

Fall 2007

Self, Other, and Jump Rope Community: The Triumphs of African American Women

Wynnetta Ann Scott-Simmons

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SELF, OTHER, AND JUMP ROPE COMMUNITY: THE TRIUMPHS OF AFRICAN
AMERICAN WOMEN

by

WYNNETTA SCOTT-SIMMONS

(Under the Direction of Ming Fang He)

ABSTRACT

Using Critical Race Theory, Critical Literacy, Black Feminist Thought as a theoretical framework and Oral History as research methodology, the lives of four young African American women are explored as they leave their culturally insular surroundings, “Jump Rope Communities”, to seek access to the codes of power and registers of language in all-White, all-girl, elite private schools during the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. In capturing the memories, perceptions, and lived experiences of these women over thirty years later, the journey into a world of divergences was explored--divergent language codes, divergent social, cultural, and economic stratifications, and divergent linguistic expectations, behaviors, and dispositions. The study focused on the motivational factors that prompted attendance at All-White, all-girl, private schools despite feelings of success within culturally segregated Jump Rope Communities. The resilience of spirit necessary to continue to move the race forward that is displayed by the African American female is also explored. The research includes an historical look into the benefits of and challenges of segregation, integration, resegregation, and the impact of the Civil Rights Movement on the creation and continuance of Jump Rope Communities. Through a personal view of lived experience, the researcher took an inside look into the spirit of togetherness, the establishment of a unifying goal, and synergy that

exists among the Jump Rope community members. Various forms of literacy such as cultural literacy, family literacy, community literacy, music literacy, artistic literacy, historical literacy, and oral literacy were explored. In exploring these forms of literacy, the researcher calls for a recognition of cultural self, cultural voice, and cultural identity and an on-going effort to build a cultural community to prevent the loss of cultural and linguistic heritage.

INDEX WORDS: Black Feminist Thought, Critical Race Theory, Oral History, African American Females, Integration, Segregation, Desegregation, Civil Rights, Literacy, Critical Literacy, Resiliency, Cultural Identity, Minority Community

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AMERICAN WOMEN

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

STATESBORO, GEORGIA

2007

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December 2007

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my personal partners in education; to the people who provided such broad and strong shoulders upon which to cry and to stand so that my view of possibility lay before me unobstructed. To my first educators, Winfield and Bennetta Scott, they taught me the value of an education and its power to determine the course of your life. They expected me to make good on my share of the generational promise. To my segregated school house educators, Mrs. Ore, Mrs. Jones, Mrs. Wiggins, Mrs. Smith, and Mrs. Strand who, in their ethic of care, dedication to excellence in teaching, expected excellence in learning. We jumped then to learn. We jump today to make you proud.

For My People by Margaret Walker

For my people everywhere singing their slave songs repeatedly: their dirges and their ditties and their blues and their jubilees, praying their prayers nightly to an unknown god, bending their knees humbly to an unseen power;

For my people lending their strength to the years, to the gone years and the now years and the maybe years, washing ironing cooking scrubbing sewing mending hoeing plowing digging planting pruning patching dragging along never gaining never reaping never knowing and never understanding.

For my playmates in the clay and dust and sand of Alabama backyards playing and baptizing and preaching and doctor and jail and soldier and school and mama and cooking and playhouse and concert and store and hair and Miss Choomby and company;

For the cramped bewildered years we went to school to learn to know the reasons why and the answers to and the people who and the places where and the days when, in memory of the bitter hours when we discovered we were black and poor and small and different and nobody cared and nobody wondered and nobody understood.

For the boys and girls who grew in spite of these things to be Man and Woman, to laugh and dance and sing and play and drink their wine and religion and success, to marry their playmates and bear children and then die of consumption and anemia and lynching;

For my people thronging 47th Street in Chicago and Lenox Avenue in New York and Rampart Street in New Orleans, lost disinherited dispossessed and happy people filling the cabarets and taverns and other people's pockets needing bread and shoes and milk and land and money and something—something all our own;

For my people walking blindly spreading joy, losing time being lazy, sleeping when hungry, shouting when burdened, drinking when hopeless, tied and shackled and tangled among ourselves by the unseen creatures who tower over us omnisciently and laugh;

For my people blundering and groping and floundering in the dark of churches and schools and clubs and societies, associations and councils and committees and conventions, distressed and disturbed and deceived and devoured by money-hungry glory-craving leeches, preyed on by facile force of state and fad and novelty, by false prophet and holy believer.

For my people standing staring trying to fashion a better way from confusion, from hypocrisy and misunderstanding, trying to fashion a world that will hold all the people, all the face, all the adams and eves and their countless generations;

Let a new earth rise. Let another world be born. Let a bloody peace be written in the sky. Let a second generation full of courage issue forth; let a people loving freedom come to growth. Let a beauty full of healing and a strength of final clenching be the pulsing in our spirit and our blood. Let the martial songs be written, let the dirges disappear. Let a race of men now rise and take control.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The house does not rest upon the ground, but upon a woman.

Mexican Proverb

To be a woman of the Negro race in America, and to be able to grasp the deep significance of the possibilities of the crisis, is to have a heritage, it seems to me unique in the ages.

Anna Julia Cooper, 1858 – 1964,

Educator, Activist, Feminist, Scholar

To my Special S's: Steven, my safe harbor; Thank You for turning the ropes of our lives to match the pace and rhythm of my dream; Shayna and Sianna, the embodiment of our hope and possibility; Thank You for jumping in stride with my dream. Your support and encouragement helped the dream see the light of day.

My thanks and recognition extends to my dissertation committee. To Ming Fang He, my incredible major professor, whose words of encouragement, guidance, and understanding helped me to find my own place between the ropes. Doctors Ayers, Nettles, and Weaver, my *enders*, who set the pace and the rhythm of this jump rope session by improvising through suggestion. – I will be eternally grateful to you all.

To Estelle, Joanne, and Theresa – Thank You for once again deciding to inhabit memories of days long past and a past long in memory but short on preservation. Thank-You for allowing me the privilege of telling your stories and sharing your insights. In stirring up old messes our stories live on these pages.

To Thelma – My research and road buddy. Thank you for your shoulder, suggestions, and encouragement to keep my eye on the road, my foot on the pedal.

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PROLOGUE

INTRODUCTION TO TRIUMPHANT POTENTIAL

Hambone, Hambone where you been?

'Round the world and back again!

Hambone, Hambone where's your wife?

In the kitchen cooking rice.

Hambone, Hambone have you heard?

Papa's gonna buy me a mockingbird.

If that mockingbird don't sing,

Papa's gonna buy me a diamond ring.

If that diamond ring don't shine,

Papa's gonna buy me a fishing line.

Hambone, Hambone where you been?

'Round the world and I'm goin' again!

One of the great things about jumping (some people say skipping) rope is that there are so many ways to be good at it, and yet there's always some new triumph to shoot for. If you can jump thirty times in a row without missing, then you've created a new record just waiting to be broken – by you.

Elizabeth Loredó (1996) *The Jump Rope Book*

Capturing the synergy and the dynamics of a triumphant minority community became the something that I chose *to shoot for*. When I decided to include the power of the jump rope to symbolize the power and triumph of my segregated community, the Hambone rhyme was one of the first to come to mind. My imagination, as Toni Morrison (1990) describes it, was bound together with my memory. My memory takes shape on these pages in the cultural tradition of my heritage as story.

My memory includes harmonicas, knee slapping, spoon tapping, singing, grilling, and laughter. These memories were warm and safe. My memories also include alcohol induced arguments, silences, whispers, finger pointing, and dropped gazes. These memories were familiar. The warm, the safe, and the familiar all take me back to the freedom felt while growing on the playground behind our home. They take me back to summers at our maternal family home in Monroe, North Carolina. Memories struggled to unfold and emerge like the petals of a spring flower. Homes full of cousins, Aunties, Uncles, extended friends, and family on cool summer evenings and warm winter days brought that hambone to life. Coolers filled with beer and eight ounce Cokes, games of Pokeno, fish fries, and fly swatters are all a part of the memories connected to this simple rhyme about a hambone.

The Hambone, Hambone jump rope rhyme is a story of possibility, of dreams, of hopes, of setting new goals, and of the potential borne of options. It is also a story of community, relation, and survival. The Hambone was passed and shared '*Round the world* from pot to pot, neighbor to neighbor to flavor the soup. As it was passed it picked up new flavors and deposited remnants of previous meals. The hambone was passed

bringing fellowship, relation, and connection. To serve the needs of the community, to resist, and to provide sustenance for the struggle, it would keep *goin' again*.

My grandmother used to save not only the hambone and the pot liquor it seasoned when cooking the collards, but also the grease that remained in the cast iron skillet after frying chicken or bacon. Cooking among the African American community is a combined story of creativity, invention, and survival. It is a story that is passed 'round the world among the community. It is a story of hope and triumph over the daily struggle as a minority that comes to life in the jump rope rhyme - *Hambone, Hambone where you been?*

Those hopes and goals paved my path to the southern college town of Statesboro, Georgia. I had moved south of the Mason Dixon line to green and open spaces. It was a move that confused my southern born mother who had fled the unforgiving stares and whispers about her parentage to seek refuge in the close-knit row houses of Philadelphia. It was in Statesboro that my research buddy encouraged me to tell my story of segregation and integration. It was there that my advisor encouraged me to make it a personal story, a passionate story, a story of participation. My lived story is a story of memories known and unknown, familiar and strange. It is familiar in the feel of memories that served as hands to guide and comfort. It is familiar in the sounds of memories that brought warnings and cautions. It is familiar in the scents of people that meant safety. Coupled with these familiar memories are the strange interpretations that are a result of examinations through current eyes and additional lived experiences.

Looking through yearbooks, saved report cards, and old programs helped my march back in time. As I returned home to gather mementos, I began to discover the pieces of a triumphant puzzle that lay protected in the folds of my memory. The snatches of generational advices, cautions, and warnings create a theory of cultural survival and triumph. This is a story of achievement, realization, accomplishment, and of triumph. All are commonalities of the human agency. These concepts owe no debt, no allegiance to the social constructs of race, class, gender, or status. As such, much like trying to grasp mercury, they defy containment and restraint, choosing rather to settle up against temporary boundaries that serve only to cause a change in the direction of the flow. It is the boundaries, touched by the flow, that remain forever changed and not the integrity of the mercury. Or it is like trying to contain the seasoning of the hambone. Once added to the pot it creates distinct flavors based on the mix of ingredients.

This is a story of a search for potential and possibility; of hope and of dreams; of parental wisdoms and fears; of success in the face of potential failure. It is a story of the person and the personal. It is a story of the connectedness of humans in the pains shared and the triumphs enjoyed. It is an attempt to capture on these white pages bound by theoretical frameworks and methodologies the oral glimpses, traditions, stories, and lived theories of these African American families and the impact they had on the lives of four adolescent females. These are the cultural theories that spring from the daily battles, struggles, and resistances. Aptheker (1989) calls this the *dailiness of women's lives*.

They form an oral tradition, passed on from one generation to the next.

Sometimes they are just seen as anecdotes about family 'characters' and their antics. Sometimes they are teaching stories. They are about having

respect, about having decent values, about how to live properly, about how to survive. Cultures shape stories in different ways, and stories pass on women's consciousness as it has been shaped by specific cultural, racial, and class experience (p. 40).

It is a story that seeks to disrupt the negative expectations of a double existence; female and African American. It is a story that seeks to reveal the contradictions of the inclusions and exclusions of four young African American women as they made their way through the maze that was integration. It is a story that will be brought to light thirty years later. It will begin at this temporary end, the current now of the story. This story, in its continuance and dynamism presents answers, and certainties that give way to questions and wonders. This is a story of and/both rather than either/or. It is a story that will flavor the mind of each reader differently. It is a story that will be changed due to the interpretation of the recipe and the ingredients added; using current day eyes to reread the experiences leading to the now. It is a story that will go *'Round the world and back again!*

CHAPTER 1

LEARNING THE ROPES

Five, ten, fifteen, twenty,

Nobody leaves the rope empty.

If they do, they shall suffer,

Take an end and be a duffer.

I began learning the ropes of my doctoral pursuit with a warning of being broken and put back together again. I thought instantly of Humpty Dumpty. Learning the ropes of a terminal degree through the dissection of my memories and the fear of being broken has in no way compared to my fear of, like Humpty Dumpty, having my innermost fears exposed and never being put back together again.

Learning the ropes is an idiomatic expression that suggests new experiences, unknown concepts, and the uncomfortable feeling of ignorance. There is the sense of initiation inherent in learning the ropes; a type of on the job training, OJT, which presumes a period of adjustment and alteration. Learning the ropes also implies a partnership, an interesting and symbiotic connection between one who is in the position of student and another, possessive of the knowledge in the position of the teacher or instructor.

Over the course of my life learning the ropes has been situational with experiences framed by the expectations of a place, an institution, or a group affiliation. Each has been different in structure and yet amazingly similar in their ability to reduce me to the uncomfortable position of not knowing, of feeling my way through the fog of

uncertainty and ambiguity. Each new job, new city, new school, meant a new group of friends, and brought with it a sense of unfamiliarity. While I found excitement in the newness of the event, there was a gnawing sense of confusion and loss of control that I have found extremely disconcerting.

Learning the ropes in my early elementary years centered on figuring out the teacher's hot buttons and determining what to do to turn them off before the fire reached my seat. I had learned to please through hard work and desired behavior. After my marriage and decision to convert to Catholicism learning the ropes meant knowing when to sit, stand, and kneel. It also meant knowing when to pause during the Lord's Prayer, when to raise hands or squeeze fingers in quiet acknowledgment, and when to turn and speak to your neighbors. Learning the ropes as an expat wife meant connecting quickly to American women's groups and volunteering at embassy approved service organizations. In each case I was determined to learn the ropes quickly enough to blend in, fit in, and to regain my momentary sense of awareness and control.

For me that fear of exposure outside of the comfort of control began as a child learning the ropes of my family's ebbs and flows. Our family's unique rhythm was resultant from bringing together the ebbs, flows, and idiosyncrasies of my parents' families and then adding a new ingredient in the form of three children. Challenges and impacts on our future lives were bound to happen. Control, the lack of control, and the fear of losing control would become one of my personal challenges impacted by my early life with mom and dad.

Learning the ropes for impending family gatherings or outings meant getting in step with my parents' interesting dance of preparation in and out of the single bathroom

on the second floor of our three-bedroom home. Our bathing assembly line resembled the dunking of fresh vegetables to remove the dirt and grit embedded in the folds. With my mother positioned on her knees in front of the tub we were each dunked, swirled, rubbed, and wrapped in towels as we emerged from the tub. Once dressed, my sister and I were directed to sit still and not get dirty. We rarely disobeyed. My mother, after two girls, would eventually learn the ropes of caring for our younger brother; a different type of vegetable. He would receive his dressing only minutes before we left the house.

Once done with us my mother and father would begin their unique pas de deux. My father would bathe, lather up with Magic Shave, turn the water on in the tub for my mother's bath, and emerge from the bathroom. My mother would dance past my father with an effortless move that came from years of practiced choreography. Once in the room she would turn off the water and for the first time since beginning this family ritual would catch her breath once submerged in the steamy water. It is at this point in the dance that we learned the ropes of invisible observers, trying to see and hear the strained conversation between our parents without being seen or heard. My mother would linger too long in the tub, my father would begin pacing up and down the hall as the Magic Shave was surely reshaping his chin and cheeks, and despite beginning the entire process with more than enough time, we would each sense the encroaching panic and dread in my father, a man with a Marine's sense of punctuality.

The grumbling undercurrents would follow us each into the car and taking up the last seat in our green Ford Station Wagon would fester and spout at nearly every stop light on route to the family event. My father would blame my mother for our tardiness, my mother would blame my father for his lack of assistance, and in my quiet listening

from the back seat I would resolve to never keep anyone waiting or be kept waiting when I grew up. I would remain in control and not be controlled by my failure to quickly and efficiently learn the ropes.

I recognized that familiar sense of panic, confusion, and loss of control from the first class of my doctoral quest. Arriving at the class entitled Theories of Educational Inquiry as an older student I was once again placed in the position of learning the ropes. Unlike many of my classmates I had no knowledge of hegemony, hermeneutics, or of the master's tools. Despite the newness of the course content and the arrival in the halls of graduate scholarship, there was a sense of comfort in my discomfort as I unpacked a few old and familiar items trapped in the baggage of my educational journey; self-doubt and fear at the exposure of my educational gaps. The fact that I was one of only two African Americans and one Latina in our all-female cohort did little to lessen my fear. I dreaded the process of once again learning the ropes of receiving an education in a predominantly white environment. I dreaded the process of once again being judged but what I did not know rather than what I did know.

I wondered who would be the one to ask about my credentials with their questions about my educational pedigree. Who would be the first to claim to understand me and my pain as a result of having a single Black friend at home? Who would be the one to look upon my admittance into the program as a direct assault on the perceived worth and value of their eventual degree? Who would be the one to expose my educational gaps, my literary shortlist, and my conversational short fuse? Who would challenge my fragile resolve to achieve? Who would be the first to repeat the statement of backhanded praise that usually ended with the qualifier, '*...for a Black girl*'? Who would make learning

these new educational ropes feel like the integrative experiences of school and adolescence and in so doing finally force me to question myself all over again? Who would scratch my eggshell exterior and my mask deep enough to expose the fraud that I feared lay just below the surface? Who would expect me as one of the two African American females in the cohort to understand and explain the myriad of all-things-Black despite the gaps in my cultural awareness as a result of an all-things-White education? Whose words would push me from my tenuous precipice and cause me to crash below in the thousands of exposed pieces never to be put back together again? More importantly, would I be able to gather myself up and serve as a voice for those who lay scrambled outside of the ropes due to the daily verbal and mental assaults that are a part of living as a minority in a racist society. My decision to continue to learn the ropes of a terminal degree was based in the fear of disappointing my family, my community, and my race that far outweighed the fear represented by the questions posed by any of the women in this group.

Learning the ropes of this doctoral process and project has been both cathartic and painful. I have been encouraged to admit and acknowledge the wiggle of my phases of awareness and ignorance. I have also been encouraged to write into the conflict and the contradictions, to be willing to expose the frailties of my pursuit, and to be willing to kill the memories of those I have held so dear (Ayers, Schubert, & Watkins, Personal Communication, April 8, 2007). In the examination I have become the one to question self, question ability, question credentials, and question my rights to claim titles. I examine and question in order to claim spaces for others to question, connect, and affirm.

