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# African American Teenage Males Speak Out: The Influence of African American Males on the Academic Achievement, Identities, and Lives of African American Teenage Males

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AFRICAN AMERICAN TEENAGE MALES SPEAK OUT: THE INFLUENCE OF  
AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES ON THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT,  
IDENTITIES, AND LIVES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN TEENAGE MALES

by

OTHA JERMAINE HALL

(Under the Direction of Ming Fang He)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the influence of the presence of or lack for African American males on the academic achievements, identities, and lives of five African American teenage males who live in middle Georgia, a predominately White rural area. Theoretically, I draw upon the works of Derrick Bell (1987, 1992, 1999), Pedro Noguera (2003, 2008), Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2000, 2012), Gloria-Ladson Billings (2001, 2003, 2009, 2013) and William F. Tate (2006), Cornel West (1993, 2001, 2008), Carter G. Woodson (1933, 2010), W. E. B. DuBois (1903, 1996), and others on critical race theory and William Watkins (2005, 2006) on Black protest thought. Methodologically, I draw upon the oral history works of Willa Baum (1991), Donald Ritchie (2003), and Patricia Leavy (2011).

Five African American teenage males enrolled in middle Georgia public high schools are the main characters in the stories collected. African American men, or their absence thereof, have affected the five African American teenage males in diverse ways. Using oral history research methods, I collected the stories of these young men as we lived our lives in our schools, churches, families, and neighborhoods. Through our daily encounters, I began to gain a deeper understanding of how African American male

students viewed themselves, and how the presence or absence of African American male role models in their lives influenced their academic achievements, identities, and lives. Examining their academic report cards, reviewing their behavioral reports, and observing what was going on in their lives inside and outside schools enabled me to gain insights on how these African American teenage males perceived and constructed what was going on in the world around them. In order to protect my participants, I fictionalized characters, settings, events, times, and places based upon the stories I collected from the five African American teenage males to allow their silent voices to be heard.

African American males stereotypes usually include being unruly and evil. The United States spent millions of dollars on studying instructional methods, medication, prisons, and cemeteries. Few people, however, take time to have serious conversations with young African American males. I sincerely hope that my dissertation has created opportunities for five young men to voice their ideas and to tell their stories of struggles, hopes, and dreams. I also hope that teachers, educators, researchers, administrators, parents, and other educational workers consider that African American males might be able to define and express their struggles better than anyone else who has never *walked a mile in their shoes!*

Seven findings have emerged from my inquiry. Schools and societies are racialized spaces that reproduce and perpetuate racism and discrimination that suppress African American teenage males' academic achievement. We need to provide more positive African American role models to influence the ways African American teenager males learn and interact with others, how they construct their identities, and how they live their lives in schools and societies. Culturally biased discipline policies and standardized

tests assassinate the dreams and futures of African American teenage males before they graduate from their high schools. It is extremely important to teach our African American teenage males how to react to racism and discrimination to avoid being murdered such as what has happened to Travon Martin and Michael Brown. Oral history methods allow African American teenage males to tell their silenced counterstories that challenge the official or meta-narrative and empower them to understand the sources of racism and discrimination in schools and societies. There is a demand to develop a culturally responsive and challenging pedagogy that help raise critical consciousness within African American teenager males and empower them to understand their situations and responsibilities in schools and societies and to develop strategies to fight against injustice. It is of paramount importance to develop a caring, just, and inspiring learning and living environment where young African American males feel that they have equal opportunities to reach their highest potential (Siddle-Walker, 1996).

**INDEX WORDS: Oral History, Critical Race Theory, Black Protest Thought, African American Males, Culturally Relative Pedagogy, African American Culture, Counter-Storytelling**

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## DEDICATION

First, I would like to thank the Almighty GOD, because without him none of this would be possible. Second, I would like to thank my uncles who have been instrumental in making sure I did not become another bad statistic as an African American male. Third, I dedicate this work to my immediate family because without their support and guidance this work would not have been possible.

**Bessie Hall-** You have been the best mother that God could have blessed a child to have. You have always encouraged me to further my education and be the best that I can be in life. I am eternally grateful for the support, prayers, and lessons that you have taught me.

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**Jackie Nelson-** Thanks for being a big sister that challenged my ideas while still being willing to listen my thoughts as I went through a transformation of thinking throughout the Curriculum Studies program.



**Gwen Polk**-Thanks for being a big sister that I could always count on to remind me that things are not as stressful and serious as they seem to be because there have been several times throughout this process that I needed to be reminded of that.

**Erica Hall**-You came into my life as my wife about halfway through this journey. I am forever grateful for your support and patience with this process and me, as I have spent several days and nights working to carry out this work that I feel God has called me to do. Throughout this process, we have advanced from getting to know each other as friends to getting to know each other as husband and wife, and that has been the biggest blessing in my life!

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I would like to thank my committee members Dr. Sabrina Ross, Dr. Daniel Chapman, and Dr. Derrick Tennial for their efforts in assisting me in putting together the best dissertation possible. I am appreciative of all the advice, suggestions, and encouragement along the way. Dr. Chapman and Dr. Ross, I am sure that I will never look at movies the same again, no matter how hard I try. Both of you definitely broadened the lenses through which I look at life. I now see the hidden messages in commercials, movies, and government policies that I did not pay any attention to before I sat in your classes. You are absolutely two great assets to Georgia Southern University and the field of Curriculum Studies. Dr. Tennial, thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to drive to Statesboro for doctoral defenses. I am even more grateful for the time you took to read my work and offer useful feedback.

I would like to thank my special friends from the Curriculum Studies who continuously challenged me to keep reading and working. Too many individuals supported me for me to call all names, but they know who they are! Finally, I would like to thank the five African American teenage males who were brave enough to share their stories with me. This dissertation would not have been possible if it had not been for them. I am also grateful for their parents allowing them to share their stories with me. I pray that their voices in these stories will cause men to be better fathers and role models. I pray it will cause teachers to examine how they view and interact with African American teenage males. Most of all I pray that by allowing these young men to tell their stories, they will realize that they have voices, and their voices need and deserve to fall upon listening ears. It is my desire that they will know from now on that there are those of us out here who know they have ideas and are willing to share and let what they have to say make a difference! Alexander (2010), in her latest book, *The New Jim Crow*, takes the same route Bell (1987/1992) traveled. Alexander examined the relationship between race and the criminal justice system relative to the absence of role models for African American male students because, unfortunately, several of these young African American men have a negative encounter with the criminal justice system because of the lack of positive role models in their lives. Just as the educational institutions have served the purpose of making one race feel inferior to another, Alexander (2010) argued that the criminal justice system has done the same. She argued that just as poll taxes, literacy tests, and other laws kept African American men from voting a century ago, so does a felony today, and it seems as if these felonies are given out more readily to African American males than Caucasians (Alexander, 2010). This book, published after the

election of the first African-American President of the United States, is a testimony that a critical time exists for African Americans. The time is critical because on one hand, it demonstrates and pays homage to those individuals who have worked diligently to break down color barriers. However, the time is also critical in that it can provide a false sense of arrival for a race that cannot afford to ignore racism and discrimination. The fight for justice must continue, even beyond the election of an African American to the highest office in the land. The relevance of this work aligned to the fact that it is dealing with the present issues in the African American communities.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION: AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES SPEAK OUT

The Travon Martin verdict swept the country during the summer of 2013 because most Americans, like me, could not come to grips with the idea that an African American teenager, gunned down, for nothing more than going to the store and armed with a bag of skittles. The biggest shock came when a judicial system did not consider the gunman as committing the crime of murder. This verdict was a revelation and an epitome of what it can mean at any given moment to be an African American teenager in the United States. As the media, coverage and social media increased during the trial and days after the trial, it was obvious that the view held of African American male teenagers was less than human beings who deserved the same rights as other individuals in the United States of America. I cannot help but to think that the way the six White female jurors of this court case viewed Travon Martin is the same way that some educators view the African American male teenagers in their classrooms each day.

In my dissertation, I explored the lives of five African American males between the ages of 16 and 18, influenced by the presence or absence of African American men. The purpose of this study was to examine the use of Critical Race Theory and Black Protest Thought as Derrick Bell (1994) and William Watkins (2005) defined, and to allow selected participants to tell their stories of being young African American males in education and life. Statistics continue to describe the extent of how African American males are failing in public education, and how they make up the majority of the incarcerated population in the United States. In the South, young African American men attend schools populated by a mass majority of White administrators, teachers, and staff and they return home in the afternoon to homes of single mothers. The majority of young African American men spend most of each day without being in contact with



African American father figures or role models. In addition, few young African American males have fathers at home or have an opportunity to relate to African American role models throughout the school day. When referring to the American society, hooks (2004) stated, “Sadly, the real truth, which is a taboo, is that this is a culture that does not love Black males, that they are not loved by White men, White women, Black women, or girls and boys”(p. xi). *News One* reported that 72% of African American children live in a single parent home, which usually consist of a mother instead of a father in comparison to only 25% for the entire United States (Staff, 2011).

This study was about understanding what is going on in the minds of our young African American males who go days, weeks, months, and years without having the influence of African American male role models in their lives. This study also allowed for a comparison between the few young men who have an African American male role model in their lives like I did, the ones who have negative African American role models in their lives, and the ones who just simply have no African American male role models. Using critical race theory enabled us to see the impact that race had on their academics, identities, and lives. Black protest thought enabled us to examine plans of action to counteract the miseducation of our young African American men.

Often time African American males and the environments they are raised in are highlighted as the main problem for their failure (Ryan, 1976); however, this is a societal issue. In order for African American males to be successful, more than just their own race and gender must understand them. Although this study focused on the influence that African American males had on the lives of young African American males, I prayed that it would draw attention to the need for all people to understand these young men, especially administrators, teachers, and

staff members with responsibility of providing educational experiences for this marginalized population of students. Woodson (1933/2010) shared this same sentiment:

Being without actual education, we have very few persons prepared to help the Negroes whom they have set out to lead. These persons are not all dishonest men and women. Many of them are sincere, and believe that they are doing the race some great good in thus holding it backward. [We must awake them and show them the error of their ways]. (p. 77)

If we cannot create constructed conversations that specifically point out the disconnection between African American teenage males and their White teachers, then we will never be able to reach them. If we do not have a call to action concerning the culture and needs of our African American men, essentially, we are saying that they can be educated and become successful only in schools and a world that is segregated, which is what our forefathers fought so hard against. This is why we must create constructed conversations and work diligently at addressing the needs of our African American men. Great conversations can lead to great actions taking place concerning the progress of African American men.

The United States Department of Education reported that White teachers make up 83% of the teaching force, and women make up 76% (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). In as much as teenagers spend the greater portion of their time either at school or at home, many young African American males spend most of their time around individuals other than positive male role models to whom they can relate. If all of the above opinions and statistics are true, the absence of positive role models have to influence the way African American males perform in school, how they construct their identity, and how they live out their lives.

## Research Context

The National Association of Educators presented some astonishing numbers in a report called *Race against Time: Educating Black Boys*. This report mentioned the fact that African American males make up 9% of the entire student population in public schools of America (National Association of Educators, 2011). Although African-American males make up barely a 10th of the public education population, they account for 80% of the special education programs and 20% of all students labeled as mentally retarded (National Association of Educators, 2011). African American males represent most of the students in remedial reading and special education (Whitie & Cones, 1999). Students on lower tracks receive an inferior education compared to other students (Oakes, 1985, Oakes & Wells, 1998). It is as if a conspiracy exists to get rid of African American males (Kunjufu, 1984). Excluding African Americans is the benefit of whiteness as property (Harris, 1993).

In addition, African American male students experience suspension from school at a rate that is three times higher than other group; they are 2.5 times less likely to be entered into the gifted program, even if they qualify; and 42% of these young men attend schools that are underfunded by the government (National Association of Educators, 2011).

In 2005 Sixty-five percent of the African American males who dropped out of high school who were in their twenties were jobless or incarcerated (Ladson-Billings, 2011). Sixty percent of African American teenage male dropouts in their early thirties have spent time in prison (Ross 2006). Alexander (2010) reported that more African American men are in jail or prison than were bound by slavery before the Civil War. West (1993; 2001) documented that one out of three African American males will spend time in jail. African American males drop out

rate, unemployment rate, and prison rate is higher than any other group (Mauer, 2006; Gause 2005). The national graduate rate from high school for African American males is below 50% (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). According to an article in *Black Voices*, 63% of suicide cases, 90% of homeless and runaway cases, 85% of rapists with anger problems, 71% of high school dropouts, 75% of chemical abusers, and 85% of incarcerated youth come from homes without a father (Savali, 2010). Numbers like these signal a cry for help for African American males who are missing role models in their lives. Better teaching strategies, additional technology, or increased government funding do address some issues relative to educating African American young men. However, the problem is a bigger issue. Specifically, African American young men need to have their voices heard so that we can learn about their problems from them. We need to develop awareness about how their problems influence them, and how we can help them to succeed. During my dissertation inquiry, I gathered data by listening to the cries of five young African American males.

An issue among African American males was the absence of positive African American role models in their lives. For example, the National Center for Education Statistics (2011) reported that 83% of the teachers in public education in 2008-2009 were White women in comparison to only 6.9% African American males (Fast Facts, 2009). Hooks (2004) opposed the belief that the absence of African American role models is the main problem with African American young boys. hooks (2004) stated, "Patriarchal fathers are not the answer to healing the wounds in Black family life" (p.102). hooks indicated that there is an emotional problem that need liberation in African American males before real change can take place. Although I agree with hooks' (2004) position on this issue, I believe that the presence of successful African American men increases the chances of producing successful African American students. Young

African American men leave homes of single mothers and go to school in which the majority of their teachers are White females. In the late 1990s, the teaching force was 86% White (Ladson-Billings, 2001). This is not suggesting that mothers and White teachers cannot have a positive impact or teach young African American men; however, the fact that young African American men do not perceive others like them in respectable roles and as fathers could give them a distorted view of what it means to be an African American male. Due to the absence of successful African American men, the media, public education curriculum, White teachers, and other institutions in society tend to define incorrectly, who African American men are.

The media, for example, uses hip-hop and other pop culture to define African American men as those who wear their pants below their waist, have the finer material possessions in life by selling drugs, and calling each other niggers. Some rappers proclaim that “real niggas come out the projects” (Ogbar, 2007, p. 44), and our young African American men believe and imitate that belief. hooks (2004) stated, “A biased imperialist White-supremacist patriarchal mass media teaches young Black males the street will be their only home” (p. 27). This same media shows them that a real man is one who is able to survive by being a violent predator (hooks, 2004). This miseducation could lead a young African American male to make it his goal to live in the projects. I am not suggesting that there is something wrong with living in the projects. However, I am suggesting that there is a problem when the goal or expectation is to do awful in school and end up in the projects because they believe this is what actually makes them *real* African American men. Some young African American males actually believe that being an educated African American male makes them a coward. This misunderstanding could explain why many African American men look to sports and the music industry to define their masculinity (hooks, 2004).

Noguera (2008) told the story in his book of how poorly his son performed at one point in school, despite all the structuring, parenting, and role modeling his son had received. When Noguera got to the root of his son's poor performance, it all came back to the idea that his son was embarrassed to succeed in school because he believed making good grades was not cool.

The public educational curriculum does not paint a much better picture of African American men than the media. In the history curriculum, African American males are mainly slaves, giving them an inferior identity. Positive images of African American males, like Martin Luther King, Jr and Nat Turner, are few in instructional materials throughout the curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 2003). Little information is included about how African Americans, historically, contributed to the foundation of the economy of the United States. African American males are invisible in other subjects as well (Ladson-Billings, 2003). Along with a hidden curriculum that suppresses African American males, a lack of African American males is obvious in public education. This, to a certain degree, possibly could confirm what the media and curriculum are implying, which is that African American males are not successful and illiterate. hooks (2004) stated, "More than any other group of men in our society, Black males are perceived as lacking in intellectual skills" (p.33). To constantly hear, see, and live within a distorted environment, this myth must give young African American males a negative view of who they are and who they are supposed to become in the future. The problem with this distorted self-vision is that it becomes a self-fulfilled prophecy, and African American young men make up the awful statistics like Alexander (2010) pointed out.

I must admit that the fire ignited in me concerning the struggles of young African American males, has come at the hands of this Curriculum Studies program. As an African American male, I am disappointed that it has taken me to this point in my life to see the

seriousness of the struggle that young African American males are facing in our society. It has taken the readings of Watkins (2005), West (2001), Bell (1987), Noguera (2008), Ladson-Billings (2003), hooks (2004), and others to raise a cultural awareness within me. Out of all my years of education, the Curriculum Studies program at Georgia Southern was the first time a professor challenged me to go and read works written to share the same cultural background as I. These readings opened my eyes and mind to a way that I had never seen before in society and education. While completing these readings, often I found myself angry, frustrated, sad, and even confused at times. I now look at movies and television shows for a purpose deeper than just entertainment. Now I look for structural inequalities such as stereotypes, power structures, economic structures, and racial structures that I see played out in real everyday life.

In this study, I looked into the lives of five African American teenage males enrolled in public high schools in middle Georgia. They will be given the opportunity to tell what their experiences as African American teenage males has been life in a world that dominated by White males and females. In order to protect their identity their stories included fictionalized characters, events, people, and places. Three of these students attended Joy High School, one attended Union High School, and one attended Dunn High School. The demographic makeup of Joy and Dunn high schools were very similar because both schools were majority White in student body and educators. Union High School demographic makeup was very different from Joy and Dunn High Schools because Dunn High School consisted mainly of African American students. Dunn High School also had a substantially higher number of African American educators than Joy and Dunn High Schools. The young men in this study engaged in conversations about their experience in public education. They highlighted what they perceived as their struggles and successes as African American males, and how they perceived themselves. These conversations

extended to other equally important feelings, emotions, and opinions. The stories of these young men derived through an analysis of observations, unstructured conversations, and academic reports.

### **Key Research Issues**

Throughout my study, I hoped to discover how African American males influence the academic achievement, identity development, and lives of young African American males. I hoped to see the good and bad influences of the presence and absence of positive African American males in the lives of the young African American males. I also wanted to discover who and what these young African American males were using as role models to construct the identity of African American males. Another issue examined was how the curriculum and the culturally out-of-touch White teachers who implement the curriculum played a major role in how African American males perceived themselves.

### **Autobiographical Roots of My Inquiry**

As an African American male researcher from a traditional family, I had to reflect critically upon my own experience as an African American male moving through a public education system and a society that was very similar to the public education system and society of the five young men with whom I was researching. I had a strong father in my home every day. I also had strong uncles who were very involved in my life; therefore, my experiences as an African American male were different from some of the young men in this study, who have no father at home. My father was a Christian, a strong disciplinarian, a faithful husband to my mother, and an efficient provider for the entire family. Several of my uncles share the same notable characteristics as my father; therefore, my definition of a successful African American man probably occurred from the examples they set. I experienced an advantage and a



disadvantage at the same time. The advantage was finishing college. The disadvantage was learning the hidden language, which depicted an African American male as an individual who fits into mainstream society just a little bit better. I have to admit that my upbringing in a traditional family, and my education gave me an advantage. By owning up to these advantages, I was able to challenge myself to make a difference in the lives of others who were not as fortunate.

### **A Family That Prays Together Stays Together**

Even though I lived in a traditional family with both my father and mother present and involved in my life, neither my parents nor my grandparents attended a four-year university. My mother made a living working in factories, and my father landed a job with the federal government after he completed his military career. Their careers allowed me to see both ends of the spectrum. I saw the minimum wage struggle and the impact of poor labor laws within my mother's work. However, I saw the middle class privileges in my father's work with the federal government. As a child, I did not perceive how witnessing these separate ends of the spectrum in America would shape my viewpoints later on in life. My mother's father was a preacher and my father's father worked on the farm for White landowners. Both of my grandmothers' occupations were-stay-at-home parents who occasionally worked in the field on their own property.

I have two older sisters; therefore, I am the youngest sibling in the family and the only male sibling as well. Both of my sisters obtained education beyond high school, which was a blessing to the family. One sister achieved as an educator and the other one succeed as a radiology technician. With both parents and two sisters who both completed higher learning definitely had its advantages, but like any family, we have our bad moments as well. We went to church and taught that it was our faith in God that allows us to make it through tough times. My

father was a deacon in the church; therefore, going to Sunday school, Bible study, and multiple church services on Sunday was not an option in our household. We had to be active in the church. Both of my sisters were members of the choir, and I played the drums in the church until I was 24 years old. I did not realize at the time that my faith would play as an important role as it has played in my life.

Although being an active member of the church strengthened my faith, I cannot say that churches continued to make a major impact as a change agent in society in comparison to how they functioned historically in the African American community. Martin Luther King, Jr (1963/2000) warned us of this change in the role of the church in the community when he stated, “If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority” (p. 64). Through a study of the Bible at church, I learned quite a bit about how I could be a better person. However, I cannot credit the church for teaching me about being an African American man in America. Woodson (1933/2010) suggested that this void occurred because African American preachers do not spread awareness from the pulpit about how the public educational system culturally annihilates African Americans. The church is one area that has the ability and platform to help shape African American men, and I cannot say that we have taken advantage of that platform. King (1963/1981) stated, “Two types of Negro churches have failed to provide bread. One burns with emotionalism and the other freezes with classism” (p. 64). King suggested that African American churches are turning into places of entertainment and *feel good* sermons, or they are turning into prosperity gatherings.

Then there is the religious crowd that Dubois (1903/1996) referred to that has allowed religion to become a crutch. They are not under a spiritual allusion; rather, they have a superstitious belief that God would not have them to put forth the effort to be involved in the

change process because God makes it just happen magically. This religious group has no successful or productive plan of action in place to help African American men. Their idea of a plan is tons of prayers and faith with little work, which is the opposite of the teachings of the Bible. Unfortunately, I see these trends King (1963/1981), Woodson (1933/2010), and DuBois (1903/1996) described as being true. I have been a member of a church and attended churches that fit into all of the categories these men described. However, for the past 5 years, I felt blessed to be under the leadership of a pastor who took advantage of his platform to help African American men. My Christian beliefs taught me that a family that prays together stays together. My Christian belief also taught me that a family that has faith and adds some work to it not only stays together but also makes progress.

### **Guide Me through This Barren Land**

I was born in 1984 in Laurens County, Georgia. This rural area is located in the middle of Georgia between Savannah and Macon. The total population is 48,041 (Laurens County, Georgia Demographics, 2014). There is little racial diversity in Laurens County. Whites make up 61.6% of the total population, while African Americans make up 36% (Laurens County, Georgia Demographics, 2014). Only 16% of the population holds a college degree (Laurens County, Georgia Demographics, 2014). The average income per capita is only \$19,358 (Laurens County, Georgia Demographics, 2014). Laurens County is a community in which land is plentiful in that it is the third largest county geographically (Laurens County, Georgia Demographics, 2014). The abundance of land has made for a very big farming market. Culturally, Laurens County is notable for widely celebrating St. Patrick's weekend. Unfortunately, Laurens County is also notable for celebrating the famous Redneck Games, although no games occurred since 2012.

## **Name Your Blessings and Count Them One by One**

I entered this world from day one as a baby boy of a strong, African American mother and father. At that time, I had no idea that I would have a unique advantage that most African American males would not have. I grew up in a home with a father and mother, along with two older sisters. This type of family has become so rare that I can remember one of my college roommates referring to my family as the Huxtables, which was a name for a perfect family resembling the famous television sitcom *The Bill Cosby Show*. I also had several uncles and a brother-in-law who were all strong, Christian, African American males. These men had numerous conversations with me about getting a good education because a good education would open up opportunities for me down the road later in life. These men told me, for example, that I could not make it in America without a good education. Along with these conversations came an enforcer, my dad. He constantly checked my grades to make sure my grades met his high expectations. These men, my dad and his brothers, would sit around on the porch and talk about the “good ole days,” which involved discussions of what life was like for them. They discussed how things had or had not changed. They would talk about the Martin Luther King’s, Carter G. Woodson’s, and W.E.B. Du Bois’s of the world just to name a few. These names were not foreign to me, even though I had no opportunity of learning about them in public school. What I did not realize, at that time, was that the conversations I had about positive African American leaders embedded in my mind, heart, and soul the achievement of notable African American male leaders. I was being taught something that public education was not teaching me, which was to be proud of being African American and having high expectations for myself, no matter what my surroundings portrayed. Not only were there conversations that influenced me, but there was also their exemplary lifestyle. These men were believers in Christ, and they

believed strongly that “Faith without works is dead” (James, 2:14). The men in my family were not like some of the African Americans that Du Bois (1903/1996) described as using the church as a crutch because they felt like God did not desire that they do anything for themselves but rather wait on God himself to do it.

The African American men in my life, instead, had more than just great conversations. They were men of action who set great examples through how they lived. As a young African American male, I watched these men go to work every day, even when they did not feel like going. They took ownership of the belief that it was their responsibility to take care of their family, even if it meant working two jobs. Once again, I did not realize that by just watching them, I would adopt their same positive leadership styles. I realized the power of expectations when I noticed that I had not taken a personal or sick day off from work since I became an educator in 2007. This is not to say that I will never get sick or need a day off. I am saying, however, that by watching the positive role models in my life, who went to work every day, I have come to believe that taking off days from work for no reason is a sign of irresponsibility and poor work ethics. I used the illustration of how these role models’ mentality towards work shaped my viewpoint about work to demonstrate the importance of African American male role models. The men in my family, as positive role models, were teaching me lessons just by being around and doing the right thing.

The men in my life planted the knowledge in me that helped to groom me into becoming a young man who is now working towards completing a doctoral program. It was not the lessons taught by public education; although, I had to master the lessons in public education in order to get where I am at today. There are parts of those lessons in public education that served and still serve a great purpose in my life. However, when I examined the question that I posed earlier

concerning how I made it to a doctoral program, I could not help but to acknowledge that it was the knowledge of the great men in my life who taught me to show up for class on time, stay out of trouble, study hard, and do my best. I do not believe I could have learned these lessons by any other mean than the African American role models in my life. It was not all due to the instructional strategies teachers used to teach me, the amount of technology presented in the education, nor differentiated instruction. It was not classroom management or fear of the principal that kept me out of the office for discipline. Woodson stated,

Such has been the education of Negroes. They have been taught facts of history, but have never learned to think. 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, 1933/2010, p. 74)

It was, however, a select few African American men and the grace of God in my life that contributed to my development as an African American man. I do not want to send the message that African American women or other races did not play a role in my success; however, I do want to focus on the role that African-American males played in shaping and molding me into become the African American man that I am.

