00. In 2008, the average cost of funerals is a minimum of \$7500.00. Just this figure alone represents a paradigm shift in African American funeral service. The paradigm shifted several times with the cost of funerals.

The graph on Appendix E illustrates the shift of cost in African American Funeral Service.

In the early 1900's, African Americans families paid cash for their funeral services. Funeral service during that time was just what it applies, funeral service. Data showed in the 30's, 40's, 50's, 60's and early 70's confirmed payment for funeral service was paid with cash and a payment plan. It provided a service with no economical value for those who were providing the service and it proved that burial insurance did not cover funeral cost. In Appendix H, the statements of goods and services identify payment plans dated back to 1939. Ann was one participant who did not know much about burial insurance. She had faith in the funeral director and she also did not worry about the cost. Money was not a problem for her.

The other participants were aware of the difference between burial insurance and pre-need insurance. All of the participants agreed that burial insurance was like a society. It was a nickel and dime insurance. But the economy had changed and people needed more money to bury their family members. Manona mentioned that back in the day; blacks could not afford to buy a whole funeral. Burial societies were not keeping up with the times. "Many individuals belonged to fraternal societies that provided services at a reasonable cost." (Wright and Hughes, 2007, p. 252) In addition to, two of the participants connected when they sustains that family switched from burial insurance to pre-need insurance because they need to have some extra spending money for themselves. They all agreed that pre-need was better than burial insurance. This change was good.

Cremation

“The level of cremation in the United States has continued at a steady growth rate for the past twenty years (Gilligan & Stueve, 2003, p. 39).” This study is investigating cremation as an element in the transformation of African American funeral customs and rituals. This element explored the idea of African Americans choosing cremation over traditional funerals that include ground burials. All of the participant’s narratives indicated that cremation is a consideration for final disposition among African Americans. Several of them admitted that cremation is new within African American communities. African American did not always considered cremation as a final disposition. Robert validates that black folks did not believe in burning. Manona was adamantly against cremation. She wants her money in the ground. Manona did not think God wanted her to be burned up. She also sustained that some religions don’t believe in burning.

There were several myths within the communities that fostered a fear of cremation. One was that of burning twice. This concept has a religious tone because preacher throughout my childhood preached if you are not good, you will die and go to hell. In Sunday school, we were taught when you go to hell you will burn. Alma believed the concept of burning in hell. But, she also cremated one of her ex-relatives.

The narratives of the participants on cremation gave this study a different perspective in how African Americans funeralize and memorialized their loved ones. The funeral directors took the economical approach. Frances connected with the lay persons by upholding the religious aspects of why African Americans do not cremate. Many African Americans do not cremate because they do not think they will get into heaven.

She also added again that some thinks they do not want to burn twice. Frances tosses all of the myths she heard about cremation and decided that cremation is her choice of final disposition.

The remainder of the funeral directors discussed several reasons why some African Americans are beginning to choose cremation as a choice for final disposition. One of the reasons is the increase in cost of traditional funerals. The cost of burial is on the increase. Examination of the data for this qualitative research proved that the cost of funerals have definitely increased the last 50 years. A second reason is families are moving across the country away from each other. Geographic's make it difficult for family members to return to communities for a traditional funeral. The relocation of African Americans plays a crucial role in the decision to cremate. A third reason is there is a generation that has a different attitude about death. Many feel that when death occurs it is over.

The data for this research provided me an estimation of when cremation became a choice for disposition in the Metropolitan area. The mid eighty's was the first cremation at Ivey Brothers Funeral Home. This was a direct cremation. Direct cremation specifies that there is neither a memorial service nor funeral service for that particular deceased person. As I surveyed the data through decades, cremation increased each year. By 1996, under the ownership of Carl M. Williams Funeral Directors, Inc. the trend for cremation increased. This increase went from 1% to 6% in one year. After the first observed increase in 1996, cremation continued to climb. In 2006, the data indicates that cremation has increased 20%. See appendix E. Gilligan and Stueve ((2003) sustains:

The cremation rate in the U.S. in 2000 was 26% and experts predict the rate will increase to 39% by the year 2010. Factors which led to the increase include a growing acceptance by the public of cremation (p. 39). Each year data estimates that cremation is steadily increasing in the Metropolitan area. Even though evidence confirms an increase, I do not see the increase to extend to a point where African Americans are cremating more than having traditional ground burials.

Juanita and Carl jointly agreed that there is a concern among funeral directors when the numbers in cremation increased. People are cremating now more than ever before. You only have a certain amount of money to spend on funerals. There is a variety of cost when considering ground burial. The cemetery cost includes the grave and the opening and closing of the grave. Cemeteries require a vault. That is another added cost. Then, you have to pay the funeral home for their cost. The funeral home minimum cost includes basic services, embalming, preparation and casketing, transfer of remains, use of facilities for viewing and wake, use of the equipment for funeral or memorial services, the use of the hearse and there are other charges from miscellaneous services and merchandise. One custom that is well and alive in African American funeral service is the use of limousines. This custom has been transformed throughout the years and continues to this day. With gas prices, the cost of limousines has spiraled 300%. Data inspected proved this percentage increase. In 1940, the cost of a limousine was \$10.00. In 2008, the cost of a limousine is \$350.00.

The narratives of the participants agreed that with cremation, families and funeral directors are choosing created ways to memorialize deceased relatives. Families are given

options. Some options are funeral service using a rental casket, direct cremation and afterwards having a great celebration with beautiful music, funeral programs and videos.

Transformation of African American Funeral Service

Undergirding this research is the narratives of eight participants. Each participant shared their narratives on the paradigm shift of African American funeral culture and traditions. All participants have the same opinion that African American funeral service has gone through a transformation. They differ to what extent. When looking through the lens of the elements that was discussed in this study, the participant's narratives confirmed that each element was a source of this transformation. One of the main factors in this transformation is economics. Families cannot afford to buy services and goods that are often advertised.

Advertisements use the concept of religion too foster change in African American funeral service. Karla FC Holloway (2002) asserts:

In the United States, the driving force of capitalism within the burial business imposed surprisingly similar structures on what were, in effect, discrete church traditions. The similarities between American death-ways are notable in a country of various ethnicities and cultures. What discovers as homogeneity among these practices is the direct result of the influence of the funeral industry and the rituals that it influences, which confer social solidarity (p. 151).

Emphasis were placed with the participants on how should we approach the advertisement and the consumption of the supplies and funeral goods that are used in the industry. Funeral service culture is like many other cultures. The way consumers purchase merchandise and services is based on who holds the power in advertising. Very

seldom people of color control the advertisement. All of the funeral directors upheld that advertisement was good for business. That is the only way the message can get to the public.

When I studied the field notes and listen to the taped narratives, I realized I should have elaborated on the subject of advertisement a little more. I didn't because of the fear of manipulating the narratives and the participant's beliefs. It is my belief that African Americans are losing their funeral service identity. I believe that advertising other culture's funeral ideology is a method that promotes change.