Personal Jump Rope Game

Tap-whoosh-tap, tap-whoosh-tap, tap-whoosh-tap. The sound of a jump rope hitting the ground is distinctive. It is predominantly a girl's game and is deceptively powerful in its ability to create trans-generational connections with each turn of the rope. Its power to awaken childhood memories of social connection through a cultural activity and experience only strengthens the sisterhood of expression and definition through movement and word. Learning the ropes requires a commitment of individual style, a desire to connect, and a willingness to let go of self for the greater good of the jump rope session. We each bring parts of ourselves with us to the jump rope session and leave the session transformed through connection. That connective transformation ensures that as the chant states - *Nobody leaves the rope empty.*

Estelle, Joanne, Theresa and I each jumped rope and sang jump rope rhymes with friends and neighbors in different geographic sections in and around Philadelphia during our childhoods in the 1960s. Despite the geographic distinctions, unaware of the other's existence, we found that once united we were connected by knowledge of and through this simple yet distinctive shared pastime. We did not know each other, and yet we knew enough to feel a level of camaraderie and sisterhood. We did not know each other, and yet we knew enough to possess knowledge of our respective home communities. We did not know each other and yet we knew enough to hold fast to the ropes that were tied to cultural connection and relation. We discovered in each other a familiarity within the ritual and the accompanying verses. A moment of history and circumstance not only united us at a common geographic location, The Agnes Irwin School campus, it also

changed each of us individually and collectively. We now share a history that is as unique, interesting, and as complex as the jump rope itself.

Double Dutch is not meant to be a solitary activity. Double Dutch sessions create a unique sense of community and a bond of sisterhood each time the rope passes overhead and feet clear it as it swings down low. It takes a minimum of three people to play Double Dutch, two enders and one jumper. The jump rope forces you to be a team, forces a collective existence, tempered with benefits of societal aesthetic growth (Greene, 1978). Jumping rope and jump rope sessions are also bodily representations of the creativity and artistry of expression characteristic of the uniqueness of the Black aesthetic (Gayle, 1972). Double Dutch sessions create spaces through artistic expression to develop, define, and be self while connecting the emerging self with those who understand the beat and the message held within the *tap-whoosh-tap, tap-whoosh-tap, tap-whoosh-tap*.

African American girls who play Double Dutch continue the tradition of the Black aesthetic, self-definition and resistance through artful expression, artful and critical literacy. Jump rope sessions are a “training ground for learning not only how to embody specific approaches to black musical expression, but also learning to be socially black” (Gaunt, 2006, p.19). They are members of a sisterhood created through the cultural and artistic struggle against hegemonic domination and acculturation. This is a sisterhood created in a community of cultural isolation and sustained through the strength earned in battles for self awareness, self expression, and self definition. This is a sisterhood which recognizes the dichotomy created when the body, once used as a tool of oppression and domination, can also be used as a tool of expressional resistance. This is a sisterhood

which recognizes the fighting spirit required to define and reconcile multiple consciousnesses, multiple selves that emerge in the spaces constructed by race, gender, and class.

...there is no better symbol of girl power than Double Dutch... The strength of each girl is not just in her obvious athletic ability as she does hand-spins or spins while still jumping, but also in the support she gives others. No one can get good at Double Dutch working alone. You learn from your sisters, you grow with the help of your sisters, and you teach and encourage your friends. This is a lesson that clearly must remain with each girl in her life beyond the days of Double Dutch. (Chambers, 2002, p. 6)

Learning the ropes of the sisterhood provides an identity through a connection to a larger whole, a resistant community. We became part of a collective whole, similar to yet distinctly different from the negative affects of assimilation discussed in Gini Doolittle's (2004) *Assimilation: The Borg and Teacher Socialization*. As with the collective we moved and functioned as one once we were between the ropes. However, our jump rope community collective allowed for individual thought, personal expressions of self through persistence and proficiency, and artistic expression well within the confines of our cultural context. As a part of the jump rope collective we were able to gain what Maxine Greene describes as an "imaginative mode of awareness" (1978, p. 186), insight into our personal selves as distinct individuals. The collective spirit of a resistant community, the jump rope collective, relied upon the critical thinking and varied cognitive skills of each member. When performed correctly, the jumper, enders, and rope

seem to become one fluid movement. “Double Dutch is the club you join because of your strength, skill, and ability to be part of a team, nothing else required” (Chambers, 2002, p. 7). Double Dutch requires knowledge of and coordination with sisterly traditions; knowledge of the beat and message held within the *tap-whoosh-tap, tap-whoosh-tap, tap-whoosh-tap*.

Jumping rope is a social, as well as an economic equalizer. There were few economic advantages that could be gained through jumping rope. All that was needed to jump rope was a bit of an old clothesline, a willing spirit, coordination and a pair of enders who are able to establish the beat for the jump rope session. With this meager list of required supplies, we were able to fight off Robert Bellah’s “culture of consumption” as discussed in Stephen Haymes’ *Race, Culture and the City* (1995, p. 30). The jump rope shows no socio-economic preferences yet creates a social environment based on divergent, yet collective ability. You are distinctly aware of the fact that you can do and be something that not everyone can manage. There is power in that awareness.

Jumping rope to jump rope rhymes was a popular pastime on the streets and in the side alleys during my childhood in the suburbs of Philadelphia. The *tap-whoosh-tap, tap-whoosh-tap, tap-whoosh-tap* sound of the ropes hitting the ground and then cutting through the air transmits a rhythm that could evoke an unconscious sway of the body or a head nod of familiarity. *Tap-whoosh-tap, tap-whoosh-tap*, is a sound, a beat, and a rhythmic melody that is identifiable from blocks away. The lyrical rhymes possess the power to draw smiles of recognition. They cause fingers to snap – *tap-whoosh-tap* – and a recitation of the accompanying rhymes by any passers-by connected to and cognizant of the message of unity gained through shared struggle and passed down in the rhymes.

Tap-whoosh-tap, tap-whoosh-tap, is a simple enough beat for a simple enough game. You might think that a written description of this child's game sufficient to capture the intent and objective. Turn two ropes in a syncopated fashion allowing the jumper in the middle to clear the ropes as they pass beneath her feet. Double Dutch and jump rope rhymes are so much more.

The enders, or rope turners, to the untrained and unaccustomed eye, appear to be operating in tandem. They turn the double ropes to a rhythm in a precise motion so that one rope hits the ground just as the other hits its peak. A closer look and you are able to discern individual style amidst the union; a bob of the head on the up beat, a shake of the hips on the down, a tap of the right foot, and chewing gum popping to the tap-whoosh-tap. There is independence in the codependence, diversity and unity (Blackwell, 1991) and a widening of the space to allow for the creation of a closer community (hooks, 2003). Jumping Double Dutch is the balanced movement of two opposing ropes turned by the individual expression of two different enders in support of group success. Double Dutch is unity within the diversity.

The jumper, a member of this coordinated game, appears to be unaware of the enders' presence. She is engrossed in her own world amidst the union – concentrating on the ropes, arms swaying back and forth, lower body poised, searching for her own personal space between the passing ropes. With a closer look, a more critical eye, you are able to see that even in her concentration on the task at hand, she must be in tuned to the rhythm, the tempo, and the expectations of the enders; possessive of a level of double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903) in order to succeed. Without this awareness, without this ability to function in and attend to both worlds, her success is unattainable, improbable.

Apparent unrelated tasks are united in search of group success – solitary focus supported by group manifestations.

Seeing an opportunity, a space to claim between the ropes, she is in. Jumping takes over, slower, faster, salt and pepper jumping, spins on one foot, and touching the ground. The jumper jumps in the new found connection, jumps to keep the ropes moving, and jumps to earn respect through time spent between the ropes.

Every team member is aware of their responsibilities and knows the importance of their position in the overall game. The overall objective is teamwork and solidarity while permitting and respecting the individuality of style, the power of persistence, and the determination to claim a place based on their unique prowess. A simple child's game? Double Dutch is simple in its very complexity; static in its continual flow.

The complexity of this child's game represents the complexity of a people. To the untrained observer, and based purely on race and racial perceptions of inferiority, there exists a designation of simplicity, transparency, and insignificance. To those unaccustomed to the intricacies of the African American culture and its members, the union is all that is seen, a commonality based on skin color alone. To the careful and patient observer, just as with the Double Dutch participants, there is so much more to be seen and read. The lilt of the voice, the bodily mannerisms, the artistry of the movement, and the creativity of joining body and words are used to create unique expressions. The use of bodies as tools of communication and the words unspoken manage to speak volumes about this complicated people. African Americans are simple only in the consistency of their complexity. African American women, jumping at the culture's core, as intersectional embodiments of race and gender are its most complex members.

This is a people who like each ender, is holding onto the ropes for dear life; holding on to keep the game in motion and to stake a claim for recognition on their own terms. Holding onto the ropes means a membership in the community, a place on the team, a connection to a unique heritage, and a buffer against being misunderstood. Even in the connection there is room for exploration, space for new routines, new choreography. Letting go means a disconnect that has at the end of the rope disappointment and cultural oblivion. Letting go means no longer recognizing the message or the history in the ropes. Letting go causes not only a disconnection from the game, it also means a disconnection from the ability to understand and identify the significance and the development of the game to this point.

At the center of the game, the race and the community is the African American female. Cheryl Gilkes (1994) describes her role as, “Working for the race began during slavery. Within the slave community, women not only played key roles in the development of family, education, and religion but also developed a women’s network that was a foundation of strength, leaders, and mutual aid (p. 235). Jacqueline Jones (1995) describes the work of African American women as a triple duty; caring for the home, the man, and the family. In an effort to keep the game and the race moving forward, the African American female distributes the ropes of the game, assigns the roles, and sets the pace of the *tap-whoosh-tap, tap-whoosh-tap, tap-whoosh-tap*.

Jump Rope History

Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow

Never comes.

Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow

Always runs.

*All great people glorify their history and look back upon their early attainments
with a spiritual vision. Kellie Miller*

In light of the present catastrophe, I want to recall the history of Africa. I want to retell its story so far as distorted science has not concealed and lost it. I want to appeal to the past in order to explain the present...So now I ask you to turn with me back five thousand years and more and ask, What is Africa and who are Negroes?

W. E. B. DuBois, "The World and Africa"

Rope skipping, skip rope, skipping, or jumping rope, holds an ethnically rich history, dating back to Egypt, Phoenicia, and China. There is evidence of Egyptians using vines as jump ropes dating back to 1600A.D. Vines, woven plants, and even bamboo were used as jumping equipment or as objects to be jumped over in survival or combat training. Jumping rope as a fun pastime was likely the result of blending the techniques of survival and hunting with physical training required of sport competitions.

Children, then as now, mimicked the jumping of adult training and survival activities in order to gain the admiration of community elders and to train for expected activities of adulthood. Children watched and practiced, practiced and learned. In the

early history of rope jumping, this cycle of repetition and duplication served as a method of protection and species continuation. It also served to provide the children with active connections to the previous generation through common activities, common standards, and common expectations.

Scenes of children jumping rope and jumping through hoops can be found in medieval European paintings. Europeans were enthralled with the twirling ropes, believing that they possessed magical powers with the ability to cast spells and foretell the future. Familiar jump rope chants are still used today to predict the names of future lovers or to guess at the amount of forthcoming material possessions.

The double rope version of the game was imported to the Netherlands and then onto the new world's New Amsterdam, by Dutch settlers. Upon seeing the Dutch children playing the game of two ropes and hearing the perplexing chants, the English christened the game Double Dutch to denote the double confusion of the action and the language. An historical and contradictory connection worth noting is the use of Dutch ships as carriers of the first slaves to be brought to this country and sold in Jamestown in 1619 and the metaphorical use of Double Dutch jump rope chants as a form of verbal rebellion and expression by descendants of those slaves.

The twentieth century saw a rebirth of the game in the crowded inner city neighborhoods in the northeastern section of the United States. The current, more recent version differed from the ancient version, not merely in material, style, and objective but also in the players permitted. Jump roping from ancient time to around the early 1900's was strictly a male pastime of competition, of winning or losing. It was used to display physical prowess in the number of jumps made or time spent jumping. Women were

prohibited from this type of physical exertion due to concerns of the time relating to their inherent fragile nature. The abilities and capabilities of women, then as now, were doubted. It was believed that young girls could suffer nervous breakdowns, burst blood vessels, or damage leg and back muscles if they attempted jumping.

Unlike the ancient game dominated by male players, the competitive nature of jumping has been replaced with the addition of chants, rhymes, and rhythmic steps by female jumpers. As more and more girls began to create rhymes and claim the rope jumping games in open defiance of accepted practices of the time, there were fewer and fewer boys who chose the game as a pastime. A new chapter was added to the historical beginnings of the game; an oral expression of collectivity, togetherness, and sisterhood forged through resistance to established norms and a drive to be recognized on individual merits. *Black Feminist Thought* (Collins, 2000) combines with the orality of jump rope rhymes to create *Black Feminist Orality* (Fulton, 2006). Double Dutch is self-definition through expression.

What has remained today is the use of the activity as a means of entertainment, information, and preservation of cultural connections. The cycle of repetition and duplication continues to provide the children with active connections the previous generation through common activities, common standards, and common expectations. Female jumpers continue to not only watch and practice, practice and learn; they have also added a sisterly responsibility of instruction, protection, resistance, and determination to their modern jump rope repertoire. Double Dutch jumping and jump rope chants will be positioned in this research endeavor as an oppositional symbol of female power, creativity, solidarity, relational connections, resistance, and expression.

The challenge for this work of exploration will be in my ability to provide enough information to present areas of connection while creating a preservation of cultural histories without being reviled as a “[racist]-in-reverse” (Gayle, 1972, p. 3), “arousing the resentment of my colored brothers [and sisters]” (Fanon, 1967, p. 8) or suffering a fate of racial criticism experienced by Zora Neale Hurston. The accusation of lifting “the veil too much” (Gates, 1997, p. 117) earned her crushing reviews by racial peers. Despite the potential danger in “the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation” (Lorde, 1984, p. 42) I hope that the stories are added to others that speak of strength, pride, and triumph for African American females. As Henry Louis Gates Jr. states in his chapter entitled, *Lifting the Veil*, I too hope that my attempt at capturing the stories of our integrative experiences help to “make younger people feel freer to tell their own stories” (p. 118). Our stories are told and captured in order to end the negative discourse, “to identify marginality as much more than a site of deprivation...[to show] that it is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance” (hooks, 1990, p. 341). Our stories, our theories based on lived experiences are told to begin to break the cycle of pain and struggle caused by our existence in the world as examples of double consciousness and double oppression (Collins, 1986; DuBois, 1903, hooks, 1981; King, 1988; White, 1999); one consciousness responsive to issues of race and one consciousness reactive to issues of gender. “Few scholars who study black women fail to note that black women suffer a double oppression: that shared by all African Americans and that shared by most women... a consequence of double jeopardy and powerlessness is the black woman’s invisibility” (White, 1999, p. 23). *Race does matter* (West, 2001), but so too does gender, class, and culture.

Our stories of triumph are captured and expressed on these pages in order to unite our internal selves while ending the pain and suffering of invisibility and marginalization. That invisibility and powerlessness exists as a result of living in a racist society which fails to acknowledge issues of significance in the African American community. An additional level of invisibility exists as a result of living at the mercy of a male mentality that fails to acknowledge issues of significance to women. The pain of African American women exists at the expense of a male mentality focused on domination through property ownership and living through the pain of sisterly disappointment as a result of liberal ideas of savior on the part of White females.

Our stories are just that, *our* stories. They are collected to claim spaces on these pages of their own accord and in their own style. They will touch on issues of race, issues of gender, family, class, education, literacy, and access. The vignettes will exist as counter stories to the discourse of racial failure, submission, and inferiority. They will also be presented as examples of multiple positions of subjectivity in recognition of the fact that “we cannot form an accurate picture of the status of black women by simply focusing on racial hierarchies” (hooks, 1981, p. 12). The stories are a way of “openly declaring myself an ‘intellectual’ and to encourage other Black women to do the same, to make their presence known, to convey our thoughts about the intellectual process” (hooks, 1991, p. 163). The stories will look into the dynamics that speak to potential in the face of adversity caused by the numerical solution to the social problem that was integration. Our stories will delve into educational and language access and the part that grooming may play in the development of four small girls from the other side of the tracks, from their jump rope cultures who became a doctor, lawyer, teacher and company

chief. Our stories of triumph speak to our sisterhood, our recognition of our uniqueness and contradictions within that sisterhood, and our understanding that the message in the *tap-whoosh-tap, tap-whoosh-tap, tap-whoosh-tap* is one that we know and are emotionally connected to.

Jump Rope Traditions and Connections

Kings and Queens and partners too,

Here are the things that you must do;

Stand at ease,

Bend your knees

Salute to the east,

Bow to the west,

Shake to the one,

That you like best.

Creative and subversive forms of expression and connection were used by the descendants of African royalty trapped in slavery, who were denied expression in their native languages. The body became a literary vessel, a tool for connection, survival, and expression. It could be used to speak, to shake it out and to transmit messages. As this chant suggests, physical expression can be used as a method of instruction, communication, and acknowledgment. Jumping rope and jump rope chants combine to shake it out and demand attention, participation and recognition. Jump rope chants shake out necessities and they shake out directional guidance. They shake out spaces for cultural expression, communication and connection in the here and now and in so doing create a generational link to history. They serve both as expressive bodily and verbal

connections to the pride and lineage of ancient royalty, as well as the contemporary links to familial hopes and aspirations despite the disconnections suffered during slavery.

Many Americans share a heritage that can be traced back to several countries on the European continent. African Americans must work a bit harder to capture the shared heritage of kings, queens, chiefs and priestesses that can be traced back to several nations on the African continent. Despite the current lack of general awareness, the lives, struggles, lessons, and triumphs of these kings and queens from the Dark Continent have been remembered, safeguarded and transferred between generations by African storytellers. Based on their country of origin, they are known as the griot, raahwiya, bards, and the djelis. These cultural storytellers and guardians of a people's history have combined the gift of voice, the rhythm of beat and pace, the movement of the body, with dramatic effect to present and preserve the knowledge gained through ancestral experience.

In many African cultures orality is an art. The art of delivering the word has been *professionalized* and those who possess the power "have mastered many complex verbal, musical, and memory skills after years of specialized training. This training often includes a strong spiritual and ethical dimension required to control the special forces believed to be released by the spoken/sung word in oral performances" (In Praise of the Word: African Praise Songs, Retrieved March 6, 2007)

<http://web.cocc.edu/cagatucci/classes/hum211/CoursePack/praiseword.htm>

The stories, a part of a strong oral tradition and representative of the varied literacies of the African culture, have been whispered, danced, acted, sung, protected, and passed down through the horror that was slavery. The stories of and about a royal

heritage, on their own merit and without dominant culture validation or substantiation, also serve as a proof of an existent culture that predates slavery. The stories of the struggles due to poverty, deficit educational models, and political disenfranchisement faced by descendants of slaves today serve as links to that history. Jump rope chants “draw attention to the speaker’s linguistic prowess” and “closely resemble one strain of the blues” (Brown, 1999, pp. 83, 84). As one form of performance memory or cultural literacy expression, they represent a connection to the strong oral traditions of Africa and serve as a physical expression of the mental wishes, wants, laments, and warnings among the descendants of African royalty.