### **Prophets in Sheep Clothing**

As I reflected on my own experiences as an African American male navigating through an educational system and a society dominated by White women and men, I realized the miseducation about which Woodson (1933/2010) wrote. My passion for my dissertation topic stemmed from my experiences as an African American male, educated in the southern public educational system. I can remember vividly some of the obstacles I had to overcome that my White counterparts did not have to navigate. For example, when I was not even two years into

my formal educational career in primary school, I can remember my first grade teacher wanting to test me for special education. This decision for testing was due to my lack of performance on math and spelling tests. This teacher was a White female who never smiled, never offered to help, nor did she ever offer any encouragement. She taught the lesson and expected us to memorize everything that she talked about in class. Her discipline strategy included no talking of any sort in her class. Honestly, I was simply afraid to ask questions, which led to my poor performance and lack of self-confidence. Woodson (1933/2010) stated, “The lack of confidence of the Negro in himself and in his possibilities is what has kept him down” (p. 62). I did not understand it at the time, but that is exactly what was taking place with the encounter I had with my first grade teacher. I had no confidence in myself, and an elderly, White female teacher, who could not relate to me culturally in order to help build my confidence, was going through the motion of teaching me.

Unlike several of the African American students that come through public education today, I had parents that came out to the school and refused to allow me to be tested. In addition to refusing to have me tested for special education, my parents also expressed the fact that I felt afraid in the class. They also increased the amount of time I spent studying at home. I went from possibly wearing the label as a special education student in first grade, to wearing the label as an honor graduate from high school.

As I grew older in public education, it did not take me long to realize that race was a factor. I did not have the full understanding of how curriculum, textbooks, and the success of African American males intertwined with race; however, I knew that I did not have many African American male teachers. I also noticed that we never discussed many African Americans in class. One of the most vivid memories that I have of actual racism came in my senior year of

high school, which was in 2002. We had an African American History program one afternoon, and the majority of the White students' parents allowed them to sign out of school early or picked them up from school so that they did not have to attend the African American History program. I can remember thinking that these same people ate together every day, had classes together, and played sports together.

The message on this particular day was loud and clear. The message was that African American History applied only to other African Americans. However, White History as the state mandated was for every student, every day of the year in History classes. The state made it clear that policy maker, curriculum developers, and legislators knew what I needed the most to be successful in America, but I have come to realize the power structure was nothing more than prophets dressed in sheep clothing.

### **Racially Rejected and Educationally Accepted**

I can still remember running into issues of being an African American male, after high school, as an adult. My first week back home in Dublin, Georgia, after I had graduated from Georgia Southern University, I went car shopping. I left the gym from playing basketball one evening and walked onto the car dealership yard, where an African American auto sales representative approached me and asked what I was looking to buy. I answered him, saying that I was interested in a new Nissan. I guess because of the big fitting basketball shorts, tennis shoes, and being a young African American male, he assumed that I could not afford a new car. He immediately said that we should start by looking at the used cars, which were more affordable. Now granted, he never asked me what was my profession or salary. I recognized immediately what was going on, but I played along anyway. The sales representative proceeded to show me the used cars and gave me his business card. The next day I returned dressed in slacks and a polo



shirt. I also had on my school badge because, right out of college, I had been fortunate enough to teach summer school. The auto sales representative looked at the name badge and asked me what I did at the school. I replied that I was a teacher, assistant basketball coach, and that I was working on my Master's degree. He immediately took me to the new cars. By the time I made it home, which was about a 15-minute drive, he had already called to ask if he could do a credit check to get me approved for the loan. I told him not to worry about it without giving him a reason.

This was just a prime example that discrimination and misunderstandings of who African American males are, come from Whites as well as other African Americans. This auto sales representative was a product of the indoctrination that takes place, which teaches that a certain look goes with success. That look is a White or an African American dressed a certain way. Having strong African American males in my life did not exempt me from stories like stories I shared above; however, I was equipped to handle those awful encounters in a much better manner. I can see easily how encounters like the ones I experienced in public education and at the auto dealership could cause some people to feel like there is no hope for humanity as an African American male.

### **Bamboozled**

I must be honest and say that I did not realize the negative impact that the absence of African American male role models had on young African American males. I made the awful assumption early on in my life that if I made it in a system that lacked African American males, then other African American males should be able to make it as well. I did not realize the importance of having, hearing, and learning from my father, uncles, brother-in-law, and other African American males in my life. I took for granted an attribute that was a precious

commodity. I was under the false assumption that young African American males just needed to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps and do what it takes to be successful. Now I realize that it was the African American male role models I had in my life that instilled the desire for me to pull myself up by my bootstrap and not allow anything to stop my growth and mentality.

### **The Great Awakening**

As an African American male student who came through public education, I only encountered four African American male adults in the school, from kindergarten through Grade 12. Two of these adults were basketball coaches; one was a principal, and only one was a classroom teacher. During my college career, undergraduate and graduate, only one additional African American male added to that count. This male instructor just happened to teach African American Studies. Thus, the instructional staff in every public school and university I attended has been majority White as well.

In my entire academia career, including a high school diploma, an associate's degree, a bachelor's degree, a master's degree, and a specialist's degree, I was without encouragement to read or instructed to read books by African American male authors who reflected my own culture. It was not until I entered the Curriculum Studies doctoral program at Georgia Southern University that a recommendation strongly guided me to read books and studies by other African American males. This also was the first time in my profession that I started hearing words like culturally responsive pedagogy and culturally relative curriculum. All my previous professional development, up to this point, had rested on creating better lessons plans, incorporating more technology, and including differentiated instructional strategies to raise standardized test scores.

About midway through my doctoral program, I began to question my own experience with public education and strong African American males. I began to question how I even made

it to a doctoral program, being an African American male who went through an indoctrinated public educational system that did not resemble me in the curriculum, textbooks, or classrooms. I did not know it at the time, but the summer of 2010, when I entered the Curriculum Studies program, this became my Great Awakening to the indoctrination process we call education.

### **A Charge to Keep I Have**

Just as the brief piece of my personal story above, gave a voice to some principles that allowed me to be successful in school and life, the struggling young African American men, who participated in this study, had a voice to share as well. We cannot speculate what their voice revealed until it is heard; however, it will give us an idea of where we need to begin in order to turn their lives around. Just as the fancy traditional instructional methods were not the foundation of my success, I do not believe that these modern instructional methods are going to be the solution to young African American men who are struggling in public education and life today. As I began to read more writings and studies from African American scholars, I realized quickly that the stories that we hear the most are the ones in which African American adult men have found a way to overcome their obstacles. Some adult African American men came from families of strong male role models and were successful in their own ways. These stories are good, encouraging, and motivational. However, the voice of the ones who struggled in their teenage years is missing.

Without help, many African American young men never make it out of their struggle. The missing voices of these young African American men who are struggling and are on the verge of destruction, brought me to the topic of examining the influence of not having strong African American males in the lives of African American teenage males. I was passionate about this dissertation inquiry because I am an African American male. The epidemic or plight of the

African American male often jolts me into reality because I have nephews, cousins, friends, and students. One day, maybe even sons, who could become part of the dreadful statistics that follow young African American males, if something does not happen to change the course of history relative to their successful enculturation into mainstream values and quality of life.

### **A Calling to Fulfill**

I am an African American male educator in my eighth year of education. I spent the first six years in the classroom, full time before assuming responsibilities as an assistant principal. I am also the head coach of the boys' basketball team. My roles as an educator, administrator, and coach allowed me to see the good, the bad, and the ugly in public education. A large number of the bad and the ugly issues derive from seeing young men, who belong to the same race and ethnicity, as I am battling academically and struggling to stay out of the principal's office for disciplinary reasons. During my eight years in education, I sat in many meetings, read numerous articles, and observed firsthand, the struggles of young African American males in education. I saw the blame placed on parents, teachers, and the young men themselves. I witnessed proposed solutions, ranging from increased tutoring and extra funding from the government to Individualized Education Programs (IEP's) and 504 plans. Books speak about the different instructional strategies to implement to increased African American males' academic achievement. However, over the years, the only thing that seemed to remain constant was the struggle that African American young men faced in their quest for educational equality and equity. Everybody appeared to be discussing and selling solutions to this problem, but we have enough proof and data to confirm that all the above methods failed and continue to fail.

Woodson (1933/2010) summed it up best when he said:

The Negro needs to become radical, and the race will never amount to anything until it does become so but this radicalism should come from within. The Negro will be very foolish to resort to extreme measures in behalf of foreign movements before he learns to suffer and die to right his own wrongs. (p. 95)

I would described the medication, IEP's, 504's, and other labels as the foreign movements that failed. The voices of young African American men need a listening audience because their responses may touch that radicalism on the inside that Woodson (1933/2010) referred to in the above quote. The foundation to building a solution to the struggle of young African American male students might be in their own personal stories and daily lives. As I walked the hallways at my school, I realized that I did not see many African American male role models. Only three adult African American male educators and coaches worked in the entire building. For the first six years of my career, I was the only African American male educator in an academic classroom. When I moved into administration, that number decreased to two. Based on statistics, these same young African American male students leave a school building with only two male educators and go to a fatherless home as well. Statistics show that 72% of African American children go home to a single mother parent (Staff, 2011). The absence of strong African American males must have some impact on these young men; however, we had hear their voices to see what that impact was and how it influenced their success in school and life.

### **And God Said Let There be Light**

Thinking back on my family, religious upbringing, educational experiences, and life in middle Georgia, it was a critical part of my understanding of African American males' racial identity. While writing this autobiography, I reflected upon where I came from, while being motivated to have a positive impact on the future of others. I was able to see more clearly how

my family and faith helped mold me into the person that I became in adulthood. While writing about some of my experiences as an African American male in middle Georgia, I was able to view discrimination as something much deeper. I was able to see it for the racism and cultural hegemony that for which it stands.

I must admit that as I was writing about my upbringing and past experiences in the South, I caught myself feeling angry for being accepting indoctrination taught in public education. I fault myself for choosing to attend universities that ignored my culture; however, these same institutions played some type of role in my success. I have an internal battle of deciding how to allow my own kids to be educated one day, if the Lord blesses me with children. I question whether I will have enough light to erase the darkness placed over their culture in public education. I also question if I should strategically place my own children in schools that will celebrate their culture.

I had a strong African American father at home; however, school officials and curriculum ignored my culture in school. I did not realized the absence of my culture. I assumed my culture did not exist or was not important. While I was conducting this research, my prayer was that my research would allow me to tap into the minds, hearts, and souls of the young African American men in the valley of public education. I further prayed that whatever I found would motivate me to continue to be a change agent for all people.

### **Significance of Study**

Providing an education based on equality is a common phrase discussed lightly as if it automatically takes place every day in schools throughout America. In reality, however, “violence and racism are a basic part of American social and school history” (Spring, 2001/2011, p. 7). In the 18th century, Black slaves worked the plantation in the South, and the key to making

this system work was a strong hierarchical system that relied on discipline and order (Spring, 2001/2011). Brutality and the stripping of Black slaves' culture, which is known as *deculturalization*, was the key to making Black slaves rely on their owners, regardless of the treatment received (Spring, 2001/2011). These Black slaves lacked the ability to communicate with slave owners because they could not speak the English language; however, this was not a problem for slave owners because it provided a great opportunity for economic exploitation (Spring, 2001/2011). The system, according to Spring (2001/2011), for Black slaves might not seem like education, but in reality, it was. The slaves learned to feel inferior, learned to follow orders, and learned the consequences of not following orders. What they were not being taught were ways and means to improve their living and economic conditions because this would have led to rebellion and ultimately to freedom. The slave and slave owner relationship also demonstrated the problems that occur with racial, cultural, and linguistic barriers.

By the mid-18th century, both free and enslaved Africans started to pick up the English language; thus, the need to be educated increased for the freed slaves (Spring, 2001/2011). The idea of African Americans and Whites being educated together was nonexistent socially, politically, and culturally. Schools had division among race until the mid-1900s when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled segregated schools to be against the U.S. Constitution (Spring, 2001/2011). The movement for an equal education moved at a much slower pace in the South than it did up North (Spring, 2001/2011). In the South, segregated schools struggled to provide a quality education because of the lack of resources, and African Americans realized quickly that their schools were inferior to the White schools (Spring, 2001/2011). Structural inequality posed economic problems for African Americans who had left the plantation but did not have a decent enough education to find a job in the racially divided South (Spring, 2001/2011). For the African

Americans that stayed in the larger cities in the South, such as Charleston and Savannah, there were more opportunities to earn a living.

As I fast forward to the 21st century, education for African Americans in the South, I looked back at the previous paragraphs, and saw how far we have come. I also see how we have remained the same. In most rural areas in the South, the teaching force is composed of instructors who do not share the same culture, race, or socioeconomic status as their African American male students. In no way did I place the blame for low achievement among African American male students on their teachers; however, I did surmise that part of the problem related the racial, cultural, and linguistic gaps that existed in classrooms, textbooks, and curriculum. Ladson-Billings (2003) used the social studies curriculum and textbooks to point out the discrimination and lack of information pertaining to African Americans. Obviously, companies printed the information in the textbooks, based on a curriculum politicians created. I could not help but link deculturalization in schools to deculturalization of the 1800s.

Noguera (2008) did a survey that revealed 42% of African American males strongly disagreed with the notion that their teacher supported them and cared about them. Once again, this finding is similar to life in the 1800s when African Americans felt they were not cared for in public education. Noguera (2008) stated, “Unfortunately most African American children are not enrolled in effective schools that nurture and support them, while simultaneously providing high-quality instruction” (p. 37). Structure and cultural forces are a part of a formula that creates individual identity (Noguera, 2008). Noguera painted a vivid picture of African-American males in public education when he stated,

For African American males, who are more likely than any other group to [experience] negative forms of treatment in school, the message is clear: individuals of their race and



gender may excel in sports, but not in math or history. The location of Black males within schools-in remedial classes or waiting for punishment outside the principal's office-and the roles they perform within school suggest that they are good at playing basketball or rapping, but debating, writing for the school newspaper, or participating in the science club is strictly out of bounds. (p. 31)

This feeling described in the above quote leads African American males to unachieved dreams of being the professional athlete without an education to fall back on, which leads to a bad economic situation that many are stuck in for life. African American males need to know that they can succeed in other areas of life besides athletics and rapping careers. African Americans need to understand that they too can be scientists, technologists, engineers, mathematicians, doctors, lawyers, and educators.

### **Outlines of Chapters**

My dissertation consisted of five chapters. In Chapter 1, I laid out the purpose of this dissertation, and described what the statistics showed about African American males. In this Chapter, I also discussed my experience as an African American male in a society dominated by Whites.

In Chapter 2, I provided a detailed summary and analysis of the literature that pertained to Critical Race Theory, Black Protest Thought, and the lives of African American males. The literature review includes writings from Derrick Bell, William Watkins, Cornel West, Pedro Noguera, Martin Luther King, Jr, Carter G. Woodson, W.E.B. Dubois, Paulo Freire, bell hooks, and Gloria Ladson-Billings, just to name a few. These individuals examined critically African American males' academic performance in public education, the construction of their identities, and described experiences in the everyday lives of African American males.

In Chapter 3, I described how the study of five African American male teenagers proceeded. Using oral history as my methodology, I drew upon the works of Baum (1991), Ritchie (2003), and Leavy (2011). Using oral history as the main research method, these five young men had an opportunity to share their stories about being African American teenage males in society. This chapter examined the methods in which the stories unfolded and how I analyzed the stories for themes and commonalities.

In Chapter 3, I introduced the five characters in my study. The characters included four 17 years old and one 16 years old African American males. They attended public schools in the middle Georgia area. Out of the five, three lived in the home with African American males, and two lived in single-parent homes. The characters had various experiences that made them unique in this study, whether it was having a male that was a good role model, bad role model, or not having one role model around at all. Four of the young men attended schools that were very similar in their demographic makeup, being majority White, and one attended a school that was predominately African American in its makeup. Chapter 3 provided detailed profiles of these five African American teenagers as well as detailed demographics of the schools they attend.

In Chapter 4, I shared the stories of these five young African American males. These stories explained how the absence or presence of African American male role models in their lives influenced these young men. These stories allowed these young men to discuss their successes and struggles through their own lenses.

In Chapter 5, I reflected upon the stories shared by these five African American males and determined how they view the negative images of themselves the mass media and Whites created. I also examined how these young men felt about themselves, and the condition that adult

African American males experience. These stories demonstrated how African American male students felt about the absence or presence of their fathers' involvement in their daily lives.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Several bodies of literature relevant to African American males are in this chapter. First, I began with the theoretical framework, which is critical race theory and Black protest thought. Second, I addressed the education and miseducation of African American males in the South. Third, I examined African American role models. Next, I covered the absence of African American male role models. Then, I looked at academic achievement of African American males. After that, I looked at the influence of critical race theory on the academic achievement of African American males. Finally, I looked at African American males' identity. I remained paralleled to the order listed above; however, several topics intertwined with each other. I touched on all of these topics throughout this review of literature.

My dissertation work linked to curriculum studies because it allowed African American males to express how they felt about education, how they felt about textbooks and curriculum materials that leave them out of the presentation, and how they felt about schools that had no men that looked like them or could relate to them. The voice of these students enabled them to describe the elements that they missed from having an African American male role model in their lives. This type of study focused on the human being taught, rather than the information and content taught and how they acquire the delivery of information. Ultimately, curriculum studies help educators along their journey in education (Schubert et al., 2002). This is what I saw myself doing by figuring out what these African American male students dealt with in school and life. My interviews and studies advanced the field of curriculum studies for African American males by providing insight into the following questions about African American males who do not have positive role models in their lives:

What do they need to know, feel, and do? Why do they need it? What do they learn about living and from what sources? What should they learn about living and from what sources? What should [those specialized agencies called schools that are set aside by advanced industrial societies] do to teach that which children need but do not receive from everyday living? (Schubert et al., Carroll, 2002, p. xxxii)

Having struggling African American male students reveal insight to these types of questions allows teachers, textbooks, and curriculum developers to address better the needs of these young men. Dating all the way back to prehistoric tribes, scholarly traditions pointed to informal use of curriculum study to decide what students should be taught (Schubert et al., 2002). These types of questions that asked by curriculum studies also cultivate epistemological curiosity, as Freire (1970/2009) called it. Freire defined epistemological curiosity as “a curiosity that is often missing in dialogue as conversation” (p. 19). The impact of the absence or presence of African American male role models and culture in public education is definitely something that is missing from the conversations at schools in the United States. Specifically, asking what African American male students need from public education in order to become successful is not a question on the agenda for discussion at the national, state, or local level. Instead, I have seen measures taken to blend African American young men in with everybody else. Freire (1970/2009) stated,

If students are not able to transform their lived experiences into knowledge and to use the already acquired knowledge as a process to unveil new knowledge, they will never be able to participate rigorously in a dialogue as a process of learning and knowing. (p.19)

We cannot continue to ignore the situations of African American males who come from fatherless homes only to come to school for the next 18 years and still not see men who resemble

them and expect them to be successful. Stovall (2005) made it clear that critical race theory is not just theory. It is also a call to work and praxis. Several theorists have made this transition from theory to action.

### **Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory and Black Protest Thought**

The theoretical frameworks that I am using to inquire about the lives of young African American males with or without positive role models are critical race theory and Black protest thought. There are those individuals who believe race should be included among the subject of politics instead of a category that viewed as an autonomous concept (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995/2004). There is truth to the notion that race intertwines with politics and other ways of understanding curriculum; however, it is critical to understand how race stands alone when individuals try to understand curriculum (Pinar et al., 1995/2004). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) defined critical race theory as “a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (p. 3). Stovall (2005) described critical race theory as an “educational protest, as well as scholarship intended to provide new insight and opportunity for educational praxis” (p.197). Both viewpoints of critical race theory focus on the opportunity to change with race being the focal point. Both critical race theory and Black protest thought are important ideas in discussions of the issues African American teenage males face on a daily basis. Critical race theory gives us the lens needed to examine the situation and think critically about what issues exist among African American teenage males. Black protest thought is useful to deal with the issues that we critically examine through critical race theory.

## **Critical Race Theory**

After the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, scholars such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado realized that in order to carry out the accomplishments of the Civil Rights Movement, new theories and practices had to evolve (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). These new theories and practices that took flight in the 1970s included critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). In Watkins (2005) book, *Black Protest Thought and Education*, Stovall (2005) described critical race theory as “educational protest, as well as scholarship intended to provide new insight and opportunity for educational praxis” (p. 197). Most critical race theorists believe that racism is normal. They believe being White comes with certain privileges. They further believe that races are constructed based on social thoughts, relations, and differential racialization. Scholars who support the critical race theory believe that oppressed groups have a unique voice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Critical race theory is not just limited to African Americans and Whites. Since the 21st century, Asian Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans have all come under the umbrella of critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Critical race theory also extends across gender lines (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). In this paper, I examined specifically how critical race theory can help explain how the lack of African American role models at school, home, and in life influence young African American males. I also showed how the educational system fails to mention positive role models about African American race and gender in the textbooks and curriculum. We know this to be true because “if racism were merely isolated, unrelated, individual acts, we would expect to see at least a few examples of educational excellence and equity together in the nation’s public schools” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006, p. 18); however, we do not see this taking place. What we do see is that most of the educational success by African American students comes from outside of the walls

of public education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). I will take a closer look at the works of scholars that have contributed to my understanding of critical race theory through examining the lives of African American males and how a society that is not culturally relative to them influence their success in school and in life. Critical race theory provided a voice to an oppressed group of young African American men. Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) stated, “A theme of naming one’s own reality or voice is entrenched in the work of critical race theorists” (p. 20).

As a classroom teacher and administrator, I have seen young African American males struggle academically and socially, but rarely is anyone willing to open space for them to express themselves. The curriculum taught in the classroom leaves African American males out of the learning process. They receive papers and results from standardized tests with failing numbers on them and office visits where the expectation is that they take their punishment with grace. In the meantime, another expectation is that they should display a good attitude without having an opportunity to explain their actions. I sit in meetings in which the focal point of the meeting is closing the achievement gap among minorities and the majority race. In these meetings, minorities normally are labeled as subgroups. We rarely, if ever, discuss the issues of race, culture, and linguistics. The perception is that ineffective instructional strategies and lack of effort are the main problems rather than race. Race should probably be at the forefront of the conversation. Race apparently is a subject omitted out of the discussion because it is “complex, dynamic, and a changing construct” (Pinar et al., 1995/2004, p. 316), which would take too much time to discuss. People ignore race because they do not want to discuss what they fear and do not understand. Ignoring the impact of race and its complexity allows public educators to come up with quick fixes that are supposed to change the landscape of education for African American



males, without educational leaders having to accept race as an issue. Legislation such as No Child Left Behind has done a great job of suggesting that all students can be successful, while ignoring the fact that race, culture, and language are major components in curriculum.

The conversations in public education that ignores race as major role component depict the African American males as being useless in helping to solve their own problems. The curriculum and textbooks that used to teach them leave them out completely. The exclusion of African Americans in positive roles in instructional and learning materials create a sense of inferiority and a hopeless feeling inside African American males. The teachers leave these conversations feeling that they have what these young men need to be successful if the young men would simply sit quietly and listen to all the good information that the teachers are awaiting graciously to deposit into them. This is right in line with what Freire (2009) referred to as the banking method of education. With critical race theory, we can bring the voice of the young men who are actually going through the struggle into the equation. Stovall (2005) stated,

Each contribution is unique. Instead of staking claims as to which group's knowledge and experience is more authentic or valuable, CRT incorporates narrative as the "tie that binds." As individual experiences (narratives) demonstrate common themes, the job of the critical-race theorist is to assess critically the thematic trends in relationship to a discipline or disciplines. Through the lens of this collection of disciplines, "intersectionality" serves to articulate the experiences of people of color with racism. (p.198)

This statement sums up why critical race theory is important for exploring the impact of the absence of role models in the lives of young African American male students. This theory

provides a unique voice for the students, and it gives the teachers a perspective that they may not have thought about previously. Crotty (1998/2009) stated,

Critical forms of research call current ideology into question, and initiate action, in the cause of social justice. In the type of inquiry spawned by the critical spirit, researchers find themselves interrogating commonly held values and assumptions, challenging conventional social structures, and engaging in social action. (p. 157)

On a much deeper level, the oppressed group now has an opportunity to liberate the oppressors without even realizing that is what they are doing. This is a cycle, Freire (1970/2009) believed, is critical to liberation. Curriculum studies, as a field, is interested in the human path that leads to learning, while considering what feelings are involved, and what learners need in contrast to daily lesson plans (Schubert, Schubert, Thomas, & Carroll, 2002).