There is one subject I have not talked about in this study. That subject was brought up by several of the participants. Each one of them had their own unique way of expressing it, but it was uttered just as well. Ann began her conversation of segregation. At one time, African Americans could not go to White only cemeteries and funeral homes. When those doors opened, some African Americans abandoned their own funeral establishments and cemeteries. For some reason as Robert asserts that the others water is colder. African Americans switching to the non African American facilities for funeral services support a change in custom and rituals. As one participant puts it, "When you are in Rome, you do what the Romans do." Juanita emphasized on several occasions that African Americans are imitators of the culture around us. Karla Holloway (20020) affirmed the change in African American funeral service:

For much of the twentieth century families took the responsibility of funeralizing very, very seriously. Black culture's attention to this ritual was, however, susceptible to the century's turn toward a lesser degree of formality. Some members of the NFDMA felt that they were particular witnesses to shifts in

cultural mores and codes. Even as they experienced a gradual eroding of their black clientele base, they noted a similar shift in the attention given to rituals of burials (p. 163).

We give up our culture faster than any other culture. Alma was adamant when she continued to say that older people are more traditional. When integration began, different values and the mixing of various cultures, people values change.

Most of the participant's narratives point out that in today's world everything is fast pace. Just do it and get it over with. They are less caring or they appear less caring. In the past, African Americans cared about each other. Several of the participants flashed back to the wakes. That was one ritual that everyone participated in because everyone cared about each other. Now the participants allege that it just not the case anymore. Funerals were intense, plenty of loud noises and crying. People care as though the deceased will be missed. It is not like that anymore. Personally, I think it depends on the family and the community. Church traditions often determine the tone of the funeral service. African Americans have a myriad of religions. A Catholic funeral service differs from a Progressive Baptist Church funeral service. Rituals for each faith often determine the emotional tone of the service. Outbreak in emotions does not determine the love and care a family member has for the deceased loved one.

Homogenization of Funeral Service

All of the participants can identify differences in the funeral service of African Americans and Non-African Americans. Ann had not gone to any other service other than African American but gave hearsay details on Non-African American funeral services. All funeral directors and lay persons identified differences in the funeral cultures. They

stressed that White Americans don't show emotions like African Americans. African Americans continue to use limousine whereas White Americans do not use limousines. African Americans repast is different from non-African Americans. African Americans have complete meals whereas White Americans have light snacks. African Americans have funeral programs and White Americans do not use funeral programs. They are not part of White Americans funeral culture.

With the differences identified, half of the participants maintain that the gap is closing. Several African American rituals and customs have changed. Life has changed. The way we funeralize our loved ones has changed. Frances and Juanita join together in their observations on the change of African American funeral service by taking a look at the younger generation. Jobs, busy schedule, privacy with grief, interracial marriages play a major role in the changes that are beginning to occur in African American funeral service. Because African Americans can afford more services and goods offered, the participants defended the change in African American Funeral service. Everyone wants what the other Americans wants.

All funeral directors and some of the lay persons admitted that some of the changes that are occurring in funeral service are due to laws that are made to protect the consumers. Funeral homes have to abide by the rules and regulations that are put in place for the industry. FTC rulings, OSHA, cemetery laws all promote changes in funeral service across the board. When laws are passed, it somehow authorizes a change in the industry. I ask, what happens to African Americans funeral customs and rituals? When laws are made to reflect a dominant group, whose culture is betrayed when lawmakers

began to make laws that affect the funeral industry. Funeral service culture changes to abide by laws that are made by the dominant culture

Theoretical Contributions

This study provided a critical narrative inquiry on the paradigm shift of African American funeral customs and rituals. This inquiry also presented a narrative exploration of the historical aspects of African American rituals and funeral customs to identify the influences that contributed to changes in those customs and rituals within the last fifty years. Critical narrative inquiry seeks to find answers through storied experiences. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stated that as researchers, “We come to each new inquiry field living our stories” (p. 63).

The participant’s narratives told real stories of rituals and ceremonies of funeral service within African American communities. As an active participant, I looked for influences on the changing forms of African American funeral customs. I use narrative, which “allows me to bring my personal experience to bear on research, to embed research in participants’ daily lives to respect participants’ voices” (He, 2003, p. 19). As He uses narrative to bring her personal experiences to this research, so did I bring to this query my experiences as a funeral director and a funeral service educator?

African American funeral service must continue to care for the dead and serve the living in a way that enhances the dignity of humankind. Rituals must meet the needs of the deceased and those who mourn. It is the responsibility of African American funeral directors to provide a funeral for the deceased that is appropriate to the culture of his or her community. However, it is often difficult to identify a culture within the community. Critical inquiry was a process used in this study to look through the lens of oral history

and consumer culture for answers. The personal narratives in this study showed relationship to aspects of the participants' daily lives and their historical memory in exploring the paradigm shift of African American funeral service. This study investigated the proposal of the researcher that African Americans are losing their identities and traditions, including their hallmark funeral traditions. This inquiry purpose was to determine whether if consumer culture had the greatest influence on this loss of identity in African American funeral service.

African Americans are living in a society where assimilation is more important than remaining in a culture that is often denigrated by mainstream society. They find that "the eclipse of hope and collapse of meaning in much of black America is linked to the structural dynamics of corporate market institutions that affect all Americans" (West, 2001, p. 27). African Americans want to be accepted by the dominant culture in order to achieve success, but in order to become part of that culture, they must often remain silent and minimize or reject many of their traditions.

Another change was the increase in funeral cost. Because of the rising cost of funerals, consumers have to transform traditions in order to provide a service that will reflect the life of the deceased. Integration has also contributed to the modification of African American funeral service. African Americans continue to mimic other cultures. When enculturation becomes a part of funeral service the dominant culture becomes the culture of choice. The narratives skirt around the subject but it came out in subtle ways. hooks (1995) theorized, "Black people remain rather silent about representations of whiteness in the black imagination. As in the old days of racial segregation where black folks learned to 'wear mask,' many of us pretend to be comfortable in the face of

whiteness” (p. 37). After listening to the narratives of the eight participants, I believe that African Americans continue to wear the mask. I also believe that we have become assimilators and have abandoned some of our most sacred rituals and customs.

Benefits of this study to society include an understanding of how the transformation of African American beliefs and culture impact how the funeral industry has developed a consumer culture within its own culture. All people are subject to trends - African Americans are no exception. African American rituals and ceremonies have often changed to reflect mainstream culture. Funeral service is becoming homogenized within a society that reflects many different traditions. This new consumer culture makes it very difficult for society and the funeral industry to continue to provide traditional service. This study contributed to the body of literature that looks at the ever-changing funeral service industry.

Further Inquiries

This study allowed the voices of four African American funeral directors and four members of the Metropolitan Area who have a familiarity of the funeral service industry to tell their narratives on the paradigm shift in African American funeral service. I have been able to evaluate this study and examine the questions that guided this research.

Below are the recommendations for future studies.

1. This study investigated consumer culture as a factor that was fostering a change in African American funeral customs and rituals. I propose additional study on the advertisement of funeral services and goods. This future study should include funeral directors only. The present study included participants outside of the

funeral industry arena. Funeral directors can provide in-depth information that lay persons cannot.

2. In the beginning of this research, I proposed that students are not taught the traditions of multicultural communities. A research that involves students could identify elements that are changing funeral service as a whole.
3. A research that will include educators will be another way to identify changing forms in funeral service, especially African American funeral service. Greater insight may be revealed when a research can identify whose culture is being taught in the mortuary schools.
4. In the initial stage of this research, one of the goals of this research was to query popular culture as a contributing element in the transformation of African American funeral culture. Future research could determine what impact popular culture has on the changing forms of customs and rituals within African American funeral service.