Jumping rope and jump rope chants are a form of communication that seeks to continue the storytelling traditions of the griot and the djeli as they combine words and action to entertain and to teach. They will be used in this research project as the metaphorical representation of and links to historical resistance and triumph through the creative expression of self and community. Jump rope chants and jump rope communities are generational links of capability, possibility and hope in the chain that seeks to end the discourse of failure and ineptitude that has been applied to the descendants of African royalty.

Each rhyme is a story, an answer to and a connection with questions borne of need, hope, desire, wonder, and social justice promises yet fulfilled. The words and beat of a jump rope chant combine to demand involvement, participation, and action. The call and response connection of the chant is rooted in the African spiritual, the play and work songs recited during slavery (Sale, 1992). The coordination of body and verse, and the challenge of verbal manipulation combine to create a form of connection,

metacommunication and expression that Cornel West (1989) calls *kinetic orality*, a way of coming to know, of knowledge through the connection of body and word.

The concrete, everyday response to institutionalized terrorism – slavery or Jim-Crowism – was to deploy weapons of kinetic orality, passionate physicality, and combative spirituality to survive and dream of freedom. By kinetic orality, I mean dynamic repetitive and energetic rhetorical styles that form communities, e.g., antiphonal styles and linguistic innovations that accent fluid, improvisational identities... By passionate physicality, I mean bodily stylizations of the world, syncopations and polyrhythms that assert one's sombodiness in a society in which one's body has no [perceptible] public worth, only economic value as a laboring mechanism. (p. 93)

Knowledge is a curious blend of concepts known and unknown, impressions made and yet to be felt, ideas recognized and the recognition of gaps yet to be considered. Maria Stewart describes this as being sensible of your ignorance (1987). Knowledge is a curious combination of an awareness of the known and unknown. "Education is an act of knowledge" (Freire, 1994, p. 100). Knowledge, a concept that can be described as perception, validated beliefs, communication, and reasoning, is as Geneva Gay (2000) has posited, culturally situated, culturally based, and culturally expressed. Knowledge is a series of subtle reconciliations and a search for temporary personal spaces to claim and take comfort in. It is also the cognitive use of those spaces as springboards for growth and expression. Learning and knowing, knowing and unlearning (Wink, 2002) are cycles of knowledge that involves a constant push and pull or give and take. Knowledge is standing firm, existing whole, and seeing the potential for something personal to claim in

the contradiction of cultures. Knowledge exists in the gaps between awareness and confusion. It flails between the flailing ropes. Our stories are our way of knowing, our way of bolstering self, our way of educating self of self, and our way of sharing that awareness.

We know what we know based on our information filters, interaction, preceptors, and situational judgments. These sieves are set by long cultural histories of actions, reactions, and struggles toward recognition and validation. Cultural histories, highlighting the efforts and the pains borne of struggles toward hope and promise, are passed from one generation to the next through cautions, advisements, and stories. The stories, also culturally based, take many forms when passed from one generation to the next. They can be in written form, pictorial form, or oral form. As connective twine, the stories become generational connections; associative links between the promises of today and the hope for things yet delivered in the yesterday.

Promises yet fulfilled have contributed to the body of cultural knowledge African Americans have gained as a result of years of struggle and resistance against dominant culture hegemonic practices. Oral stories of resistance, a form of talking and testifying (Fulton, 2006; Smitherman, 1977) have also been a part of the oppositional history of African Americans. These testifying stories of cognition through oral expression exemplify the forms of resistance and opposition practiced by African American females. DoVeanna Fulton (2006) calls the oral manifestation of using the voice by African American females as a tool of opposition Black Feminist Orality. From positions as outsiders within (Lorde, 1984) African American females have used the voice as a tool of opposition in the struggle for recognition, racial progression, and social justice. The voice

is used to establish connection, as a rallying call, as a tool of sense making, of truth speaking, and a motivation for change through progression. The voice has also been used as a protective tool in the expression of the quick and cruel wit.

My goal with this project is to add our voices and our stories to the body of research. We seek to add an awareness of the struggle, the searching, the asking, the becoming and also the accomplishments of four African Americans females. We will use our voices to tell our stories of self-examination and reenter our distinct yet connected pasts with the critical eyes of the present. Through the collection of personal stories of struggle and possibility I seek to connect the history and lessons of yesterday with the continuing individual stories of resistance and triumph of today. I seek to add the written form of the oral stories and histories of members silenced by existences in nobodiness and erasure caused by years of culturally diminishing racism and hegemony.

The passion for my inquiry, evoked by the oral nature of the jump rope chants, is nurtured by the memories of my life as a young member of a segregated community. From my current day vantage point, and with the eyes of a researcher, the advantage of years and the assistance of education I hope to be able to analyze and theorize the changes in ability, facility, and disability displayed by my childhood friends as a result of the shift from segregation to desegregation. I watched my African American friends, as a result of desegregation, shift from the confidence, proficiency, and rhythm of an orate society to the defeat and exclusion of a literate society in what some would call a level of interest convergence (Bell, 2000) on the part of White elites.

An additional passion behind this inquiry is in the ability to document the personal struggles experienced as a result of becoming one of only a handful of African

American females to integrate an all-girl, private school located in the Philadelphia suburbs in 1969. In light of the personal struggles endured due to the provided glimpse into Du Bois' life beyond the veil, many cultural questions of value and return on the investment of integration were created. The goal of this research is not to suggest that life for African Americans since desegregation has been completely in vain. Rather, it is to determine what cost, if any, has been paid in cultural currency and cultural unity for the shift from segregation to desegregation. What will be the asking price and what will be the cost paid in cultural integrity for the phase following desegregation, the authentic and elusive concept of cultural integration? Integration, the provision of unrestricted and equal access to resources regardless of race or ethnicity, will be the true test and measure of social justice through education.

This project seeks to combine historical lessons with the current practices, reactions, and interpretations of research. There exists a desire to add this researcher's perspective to the greater body of critical research currently being done with African American women and their lives at the center; lives that have been shaped by the multiple constraints and unique intersections of gender, race, class, and economics.

My inquiry seeks understanding in the layers of potential explanations, searches for light in the darkness of societal exclusion, and answers or fixes to the questions caused by confusions borne of living in a racist environment. The exploration into the lives of the research participants seeks to discover contributing variables, concepts, and answers to their struggles and triumphs. The impact of segregation, desegregation, and integration on the formation of their individual and community identities will be explored and examined while searching for answers to a number of guiding questions. How does

racial and cultural identity formation in Jump Rope Communities impact the integrative school success of African American women? How does educational desegregation and integration impact the ability of African American women to maintain the development of their individual cultural identity and their ability to pass on cultural lessons and warnings to successive generations? What part did the varied forms of cultural literacy lessons learned in the segregated Jump Rope Communities contribute to the development of the resilience of spirit necessary to succeed in the experiment that was integration?

A sisterly resistance and the drive to carve out a space for expression and maintenance of cultural self is the focus of this research. The lives of four young African American women are explored as they leave their culturally insular surroundings, “Jump Rope Communities”, to seek access to the codes of power and registers of language in an all-White, all-girl, elite private school in the suburbs of Philadelphia. In capturing the memories, perceptions, and lived experiences of these women thirty years later, the journey into a world of divergences was explored--divergent language codes, divergent social, cultural, and economic stratifications, and divergent linguistic expectations, behaviors, and dispositions.

The study focuses on the motivational factors that prompted attendance at the all-White, all-girl, private school despite a sense of connection and of success within culturally segregated Jump Rope Communities. Additionally, the study will examine the cultural confusion that ensued for each of us as a result of the intersection of our integrative experiences with the developmental phase of our adolescent identity. What impact did the timing of this experience have on the development of our personal and cultural identities?

Experiences of support, encouragement, as well as personal feelings of doubt and alienation in both worlds, will be explored. Questions surrounding the creation of what Du Bois called our double consciousness (1903) will be discussed. Experiences of our double lives, one in our Jump Rope Community and the other in our lives beyond the veil will be explored. Ming Fang He describes this confused state of being as feeling “...dislocated as if trapped in an *in-between* culture.” (He, 2003, p.2)

We will delve into our individual hopes and dreams and position them against the cultural and familial expectations, responsibilities, dreams, and pressures of family and community. Our stories will be presented as counter stories against the level of low societal and dominant culture belief in racial achievement. They will be presented as a sign of complexity amidst the homogenizing pull of hegemony. They will be presented as examples of possibility, of hope, and of triumph over adversity. I also recognize that the collection and presentation of the stories may cause pain. Recognition and acknowledgement often leads to interpretation. The unfreezing and exposure of a formerly safe and locked away memory may make the current we and us something different and strange. Our spoken memories may serve to claim spaces in the present and the past that changes us each in our expectations of the future. While our reentry is likely to show that we are still in process, still in progress, still open to interpretation and investigation, the examination on these pages will be by our own hand and by our own critique of self.

The focus will be on the institution of education at a particular site of cultural, cross-cultural, gender, social, economic, and historical intersection with the lives of four young African American women. These women left their culturally insular surroundings

seeking access to the *codes of power* (Bourdieu, 2000; Dowling, 2004; Payne, 2005) registers of language, and standard literacy in an all-White, all-girl, elite private school.

The end of the 1960's and the beginning of the 1970's serves as the temporal backdrop for the collected memories and oral histories of the participants. The arrival of the four women on the campus as agents of integration is not without historical connection and impetus. An exploration into the historical rhythm, the *tap-whoosh-tap* of historical choices and their impact on the lives of the four classmates from Jump Rope Communities will add depth to this inquiry and research endeavor.

Born as tail-end members of the United States Baby Boomer generation, the backdrop to our early lives is an interesting intersection of history with the social, political, racial, and gender events of the time. Truman and Eisenhower expanded the reaches of the hydrogen bomb into Korea and the televised speeches into American homes. The televised McCarthy hearings, the execution of the Rosenbergs, and the passage of the Immigration and Naturalization Act fueled ongoing debates of nationalism and contributed to nervous times for political outsiders. Brown, Rosa Parks, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Federal Highway Act called into question our nation's fundamental beliefs of equality and its people's ability to use miles and land rights as methods of maintaining racial separation. The end of the decade expanded the size of our nation as well as our nation's expanse into new frontiers with the first domestic air flight by National Airlines, the orbit of Explorer I around the Earth, and the addition of Alaska and Hawaii as new states.

The historical events of the decade sent ripples through the social, political, racial, and educational fabric of our nation. The events leading up to segregation, desegregation,

and the movement for civil rights across the color line (DuBois, 1903; Sundstrom, 1994; Wells & Crain, 1997) will be used to frame the study. An examination into the historical underpinnings that housing and educational segregation played in formation of a proud Jump Rope Community (JRC) among African Americans despite reduced or deficient resources will also be conducted. The strengths of that community during segregation, its educational heritage, the continuation of its strong orate tradition, its varied forms of literacy, communication, and expression will be explored. The African American women who provided the shoulders upon which to place the movement that some have labeled Black Feminist Thought and the role that the African American woman has played in the preservation of that cultural heritage are also included in my inquiry. These women will be positioned as the enders, the rhythm makers, keepers, and the pace setters. Theirs is a game that is still gaining momentum. I will try to hold onto the ropes with both hands while adding my own unique syncopated style to the *tap-whoosh-tap* in hopes that others will join the game.

My experiences as one of the females who left the security of a supportive, segregated school and community make this an extremely personal, passionate, and participatory endeavor. My desire to discover what was viewed as the secrets of an elite education and an understanding of the dominant codes of literacy tie this endeavor to the field of curriculum studies and teacher education in its exploration of what counts as literacy and knowledge. My fascination with the power of the word and the ability to convey and manipulate meaning extends back to my childhood dreams to become a teacher and forward to my training of future teachers who will not only recognize but

validate the cultures and culturally positioned knowledge that their students bring with them to class.

My personal background and passionate connection to this research and the chosen participants places me and my interpretation at its center. At the center, as a Double Dutch Diva, (Gaunt, 2006) I am in the best position to gaze and reflect outwardly to theorize and practice. From this chosen position of what bell hooks calls radical black subjectivity (hooks, 1994), I am able to select theoretical frameworks which allow me to reclaim “the power imperative to conceive of oneself as a centered, whole entity” (Fuston-White, 2002, p.462). I chose the position. I choose the platform to relay and express and establish the meta-story of my life that “can’t be understood from her friend’s frame of reference; instead it must be told within a frame of reference all its own” (Carter, 2001, p. 152). I am able to see that who I am and what I do cannot be separated, nor can it be subjugated based on race, gender, or a whitewashed version of what it is thought that I should be. From the center, amidst the turning ropes, I no longer represent a member holding only double outsider status. From this chosen position “we looked both from the outside in and the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin. We understood both.” (hooks, 1990, p. 341) From a position of epistemic control, intimate connection and understanding, I am in the position to decide what counts as theory and the manner in which I choose to theorize. From the position of claimed control and awareness of self I am in the position to decide upon the voice to be used and the message to be presented. I am able to “show that oral histories are not merely anecdotal tales, but are frames through which Black women develop identities and understand the world” (Fulton, 2006, p. 16). I am able to tell the stories from the

margins and use that sense of exclusion as a point of reference, resistance, and strength. If our stories are our history and our theory, we will tell our stories and leave each as chosen interpretation, chosen possibility, and chosen site for the establishment of existence, knowledge and education. We chose not to and “we refuse to look at ourselves through the eyes of white America” (Adoff, 1968, p.159). Rather, we choose to add our perspectives as an attempt to break the “ideological dominance in the canon of Western thought.” (Shujaa, 1996, p.1)

I am an African American female teacher who was educated in and educated about the community borne of struggle, resistance and hope. That education took place in an environment defined by the racially segregated composition of its members and the historical setting of the time. We learned to gain strength through connection and to use that connection to gain knowledge and to perfect our individual talents. We also learned that talent is expressed in a myriad of ways. We learned to appreciate a wide range of knowledge literacies and methods of gaining understanding. I do the work of this research to provide a personal and illuminating voice to the counter story of what counts as educational success and literacy inclusion.

My research seeks to bring to light the resilient and adaptive spirit, the cultural heritage and cultural strength of the African American female and community; a community that I have labeled Jump Rope Community (JRC). I also seek to discover the impact that desegregation has had upon that resilient and adaptive community. Desegregation was held out as the answer to problems along the color line; what was once separate but unequal would, through litigation, would become equal. While there has been much progress since the landmark 1954 case of *Brown v. Board of Education*,

we have failed to reach the level of integration as a nation or at the institutional level of education. Integration requires an eradication of access barriers to resources regardless of race. It also requires the recognition of divergent cultures as holding equal shares in societal decisions. Integration cannot be achieved through legal wrangling, but rather through social and attitudinal change. Nonetheless, the movement that started as a legal answer to years of denial has had a profound impact upon African Americans and the African American culture.

This research seeks to discover the need, the desire, and the ability, of African Americans, in general, and the African American woman in particular, to maintain cultural cohesion and connection through the lessons and strategies learned as a result of struggle in a racist society, to learn and thrive in the face of adverse attacks upon cultural integrity; to hold onto the ropes. He calls this maintenance of cultural voice, signature, and identity (2003), Nettles calls it resilience (1998, 2001), Bowers calls cultural conservatism (1995) and Jane Roland Martin calls cultural wealth (2002). Despite the proud heritage many have chosen to walk through *the unusual door* (Baldwin, 1985) in search of something new, different, and some would say better. What has been the price of the ticket for opening *the unusual door* of the bejeweled box that held desegregation and integration? What has been the cultural price paid by African Americans for the current trend of resegregation? What has been the cultural price of the ticket paid for access and a separate an equal chance at justice?

As an educator of pre-service teachers, I work with African American, minority, and White students, to promote cultural involvement, participation, and action with their lessons as a means of fostering social justice not only for minority students but for all of

their students as a result. My students are challenged to consider teaching practices that are grounded in cultural sensitivity. I support these future teachers by providing connection to divergent cultures through open and reflective dialogue. We discuss the premise of teaching as political, justice through education and the resultant implications; the recognition of distinct and blended cultures, as well as the redistribution of resources to facilitate change. We talk to discover spaces for connection and change.

I challenge my students to teach in a way that is rooted in and accepting of the personal, considerate of conflicting passions, and inviting of divergent participation. Recognizing the political nature of my personal teaching practices, I encourage these educators accept their political path toward educator. They are encouraged to provide their future students with the tools necessary to thrive in a society that expects very little of them yet exacts great payments in terms of cultural integrity and maintenance of cultural practices. I seek to raise their awareness and increase their acceptance of the triumphant spirit of hope and capability existent in the African American Jump Rope Community and the members from those communities. This spirit exists despite the pull to surrender the ever dynamic aspects of cultural heritage, cultural traditions, and self-definition, in exchange for access to codes of power and places in history that is promised through education.

In *Red River*, Lalita Tademy (2007), uses artistic imagery and words in self dialogue to convey the thoughts of her character Polly. Polly expresses in the prologue what I hope to accomplish in this project.

Come closer. This is not a story to go down easy, and backwash still got hold of us today. The history of a family. The history of a country. From bondage to the

joy of freedom, and almost ten hopeful years drinking up the promise of Reconstruction, and then back into darkness, so fearsome don't nobody want to talk about the scary time. Don't nobody want to remember even now, decades removed, now things better some. Why stir up all that old mess from way back in 1873? I don't hold with that point of view. I was there, watching, like all the women done, up close some of the time but mostways from a distance. They all dead and buried now. I outlast each one, using up my time on earth and some of theirs too. One hundred last birthday, trapped in this wasted body. All I do now is remember and pray the story don't get lost forever.

In an effort to avoid the pain of stirring up old messes, we have not captured the stories of our ancestors and many have been lost forever. The story of slavery, survival, and resistance that “was not a story to pass on” (Morrison, 1987, p.) has been coerced and erased from “the collective cultural memory [and] must be known, woven into the fabric of history” (Fuston-White, 2002, p. 463).

Hasker Nelson (2000) cautions that those of us fortunate enough to be living with elders in their “80’s, 90’s, and 100’s must remember that those relatives represent the last generation of Blacks who may have actually met and known ancestors who have been enslaved.” (pp. 6, 7) These are the stories that represent determination, perseverance, and resistance. These are the stories of silent victories that speak so loudly they can be heard over dismissal. In the telling our stories, more than thirty years later, enough time has passed to avoid being burned by their truths and yet not enough has passed to render the memories emotionless and without the flame required to ignite interest and contemplation. I am deliberately stirring up an old mess to end the cycle of lost

connections, to disturb the discourse of failure and to provide directions for future generations of African American females.