Woodson (1933/2010) in his work, *The Miseducation of the Negro*, discussed the reality of what education for African American students was like in schools that left them out of the curriculum. Woodson (1933/210) believed that teaching a student that being African American is a curse is worse than any kind of lynching. Woodson (1933/2010) described education as culturally conditioning African American students. This is harmful because by controlling the mind, they were controlling African-American actions as well. Ladson-Billings (2003) turned theory into action by addressing the absence of diversity in the social-studies curriculum and textbooks in public education. She even touches on the politics that go into developing the hidden curriculum taught in social studies. Ladson-Billings (2003) stated,

One of the reasons for the lack of attention paid to race and racism in social studies research and practice could be the organizations such as the NCSS and College

University Faculty Assembly, and many other social studies educators are predominately White; thus, topics such as race[are rarely in the instructional contents]. (p. 38)

This taps into the idea of who makes curriculum and textbooks and how the writers influence what goes inside curriculum and textbooks, which ultimately ends up inside all students. Noguera (2008) book, *The Trouble with Black Boys*, used real experiences from his career and students he came across to discuss what is necessary to help African American male students achieve at higher rates. He gave direct accounts of what some African American males have described as their experience in public education, but he did not stop there. Noguera (2008) went on to offer suggestions and solutions based on what he gathered from the stories of the African American males along with his personal experiences. Kafele (2009), *Motivating Black Males to Achieve*, gave insight into how learning more about the culture of African American males allows teachers to relate to them better, which increases learning. West (1993/2001) took theory and looked at the issue of race from a political perspective. In, *Race Matters*, West addressed the absence of African American leadership contributing to the crisis of young African-Americans. In, *Hope on a Tightrope*, West (2008) came back to offer insight and advice about the sense of urgency and courage we must have to improve African-American communities. He also focused on the importance of faith, family, and leadership as part of this change process as well. Bell (1987, 1992, 1994) in his books, *And We Are Not Saved*, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*, and *Confronting Authority*, talked about the daily struggles that exist because of race. The men referenced in this section are not all of the theorists that have turned critical race theory into practice; however, these are just a few of the ones that have challenged me to reflect upon my own life as well as the lives of African American young men that I come

across every day in my journey. After researching theorists like the ones listed above, my entire perspective about my calling as an African American educator is changing.

### **Black Protest Thought**

The guiding theory of Black protest thought is that education is politics (Watkins, 2005). Black protest derived from the past 400 years of slavery, involuntary servitude, discrimination, and bad treatment in the United States (Watkins, 2005). The words Black protest automatically leads one to believe that violence acts are involved in the process of change; however, that is not always the case. The whole idea of African Americans protesting in the United States dates all the way back to slavery, before the Civil War (Meier, Rudwick, & Broderick, 1987). The purpose of Black protest thought was to deal with the changing status of African Americans in the 20th century (Meier et al.). Although Black protest thought has evolved over time, the overall objectives have remained the same, to eliminate discrimination and segregation (Meier et al.). Black protest thought is very diverse as far as those individuals who have been involved in these protest activities. The group ranges from the likes of peaceful individuals such as Martin Luther King, Jr, W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, and Carter G. Woodson, to militant leaders like Malcolm X. Groups, the NAACP, and the Black Panthers who were more violent. All of these groups, however, sprouted roots out of the Black protest thought movement, and granted, not all of these people and groups agreed on everything. The one thing they all had in common was that they all wanted a better life for African Americans.

Watkins (2005), who is more relevant in Black protest thought, took a direct approach in addressing the impact that mainstream White politics and ideologies have on the curriculum taught to our students every day. Watkins (2005) also understood that mental liberation and political liberation must take place in order to bring about equality for African-Americans in

education. He does this in his work, *Black Protest Thought and Education*. Watkins (2005) stated, “Oppression and protest are inextricably linked” (p. 1). This statement solidifies the fact that protest and progress go hand in hand in the process of liberating an oppressed mind. In *The White Architects of Black Education*, Watkins (2001) shifted his focus more towards the impact that politics and power play in the role of shaping curriculum for education stating, “The politics and ideology of accommodationism shaped the sponsored education of Blacks in the United States” (p. 23). This issue still holds true as positive stories and identities are very limited in the textbooks and curriculum in public education. This absence definitely has the ability to make young African American males feel inferior and oppressed.

Critical race theory and Black protest thought both need further exploring because these two ideologies bring together theory and action. One without the other makes for a mute purpose, if our goal really is to push our young African American males to be the best they can be. Those individuals who have participated in either one of these two groups did not make the mistake of which Freire (2009) warned us, which is the oppressed gets liberated and then becomes the oppressor. I have noticed that when some African American males become successful, they quickly seem to forget to reach back. I cannot say whether this is intentional or unintentional; however, I can testify that it seems to happen. Critical race theory keeps this puffed up attitude from happening, and the Black protest thought calls us to act now.

### **Education and Miseducation of African American Males in the South**

#### **Education of African American Males in the South**

Coming out of slavery, the vast majority of African Americans were deprived of an education. One slave was quoted as saying, “There is one sin that slavery committed against me

which I will never forgive. It robbed me of my education” (Anderson, p. 5). Slavery and racial inferiority has had a lingering effect on African American males especially when it comes to punishment (Loury, 2007). We can try to forget our past; however, it is always present (Pinar, 1975). After slavery, education for African Americans slowly took off. After slavery in 1865, the Freedmen’s Bureau headed up 126 schools; however, they faced several shortcomings (Anderson, 1988). Education for African Americans in the South served as an opportunity to ease individuals into mainstream society. White business and industry owners in the South were okay with African Americans receiving an education as long as it trained them to be better laborers and citizens (Anderson, 1988).

This education did not allow African Americans to discover their own history and define themselves as African Americans. The majority class saw African American culture as unworthy and surly not represent the way a citizen should act in the 1800s. This early educational movement did not have anything to do with transforming the social position of African Americans, but instead had more to do with making society run more efficiently (Anderson, 1988). Due to the lack of African American teachers for higher-grade levels, the majority of African Americans ended their education in the early grades (Anderson, 1988). The African Americans that wanted a higher education had to attend private universities; however, these were rare because of the lack of land, funding, and professors to teach the classes (Anderson, 1988).

Anderson (1988) stated, “W.E.B. DuBois was on the mark when he said public education for all at public expense was, in the South, a Negro idea” (p. 6). This statement demonstrates how important African American males in the South thought education was. African American males in the South took learning into their own hands. There were schools that consisted of only African American teachers, which occurred essentially to keep indoctrination out of schools

(Anderson, 1988). Even before President Abraham Lincoln and the 13th amendment officially ruled slavery illegal, African Americans in the South already had begun to establish their own schools (Anderson, 1988).

As time went on, the Freedmen's Bureau took over the African American public school system, which had built up to over 100 plus schools, 19,000 students, and over 100 teachers (Anderson, 1988). Federal contributions and the implementation of property taxes funded the schools (Anderson, 1988). Coming out of slavery in the South, men like Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois led the freedmen's campaign for education, and the purpose of this movement was to have control over their own schools for the future generations (Anderson, 1988).

When the focus of African Americans education in the South shifted towards men, we began to see that value or lack of value placed on education by African American men. Due to the agricultural family model that existed coming out of slavery in the South, the men were expected to work hard in the field, even if that meant dropping out of school (Faulk, 2004). As Faulk discussed the stories that he collected from an older African American male in the South named AC, I could not help but notice the similarities between the older African American men's concern for the young African American males compared to today. Faulk stated, "AC's sense of young people's lack of skills was coupled with a more general impression that too many young Black males lacked general sense of direction that would lead to a productive adult life" (p. 41). AC's wife started a group to help develop young African American men in the South; however, she believed that it was sad that she as a woman had to lead this group. To her, this demonstrated a lack of African American male leadership in the communities and schools in the South (Faulk, 2004).

## **Miseducation of African American Males**

Woodson (1933/2010) work, *The Miseducation of the Negro*, addressed the impact of an educational system and curriculum that leaves Blackness out of learning materials. Woodson believed, “The education of any people should begin with the people themselves, but Negroes, thus trained, have been dreaming about the ancients of Europe and about those who have tried to imitate them” (p. 30). Woodson felt as though Blackness in education was on purpose to culturally condition African-American students. He did not believe that adding a higher number African Americans to the field of teaching would automatically provide a well-balanced education because the same professors taught African American teachers and used the same textbooks filled with information about Caucasians.

In order to provide African American students with the education they needed, Woodson (1933/2010) felt there needed to be qualified African American or Caucasian teachers who educated for the purpose of liberation and not just for monetary gain. Often teachers teach students that education is a means to a life of nice material possessions, which equals success. This is what West (1993/2001) called the expanded market culture. Woodson (1933/2010) stated, “In our time, too many Negroes go to school to memorize certain facts to pass examinations for jobs. After they obtain these positions, they pay little attention to humanity” (p. 40). This was a good thing, but actually, it is not. Throughout this work, Woodson continuously pointed out that not having a true representation of African American culture in public education causes African American students to adopt a false sense of what is really success and education. Woodson did not limit the failure of African Americans to just school houses but also to churches, communities, and households as well. The absence of Blackness in schools, churches, and



communities still exists, and it gets even worse when we narrow the absence of Blackness down to African American males.

### **Critical Race Theorists/African American Male and Female Role Models**

Derrick Bell, William H. Watkins, Richard Delgado, Jean Stefancic, Cornel West, Martin Luther King Jr., W.E.B. Du Bois, Malcolm X, Baruti K. Kafele, Gloria-Ladson Billings, Michelle Alexander, and Pedro A. Noguera have greatly influenced the way I think about critical race theory and African American males. I think these individuals were important for my study for several reasons. First, they were representative of African American men and women who broke through the racial barriers and beat the stereotypes. Second, these notable men and women experienced success in working with African American males. Third, these trailblazers used critical race theory or Black protest thought to research and take action against struggling African American males. Not everyone in the list above might be a critical race theorist. In fact, some of them actually came about before the movement was established. However, they embrace issues of race and the impact race, culture, and language play in our society. In the paragraphs below, I discussed the authors in relation to their works and the relevance of their works in relation to the absence of role models for African American male students.

### **Critical Race Theorists**

Bell (1977/1987) is instrumental in the field of critical race theory in that he is the intellectual father of the movement (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). In the books, *And We Are Not Saved*, Bell examined the laws, court rulings, and Constitution to depict why we must have a plan of action to move forward the fight for equality. Bell stated, “Both history and experience explained that each new victory over injustice both removes a barrier to racial equality and reveals another obstacle that we must, in turn, grapple with and eventually overcome” (p. 257).

Bell even flirted with the idea or question of whether African-Americans could benefit more from segregated schools that provide caring teachers who understand their culture. This reminds us that the quest for equality is ongoing because we now have an African American president, and there are individuals who assume that we have accomplished the deserved warranted equality in American. Bell warns society against this type of thinking. As a law professor, civil rights leader, and champion of critical race theory, Bell (1977/1987) voiced his viewpoints about race through his writings. In his book, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*, Bell addressed the reality of race straight forward by using allegories and tales through an imaginary female lawyer name Geneva Crenshaw.

Initially, Bell (1992) explained how, in his youth, slavery was something that was shameful instead of an institution of which African Americans should be proud because they were able to withstand and defeat oppression. Often this attitude towards slavery was an indoctrination for young people in the South. Bell described defeat of slavery as a symbol, which is the same description that he used for holidays like Martin Luther King Day, desegregation, the passage of Civil Rights legislation, or any other political, economic, or social victory by African Americans. These symbols to suggested that African Americans are making great progress in the United States; however, Bell (1992) suggested that nothing could be further from the truth.

Bell (1992) stated, “Despite undeniable progress for many, no African American [is] insulated from incidents of racial discrimination” (p. 3). Bell does not refer to these accomplishments as symbols to be insulting; however, he just believed that they were small pieces of motivation to keep us pushing forward with the fight against racism. African Americans cannot take the symbols as proof that, we as a race, have arrived. Bell (1992) is very

clear in his belief that we must visit and be honest about our past as well as our present to make any real progress in the future. Bell (1992) stated,

We remain what we were in the beginning: a dark and foreign presence always designated “other.” Tolerated in good times, despised when things go wrong, as a people we are scapegoated and sacrificed as distraction or catalyst for compromise to facilitate resolution of political differences or relieve economic adversity. (p. 10)

This statement is a depiction of what we see in public education every day. Policy makers and school systems constantly use standardized tests to show how various groups in America are performing based on race, gender, and socio-economic status. Many of the reports that go out give African American males bad publicity. This ranges from public education to the incarceration of African American males. Bell (1992) is alluding to the reality that “racism is a permanent component of American life” (p. 13). Bell (1992) went on to say “The goal of racial equality is, while comforting to many Whites, more illusory than real for Blacks” (p.13).

In an allegory, Bell (1992) is in a taxi, driven by an African-American male who is not formally educated, but he is well read. During the conversation, Bell tells the driver that despite having different professions and levels of education, they are both in the same boat because they are both Black. The taxi driver quickly corrects this theory in a way of which I never really thought. The taxi driver felt that successful African American males hurt other African American males every day. This is a strange twist for me because I believe more African American role models are necessary for all African American males. The driver explained that when a successful African American male appears on the scene, Whites conclude “that discrimination is over, and that if the rest of us got up off our dead asses, dropped the welfare tit, stopped having illegitimate babies, and found jobs, we would all be just like you” (Bell, 1992, p. 26). This

answered a lingering question for me as to why most White teachers assumed that most African American males are failing from just a lack of effort. They look at productive African American males like me and assume that if he made it, they all can succeed. Some White teachers rarely take into consideration that all African Americans are different and come from different situations. They group the entire race into one big pot. I need to pause long enough to explain that successful African American males in the terms explained here alludes to African American males who have been educated formally and escaped the prison system. I do not hold the belief that this is the only requirement for being a successful African American male. In fact, success, defined in a number of ways and situations, include incarcerated African American males who are using their experiences to keep other young African American males from making the same mistakes they made.

In another allegory, Bell (1992) suggested that instead of having Civil Rights legislation, which causes people to somewhat ignore racism and break legislation with no punishment, we should issue Racial Preference Licensing (RPL). This license is one that would allow everything from dwelling places to jobs to use race and legal reason to exclude people, and it would require that a 3% tax paid to the federal government (Bell, 1992). At first, this RPL sounded like nothing but a plan that would help race relationships in the United States, but in actuality, RPL does something that Civil Rights legislation does not do. This law required racists to publicly display themselves and pay higher taxes, whereas under Civil Rights legislation racism existed with no punishment or fine. Here Bell (1992) used the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling as an example of Civil Rights legislation unenforced. Bell believed that a RPL would work because then any White without the license that discriminated, based on race, actually would be punished. African

Americans would receive fair wages and finally African Americans would not waste precious time applying for jobs that they are not going to get anyway.

Bell (1992) stepped away from the allegories to a certain degree in Chapter 7 and addressed the issues of Black leadership and the role of critical race theory in the fight for equality. He agreed with Dubois in that leadership in the African American community must come from strong Black men. They both agreed that not all teachers of Black students need to be Black, but teachers must understand their dual role of teacher and trainer, regardless of race. The issue of Black leadership also appeared in Chapter 4. Bell suggested that Black leaders must be bold and courageous, but they must not set their organizations up in a manner that does not allow them to exist if the leader dies or get sick. He is saying that Black heroes are great, but they are not the solution to all the problems in the African American communities. Bell stated, “Our people must rely on their faith in God and themselves. Human beings may be able to inspire that faith. They cannot replace it and should not try” (p. 87). Bell continued by explaining why critical race theory is useful in examining the race problem in America by stating, “A good deal of the writing in critical race theory stresses that oppressions are neither neatly divorceable from one another nor amenable to strict categorization” (p. 145). Bell is an advocate for progress in the area of race, but not sold completely on the idea that it can be done through laws made predominately by the majority race. Bell stated, “We believe, moreover, that each race must take care of its problems before real multiracial togetherness is possible” (p. 95). This goes back to Bell’s opening point in the book, which is that we must first admit that race is an ongoing problem. We cannot address a problem that we have fooled ourselves into believing does not exist any longer because of the symbolic victories that have been accomplished along the way.

Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic were influential in describing the origins of critical race theory and explaining where we are today with this theory. They do this in both, *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, and *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. Both of these individuals focused on the impact that social issues have on race. One example they used is how derogatory name-calling and stereotyping affect African American students in a negative manner (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). This example sheds light into how having preconceived notions about the ability of African American males ability to learn affects how they actually perform.

### **African American Male Role Models**

West (1993/2001) definitely ranks at the top in relevance when looking at the impact of the absence of role models for young African American males. Several of his works focused on the absence of Black leadership explained how that absence influenced the African American community. In, *Race Matters*, West stated, “The major tragedy of Black America in the past decade or so is the low quality of Black leadership and the relative inattention to the deep crisis of Black youth” (p. x). This crisis is a direct correlation to my belief that the absence of African American male teachers in schools and fathers at home have a negative impact on young African American males. West (1993/2001) was quick to point out that it is not enough to just increase the number of African American males in leadership positions, but we must also increase the quality of this leadership. The only problem is that good leadership is a process (grooming) that develops over time, and few are available in the communities to do the grooming because of the absence of African American males. West added, “Quality leadership is neither the product of one great individual nor the result of odd historical accidents. It comes from deeply bred traditions and communities that shape and mold talented and gifted persons” (p. 37). The quality leadership that West described is missing at home, in church, and in public education. The home,

church, and school are the three places that young African American males spend a great portion of their time. West also focused on the impact of culture and race. In, *Hope on a Tightrope*, West (2008) stated, “Without leadership, Black rage will remain chaotic and ultimately self-destructive” (p. 140). He added that culture plays just as important a role as politics. West also stated that he believes the structure of culture is rooted in families, schools, and churches. This makes the absence of African American males even worse because now we have to question what the young African American males are learning in relationship to their culture of being an African American male in the United States.

Martin Luther King, Jr. works, *Strength to Love* and *Why We Can't Wait*, are both relevant to the absence of role models for African American male students because he provided answers to several of the problems African American males are facing. He also demonstrates what good African American leadership qualities should be like. Martin Luther King, Jr. used his Christian faith to fight for equality during the Civil Rights movement. In addition, he left plenty of advice to help us deal with the problems in African American communities. We have all the numbers needed to show that race is a factor on why African American males end up in prison and out of schools. These numbers strongly suggest that African Americans, as a whole, is an oppressed group. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963/1981) warned us, “There will be no permanent solution to the race problem until oppressed men develop the capacity to love their enemies” (p. 55). This is great advice for young African American males who are missing African American male role models in their lives. In my 8 years as an educator, I have watched this particular group. I noticed that they seem to have a strong dislike for authority and those of the opposite race. The young men also tend to turn to violence as a problem solver in moments of controversy. What they fail to realize is that violence only solves problems temporarily, while

creating social problems, with never-ending peace of mind (King, 1963/1981). Dr. King helped change the world by his non-violent tactics and love for his enemies. Dr. King was a living example of what Freire (1970/2009) meant by his belief that the oppressed has the difficult job of liberating themselves as well as the oppressors. Self-liberation can be a difficult task for young African American men between the ages of 15 and 18; however, self-liberation is essential for them in overcoming the absence of positive role models in their lives. In Dr. King's (1963/2000) work, *Why We Can't Wait*, he discussed the sense of urgency we must act with to combat the racial problems that exist in society. This book was a call to action so that communities would realize that the movement must go beyond the Civil Rights Movement itself, which is the exact message that the critical race theory sends. The sense of urgency and nonviolent movement that Dr. King used is necessary today to reach the young and lost African American males. Instead of a sense of urgency and nonviolent approach, society has taken a slow and violent approach. Slow, as in, we wait until they are 16 or older to seek help for these young men. Violence, as in, we fill the prisons with them, and kick them out of school at 17.

Du Bois' (1903/1996) work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, focused in on the relationships between Whites versus Blacks, rich versus poor, and educated versus uneducated. In Chapter 6 of this book, Du Bois (1903/1996) shifted his focus to the training of Black men. In this chapter, he stated the position that he perceived Black men as being in, which is:

So here we stand among thoughts of human unity, even though conquest and slavery; the inferiority of Black men, even if forced by fraud; a shriek in the night for the freedom of men who themselves are not yet sure of their right to demand it. This is the tangle of thought and afterthought wherein we are called to solve the problem of training men for life. (Du Bois, 1903/1996, p. 75)



The last sentence in the above quote from Du Bois (1903/1996) is where we are today. We have the problem of African American males feeling inferior for whatever reason, but it is the called to duty of African American males who have been liberated to train these young African American men. In this chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois (1903/1996) mentioned that all Black colleges, like Fisk University, which took on this responsibility, should embrace this call to action. This method may not be relevant to today's society because segregation is illegal, and it would be impossible to get the financial resources to run a Black-only school. The answer is holding all races and genders accountable for being each other's keeper. This requires an understanding of various cultures and the desire to perceive cultures, other than one's own as being important.

*The Autobiography of Malcolm X* is the life story of an African American male who was raised without the presence of an African American father and other male role models being around on a daily basis. When discussing the absence of African American male role models and the impact that it has on young African American males, one paragraph comes to mind from the story of Malcolm X. In this paragraph, Malcolm X is telling about a class election for president that he had just won at a predominately-White school. He described it as follows:

Then, in the second semester of the seventh grade, I was elected class president. It surprised me even more than other people. I can see now why the class might have done it. My grades were among the highest in the school. I was unique in my class, like a pink poodle. I was proud. I'm not going to say I wasn't. In fact, by then, I didn't really have much feeling about being a Negro, because I was trying so hard, in every way I could, to be White. Which is why I am spending much of my life today telling the American Black

man that [he is] wasting his time straining to “integrate.” I know from personal experience. I tried hard enough. (Haley, 1964/1965, p. 31)

This could possibly be one of the most relevant statements to what African American male students are feeling in classrooms throughout American today. They make an effort to fit and blend in only to still meet misunderstanding by those individuals from mainstream cultures who have little or no knowledge and understanding about African American cultural heritage. Malcolm X happened to be one that was academically successful in this stressful environment; however, he felt at the end, he was wasting his time trying to fit in with mainstream culture. I can only imagine what it must be like for the African American students who are trying to fit in as Malcolm X did, while failing academically and staying in trouble. It would be very interesting to see what African American males could do in school and life if they had more role models and the opportunity to be educated in an environment in which they felt as a part of the status quo and not made to feel inferior.

Kafele (2009) predicted what African American males can achieve in an environment that is conducive and accepting of their culture. In his book, *Motivating Black Males to Achieve*, he specifically talks about instructional strategies that will raise improvement amongst young African American male students. First, Kafele explained that teachers must be teachers of students first and content second (Kafele, 2009). Often teachers are concerned with raising test scores so much that they attempt to teach children whom they have not gotten to know nor with whom they have built a relationship. He also goes on to say that, educators must examine who they are first and how that contributes to how they teach African American males. Kafele sought to take the emphasis off failing African American males. He wanted the focus shifted to those educators whose task it is to educate African American males. Often times, African American

males are seen as the problem; however, teachers have low expectations for some African American males as soon as their names appear on the class rosters. The teachers become the problem because the students are only rising to the expectations that have been set before them. For African American male students, the expectation is often very low.

Finally, Noguera (2008) is a scholar that has influenced my thinking about critical race theory. His work, *The Trouble with Back Boys*, almost aligns perfectly with my dissertation idea of researching into the lives of young African American males and researching how the absence of role models and an educational system leaves them out of the curriculum causes problems in their lives. In the opening of this work, Noguera (2008) told the story of his son (Joaquin), an African American male, who had been successful all the way through school up until the Grade 10. Then all of a sudden, a drop in grades and an increase in behavior problems started to take place. Joaquin lived in a two-parent, middle class home; however, most of the males he grew up with came from working class, single parents, who had dropped out of school (Noguera, 2008). Joaquin felt that in order to fit in with them, he had to do awful in school; otherwise, other African American males (Noguera, 2008) saw him as being culturally out of touch. If Joaquin, who came from a home with a male role model, felt this way, I can only imagine how students who do not have a role model must be feeling. I cannot imagine how they deal with portraying the image of who they are, based on others. It is possible that without role models, young African American males simply model what they see in the neighborhoods and on television, which is not always good. Pedro Noguera (2008) provided insight about the experience of African-American males in public education, the search for equity and equality, and the type of public schools needed to support African American males.

## **African American Female Role Models**

As I stated in the introduction, *News One* reported that 72% of African American children live in a single parent home, which usually consist of a mother instead of a father in comparison to only 25% for the entire United States (Staff, 2011). With this many women raising African American males by themselves, we must look at their role in raising these young men. Ladson-Billings (2003) demonstrated in, *Critical Race Theory: Perspectives on Social Studies*, how curriculum and policies camouflage racism. Social studies books and curriculum lead most young African American males to believe that they were born to be inferior and that they will always be inferior. It is in the curriculum in which students learn that all men are created equal, but educators question how the men who wrote the Declaration of Independence were hypocritical in their writings. African American males are told to be patriotic about the Declaration of Independence; however, this happens to be the same document that referred to African Americans as property instead of humans. Issues of racism and hypocrisy are ignored in the curriculum for those African American students who have not developed the lens to read between the lines. Ladson-Billings (2003) stated, “Fear of addressing race is likely to lead to adopting the color-blind perspective, a second reason teachers may not teach about race and racism in the social studies” (p. 111). In this particular book, Ladson-Billings called attention specifically to social studies; however, curriculum across all subjects fail to address the issue of race. The reality is that by not addressing racism, our school systems are endorsing curriculum guidelines and policies that seek to make one race superior to the others.

Ladson-Billings (2009) discussed in her book, *The Dream Keepers*, the process of what is missing and how we can teach African American students successfully. The question of whether or not desegregated schools can educate African American boys properly has been of great

debate in America. Some cities such as Miami, Detroit, and New York are experimenting with special schools for African American boys (Ladson-Billings, 2009). This idea is not that farfetched, being that several inner-city schools are *de facto* segregated. Desegregated public schools have not proven to be sufficient, and data prove that African American children attending private and independent schools perform at higher levels than those African American students at public schools (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Individuals argue about how successful desegregated schools were for African Americans; however, they base the success of segregated schools on the achievement of White students and support of their parents. In reality, however, the dropout and suspension rates for African American males in these schools are above average (Ladson-Billings, 2009). When we look at this comparison between desegregated versus segregated schools for African American boys, we must not be quick to blame the lack of success on racism alone. Teachers are just simply not prepared. Very few teacher induction programs prepare teachers how to instruct and engage African American students, in general (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Some teachers do recognize that there is a difference in race among African American students, but they fail to realize and relate to the difference in culture (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Students of all races tend to do better when their culture is represented in the school settings (Ladson-Billings, 2009). This representation comes as part of the mainstream educational system for Whites but not for African Americans. In fact, an African American “doing well in school is seen as acting White” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p.12).