Summarizing the Narratives

This qualitative inquiry presented in African American funeral customs and rituals were collected in a unique place, I as a researcher, funeral director, embalmer and funeral service educator finishing my doctoral studies was able to share narratives with eight participants. These participants shared stories in multiple positions on their experiences of African American funeral customs and rituals. As I listened to the narratives, I reflected back to my childhood, teenage years and my beginning of both careers. I remembered my narratives of mourning stories and shared those experiences

with the participants throughout this inquiry. Their stories became my stories and my stories became their stories.

Even though I conscientiously listened to the participant's narratives, I had the feeling throughout this story telling that something was missing. I believe that I was not getting everything I should be getting from the participants. I wanted more from the participants. The participants were chosen because of their age and the experiences they had with the world in which they lived. I am constantly engaged in qualitative research. As a funeral service provider, I am under constant pressure to provide answers and solutions to the problems of death and dying. I must provide some sense of rationality, objectivity, and truth to situations that cast those three out of the window because they have none of these qualities. As a qualitative researcher and funeral service provider, my daily activities are fluid and situational. Funeral directors and educators constantly hear the narratives of lived experiences.

I am concerned with the opinions, experiences, and feelings of individuals and families. I can provide an experienced account of human experience. This leads me to be concerned about the results of this research. All the participants told their narratives on African American mourning stories. What I was looking for is the underlying reason of *why African Americans are steadily changing their identity in African American funeral customs and rituals*. I heard the changes through narratives but I never heard why the customs and rituals are changing.

The narratives fulfilled the ideology of this research several sources that have promoted a paradigm shift in African American funeral service. Those sources are the change in time, economics, the funeral industry introducing innovative goods and

services, African Americans financial stability, and integration. I agree with all of the findings of the changes; however, I argue that there are hidden sources that the participants did not talk about.

I deem that with integration and the financial stability of many African Americans, the funeral culture within various communities changed. “As racial integration brought job and career opportunities for black people, especially educated black folks, the will to make money began to replace the will to be free, to be independent thinkers (hooks, 2003, p. 101).” With this newfound way of making money, African Americans were able to have choices and pay more for funeral services and goods. Integration was vital during the 1960’s and 1970’s, but its value has become diminished in terms of its value to individuals born between the 1980’s and the present. The younger generation cannot identify with integration because they have not experienced segregation. Therefore integration after the 80’s became homogenization. Assimilation is a component of cultural homogenization.

What is the underlying principle behind the transformation in African American funeral service? Integration brought major changes within African American communities. When varied doors opened, other closed. African American funeral traditions and services were no exception. The narratives of the participants sustain that some of the changing forms of African American funeral service is due to integration. I surmise that when integration brought a new set of ideas to African Americans, homogenization began. When avenues for the dominant culture became accessible to African Americans, windows are opened to throw their own culture right out of them. When African Americans begin to assimilate the dominant culture, significant factors of

our history is loss, which includes funeral rituals and customs. Customs and rituals change due to assimilation. Assimilation creates a homogenous culture.

As I listened to the participant's narratives, I reflected upon those various changes in African American funeral customs. In my reflection, one event immediately came to my mind. I had the opportunity to serve a family that had two deaths back to back. One death was an aunt; the family anticipated her death. The day after her death, a son tragically died from a motorcycle accident. Two deaths from one family and I had to work with this family who had no money. They came to the funeral arrangement starting from the bottom of the financial barrel. The family was a very caring family. In fact, this family came to my mind when Manona and Alma's narratives assert that people do not care about each other anymore. This family would prove them wrong. Both funeral services for this family were upbeat and very emotional. The family was compassionate and the financial situation they were facing was unsettling for them because they did not have the funds to do some non-traditional items.

When a family cannot keep up with the new trends in funeral service, they feel inadequate. Families leave the arrangement setting with feelings of guilt because they are not doing what they think is best for the deceased. Because of a consumer driven industry, many families cannot vary from traditional funeral services. When I think back, this is true with a large percentage of my clientele that have no money or struggling to handle business with limited funds. I would like to note most not all. Historical traditions that were discussed in this narrative inquiry are alive and well. Families with limited funds, tend to remain traditional because traditional is all money can buy.

When funeral professionals serve certain churches, they know what type of service they will probably have based on the economic status of its members. The only element that would change this concept is the use of insurance. If families are not able to pre fund funerals or pay for insurance, the rising cost of funerals could be devastating for some of them. The data in this research confirms my thought that cost plays a major role in traditional vs. non-traditional funerals.

In analyzing the data of this research, the increase cost of funerals was extensive from the seventy's to the present time. This timeframe was in the middle of the civil rights movement. Immediately after the civil rights movement, the companies in the funeral industry began to offer more merchandise and services to African Americans. There were services African American funeral directors did not know existed until integration. There were certain companies in the funeral industry that would not sell to African Americans. When funeral directors were able to offer more in services and merchandise, the cost of funerals increased. When consumers of funeral service goods and services began buying the same products throughout the country, funeral service became homogenous throughout. When funeral suppliers sell the same products to all funeral homes whether it is an African American funeral home or non-African American funeral home, funeral service culture became the same for everyone.

It is my opinion, that when African Americans move upward financially, their attitude about life and traditions on anything changes. I must concede that I have the same conviction when it comes to traditional vs. non-traditional funeral service for my family. When my mother and grandson passed away, their services were traditional and non-traditional. My mother's funeral service was more traditional because of her age and

she was a traditional person. She was funeralized in a small town in South Carolina where traditional funerals are prevalent. I was able to financially provide non-traditional items such as funeral programs and a video that told her life story. My grandson's service was held in the Metropolitan area where traditions are incorporated with non-traditional items. My son chose a non-traditional service. We also have to keep in mind the age of my grandson. He was six months. His age gave permission for us to have a non-traditional service. His parents were younger and they preferred a non-traditional service.

I have the auspicious occasion to serve families who are financially able to choose any type of services they want and write a check for the full amount. Majority of the time, their services are diverse with traditional and non-traditional items. Families are able to pay for these non-traditional items and services. When families are able to come into funeral homes and buy additional items, they tend to stray away from traditions because they have options. It is my belief that when more and more families attend non-traditional services, they began to move towards that trend. If a family can afford to buy what they see, they buy it when it is time to make funeral arrangements for a deceased loved one. All funeral directors in this qualitative narrative agreed that advertisements are positive because it informs the consumers on the variety of goods and services available to them.

Advertisements also provide information to the consumers about ways to fund funerals through pre need arrangements. Pre need arrangements help families make reasonable decisions before the time of death. This ideology gives families time to think about traditional or non-traditional services. Pre planning takes away the pressure from families and allows time to think about how funerals will be funded at the time of need.

The participant's narratives supported pre arrangements because it was the answer for many in providing funding for funerals. Traditional burial insurance was not adequate enough to keep up with the changing times.