While I hope to resist the temptation of writing what William Watkins has labeled a glory story (Personal Communication, April 7, 2007), I do not want our stories of integrative struggle and triumph to get lost forever. This project is not presented as a tale of ego or self-glorification, but rather one of celebration and recognition. I do not want these tales of triumph to be caught in a racial and cultural blind spot (Ritchie, 2003) where they reside unappreciated and unacknowledged. I do not want our stories to get lost forever or to become so modified by the common and accepted research methods of the day that we no longer recognize our own images or hear our own voices or recognize and apply our own theories. I do not want our stories to get lost forever or to be told by another who may not possess the commitment to racial uplift and self-definition. I do not want our stories to get lost in the living of the struggle, lost through the passage of time and memories forever left to interpretation and speculation.

Despite the discomfort caused by stirring up old messes, by the tellin' and the talkin,' our participation in an historical event did occur. Our experiences were replete with great meaning and perplexity, and unlike Polly, our watching was done up close. While this work is not to be positioned as *The Authority* on all things experiential through integration, it is presented as a version of what Geneva Smitherman (1977) calls testifying. It is our attempt at telling the truth, our version of the truth, through story. It is our attempt at testifying as a form of "resistance to objectification and injustice," (Fulton, 2006, p. xi) as well as a "resistance to voicelessness" (p. 19). Unlike the veiled voices of decorum with which many of the slave narratives were written as pleas to

terminate slavery, we have no need to “make it palatable to those who were in a position to alleviate it” (Morrison, 1990, p. 301).

These oral histories are presented in an effort to capture for future generations an African American female standpoint of personal and community strength, self-determination, resistance, expression, and triumph. Our talking and testifying (Smitherman, 1977) and telling serve as our attempt to continue the legacy of cultural hope and triumph through story. These stories serve as living links to the memories and stories of our ancestors. Stories by people of color can counter the stories of the oppressor. Furthermore, the discussion between the teller and the listener can help overcome ethnocentrism and the dysconscious way many scholars view and construct the world (Tate, 1997, p. 220). This is an attempt at reconciling the complexity of our identities, our experiences, and our storied paths toward self-awareness. These stories continue the recognizable and covert connection to the *tap-whoosh-tap, the tap-whoosh-tap* forms of expression that “exemplify African American culture’s unique and oppositional nature” (Fulton, 2006, p. xii).

Oral History will be used to capture memories of our lives, strengths gained, and hopes internalized, as members of culturally segregated home environments, what I term Jump Rope Communities, (JRC). This methodology compliments the oral literacy tradition so prominent in the African American culture that has “...remained a critical mode of expressing our inalienable rights to freedom” (Gaunt, 2006, p.5). It is used to capture the vignettes of four classmates who left the confines of their individual Jump Rope Communities and endured the trials of cultural perplexity while integrating a White, all-girl private school in a Philadelphia suburb. I investigate this journey through

an examination of various forms of cultural literacy and kinetic metacognition found in the musical, artistic, and oral literacy so much a part of African American communities.

The political lens of Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000), the positioning of the Black feminist voice within cultural and familial circles, and the inclusion of the Black feminist voice with respect to the valuation of education (Collins, 2000) will be used to examine the search of these women's right to define, position, and raise their voices in discussions focusing on our segregated and gendered selves.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Bell, 1995; Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Stefancic, 2001) and Critical Literacy (Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994) will also be used as the theoretical framework through which to examine the resilience and determination of spirit necessary to live up to the positional requirements of cultural griot and heritage protector. CRT recognizes and presents a forum for our stories to be presented as our own way of knowing and understanding. Ladson-Billings (1998) explains and clarifies that "the primary reason, then, that stories, or narratives, are deemed important among CRT scholars is that they add necessary contextual contours to the seeming 'objectivity' of positivist perspectives" (p.10). The unique perspectives of historical African American feminists in addition to the interpretations of contemporary African American feminists will be used to gauge the impact of segregation, desegregation, and integration on cultural integrity and survival.

I will explore what part the segregated gender framework of the school played in the academic success of these young women. Embedded within the gendered existence, gendered search for understanding is also the gendered existence that is racially situated. The exploration of the gendered education of these women, the process of integration and

of gaining access through a privileged education will open up the research to the question of empowered intent on the part of the school's faculty. Was this merely an experiment in "...the political subordination of Black women" (Collins, 2000, p. 4) by removing them academically, linguistically, and socially from home cultures? Was this to be another test of adversity? Were these women even expected to garner levels of success or was this an experiment in the political correctness of the time fifteen years after Brown vs. Board of Education? Finally, what part did cultural integrity and resilience learned through struggle play in their march toward triumph?

Starting from an African American female perspective of an historical inquiry into the benefits and challenges of segregation, integration, and the impact of the Civil Rights Movement, I study the spirit of togetherness, the establishment of unifying goals, and synergy on which the Jump Rope Community thrives. Recognition of cultural identity, an on-going effort to build a community, and the preservation of cultural and linguistic heritage are critical for the success of African Americans in general and African American females in particular. I hope to shake it all out by interrupting the discourse of failure. I hope to shake it out to raise the awareness of a triumphant community and to shed a light on the

...consistent characteristics. These include exemplary teachers, and principals who increasingly were well trained and who created their own culture of teaching; curricular and extracurricular activities that reinforced the values of the school and community; parental support of the school, both in its financial needs and its cultural programs; and school principals

who provided the leadership that implemented the vision that parents and teachers held about how to uplift the race (Siddle-Walker, 2000, p. 276).

I write this story in order to leave a written marker of the challenges and the triumphs; a signpost for others to follow, learn from, and adapt.

Jumpers, Skippers, and Enders: Autobiographical Roots

Fortune teller, fortune teller,

Please tell me

What do you think,

I'm going to be?

Butcher, baker, undertaker

Tightwad, tailor, bow-legged sailor,

Rock Star, painter, cowpoke, thief,

Doctor, lawyer, teacher, chief!

*Family faces are... mirrors. Looking at people who belong to us, we see the past,
present, and future.*

Gail Lumet Buckley

The town was a small one. It was home.

The town was small, yet it was a large enough home.

The literacy held in the jump rope united us all.

My town was small, yet it was a large enough home.

Come home with me, meet me in my space, you come to know me.

Visit with me, visit with my home, sit and take it in,

Listen to the tales, hear the whispers, hear the rhythm,

Feel the beat, move to the pulse, step to this pace,
Get to know my home, get to know the why,
get to know my me.

The words of a jump rope rhyme are not arbitrary. They do not happen by chance. Jump rope rhymes have a home in experience, in the memory of an event, in the living of the life. The rhymes speak of cautions, of wonders, and of dreams. This jump rope chant speaks of the faith that adult members of our community had in our ability to succeed. The words display the sense of wonder and the power of hope for a future filled with possibility. There also exists a level of doubt and question that speaks to the years of struggle against and from within a marginalized status. As members of a nameless and voiceless minority assurances of fair play and justice were often difficult to believe.

This chant served as one of the verbal challenges and encouraging links to generational hope borne of a struggled existence. Our parents in the struggle had taken positions as butchers, bakers, and undertakers in order to ensure our survival. From these positions our parents were able to protect us and serve as buffers against harsh realities of racism. They were determined that we would not suffer through similar existences and planted seeds of attainment through education. We were told that we could be anyone, do anything, and go anywhere if we would only work hard enough. We would not be limited by the traditional jobs set aside for African Americans; janitor, nurse, teacher, athlete. We nurtured new seeds as we dreamed big, dreamed of far off worlds, and dreamed the collective dreams of our parents and their parents. As Nettles (1994) discusses in meeting the challenges of multiculturalism, we held tight to the occupational dreams and aspirations whispered by our parents and cultivated by our personal hopes.

I thought about those parental dreams as I sat in the middle of the floor of our childhood home on a cold rainy in April. My return to the Philadelphia airport had been greeted with freezing rain. Despite the years since this airport had served as the gateway to and from my childhood and many years living in warmer climates, my body responded instantly to the cold. My hands moved deeper into the pockets of my coat, my chin lowered to my chest, and my step quickened. I had returned home on this April day to begin the arduous task of cleaning out our family home. I was not looking forward to the task; not only because it symbolized an ending to the foundational chapter of my life as receivers of a family's care, but because it signaled the beginning of a new phase in our lives as the caregivers. As members of the sandwich generation, caught between caring for our children and caring for our parents we were each here from distinct homes of our own, the three of us, to clean out our childhood home.

The short drive from the airport required very little active attention on my part. Automaticity of motions and reactions had taken over the wheel and provided me with the opportunity to gaze and reflect. I passed homes that had defied the odds and been built over what was once the Tinicum Swamp. It was from the edges of this swamp and from the back of our family station wagon, that we had often come to dream of far off places; to wonder about the destination of each plane that pulled up its wheels and steadied itself against the wind. My mother explained years later that she wanted us to picture the possibility, to imagine our worlds to be as endless as our imagination.

A bit further on my route between the airport and home I caught sight of the ARCO oil tanks and the tombstone shop that lay adjacent to the Mount Lawn Cemetery. It hardly seemed possible that fourteen years had passed since the twenty-one gun salute

had pierced the air and signaled the departure of my first admirer, my first hero, my dad. While my mother had been responsible for my educational thirst and drive, my father could take all credit for my confidence and my positive self-image as a female. I had been his Miss Sepia model, and the recipient of flattering whistles as I descended the stairs in our home on my way out on a date. Those whistles had provided me with the assurance necessary to walk into unknown situations, to draw up confidence, to know that I was visible, and to feel that I was loved.

I was thankful for the quiet of Mount Lawn that April day. It provided me with the opportunity to catch up with the male equivalent and quiet balance to the energy of my mother. As always, I talked that day and my father listened. I shared the fears and the uncertainties of my latest educational endeavor, the pursuit of my doctorate. I wondered aloud about the circumstances, the dreams, the fears, and the generational sacrifices that had been made to pay the price of the ticket (Baldwin, 1985) on my behalf; the ticket that provided educational and social access. My mother had insisted on our participation in a variety of cultural lessons. Each Saturday morning, for a period of ten years, we were students of ballet, violin, piano, clarinet, and art lessons in preparation for the future lives she envisioned. My father had been told by my mother that education would be our ticket out and up. My father had not been so sure. Maybe he was afraid for us. Maybe he feared the potential fear of us as a result of what he called our *fancy education*. I wondered about the life choices denied my father and the contrasting choices my father's life struggles had provided me and my siblings. I wondered if he was proud or if he was still afraid for his Miss Sepia.

We were each the embodiment of their dreams and the union of their hopes. My father had wanted me to be a lawyer; my mother had always said that I would be a doctor someday. We both recognized the wisdom and the prophecy of his wife that rainy day in April. As I left Mount Lawn that day I felt the comfort of his approval and could still see the proud smile in his eyes.

His dreams had included a career as a graphic artist. He had been born before the retirement of Jim Crow, the relaxation of the Black codes and opportunities provided through affirmative action. Born ahead of his time, his skin color had prevented the world from enjoying his skills in that arena. He expressed his inner self, his personal voice, his artistic literacy through his hand-made canvases, sable brushes, and homemade plexi-glass palettes. At that time in our country's history his artwork had provided the freedom of spirit and personal expression his skin color had prevented. We had learned not to disturb my father as he painted and as such it had also served to provide his retreat and escape from us.

He did manage a bit of personal and career bravery with the establishment of his own construction company. In the tradition of survival passed down by our ancestors in the struggle, he had followed his skills into entrepreneurship and become a self-employed general contractor. He could visualize the possibility of a beautiful room when others only saw years of neglect and decay. Striking out on his own with a wife and three children was a testament to his talent and his desire to carve out a slice of the world that he could claim on his own terms. This too served as a form of personal retreat.

His general construction company demanded most of his time. It took him away from or home long before we greeted each morning and brought him home each evening

long after our bedtime. He was one of the old timers who believed that any job worth doing at all was worth doing right. He was good at what he did and his steady stream of word-of-mouth clients stood as a testament to skill. As diligent and as skilled as he was to his craft, his free time was devoted to his passion, the painting of landscape scenes. His favorite subjects were wild horses and eagles. He called them majestic creatures lucky enough to exist in the freedom of the wild. He would exchange his overalls, heavily scented with turpentine and Dutch Boy paint, for the solitude of the garage and scents of gesso and acrylics. As a master carpenter he had worked magic with his hands, as an artist his hands divulged the creativity of his mind, his ultimate retreat.

Even today, the scents of spackle, paint, and turpentine remind me of our summers together as I learned the ropes of construction as the apprentice to his guidance. My proudest construction moment came as we stood admiring the installation of a wrought-iron, spiral staircase in a downtown loft. He admired the work as well and remarked that it had been a job well done, something I could be proud to attach my name to. Determination, pride in your work, and your word as your honor; my dad was a simple man who in my mind's eye held captive the spirit of a giant.

He was considered a serious soul and his silent observation of the world made everyone who did not know him nervous. Generous to a fault, I took pride in the fact that everyone who saw me said that I looked just like my father. He was my own private sun and I was his Miss Sepia. I patterned myself after him to the best of my ability. We did jigsaw puzzles together until the wee hours of the morning, dunked ginger snap cookies into mugs of hot lemon tea. We enjoyed warm bowl of Wheatena sweetened with maple syrup on winter mornings when I awoke early enough to catch him. I was not blessed

with his gift of capturing life and nature on canvas. I was blessed with his eye for color, his decorative vision, his unstoppable right-handed hook shot from the foul line, and his determination to claim my desires and my own spot in the world. I was after all his Miss Sepia model.

I understood my father's desire for personal spaces. I shared his search for personal retreats and also shared his unwillingness to feel an obligation to share those spaces. In these places I could battle, converse with, and question my own personal demons. In these private spaces the battles could occur with personally created demons without taking on those supplied by others. In these spaces I could be left to determine the reasons for my self-imposed alienation. Why was I not understood by family? Why did my refuge in books serve as a threat? I recognize the contradiction of my feelings for solitude amidst a community supportive of connection and relation. It is a constant private battle exacerbated by perceptions of onlookers about my time spent in all-White environments and internal questions surrounding cultural pulls.

The rental car continued on past the oil storage tanks, the automobile junkyard, and the incinerator before pulling up to the curb in front of the red brick house that seemed much smaller now. This, the only house on the block with a front porch had been the site of my formative world, the frame that held and fed my dreams of life beyond its walls.

The porch addition had been an annual request from my mother. A country girl from North Carolina, her family had spent evenings on the front porch talking, laughing, and speaking with passing neighbors. That porch had been the site of community and of connection for her. She longed for the same opportunity to connect with neighbors and

pass the time here in her northern home. My father had finally relented when my younger brother was old enough and strong enough to move the wheelbarrow loads of concrete from the sidewalk to the house. Once again, an idea that my mother had set her mind to had come to fruition. The sight of the porch had not only set my memory in motion, it also brought to mind the impending loss of the house that held so many other foundational memories.

We had been losing my mother in bits and snatches since my father's death. Audre Lorde (1982) shares her mother's power in her biomythography entitled *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*. I too recognized my mother's power from an early age. Her *Redbone* classification had forced her to develop a skin tough enough to handle the questioning looks from Whites and Blacks alike; neither group knew quite what to make of her. Despite this tough exterior, too much of my mother had been connected to my father. His passing had signaled the beginning of her ending. My mother had been the caretaker of both her husband and her own mother. The care that she had expended had taken its toll on her in ways that only her mind knew. Admiration of both spheres of my mother's mind holds a secure place in my memory. Her determination, cunning, and sharp wit could be used in your favor. They could just as easily be used against you if she felt threatened or trapped. The mind that was described as the brains behind my father, a mind not to be reckoned with, and a mind once set on its path could not be deterred had recently been described using a new terminology. My mother's analytical and determined mind had recently been described by and linked with another's name; her life would heretofore be linked with the disease that bore the name of Dr. Alois Alzheimer.

Having watched her mother, my grandmother give into the same disease, I was hopeful of a different outcome yet acutely aware of the likely journey that lay before us. My mother had cared for her mother in this house, in this very room, until she could no longer do so. Years later she still spoke of the regret caused by the Nursing Home decision she had been forced to make. It was our turn as her children to be forced to make that guilt filled decision.

My mother had also cared for my father as he fought the ravages of cancer. Cancer had seemed a mean disease for such a sweet natured man and quiet man. My father's smile could light up my world and his infrequent laugh warmed my heart. She had sworn those family members who knew of his diagnosis to secrecy, not wanting us to 'trouble ourselves' with knowledge of his disease. Our discovery came years into his disease and years into her burden filled existence. In the years since his death I have thanked and cursed my mother for their promises of secrecy. While I was spared the visual of his physical deterioration I was not present at his death and have found little comfort in the claim's of family members that "he would not have wanted me to see him in that way." I hid my anger at them during that time of grief. His final chapter had not included me despite his presence on every page of my personal story.

It was, however, my mother's world that lay before me on the floor that rainy day. There was a compilation of books, photos, papers, journals, coin collections, jewelry, and medical bills. She was a pack rat, a child of the Depression. She had also been the disciplinarian of the pair. I remember her prudent use of the phrase, "I'm sorry" yet relied on her strength for countless school projects, last minute crafts, or to massage away the pains caused by physical or emotional mishaps. Her description as the rock of the family

was due to both her strength and her somewhat cold and businesslike exterior. Always there with mercurochrome and band-aids to handle the scrapes and bruises, she offered limited mental salves for our emotional mishaps. Brief and dry advice was plentiful, hugs were few. While I was told that I looked like me father, I was told that I acted like my mother. It would be years before I would take that as a compliment.

It was from my mother that I learned to sew, to cook, to knit, and the value of buying quality goods on sale. The coupon queen, I often watched in amazement as my mother would earn money after shopping on a double coupon day. We traveled a great distance to shop in the grocery stores on the Main Line where my mother said the food was fresher, the selection greater, and the prices were lower. A product of the Depression, she saved the ends of everything and stock piled everything else. As a college student I remember coming home to shop for soap, toothpaste, canned goods, and fabric for new outfits. It was also from my mother that I inherited my mean tongue, my quickness to judge, and my discomfort outside of the bounds of control.

My mother had been educated by her grandmother in North Carolina before moving north to Philadelphia. Reading was her passion. While my father had passed his love of basketball and jigsaw puzzles onto me, my mother shared with me her love of books. Never one to give into sweet treats at the grocery check-out, I knew that I would always be granted a book as an alternative treat. She had described books as windows to the world. I remember her pulling down her blue suitcase one afternoon and filling it with clothes and treats as we pretended to travel through one of the worldly windows that had been opened by a book she had read aloud to me. She encouraged my curiosity and fed my imagination with a steady supply of books.