Teachers in training learn about pedagogy, but some of their pedagogical strategies are not beneficial to African American students. Ladson-Billings (2009) defined pedagogy as “a deliberate attempt to influence how and what knowledge and identities are produced within and among particular sets of social relations” (p. 15). Based on this definition, it is an intentional

effort to construct a perspective that in order for an African-American to be successful. They must conform to a curriculum and pedagogical approach that ignores their culture. Cultural relevancy must be in place for African American boys to be successful in desegregated public education. This process ranges from the curriculum and textbooks to the staffing of the building (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Ladson-Billings (2009) brought out a great point when she raised the question about what it lead an African American students to think about them when the teachers and administrators are White, but the janitors and cafeteria workers are African American. The point she is making is critical because now we are tapping into how African American males might start constructing their identity through others.

Some individuals feel like color is not an issue at all, but I believe this is because color exists in their subconscious; therefore, they are practicing racism even when they do not realize they are practicing racism. For example, teachers might think it is a positive thing when they make the statement that they do not see color or that they are colorblind. The problem with these statements is that it totally means that there is no difference recognized in the needs and culture of some students compared to others. This type of thinking leads to teachers not planning for different students, but instead, assuming that they can teach all students whether rich, poor, African American or White, the same instructional content (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Teachers who are culturally relevant and successful at educating African American students have high self-esteem, which means that they believe in what they are doing. They also dress like professionals every day. They see themselves as part of the community. They see teaching as an art. They believe students can succeed. They help students connect their personal lives with the

everyday things around them, and they see teaching as having to dig knowledge out of students rather than placing tons of knowledge into students (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

### **Absence of African American Male Role Models**

Alexander (2010) in her latest book, *The New Jim Crow*, takes the same route Bell (1987/1992) traveled. Alexander examined the relationship between race and the criminal justice system relative to the absence of role models for African American male students because, unfortunately, several of these young African American men have a negative encounter with the criminal justice system because of the lack of positive role models in their lives. Just as the educational institutions have served the purpose of making one race feel inferior to another, Alexander (2010) argued that the criminal justice system has done the same. She argued that just as poll taxes, literacy tests, and other laws kept African American men from voting a century ago, so does a felony today, and it seems as if these felonies have been given out more readily to African American males than Caucasians (Alexander, 2010). This book was published after the election of the first African-American President of the United States, which is a critical time for African Americans. The time is critical because on one hand, it demonstrates and pays homage to those individuals that have worked diligently to break down color barriers; however, it is also critical in that it can provide a false sense of arrival for a race that cannot afford to ignore racism and discrimination. The fight for justice must continue, even beyond the election of an African American to the highest office in the land. The relevance of this work is aligned to the fact that it is dealing with the present issues in the African American communities.

Now that we have more African Americans gaining post-secondary degrees than ever before in our society, along with the election of an African American president, one would

assume that finding a good African American male to be a role model would be fairly easy.

Porter (1997) warned, however, not so quickly. Porter stated,

We have believed that as more and more African-Americans receive college degrees and obtain professional jobs with substantial salaries, they would elevate the race. We have believed that these high paid, well-educated Brothers and Sisters would become sources of inspiration for our youth and will open doors for the rest of us once they're "inside."

But a strange thing happened on the way to the corporate suite. (p. 13)

Porter (1997) described the strange thing that happened as the paycheck. He is saying that successful African American men become so caught up in the American dream that standing up for young African American males became a threat that they could lose their job, thus losing the American dream. Porter stated, "They become owned by what they own, and they end up with two masters: the Caucasian master with his or her paycheck and their material possessions" (p. 14).

Being that the majority of educators in the United States are White females, most African American boys rarely have experience with African American male teachers. Porter (1997) placed White female teachers into five categories relative to how they relate to African American boys. The first category includes the people persons' teachers. These teachers actually push African American boys to be all that they can be. The second category includes the touchy-feely White female teachers. These teachers are simply curious about African American boys because of all the stereotypes that follow them in society. These teachers are also more intrigued about the young African American men in the flesh than in educating them. The third category is the plantation mistress. This category includes teachers who prefer African American boys never come near them. These White female teachers are very high up on the social pole and would



rather be anywhere else besides teaching African American boys. The fourth category is the theoreticians. These teachers know all of the latest strategies and believes with all of her heart that these learning strategies will work with all students. They constantly rewards students with candy and other items; however, the young African American men never get pass memorization skills. The final category is the missionary teacher. In this category are White female teachers who truly believes their instructional strategies are right and just. They believe that African American boys not ready for regular education; therefore, they should be placed in special education. The White female teachers described in this paragraph are critical in our discussion of the lack of African American male role models. Most of them are serving in a capacity in which they do our African American boys more harm than good, whether it is consciously or unconsciously.

### **African American Males' Academic Achievement**

Porter (1997) discussed the academic achievement or lack thereof concerning African American males in his book, *Kill Them Before They Grow: Misdiagnosis of African American Boys in American Schools*. In this book, he also discussed how and why African American males struggle academically in the public educational system in the United States of America. African American males are three more times likely to end up in special education programs; however, they are only half as likely to be in a gifted program (Hayward, 2014). Porter (1997) makes the claim early on that Public Law 94-142. This law, which created special education in 1975, was the start of an academic downward spiral for African American males. Porter argued that this was an opportunity to keep the African American males out of the classroom with Whites. Tests and recommendations from teachers determine who sit in these special education classes, and Porter (1997) argued that standardized tests are only good for two things. Those two things are to

maintain the majority race and social status and to allow schools, colleges, textbook publishers, and testing companies to make a profit. In other words, Porter argued that the tools used to place African American males in these special education classes are not valid. To add validity to his claim that special education was used to keep African American males out of the regular classroom, Porter (1997) pointed out that Public Law 94-142 came into effect 6 years after the Supreme Court ordered immediate school desegregation. Before desegregation, there were no special education classes. To educate African American males could be the development of another Nat Turner, Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, or W.E.B., argued DuBois Porter (1997). In Vidalia, Georgia, the odds of a White student placed in special education are 1:784 compared to 1:34 for African Americans (Porter, 1997).

One would probably ask how could something so obviously wrong as described in the above paragraph takes place right up under the noses of the American people, without anyone taking notice. Porter (1997) added that the answer is simply the work of con artists in schools, including principals, social workers, and teachers of all races. These individuals convince African American parents, who professional often intimidate, that they are acting in the best interest of their son by placing him in special education (Porter, 1997). This academic journey takes place in stages. Porter breaks it down into three stages with the first being daycare through kindergarten, second being ages six through 12, and the third being ages 12 through 18. He described the first stage as going well for African American boys, but the second stage is where the most damage occurs. This is where the curriculum starts to focus on Europeans being the heroes and African Americans occurring only in reference to slavery (Porter, 1997). By the third stage, young African American males are so confused about who they are, they begin trying to identify themselves (Porter, 1997).

Tatum (2009) also contributed to the field of African American males in correlation to their academic achievements or lack thereof. Tatum (2009) set the tone early in his book, *Reading for Their Life*, that using the latest researched instructional strategies would not be enough in itself to turn around the academic woes of African American males. Tatum (2009) stated, “Neither effective reading strategies nor literacy reform will close the reading achievement or life outcome gap unless meaningful texts are at the core of the curriculum and educators know how to mediate such texts” (p. xii). The texts that African American males read must relate to the poverty, violence, fatherless households, and gangs that these young men are facing everyday (Tatum, 2009). Four main reasons show why most educators struggle to teach African American males effectively. First, they do not understand the African American male experience. Second, they do not face the reality of the impact of race and slavery on these young men. Third, they are blind to the effects that educational policies have on African American young men. Finally, they are not familiar with instructional strategies that are beneficial to African American males (Tatum, 2009). Tatum carried out interviews among young African American males, and one constant factor that kept arising was the fact that these young men realized that teachers felt like they were inferior and could not learn. There is no doubt that low expectations for young African American men leads to self-fulfilling prophecies of failure. To describe the knowledge and feelings that African American males have about their teachers and themselves, Tatum (2009) wrote a poem called *The Failure Dance*, and it goes as follows:

It is common knowledge among many African American adolescent males that teachers use us as training grounds. Although your intentions are good, we know that you do not want to be around us for long. You will cut out when a better teaching opportunity presents itself. (I would too!). We sit in the classroom squandering and acting out with

substitute after substitute as you continue to collect your paychecks. This is not hidden from our eyes. We experience your abandonment as we abandon ourselves. We know what you say when you go home and talk about those Black boys in those schools. We hear the voices of your spouse and parents who tell you that you need to get out as soon as possible. They do not understand why you put up with that lost generation (or whatever names they call us). We know this. We are not lost. We are right here, but you fail to see us. (pp. 15-16)

The above quote is exactly what we see when teachers are offered signing bonuses and higher salaries to teach at minority and low-income schools. Several of these teachers are only there for the paycheck. Students are able to sense when teachers do not care for them or where they come from. The poem goes on to state the feelings of the students:

We hardly see ourselves. You have to prove yourself to us before we give you the chance. Maybe it should not be this way, but we lack the emotional maturity to act otherwise. You are not teaching me anything anyway with your skill and drill sheets that require little thought to plan. You simply make copies, pass the sheets along, and voice how I need to be serious about my future. You are banking on those pages to help shape my future, while you are planning a way to abandon me for your own future-your own inner sanity. How can I take you seriously when you do not take yourself seriously? We got each other so I guess we will continue the failure dance until the new administration comes. You will escape or leave and we will remain trapped. Good luck at your next interview when you share your inner –city teaching. They will be impressed, while we remain oppressed. We are all guilty. (pp. 15-16)

That was a long poem to quote; however, it is gut wrenching because, as a teacher and now administrator, I have heard conversations that are almost verbatim as this poem. It is as if Tatum (2009) has been around some of my personal conversations, interviews, and roundtable discussions with educators. No line in that poem that does not reflect many of the thoughts or feelings from teachers who leave mid-year and use their experience at predominately (Black) urban/low income schools as proof they can teach anywhere, or wives who say their husband often tell them they need to find a school with “better” students. Tatum (2009) is driving home the fact here that teachers cannot teach African American males successfully when their views of them include what he described in the above poem. In order for African American males to have academic success, Tatum (2009) left us with three points. First, we must stop accepting the idea that African American boys do not care about their education. Secondly, we cannot accept that any form of instruction should engage them. In addition, we must deny the idea that they need saviors before they need a quality education.

### **Challenging the Notion of Academic Achievement Using Critical Race Theory**

In Noguera (2003) book titled, *City Schools and the American Dream: Reclaiming the Promise of Public Education*, he stated, “Since the 1960s, explanations of school performance that have the greatest popularity tend to emphasize the importance of cultural differences” (Noguera, 2003, p. 43). Although critical race theory is a theory, it is also a call to action that seeks to address issues that exist for African Americans in education (Stovall, 2005). Stoning statistics, like those provide by Alexander (2010), in her book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, which claimed that there are more African American men incarcerated than enslaved before the Civil War, paints a clear picture for a call to action. West (2008) stated, “One-out-of-three Black male babies today will grow up and spend time in

jail or prison” (p. 177). According to the U.S. Department of Education, only 47% of African American males graduate high school and only 33% go on to graduate college (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). In *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge*, Kevin Brown (2000) noted that statistics about the poor performance of African American males paints a picture of the educational crisis of African American males rather than an inability to be successful in education. In order to understand how African American males have fallen so low in the United States, there must be an examination of the role that race plays in these dreadful statistics. Race, as examined, is an autonomous concept when we are trying to understand curriculum (Pinar et al., 1995/2004). “Examining race relations is critical, not simply for an understanding of social life as it is expressed in the margins of industrial society, but ultimately for an understanding of life as it is expressed in its very dynamic center” (McCarthy, 1993; Crichlow, 1993, p. xxi).

Critical race theory has the ability to improve instructional improvement for African American male students in many different ways. Research has proven that one of the most effective ways to increase student achievement is positive relationships between the teacher and the students. Schaps (2003) stated, “When a school meets students’ basic psychological needs, students increasingly become committed to the school norms, values, and goals” (p. 31). Kafele (2009) made notice of the relationship between a teacher and the students by reinforcing the idea that we must first know and understand our students before we begin to teach them content. This positive relationship between the teacher and student does not come natural for African American males. In 2007-2008, the U.S. Department of Education reported that 83% of the teaching population was White and 76% was female (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). African American male students do not walk into an environment where they are naturally comfortable in public education. A teacher’s culture plays a large role in her perception of what

is considered good behavior (Monroe 2005, and Graybill, 1997). It is at this point that critical race theory has the opportunity to improve instructional improvement for African-American males. The very definition of critical race theory focuses on relationships between different races (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Critical race theory allow the space needed for teachers to examine who they are and how race plays a critical role in how they understand and educate African American males. This examination, if carried out correctly, would bring about a sense of reality. Stovall (2005) stated,

CRT is not a plea for “understanding.” Rather, it is a response aimed at changing the realities of public institutions, including education. Not just in the ideological sense, but also as an active engagement in praxis, real change will confront the reality of public education as an often-debilitating environment for children of color. (p. 199)

Often when instructional improvement is the issue, minds wonder straight to the methods of instruction that are used to educate students; however, without a positive relationship between the teachers and students those methods are ineffective. The process of examining the relationship between a predominately-White female teaching force (U.S. Department of Education, 2012) and African American male students can occur through critical race theory. Critical race theory keys in on the cultural gap that exists between these two groups.

Understanding various cultures is a critical role in building relationships. Brown (2000) stated, “A number of educational researchers have examined how cultural misunderstandings between teachers and students result in conflict, distrust, hostility, and school failure for many African American students” (p. 419). Most African American culture does not align with the American culture embedded in public schools (Brown, 2000). This could possibly create a sense of inferiority for African American male students. Watson (2003) confirmed this by her belief that

environments that do not support diversity have the ability to be oppressive. Gay (2010) examined very closely the power of teachers being culturally in touch with their students. She stated, “Culturally responsive pedagogy simultaneously develops, along with academic achievement, social consciousness and critique, cultural affirmation, competence, and exchange; community building and personal connections; individual self-worth and abilities; and an ethic of caring” (Gay, 2010, p. 45).

Critical race theory also improves instruction for African American males by critically analyzing the content that is included and excluded from the curriculum. This factor exists in the curriculum of all subjects, but it occurs more in social studies. In social studies, critical race theory takes aim at the way the curriculum hides racism (Ladson-Billings, 2003). Brown (2000) was specific in pointing this out by examining how textbooks and high school curriculum focuses on the movements by Abraham Lincoln, a White male, as the hero in freeing the slaves. However, the curriculum fails to mention the struggle that slaves themselves encountered to end slavery. Perspectives like this one occur in the curriculum daily in public education. The impact that this omission has on instructional improvement for African American males is critical. African American males leave their United States History class feeling disempowered because their whole history has been based on what the majority race *allowed* them to do (Brown, 2000). This sense of inferiority contributes to low self-esteem, which causes African American males to feel like they cannot learn. If the script flipped and the United States History curriculum focused on the mental and physical strength needed by African Americans to survive and escape slavery, African American males would leave their classes feeling empowered (Brown, 2000). The results of this empowerment would be a group of students who felt that if their ancestors were able to do it, then they could overcome and be successful as well. Critical race theory improves



instructional pedagogy for African American students by causing those educators with the task of providing the instruction and content to examine critically their relationships with African American male students. It causes them to examine their cultural relativity to their African American male students and to examine critically the curriculum taught to African American male students. Not only are there ways that critical race theory enhances instructional improvement for African American males. These three are a critical part of the process. The most important thing to remember about critical race theory is that it must go beyond examination and actually enter into the action stage. Stovall (2005) said it best when he said,

CRT is educational protest, as well as scholarship intended to provide new insight and opportunity for educational praxis. Rooted in legal, social, historical, and philosophical ideology, the purpose of CRT was twofold: to identify White supremacy in education; and to develop praxis to counter its hegemony. (p. 197)

Critical race theory ultimately serves as a theory, while providing working tools to address African Americans struggles in education and putting these tools into action (Stovall, 2005). By studying these theories and by putting these tools to action, we directly improve the instruction provided to African American males because we have improved the teachers that are giving the instruction. We have also improved the curriculum that taught to these African American males.

### **African American Males' Identity Development**

I am going to open this section on African American male identity with an astonishing question and answer from Michael Fletcher (2007):

What does it mean to be a Black man? Imagine three African American boys, kindergartners who are largely alike in intelligence, talent, and character, whose potential

seems limitless. According to a wealth of statistics and academic studies, in just over a decade, one of the boys is likely to [spend time in jail] or head to prison. The second boy- if he hasn't already dropped out- will seriously weigh leaving high school and be pointed toward an uncertain future. The third boy will be speeding toward success by most measures. (Fletcher, 2007, p. 3)

The above question is astonishing because that is what the African American male identity has become. An identity defined by prison, death, dropout rates, and one that slips through the cracks to become successful. African Americans masculinity is generally defined by comparing and contrasting it against whiteness (Gause, 2005). When it comes to African American males identifying themselves, most of them do not know whether they consider themselves Black American, African American, Colored, or Negro (Harper, 1996). The reality is that it does not matter; however, it is worthy enough of African American males to understand the root of all the various forms of identifications. Without having to write out a long description of each identifying word, it is safe to say that all of the various names for people of color exist for the purpose of self-esteem purposes (Harper, 1996). The sad reality is that when people see the physical color of the skin, some conceivable form of judgment is evident. People of color in the 1900s were concerned with the name or capitalization of the race and ethnicity because of the symbolic meaning behind each (Harper, 1996).

bell hooks (2004) in her book, *We Real Cool*, goes into great depth discussing how young African American men become adult African American men. hooks (2004) does not necessarily buy into the whole notion that having more successful African American males around is the major fix that is needed to change the awful statistics that are attached to young African

American men. Instead, she indicated that she believes even African American men that are successful suffer from psychological problems that can date all the way back to slavery. hooks (2004) stated, “Patriarchal fathers are not the answer to healing the wounds in Black family life. Ultimately, it is more important that Black children have loving homes where men are present” (p. 102). She even goes on to say that, two parent homes are just as bad as single parent homes when they are dysfunctional (hooks, 2004). Unfortunately, most men in society, regardless of race, believe that being as tough as possible on young boys will grow them into successful men; however, the emotion of love often is absent from this process. hooks (2004) stated, “Many Black children are emotionally neglected and/or abandoned by biological fathers” (p.103). The point is that having a *successful* African American male in the home who carries out the stereotypical emotionless father can have just as much of a negative influence on African American males as no father being in the home at all.

hooks (2004) stated, “We’ve accepted a definition of ourselves that’s killing us in a way no bullet ever could” (p. 138). The “we” she is referring to are African American males and the bullet to which she is referring is the belief that successful African American males cannot come out of these single parent homes. The media echoes this message very much. She contributes all of this to a patriarchal way of thinking (hooks, 2004). The media has also played a major role in what it means to be a *cool* African American male. hooks (2004) compared what it used to mean to be cool to the present idea of what being cool is. hooks (2004) stated,

Once upon a time, Black male ‘cool’ was the ways in which Black men confronted the hardships of life without allowing their spirits [to be free]. They took the pain of it and used it alchemically to turn the pain into gold. That burning process required high heat.

Black male cool was the ability to withstand the heat and remain centered. It was defined by Black male willingness to confront reality, to face the truth, and bear it not by adopting a false pose of cool while feeding on fantasy; not by Black male denial or by assuming a 'poor me' victim identity... defined by individual Black males daring to self-define rather than be defined by others. (p.147)

In short, hooks (2004) believed that the media and mainly hip-hop messages have reduced being cool to obtaining as many material possessions as possible, calling each other niggas, killing people and dying tragically, and having sex. This reality was, and still is present in a student name Sheldon in a book called, *A Search Past Silence: The Literacy of Young Black Men*, written by David E. Kirkland (2013). Sheldon is a young African American male that loves to read, and because of his love for reading, his peers refer to him as sweet. One student stated, "That nigga an encyclopedia" (Kirkland, 2013, p. 108). African American males have come to view this awful lifestyle as keeping it real, which is the way hip-hop explains it (hooks, 2004). The reality is that the lifestyle exploited by hip-hop is the opposite of keeping it real and is instead a fantasy (hooks, 2004). In her closing, hooks (2004) went on to say that what Black males need, more than anything (even more than successful African American role models did), psychological freedom and males who demonstrate the emotion of love.

In an effort to improve the identity of young African American males, Edward Fergus, Pedro Noguera, and Margary Martin (2004) wrote about a single-sex school in their book called, *Schooling for Resilience: Improving the Life Trajectory of Black and Latino Boys*. The focus of this single-sex school was to reconstruct the identity of minority boys. They went about this process by hiring teachers who minorities knew they were there to save Black boys, and who understood that the study of minorities would be celebrated (Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, 2004).

These young men left this school understanding that by being African American, they would face negative stereotypes. However, they also left projecting a more positive image of themselves (Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, 2004). The success of these African American students attributed strictly to having teachers who were able to relate to their cultural needs.

The two previous sections gave a snapshot of the awful statistics and data concerning the academic achievement of African American males; however, we must dive into what causes these daunting numbers. Tyrone Howard and Rema Reynolds (2013) stated, “Further, the failure to unpack the multiple layers of identity markers inadvertently leads researchers to narrow and often misguided understandings of the lived experiences of certain groups-particularly those on the margins, in this case Black males” (p.235). Unfortunately, “Black males find themselves in perpetual negotiation as they seek to reconcile their own individual lived experiences with prescribed societal expectations, and limitations” (Howard & Reynolds, 2013, p.236). Who African American males perceive themselves to be must influence how they perform in the classroom to a certain degree. An African American preacher by the name of Keith Hawyard (2014) conducted a study concerning the negative perception issue among young African American males. Hawyard (2014) argued that how African American males view themselves decreases their motivation, which leads to poor academic achievement. Hawyard (2014) stated, “Self-image is an idea social psychology has assumed derives in large part from how one is viewed by others-family, school, and the broader society” (p.42). When we examine how the media and society view African American males, it is no wonder they struggle academically. African American males are not born, believing that they are inferior and dumb. Research has proven that 80% of African American students enter school feeling good about themselves; however, this number is down to 20% by fifth grade and 5% going into the senior year

(Hayward, 2014). White teachers and Black teachers viewed African American males negatively (Hayward, 2014). This creates a strange atmosphere for a smart African American male because if African American males are supposed to be dumb and inferior, it is questionable how to classify one who is smart. Obviously, society does not consider him as a smart African American male; therefore, they exist in the box that Hayward lays out below:

African American male students are forced to fit in images that they could never live up to. White is presented as the better way while Black is presented as the wrong way. It is for this reason that students begin to equate achievement with ‘acting White’ or ‘selling out.’ (p.54)

Being that African American males spend a great deal of their time at school surrounded by White teachers proves that institutional racism is definitely a contributing factor to low self-images that they hold (Hayward, 2014) whether done intentionally or not. How African American males construct their identity is probably the most critical aspect of their lives. Most of the time, identity and our character dictate what leads us to success or failure (Hayward, 2014). Hayward stated, “As these children mature, they begin to experience hostilities imposed by the majority culture and by the time these students reach adolescence they begin to believe that academic achievement will not improve their status or benefits” (p. 27). As African American males get older they are no longer viewed as cute and innocent (Kunjufu, 2005). Definitely, this could explain the lack of motivation we see from these young men at times. Legally, African Americans have not been denied access to academic success; however, they have had very limited resources. The resource that has been the most limited is their voice. Hayward (2014) stated, “Their voices have been muted by structured racism, educational limitations, and negative

images that reinforce both” (p. 34). For this reason, the goal of my research was to unleash the limitations placed on them by allowing their voices to be heard.

African American males have had their identity constructed by slave owners, magazines, and the media, just to name a few; however, very few African American males have truly researched who they really are. Due to the mass media few teachers really believe that minority children can learn (Delpit, 2006). Sadly, African American men tend to be viewed photographically by White people (Wallace, 2002). Wallace stated,

Just how Black masculine subjectivity constitutes itself relative to the masculine hegemony, in other words, or recognizes Black masculine subjects as men, in opposition to the putative sociohistoric record noted by Spillers, is a feat of social and psychic wonder that has yet to be definitively named. (p. 2)

This quote alluded to the fact that African American men really do not know how they have become whom society has defined them to be, or better yet, the process in which society has used to define them. Steven Holmes and Richard Morin (2007) made mention of the idea that African American men are not unified in how they see themselves in America. Understanding identities is important because “Understanding the process through which racial identities are constructed in school is important in order to devise strategies that enable us to counter the insidious ways in which race and achievement become linked” (Noguera, 2003, p. 58).

### **Summary of Literature**

Much research exists about African American males. Fletcher (2007) summed it up best by saying, “Perhaps no slice of the U.S. population has been more studied, analyzed, and dissected than Black males” (p.7). I could not agree more with this statement. Critical race theory is a method that allows us to continue this study of the struggles of African American males;

however, it is going to take the actions described by Black protest thought to bring about a real change in the lives of African American males. I cannot honestly say that anything was absent in the literature when it comes to the facts, opinions, and quantitative data on African American males. However, the voices of these young men did not exist. Based on the literature, critical race theory leaves room for the voices of African American males to be heard. I am not dismissing all of the data and research conducted about African American males. In fact, the daunting data and research remind us that we must continue to fight for the success of African American young men, and I think the answer to our problems is in the area that is missing the most. That missing area is how these young men view and construct their own reality in life.



## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

As I discussed in Chapter 2, I conducted my research, using critical race theory and Black protest thought as my theoretical framework. Critical race theory provided a voice to an oppressed group of young African American teenage males. Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) stated, “A theme of naming one’s own reality or voice is entrenched in the work of critical race theorists” (p. 20). Ontologically, the basis of critical race theory is the past, with a touch of historical realism, epistemologically. Critical race theory asserts that the researcher and researched are inseparable, and methodologically, this theory is entrenched in qualitative research (DeCuir-Gunby & Walker DeVose, 2013). The purpose of Black protest thought was to deal with the changing status of African Americans in the 20th century (Meier, Rudwick, & Broderick, (1987). I used Black protest thought to investigate the continuous changing status of African American young men in the 21st century.