We can identify a transformation in funeral service with an increase in cremation among African Americans. Consumers choose cremation because the cost is lower than traditional funerals. "The consumer must look at cremation for what it is; an inexpensive alternative to burial (Wright and Hughes, 2007, p. 455.)" But, funeral directors can increase in sales if they offer alternatives to products and services to the consumers who choose cremation over ground burials. Those families who choose cremation over ground burials are given choices of items to purchase that are non-traditional. Funeral programs, videos, urns, portraits, memorial services, book marks, and visitation or wakes are all items available with cremation. The data in this research proved that as funeral service evolved so did cost.

The narratives confirmed that cremation was not a traditional choice of disposition within African American communities. As time changed, the ideology of cremation changed among African Americans. The narratives spoke of two reasons. One reason is the growing cost of funerals and secondly, assimilation. African Americans see what other cultures are doing and they emulate those cultures. Funeral directors offer alternatives when families are choosing cremation. Families can continue the traditional funeral services by using a rental casket and later cremate as a final disposition. Non-traditional items can also be purchased when planning the services that involve cremation.

When families can buy the basic services such as an inexpensive casket, concrete lining instead of a vault, no funeral programs, no videos, no portrait, those families are prone to remain traditional. There is no major increase in cost when families remain traditional. When a conscientious traditional family employs our funeral home for service, three things are apparent. One, the family stays traditional because of low funds and they cannot afford to do any of the non- traditional rituals. Secondly, the family is frugal and they limit their spending to a certain amount. Third, religious base will determine to what extent traditional or non-traditional funeral rituals will apply. Traditional funerals vary from church to church.

What is the connection between consumer culture and the modification traditional African American funeral customs? Consumer culture enters into this fast pace society by way of advertising and mass media. Funeral directors via conventions, trade magazines and schools learn about varied trends in funeral service. They pass this knowledge on to the consumers they serve. When clients buy into new trends it has a domino effect. If it is done at one funeral and it is affordable then it becomes the norm. African Americans through narratives transcend these new trends. Cornel West (2001) suggests that, “Culture is a much structure as the economy or politics...the economy and politics are not only influenced by values but also promotes particular cultural ideals of the good life and good society (p.19).” When consumers are able to buy their needs and wants for a deceased love one’s funeral, their reaction is more upbeat than a family who are struggling.

The narratives in this qualitative inquiry provided avenues to consider in examining the paradigm shift of African American funeral service. Many of the

participants indicated that money is a significant factor when looking at the paradigm shift of African American funeral culture. Since segregation, African Americans embark upon comfortable financial position because better education and job opportunities became available. With this newfound financial position, more African Americans are able to buy and provide more for their families. When someone dies in the family, funeral directors are making available the products that are new and innovated.

Funeral directors get new innovated marketing strategies of advertising through narratives from other funeral directors, trade magazines, and salesman and at the various conventions they attend. Many families come into funeral homes unaware of new services and goods. When pre-need funds and other financial means give families the availability of funds to buy the varied products and services non-traditional funeral service often occurs. “The same knowledge, experience and information that is causing the consumer to demand quality automotive service is causing consumers to demand more complete and imaginative funeral service (Doody, 1994, p.110).” Consumers attending funerals and wakes get an opportunity to see the varied funeral programs, videos, different types of caskets and portraits. These consumers if money is available will want the same for their love one at the time of death. African Americans have a desire to provide for their family members the type of funerals that other groups provide for their family members. Happiness is something we all strive toward. African Americans have struggled to maintain a life style that the consumer marketplace pledges a promise of success. If you can buy it, success is obtained.

“In the future, there will be a need for many different types of service, including a large number of customized or individualized services (Doody, 1994, p.116).” The

tradition of African American rituals and customs of funeral service is set aside to meet the need of an individual. Advertisement in funeral service is promoting personalization. Each death represents a fulfilled life. The funeral service or memorial service should represent the life of that individual. Funeral programs and videos often tell the life story of the individual. Funeral service is ingenious and partially an art form. Moving away from traditions when all funeral rituals are the same, African Americans through the use of non-traditional items are individualizing funeral service. Each funeral represents the person and tells a narrative of the deceased. The video of the deceased gives a pictorial history of that person, also the video tells the narrative of the person's life. Each promotes the ideology of changing forms in African American funeral service. These changes are geared towards an individual instead of a culture.

Fear of taboos, superstitions and myths about death and dying are factors in the transformation in African American funeral traditions and rituals. Participant's narratives can not identify many of the taboos and superstitions related to African American funeral service. However, they were able to name a few, but not as many that continue to exist in other parts of the United States. According to the narratives in this study, they just don't exist in the Metropolitan area in where this research took place. It is my belief that because of certain stigmas within our culture; we again throw certain parts of our cultural history out the window. It is important for us to integrate, assimilate and homogenize than to recognize, respect and represent our heritage.

Imaging the Future

What is the impact of this transformation on African American communities? I assume that when African-American consumers find it necessary to assimilate the

dominant culture, identity is lost. There is a struggle with identity when consumerism supports the ideology of a dominant culture. To be successful, African-Americans conform to the ideology to what they feel bring success. When attending funerals, African Americans get ideas of what they think funeral service is all about. Narratives of funeral service are no longer passed down because old traditions are no longer acceptable in much of today's society. Younger generation have a desire for something new and different. Scores of them cannot tell you what a traditional funeral is because traditions have been lost in translation. The older generations find it unnecessary to transcend a culture that is vital to the identity of a culture.

I am the Education Commissioner of the National Funeral Directors and Mortician Association, Inc. I am responsible for all the educational proponents of the association. When planning conventions or meetings, I get requests from members who want something new and innovated for their education classes at all meetings. When I attend the NFDA (A former White Association) I receive information so that I can go back and share with the members of the NFDMA (A former African American Association). For this qualitative inquiry, we no longer have segregated association. But in reality, segregation continues in 2008 in the funeral service world. This discussion is another dissertation at some other time. I go to these associations meetings because it is my belief that if African American funeral directors do not keep up with the trends in funeral service, the non African Americans funeral directors will be serving African American consumers.

I will always believe in the garden salad metaphor that the funeral industry should represent a chef making a delectable garden salad. The funeral industry must appreciate

all the ingredients that go into that salad. Every ingredient contributes to the enjoyment of the whole and nourishment of the entire system. Just like a garden salad, all cultures should come together to make the American dream a reality for everyone. African Americans should not forget traditions of African American funeral service. Non-traditional elements should enhance the services not take away. The culture of funeral service should be everyone's culture. W.E.B. Dubois (1903) ideology of African Americans holds true to this day:

From the double life every American Negro must live, as a Negro and as an American, as swept on by the current of the nineteenth while yet struggling in the eddies of the fifteenth century, from this must arise a painful self-consciousness, an almost morbid sense of personality and moral hesitancy which is fatal to self-confidence. The worlds within and without the Veil of Color are changing, changing rapidly, but not at the same rate, not in the same way; and this must produce a peculiar wrenching of the soul, a peculiar sense of doubt and bewilderment. Such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double ideals, tempt the mind to pretence or to revolt, to hypocrisy or to radicalism. In some such doubtful words and phrases can one perhaps most clearly picture the peculiar ethical paradox that faces the Negro of today and is tingeing and changing his religious life (p.143).