As I sat on the living room floor of our family home fingering her possessions, I felt helpless and unprepared for the decisions that we would be forced to make on her behalf. Her current world had been reduced to a room in my sister's home. This meant that symbols of her personal existence and her life with my father would need to be sorted through and many would not be making the trip from Philadelphia to Conyers, Georgia. In that moment I recognized our oversight and a sense of sadness gripped me. As a people living in the here and now, who have never been promised a tomorrow, who have held no major claim or place in the history books used in this country, who had stories we believed to be too sad to pass on, we had not been trained to value our own history. Worse yet, this lack of historical valuing had resulted in our historical oversight. That had translated into a failure to capture the stories of my parents, their parents, and the wishes of things hoped for, fought for, and resisted by previous ancestors. My realization of loss had come too late for my mother. The photo that I held in my hand was one of the façade of our little, red brick house with the front porch from which to view the world as possibility and community. That photo reminded me of my own family home in Georgia. It also reminded me that there was still time for my girls to live and learn through the captured memories and lessons of my life.

Double Dutch Diva

The first twelve years of my life passed without any realization or recognition of our social or economic status. I now know that we were not rich. We were not poor. We were like everyone else in our neighborhood. With a change in the societal rules of the time, we could easily have slipped up or down the economic scale. A bit more social justice and my father's construction business would have been awarded the bid to renew

a section of West Philadelphia. A bit less determination or resistance and the business would have dissolved into ruin taking us with it.

My childhood had actually taken place in two connected, yet distinct worlds. Those worlds, urban and suburban, were separated by a mere ten miles and twenty-five minutes by car. One world had served as my parents' temporary home during the first three years of their marriage. It was home to my mother's family and was geographically located in an area known as West Philadelphia. My section of West Philadelphia took place on a street that was less than one mile in length and city planners had given it the name of Ogden Street. Ogden Street was home to both sets of grandparents. The two houses were identical in construction, number of rooms. They could easily have been more than a city block apart from each other based on the disparity between the large numbers of visits paid to the home of my maternal grandparents as compared to those paid to my father's childhood home. They were worlds apart and yet very similar in the role that the members of each played in shaping the person that I am today. Each grandmother took seriously the charge of serving as what Frazier (2001) calls the Guardian of the Generations. "The Negro grandmother has not ceased to watch over the destiny of the Negro families..." (p. 158). They are similar, and yet vastly different in the types of memories I created and hold in my mind from visits to each. Yet, they were both equally responsible for imparting their theories of cultural life through the stories, cautions, advices, and dreams shared with me.

It was from my paternal grandmother that I acquired my love of and respect for history. Rose, a religious woman, frightened me with her warnings of the connection between idle minds and hands and the clutches of Satan. She explained life simply as

time spent learning or teaching; ceasing to do one or the other could only lead to certain death of spirit and body. This family matriarch, griot, and storytelling priestess had lived through ten single births and had made the conscious decision to become a foster mother to countless other children. She was a history teacher and had named each of her ten children after historical figures believing in the power of names. Names, according to Rose possessed the ability to hold a person's essence and could suggest a direction or the style for one's path through life. My own father was named after the West Pointe graduate and presidential candidate to lose to Franklin Pierce, General Winfield Scott. The youngest of the ten children was named for a feminist and the third national president of the National Organization of Women, Wilma Scott Heide.

She called each child and grandchild by their full and given name and frequently presented mini-history lessons on the care with which each name had been chosen. Nicknames and presented titles, she warned was the White man's way of claiming familiarity; a way of "vulgarizing [your] name" (Brooks, 1993, p.122). Name familiarity according to my grandmother was a gift that could only be given not claimed. She loved my name, a combination of my mother's and father's names. It is from this generational link that I learned to insist that it be spelled and pronounced correctly as a representation of the person that is me.

My other Ogden Street home belonged to my Mom Mom. Just as it had been for James Baldwin (1985) when he walked through Beaufort's door, walking through the door marked 4005 meant walking into an education not found in the textbooks at school. It was from this home that I learned to speak Pig Latin as a form of protected speech. I learned to count the cards as I watched games of Pinochle on Saturday nights, to listen to

and cheer for the Phillies on the radio, to hold a gun, and to jump a ride on the back of the trolley car that ran down the middle of Ogden Street before turning right onto 40th street. It was in this small row house that I learned to bake potato rolls, to listen to grown folks talk about *Uncle Charlie* from the stairs, to play Jacks, and to jump Double Dutch. Double Dutch and jump rope rhymes had provided my first lessons in manipulating the English language with my tongue and to move my body to match the beat of my culture. It was in this home that was always filled with relatives, that I learned about the struggles, the dysfunctions, the pride, and the hopes of family and of a collective people.

My maternal grandmother had been a domestic, a polite term for cleaning lady, for many years during my childhood. She had been required to wear a maid's uniform in the homes on the Main Line where she worked. She frequently presented us with used and discarded designer children's clothes from the families for whom she worked. With the ignorance borne of middle class privilege, I remember asking her once (and only once) why she wore the uniform and continued to do such menial work. Her simple reply had rocked me to shame "I do this so that you won't ever have to." My grandmother then proceeded to provide me with a lesson in using access to watch and learn. She explained that when she cleaned their closets she made note of the labels in the suits; when she served their dinners she made note of the utensils used; when they entertained she worked overtime to listen to their stories. My grandmother taught me the power of access. Through access and the observance provided as a result of invisible status, she had learned to read their world (Freire, 1987) and worked to bring the messages home to her world. She was determined to use her access to help us to maneuver in the world she

assured us that we would one day live in. Later, she would attend every parent or grandparent function at my school on the Main Line with an air of retributive pleasure.

My other world, the world that housed my nuclear family, had become our family home one month prior to my birth. This home lay on the outskirts of Philadelphia in the Township of Darby. I grew up believing that we had been the original owners of our house. In going through my mother's papers I discovered that we had in fact been the second owners. The White original owners had sold the home to my parents a mere three months after moving in and a month after the arrival of the first Black family. The arrival of my parents and folks who looked like my parents had caused their own situational and historical phase of White flight. A segregated community resulted.

This small and segregated neighborhood on the fringes of Philadelphia shaped me, guided me, taught me, and provided me with a strong foundation. It was this foundation that would prepare me to take on the outside world. I am certain that it is this segregated grounding and orientation of cultural identity formation that helped me to withstand my exposure to future racial slurs and personal questions that would come during my time at Agnes Irwin.

Fifteen minutes away from the big city, a lifetime away from possibility, miles away from threat and degradation. The concept of neighbor and neighborhood held significance in the segregated towns of the time. In the closeness of the buildings in city neighborhoods and small suburban towns, families blended and common threads were established. Food was one connection used to transcend and blend race and class. Differences in the shades of skin color simply meant different ways to cook and serve the rice that *everyone* ate. Whether with beans, under stew, fried, baked or boiled, it served as

one of the many links between households and families. The jump rope was a childhood link that spoke to the segregated relationships forged in the small towns over generations of understanding and mutual respect.

Early in my childhood our neighborhood was filled with stay-at-home moms and their kitchen windows face the playground and the creek that lay at its edge. We were well aware of the fact that anything attempted by any child under the watchful gaze of the *Window Queens* would be reported immediately to that child's mother. The Window Queens, matriarchs, from front window thrones, dolled out reprimands and punishments for behavioral infractions across all family lines. Even for Grumet's *other people's children* (1988, p. 64), they shaped behavior with love and caring. Mutual respect, pride in the self and lack of need or desire to create an-*other* (Bloom, 1998; Britzman, 1998; Haymes, 1995; Morris, 2001), kept us safe. We had yet to experience what Britzman tells us of Alice Balint's "identificatory thinking" (Britzman, 1998, p. 31). Our egos had yet to come under assault by a separate *other culture, other ethnic, other racial*, and foreign standard. Our learning was community, cultural, ethnic and racially based, and as such lacked any paradox caused by an awareness of a failure to learn (Britzman, 1998) based on a standard set by an exclusionary dominant culture. Growing up under this ethic of care (Siddle Walker, 2004) and concern provided the fertile ground for courage and risk to become internalized and to take root. We would need to sow these seeds of courage, resistance, and resilience throughout our lives.

We spent summer evenings under the watchful eyes of parents and local teachers as we chased lightning bugs, enjoyed slow churned ice cream, and crab boils prepared on the neighborhood bar-be-cue pit. There were also frenzied bicycle rides for blocks behind

the DDT truck. Our neighborhood sat next to a meandering creek that was a breeding ground for mosquito larvae and mosquitoes. The sprayed DDT served as the treatment du jour. While the mosquito population varied from year to year depending on the frequency of visits by the truck, I am certain it was not designed for close contact inhalation and likely did our lungs no good. There were however never any shouts of protest or protection by the driver and deliverer of the pesticide to our neighborhood.

Through the eyes of a child our neighborhood held all that we needed. Smitty's was the barbershop. This was where the men gathered to discuss the passing of time, passing of lives, flickering dreams and long gone hopes. Pam's was the main beauty shop where the women met to enjoy a bit of female fellowship, away from the men. Couch's Corner Store sold penny candy, wax lips, dill pickles from the barrel and was the children's haven of treats and sweet smells. The one funeral parlor in town, Edmondson's, was where many were dressed for their final rest. Next door, Mrs. Sadler, the neighborhood and school music teacher, gave piano lessons in her home. I dreamed of learning to play the piano, yet could never muster the courage to walk past Edmondson's.

There was also the small post office that was situated on the first floor of a local store. Our home town was Darby Township yet we were instructed to use Sharon Hill as the official city on all mailed correspondence. We shared another town's name and zip code in order to receive our mail. Today I recognize that as a co-opting of our existence as a distinct community. At the time it was seen as simply a necessary government conciliation in order to receive mail from the outside world.

The town was a small one. It was home.

The town was small, yet it was a large enough home.

The literacy held in the jump rope united us all.

My town was small, yet it was a large enough home.

The jump rope ruled a forged a sense of community, a sense of self.

We jumped to the beat and jumped to be our best.

The jump rope held our community tight, held cultural expectations.

Come home with me, meet me in my space, come to know my me.

While I cannot remember the players of the games, I do remember long summer days filled with friends, games of baseball, touch football, jacks, mud pies, and Double Dutch. Nights were filled with star gazing (one of the benefits of living away from the city skyline and resultant smog), catching fire flies, and listening to baseball games outside on the radio. We searched for tadpoles and frogs in the creek during the summer and tried to ice skate around the protruding rocks during the winter. The creek took a turn at the end of the last row house and dropped about ten feet. We fantasized about jumping off the edge into the pool below. We would set up what we thought to be an elaborate system of look-outs and sentries. Try as we might every attempt to master the rapids was met with a, “You kids get away from there before I call your parents!” As we scattered I am certain that more than one of us felt saved by the scream. Once again the awareness of an ever watchful Window Queen would prevent us from doing something really dangerous or stupid.

Food was another connection used to blend and build community. Differences in the shades of skin color simply meant different ways to cook and serve the foods that we all enjoyed. Whether fried, stewed, baked or grilled, food served as a link between households. We were in the struggle together and the jump rope rhymes talked of food as

one of the connections. Al sold some of the best bar-be-que chicken and fish dinners from his basement in our small town. This was a family treat on Friday evenings. It was here that the neighbors met to take stock, to listen and be heard, to lament, to praise, to dream, and to plan.

The one firehouse, Firehouse No.8, was home to the one community fire truck and the volunteer fire department. Our firemen had day jobs as policemen, construction workers, and mechanics. The siren could be heard throughout the entire town. It signaled, not only, a call for help, it alerted the members of the town that the community would be needed to rally around one of its own. That same siren also called us to block parties in the summer, school dances in the fall and church picnics in the spring.

It was small community, yet it was home to several churches; Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, Episcopal, Jesuit and Non-Denominational. As in many segregated communities of the time, the church was a unifying force in our segregated African America community. It was a site of connection, gathering, discussion, fellowship, dialogue, and community. It was in church that we learned to recognize the power of the voice through the call and response interplay of the sermon. It was also through the church that we came to recognize the power of the female voice in the choir, as the force behind the pastor, as the mother of the congregation.

My mother, determined to show us the possibilities that exist in the varieties of life and as a retaliatory strike against what she called her hypocritical Southern Baptist roots, saw to it that we went to a different Bible school every summer. This was one of her early lessons in exposure, inclusion, open-mindedness and acceptance. “How will you

ever learn to talk to someone who is different, if you never talk to anyone who is different?"

The 2000 census lists the racial make up of Darby Township as 62% White, 36.4 Black, .9% Hispanic, and .7% bi-racial. These figures are somewhat misleading in that Darby Township was and remains two distinct communities divided by train tracks. There were one or two Whites who recognized the economic potential in entrepreneurial monopolies and conducted businesses south of the tracks. The dry cleaner that our family supported was located adjacent to the southern side of the train tracks. Technically, this location meant that we could also claim as residents his business and attached second level living quarters. The concrete business, the junk yard, and the automobile body shop were all run by Whites. These businesses were located on the fringes of the community and served as a buffer, a type of gateway between the distinct communities. They were also a potential gold mine in their capacity to supply services to both the Black and White communities. However, as dusk fell, our reverse sundown town (Loewen, 2005) became a Jump Rope community that remained African American and segregated through the night until the street sweepers would unzip the cloak of darkness exposing our small community to the light of day.

My educational journey began as a student at Lincoln Elementary School. Its name would later be changed to Studevan Elementary. The school stood at the heart of the 1.4 square miles that was designated as Darby Township, Pennsylvania. Today, the red brick building is a part of Studevan Plaza. It stands as a retirement center housing many of the community's elders. Then, Lincoln Elementary was the only school in the town. It was more than a neighborhood school. Along with the fire house, it served as the

town's central entertainment and gathering place. May Day celebrations, foot races, barbe-cues, black top ball games were annual community affairs. The teachers were neighbors, friends and even family members. Many had fled to this and other segregated communities to continue their art following the mass dismissals of Negro teachers in the wake of Brown and desegregation. It was a second home not only to us as students but also to our teachers. The ethic of care within served and supported our development. It also served and supported our teachers.

Everyone walked to school. As with most children left to their own devices the walks to and from school were filled with the occasional disagreements, bouts of name calling, and threats of after-school retribution. At the schoolhouse door community, union, and an ethic of care existed on the other side of the threshold.

Our first grade world was shaped in Mrs. Ore's classroom. She was my first encounter with a dreamkeeper (Ladson-Billings, 1994), a gentle combination of educational griot and Orisha (King, 2005). Mrs. Ore, our Yemajá, "whose compassion was a healing force" (p. 27) was responsible for knowing, holding, and transferring the dreams of the previous generations to our generation.

She was a tall woman. I recognize that at six years of age everyone must seem tall. My recollection of her stature is bolstered by visions of her height when compared to the five feet ten inches height of my father. Mrs. Ore ruled the first grade, a towering woman with incredible presence and a gentle spirit. I remember feeling loved, are protected, and cared for in her classroom. Vanessa Siddle-Walker describes this ethic of care as, "a strong emphasis on responsibility, commitment, and a parentlike morality" (2004, p. 16).

Mrs. Ore provided some of the first glimpses into hopes and dreams that our teachers held for us. She was one of the first to ask each of us what we wanted to be when we grew up. Despite the actual answers, she would reply by substituting a suggested hope and direction for each of us. Students who replied secretary, fireman, policeman, or nurse were told that she saw them in careers as doctors, lawyers, and judges. I also remember that she did not provide a substitute reply when I offered teacher as my chosen career. In that instant I knew that in this dreamkeeper's eye (Ladson-Billings, 1994), teaching was indeed a profession that had her blessing. That was all that I needed.

Mrs. Ore laid the groundwork for our future as minority citizens through lessons on the pervasiveness of race in America. *"It ain't fair but it is what it is."* It was in Mrs. Ore's classroom that we were provided with our first lesson in racial and cultural expectation, along with racial and cultural strife. It was in Mrs. Ore's first grade classroom that we were told what it meant to be little Black children in a white man's world, "You'll have to be twice as smart, twice as determined and three times as fast to get half as far. For every one step that they take, you'll have to take three. *It ain't fair, but it is what it is.* And you will *become* somebody so long as you remember who you *are.*" Another great African American educator, Mary McLeod Bethune framed the sentiment in the following terms. "I find that the Negro youth cannot have, and enjoy, the highest places of citizenship, but must measure up to the standard nonetheless. As a part of the citizenry of this country, the greatest country in all the world, he is expected to be superior despite the ever-increasing limitations" (Collier-Thomas & Franklin, 2001, p. 15).

We were taught by a teacher similar to the one mentioned in Ira Shor's *Empowering Education: Critical Teaching for Social Change*. The high school English teacher from Oregon, Linda Christensen provided her students with lessons on the necessity of learning Standard English through their own cultural exploration into who makes, enforces, benefits and loses from the rules deemed necessary by the dominant culture. We were taught, as were Linda Christensen's students, about the differences and the ability to overcome those differences through our teacher's efforts to help us develop a "command of two idioms, their 'home' language and the 'cash' language (Standard English)" (Shor1992, p. 53). We learned as Audrey Watkins to be "...very well educated on how to speak correctly. We learned to speak incorrectly to survive in the neighborhood," (Watkins in Reynolds & Webber, 2004, p. 161) and to switch over to the language expected during the hours of training and education at school (Hobbs, 2004). We did need to be twice as smart and our lives as segregated students provided our initial lessons in the mastery of two languages; the language of home and community, as well as the language of the dominant culture.

My memories of first grade include a confusion when writing b's and d's, a challenge that I struggle with even today. My memories also involve Dick, Jane, Sally, Spot, and Puff. First introduced in the 1930's, these readers depicted a life that was more perfect than reality. Today I know that the early stories also failed to represent or depict any minorities. At the time I do not remember noticing the omission. As a first grader in the early 1960's, our readers were the surplus copies that held the 1950's storylines. A decade before the introduction of diversity into the character list with Mike and twin sisters Pam and Penny, the plots of our Dick and Jane readers centered on the growth and

prosperity of the post-war economy. These stories captured a life in the suburbs where families had two to three children, a cat, a dog, and the white picket fence.

Unlike minority parents of today who have been provided with a selection of racially appealing and appropriate storybook characters, we did not see ourselves in the plotlines of the readers that provided our daily lessons. At the time I do not think we gave much conscious energy to the difference in skin color between ourselves and the children in the readers. Our parents were more concerned with reading progress than with lodging complaints dealing with content. They were accustomed to years of invisibility. Due to Mrs. Ore's prodding and expectations, we were more concerned with the words on each page. Reading rather than figurative representation was the focus in her class. As with Lisa Delpit's (1995) culture of power Mrs. Ore explicitly provided us with tools for success within the tools provided.