Providing an opportunity for young African American men to tell their stories through critical race theory was important for three reasons. First, much of reality is socially constructed. Second, stories can be an avenue for psychic self-preservation. Third, stories allow those that are listening to overcome ethnocentrism and a dysconscious conviction of single perspective (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). These authors also stated, “The voice component of critical race theory provides a way to communicate the experience and realities of the oppressed, a first step on the road to justice” (p. 21). As I stated in Chapter 2, critical race theory and Black protest thought are both needed because these two trains of thoughts bring together theory and action. One without the other makes for a mute purpose if our goal really is to help our young African American males.

## Oral History Method

The methodology for this study is oral history. Oral history allows individuals to tell their stories. Oral history is nothing more individuals sharing their memories and personal interpretations of history that is important to them (Ritchie, 2003). Sharing memories is important for African American males because the stories they hold within remain stifled under heaps of racial barriers and structural inequalities in homes, schools, churches, and the communities in which they live. The art of oral history also allows for culture from one generation continued on to the next generation. Oral history allows, “a way of accessing subjugated voices” (Leavy, 2011, p. 5). The stories about African American males told by the majoritarian focus on how African American males underperform compared to white students (Love, 2004). Oral history allows for “individuals or groups that historically have been marginalized, silenced, disenfranchised, or otherwise had their experiences left out of the historical record” (Leavy, 2011, p. 24). This is exactly what was happening to the young African American males who were a part of my study. Addressing the issue of race can be very difficult for society, one head at a time; however, that is what oral history does. Oral history makes room for individuals, one at a time, to tell their own individual story. Ritchie (2003) stated, “That is the reason for doing oral history: to ask the questions that have not been asked and to collect the reminiscences that otherwise would be lost” (p. 46).

Oral history is a means of transmitting information throughout families for a long period. One book that I came across, written by an oral historian, was *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, by Alex Haley. I watched the movie, *Malcolm X*, at an early age. However, it was not until I read the book that I truly realized the power of an individual discussing the importance of life through oral history. After reading this book, I realized that nobody tells about the significance of an

individual's life better than the individual tells. This book was the product of collaborative effort between Alex Haley and Malcolm X. No one could have analyzed the feelings that Malcolm X felt better than Malcolm X himself could.

Multiple ways are available to collect oral history. The four main steps involved in collecting oral history include creating, processing, curating, and using (Baum, 1991). When using oral history, one must make a transition in methodology from gathering information, interactions, asking the right questions, and realizing the subjects' viewpoint (Anderson, 1998, 2006). The type of oral history that I am using is sometimes referred to as community oral history because I am interviewing a group of young men who, geographically, are rooted in the South, and they are all African American (Shopes, 1998, 2006).

One method of conducting oral history is interviewing. Interviewing can be very complex because various cultures and geographical locations can cause those individuals interviewed to interpret experiences differently than the interviewer (Perks, 1998, 2006). Interviewing should be more like storytelling throughout the process. Leavy (2011) stated, "The researcher guides a process [in which] each participant narrates his or her story" (p.11). I did not feel like this would be a huge obstacle for me in that I shared the same geographical location with the participants in the study, and I had the same cultural background as the young men I interviewed. Shopes (1998, 2006) offered three suggestions for anyone conducting their own interviews. They included (a) form your project around a historical problem or issue, (b) define the universe in a broad manner, (c) and approach every interview with a mindset of critical inquiry. Various methods of interviewing are available. First, there is structured interviewing, in which all respondents receive the same series of questions (Fontana & Frey, 2003). This type of interviewing occurred in my study to determine the similarities and differences among different young men, revealing

the impact of the absence of an African American male role model in their lives. For example, this type of interviewing included open-ended questions such as, How do you feel about African American men? How do you think your life would be different with African American males around more often? I used group interviews informally as a method of conversing with young men participating in the study just to get a glimpse of their perspective on education and life, in general. I wanted to know what young African American males thought as they were being educated in institutions that employed few adults that look like them in the hallways, curriculum, and textbooks. These types of interviews offered opportunities to bring out the best in people because of the safe atmosphere created (Slim, Thompson, Bennett, & Cross, 1998/2006). Finally, the observations represented a way for me to examine daily actions of the young African American men to see how their behavior was relevant to their stories in the interviews and conversations throughout the study. Adler and Adler stated, “Observations have been characterized as the fundamental base of all research methods in the social and behavioral sciences” (Adler & Adler, 1994, p. 389). Originally, observations applied only as a way of collecting data. However, observations have become a way to interact in a dialogic fashion with those who are studied (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2003).

### **Counternarrative or Counterstorytelling**

A strength of critical race theory is the opportunity to use counterstories and narratives of marginalized groups that go against the majoritarian (Delgado, 1989). Two types of narratives exists in the research literature. The first is the master narrative, defined as “a script that specifies and controls how some social processes are carried out” (Stanley, 2007, p. 14). The second is the counternarratives, “which do not agree with, and are critical of the master narrative, often arise out of individual or group experiences that do not fit the master narratives” (Stanley, 2007, p.

14). He and Ross (2012) used counternarrative as a way to contest the meta-narrative that depicts inferior groups in the South. He and Ross (2012) also used counternarrative to allow the exposure of silenced voices. Solorzano and Yosso (2002) believed that counterstories serve as sources of survival as well as political and cultural resistance, and the challenger of master narratives of race.

Counterstories have the power to show that what we have come to accept as right is ridiculous (Delgado, 1989). In *The Handbook of Critical Race Theory in Education*, DeCuir-Gunby and Walker-De Vose (2013) stated, “In counterstorytelling, the narratives of personal accounts, stories of other people, and composite stories are developed into a narrative that is grounded in real-life experiences and empirical data and contextualized within a specific social setting” (p. 252). Traditionally, counterstorytelling comes from the storytelling tradition in African American, Chicano, and Native American communities (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

Throughout my readings, I came across Bell’s books, *And We Are Not Saved* and *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*. In these books, Bell (1979) used storytelling to allow the reader to engage in the harsh struggles of the Civil Rights Movement. Bell became interested in turning real life stories into allegorical stories, while he was working on the Foreword to the *Harvard Law Review* 1985 Supreme Court issue (Bell, 1999). Bell (1999) stated,

The Civil Rights Movement, after all, was much more than the totality of judicial decisions, the newly enacted laws, and the changes in racial relationships reflected in those legal milestones. The Movement was a spiritual manifestation of the continuing faith of a people who had never truly gained their rights in a nation committed by its basic law to the freedom of all. As deadlines hovered, I sensed the need for a method of

expression adequate to the phenomenon of rights gained, then lost, then gained again that surprises even as it repeats the cyclical experience of Blacks in this country. (p. 2)

Delgado (1989) stated, “For stories create their own bonds, represent cohesion, shared understandings, and meanings” (p. 2412). Stories and narratives are great tools for destroying the mindset of the majority (Delgado, 1989). Counterstories have the ability to “open new windows into reality, showing us that there are possibilities for life other than the ones we live” (Delgado, 1989, p. 2414). The opportunity for African American men to open new windows and possibilities that are different from the awful image painted by the media can emerge when allowing them to tell their stories. In order for counterstories to be effective, the stories cannot look as though they derived from coercion (Delgado, 1989).

### **Exemplary Oral History Research**

In reading the dissertation, *If You Can't Find Me in the School Room: Oral Histories of African American Educators and Students during the Albany Movement*, Griswold (2010) used oral history to collect the stories of four African American educators and students who were involved in the Albany Movement in 1961. Griswold (2010) wrote, “Oral history provides an avenue for capturing the voices of African Americans, whose stories have been long lost due to a lack of importance to the majority population” (p. 93). Griswold (2010) used oral history to look into the experiences of African American women who dealt with segregation, integration, and educational change during a critical time in history. While doing this recording of the experiences of these four African American women, Griswold (2010) realized that oral history allowed these women to understand and pass on the important cultural history.

Tennial (2008), in his dissertation, *Unto the Third & Fourth Generation of African Americans: Kaleb Norris's Stories of Generational Poverty and Inequality in the South*, used

oral history to record how educational, political, and public policies affected his paternal family from 1899 to the present in Northern Mississippi and West Tennessee. Tennial (2008) stated, “Oral history not only allowed me to capture their stories but to also understand them as individuals in light of their lived experiences” (p. 1). In this dissertation, Tennial (2008) used critical race theory as his theoretical framework and oral history as his methodology. Critical race theory has been a useful theoretical foundation for acknowledging the power of oral history. Tennial (2008) stated,

Using both oral history methodology and critical race theory as my theoretical framework, I was challenged to (1) look beyond individual circumstance to the root of the problem, (2) raises awareness in an effort to change, (3) identify the hidden meaning behind-established power structures and traditions and its adverse effects, and become ‘prophetic’ by understanding the past and making predictions about the future based upon the given circumstances. (p.128)

Looking beyond the root of the problem and raising awareness, formed the basis of my study, as I examined how few African American males are involved in the lives of our young African American males. This study provided an opportunity for voices kept quiet normally, to present a unique viewpoint on racial and structural inequalities, and the effect of educational, political, and public policies on six generations.

Mabray (2012) conducted a dissertation study titled, *Rainbow in the Clouds: Oral Histories of Black Homosexual Male Graduates Experience of Schooling in Augusta Georgia*. This dissertation focused on the high school experience of four African American males who struggled with sexual identification in a southern high school. Mabray (2012) stated, “The ultimate outcome of the narrator-researcher relationship was a narrative that amplifies the voices

of the narrator, positions their story in the public discourse, and interprets the story's significance" (p. 63). Mabray's goal was to bring educators and policy makers a different viewpoint as they effected legislation in southern schools.

Bell (1987/1992) used the art of storytelling in both his books, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism* and in *And We are Not Saved: The Elusive Quest for Racial Justice*. He used storytelling to hash out the problems of racism. As Bell told these stories, he used fictional characters. In a similar manner, I used storytelling with the young men in my study in order that I might protect their privacy. Both of Bell's books provide heart-drenching accounts of the Civil Rights movement, and the horrible experiences African Americans actually live through. These stories gave me, as a reader, a gut check to visualize that these are the stories of real people, and I attributed this feeling to the art of oral history.

Noguera (2008) did a story in his book very similar to the research I conducted. In his book, *The Trouble with Black Boys: And Other Reflections on Race, Equity, and the Future of Public Education*, Noguera (2008) stated,

The stereotypes that shape the American images of Black males are so stark and extreme that even the most ordinary and unexceptional Black males find they are forced to contend with the fantasies and fears that others hold toward them. (p. xiii)

Allowing African American males to tell their stories served as the first real effort to break down stereotypes that impede their progress in educational and social development. Noguera (2008) stated, "Sadly, the pressures, stereotypes, and patterns of failure that Black males experience often begin in school" (p. xvii). This problem begins with the lack of African American males in public education. The absence of African American male teachers and



administrators could lead young African American males to believe that it is impossible to be African American and educated.

Kirkland (2013) wrote a book called, *A Search Past Silence Literacy of Young Black Men*. This book represented the author's means of giving young African American men a voice for educators to hear. In the foreword of this book Noguera explained how guidance and support for African American males is needed; however, "It also means helping them in finding their voice. Voice means the ability to express one's hopes, dreams, fears, angst, and inner turmoil-is what allows us to tell the world" (Kirkland, 2013, p. ix). Oral history offers this opportunity. Noguera also stated,

Yet, for voice to be meaningful there must be those willing to listen. In fact, this may be what Black males need most of all: adults who are willing to open up lines of communication, to engage in dialogue, and to listen. That may sound like a simple solution, but actually, it is the [first] step in recognizing the humanity of Black males. (Kirkland, 2013, p. x)

This is the reason that collecting the stories of the five characters in my study was so critical because their stories created an opportunity for these young men to express their feelings. Kirkland's (2013) book did just that by allowing us to learn from the experiences of young Black men and see the negative experiences and barriers in the educational system from their perspectives.

### **How I Will Hear the Voices of Five African American Teenage Males**

As an African American male who grew up in a predominately-White town in middle Georgia and attended predominately-White schools all of my life, I understood what it was like to have voice and culture silenced in school. In an effort to allow five African American males,

who were in similar situations, not have their voice and culture silenced, I collected their stories, using oral history. This study consisted of five African American males between the ages of 15 and 18, who lived in single parent homes and traditional families. These participants in my study told their stories of what it has been like to be surrounded in a world in which few people resemble them, and how this predominately-White atmosphere has affected their lives. Four of the young men attended high schools dominated by White educators, while one of the young men attended a school that had a good mixture of Whites and African American educators. Over a period, I observed these students' grades and behaviors. I also sought the personal experiences of these students by conducting interviews and keeping field notes of what I observed throughout the study. Fontana and Frey (2003) stated, "Interviewing is one of the common and powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow human beings" (pp. 61-62). Using interviews as oral history has been controversial over the years; however, over time, it has become accepted as a form of modern oral history (Perks & Thomson, 1998, 2006).

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) coined a term called *bricoleurs*, which is French for a handyman or handywoman who uses any tools they have to get the job done (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008). In research, this *bricoleurs* means using the various methods offered by qualitative research to find answers to questions that cannot be answered, using just common methods of research. Kincheloe and McLaren (2008) stated, "Rejecting this normalized state of affairs, bricoleurs commit their knowledge work to helping address the ideological and informational needs of marginalized groups and individuals" (p. 423). The African American males that I hope to observe and interview fall into this margin as a group and as individuals. Using the various tools of interviews, observations as strategies for data collection in narrative inquiry, contributed to my finding answers that rejected the normalized beliefs that African

American males perform worse in school and life because they are inferior, which is a notion that is based solely on race.

### **Collecting Oral Histories**

The following methods used to collect oral histories from the five young men: oral history interviews and field journaling with informal notes.

### **Snapshot of Schools**

Joy High School is located in a rural county in middle Georgia called Joy County. Six small communities filter into this school. Some other students from other counties pay tuition to attend. The population at this school is over 1200 (Georgia Department of Education, 2013), which is the largest it has ever been to date. Two elementary schools and one middle school fed into Joy High School. In the 1990s, the school was diversified decently; however, that demographic has shifted to 68% White and 32% African American (Georgia Department of Education, 2013). Dunn High School is located in a rural area as well. Dunn High School is 55% White and 45% African American (Georgia Department of Education, 2013). Union High School is a school system located in the inner city of Joy County. The demographic makeup is 77% African American and 18% White (Georgia Department of Education, 2013).

For African American students, this definitely created a situation in which they did not culturally connect with the environment around them. For African American males, an even greater situation was present because the majority of the students were White and female, and that was true for the teachers as well. Joy High School was a non-title I school, which meant most of the students' parents were middle and upper class; therefore, African American males were dealing with a student and teacher population that did not relate to their culture, gender, or socioeconomic status. Only six African American male teachers were on one entire side of the

county, from elementary to high school. Among these six, only two African American administrators were included in the group.

The likelihood of an African American male student having an African American male teacher from prekindergarten through Grade 12 was very slim. Dunn High School was very similar to Joy High School. Union High School faculty was very different from Joy and Dunn High Schools. Union High School had several African American teachers and an African American head principal. This school was also a low-income Title I school.

### **Character Profiles**

The characters for the study included five African American males, enrolled in public high schools. All five young men know the researcher, either as a faculty member at the school they attended, or as a family member. The young men and their legal guardians agreed to participate in this study. I chose only five participants, due to a limited time used to conduct the study, and this small group allowed for an in-depth analysis of the findings. These young men names were anonymous throughout this study. Being that the research occurred on African American males, influenced by African American role models, it was important to choose African American male participants, influenced either positively or negatively, by the presence or absence of African American male role models. The researcher purposefully selected young African American men from various schools and home environments to compare and contrast differences that existed, based on the presence or absence of an African American male role model.

Raymond Duhon, 17 years old, is a relative of mine. Raymond and I have known each other all his life, and we have built a relationship of trust between each other. Raymond is in Grade 11 and is an outstanding football, basketball, and track athlete. He lives in a single parent

home with his mother. He and his mother spent a great amount of time at his grandparents' home. Academically, Raymond is about a B/C student who does not get in much trouble. He attends a high school that is predominately White, with the number of African American males very few.

Terrell Duhon, also is a relative of mine as well. We have known each other for 15 years and we have built up a relationship of trust over that period. Terrell is the younger brother of Raymond. He is in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, and he is an outstanding football and basketball player. He, too, lives in a single parent home. Academically, he is a C/D student, who struggles academically at intervals. Raymond and Terrell attend Joy High School.

Mike Sanders and the researcher have known each other for 17 years. He is also 17 years old, in Grade 11, and he is an outstanding football and track athlete at Joy High School. He lives with his single mother. Academically, he is an A student who has a very bright future. He tends to get into trouble from time to time, but never is the disciplinary infraction anything major.

Shane Nixon, raised in a traditional family with his mother and father, is a great student that does not get in trouble at school. Shane and I have known each other for three years. Shane is a 17-years old student in Grade 11 and is an outstanding football and baseball player. He attends Dunn High School, which is predominately White, with few minority teachers.

Jerome Dixon lives in a traditional home with his mother and father; however, the father is not the best role model, according to the standards of conduct society values, in general. I have known Jerome for most of his life. At the time of this study, Jerome was 18 years old and enrolled in Grade 11. He is also an outstanding football player. However, Jerome struggles through school, having failed an earlier grade, and he has experienced some discipline issues in

school as well. He attends Union High Schools, which is a largely African American school district.

All five of these characters live in the rural middle Georgia area, an area dominated by the majority race. From birth, they all lived in middle Georgia. The communities in middle Georgia consists of farming and factories as the main sources of revenue. It was not difficult to tell, by the description of all these young men, high school sports was rooted deeply in the communities. Athletics represented an area in which young African American men tended to be very successful in middle Georgia. More information about these young men's identity and lives continue in this study.

### **Oral History Interviews**

Throughout the study, I used a combination of informal interviews, observations, and field notes. At this point in the study, it was impossible to determine the exact number of conversations held. I waited to see how the conversations went to determine the number of interviews and discussions needed to capture the stories of the characters. With permission, I used a digital recording device while interviewing these young men., coded, and analyzed the data retrieved from the interviews, and made sure to use a level of integrity that reflected what these young men revealed.

Before I finished the final version, the young men had an opportunity to review, add, or to take away the information they read. In areas that needed clarification, I asked probing questions. I created a list of interview questions; but I permitted the young men to lead the direction of the interviews. Terkel and Parker (1998) made it clear, "There aren't any rules. You do it your own way. You experiment. You try this; you try that. With one person, one-way [to ask questions is] the best, and with another person another. Stay loose, stay flexible" (1998, p.

123). Terkel and Parker also made it clear that the researcher should not coerce, push, rush, or harass participants to get answers. For this reason, the young men essentially guided the interviews.

### **Daily Encounters**

I took informal notes on these students as I observed them in the hallways, classrooms, after school activities, church, and at home as often as I was in the presence of these young men.

### **Field Notebook/Journal**

I utilized a field notebook to record these young men's reactions to certain questions, conversations, interviews, and general observations. I also included my reactions and thoughts from the process.

### **Challenges of the Study**

Promoting African American male teenagers to examine their perceptions of the influence of African American male role models and having their voices heard were important aspects of this study. However, limits to this research needed clarifying. Some of these limitations were situational, while some were personal.

This study was limited to just the five participants, who could not possibly represent all African American young men who have not had many experiences with African American males. Dixson and Rousseau (2006) made it clear that "the use of the term voice in the singular does not imply that there exists a single common voice for all persons of colors" (p. 35). This study was also asking teenaged young men to look at how race and the presence/absence of African American role models influenced their lives. This question was difficult because the young men in this study were at an age in which the media portrayed rappers and athletes as their role models. Another limitation that existed was that these young men felt comfortable enough

with me, as a researcher, to open up completely about their feelings without feeling vulnerable, which could produce such a high volume of information, it would be difficult to use every input that they provide. This study was also limited to rural schools, which were predominately White, and one inner city school that was predominately African American. All three schools are located in small town areas and are geographically located in the South. The views the participants reported did not represent young African-American males in larger cities or the Northern part of the United States.

Another limitation was my position as the researcher. I had to be considerate of my own biases, beliefs, and ideological viewpoints. I used my autobiographical roots to point out bias as an African American male raised by both parents and a host of uncles who served as African American role models. I could not take this blessing for granted.

As an educator and African American male myself, I could not leave out the idea that some of the participants' answers might have represented them saying or acting the way they felt, like I wanted them to answer or act. In addition, with some of the participants being family members, there could be details that they were fearful about sharing for sake of judgment. I hope that I built up enough trust with the participants through our informal dealings to form a barrier for such limitations. Finally, I knew that using critical race theory and Black protest thought comes with certain biases; however, that was even more reason that we needed this type of study.

Critical race theory could improve instructional programs for African American male students because this theory causes those individuals who instruct young African American men to examine themselves, face the issue of race head on, and look at how culturally sensitive they are to African American male students. For this factor to take place, critical race theorists must come together and actually carry out the policies we recommend (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006).



The scholars I drew upon have led me to realize that instructional methods are not limited to differentiation, use of technology, lecture, discussion, and group work. These traditional methods for improving instruction might work for other groups, but among African American males, statistics show that something else is necessary for high achievement among African American young men to occur.. That something else is critically to examine the influence that race plays in public education. The scholars listed above specifically might not be critical race theorists; however, they all have dealt with the issue of African American males and their place in society, whether educationally, politically, socially, or culturally. For some of the scholars, it could have been a personal story or an autobiography about how they dealt with or fought against racism and discrimination. The above scholars were critical to my research in different and various ways. Some contributed specific measures that needed addressing for African American males who did not have role models. Others asked the critical questions that needed investigating, so that we might guide African American male students into the right direction to combat the absence of African American male role models. Some scholars gave personal testimonies, but I was sure this was not a final list of scholars because I was reading additional materials every day. However, this group laid the foundation for my path in critical race theory. William Watkins (2005) said it best when he stated, “CRT is not *the end-all-be-all* in creating antiracist education. Instead, it should be included in the array of epistemologies that address issues of race and racism in education” (p. 197). Critical race theory might not take the dreadful numbers attached to young African American males and turn them into awesome numbers. However, critical race theory has the potential to lead to better schools, teachers, churches, dads, and communities that when working together can turn these negative numbers for African American males into success stories.

Never was a time more critical than this present age to collect the stories and feelings of African American male students who realized the social and cultural disconnect, created by political decisions on curriculum. Listening to the voice of these young men should lead us to possible solutions to help this group change society, their lives, and their economic future. We cannot stop with the five young men in my story because that would lead to essentialism, defined as “a belief that all people perceived to be in single group think, act, and believe the same things in the same way” (Ladson-Billings, 2013, p. 40). However, we must hear the voices of all African American males we meet, at home, church, school, and in the community. As we hear and collect these stories, we must keep social justice at the forefronts of our minds. We must take their stories seriously. Teachers must use their stories to look into the mirror and ask themselves the tough questions. Questions such as: Do I invest in my African American males? Do I believe in them? Do I have preconceived notions about them? We cannot change education without changing the social context in which we exist. Noguera (2008) supports this belief by stating,

Changing the culture and structure of schools such that African Americans male students come to regard them as sources of support for their aspirations and identities will undoubtedly be the most important step that can be taken to make high levels of academic achievement the norm rather than the exception. (p.42)

My goal for the stories that I collected in my study was to give me insight into the identities of African American male students. A culturally disconnected educational system constructed these identities. I hope that out of the studies, we can find the spark needed for the educational change that must take place on a political, cultural, and social front. At this point, I reviewed several bodies of literature concerning African American males, laid out the theoretical framework (critical race theory) and methodology (oral history) that I used to collect the stories

on five African American young men. In the chapters to follow, the stories appear. The stories, told by these young men about their experiences as young African American males who are being raised in a society with very few African American male role models, provided insights for social change in the home, church, school, and communities that nurture young African American males.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE STORIES OF RAYMOND, TERRELL, MIKE, SHANE, AND JERMOME

*“Defining myself, as opposed to being defined by others, is one of the most difficult challenges I face.”-Carol Moseley-Braun*

#### Participants Stories

In this chapter, five African American teenage males told their personal stories about their coexistence in a society with very few African American males as leaders, teachers, doctors, fathers, and role models. I chose these young men because, as African American teenage males, they attended schools dominated by White educators. I chose these participants for their ages and number of years in school, which provided them with real life experiences in a society and an educational system dominated by the majority race. I also chose a combination of young men who lived in single-mother homes and two parent homes to see if there was a noticeable difference in their stories about African American male role models. These young men told of the stereotypes that they faced daily that came about because of the media and preconceived notions about them that existed. Pseudonyms replaced the real names of these young men and the stories were fictionalized to protect their identity. In an effort not to take away from the participants' stories, the stories appear directly as they were told in the actual speech pattern of each speaker, frequently with poor English usage.