In most cases, we know whom we are within, but outside of ourselves we want to be like the others. We continue to live in a society where the color of your skin continues to be a factor. Martin Luther King's dream has not yet matured, because African Americans continue the quandary with the color line. African Americans continue to walk with the

veil. As a widower follows the casket of her deceased husband and is identified by the veil, African Americans continue to wear the mask. We cannot hide who we are nor can we escape the veil.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

**COLLEGE OF Education****DEPARTMENT OF Curriculum, Foundations, and Reading**

1. **I am Carol Thomas Williams, Georgia Southern University Doctorial Candidate, conducting Dissertation Research.**
2. **Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research is to provide a narrative exploration of the historical aspects of African American rituals and funeral customs. This research will decisively seek out influences that contributed to changes in those customs and rituals within the last fifty years. This qualitative research will explore the influence of religion on the traditions and ritual of African American funeral customs. This research will seek to find how much of these vestiges have survived and transformed though popular culture and influenced by consumer culture.**
3. **Procedures to be followed: Participation in this research will include completion of audio taped interviews. The interviews and dialogues will be audio taped, transcribed, and reviewed by the researcher. The audiotapes of the interviews will be stored in my home. Each interview will be a semi-structured one-on-one, face-to-face, audio taped session designed to provide interviewees an opportunity to talk about their lives, experiences and understandings of the transition within African American funeral service. The sessions will take place in a quiet, private location convenient for the interviewee. Copies of the transcripts will be reviewed with the participants before the final copy of the study is prepared. This will allow the researcher and participant's time for reflection and clarification and allow the researcher to insert her own reflections and narratives into the transcribed materials.**
4. **Discomforts and Risks: Funeral directors work with people who are grieving and are very sensitive to the feelings of people during this very difficult time. Compassion and the ability to work under stress are essential. The educational and licensing requirements prepare these persons to manage the day to day discomforts of such a career and therefore the probability of harm for funeral directors is no greater than that encountered in daily life. There is minimal risk by virtue of the fact that participants will respond to interview questions and responses will be audio taped. The age range of the lay people to be interviewed for this study is age 65 – 106. Each of these persons come to the study voluntarily and presents no signs of anxiety about responding to the interview questions. In the discussions that lead to their agreement to participate, a clear description of their involvement will provided and they will show an eagerness to share their knowledge and experiences. The interviews are designed to last no longer than 90 minutes. Given these considerations and the level of comfort and willingness to participate, there is minimal risk to lay persons by virtue of their understanding of what is required and**

their soundness of mind. There is minimal risk due to the fact that participants will respond to interview questions and responses will be audio taped

5. Benefits:
 - a. The benefits to participants include **an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the status of the funeral services industry in the African American community and to contribute to the telling of the story of their participation in the evolution of that industry. This opportunity includes relating how many of the rituals and customs that are prevalent in today's ceremonies were passed down from African and slave traditions. This research is significant because participants will also have a better understanding of cultural changes in funeral service. Participants will begin to understand the importance of maintaining funeral customs that are passed down through generations.**
 - b. The benefits to society include **an understanding of how the transformation of African American beliefs and culture impact how the funeral industry has developed a consumer culture within its own culture. All people are subject to trends, and African Americans are no exception. African American rituals and ceremonies have often changed to reflect mainstream culture. Funeral service is becoming homogenized within a society that reflects many different traditions. This new consumer culture makes it very difficult for society and the funeral industry to continue to provide traditional service. This study will contribute the body of literature that looks at the ever changing funeral service industry.**
6. Duration/Time: **Interviewees will be asked to set aside one to two hours of interview time. Two sessions may be required if all questions on the interview guide cannot be answered in the first hour long session. Should an interviewee require second session continuity will be maintained by referring to the list of questions on the interview guide that were not previously covered.**
7. Statement of Confidentiality: **Only the researcher will have access to audio tapes. Interviewees' names are not used during the taping sessions. Interviews will take place in the homes of the interviewees or in a private place designated by the interviewee. Audio tapes will be stored in the researcher home. Transcripts will be made on diskette by the researcher, also to be stored in the home of the researcher. The researcher will have sole access to and responsibility for all information. All information will be treated to preserve anonymity and reported in the research documented with all identifiable attributes masked.**
8. Right to Ask Questions: **Participants have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If a participant has questions about this study they may contact the researcher, Carol Thomas Williams or the researcher's faculty advisor, Dr. John A. Weaver 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 Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-681-0843.**
9. Compensation: **Participants will receive no compensations.**
10. Voluntary Participation: **Prospective participants will be approached by the researcher in a one on one conversation. A description of the study will be discussed**

and their participation will be requested. They will be told that they will not be named or identified in the study and those who do not wish to participate will not be included. Persons who agree will be made aware that participation is voluntary and that they may end their participation at any time. They will be made aware that they did not have to answer any questions they do not want to answer. They will also be told that their interviews will be audio taped and that the tapes will later be destroyed. Interviewees will receive copies of their interview transcriptions to ensure accuracy.

11. Penalty: **There is no penalty for deciding not to participate in the study.**

12. **Deception: This study involves no deception.**

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

Title of Project: **Paradigm Shift Of African American Funeral Customs: Looking Through The Lens of Oral History and Consumer Culture**

Principal Investigator: **Carol Thomas Williams**, address: **2756 Dodson Lee Drive, East Point, GA**, 30344, telephone: 404-344-1879 and email address: carolejtw@bellsouth.net)

Faculty Advisor: Dr. John A. Weaver, address: Georgia Southern University, P.O. Box 8144, Statesboro, GA 30460-8144, telephone: 912 - 871-1709 and email address: jweaver@GeorgiaSouthern.edu)

Participant Signature

Date

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

Investigator Signature

Date

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS 1 – FUNERAL DIRECTOR

INTERVIEWEES WILL BE INFORMED THAT THE INTERVIEW SESSION WILL BE RECORDED VIA A CASSETTE TAPE RECORDER IN ORDER TO ENSURE ACCURACY IN THE RESEARCH REPORT AND THAT THE INFORMATION WILL NOT BE ASSOCIATED WITH THE INTERVIEWEE PERSONALLY. INTERVIEWEES WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT UPON REQUEST.

1. How long have you been a funeral director?
2. What was your first experience with death?
3. What role, if any, did you play in making the final preparation for the deceased?
4. What was the funeral experience like for you?
5. Can you remember your first experience in making funeral arrangements with a family?
6. What was it like?
7. Traditional funerals have always followed certain, well-defined guidelines. Rituals and ceremonies were based on religion and individual belief. At some time in history, it is my belief that African Americans abandoned the positive ancestral legacy of funeral service rituals. Do you agree or disagree with this? How?
8. Can you name any customs of rituals (vestiges) of African and/or African American culture (such as superstitions related to death) that are evident today in burial customs and traditions?
9. What part does religion play in the rituals and rites of African American funeral service?
10. Were most of the funerals you directed held, in a church or some other place?
11. Within your life span, what can you remember about the traditions of African American funerals?
12. The tradition of what we call the “home-going service” is used to help characterize the funerals and memorializing of loved ones in African American communities. What parts of African American funeral service do you think have gone through a change?
13. Do you think this change has been a positive or negative change for African Americans?
14. What has influenced these changes in the way African Americans funeralize their loved ones?
15. What is your opinion on the advertisement of funeral service and goods?
16. Who or what control advertisement in funeral service?
17. Has the buying power of African Americans in purchasing funeral service and merchandise impacted changes in funerals?