I remember recognizing many of the words on the page even before Mrs. Ore began our journey toward the comprehension and the decoding of the word. In my memory it was this prior knowledge earned me the position as model reader. A recent look at my first grade report card revealed that I was only an average reader at the start of the school year. My grades for the final two grading periods placed me in the highest reading group for the start of the second grade. While I beamed at every opportunity to impress Mrs. Ore with my skills in class, after class my skills, a conflicting sign of distinction and separation, were the source of several fights and name calling sessions. Avoiding many of those fights provided the early training for the track career as a sprinter that lay head of me at the new school. I spent many afternoons racing through yards in order to enjoy the safety provided by reaching the other side of the bridge that

separated our row homes from the area of town known as the projects, government supported housing. Supported by the encouragement of parents and Mrs. Ore, I chose not only to listen to, but also to believe their dreams of a better life through a dedication to education. I settled on being a runner and I resigned myself to getting a quick start out of the blocks each afternoon when the last bell rang.

While I suffered through childhood jabs of acting white (Horvat & O'Connor, 2006; Ogbu, 2003, 2004) with respect to my diction, my grades, my teacher-pleaser fixation, and my chosen spare time refuge in books, my Double Dutch skills served as my social equalizer. It was in between the ropes that I learned to negotiate and create a space between the worlds of my developing identity, one of simultaneously one of social cast-in and out-cast. I do not believe, at the time, that my friends questioned my racial identity in terms of the community collective. I was often the first jumper chosen when the jump rope game took on a competitive quality. Light on my feet, able to concentrate on and internalize the pace of the ropes and to read the expressive intentions of the enders, I could jump for what seemed like forever. I practiced whenever a free moment presented itself. Aware of the fact that my unique jumping skills served to elevate my cultural stock and peer position, I used each jumping opportunity to highlight new moves and demonstrate my personal style. I was not known for my dancing skills and would rather watch the rhythmic moves of friends at the neighborhood dances. Double Dutch was a different story. Here, body claimed a personality and identity that translated into a level of acceptance that was created through the sisterhood of the school yard and not the school building.

We moved from grade to grade, from lesson to lesson. Everyone in the neighborhood had the same teachers for each grade, year after year. Younger siblings had to listen to the praises of or admonitions about older sisters & brothers. Mrs. Wiggins held court in the second grade. She had the reputation for being strict yet fair. Mrs. Jones held court in the third grade. She opened our minds to the world of possibility as she talked about college and distant ports. Mrs. Smith for fourth, we would have followed her anywhere simply to hear her encouraging words and winks. Mrs. Strand for fifth - she made sure that we could read and discuss anything placed in front of us. And read we did! We read, and read and read some more. We did so with great flare and enthusiasm.

She became pregnant during the second half of the school year. Decorum practices of the time demanded that she leave the classroom before the secret became apparent. One afternoon while helping her to clean the chalk from the erasers, she shared a secret with me that cemented my desires of a chosen profession and changed my world. She dreamed out loud that she hoped she would have a little girl and that she would one day be a student just like me. I have wanted to be a teacher just like her ever since that afternoon.

We learned lessons through the hidden curriculums of life (Grumet, 1988; Pinar, 2004; Purpel, 1999), outside of the ethnically divided schools and within the confines of our distinct, yet connected neighborhoods. Street games set the standards for competitive spirit, community pride and personal self esteem. Stick ball, basketball, jacks, and marbles all became yardsticks by which to measure and be measured. We were as good as we were and played to be recognized as such. Another activity, which served as a transcendental thread to race and culture, was the jump rope.

We turned the readings into Hop Scotch chants and jump rope rhymes. We had learned, in that small school, to read the word and to feel secure in our success. Reading the world had limited scope. Our world sent messages that held whispers of, “*You can do it! You can be anything that you want to be!*” I do not remember taking books home from school. I remember needing to share books with classmates. In addition to homework, I remember replaying the lessons learned in class in our games out on the playground during school recess and after school at home. History, Math, and Geography lessons became jump rope rhymes. Book facts, were played out and reinforced in the rhymes. The verbal, repetitive practice of the jump rope rhymes also served to support our Reading and Language Arts development.

Our jump rope rhymes were filled with life lessons, history lessons, and math lessons. Surrounded by the beat and security of the ropes we learned what was expected of us; we learned what it would take to succeed; we learned the value of a good education; we learned what it felt like to be special and loved; we learned about trust, motivation, dedication and grit.

Banana, banana, banana split

What did you get in arithmetic?

Banana, banana, banana free

What did you get in geometry?

We succeeded in the lessons provided by our neighborhood teachers. While these were not lessons of expectation as defined and delineated by the dominant culture, they provided spaces for attainment and achievement as defined by the people who knew us as community. We were determined to be the people that our teachers knew we could be.

Without an overabundance of supplies, our lessons took on a practical and authentic air. When studying the Earth we were given the assignment to paint maps of the seven continents. I was not fond of painting and decided to ask my father to put his artistic skills to use for my assignment. He used one of his hand-made canvases to paint a map of the world that would rival any atlas of the time. Mrs. Smith recognized the artist with one look. I was instructed to march myself right back home. I was to remain there until I had completed the assignment using my own art skills. My father's painting was used as a resource for the remainder of the year. It became a point of discussion at every community gathering that year.

The segregated schools were merely extensions of the community that held fast to a common culture and common hopes for the extension of that culture. Cultural, historical, racial and perceptual connections were made between students and teachers that needed no lesson plan, essential questions or culminating event to tap into those connections. Our teachers spoke the same language and were a part of the same conscious and historical stream of memory from which we had all emerged (Bowers, 1995; Haymes, 1995; Morris, 2001; Pinar, 2004). Our teachers structured "lessons to engage and connect students to their communities and classroom, Black teachers created classroom environments based on mutual respect as a way to acknowledge and validate their students" (Irvine, 2002, p. 43). Teachers in segregated communities of the time knew the background knowledge of their students, had actually played a part in shaping it, and framed questions in manners that spoke to those experiences.

The playgrounds, school yards, and side streets served as extensions of the classroom as we sang, explored, and cemented our lessons in our jump rope rhymes and

chants. The safety of our community left us free to examine the material in a context that encouraged expression and discovery of self. We learned our lessons well and made promises to do our teachers proud.

Here comes teacher -

Better think quick!

Now it's time for arithmetic

1 and 1 are 2

2 and 2 are 4

3 and 3 are 6

4 and 4 are 8

- - -

The elementary school served us well until the end of the fifth grade. The jump rope sang for us all, beat for us all and we all understand its cultural rhythm. There were few secrets and every statement held a life lesson. The sixth grade dawned with a bus ride to “the other side” of our little township, the *White* side. We boarded buses that would take us to Darby Township Elementary School, far newer, far larger, far nicer, and far stranger. Memories of that year are not pleasant ones. We sang about our pains, troubles and heartaches in the jump rope rhymes. We were united by the struggle and strengthened by the mutual understanding. With all that the jump rope represented, we packed it away as we boarded the buses of desegregation to follow the American dream across town. Our jump ropes were stilled. This marked not only a turning point in the identity of the African Americans from the small jump rope community; it also heralded

a decline in literacy awareness and school success for the African American in postmodern America's crisis of racial unity.

I was hit by a school bus in the sixth grade. Our bus driver insisted that we line up in single file fashion before he would open the doors to the bus. On this morning we were very proud of our lining up effort and were handing out compliments to each other on our efforts when we caught sight of the bus. The bus driver pulled up to the line of awaiting children and then decided to move the bus forward. At that point everyone began to run to be the first in line. I was pushed from behind and I remember falling. Children began pointing at me and screaming about blood. It was then that the pain hit and I looked down to see my arm covered in blood. I remember thinking that it looked like a foreign object and did not feel attached to the rest of my body. I turned and began running down the road that connected all of the driveways behind our row houses. I remember hearing the bus pulling away from the curb and was certain he was bringing it around to pick me up and take me to the hospital.

He did not pick me up that morning and I was introduced to the bitter and divisive world of litigation among the race. For a brief moment, my dreams of adult professions had centered on becoming an attorney to ensure that children would have at least one lawyer willing to fight just for them. The battle that ensued in that courtroom caused a divide in the community. Matters of negligence and blame cost a neighbor his job and caused threatening phone calls to our home at strange hours of the night. My mother's nervous system suffered as a result of my pain, my struggle to regain use of my arm, and expensive visits to specialists. As an employee in the county's front office, she also

suffered through being forced to put a public face on a personal lawsuit. My dreams of life as an attorney remained in that courtroom at the conclusion of the trial.

My other memories of that year include watching as the children, from Studevan Elementary, were divided into sections from A to D as we were bused to the school on the other side of the tracks. Many of my friends took up residence in the “D” section. The message was clear, “D” for deficient, “D” for deferred, “D” for disparage. We translated the message to mean “D” for *downright & doggone different*. I watched my happy friends, my secure friends, my confident friends, and my successful friends become “D” for defeated. Questions filled my mind. *What had happened on that 15 minutes bus ride across town? How had many gone from self-confident and motivated to insecure and conquered? What magical and mystical event had occurred as we crossed the train tracks? Why were we unaware of the negative transformation that seemed to happen?*

With new eyes, with new interpretations and with new tools for measuring and being measured, we read the world far more critically. We saw our safe, secure, confident world disappear. We saw the junkyard that bordered our neighborhood as a junkyard, not the playground full of great hiding places. We saw the incinerator that bordered our homes as an incinerator, not the impetus of great ghost stories. We saw the oil tanks that separated our neighborhood from the cemetery as oil tanks, and no longer as alien landing pads. We saw the city dump as a dump, and no longer cared to use the recycled hills as dirt bike launch pads. We saw the sewage treatment plant as a sewage treatment plant and no longer as a clandestine home for secret agents. We saw our world as less than, as “D” for different, “D” for deficient and “D” for defeated.

Our world would never be the same; we would never read our world with similar eyes, similar hopes, or common cultural and community memories. It was then that we began to question our idyllic segregated existences and experiences. Aspects of our community, previously merely a part of the community, were now highlighted as deficiencies. We were suddenly made acutely aware of the fact that we were not expected to succeed outside of our Jump Rope Community and would not be supported in our search for that success in our new educational surroundings. Our jump ropes had been stilled and with them seemed to go the connective oral links to the rhythms, beats, and encouraging chants of generations past and connections to the village concept.

It does indeed take a village to raise and educate a child. The impact of peer, societal, and community influences play important roles in the creation of the efficacious student. I agree with portions of an Ainsworth (2002) study that examined the impact of the neighborhood on the potential educational achievement of children living in poverty. Also examined was the degree to which social inequality is reproduced through community perceptions and expectations of education. Collective socialization, social capital, and perceived opportunities were viewed as institutional characteristics that played a direct role in shaping educational motivation. However, our segregated community, our collective socialization involved a positive concept of the potentials existent through education.

Collective socialization and the resultant levels of social power, currently exists in neighborhoods and communities of poverty to a negative degree. Here, the prevailing numbers of adults do not work and there exists few if any role models to establish educational norms of academic expectation. As a result of the continuous cycle of

poverty existent for many children in our educational systems of the day, examples of accepted school behaviors, expectations, and activities are lacking among children living in neighborhoods of poverty. The outlook for opportunities that derive from academic pursuits stands in direct contradiction to the existent lifestyles of “un” and “under” employment. Restricted opportunities and limited examples prevent children who live in poverty from buying into the American dream of working hard in school to secure the eventual payment of a good job.

Michael Apple discusses the social perceptions of education as the deliverer of job opportunities in the book *Education and Power* (1995). In the book, Apple sheds further light on the concept of social capital and the power of peer relationships as they relate to the pursuit or denial of the American dream. Surrounded by joblessness, under and unemployment, “the lads” unlike the “ear holes” in the book, choose to live a life that is in direct contradiction of the messages related to the perceived power of schools. The capitalistic pull forced many of the lads to drop out of school to secure part or full time, blue-collar jobs. Almost as if to prove that an education was not the only key to a job, their choices to turn their backs on school forced them into lives of unrealized potential. The contradiction served as a double edged sword as the “...seeds of reproduction lie in this very rejection” (Apple, 1995, p. 90). The rejection of book learning, in declaring an independent nature, actually serves to continue the cycle of poverty and reduced economic options.

Collective social controls and the quality of social capital are limited in the communities of poverty. Fewer adults exist who can truly exert levels and examples of social behavior norms. The amount of time that adults can spend with youth in poverty is

also diminished by the struggle to provide for minimal existence. This is compounded by the fact that there exists little industry or employment opportunities to provide enough of a tax base to pay for services in communities of poverty. These factors combine and lead to what is termed *concentrated poverty* (Payne, 1996, 2005). These neighborhoods are where children of poverty spend their developing and formative years. Children living in poverty, and doing so for extended or generational periods of time, experience great mental and physical challenges. Academic ability development and subsequent achievement of children in poverty are affected by the people and the experiences in their immediate environment (Brooks-Gunn & Leventhal, 2003).

The power of children living in poverty to break the cycle of diminished academic ability and achievement rests in the type and timing of educational intervention. The educator, the professional in the classrooms, plays an important role in addressing the special needs of children who arrive at their classrooms from homes and environments of poverty. Pinata and Stuhlman (2004) conducted research on the impact of teacher-child relationships on the child's ability to acquire the necessary skills for success in the educational setting. The results of the study showed that despite the early academic limitations experienced by children living in poverty during their formative pre-school years, the interpersonal relationships with teachers trained in early identification and intervention strategies yielded positive achievement results. The positive and supportive social aspect and dynamics inherent in the early elementary years between children of poverty, classroom peers and the classroom teacher were enough in this study to impact academic achievement. An additional study conducted by Pearson et. al., (2003) found that subjecting students of poverty to engaging, high cognitive instruction with high

expectations and scaffolded support, served to increase academic achievement and motivation.

The teacher, the teacher's perceptions and expectations have much to do with the motivation, participation and pursuant achievement levels of children from environments of poverty. Lisa Delpit relates the advice that many minority children living in poverty and segregation were given, "...the one thing people can't take away from you is what is between your ears." She continued with, "...you must do twice as well as white people to be considered half as good" (Delpit, 1995, p. 158). Despite segregation and marginalization based on class, social status and socioeconomic levels, jump rope cultural communities had provided high standards for achievement and success. These expectations were grounded in the accomplishments of the collective community, of future successes and pride in an educational heritage that had spanned continents and generations. The teachers in segregated environments "were determined that despite all odds [we] would achieve" (Delpit, 1995, p.158). They recognized the power in the cultural community lay in the high educational expectations for their children and were determined to attain the desired levels.

Despite a heritage of educational self-determination among members of the Jump Rope Community, there exists a burden experienced by African Americans who possess the quest for intellectual freedom, recognition, and excellence. bell hooks, (1991) describes this outsider-within (Lorde, 1984) status in the book *Breaking Bread: Insurgent Black Intellectual Life*.

The choice of becoming a Black intellectual is an act of self-marginality; it assures a peripheral status in and to the Black community. The quest for

literacy indeed is a fundamental theme in Afro-American history and a basic impulse in the Black community...The reasons Black people choose to become serious intellectuals are diverse. But in most cases these reasons can be traced back to a common root: a conversion-like experience with a highly influential teacher or peer that convinced one to dedicate one's life to the activities of reading, writing, and conversing for the purposes of individual pleasure, personal worth, and political enhancement of Black (and often other oppressed) people (p. 132).

My personal dreamkeepers had provided the impetus for and the foundation of my intellectual progression. Despite attempts at marginalization from within the community I choose to use my ever-changing degree of literacy and my struggle toward awareness to add to the ethic of care begun in Mrs. Ore's classroom. As an educator today I think often of that transition from the care and high expectations awaiting us as we entered Lincoln Elementary and Mrs. Ore's class, to the deficit model of learning that many of my friends encountered upon entering the school across the tracks. I remembered the look of sadness on the faces of my friends as we left school each day and even longed for the sprints home to avoid a fight. I remembered the encouragement of my parents and of my teachers at Studevan Elementary. Their words and dreams spill out at me each time I struggle with new content or unknown concepts. I am as determined today to make my personal people and my community proud. My environment might change but my ability to use books to open windows onto new worlds will forever be a gift of my dreamkeepers.

CHAPTER 2

STARTING IN PLACE

I took a trip around the world

And this is where I went:

From Austin to Boston,

From Boston to Canada

From Canada to Denver,

From Denver to England...

Staring in place is a contradiction and evokes a type of visual paradox. Yet, we find comfort in claiming a place to begin and believe that everything begins at the beginning. This is the point from which exploration begins. There is a commencement, or a start to lives, events, experiences, and memories. The prestige surrounding the beginning, the start, or being the first creates a sense of pride and certain levels of arrogance. The beginning, or the start, are events and moments are like no other and gain status due to their uniqueness and distinction. That moment is historically set, awaiting a release prompted by memory or discussion. Its captive hold on our attention is relinquished, much like a time-released capsule, as we move further and further away from the curiosity and exclusivity of initiation. In this recognition we realize that the beginning is cyclical and a necessary evil for a doorway through to growth; taking us from awareness or knowledge to the discomfort of ignorance or coming to know. We recognize that in the start, we have arrived at a place where others have begun and hope for others to follow.

In this cycle of knowing is the concept of place and space. How does one capture, understand, and claim spaces that are perpetually in motion and in flux as they react to societal and historical influences? How are our spaces constructed? How do we contribute to or resist the construction of our spaces? How do these constructions and claims occur in a racialized society? How do we begin the process of deconstructing negative places and spaces based on race, class, gender, politics, and economics? How does the difficult conversation begin within plural definitions of fluid existences and realities?

Despite the reluctance and difficulty, we can start with the uniqueness of place. In attempting to find answers memory can be used to recapture and reposition place, if only for a brief moment in time. This means a connection to the pride, the practice, and the status associated with beginning at the beginning; starting in place with the ropes still (Loredo, 1996) and the jumper prepared through a connection that “captures the social memory of a community in new ways” (Gaunt, 2006, p.4). This is a start to begin with; a start to create something new in a place where we as African American jump rope divas can come to start on their unique struggles toward the cycle of growth, awareness, and the dynamism of place.

Through the Tunnel Jumping: Rememory

Mother ran the butcher shop,

Father cut the meat.

I was just their little kid,

Running cross the street.

How many times do I cross?

One, two, three...

With regret I forget, If the song be living yet Yet remember, vaguely now, It was honest anyhow. Anna Julia Cooper

The objective of Through the Tunnel Jumping is to run through the rope as it swings overhead without letting any part of the rope touch the body of the jumper (Loredo, 1996). Memories, without an opportunity of connection through discussion often run through the mind without stopping or touching connective glimpses into the past. This is especially true for negative memories, memories created as a result of struggle, pain, and oppression. The mind runs from negative memories and tries not to let these memories define or become an entrenched part of the current reality. And yet, these memories are also a part of the current reality, the current reaction to experiences, and the current definition of self. Try as we might, the ropes will eventually touch us in some way; memories will out.