#### Raymond Duhon's Story

*Do you feel like African-American teenage males are treated equally with their White counterparts? Uhh I know in some circumstances a lot of White people just don't get caught or somebody get them out of it like I've seen it firsthand pretty much. They just really don't get caught. From like that school incident I don't know if all of them got in trouble like Jarome who*

*is Black. He said he had to pay like a thousand dollars and like Constance who is White her mama pretty much like they said her people pretty much got her out of it. Her daddy, I don't know if her daddy really a sheriff or not. Like I know a couple of White kids who do drugs all the time, but they just don't get caught with it. Like Jonathan who is Black got caught with some drugs before they be getting drunk and stuff like that all time. I can't tell you why the Whites don't get caught and the Black kids do. I guess sometimes the Whites do get caught, but not as much. The Black boys just make stupid choices; they tend to slip up more than the White boys do. When both are caught the punishment for Whites and Blacks seem to be different. What do you feel like is society's viewpoint of African-American teenage males? From the White students I am around they are scared of Black boys for no reason. Like they can know nothing about them, but because of how they look they can be scared of them. I know for the White students their parents tell them not to talk to Black boys just because. They base their perception of African American males on other Black males and what they see on TV most of the time. How do you think your teachers feel about African-American teenage males? Like if they know you like they know me the teachers will be like oh yea! I like you, but so on and so on. Some of the teachers I have they are pretty good they are not racists like I'm trying to think, I don't know if they really racists they are just mean to everybody. My experiences with most of my teachers from elementary through high school have been good. Have you been taught by any African-American teachers? I have only had two African American teachers from pre-k through my 12<sup>th</sup> grade year. Why do you think White teachers treat African-American teenage males differently? White teachers already have a bad concept of Black boys already without ever giving them a chance. So when they do something bad it is like oh I already expected that. It's like you are already on their bad side for no reason and like for no apparent reason. How does it make you feel to be treated*

*different solely on the basis of your skin color? Uhh I feel like its bull to be treated that way solely because of race. We actually talk about it among ourselves we just be like that teacher be doing this and that and we just be agreeing with each other. They tell me what they be seeing and I tell them what I be seeing and we just talk about it sometime. Can you think of any incidents when an African-American teenage male was treated differently? Like even in football they show favoritism to certain players unless you are really good for example Jarvis who is Black is not that good so they really act like they cannot stand him when he make a mistake, but Robby who is also Black, but good at quarterback he can mess up and it's okay. Now the White backup quarterback who is not that good can mess up, but it's okay with the coaches as long as he is trying they on his good side, but they will call Jarvis stupid compared to when the White quarterback makes a mistake they just tell him how to correct it so he can do it better the next time. They don't treat Jarvis like that because he is talented, and the coaches are gonna make sure he is taken care of because he gonna help us win football games. Do you feel like being an African-American teenage male is an advantage or disadvantage? Why? Being an African American male student is no advantage or disadvantage for "Me" I mean for me it's like non of my teacher it's like I am considered a good kid. I'm just like from elementary up I have been considered a good kid, it's like the teachers already know my name before I get their, and they are like oh he is a good kid I know where he is from so they don't really bother me. They know who my people are, and I don't get in trouble. It's kind of like who they know in my family that I feel like helps me out (his aunt and uncle both work in the school system). They don't ever hear my name in anything so they are like he must be good. Do you think your experience at a predominately African-American school would have been different? Explain how and why? If I attended a more Black school I feel my experience would be the same with the students because*

*from what I see both Black and White students seem to be doing the same thing, and with the teachers I really can't say how it would be because I guess they have good and bad teachers everywhere. I do think the Black teachers would make a better effort to understand me better. Like one of my White teachers Ms. Kinder can relate and Coach King. Coach King was talking to us one day coming from a meet and he was like what he has seen and his point of view was it's not the race it's the culture, and he is not racists in my opinion, but he was just saying he explained to me that how some of "them" view us. I know Coach King and Ms. Kinder are Christians and they pretty much it's just that's part of the reason. They treat everybody different, and Coach King has been other places and he just knows how to handle and treat people right. Tell me your personal experience with public education from elementary to this present time? My education experience with sports has been fun. Like coming up school most of teachers either knew my parents or grandparents so I never really had any problems with them or if I did get in any trouble they would call my parents because they knew them like they went to school together or something like that. Umm yea so my experience hasn't been awful or bad it has been normal. By normal, I mean you gonna have some good grades and some bad grades, but you want more good grades than bad grades but you know you not failing you are passing all of your classes, you're not getting in that much trouble, but you might get in trouble every now and then, but you don't have no juvenile record or anything like that. When it comes to testing I feel like the African American males don't do as well because our parents might can't afford tutors like the White kids can and stuff and how they go to study sessions with other people that their parents be hiring. Like I guess some of the Black parents can't afford it. They (Whites) tend to have both parents in the home and Black boys normally got a father or a mother and not both. At the schools, they need to quit changing stuff so much. That would help us Black boys who might*

*can't afford a tutor to do a little bit better in school. You got to get results and take time to see how people study like the teachers just need to take time make sure everybody got it if they want everybody to pass like they say they do and stuff like that. When do you think you realized being an African-American male meant you were different in some kind of way? I realized that race play a role in who was successful in school and who wasn't around 7th grade. I just started picking up obvious stuff. A lot of Black boys in my school was just really good in sports compared to the White boys, and the White boys were a lot smarter in their school work and all that other stuff like that. Are successful African-American men discussed in your classes? They don't teach a lot about Black people in school so you really don't hear or know about them, which is a place you suppose to learn about stuff so all you really know are the ones they are teaching about. So far as you (the student) is concerned there are not Blacks worthy of being talked about unless you go read it on your own and found out by yourself. I don't know why they don't talk about successful Black males in our books I don't have a clue why. They should put everything in the book. When they do bring up people like Martin Luther King and President Obama it can get weird at times, but in my classes they don't really say anything they just learning like some of even the White students when they were talking about slaves and stuff like that they be like oh I could not have been a slave or oh that's messed up so we all be saying the same thing. Some of the students will tell me how their granddaddy is racists and they be like I don't know why he is like that. It is no point in it so that's how I know they hear racists things in their own house, but they don't listen. I have heard White kids say things out the way when slavery or successful Black heroes are talked about in class, but normally the teacher don't hear what they say or at least they pretend they don't. Some teachers will say things jokingly, but they don't mean we all laugh it off or least I don't think! They mean it. They will some junk about*



*watermelon, fried chicken, or kool aid or something like that. Since they are joking it don't bother me because I know White people eat that stuff as well.*

*What do you think about African-American men from your personal experience? To me it is two kinds of Black men it's like either the good kind or the bad kind. I have been to local gyms where you had like thugs who were sagging and all of that, but like in my household I know good African American men that know how to carry themselves, and they don't act crazy and wild and stuff they know how to act. The difference to me is simply who you hang around. You choose when you get to a certain age you choose and know what you want out of life. Like you know if you want to go to college and make something out of yourself or if you just want to gangbang. I think people choose the bad rout because of the influences around them that's the only thing I see and I can think about. Do you think a young African-American male misses out on something when their father is not present? What/Why? They don't have any leadership or anybody to tell them that's not good you don't need to do that. They can miss out on something if they father is not in the picture I want say that is the problem in all the cases, but it can be. They just miss out on somebody they can talk to all the time about their problems and having somebody to keep them straight when they are not on the right path. Some of them buck with Black men to prove that they cannot be told what to do and there is no point in that. Like when they see some of the White kids they parents let them do whatever they want so when the Black kids try to do it and their parents be like no don't do that they feel like why they (White) can do it, but I can't. They are followers. What do you think would have been different if your father was more involved in your life? I cannot say that my father not being in the house with me hurt me much because my mother she has like a really good job and so she, my grandparents, uncles, and aunties were able to buy stuff that I needed so I guess I never really went without anything I needed, and stuff I*

wanted they tried their best to get it for me. To be honest it did not bother me that my father was not home when I got there to talk about my day or how basketball or football practice went. To be honest it got to a point that the only time I saw him is when I got in trouble so I was well I don't want to see him at all so it got to a point that when I did see him it was like what did I do this time. Knowing my father if he had been involved in my upbringing my life could have been worse you know. Like when we were little and we would spend the night with him sometimes he would have girlfriends over and he would go back in the room with them, and we would here a bunch of bumping, and we would just assume they were fighting and stuff like that and he is always fussing and yelling and I didn't want him around my ma like that so I think I have been much better off without him in my life daily. Do you think most African-American men are good role models? Explain? Most Black men are bad role models because their actions are like little kids. Some of the grown men gang bang and they influence some of the other kids to do it, and they think it is cool and funny and stuff. They be like my lil homie this and that and they just loud and try to show out in public so yea most of them are bad I don't know too many good ones.

How do you view yourself? I consider myself a good Black male. I am versatile, I get along with people, I don't really get into any trouble. I keep myself busy with sports and I work hard so I consider myself a good one. How do you feel about yourself in comparison to your White classmates? Personally, I do not feel like White boys are above me in any way, but to society they do so they will have an advantage in a job interview or anything else. I think that's bull too! I feel like I am about as smart as them. How many African-American doctors, law officers, teachers, principals, and/or other professionals you know? I only know about two African Americans that work like professional jobs like lawyers, teachers, and doctors. Like something aint right or somebody not do something they suppose to be doing. Either Black males

*are not being hired for those types of jobs because of their race or either they not doing what they supposed to in the classroom themselves or like in college and stuff. I don't know I can't tell you what's going on cause like I've only seen two. I'm sure it is a lot of them that's trying to get the jobs, and uh but I guess the Whites just override them I guess. Say a Black kid is speeding and get a ticket by a White cop it's oh they racist, but you broke the law. But some of my White friends have told me about the leeway they get when they get stopped by the cops. Like they are all related or it's some of their cousins or something and they will get off.*

*What type of father would you like to be one day? When I become a father, I will try my best not to mess up, and make sure my child can come talk to me about anything. I would listen cause that's the biggest. You just don't not listen to a kid because of their age. Kids know what they are talking about. I would actually listen and take into account what they are saying. People feel like they don't have to listen to kids all at all because of their age, and hear all of this about respect your elders, do what your elders say, so if you are younger than them they don't have to listen to you or anything like that.*

*What are some areas in your life you feel like you have been successful in despite your race? Despite my race, I have been very successful in sports, and I have had some success in the classroom. That's all I have been doing up to this point in life is class and sports. What are some areas you could have done better in? I believe I could have done better in the classroom. I might not have studied like should have always studied in the classroom. What do you think your life would have been like with more African-American males around If I saw more Black professionals on a regular basis and I think things would feel more normal. How do you feel about our first African-American President? It's like the Black president that's weird people feel like that's not suppose to happen because of the past and how people have been raised. We have*

*never seen a Black president before so that makes it not normal and it is the same thing with Black professionals. In our history it has always been White just like slavery it was not normal for a Black to be successful. They might be jealous by Black becoming successful because they feel like we will want revenge or payback for how they use to do us. I'm okay with an African American president as long as he does his jobs and not trying to throw bombs on us or anything. I have no clue or answer as to why a White male cannot accept an African American in charge as long as he is doing his job. What race do you feel most comfortable being around? I feel normal around both races because I am cool with everybody because I have grown up around both.*

*How do you feel about the role that African-American preachers have played in your life? African American preachers preach a good sermon, but they have not had a big influence in my life really. As far as talking to me or helping me out with life they have not really helped. None of them have come to me, they may ask me some Sunday's how I am doing in school or sports, but that's about it. I feel like most preachers are fake when it comes to truly helping African American teenagers, there is not much action at all. I don't feel like they have done enough in their communities to help young African American males. Like when we have vacation bible school or something, or we watch a movie or Christmas play, but nothing spectacular like taking us as a group talking to us. They don't talk us down, but they will mention how society looks down on us, and how we should do something to stop them from looking down on us, but after the sermon nothing ever happens. To fix our problems we got to start with the grown ups like start holding people accountable not just letting them get away with stuff. Like if somebody say they gonna do something need to do it. I'm just living life trying to do what is needed to be successful. I am not really speaking out. I am just trying to stay in my lane and do whatever so*

*nobody will try to backstab me. People don't want you to override them so like if you go against somebody they just trying to throw you away they don't need you. Jealousy cause everybody to be with you until you are doing better than them. Some Blacks are unsuccessful because they are afraid of losing a friend. Everything I have heard and seen has shaped me into the person I am. After I became a certain age I just started putting certain things together, and started focusing on who and what I wanted to be. I'm gonna do what I want to do in a respectful way I mean, and I am not gonna worry about what other people say. Sports taught me that you should never be afraid of your opponent, and I am like that with life. I am going to do what I need and what's needed to be done and if you don't like it oh well. You got to have confidence and believe in yourself, and for kids that don't play sports that needs to come from home.*

*How has being educated in a predominately White school impacted your educational experience? My school experience in a majority White school has not exempted me from Black culture because you see it all the time like with the little amount of Black people we do have at school you see everything that exists in Black culture. To be honest now Black and White kids listen and watch the same thing. Some of my teachers listen to both, but they like country music more. I think the perception of thugs come from being scared of certain Black males. Like my friend the way he act his dreads, and like how he basically scares them automatically makes him a thug in their eyes. Television with all the rap videos with all the girls and guns people see that and assume all Black males are like that and all Black boys are not like that though. I believe this was happening before I was ever born. How do we fix the problem that exists with racism and discrimination towards African-American teenage males in our world? I believe the racial problems can come to an end, but I don't know if it will as long as we got older White people telling their kids and grandkids that Black people are bad people. It does not make me feel good,*

*but at least I hope their kids don't see it that way. At least I know somebody is feeding that to their head, and with my age group they are old enough to believe what they want to so they should know that all Black people are not bad.*

### **Reflections on Raymond Duhon's Story**

As I reflected on Raymond Duhon's story, I remembered him holding a basketball throughout the entire interview. The basketball seemed to have found a way to make him comfortable telling his story about being an African American teenage male in today's society. As I read over his story multiple times, I realized that sports was a reoccurring theme as he discussed life and school. I thought to myself that if this young man could become as comfortable with his schooling and life as he is with sports, he could be whomever and whatever he wanted to be in life. As I pondered what would make this young man so comfortable with sports, but face challenges in other parts of his life, it dawned on me as I read his story and the other young men stories as well, people expect African American teenage males to do well in sports. That became an instant "aha" moment for me. Raymond was able to sense that educators did not expect him to do well in school and life. Therefore, he was less confident about school and life. In sports, people expected him to be better because of the stereotype that African American men are stronger, faster, and more talented; therefore, he pushed himself to meet the high expectations that existed for him on the football field and basketball court. The lesson we need to remember here is that we must express to young African American teenage males like Raymond that we expect as much out of them in the classroom and life as we do in athletics. Something else that caught my attention during the interview was Raymond's response to religion and the church. When the topic of church and religion came about, Raymond just kind of laugh and admitted that preachers talk a good game, but their actions lacked sincerity. His laugh

was almost as if he wanted to say something even more insulting about modern-day preachers that he encountered, but he refrained himself from doing so. From part of the interview, I was able to gather that preachers and leaders in the African American community must practice what they preach because the alternative is to become a joke to young men that need us as examples the most.

### **Terrell Duhon's Story**

*What do you think is a problem African-American teenage males are facing today? I think trouble always find African American males. Umm I believe trouble is the main one because it is there, we can be as successful as we want to be. We just don't take advantage of the opportunities, and some come from rough neighborhoods and backgrounds and have never been taught. I would say trouble find us because of our backgrounds, but you can't always blame it on that you just have to learn as you get older what's right and what's wrong. What do you feel like is society's viewpoint of African-American teenage males? I believe society they really don't expect African American teenage males to make it. I don't think if they had to depend on us one day they wouldn't want to because of the percentage of us that graduate and our backgrounds and we get judged off some stuff that people should not be judged off of. How do you think your teachers feel about African-American teenage males? I believe our school do what they can. They set us up for success whether we take the opportunity or not. They give us the school, material, and information we need. They tell us what to be prepared for on the test and they just help us out like that. Like what I said it is up to us to take advantage of it. I don't think they fully understand us culturally. They don't understand the backgrounds we come from like every African American their daddy/father is not always home. Like I usually single mothers be raising them and they don't understand that. I would say they don't, but maybe they do. I think they*

*could probably better teach us if they understood more about our situation. They would be able to communicate with them better in a mental way.*

*Have you ever been taught by any African-American educators? In all of my school experiences, I have never had an African American male teacher. From what I've seen White teachers don't treat us any different they kinda treat all of us the same. I haven't seen any situations where I felt like Blacks were treated different, I can't say that I have seen it. How does it make you feel to be treated different when you know it is because of your race? I use being an African American male as an advantage because nobody expect you to make it so you know some people use that as fuel like I do to do better you know just prove everybody wrong. Just the way African American males go about things at school and the way they do teachers might think they are a hood rat or they not here to learn, and they just here to cause trouble, commotion but that's not always the case. Like I said trouble just seem to always find African American males. How do you think your educational experience would have been different if you had more African American teachers? If we had more African American male teachers I think school would be different. The teachers at an African American school could probably communicate with you better. They know they pretty much know what the situation is at home and they will be able to communicate mentally with you. Sometimes White teachers don't even realize they can't identify with us you know their situation is so different.*

*Are successful African-American men discussed in your classes? We don't really talk about African American men like Martin Luther King in my classes. I really don't know what the deal is with that I mean it's history just like the White folk got history we got history too. I'm not sure why they won't talk about it as much. I don't know if it is racism or what. From my experience when we do talk a little about people like Martin Luther King the White students take*



*it okay. What has your overall school experience from elementary to the present time been like? I would have to say my school experience overall has been good. I feel like overall my teachers have tried to set me up for success. I love school because it is good for personality, learning, and that's pretty much it. I don't feel like I have been taught a lot about myself or whatever. I think it would have been good to know more about my background and African American leaders who made it. I feel like they feel that information is just not that important.*

*How has life been thus far as an African-American teenage male? Life can be good or bad depending on the way you live it that's pretty much it. My friends try to give everybody an equal chance. My friends my age don't really use racism it is like everybody is just one group. When do you think you realized that being African-American meant that you were different in some kind of way? It wasn't until around eight or ninth grade that I realized that race can be such a big deal. I realized that it was gonna be a little bit harder. You kind of have to look out for yourself. They already don't expect African American males to be successful. They do expect White males to be the leader of the country and stuff. It is gonna be harder for us African Americans to get up there, but it is possible. But it is like I said earlier I used that as fuel. How does that make you feel? It really don't make me feel bad because I don't mind working hard.*

*What do you think about African-American men from your personal experience? I feel like we let trouble find us too much. We got too many African American males out there who coulda or shoulda did something with the knowledge or athletic ability, but I feel that it's just a hump that African American males get caught on the hump it's just trouble. We can be successful and leaders just like the White males can. Do you feel like young African-American males miss something when their fathers are not in the home? I don't feel like much is missing when an African American male is missing in the home. You know, as you get older you know right from*

wrong. It could be tough for a minute, but once you get a certain age you just gotta do what you gotta do. You can't think about not having a father because once you know right from wrong that's it. What do you think would have been different for you if your father was around more? Me not having my father in the home daily has helped me in a positive way. It just gives me fuel to keep grinding to be what I know I can be one day. If my father was in the house everyday the biggest difference would have been more rules. We stay in contact every now and then, but nothing pretty much woulda changed. Do you think most African-American men are good or bad role models? Why? I think in general most African American men are bad role models. We got fathers that just don't stick around very long with their kids. Some do, but the majority don't. I've seen some of my friends fathers go to clubs every weekend or on drugs so a lot of these African American kids don't get a chance to be around their father a lot. How do you view yourself as an African-American teenage male? I feel like I'm just a kid from a small town trying to make it out, and use my knowledge and athletic to the best of my ability. Just trying to show that you can come out of a small town with not many people like you and still make it big one day. How do you feel about yourself in comparison to your White counterparts? I feel that I could be up there with the White students in my class. I slip some times and should be doing things different, but I feel like I could do more than I do. I do stupid things like not studying when I should be or wrong place wrong time or hanging with wrong crowd. What are some areas that you have been successful and/or unsuccessful at? I have been successful in the classroom, but I could have been doing much better. I do pretty good in athletics. Just African American male stuff when I could be studying with my head in the books because White students always got their head in the book.

*What type of father do you hope to be one day? I hope to be the type of father one day that will be there for his kids and be at their events at school, be in contact with the teachers and just be with them every step of the way until they are grown enough to make it on their own. How do you think your educational experience would have been different with more African-American male students? With more African American male teachers I might would have had more of a mental connect they would have just known my situation a little better and that my situation might not be perfect and I need somebody to talk to or extra help. How do you feel about our first African-American President? I am glad we got an African American male president. He is paving the way for those of us to come. Like I said White people don't always believe that we are smart enough to be in those positions that high, but he is showing them that we can and he is showing us that we can too. Most of my White friends got negative things to say about him and I hear racists statements about him, but some people like him. Why is that? I think it just comes from the history that we use to be slaves, and some probably wish it was still like slavery. Ignorance is the only reason I can come up with for that. Although I attend a predominately White school I still think I identify with Blacks more.*

*How do you feel about African-American pastors and the role they have played in your life? The African American preachers I have come across seem pretty sincere you know if I called them and needed something they would help out. I don't think they have done a whole lot so far as action in the community as a whole, but will speak of it or help you if you need it. What do you think is a solution to better our African-American male community? We just got to keep African American grown males to push the African American male teenagers to do the best they can, and help them out. They need to be in high places to show us that we can be in high places one day.*

### **Reflections on Terrell Duhon's Story**

I could tell that Terrell Duhon was a little nervous about telling his story, which is normal for a teenage African American male. After all, men in general are not eager to share personal things with anybody especially about a topic like racism. About five minutes into the interview, something seemed to click that made him feel like it was okay to tell his story, and that I would not judge him for doing so. Once he opened up it, became apparent very quickly that he was not as aware of racism and discrimination as were some of the other young men (he was the youngest) whom I interviewed. However, as strange as this might sound, as I followed his story above, it is as if he became more conscious about racism and discrimination as he openly talked about the subject. Something else that became apparent to me was that he seemed not realize the importance of having African American men in his life because he has journeyed through life without one, which lead him to believe that African American role models are good, but maybe not a necessity.

I quickly gathered two things from his story before we left the room. First, conversations about race and discrimination must take place because it is in these conversations that an awareness and knowledge about racism and discrimination occur. Second, we must provide an increased number of African American male role models so that we, as African American older men, are relevant to our young African American teenage males.

## **Mike Sanders's Story**

*What is a problem facing African-American teenage males today? Uh the main problem I think is the family issue really that most African American males don't have a lot of father figures in their life because well statistics is right on a lot of them being that they do grow up without a father because their parents get divorce or whatnot. What do you think is society's viewpoint of African-American teenage males? Off the bat White people see a Black dude just doing whatever. I feel like when they see me they see a dude that they assume smoke, fight, think I am in a game, or just out doing bad stuff. This is because of the image they see of us in the media, and how they view us all together like all the stuff they hear about us. How do you think your teachers feel about African-American teenage males? When my teachers first look at some of us I think they look at the way we dress and stuff and the way we act outside of class. Then in some cases they might be right and in some cases they are not going to know until they really get to know us. Some of the teachers try to get to know us for who we really are and some don't it just depends on who the teacher is. Those that try to get to know us probably been around a couple of Black people who look the same way, but didn't act anything like they thought they would act. How many African-American teachers have you had in school? I have only had one African American male teacher my entire career. The class with a Black teacher is like having someone more over your shoulder because they know how society is gonna look at you as African American so they expect you not to act like what the bad statistics say about us. White teachers treat us different because of how we are portrayed. For example, lets say something happens in class and the teacher doesn't know who did it they are gonna automatically think the Black kid did it because of the image they have of us. I like to clown around in class sometimes just to be honest about it, but then again some of the White guys in the class clown around as*

*well, but it is like when Black people do it is a whole different story sometimes. How does it make you feel to know you are being treated differently solely on the color of your skin? I mean when it first started happening I got angry, upset, and you know pissed off about it, but then you know through the years you kinda get used to all of it with all eyes being on you thinking such and such. Can you think of any situations where you or someone you know was treated differently because they were African American? This has nothing to do with school, but I can remember one time one of my friends [a Black male] (well I wasn't there, but he told me about it) was walking around the mall and he was with one of his White friends and they walked in together and walked out together, but when they walked out of one of the stores the bell ring I mean the alarm thing, and they automatically thought it was him the Black guy they didn't even check the White kid they just automatically thought it was him. I feel like in most cases it's a disadvantage to be an African American male student or in life in general because there is a lot of pressure and things that will be put in your way to prevent you from getting to certain stuff, but you just got to work through it. How do you think your educational experience at a predominately African-American school would have been different? Me personally I think I could have been successful at a predominately White or Black school. Are successful African-American males discussed in your classes? Like in our school, which is mainly White, the only time we talk about African American leaders is when it is mentioned very briefly in a section of a book. We just read and state the facts and keep moving. It is as if it's information that everybody should already know, and they don't go into detail about Martin Luther King, Jr life just as an example. They just say what he did, not who he was or what he stood for. If it is President Obama they are talking about White students make comments like ahh there ain't gonna be no Black man in the White House and stuff like that. I know the teachers hear it, but there response is nothing and*

*they just look. What has your experience in public education been like? Honestly I feel like I have had a good experience in my public educational journey except for a few situations that I have been in when I have been prevented from doing stuff just because I was Black. Like in middle school to get into REACH (program for students with above average intelligence), like I didn't know this, but a White teacher actually told me this. I thought I failed the test to get into reach, but she told me I actually passed and exceeded the test, but it's like White people who made lower test scores than I did, but they still got in reach. She didn't explain why, but she specifically told me, and this is one of the teachers I actually like, but she just told me that the tests didn't that the majority of the people they wanted in REACH were White. So she basically told me that I didn't get into reach because I was Black. She wasn't the one that made out the test or graded it. She was just willing to be honest with me.*

*How do you feel about life in general as an African-American male? I feel like life is messed up how they do us (Black males). Like that Travon Martin case I feel like if it was a Black man in what's his name (Zimmerman) and a White man in Travon shoes then the Black man would have went to jail, but instead Zimmerman not being Black he just got set free. How do you think society views intelligent African-American men? If you are a Black male that's educated they don't view us as just being smart, but instead they view us as Black and educated with an emphasis on the word "Black"! They think it's so rare to be a Black man and be educated, but it really is not. Some Black males be happy to see other Black successful men; however, some of them believe the statistics that Black males suppose to act a certain way so they be like he trying to be like the White man when they see a Black successful man when really it has nothing to do with race it has to do with intelligence. I haven't been chewed out by people of my own race for being smart, but I have had a bunch people look at me and be like oh he can't*

*be smart, but once they get to know me they are like oh yea he is pretty smart. When do you think you realized that being an African-American male meant that you were different in some kind of way? When I was in middle school I realized that being Black meant I was different. There was one day me and my brother was just walking the road at home, and it was about 9:00 at night or something like dark outside, and a police just ride up and stop us. We were just walking in the road and he pulled up and we don't have anything in our hands or on us, and he just get out the car flashing lights and asking questions and whatnot like we were doing something bad when we were just walking. I was pissed off I was like we weren't doing nothing. The officer asked us what we were doing and we just said walking home. He made us empty our pockets, and then when he didn't find anything he just kept asking us do you'll have anything on ya. We were like no we got nothing. We were just to Black dread heads walking.*