18. Describe any development of unique rituals and customs of African American funeral service.
19. Can you remember the first funeral program? How have they changed throughout the years?
20. Describe any changes in the wake or visitation in the African American communities within the last fifty years?
21. Can you see a transition from burial insurance to pre-planning funerals?
22. What can you tell me about cremation in the African American communities?
23. How are African American funeral services similar to or different from non-African American services?
24. Do you think America has become a melting pot for various cultures and has developed its own set of rules for funeral service? If your answer is yes, what are the elements that you think caused this change?
25. Is there any thing you would like to share about your experiences with the funeral service industry that I did not ask about?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS 2 – LAY PERSON

INTERVIEWEES WILL BE INFORMED THAT THE INTERVIEW SESSION WILL BE RECORDED VIA A CASSETTE TAPE RECORDER IN ORDER TO ENSURE ACCURACY IN THE RESEARCH REPORT AND THAT THE INFORMATION WILL NOT BE ASSOCIATED WITH THE INTERVIEWEE PERSONALLY. INTERVIEWEES WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT UPON REQUEST.

1. What was your first experience with death?
2. What role, if any, did you play in making the final preparation for the deceased?
3. What was the funeral experience like for you?
4. Traditional funerals have always followed certain, well-defined guidelines. Rituals and ceremonies were based on religion and individual belief. At some time in history, it is my belief that African Americans abandoned the positive ancestral legacy of funeral service rituals. Do you agree or disagree with this? How?
5. Can you name any customs of rituals (vestiges) of African and/or African American culture (such as superstitions related to death) that are evident today in burial customs and traditions?
6. What changes can you describe in guidelines, rituals and ceremonies from our ancestral history of African American funeral service?
7. Do you think this change has been a positive or negative change for African Americans?
8. What role does religion play in the rituals and rites of African American funeral service?
9. Were the funerals you attended held in a church or some other place?
10. Within your life span, what can you remember about the traditions of African American funerals?
11. The tradition of what we call the “home-going service” is used to help characterize the funerals and memorializing of loved ones in African American communities. Do you know the origin of the words “Home going”?
12. What has influenced changes in the way African Americans funeralize their loved ones?
13. Can you name any customs of rituals (vestiges) of African and/or African American culture (such as superstitions related to death) that are evident today in burial customs and traditions?
14. What is your opinion on the advertisement of funeral service and goods?
15. Has the buying power of African Americans in purchasing funeral service and merchandise impacted changes in funerals?
16. Describe the development of unique rituals and customs of African American funeral service.

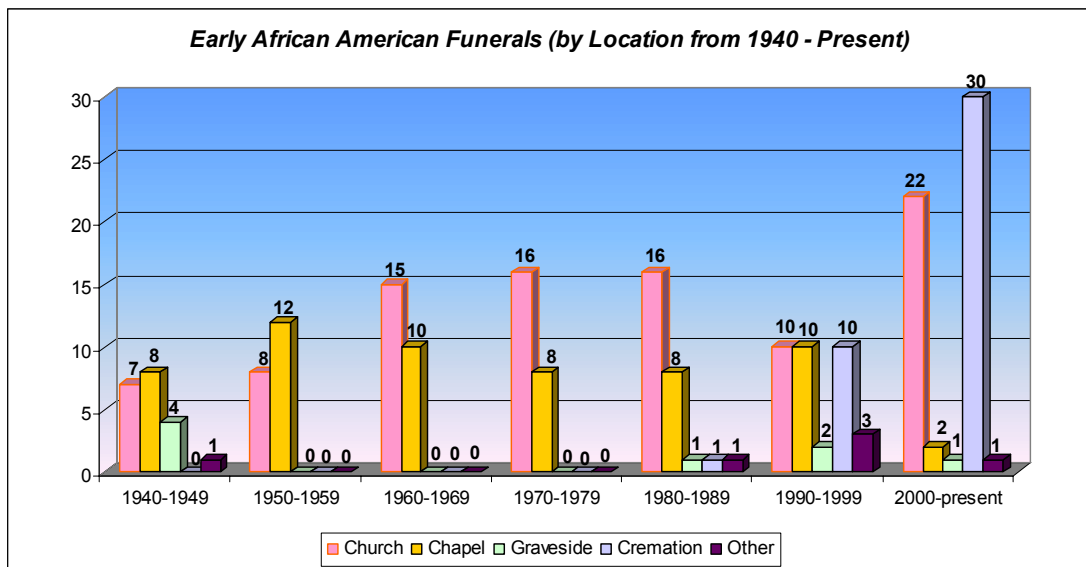
17. Can you remember the first funeral program? How have they changed throughout the years?
18. Describe any changes in the wake or visitation in the African American communities within the last fifty years?
19. Is there a transition from burial insurance to pre-planning funerals?
20. What can you tell me about cremation in the African American communities?
21. How are African American funeral services similar to or different from non-African American services?
22. Do you think America has become a melting pot for various cultures and has developed its own set of rules for funeral service? If your answer is yes, what are the elements that you think caused this change?
23. Is there any thing you would like to share about your experiences with the funeral service industry that I did not ask about?

TIME LINE RESULTS OF DATA

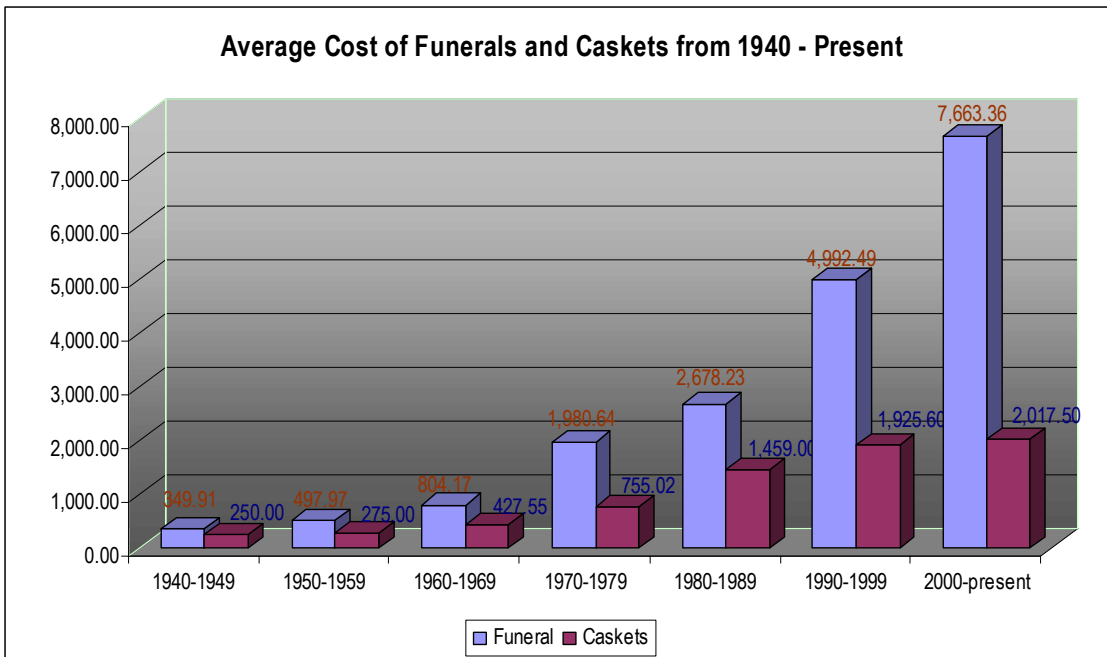
**THE PARADIGM SHIFT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN FUNERAL SERVICE
METROPOLITAN ATLANTA, GEORGIA – ACHEOLOGY INFORMATION
TIMELINE RESULTS OF DATA FROM 1940 – 2008**