Jump rope chants have the power to take us back, to awaken the memory and call us back not only in chronological time, but also in cultural time. Remembered Double Dutch sessions bring to mind other street games, memories of friends at the time, water ice, soft pretzels, stoop confinements due to some violation of a parental rule, plaits rather than braids, and feelings of safety. The rhymes, the repetitions, and the memories they stimulate, serve as a verbal link to a period in time when you were guided by generational expectations and shaped by the wants, wishes, and *gonna be*'s shared with friends, family, and community members.

Memory is ...? Memory is a curious combination of things that we actually remember, things that we wished had happened, things that we think should have happened, and things that we were told happened. Often these last memories, the told memories, have been related to us so often that they assume a new reality; these memories take up residence in the actually remembered file. Regardless of the categorical placement in the brain, memories serve as the testimony of our experiences and existences whether actual or desired. They vary from person to person due to the varied personal receptors. While the collection of the personal memories from several sources are often presented as a method of event corroboration, these too can be presentations of what should have been, could have been, and of moments hoped for?

Some of our earliest memories, or stories of memories, often involve family. We remember what mother was like and how mother made of feel. We remember what father did for a living and what he expected of us. We remember their stories of us before we came to know and remember ourselves. As if trying to cement the history, we ask for the retelling of certain stories; we ask to be taken back to a time our current memories have failed to reproduce in real time.

Memory has the power and authority to bend time. It shifts blame, reduces guilt, and justifies actions. It can also be rendered powerless in the presence of doubt. Memory is the power to reduce the distance between the here and the there to as much as a moment and as little as a lifetime. Yet, with its power to transform, memory can only be trusted to reach back to the recesses of the brain where recall resides; that place in the folds that is dependent on ego and houses the preservation of self identity. Memory is an honest attempt at truth rectified. It is through memory that history is born.

When I am asked to remember an event, an occurrence, a song, or a restaurant there is the confusion that comes with the reconciliation of actual mental sight with the film strip version caused by the push play of suggestion. Do we really remember or do we accommodate someone's desire to reflect? Is it the suggestion that creates the memory or the does the memory reconcile the suggestion? Perhaps memory is as Kevin Quashie suggests, "part will and part surrender" and is "something to be claimed as well as allowed to make a claim on a subject" (Quashie, 2004, p. 127).

There was a period in my life when my memory earned me the nickname of Memorex; a reminder of that audio cassette commercial. *Is it live or is it Memorex?* I could remember a wide assortment of phone numbers, faces and could match outfits with special events. These are memories from a younger, focused life. Today, I am challenged to remember what I ate for breakfast or to put the events from the previous day in sequential order.

Psychologists have studied memory, focusing more heavily on short-term memory as opposed to the memories from early life experiences or those amassed over a lifetime. Researchers are beginning to discover that events which changed the course of our lives represented exciting times in our lives. Events that created major conflict in our lives have great staying power in the mind's banks of memories. Near and far memories compete for the mind's attention. Far memories, memories from the distant past, possess the power to rest in the brain until called upon for discussion or resolution. These are the memories that shape and define. These are the memories that can be tapped and trusted. Childhood, high school, college, early married and family life have the power to combine memory with recall; to unfold the crevices where recall rests. Parents, siblings, and

family activities remain on the folds on the brain until lifted by thought and called into actions by ego.

Memory provides a clear view of the concept of subjectivity and the establishment of self-proclaimed existences. Shared group memories, as in slave narratives, creates a situation that William Zinsser has described as “multiple ownership of the same past” (1998, p.6). The use of oral history to collect the stories of our integrative past will provide us with the opportunity to claim and to own the memories, as well as our positions of subjectivity, and our own concepts of knowledge and understanding.

Memories start with glimpses into the yester-day framed by the mind’s perceptions. Our perceptions, while shaped by our lived experiences, are ever evolving and adjusting to events in the present. Memories, too, are ever evolving, beholden to the present for life. They are created the instant a thought or event outlives its life in the now and must await a revival caused by a sensory suggestion. Zora Neale Hurston describes the impossibility of capturing memory in the following quote – “The great difficulty lies in trying to transpose last night’s moment to a day which has no knowledge of it” (Newman, 2000, p. 223). Memories are a fleeting attempt at capturing a moment in time that is out of place and uncomfortable in the present. We inhabit a memory each time our concentration is moved from our consciousness in the present by a familiar song, a photograph, a scent, or the flavor of an unidentifiable spice on the tongue. Each memory possesses the power to take us back in time as we try to recapture the whispers or to gather up the corners of a past occurrence. Each is filled with “images that float around them – the remains, so to speak, at the archeological site – surface first, and they surface

so vividly and so compellingly that I acknowledge them as my route to a reconstruction of a world, to an exploration of an interior life that was not written and to the revelation of some kind of truth” (Morrison, 1990, p. 304). Truth according to memory is not only fleeting, it is owned by the mind which holds it captive.

Memory stirs up emotions including those that can be described as old messes. Toni Morrison uses the rememories of slaves to do the telling of the horror experienced during slavery in her book *Beloved*. She also uses these re-visited memories to construct a critical look at slavery and to “pose a strong theoretical challenge to the Modernist tradition of knowledge, reason, language, history, and identity” (Fuston-White, 2002, p.461) that White historians would have us believe. E. Franklin Frazier (2001) discusses the Forgotten Memories of slaves. He presents the argument that after the long captive journey through the forests of Africa followed by the long captive Middle Passage, many of the slaves, former long-term domestic slaves on the continent, “had only a vague knowledge of the African backgrounds of their parents” (p. 13). Both authors attest to the decision to forget the painful and horrible memories associated with captivity. The choice to inhabit new customs and claim them as memories from which to position a new future is nonetheless shaped by the memories of the past. The new illumination is foreshadowed by the dim of old lights; the new personas merely a version of the old.

Memories place us in our best light by moving to the foreground of the mind what we believe to be most important. Through memory’s gateway we are able to re-construct clear streams of knowledge, able to use forms of language to support and reconcile paths toward reason, and claim desired identities.

Much of the recent struggle for cultural recognition or resistance against exclusion has come in the form of memory and captured in oral form. We have memories of the Civil Rights Movement, memory of segregation, memory of desegregation, and memory of attempts at integration. These memories have been captured in oral and vocal formats as protest speeches and rallying cries of resistance stances. The aim of this project is to add the results of triumph in the face of adversity and to add our memories to the collective body of integrative research. As African Americans and as women our views, our stories, and our perceptions have suffered the double weight of racial and gender exclusion. African American women have consistently battled for a place on the folds of recall. We recognize the fragile nature of memory, in general, and our own memories in particular. We also hope that through the recall of our perceptions, that our biased hope for truth as a central subject is recognized.

Slave narratives, were an oral presentation of the battle for freedom. Yet, even this form of protest was placed at the editorial and perspective mercy of transcribers whose duty it was to capture the narratives in written form. The Narrative of Sojourner Truth is the result of her dictated narratives to abolitionist Olive Gilbert. “The text is narrated in the first person from Gilbert’s perspective, with relatively few direct quotations from Truth and many of Gilbert’s personal convictions” (Fulton, 2006, p. 24). The oral versus the illiterate nature of former slaves produced a dependency on the enslavers for validity, exposure, and recognition of the very experiences from which they sought freedom; the co-option of personal words, self, and memory. Memory is a “way of knowing reality which affirms continually not only the primacy of resistance but the

necessity of resistance that is sustained by remembrance of the past” (hooks, 1990, p. 342).

It is impossible to use the master’s tools to dismantle the master’s house (Lorde, 1984). The collection and dissemination of our memories of struggle, resistance, and triumph will need to be the tools that we use to dismantle the discourse of failure and inability. Critical Race Theory helps us to recognize the pervasive nature of race ever present in our memories. CRT provides the theory through which we come to understand the dominant culture’s motivation to consolidate and remain in power. This theory provides the lens through which we come to understand the suppression by the dominant group of African American memories of adversity, resilience in the face of that adversity, and triumph over that adversity as an attempt to disregard, erase, edit, and rewrite triumphant histories.

Black Feminist Thought provides an additional lens through which to view the perceptions, memories, and experiences of the African American female. The unique experiences can be positioned and examined as a critical alternative to those espoused by members of the dominant culture and also by African American males. Our stories of triumph are presented as the basis for our ability to self-name. We are able to use our stories of integrative *rememories*, our own tools, and the power of the pen, as recognized by the greater society, to establish our own unique concepts of power and racial recognition. These theories are used as frameworks of *rememory* and of self-definition.

Jumping rope represents a tangible example of Bower’s “community of memory” (1995, p. 150). Girls and women “are connected for at least a moment to the rhythm of

their steps and to each other. For that moment everything is in sync and all is right with the world.” (Chambers, 2002, p.6)

Your memory of motion, memory of steps, and memory of the chants is automatic and is automatically connected to the memories of previous jumpers. Gloria Wade-Gayles has captured the power of the unique connection between girls and women in her book *Their Memories, Our Treasures: Conversations with African American Women of Wisdom*. This oral history project paired students with mentors ranging in ages from 90 to 104. The resultant book, one in the series published by the Spelman Independent Scholar, SIS, highlights the memories and the wisdoms of these women shared during several interview sessions. The rememories captured in written form of this diverse group of modern day griots served to continue the generational connection and further cement the community of memory, of resistance, and of endurance.

I recognize and accept the tendency to choose to inhabit those memories which present us and our history in the best light possible. These are the memories possessive of enough strength and determination to push through the folds and crevices of recall. The power of these memories, the desire of these memories, to stand exposed as captured versions of self, will be presented as a version of the truth. The collection of our varied stories, varied oral representations and rememories will serve as a type of memory check and balance to prevent the glory story temptation. As a part of our being, our practice of subjectivity and identity, memory is “a process of being and becoming” (Quashie, 2004, p. 13) and has earned the right to be positioned in the story of our lives. We must fight against the individual and collective control of our memories and fight rather to use them to enhance and transmit the stories of cultural assets rather than witness their use as

conduits of cultural deficit. Additionally, we must resist the temptation to use them as proof of a past that is painted as more perfect than the reality of the events. It will be in the examination of our stories that we hope to find glimpses and snatches of truths and places for possible connection and understanding. Our captured memories are presented an attempt at both connection and rebuttal of dominant school and educational myths.

Unchallenged memories become uncontested truths that are strung together to create a grand school narrative. This narrative, then, conceals and trivializes schooling experiences that trouble mainstream notions. For racially marginalized groups, the exclusion of their stories renders their particular challenges and successes invisible (Carter, 2001, p. 152).

Our singularly multiple stories, as the jump rope chants, will be examined, sung, and discussed in unison as we search for versions of community truths and possibilities. It is in the revisiting of these stories that we hope to find and express the multiplicity and variable nature of our experiences and interpretations.

Baking Bread: Jump Rope *Comm-Unity*

All in together girls,

How is the weather girls?

Please jump in...

All in together,

Very fine weather,

I see teacher

Looking out the wind-er

Ding dong, fire drill!

Ding dong, fire drill!

There is a cohesiveness about poor Black communities before integration...

Gloria Wade-Gayles

When jumpers play Baking Bread (Loredo, 1996) they bring a prop with them into the ropes. The prop is left between the ropes for the next jumper to retrieve, jump with and then leave as they exit the ropes to be replaced by the next jumper. The enders are expected to raise the ropes, if needed, to avoid *punching down* the prop and to allow time for each jumper to retrieve the prop. The motion and activity is meant to resemble the kneading of dough with several pairs of hands taking up the massaging in succession.

The baking of bread is an appropriate metaphor for this game and this activity of connection. Bread is a symbol of fellowship, community, and an opportunity for discussion. It is “about sharing and breaking bread together, of dialogue as well as mercy...of sharing fundamentally that which is most one’s own. Sharing the word...and it has to do with a critical recovery and a critical revision of one’s past, of one’s traditions, of one’s history, of one’s heritage... the breaking bread that could lead toward our critical understanding of the past and present and our transformation of the present into a better future.” (hooks, 1991, p. 2).

Discussion is messy. As with the baking of bread it requires work, patience, active ingredients, connection, and participation. Gloria Hull, Patricia Scott, and Barbara Smith (1982) provide a section in the book *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave* entitled Necessary Bread. The section presents Black women’s literature as a form of sustenance, a necessary bread among the community of Black

women. The authors look at the work of Toni Morrison, Zora Neale Hurston, and Alice Dunbar-Nelson and the labor involved in creating connection and community through the kneading of stories borne of life's experiences. These authors recognized that the "oldest form of building historical consciousness in community is storytelling" (p. 198). Their stories are told through the accumulation of cultural ingredients, the piecing together of memories, of personal and collective histories; ingredients that require work to combine to tell stories of struggle, heartache, suffering, resistance, and of triumph. Baking bread requires much of the same. There is a degree of resistance and struggle in the creation of bread, a degree of give and take on the part of the dough and the baker. The end result, the baked bread, is an enjoyable product of the labor and is best shared through connection and discussion. The recipes for the necessary bread serve as a connective link between future generations and the stories of our past.

Jumping rope presents a tangible cultural connection between the generation of children jumping and the previous generations who passed down the tradition. "Cultural processes are intimately connected with social relations" (Macedo, 1994, p. 100). Jumping rope and jumping Double Dutch happens through togetherness, *with unity or* through a combination of French and English terms, *comm-unity*. Implicit in community is the concept of place and space. Also implied and embedded is the degree to which we contribute to the perceived concepts through our speech, our dress, our values, our music, our values and habits; the very factors that converge to create community.

Communities, Jump Rope Communities share specific cultural and generational connections. Older members pass the basics onto younger members through demonstration, repetition, and encouragement. This is not a solitary endeavor and jump

rope skills are not easily learned. Once the basics have been mastered each jumper adds their own individual style, manner, and flare. At this point, you have learned the ropes of the life game within the cultural boundaries that provided safety, encouragement and expectation. You have learned purpose and success in the insular womb of the jump rope community. A game of community and connection, jumping rope also provides the space necessary for the expressive intersection of ability, individuality, and personality. Learning Double Dutch, as with the baking of bread, takes practice and happens over time through connection and relationship.

This is a game of history that continues to produce and sustain history through generational ties, connections, and togetherness. The mere mention of Double Dutch to African American women evokes many childhood memories. You were either one who could jump Double Dutch or you were an admirer of those who could. There is a sense of pride and recognition of a connection to a unique heritage that comes with jumping Double Dutch rope. You are distinctly aware of the fact that you can do and be something that not everyone can manage. Coordination, rhythm, and pace, while concentrating on recited chants, are challenging feats only accomplished by a select few. The jump rope provides an identity and a connection to a larger whole. The jump rope community collective allowed for individual thought, personal expressions of self through persistence and proficiency, and artistic expression well within the confines of a strong cultural context.

There are social structures and social norms to playing Double Dutch. The younger children start off by jumping on their own, under the watchful eye of a more experienced jumper. Once the rhythm and pace of the rope are understood, beginning

jumpers learn to coordinate foot and hand movement with balance and timing. Next, you became a *turner* to increase your comfort and familiarity with the beat of the rope. From the position as *turner*, you are able to watch the footwork, listen to the chants and learn to hold the beat, pace and rhythm in your head. You are a *turner* until you learn how to *get in* to jump Double Dutch.

Getting in requires a coordination of self with the movement and pace of the ropes. You must learn to match the beat of the ropes with your own body rhythm, sway back and forth with knees bent and arms pumping, trying to find a moment to enter the twirling ropes (Chambers, 2002). Once in, feet move, arms move and you continue to build and sustain momentum and pace; you are one with the ropes. At this point, you have become a member of a select group, a member and participant in the life of a game not recognized or known by all.

Learning the rules and ways of the jump rope helped to forge a sense of unison among a diverse set of individuals united through the common goal of the game. Oppression and marginalization caused by racism forged the creation of a sense of community among African Americans. We jumped to the beat and continued to improve. In our close knit neighborhood, community held and advanced cultural and familial expectations. The jump rope talked to us through its rhymes and provided some of our earliest relationships with the English language in an environment that was safe and held common sets of standards. The syncopated rhythm of the beating ropes supported and encouraged concentration, coordination, and exploration. *Tap-whoosh-tap, Tap-whoosh-tap, Tap-whoosh-tap*. The standards formed the basis of my values, my work ethic, and my desire to grow into all that the hopes of my parents believed could happen.

James Blackwell (1991) describes this dual existence as diversity and unity. The complexity of the segregated African American community is not only framed by institutionalized racism and the resultant marginalization, it is in many ways defined by it. While the focus of this project is not the analysis and deconstruction of the African American community, it bears mentioning a few salient characteristics and their potential impact on the lives and triumphant successes of the research participants.

However, the difficulty in the theoretical placement of the African American community within the sphere of investigational research and critical examination lies in a refusal to minimize or reduce the complexity and diversity of the African American community. The challenge for a theoretical placement also lies in the ideological language used to name and place. How can the language of the oppressor be used by the oppressed to define itself? How can the oppressor come to understand the uniqueness and validity of viewpoints espoused by a people that it believes to be inherently flawed and deficient? How can dominant culture theory be used to define and judge a people it has yet to understand and often fails to see? How can theories of the oppressor be used to analyze the struggles and pains of a people when the oppressor fails to acknowledge complicity?

Without the recognition of African American or minority scholars and scholarship as the developers of applicable theory with respect to its own unique personal and community identity, as well as ways of coming to know, how then can “Blackness” be measured and found to be viable when merely the positioning against “Whiteness” is used as the determinant standard? How can those who have been erased from history and remain in positions of societal invisibility be viewed as possessing the capability to

present applicable theory, analysis, and solutions to those challenges? Again, we are able to apply Audre Lorde's (1984) theory of the outsider-within and the impossibility of using the master's tools to dismantle the master's house.

Attempts at analyzing the creation, complexity and fortitude of the African American community, (as with the complexity and syncopation of a Double Dutch session), leaves theorists with more questions than answers. Despite the challenge of de jure and de facto racism, educational and housing segregation, political disenfranchisement, and economic disparity, the African American community continues to live. It exists in its ability to transform internal diversity into a form of cultural unity. That unity and identity exists as a direct result of the forces of the dominant cultures that have conspired, converged, and concatenated to ensure a position and designation of deficit and less than.