*How do you feel about African-American men from your personal experiences? Most of the African American adult males that I have seen really fit into the statistics. Like most of them out there selling drugs, doing drugs, in gangs, and there are really a few amount that I have seen with a high level education. Do you feel like young African-American men miss out on something when their father(s) not around? I honestly feel like we miss out on something when Black fathers are not in the home or involved in our lives. Like I really believe that if we as young Black men saw more successful Black men in our lives or as authority figures then we would actually try to stride to do better instead of falling into the statistics. The main thing about my father leaving was a lot of emotional stress and not just on me, but on the entire family. So I think a stuff that has happened wouldn't have happen if he was there because we would have had that father figure in our life. I honestly don't know what would have been different with raising part if my father was at home every night, I honestly can't say. Do you feel like most African-*



*American men are good or bad role models? Why? The majority of Black men I would have to honestly say bad on that because the majority of African American males that have kids are not in their kids lives because of a situation that made them leave or they just didn't want to be there so a lot of young Black men join gangs trying to find that father figure. For one we got to stop acting like how the media project the Black males, because the majority of the Black men that end up falling into those statistics grow up thinking this is how I am and they just accept that they suppose to be like that, which actually create the statistics itself because then they are not doing anything to change it. What role has the media played in shaping the mindset of African-American men? I think if the media stopped portraying us in a negative way then you will start to see things changes among African American men. I think of it as everybody has free will and everybody got the right to choose what they want to do, and if they want to do something they gonna do it, but the thing is a lot of them don't... they have the ability to use their free will, but they don't. They allow people to think for them so they look at the stuff on television and they just think this is who I am. How do you feel about the first African-American President? Most people look at President Obama and say well he is not completely Black. I think because of the little bit we learn about them in school people see Martin Luther King, Jr and President Obama as people who led movements, but when they look on television they be like I got to do this, that, and the other to be cool. They don't view good guys as being cool because all we talk about is what they did. For example, I know this, but in school all we say is Barak Obama is the president we don't talk about the fact that he like basketball, and he grew up in a tough city, raised by his grandmother. But when we talk about the Whites we talk about how much money they had, the families they come from, the material things they had, which make them appear to be cool. How do we counteract the bad impact the media has on the image and mindset of African-American*

*men? If we showed the “cool” side of African American leaders more then I think people would start to pattern themselves after them instead of the negative images that are looked at as being cool. We also got to do a better job of keeping the fathers in the family so that the kids want have to go out searching for African American male role models, trying to be in gangs because they are looking for somebody to look up to. We really can’t do a whole lot for the men that have already left, but for the younger men like myself we need to educated on how to keep your family together, and what things you shouldn’t do that causes you to loose your family. That lesson is something that appears we are gonna have to reach a certain level of maturity, and teach ourselves because it is not taught in school. Unless they have absolutely nobody in their lives I don’t know how we teach them to be good men, but for the Black males that are good fathers in their children lives, they got to teach the others how to overcome and reach out to help them become great fathers one day and not just their own kids. Me personally I have seen how it impacts the family when the father leaves the house. I listen to same music that influences the rest of the Black males in a negative way, but the difference between me and them is that I actually see what the problem is in my opinion so that’s why I can see the need for more Black role models in the community.*

*How do you view yourself as an African-American male? I view myself; well I am one of the top students in my class so I view myself as a smart Black male who is in school. I know being I got dread lots I am going to be viewed in other ways, but I have never took drink or smoked, and I play sports so I consider myself an athlete, and I like to joke around like any other person Black or White so I consider myself a normal person. I actually feel smarter than my White counterparts. I see their grades. I am going to be real it surprises me that there are not more smart White people in my class. Like the majority of the football team the smartest ones are*

*actually the Black ones, but most people in our school would automatically say it is the White players. I know some of my other Black friends feel the same way, but not all of them. What type of father do you desire to be one day? One day when I am a father I think I will be a strict father because I know how things can draw you. I know I will be the type of father to be in my kids' lives. I will not leave my kids for nothing not even if my wife wanted to get a divorce, but I am going to be in my kids' lives regardless no matter what. I'm gonna make sure they got a father figure and not right from wrong so they won't have to do all the things society say that they do. I think that seeing the things my father did and didn't do made me realize the things I actually need to do. You know seeing how it impacted the family when he left just made me realize one day that when I become a father I need to be their for my kids. I have been very successful academically. I honestly feel like I am pretty smart, but I don't know if I'm top five kind of smart just for the fact their study habits are better. Now I'll be honest if I was in a very strict home where I was made to study I could probably be top five in my class. I think most parents, not just Black, but any parent feel like if they to strict the kid will start being rebellious and doing things behind their back out of spite, but not being strict might not be the answer to helping us become successful. I think the look and image on the Black race if there were more Black authority figures. I think having a Black president has been like having any other president if not better because of everything he has had to go through to get to that point. Most guys think because we are Black we suppose to be a rapper or playing sports, but President Obama show otherwise. I don't feel like most of my teachers like the President, but I guess no president is liked by everybody. I think I identify more with Black, but I feel like I can mix in with any crowd.*

*How do you feel about African-American pastors from your personal experience?*

*African American preachers I think it is good to see a Black man as a preacher preaching the*

*word of God. I think Black preachers are the most sincere about their religion because of what we have been through. For example, a Black man can walk into a Black church and be looked at as if he doesn't belong. In the Black churches like the church I was at we have White people come in and we open them with open arms, which is the Christian thing to do. Honestly I do think Black preachers could do more in the actual communities besides just a sermon on Sunday morning. They will preach the word of God, which is good, but I also think it would be good to teach African American males how to rise above the statistics as well. Some Black preachers can be judgmental of those that don't dress or act a certain way, but not all of them are like that.*

### **Reflections on Mike Sander's Story**

From the beginning of Mike's interview until the end, one thing was obvious, and that was his awareness of racism and discrimination even as a teenager. I would catch myself getting angry as he shared some of his experiences about racism and discrimination in the above story. A sense of anger was on his part because he did not understand fully why people would discriminate against him because of the color of his skin and length of his hair. A sense of anger on my part existed because I did understand why the racial majority would treat him the way he discussed in his story. Mike was mature past his years, and what demonstrated his maturity was, despite his experience with racism and discrimination, he mentioned a White teacher from middle school whom he had a great amount of respect. I could tell from listening to his story that although he realized that racism and discrimination existed, he was not going to allow that to cause him to retaliate by being that way himself. That decision took a great deal of maturity, which some adults lack. What I gathered from Mike's story was hope because he realizes the good and bad of a society divided by race, and he remains positive that he can be successful despite racism and discrimination. I realized that there are African American teenage males out

there who are aware of racism and discrimination; however, their goal is to be the best person they can be to all humankind.

### **Shane Nixon's Story**

*What do you think are some of the issues African-American teenage males are facing today? Uh I think African American teenage males suffer from being fatherless although anything can happen at home even with two parents. How do you think society view African-American men? Society view us as gangbangers wanting to sell dope, or just wanting to be in the streets, flip hamburgers maybe. To me they view us like that because of the way they see rappers, and the way we dress ourselves at school and other places. We have dreads and sagging pants, and we not putting forth effort in our education, and bad attitudes and everything else so they view us negatively. Black men have it flipped. They think it is cooler to have your pants down rather than being smart and studying. I am able to understand that the rappers are making money to do all of that, but I'm not. I saw a sign at a store today that said pull up your pants before walking in the store. Whites are the ones who are making the rules about what is good and bad. How do you feel like your teachers treat African-American male students? It's fifty fifty as far as how my White teachers treat African American male students. The African American males who have the parents there teaching them the way to go they like them, and the ones that don't have any home training they don't like them. How many African-American teachers have you had since you been in school? I think I have had two African American teachers one male and one female. I feel like the African American teachers can relate to your more. They can come down to your level because not everybody works on the same level as White kids do. As Black kids we do struggle a little bit more, and Black teachers are more willing to help. White teachers teach on a different level than Black teachers do. White teachers teach Black kids as if*

*we are dumb and the White kids as if they are smart; whereas, the Black teachers teach everybody as equals. I think all of this come way back from the slaves days where all this started from. It's not fair towards me or my comrades that I get treated one way because I come from a good home and they get treated differently because they didn't come from a good home or they are not well dressed, well mannered, or into their studies as much as I am. Because of my skin color they think a Black man is never supposed to be on top. He is supposed to always stay on the bottom according to how they were taught back in the day to look upon us. We supposed to be like dogs or a footstool to them. Can you think of a time or situation where you were treated differently because of the color of your skin? I can remember playing on a particular baseball team and my dad got pretty ticked off because the guy kept putting his son in over me. Do you feel like it is an advantage or disadvantage being an African-American male student? Being an African American male student can sometimes be an advantage and disadvantage because on one hand I can show what I can do, but they are going to always look at me as the lower half or the bottom. How do you think your educational experience would have been different if you attended a predominately African-American school? I think if I was a predominately Black school my experience would be totally different. You get a comfort feeling when you are around more people that's your color. There is nothing wrong with being around White people all the time, but you feel more like a power sense when you around people of your color. For example, in my classes right now we don't really discuss Black heroes or when we do we read over it real quick, and we keep it moving. My experience with public education is it is all about who you know. If you don't know anybody oh well good luck to you, but it is all about who you know and your connections, whose going to help you get where you going in a predominately White school. I get pushed more by my teachers because my mom and grandmother both work in the school*

*system so they expect more out of me. They help me more than they help some of the other Black students because it is all about connections.*

*How do you feel about life in general being an African-American male? It's tough being an African American male. You can expect that nothing in life will be given to you; we got to work for everything we do. I mean we were already born with a mark against us. We got to live up to the White man standards to get by. I think a lot of racism is taught in church. We don't know what is going on behind closed doors in all White and Black churches. We both taught stuff behind close doors. How do you feel society view intelligent African-American men? Smart African American young men are intimidating to White people. They don't like a smart Black man like President Barak Obama. They feel like he knows the answer to things, and how to answer them correctly on the questions that are received from White men. When did you realize that you were different or being treated different because of the color of your skin? When I first started playing sports in recreation ball I realized that I was being treated differently than others around me. Not being cocky, but I was better than the White kid, but he received way more playing time than I did. We can be successful when we put our minds to it. We have been blessed with tremendous talents. Not many Black males have that get up and go unless somebody get up and push them, but so far as the talent we got it. Do you feel like young African-American men miss out on something when their father(s) are not around? When guys don't have fathers at home they miss out I feel on things about life that a father can teach you more about than a mother could such as changing a tire, fixing stuff, and any other little handy stuff that man would do that woman wouldn't do. If it weren't for my father I wouldn't know as much as know now. I would probably know some things, but not a whole lot. You have your pros and your cons when*

*it comes to role models. Some Black men are worthy of looking up to, but then there are some that are not. Everyone has some good inside of them so it's fifty fifty.*

*How do you perceive yourself as an African-American male? I view myself as being successful and going to the top. I believe if you put my test scores against my White classmates test scores they will come out to being pretty close the same. I mean the ones that people think are smart you really find out they really not that smart. I hope to be a dependable, trustworthy, loving, caring type of father. That's how my father has been to me. What are some areas you have been successful and unsuccessful in as an African-American male? I have been successful academically and a little bit athletically. Both of my parents make me put my academics before athletics. I could have been more successful in sports, but because of coaches I feel like I have been limited. We only have one Black coach and the rest of them are White. It helps Black athletes when we have someone we can relate to or someone that we can go to. It's just different because some of the stuff we go through we would feel more comfortable going to a Black coach because the White coaches want understand and they wouldn't know what to say to help you with your problem. They don't study a lot about our culture because they don't think it is important. They think that most Black kids come to school because we are either forced to do so or be locked up, or we just coming to barely get by so they don't try to learn things about us. The few Black coaches and teachers I have had want to see you succeed. It's strange because in slavery the White men would rape Black women; however, they view us as important enough to learn about us. How do you think your teachers and friends feel about President Obama? A few White people like President Obama because of their political views, but so far as having a Black man over American they don't like that. Do you feel like you identify more with White culture or African-American culture? I actually feel like I identify myself more with White society because*



*they know everything that you need to know in order to keep yourself up you kinda have to stay with them if you don't you gonna miss the boat. Their parents and teachers tell them everything that we as Blacks don't know, but they know more about and staying and listening them and getting them to tell you stuff that they probably don't suppose to tell you is very beneficial. It is kinda like a good gang (he laughs). You kinda got to be in the clique with them so they will tell you stuff. Now so far as culture I definitely identify the most with Black people, and prefer Black people.*

*How do you feel about African-American pastors based on your experience in church? Some preachers are good and some aint. Some are hypocrites and some not. The ones that reach out and help you spiritually and mentally are good ones. The hypocrites are there just to hurt you and let your spirit down when you need encouragement. For example, my granddaddy was very outgoing in the community as a preacher by helping single mothers and some two-parent homes with their kids and teaching them how to work. We not taught enough on life things that you will experience when you are out on your own. They teach us how to work hard, but they leave out the other stuff. I feel like African American preachers have done some good stuff in the community; however, I think that there is more that can be done. How do we produce more good African-American male role models? I don't know if there is a solution to fix the "Black men problem". You still gonna have a few that come from good homes, and the ones that don't come from good homes. Some get caught up in that fast life of selling drugs, and it is quick easy money. My view is I have seen kids from good homes turn out bad so I feel it is a fifty fifty chance.*

### **Reflections on Shane Nixon's Story**

Shane Nixon was part of that small percentage of African American teenage males who lived with both parents, the mother and father. It was obvious both parents were involved in his life by his story. Shane understood the importance of education, and he was aware of the politics that existed in school, society, and sports. His understanding of politics being in school, society, and sports reminded me of myself because I also came from a two-parent home. It was obvious Shane's father had discussions with him about how life works, and that most African American teenage males have to learn on their own. He understood that his mother and grandmother working in the school system granted him benefits that most African American teenage males did not get, like extra help from teachers, the benefit of the doubt, and the luxury of having certain minor actions overlooked. I was more impressed that Shane realized that not all his peers got the same treatment, and he was able to equate his privileges to being about who the individual knows. Shane understood the power of the hidden languages such as the power of affiliation, important information, and culture. Shane mentioned during his story that he felt like hanging with White students put him in a situation to be successful because they (White) know the information that is needed to be successful. This alludes to the idea that African-American students do not. That was somewhat disturbing because it made his African-Americans seem inferior; however, I understand that thought process is a form of indoctrination that several successful African-American males have embedded in their souls. As I listened to Shane tell his story I could hear the lessons that he had been taught by his father in his voice.

### **Jerome Dixon's Story**

*What do you feel are some of the struggles for African-American teenage males? Uhh I don't think African American males, well for one I say it is the father figure in the house because*

*you know now days it's a single parent in the house mostly moms. The fathers you know they don't stick around after the birth of their child. I guess the son feel like I know I mean every man has a responsibility, and that is to take care of their home, but some of these males out here they feel they have... a higher responsibility like selling drugs to pay their bills or like help their mom out or whoever is raising them. Mostly Black males feel like they have to go out and sell drugs just to make it, to make their pension, or help their parents out, but they really don't. All they have to do is stay in school and get their education and stay out of trouble, but most of these Black males they really not trying to hear that so they do what they wanna do. I feel like we are not stepping up to the plate. A lot of these Black males are out here having babies and not stepping up to the plate. I feel like most of them should be either in school or working instead of out here in the streets. How do you feel society view African-American men? I feel like society feels like we are not responsible and we are wild animals. I think society they don't give us, African Americans, a chance you know to prove them wrong. That is caused by the way as we as African American males dress, the clothes we wear, the sagging pants, the way we talk. You really can't tell a lot about a person by the way they look, dress, or talk it is hard to accurately judge a person by all of that.*

*What is the race of most of your teachers? Most of our teachers are White. It is probably 75% to 25% White to Black ratio of teachers. I know you attend a predominately African-American school, how do you feel the teachers feel about African-American males? Most of the teachers there in my school feel like we have a chance to make it. I mean they don't judge us they try to help us, but most of the time we really don't be trying to listen or all that we be in our own zone. Have you experienced any African-American teachers? I have had African American female teachers, but not African American male teachers. African American female teachers*

*push us, get close to us, get to know us better. Some of the White teachers they try to get close to us, and get to know us too, but it is not the same as being taught by an African American female teacher. To me some of my teachers they helped me with my work, but I say the difference between the White and African American teacher was say for instance I did something wrong in the African American teacher class she will pull me to the side and talk to me or whatever and talk to me. She will tell me you know you did something wrong, and I will say yea I know I did and the White teacher really want say anything maybe after class she will come up to me and say something, but it is not the same as it was with African American female teacher. I want to say it is different because the African American female teacher see something good in me, and she holds me accountable whereas the White teacher in her mind is saying he gonna do what he wants to do, but if he wants to learn he will sit in class and be quite and listen. I wouldn't say the White teacher don't see anything in me, but in the class most of the students that act up are the African American students in the class so she will put them out and teach the students that want to learn. How does it make you feel to know that sometimes you are treated differently based on the color of your skin? Sometimes it kinda make me mad to know that I being treated differently because of my race, but sometimes I really just don't care. Can you think of a specific incident where an African American male was treated different because of his race? There was this one time I was in school, and the African American male got in a fight with a White kid, and they were fighting. They both got in trouble, but the African American kid got suspended from school, and if I remember correctly the White kid had ISS for 2 days or so, and then he was back in class, but when the African American male came back from suspension he still had 2 days of ISS left. I feel like that is wrong. They both were fighting, but the African American kid punishment was harsher than the White kid. In that situation it is definitely a disadvantage to be a Black*

*male. Do you feel like being an African-American male student is an advantage or disadvantage? I am not racist against my on color or anything, but being Black is a disadvantage sometimes because the Whites they basically try to control us or whatever. It is a disadvantage because while the Black kid was kicked out of the school the White kid was there learning while the Black kid couldn't learn. How do you think you would feel being at a predominately White school? If I was at a school where the students were majority White I think it woulda been different in a way. I don't know if the school you are referring to would have more White or Black teachers, but I do know the students are majority White, but I'll say it would be somewhat different. In the fighting situation I was just talking about the Black kid probably would have been kicked out instead of suspended at a predominately White school. Are successful African-American men discussed in your classes? Even at my school that is majority Black student wise, we do not talk a lot about successful African Americans like Martin Luther King Jr, and I think about that sometimes too like when I go home at night when I am laying down in bed I be like I am saying to myself we don't learn the Black history at our school. Really we should know a lot about our own history, but we have to go home and get on the computer to get it, and sometimes I do feel like the teachers should be teaching us more about our Black history. How has standardized testing impacted you as a student? The testing has been the most difficult part of my schooling experience. We have different test every year or whatever, but I feel like the testing is making it harder for us Black males or any African American to succeed. They see we are trying but I don't think they want us to succeed. I mean the stuff they teach us in class really don't be on the test and we just have to guess on the test. Sometimes I be sitting there looking at the test and I just be like we didn't learn this or whatever, and we go back to the class the next day talking about what we didn't know on the test and teacher be surprised herself of*

*what was on the test. Do you think your schooling experience would be different with more African-American teachers? I feel that if we had more Black teachers that cared or even White teachers that truly cared about us personally that our graduation rate would be higher, we wouldn't be dropping out of schools, winding up in jail. Actually I think instead of building more jails we would need fewer jails.*

*How do you feel about life in general for African-American men? I feel like out here it's hard for an African American to get a job or anything. I mean to tell you the truth life is really what you make it. How do you feel intelligent African-American men are viewed? I feel that smart African American men are treated right. I guess the White people look at smart African American men and say they are just like us (White people). It is almost like being Black and smart is acting White. I feel it is racists for them to feel that way. I guess the Whites want us to be more like them, but I mean we are smart ourselves. For instance I think Martin Luther King Jr went to college at the age of 15. There were others just like him that went to college and got a chance to graduate. When did you begin to realize that by being an African-American male society would look at you different? I begin to realize that being African American meant I was different through the sport of football when I got to high school. I am a starter on the football and I am Black and I got a White boy who play the same position as me, and I feel the coaches they over work me, or whatever, while the White boy just sit on the sideline or whatever. It is not because he isn't a starter or they want to see me do better I just feel like sometimes I am overworked. I do think the coaches see more in me, but sometimes it just don't feel that way, it doesn't feel the same.*

*How do you feel about African-American men in general? I think not all of us African American males are bad, but I'll say for instance I mean my personal experience has been a lot*

*of older African American men want to see me succeed and they push me harder. Do you feel like fatherless African-American teenage males miss out on something? I think a young African American male misses out on something when their father is not present. Like learning how to take care of the family, work on stuff. If my father had been absent I don't think it would have changed anything about me because I would have been a stand up guy because I am kinda cool about stuff so I don't think it would have changed anything about me. I feel like by having my father there are some things like how to dress, tie a tie, walk with my head held high, and always look a person in the eye. Do you feel most African-American men are good or bad role models? I think most African American males are good role models at least the ones in my life are because they are helping out young African American me under them. How do you perceive yourself in this world? I view myself as a person who knows how to handle his self. I view myself as a strong African American male who is smart, and a hard worker. I really don't know how to compare myself to White students because I don't really have many in my class except weightlifting. I feel like if I was at a majority White school it would be hard because they would be looking at me as if why is he here or if I am standing in front of the class, and I look out and see them all whispering or whatever I would feel some type of way. How often do you come in contact with professional African-American? I have only seen a couple of African American male professionals in my life, but I would hope to one day be a good father kind of like my mentor Coach Black, and he mentor kids like myself, and one day I hope to have a mentoring group like his with more kids, but with a greater mixture. He has been very helpful to me. If we had more Coach Black's we would be very successful, more opportunities for jobs, more Black CEO's, and that would give us a higher rate of getting hired compared to going to a White person for a job. By being at a majority Black school with a Black principal I had the*

*opportunity to go to Washington D.C. for the presidential inauguration for President Obama. He came over the intercom and announced the opportunity, and we had to write an essay if we were interested, and I did and mine was chosen. I was excited and pleased with that. I was honored just to go to Washington D.C. to see President Obama. I was happy that we have an African American president because at one point in time I was saying to myself that if Martin Luther King was still here he would have been the first Black president, but President Obama is blessed to be the president. I really would have to say some of our teachers really don't care for him. Sometimes I will be walking down the hall and I can hear them bad stuff about the president. One time there was kid in my class who asked the teacher what did they feel about President Obama being president, and she didn't give an answer so I would have to say she doesn't care for him. If there was some areas that I feel like I needed to do better in it would have to be my school work because I have not taken it as seriously as I should have, but lately I have been paying more attention.*

*What role has African-American church leaders played in your life? African American preachers and deacons have played a huge role in my life. At my church they all want to see me succeed so they try to help me with whatever I need whether it is school or sports. We got to have more African Americans stepping up, going off to college, majoring in something you want to do. If we get more Coach Black's we will be better off.*

### **Reflections on Jerome Dixon's Story**

Jerome, like Shane, was part of the small percentage of African American teenage males who lived with both parents. However, sometimes his father was not the best role model that he could be at all times. Although Jerome did not refer to his father or their relationship much in his story, I noticed that Jerome constantly bragged on the people who helped him along the way in



life. In his story, Jerome spoke about two African Americans who granted him opportunities to travel and see the world. For Jerome to be telling a story about his life and these mentors, this bit of details illustrated the respect he had for them and what they meant to his life. Jerome also spoke of the experiences he has gained from his school, which had an African American principal. One opportunity was being able to go to Washington, DC for President Barack Obama's presidential inauguration. I can remember thinking during his interview that this was an opportunity, without an African American school leader, he would have possibly missed. Jerome's interview just reiterated the importance of African American mentors and leaders who are necessary to help lead our African American teenage males.

## CHAPTER 5

### REFLECTIONS ON MY INQUIRY

In this chapter, I explore seven findings that have emerged from my inquiry: (1) Schools and societies are racialized spaces that reproduce and perpetuate racism and discrimination that suppress African American teenage males' academic achievement. (2) The young men who told their stories did not specifically correlate the need for more African-American role models; however, we need to provide more positive African American role models to influence the ways African American teenager males learn and interact with others, how they construct their identities, and how they live their lives in schools and societies. (3) Culturally biased discipline policies and standardized tests assassinate the dreams and futures of African American teenage males before they graduate from their high schools. (4) Several of the young men mentioned encounters concerning discipline they have received based solely on the color of their skin; therefore, it is extremely important to teach our African American teenage males how to react to racism and discrimination to avoid being murdered such as what has happened to Travon Martin and Michael Brown. (5) Oral history methods allow African American teenage males to tell their silenced counterstories that challenge the official or meta-narrative and empower African American teenage males to understand the sources of racism and discrimination in schools and societies. (6) There is a demand to develop a culturally responsive and challenging pedagogy that help raise critical consciousness within African American teenager males and empower them to understand their situations and responsibilities in schools and societies and to develop strategies to fight against injustice. (7) It is of paramount importance to develop a caring, just, and inspiring learning and living environment where young African American males feel that they have equal opportunities to reach their highest potential (Siddle-Walker, 1996).

This dissertation derived from a collection of stories from five African American teenage males who live in a world with few role models that look like them. This research theoretically drew on the works of critical race theory (Bell, 1987, 1992, 1999; Delgado, 1989, 2000, 2012; DuBois, 1903; Ladson-Billings, 2001, 2003, 2006, 2009, 2013; King, 1963, 1981; Solorzano, 2002; Stefancic, 2012; Tate, 2006; West 1993, 2001, 2008; Yosso, 2002). Culturally relevant pedagogy also played a role in this research (Gay, 2010). To examine African American identity/masculinity, I drew upon the works writers who spoke out against cultural irrelevant pedagogy (Crichlow, 1993; Harper, 2014; Hayward, 2014; hooks, 2004; McCarthy, 1993; Wallace, 2002). To examine the education of African American males I looked at the ideas of writers who described barriers to quality education for African American students (Brown, 2000; Dixson, 2006; Fergus, 2004; Kafele, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2001, 2003, 2006, 2009, 2013; Martin 2004; Noguera 2003, 2004, 2008). Geographically, looking at education in the South, I drew upon the works that highlighted structural inequality in schools (Alexander 2010; Anderson, J 1988; Anderson, K 1988, 2006; Woodson 1933) Finally, Black protest thought was used to carry out this research as well (Broderick 1987; Meier 1987; Rudwick 1987; Stovall 2005; Watkins 2001, 2005).