TIMELINE	PARADIGM SHIFT	FUNERAL PROGRAMS Order of Service	STATEMENTS OF SERVICES AND GOODS
<p>1940 –1950</p> <p>20 Files Examined</p>	<p>No significant changes in funeral service. Average cost did not increase more than five to ten dollars. Funeral service was no more than providing a service to the community; cost was kept to a minimum; records are kept in a bound book.</p>	<p>No written account of funeral programs present in sampled data. No written account of order of service present in sampling data. Oral narratives from participants maintained, “the order of service for each funeral was done by the minister and family</p>	<p>Average cost of funerals = \$349.91</p> <p>Average cost of caskets = \$250.00.</p> <p>Cremation and funeral programs were not listed as an option.</p>
<p>1950 –1960</p> <p>20 Files Examined</p>	<p>Funeral costs increased +/- \$100</p> <p>Prices began to reflect an increase in service. One change: Transportation charge introduced.</p> <p>14 samplings revealed payment plans existed. Records were kept in file folders.</p>	<p>No written account of funeral programs present in sampled data.</p> <p>No written account of order of service present in sampled data. Evidence of minister providing an order of service; obituaries were read aloud by presiding officiate.</p>	<p>Average cost of funerals = \$497.97</p> <p>Average cost of caskets = \$275.00.</p> <p>19 funerals were paid by cash and one was paid by insurance.</p> <p>Cremation and funeral programs were not listed as an option on the service and goods form.</p>
<p>1960 –1970</p> <p>25 Files Examined</p>	<p>Average cost of funerals = \$200.00. The cost of caskets reflects the reason of the increase of funeral cost; No increase in cost of service only cost of merchandise. All records were kept in file folders.</p>	<p>No written account of funeral programs present in sampled data. No written account of order of service present in sampled data.</p>	<p>Average cost of funerals = \$804.17.</p> <p>Average cost of caskets = \$427.55.</p> <p>All sampled data reflects services were paid for by cash.</p>
<p>1970 –1980</p> <p>25 files sampled; 30 funeral programs examined</p>	<p>Average cost of funerals increased \$1,000.00.</p> <p>Funeral service evolved during this period. Payment plans show evidence of a beginning pre-planning funeral arrangements.</p>	<p>Evidence of funeral programs emerges: Basic black typed on white paper; black and white pictures of the deceased placed on front of program; Usage of religious symbols; programs reproduced with a ditto/steno machine. Few programs had name of a printing company; poems were used instead of obituaries. Funeral programs indicated that the order of services was dependant on the person’s life; all programs had prayer and scriptures from the old and new testaments.</p>	<p>Average cost of funerals = \$1,980.64.</p> <p>Average cost of caskets = \$755.02.</p> <p>12 contracts had a payment plan; 10 paid for using insurance; 3 paid for by cash</p> <p>Embalming and service cost increase slightly. Funeral programs were listed as service goods. Cremation was not an option.</p>
<p>1990 – 2000</p> <p>25 Files and 50 Funeral Programs Examined</p>	<p>African American funeral service were focusing more on the deceased and providing services for the families. General price list was included charges for personal time and basic service. Evidence proved that there were direct cremations in the early to late ninety’s and trend evolved to include a memorial service.</p>	<p>Funeral programs became more sophisticated. This time period began to show a story telling of the deceased life. Obituaries were longer. Color was introduced into the programs Paper formats changed to include various textures, styles and formats. Deceased’s role in society, dictated the length of order of service. Of 50 programs examined, 27 had a picture of the deceased; 23 three used a religious symbol.</p>	<p>Average cost of funerals = \$4,992.49</p> <p>Average cost of caskets = \$1,925.60</p> <p>18 services were paid by insurance; 3 paid by insurance and cash; 4 paid by cash</p> <p>Cremation and funeral programs were options on the service and goods form.</p>
<p>2000 – Present</p>	<p>Funeral data proved a shift in funeral service from 1940 to</p>	<p>Paper type varied from program to program. There were plain paper, Decca edge paper, and glossy paper</p>	<p>Average cost of funerals = \$7,663.36</p> <p>Average cost of caskets =</p>

APPENDIX E
GRAPH OF PARADIGM SHIFT



This graph verifies that religion plays a major role in African American funeral rituals and customs. This graph also shows the cremation rate. The data for this graph came from a random sampling of two funeral homes in the metropolitan area in which this study took place.



This graph validates the increase in the cost of funerals and caskets. The data for this graph came from a random sampling 50 files per decade from two funeral homes in the Metropolitan area in which this study took place. This graph validates the increase of funeral cost.

APPENDIX F

FUNERAL PROGRAM - 2008

When Tomorrow Starts Without Me

*When tomorrow starts without me, and I am not there to see,
If the sun should rise and find your eyes all filled with tears for me,
I wish so much you wouldn't cry the way you did today,
While thinking of the many things we didn't get to say.*

*I know how much you love me, I know you'll miss me too,
But when tomorrow starts without me, please try to understand
That an angel came and called my name and took me by the hand.*

*And said my place is ready in heaven far above,
And that I'd have to leave behind all those I dearly love,
But as I hurried to walk away, a tear fell from my eye,
For all my life, I'd always thought I didn't want to die.*

*I had so much to live for, so much yet to do,
It seemed almost impossible that I was leaving you,
I thought of all the yesterdays, the good ones, and the bad,
I thought of all the love we shared, and all the fun we had.*

*If I could relive yesterday, just even for a while,
I'd say goodbye and kiss you and maybe see you smile,
But then I fully realized that this could never be,
For emptiness and memories would take the place of me.*

*And when I thought of worldly things I might miss come tomorrow,
I thought of you, and when I did, my heart was filled with sorrow,
But when I walked through heaven's gates, I felt so much at home,
When God looked down and smiled on me from his great golden throne.*

*He said, "This is eternity, and all I've promised you,
Today your life on earth is past, but here it starts anew,
I promise no tomorrow, but today will always last,
And since each day's the same day, there's no longing for the past.*

*But you have been so faithful, so trusting and so true,
Though there were times you did some things you knew you shouldn't do,
But you have been forgiven and now at last you're free,
So won't you take my hand and share my life with me?"*

*So when tomorrow starts without me, don't think we're far apart,
For every time you think of me, I'm right there in your heart.*



Fall Blossoms
Friends and Family

Flower Arrangements
Friends and Family

Special Thanks to

~ Reverend Dr. Gregory A. Sutton and the
Jackson Memorial Baptist Church ~

~ Staff at Emory Winship Cancer Institute ~

~ Dewey Dampier ~

Acknowledgment
The family of Jeffrey A. Thomas is eternally grateful for the love,
support, prayers and services rendered during the crossing
over of their loved one.

Please know that you have made a profound impact on our
lives which shall long be remembered.



Carl M. Williams Funeral Directors, Inc.
"The Tradition Continues"

Carl M. Williams & Carol F. Williams
General Funeral Directors & Embalmers
492 Leikin Street, S.W.
Atlanta, GA 30313
(404) 522-8434 - Fax (404) 522-5751
www.carlwilliams.com

A Celebration of the Life
of
Jeffery Allan Thomas



Saturday, May 26, 2007
12:00 noon

Jackson Memorial Baptist Church
534 Fairburn Road, N.W.
Atlanta, GA. 30331

The Reverend Dr. Gregory A. Sutton
Pastor and Eulogist

Front and Back Cover (Tri - Fold 11X17)

Inside Pages

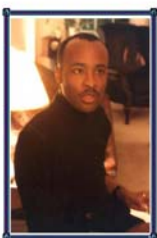
Obituary

Jeffery Allan Thomas passed away on Sunday May 20, 2007 at his home in Stone Mountain. Jeffery was born in Columbus, GA, on Dec. 18, 1962. After graduating from Kendrick High School in 1981, he moved to Atlanta to attend Clark College as a mass communications major.

At an early age, Jeff accepted Christ and joined New Bethel AME Church, where he sang in the choir. Upon moving to Atlanta, Jeff decided to join Jackson Memorial Baptist Church where he established many life long friends. While at Jackson Memorial, he enjoyed singing in the choir and serving on the usher board. He later joined New Birth Missionary Baptist and Victory Baptist.

Jeff was a flight attendant with Delta Airlines. His gregarious personality allowed him to meet and develop lasting relationships with numerous people at Delta.

Jeff is survived by his loving mother, Sarah Thomas, of Columbus, GA; brother, Huey Nunnally, of Sacramento, CA; sister, Gloria Battles (Tyronne), of College Park, GA; niece, Sherie Nunnally of Bradenton, FL; nephews: Dr. Ian Nunnally (Andrea) of Winchester, OH, and Brandon Battles of College Park, GA; sister-in-law, Veronica Nunnally of Bradenton, FL; special cousins: Virginia, John and Chadwick Sweeper of Greensboro, NC. Jeffery also has a large extended family of special



Order of Service

Processional
 Hymn "Blessed Assurance"
 Prayer of Comfort Bishop Richard B. Langford
 The Scriptures
 The Old Testament Reverend Dr. Charles Bennett
 The New Testament Reverend Eddie Bright
 Musical Selection
 Reflections:
 B. Wayne McMillan
 Gwendolyn Hall
 Resolution New Bethel AME Church
 Solo Victor Reid
 Eulogy The Reverend Dr. Gregory A. Sutton
 Solo Victor Reid
 Acknowledgments
 Recessional "When We All Get to Heaven"

Interment

Evergreen Memorial Gardens
 Columbus, Georgia



APPENDIX G

FUNERAL PROGRAM - 1970

Front and Back Cover

<p>Order of Service (contd)</p> <p>Eulogy Rev. Benjamin Gay</p> <p>Solo Mr. John Wesley Griggs</p> <p>Acknowledgments Mrs. Lena Tucker</p> <p>Viewing of Remains</p> <p>Recessional</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">INTERMENT</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Decatur Cemetery</p> <p style="text-align: center;">COX BROTHERS MORTICIANS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Atlanta, Georgia</p> <p style="text-align: center;">In Charge</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">OBSEQUIES</p> <p style="text-align: center;">For</p> <p style="text-align: center;">MISS ANNIE L. CHEWNING</p> <div style="text-align: center;"> </div> <p style="text-align: center;">Saturday October 31, 1970</p> <p style="text-align: center;">2:30 P.M.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Antioch A.M.E. Church 912 Atlanta Avenue Decatur, Georgia</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Dr. T. J. Flanagan, Pastor</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Rev. Benjamin Gay Officiating</p>
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Inside Pages

George Dennis Henderson
 C. H. Walker
 James Simon
 Frank Calloway
 Henry J. Griffin
 James Lowe
 Jasper Harper

* A C K N O W L E D G M E N T *

The Family of the late Miss Annie L. Chewing wishes to thank their many friends for their kindness during her illness.

Thanks also for your cards, flowers and kind words and deeds during our time of bereavement.

Special Thanks to Cox Brothers Morticians.

Dr. T. J. Flanagan, Presiding

Processional "Largo"
 Hymn "Amazing Grace"
 Scripture-Old Testament .. Rev.G.B.Marignay
 New Testament... Bishop J.L.White
 Song "I'll Live On"
 Prayer Rev. W. D. Wiggs
 Song - "Hold On To Jesus" Choir
 Remarks - (3 minutes each):

Rev. F. E. Perkins
 Rev. C. W. Peters
 Rev. Lonnie Young

Solo Mrs. W. M. Harris
 Remarks - (3 minutes each):

Rev. Herman Thompson
 Rev. Leon Tucker

Solo Mrs. Lula M. Calloway
 Remarks Rev. Richard Henderson

Poem Miss Dianne Henderson
 (From Nanny's Notebook)

Solo Miss Garnie Perkins
 Grandniece of Deceased

*that surprised me
 the message*

APPENDIX H

STATEMENTS OF FUNERAL GOODS AND SERVICES 1939

100% complete

PREPARATORY ARRANGEMENTS		Billed into ledger, page	
Brought forward		To Financial Charges	By Cash
Note		7-10-39	100.00
State		7-27-39	100.00
Dress		8-21-39	100.00
Coat	50.00	11-1-39	100.00
Shoe		12-3-39	100.00
Box, kind used		1-4-40	100.00
Mattress	25.00	3-20-40	100.00
Rehearsal and services		5-6-40	100.00
Washing and dressing hair		5-21-40	100.00
Shaving and dressing hair		5-27-40	100.00
Embalming			
Chair, No. of			
Moving box to cemetery			
Professional pall bearers			
Dr. certificate and permits			
Attendance at funeral			
Telephone and telegraph			
Notary public fee			
Ceremonial fees			
Music			
Death notices	2.20		
Personal time-attendance			
House and slippers			
Pushes			
Auto, limousine, coaches	15.00		
Private car	5 30.00		
Special train			
Railroad tickets			
Fees at railroad station and cemetery	10.00		
Station and transfer charges			
<i>CR</i>	20.00		
TOTAL AMOUNT			146.00

Paid 4-22-41

I, *126 2 - 137 90* the undersigned, hereby certify and agree with IVEY BROTHERS that I am herein personally responsible for all cash charges and expenses of and relating to such funeral services, and if such amount or part thereof is not paid before, I will nevertheless pay in full the same as when same is due to.

Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs Institutional Review Board (IRB)	
Phone: 912-478-0843	Veazey Hall 2021
Fax: 912-478-0719	P.O. Box 8005 Statesboro, GA 30460
IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu	

To: Carol T. Williams
2756 Dodson Lee Drive
East Point,
Georgia 30344

CC: Charles E. Patterson
Associate Vice President for Research

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

Date: September 3, 2008

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

After a review of your proposed research project numbered: H09014 and titled "Paradigm Shift of African-American Funeral Customs: Looking Through the Lens of Oral History and Consumer Culture", 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.

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.

This IRB approval is in effect for one year from the date of this letter. If at the end of that time, there have been no changes to the research protocol; you may request an extension of the approval period for an additional year. 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

Eleanor Haynes
Compliance Officer