I used oral history and storytelling as my methodology (Baum, 1991; Delgado, 1989; Leavy, 2011; Perks, 1998; Ritchie, 2003; Shopes, 1998). In order to protect the identity of the storytellers, I fictionalized the settings, events, times, and places of the young men who were brave enough to share their stories.

As an African American male myself, all of my educational experiences were carried out at learning institutions in which the majority of the educators and students were White. I never really viewed race as a *problem* so to say until I started reading the works of Cornel West,

William Watkins, Derrick Bell, Carter G. Woodson, W.E.B. Du Bois, Martin Luther King, Jr., bell hooks, and Michelle Alexander, just to name a few. I am embarrassed, but liberated, in admitting that in 19 years of formal education, I had never been encouraged or required to read works by African American authors, until I encountered the professors within the Curriculum Studies program. I can remember writing my first literature review in the program for Dr. Ming Fang He. After looking at my list of authors, she said go back compile a list of works to read by African American authors. This was the beginning of a construction site for tearing down the indoctrination to which I was exposed for years. Occasionally, the likes of Martin Luther King, and a few other heroic African Americans would occur in my schooling experience. During the 19 years I attended public schools, my African American History course, taught by Dr. Young at Georgia Southern University, was the only exception to this rule. Throughout my grade level years in public education, I can recall seeing only a few African American male educators and administrators. I can vividly remember these men being, what I saw at the time, considered different from the others in the profession. They seemed to always dress better, and they expected higher of us African American students than the others. In fact, I can remember thinking bad thoughts of some of them, at times, because I felt like they were wrong in expecting so much out of us. Now that I am older, I have a better understanding of what was taking place at that time. Although the curriculum did not allow them to focus on African American history, no more than their counterparts, they understood the hidden messages needed by the young African American males who were seeing them daily.

As I immersed myself into the political, social, and educational readings by African American authors, I became knowledgeable about facts like hegemony, White privilege, cultural relevant pedagogy, and the cultural disconnection that existed between African American males

and the rest of the United States. I began to look at movies, society, and life in general, with a different set of lenses. I just entered my ninth year as an educator and administrator in public education. Ever since I entered the Curriculum Studies program, I continuously analyzed my own flaws and the lack of promoting African American culture within public education. I have begun to look at the conscious and unconscious punishments handed down to African American teenage males because of cultural differences and the cultural disconnect between these young men and those in positions of power. I am troubled when I see young men falsely accused of acts they did not commit, but found guilty because nobody believes nor can relate to them.

I am troubled when I see schools that are majority White; however, in school suspensions, special education classes, and out of school suspension cases, the majority of the students are Black. I am troubled when I see students witness their culture ignored day-after-day, except for the one month of February. The Travon Martin and Michael Brown cases are just two stories of worse case scenarios in American when African American teenage males are misunderstood.

With my new set of lenses, I began to look at the situation for African American teenage males in my own community. I began to reflect on the educational experience that an African American teenage male, growing up in my community in rural Georgia would be like. During my reflection moments, I realized that an African American male could start school in pre-kindergarten, and go all the way through Grade 12 and see only between five and seven African American male educators, and the likelihood of having one of those African American males, as a teacher was slim to none! Then I reflected further and thought about the statistic of single mother homes mentioned in Chapter I. I kept reflecting and realized that when single mothers go

to the doctor, court, or face a law enforcement officer, these single mothers still do not see a familiar face.

As the picture became clear, I began to visualize that in my community an African American male realistically could go their entire life and never encountered an African American male role model, particularly one in a position of power. I became so disturbed in my spirit that I started to question myself about how and where did I want my future kids to grow up and attend school. I began to ask myself was desegregation really a good thing for African American males. As I started connecting my newly discovered revelation with all the negative statistics that I mentioned in Chapter I about African American males, it dawned on me that I should go straight to the source of those individuals who live this culturally disconnected life. I decided that I would interview five African American teenage males who currently were experiencing the nightmare of being a stranger in the same geographical area in which they entered at birth. I wanted to see how these young men felt about the absence of African American fathers and role models in their lives. I wanted to know how their lived experience shaped their view of who African American men are or what they are supposed to be. So often, we have speculated and used quantitative data to diagnose the problem with African American males, but I decided to go straight to the source and see what they had to say about their experiences as marginalized individuals in America, "*the land of the free and the home of the brave*" (from "The Star Spangled Banner").

All five of the participants in this study attended public schools and lived in rural Georgia. Four of the participants in this study attended schools that had a predominately-White student population as well as educators' population. One participant attended a school in which the majority of the students were African American and the head principal was an African

American male. However, the majority of teachers were White. Single mothers were the head of the household for three of the participants, while two-participants lived in two-parent homes. The revelations of my study emerged from the stories collected from these young men.

Through the collection of stories from these five young men about their experiences in school and life with such a major absence of African American role models, I came across several findings that stood out as I noted at the beginning of this chapter. The participants in this study were living in a time in which they were looked upon as problematic, thuggish, dumb, and criminals before people even got to know their names. The other side to that issue was that the participants were living at a time in which some individuals think that racism and discrimination no longer exists. A common belief is if we can have an African American president in the United States, no excuse exists for anyone else of color not to be successful. This statement could not be further from the reality of racism and discrimination in America today.

As I listened to the young men as they tell their stories, I realized that schools and societies are racialized spaces which reproduce and perpetuate racism and discrimination that suppress African American teenage males' academic achievement (**Finding 1**). This racism and discrimination could be the result of a cultural disconnect African American males suffer from in schools, classrooms, and society (Wynn, 1992/2007). These young men did not buy into the hype that they would not be treated differently because of the color of their skin. Raymond specifically mentioned in his interview a situation in which students received punishment for defacing school property. Of course, the African American male paid much more restitution than the White female student Raymond and his peers found out that the White girl mother would get her out of the situation because her dad was a local sheriff deputy. When Raymond told this portion of the story, I realized that our young African American males do notice and discuss the

difference in the way rules are applied to them in comparison to how rules are applied to White students.

Institutional racism found in schools and society contributes to low self-esteem among African American teenage males (Hayward, 2012). Our teenage African American males are not oblivious to actions like those described above. For some strange reason, society seems to be under the false illusion that African American teenage males do not recognize the mistreatment, in part, due to the color of their skin. I guess that assumption falls right in line with the perception that many White educators have that those African American male students are not intelligent. Raymond was not the only one with a story like this. Keith Hayward (2012) said it best when he stated, “As these children mature, they begin to experience hostilities imposed by the majority culture and by the time these students reach adolescence they begin to believe that academic achievement will not improve their status or benefits” (p. 27).

Terrell stated that society does not expect much from him. Mike felt like his teachers automatically assumed he smoked and gang banged. Shane felt similar to Mike in that educators viewed him as a gangbanger and dope dealer. Culture is within institutions such as schools (West, 1993/2001). Jerome knew that they felt like he was a wild and irresponsible animal. Somewhere along the way, and it could be due to the low test scores obtained by African American teenage males, we decided that since these young men were *not that smart*, they would not even realize they were being treated differently than the rest of the population. The news flash is that African American male students do realize that educators think that they are not smart, and they are able to describe it as they did in their stories!

We need to provide more positive African American role models to influence the ways African American teenager males learn and interact with others, how they construct their



identities, and how they live their lives in schools and societies (**Finding 2**). Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) mentioned that African American kids are three times more likely to live in a home with a single mother, which was probably why several of these young men felt that having an African American male around was irrelevant. They made it this far without one around; therefore, they felt no need for an African American role model. The participants in this study did not yet realized all that they missed by not having African American male role models in their presence on a daily basis because many of these young men had to step into the role of the man of the house.

Raymond made it clear that he did not feel like not having his father at home hurt him in any way. Terrell felt like having more African American male teachers would have made his schooling experience better because they would share some common culture and interests, which would lead to better understandings instead of the misunderstandings that often take place. Mike felt as if most African American men truly represented the negative statistics mentioned in Chapter I. Mike believed that most African American adult men are bad, and they are out selling drugs. Shane felt like there were African American men worthy of admiring, and even bad men have some good qualities. Jerome felt like African American fathers do not stick around after the babies are born, and like Terrell, he believed if we had more African American male teachers, things would be better for African American teenage males.

As we discussed African American leadership from the community, the African American teenage males felt like pastors and other community leaders had their best interest at heart; however, there was more talk than action concerning the progress of African American teenage males. Michael Dyson suggested that most Christians have a difficult time closing the gap between their faith and their actions (Dyson, 1996). Cornel West (1993/2001) stated, “The

major tragedy of Black America in the past decade or so is the low quality of Black leadership and the relative inattention to the deep crisis of Black youth” (p. x). West (2008) also sensed fear and cowardice among African American leaders. This was one of the shortest parts of each of the participant’s stories because there were few African American male leadership, which was disturbing.

Black leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr and Frederick Douglass were on a mission to change communities (West, 2008); however, many leaders who followed them are more on an oratorical journey than one of action. When the discussion of African American preachers occurred, the participants’ feelings were rather generic across the board in that the participants felt that African American preachers were good men, and they preach great sermons. The problem, however, was that they could probably stand to do better in the area of putting words into action relative to helping African American teenage males discover themselves and choose higher goals. West (2008) stated, “No longer can we have leaders who simply engage in moral condemnation and ethical rhetoric” (p. 139).

Raymond’s and Matt’s stories concerning African American preachers did intrigue me. Raymond felt that African American pastors were fake in that they preached a good sermon, but they spent more time talking about the negative statistics that reflect African American males than actually putting forth the effort to make a difference. Mike felt that African American preachers were the most sincere about their religion, and he said he felt this way because African American preachers treated people the way God really meant for them to be treated, which is fair. He said White people are welcomed with open arms in African American churches; however, that has not been his experience when attending White churches with friends.

One analysis from this part of chapter IV was that African American teenage males form their opinions based on their personal experiences. Therefore, it is important that as African American leaders, we provide African American male students with positive energy. We need to practice what we teach because these marginalized young adults recognize the genuine leaders who truly want to make a difference compared to those who just want to make a living.

I took the time to break down how each young man felt about African American men because their opinions were unique, complex, and scary, all at the same time. Their opinions about the goodness or badness of African American men were unique because they all had different experiences with African American men. I had the privilege of knowing some background information about some of the important men in their lives that the participants did not mention in their stories. The vibe that I caught was that those participants whose fathers were not present or those participants, whose fathers were present in a bad way, had built the idea that life was better without a man in the house. They believed that their mothers did just fine by themselves. Those participants who had a good father or male figure in the home understood the importance of a male role model. What was complex about these findings was that although some of the young men preferred the father be absent from the household, they wished there were more African American males in authoritative positions outside of the home.

Ultimately, the majority of the five were not willing to give African American men as a whole, a green light as being good role models. Now three reasons existed to show why this finding was scary. First, this finding alluded to the lack of African American role models, which was the focus of this dissertation study. This finding indicated that on an even deeper level, these young men realized that African American males are lacking in society. Second, this finding was disturbing because these African American male teenagers viewed African American adult males

in the same negative ways that many Whites do. I viewed this factor as actually a sign of being brain washed or maybe, African American male students are receiving subliminal messages through the curriculum. Third and most disturbing of this entire finding was the impact that the absence of African American role models have on the identity of African American teenage males as they define and become African American men. This factor has to create some type of identity crisis because one has to question now do I (a) remain status quo as an African American male, which is bad, (b) try to act and be White, or (c) just lose my identity all together, not ever knowing who I truly am. Of all the findings, Finding 3 was the one that jolted me most because it highlighted a future identity crisis.

Some of these young men could not even dream of what they were missing by not having a father. Their father was so bad in their evaluation, that it was better for the father to be absent from the family than being in the family and creating additional problems for the family. Now as these young men become adults themselves, they surmised that they assumed that life would be okay if they were not around because their father was not around. The only hope I found was that most of the participants in the study told stories of the great fathers they hoped to be one day. Although these young men realized that they were sometimes treated differently because of the color of their skin, they did not play the blame game known as “its because I’m Black.”

Culturally biased discipline policies and standardized tests assassinate the dreams and futures of African American teenage males before they graduate from their high schools (**Finding 3**). Pedro Noguera (2008) discussed the idea that smart African American students often, perceived as acting White, live with ridicule for doing well academically. This generated perception occurs because of existing assumptions that African American teenage males are not smart. Therefore, to do well academically is as acting White. These young men understand that

most of the people that they interview with for jobs, get loans, or go to college with will be White. Four out of the five generally agreed that they did identify more with their own African American culture than they identified with White culture. They reached a point, however, that they did not feel threatened by their counterparts. Raymond, for example, said he did not feel that White boys were better than he was in any way. Shane was willing to put his grades against anybody else's grades in his class, and Mike viewed himself as one of the top students in his class. Jerome who attended a predominately African American school admitted that if placed in a predominately-White school, he would feel a little bit nervous and uncomfortable presenting class projects and answering questions in a class where he was the minority. During this segment of the stories, I was glad to hear these young men talk about how much they love their White friends, and how they did not feel that, all White people discriminated. I was glad to hear this comment because it meant that they were not practicing the same kind of stereotypes often carried out against them. Freire (2009) mentioned that often times, the oppressed become the oppressors when liberated. I did not see this cycle happening with these young men I interviewed. They refused to allow a few ignorant people to make them feel bad about a whole race of people. In light of the famous Travon Martin and Michael Brown cases, both related to two unarmed African American males gunned down by law enforcement officers. An increased awareness is evident about discrimination among African American teenage males in the United States. However, these two cases do not mark the start of something that did not exist already.

It is extremely important to teach our African American teenage males how to react to racism and discrimination to avoid being murdered such as what has happened to Travon Martin and Michael Brown (**Finding 4**). Derrick Bell (1994) used several fictional stories to depict the mistreatment of African Americans, based on their racial identity. In chapter IV there were

several references made to situations in which African American males suffered from punishment or treatment that differed from their counterparts involved in the same crime or behavior. One specific incident that caught my attention happened to Mike. According to Mike, he and his brother were taking a walk in the neighborhood one night and a police officer who approached proceeded to get out of his car to question them and had them empty their pockets. During this process, no warrant or reasonable cause was evident unless a Black teenager who is walking is a reasonable cause for questioning. After finding nothing, the cop went on to ask them did they have anything on them as if he had not just searched them and found nothing. Situations like these happen far too often. The missing element from all the data we collect was how this harassment, inconsistency in law enforcement, and general negative view of African American teenagers influence their self-esteem, mind, emotions, goals and ambitions, and educational success. Even as an educated adult, it is a troublesome to feel and to know, and experience discrimination based solely on the color that God made us. Mike said he was pissed off about this incident, which illustrated that anger is one of the emotions experienced when blatant discrimination occurs. I just pondered how many African American teenage males received a disciplinary action in school, in court, or died at the hand of a law enforcement authority for demonstrating anger that came about only because the authority figure treated them differently because of their race. Most people would say that I was playing the race card because of statements like that, and I do not know if they really feel that way or if discrimination of African American males have become a subliminal feeling. My wife and I were out with a White couple for an evening of fun, and I can remember looking at my White friend, who was a minister and I noticed his pants was way below his waist. Now I remind you the way he wore his clothes was not the problem. I promised my wife that I could try not to make everything about race, but I

could not help but to wonder how he could dress that way and people walked by and say, “Hey pastor,” with a smile. If I were dressed that way, those same women would more than likely clutch their purses closer to their bodies while the men would probably walk on the other side of the street. I do not think I could sag my pants without people questioning whether I was an assistant principal who was actually working on a doctorate degree. Now, I have gotten to a point in life that I can honestly laugh at that type of ignorance; however, I do not expect teenage African American males to have the maturity and knowledge to laugh at that type of stereotyping. In fact, I expected them to act with some type of anger, which landed them into more trouble or death by trigger-happy police officers in today’s society. I asked the young men throughout their stories why did they feel they were stereotyped and where did the stereotypes come from. All five young men answered that the media and hip-hop music were responsible for the stereotypes. I briefly mentioned the impact hip-hop had on our youth in an earlier chapter; however, despite the negative vibes sent out by hip-hop, no one deserves prejudgment from the actions of another individual.

Oral history methods allow African American teenage males to tell their silenced counterstories that challenge the official or meta-narrative and empower African American teenage males to understand the sources of racism and discrimination in schools and societies (**Finding 5**). William Watkins (2005) believed that the narratives of individual stories is the tie that binds, and he believed critical race theory allows those voices to be heard. When I first embarked on this challenge of allowing African American teenage males to tell their stories, my biggest fear was the tape recorder going and the young men refusing to talk or remaining silent to avoid answering questions that to them were sensitive issues. If I was blessed enough to get them to talk, then my next fear was that they would give me the responses they thought I wanted

to hear instead of expressing their true and unadulterated feelings about issues that deeply affected them. As you can tell from chapter IV, the participants exceeded my expectations and wiped out my fears. They were very open and honest with me on how they felt about the issues discussed. To be honest, they seemed not care whether I liked what they were saying or not, and I enjoyed that confidence and boldness. They were able to express emotions that would land them in the principal's office, jail, or dead if they stated how they really felt about being an African American teenage male in America. Their stories were not limited to the seven findings listed above, but their stories were drenched in every word and sentence of their stories in chapter IV. This summary paragraph does not do the justice to their actual stories they provided.

After collecting the stories of these five brave African American teenage males, I was committed more than I have ever been before to be the best African American male role model possible. These stories made me realize why brave men like Martin Luther King, Jr. W.E.B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington, and President Obama, just to name a few, were and continue to be so vital to the lives of African Americans, in general, and to young African American males, in particular. However, I have come to realize that we must produce additional African American role models in mountain numbers in homes, churches, schools, and local communities in which young African American men reside on a daily basis. As African American men, we must become better fathers, husbands, educators, preachers, teachers, and community dwellers. It is also important for White educators and leaders because the majority of leaders and teachers whom our African American males meet or encounter are White.

No law states that African American teenage males cannot have a good and prosperous experience with White people. We just need to own up to the cultural disconnection and prejudices placed upon us from slavery until this present age. This study gave a group of young



men, who had numerous statistics and studies placed upon them, to tell how they felt and what they thought was the problem. If no one else ever ask these young men their opinion again, they had an opportunity to tell their side of the story here. I believe that having a chance to tell their stories was a liberating experience for them. If educators and community leaders could hear these young men stories, without getting anger or discrediting what these young men expressed, it could be liberating for them as well. These stories, if read with an open mind, would cause readers to ask themselves critical questions such as: Am I unconsciously treating my African American males differently? If so, why am I treating them differently? White teachers and leaders are not the only individuals that need to ask these questions. Everyone should ask these questions. Then I think when we deal with questions like these two, we would be able to see a decrease in the awful statistics include mainly African American males portrayed in a negative stereotypical manner. The implementing of school improvement plans, the building of more prisons, and the pouring of more government money into education might not improve the epidemic that is happening to our African American males. Allowing these young men to have their voices heard relative to their struggles, and we as a society listening with an open mind and heart, and being willing to question ourselves about what we hear in these stories is the foundation of the solution to helping African American males. We must remember or be informed that the poor statistics that precede and follow African American males is not a “Black problem. It is a society problem!

There is a demand to develop a culturally responsive and challenging pedagogy that help raise critical consciousness within African American teenager males and empower them to understand their situations and responsibilities in schools and societies and to develop strategies to fight against injustice (**Finding 6**). Those individuals who opposed critical race theory and

Black protest thought argued that these theoretical frameworks played the race card (Watkins, 2005), which is not true. Watkins (2005) stated, “CRT is not a plea for “understanding”. Rather, it is a response aimed at changing the realities of public institutions, including education” (p. 199). Richard Delgado (2012) and Jean Stefancic (2012) explained that the CRT movement involved activists making a great effort to change the relationship between different races.

African American teenage males in this study did not blame racism, teachers, or any other variables for their shortcomings; however, they seemed not to know how to deal with the racism and discrimination that they faced daily in America. Shane told us in his story, that for some reason, some African American teenage males think it is cool to wear their pants down instead of using a belt to keep their pants up, studying to make good grades, and being academically smart as possible. Raymond, despite struggling on standardized tests and some classes, said his experiences, from elementary until present day, were great and most of his teachers were not racists. Terrell felt that his teachers did their best to set him up for success. Jerome felt like young Black boys were not stepping up to the plate academically. This finding was peculiar to me because in my experience in public education, I met many individuals who suggested that Black boys say the only reason they are in trouble or failing classes is because the teacher is *picking* on them. I am not saying this comment is false; however, the young men in this study did not come across as playing the blame game. I was glad to see these young men take responsibility for their own actions, but in reality, some of the things that they take the blame for is not their own fault. I find it hard to believe that it is the African American male student’s fault that a standardized test poses a question about a yacht, and they have never been to the beach, more or less have taken a ride on an expensive boat. I find it hard to believe that the few African American teachers whom Jerome and Shane came across just happened to have

higher expectations than their peers did. I find it hard to believe it is their fault that the same standardized test that asked about the yacht forgot to include African American heroes in depth in the curriculum as all the young men mentioned as being absent from discussion in their classes and textbooks. I could go on and on with this list, but I do not want to prolong the point I am trying to make. The point is a system that stacked against African American male students hurt them; yet, they refused to play the blame game for their shortcomings in public education and life. This insinuates that they were not looking for people to blame. They were simply waiting patiently for a fair chance, high expectations, and a curriculum that did not view them as an afterthought. The young men actually felt like they had a fair chance now; therefore, a real fair chance would be like heaven right here on earth for them.

It is of paramount importance to develop a caring, just, and inspiring learning and living environment where young African American males feel that they have equal opportunities to reach their highest potential (Siddle-Walker, 1996) (**Finding 7**). These young men had experienced that African American educators, coaches, and role models expected more out them than these same officials expected out of White educators, coaches, and role models. These young men felt like they were more successful under the African American educators, coaches, and role models because of their high level of expectations and culturally shared experiences. Carter G. Woodson stated, “As another has well said, to handicap a student by teaching him that his Black face is a curse and that his struggle to change his condition is hopeless is the worst sort of lynching” (p. 17). When White teachers have low expectations for African American teenage males, they send the message that these young men are hopeless, and that is okay because it is what is expected from African American teenage males. Jerome said his African American female teachers pushed him harder, got closer to him, and got to know him better. He said White

teachers actually held him accountable for his actions. For example, the African American teacher pulled him to the side and chastised him for his wrong doings, while the White teachers just ignore it as if that is acceptable behavior. What was fascinating about this part of the story was that Jerome actually noticed the difference in what was considered acceptable by one teacher and not another. He also recognized why one teacher accepted his bad behavior and the other teacher did not. As adults, we think these teenagers do not realize dichotomies like this, but these stories have made me realize they do. Jerome talked about his experience with his African American mentors of which one was male and the other was female. He felt like if we had more people like his mentors, African American teenage males would be much further along in life and earn better test scores.

I made a side note about the light in Jerome's eyes as he discussed the things he had experienced with these mentors. He went to Washington, DC twice with his mentors. He was also able to attend President Obama inauguration. He got this opportunity through an essay contest that presented by his African American principal. This young man had an opportunity of a lifetime in going to the inauguration of the first African American president, probably in part, because he had an African American principal. While the other guys who shared their stories missed this type of opportunity, probably in part, because they had a White principal who did not care or see the importance of all children, especially African American males who needed to relate and witness to this historical event. I am not saying that some schools with White principals did not allow students to watch or go to the inauguration. I am simply using a factual example of how the absence of Black role model, especially in powerful roles, could make a huge difference. Situations like this make me question how much and what type of impact desegregation has had on African American males. We must remember that being African

American was not the reason these young men felt more connected to their schooling because an African American who thought White (Bell, 1994) does just as much harm as a White teacher with low expectations for African American teenage males.

Shane said he felt like the two African American teachers he had were able to relate to him and brought things down to his cultural and academic level. He felt like they understood that African American students do struggle more than White students do and they were willing to go the extra mile to catch up the Black students. Mike said having an African American teacher was like having someone to watch over your shoulder because The African American teacher understood how society treated students of color. Therefore, African American teachers knew how to prepare African American students for the world in which they lived. All five young men felt like if they had more African American educators than they had, their lives would be better and their schooling situation would be better. This portion of these young men stories made me realize that White students were able to take for granted that the teacher in front of them, that cop who pulled them over, or the doctor who helped them when they were ill, were people with whom they could identify and feel comfortable. African American teenage males do not have this same level of comfort. African American teenage males constantly are forced to deal with people who are uncomfortable around them, even if the uncomfortable feeling is unspoken.

African American males stereotypes usually include being unruly and evil. The United States spent millions of dollars on studying instructional methods, medication, prisons, and cemeteries. Few people, however, take time to have serious conversations with young African American males. I sincerely hope that my dissertation creates space for five young men to voice their ideas and to tell their stories of struggles, hopes, and dreams. I sincerely hope that teachers, educators, researchers, administrators, parents, and other educational workers consider that

African American males might be able to define and express their struggles better than anyone else who has never *walked a mile in their shoes!* I sincerely hope that teachers, educators, researchers, administrators, parents, and other educational workers work together to make schools and societies as safe spaces where African American teenage males could tell their silenced counterstories; provide more positive African American role models; make culturally relevant discipline policies and standardized tests; raise our African American teenage males critical consciousness to recognize the sources of racism and discrimination in schools and societies, empower them to understand their situations and responsibilities in schools and societies, and teach them strategies to fight against injustice; develop a culturally responsive and challenging pedagogy and create a caring, just, and inspiring learning and living environment where young African American males feel that they have equal opportunities to reach their highest potential (Siddle-Walker, 1996).

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