Central in the syncopation, the union, and the connection of the community is something that Beverly Moss (2003) calls the concept of *we, us, our*. Newman & Newman (2000) discuss the concept of us and we in their paper entitled *Group Identity and Alienation: Giving the We Its Due*. The authors suggest a direct connection between the ability of minorities in a racialized society to "establishing, maintaining, and enriching the family and community through openness, mutuality, generosity, and creativity" to the establishment of group and individual identity (p. 534). Ladson-Billings uses the African term of *Ubuntu* to describe the concept in a similar fashion. Moss points out that on the surface, and to the casual reader, these three words are merely pronouns. What may be missed "...is how complex and powerful these pronouns can be as they function to signal group membership" (Moss, 2003, p. 66). Ladson-Billing's African

concept of *Ubuntu* posits the acquisition of personal knowledge exists through, and is reliant upon group relationships. Her racialized discourse (2003) rests on the epistemic belief of *I am because we are*. The community perspective of I am because we are suggests an environment of concern and care. This community ethic of care is important for African Americans whose racialized societal life experiences offer such negligible levels of care and fairness (Siddle Walker, 2004).

Vanessa Siddle Walker (2004) discusses the African American community's three developmental levels of care in her book *Race-ing Moral Formation: African American Perspectives on Care and Justice*. Level one is Caring for Self or an Ethic of Survival. The ultimate aim at this level is an insurance of survival and self protection. Self-interest serves as the litmus test for decisions of care for self. There is a transitional phase between levels one and two called Transition from Survival to Conventional Responsibility and Goodness. The overriding aspect of this phase is the ability to attach to or connect with others. Awareness levels of selfishness and responsibility are heightened and a concern for the comfort and needs of others are weighed against new levels of self-criticism.

This newfound awareness of concern for others facilitates the move into level two, Caring for Others or the Ethic of Conventional Goodness. Characteristics of this phase focus upon caring for those in positions of dependency and inequality. The ultimate concern at this level is the avoidance of causing pain and suffering to others. The transitional phase between levels two and three is called Transition from Conventional Goodness to Reflective Care. The individual at this phase is making the shift from self-sacrifice and goodness to truth and honesty. Care at the expense of self becomes the

reflective question. Responsibility is weighed against personal ability and the outward interpretation of apparent care. There is an increase in selfishness and opposed to a decrease in this characteristic displayed at level 1.5.

The final level three, The Ethic of Care, is describe as Caring for Both Self and Others. Truth and honesty to self outweigh outward appearances. A practicality of care based on the needs of the established relationship supercedes judgments and appearances interpreted by others. At this level the individual reaches a balance between selfishness and selflessness based on the ability to take responsibility for choices of care and concern. The ultimate goal is a balance between care for others and recognition of the need to care for self (Siddle Walker, 2004).

The ethic of care for African Americans means a reliance on a network of familial and community support, and “emphasizes care by and for the collective as well as by and for individuals” (p. 29). An ethic of care for Black Feminists is expressed through a pragmatic recognition of racialized differences of care. Care in a racist world means providing knowledge, awareness, and strategies to navigate that world. Care, according to Black feminists, means that issues of race, class, and culture must be made visible. It also means that those placed in their care must be made aware of the fact that they will face a constant battle for recognition in the greater society.

It is through the community that knowledge is not only validated but initiated. In this way, as the community changes, as the needs of the community change, and as the challenges faced by the community change, the knowledge created by a development of sociopolitical consciousness must be continuously adapted and shared by everyone who participates in that community. It is within the community, within the comfort of the

community, that knowledge becomes attached to experiences and experiences lead to validation of knowledge. bell hooks (2003) presents an explanation of how the power in the word, power to make connections with culture and power in cultural inclusion is further recognized when she states, "...we have to work to find ways to teach and share knowledge in a manner that does not reinforce existing structures of domination..." (p. 45). Ida B. Wells was also keenly aware of the power of community, of providing the spaces necessary to develop power. Her creation of the Negro Fellowship League was instrumental in providing "...space in which their culture and knowledge would be seen as valuable" (Crocco, Munro, & Weiler, 1999, p. 23).

This battle for recognition has been documented in recent research of and by African Americans. The insistence of African Americans and the communities from which they have emerged to claim recognition as self-described and self-named entities comes as an oppositional response to dominant culture forces which have for centuries imposed negative trends of naming and describing. This battle persists as African Americans attempt to break the trends and discourses of failure that have for too long been applied to those whose punishable crime was to be brought to this country by force. The resultant community was formed and remains marginalized today as a result of forces that have combined to create the segregated existence.

James Blackwell (1985) provides us with a description of the African American community that illustrates not only the inherent unity, but also the complexity and diversity of the community. African American communities, as a Double Dutch game, appear to be simplistic in their organizational structure and performance. They are, however, far more complex.

The Black community can be perceived as a social system. Within the community value consensus and congruence exist; a significant segment of its constituents share norms, sentiments, and expectations. Structures are developed to meet defined needs and are hierarchically arranged according to their ability to respond to certain needs... Even though diversity exists within the community, its members are held together by adherence to commonly shared values and goals (p. 18).

As we see in Blackwell's definition, the African American community, just as with the Double Dutch game, provides for individuality within the space of unity and shared goals. Agreement and consensus exist to support affinity, as well as progress. Just as the *tap-whoosh-tap* is a recognizable sound that elicits memory and connection, community members recognize and respond to long established norms and expectations. Blackwell's description of the African American community continues to include external forces that serve to establish its boundaries and objectives. Here he surmises that the African American community,

...is held together by both internal and external forces. It is a highly diversified set of interrelated structures and aggregates of people who are held together by the forces of white oppression and racism. Unity within the black community is a function of the strategies developed to combat white racism and to strengthen black social, economic, and political institutions for group survival and advancement (1985, p. xi).

While this description brings to bear the reality of racism and oppression, it fails to recognize the ingenuity and capability of self-determination on the part of African

Americans. Missing in this description is the tap on the down beat, and the shake at the up beat, the conscious ability to create as a reaction to divergent needs and desires. This is the description of a community in reaction and response, rather than a community of choice and conscious decision. It also fails to recognize the ability of a people with kings and queens as a heritage to establish and choose to live by its own unique set of guiding principles and norms. Existence and validation of that existence must not be required to proceed in opposition, but rather in addition to. This is a community that is created and sustained through conscious choice.

Andrew Billingsley's (1992) work, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Enduring Legacy of African American Families* presents four defining characteristics of the African American community. The first shared and common characteristic is geography. Members of the African American community often live in or near neighborhoods where other African Americans live. There is and has been safety in numbers. This geographic proximity has been no accident. Racism and separation justified by fear and supported by law have historically played a role in the creation of residential and geographic segregation (Cutler, Glaeser & Vigdor, 1999; Orfield, 1997; Rice, 1968; Wolgemuth, 1959).

Despite numerous housing acts that have littered the domestic housing policy dating back to 1937, the economic shortfall experienced by minorities due to uneven urban and suburban development and the negative impact of financial redlining practiced by lenders and mortgage companies, minorities have been forced to reside in neighborhoods with others who look like themselves. Community organizations and homeowners associations established to protect existing housing investments, lending

practices defined by race and economic status, and the practice of real estate agents to cultivate and escalate fear based on the belief of dropping property values if Blacks move into their neighborhoods all contribute to the creation of segregated communities on both sides of the racial divide.

Poverty steadily declined in this country until the 1970s and by the 1990s Blacks and minorities were declined twice as often for housing loans as their White counterparts (Squires, 1994). This served to create an environment of confinement by minorities in urban areas and to the creation of segregated jump rope communities based on racial exclusion.

Despite this existence of struggle and resistance against a political and economic system designed to exclude, the jump rope chant presented at the beginning of this session also possesses the power to take us back to times of cohesion, security, sanctuary, and comm-unity. Comm-unity, with unity, is not meant to imply a removal of individuality or a stipulation of consistency. A separate *comm-unity* for descendants of African slaves was a place created *with unity*. The pace, message, and pull of the chants highlights the syncopated community connections while allowing each jumper to move to personally improvised rhythms of the here and now.

The second of Billingsley's characteristics of the African American community centers on a shared set of values. These values have been related from generation to generation and exist even today despite declarations by members of the White community attesting to the declining or absent state of values in the Black community. These values include "the primacy of family, the importance of education, and the necessity for individual enterprise and hard work" (Billingsley, 1992, p.72). Robert Hill

(1999) continues the discussion of by focusing his research on the positive outcomes of these shared values. He highlights the “strong achievement orientation” and the “rich legacy of achievement” (p. 81) that is directly related to high parental expectation and high levels of self-esteem among African Americans adults and adolescents. A study by Sandra Nettles and Joseph Pleck (1994) further supported the notion of positive shared values as they relate to “a positive sense of self” (p. 161) among members of the African American community. Additionally, the authors presented evidence of high educational expectations, familial, community, and educator support, as well as a desire on the part of adolescents to achieve in the face of adversity.

The shared values of the African American community are linked with its third characteristic as presented by Billingsley; an identification with a shared African heritage. Despite the loss of self-determination during slavery, and the weakened “intersection of personal and collective identity” (Bethel, 1999, p.53) as a result of a loss of direct contact with the African continent, most African Americans today continue to claim Africa as the heart of their origin, the center of their combined cultural heritage. We take pride in the singular and group accomplishments of our brothers and sister of color. We hold up their triumphs as contradictions to the discourses of failure and incompetence associated with African Americans. We embrace our physical features that remain today as visual links to unmet relatives. We recognize and claim the origin of our eye for color, taste for foods, and desire for colorful verbal and bodily expression. As African Americans we are as varied and as complex as the countries on the African continent.

The final characteristic of the African American community focuses on the organizations and institutions which have grown from that heritage and in response to attempts at acculturation. Billingsley divides this final characteristic into four distinct, yet related, entities within the African American community – "...the church, the school, the business enterprise, and the voluntary organization" (1992, p.73). While each of these entities holds a viable place in the community, it is the church which stands as a combination of all of the characteristics. It is also the church in the African American community that has stood as the meeting place for strength, the meeting place for organization against pain and suffering, and the meeting place for organization. Geographically located within the community, originating and continuing the shared set of values, inclusive of African traditions, and representative of the organized social stratification found in the greater community, the church remains a connective center of the African American community despite segregation and societal marginalization.

In spite of the confines of the bordered and segregated existence,

African Americans learned to thrive within the confines of their culturally crafted communities. They learned that it was indeed possible to leave a mark, to be verbal in the unspoken and unheard. Vanessa Siddle Walker calls this ability to thrive in the face of segregated adversity the "unintended consequences of school board neglect" (1996, p. 5). Jump Rope Community members strengthened their cultural identities in a community that was safe, nurturing, and supportive. They worked hard to "find ways to teach and share knowledge in a manner that does not reinforce existing structures of domination..." (hooks, 2003, p. 45) and to broaden the awareness of a cultural history filled with a proud

educational heritage and women strong enough to recognize the intrinsic far reaching value of an education.

African Americans discovered and nurtured ways to care for the sick. The refusal by White doctors and hospitals to treat colored patients and the experimental use of colored test subjects created a distrust of the medical institution. Hospitals became places where the Negro went to die. As a result, home remedies using ingredients found in nature were discovered. Recipes using available and discarded ingredients were created and shared. Creative ways of doing hair, chemical treatments, wrapping, twisting and braiding were perfected. Forms of entertainment were the basis of creative expression, connection, and communication. Card games, singing, dancing, photography, sports, talking, and writing were all encouraged, practiced and shared. Bid Whist, the Doo Wop sound, from the Cakewalk to Pearl Primus and Judith Jamison, Carrie Mae Weems and James Van DerZee, Sojourner Truth and Hallie Quinn Brown, Harriet E. Adams Wilson, Frances E. W. Harper, and Anna Julia Cooper provided examples of entertainment as literacy and voice.

While segregation meant *less than* in terms of material resources and access to the culture of power, it meant more than enough in terms of support, familiarity and all that was needed for survival. Toni Morrison describes this comfortable existence in her book, *Jazz*.

... because everything you want is right where you are: the church, the store, the party, the women, the men, the postbox, (but no high schools), the furniture store, street newspaper, vendors, the bootleg houses (but no banks), the beauty parlors, the barbershops, the juke joints, the ice wagons, the rag

collectors, the pool halls, the open food markets, the number runner, and every club, organization, group, order, union, society, brotherhood, sisterhood or association imaginable (Morrison, 1992, p. 10).

It was within the JRC that we were exposed to established standards that would promote and sustain expectations of excellence. Johnson and Stanford (2002) call these five essential disciplines and they exist in the lessons passed down from generation to generation. The traditional discipline focuses on the responsibility of parents to instill in their children the concepts of self-love and resilience needed to take on the challenges of growing up as a minority in the United States. It also deals with the responsibilities on the part of the child in accepting the behavioral expectations of the parent. The racial discipline centers on the strength needed to negotiate the challenges posed by the pervasiveness of race for minorities in the United States. The emotional discipline deals with the strength needed to resist the negative temptations of social and peer pressure. The practical discipline deals with the focus and determination needed to excel academically and financially. Finally, the mind-body discipline seeks to provide the support and information needed to achieve and maintain physical, mental, and spiritual health and resilience. These disciplines provided each of us with strength for our journeys beyond the safe harbor of our Jump Rope Communities.

Despite Jim Crow laws, segregation and marginalization based on class, social status and educational access, neighborhood communities provided cultural and familial expectations. These expectations were grounded in the hopes of achievement, of future success and of long overdue promises of an equal and fair existence. In the segregated sections of urban cities and small towns the seeds of these hopes were planted.

The close quarters of inner city living, in the northeast region of the country, provided a ready supply of rope turners, jumpers and chanters. The two ropes hitting the ground in Double Dutch create a beat that is both rhythmic and hypnotic. The two turners are rocking, tapping their feet and chewing gum to the rhythm, *tap-whoosh-tap, tap-whoosh-tap*. Outside of the ropes, the jumper is swaying back and forth, knees bent and arms pumping, trying to find a moment to enter (Chambers, 2002). When all of the movements happen in unison, everyone has an equal stake in the success of this team member's *turn*. The ropes are whirling, the jumper is stepping, the chant is rolling, and every player is focused on reaching perfection, continuing the beat and the *flow*. In that moment the team members experience what C. A. Bowers calls a "trans-generational connection" (Bowers, 1995, p. 135). Each person is a part of the journey and is in connection with previous generations. The individual members become a cohesive community; members of a jump rope community.

Alternate-Foot Jumping: Cultural Identity

In the dark, dark world,

There is a dark, dark country.

In the dark, dark country,

There is a dark, dark wood.

In the dark, dark wood

There is a dark, dark house.

In the dark, dark, house

There is a man trying to fix the fuse!

She knows who she is because she knows who she isn't.

Nikki Giovanni

All of us, readers and writers, are bereft when criticism remains too polite or too fearful to notice a disrupting darkness before its eyes.

Toni Morrison, "playing in the dark"

Alternate-foot jumping (Loredo, 1996) involves the raising and lowering of each foot as the rope passes beneath your feet. Balance is required. Awareness of self, awareness of ability, and awareness of positioning within the rope is also a must for success. The ability to hop on one foot while timing the replacement of the other foot at just the right moment requires concentration and responsiveness to the approaching rope. It also requires an acknowledgement of the attempt at making peace with our personal complexities brought on by the many contradictions of alternate existences.

When my husband and I shared our news of an overseas posting many of my friends told me that I would be crazy to take my two young daughters to live away from the United States. We viewed the posting as an opportunity to raise our girls away from the craziness and the duality of an existence caused by a society fraught with embedded racism. "Ethnic minority families, in addition to the many burdens that they must contend with also are challenged with teaching their children to cope with these prejudicial beliefs and acts of discrimination in order to survive in society" (Bigner, 2002, p.35). Before returning to the United States seven years later, my girls had experienced life in two Asian and African nations. They had also accumulated a lifetime of memories through the many side trips and family vacations taken in neighboring countries. They returned the United States without an awareness of popular television shows, without awareness of

the current fashion or fast food trends, and without an awareness of the negative or deficit identities reserved for and experienced by African American children.

In place of that lack of awareness my girls were provided with the time and the opportunity to discover, explore, and investigate their individual selves. There were provided with the time and the space to develop without also needing to develop the skills of alternate-foot identity formation as a way of dealing with a system of oppression. They also avoided the omnipresence of ingrained societal racism facilitated through the onslaught of negative media images, negative teacher expectations, and negative cultural capital. They did not receive the negative messages about “their current abilities, their future possibilities, and their ultimate worth” (Siddle Walker, 2004, p. 13). My girls were afforded the time to discover a state of mind that said they could long before they were ever told that they could not and would not.

Blackness is a state of mind that, in this country, also requires a balancing act (Allen, 2001; Cross, 1991; DuBois, 1903; Parham, 1993). Blackness as a state of mind requires an awareness of self, an awareness of ability, and an awareness of positioning within the ropes of society’s construction of identities based on color. Identity as an African American demands the ability to present one self while timing the insertion of the other self based on the demands of the approaching societal ropes. This double consciousness, an ability to code or identity switch is an aspect not discerned by many in the dominant culture. An observation of this transformation would require visits to the dark, dark wood – the African American identity and an examination of the fuse that may be the cause of the disconnection – racism. At the center of *the disconnect* is

...an understanding of racial identity, the meaning each of us has constructed or is constructing about what it means to be a White person or a person of color in a race-conscious society. Present is also an understanding of racism. It is because we live in a racist society that racial identity has as much meaning as it does. We cannot talk meaningfully about racial identity without also talking about race (Tatum, 1997, p. xviii).

This inquiry has highlighted my ignorance of the depth of this double consciousness and the rarity of the discussions of race as a student at AIS. It is in recognition of the knowledge gained through this inquiry that I use the term African American rather than Black to authentically situate the study in my timeline of identity awareness. African American is the term that I will use throughout this study to delineate the claim to national membership and not the state of mind caused by the nation's actions of exclusion.

My reality, my identity was shaped in part during my days at AIS. While there was not the abject exclusion based on a question of nationalism, there was a recognized difference based on race. My person, my reality was described as American of African decent and represented a gap in my racial education and the awareness of said gap on the part of my educators at the time. My reality during that period in my life had more to do with the thirst for the rights to educational access promised to all Americans than with a mental connection to the heritage of racial struggle and resistance of Blackness. Blackness as a state of mind is eventually realized as a point of salience for those of African descent due to the social constructions of literacy and identity.

The concept of race as a social construct or concept is also a state of mind. There is no biology to race, no gene that holds the primitive or inferior nature which psychologists in the early twentieth century assigned to members of African descent. Blackness is a state of mind and identity and in a racialized society it means jumping on one foot in order to give the other a rest for the duration of the journey toward self and the game at hand. Blackness is a state of mind and it requires recognition of the alternate-foot jumping necessary in order to reconcile the double consciousness required of Blacks and African Americans in our society. In our society there is an implied racial etiquette that is coordinated with visions of self, there are

...a set of interpretive codes and racial meanings which operate in the interactions of daily life. Rules shaped by our perception of race in a comprehensively racial society determine the presentation of self, distinctions of status, and appropriate modes of conduct...Etiquette is not mere universal adherence to the dominant group's rules, but a more dynamic combination of these rules with the values and beliefs of the subordinate groupings. This racial subjection is quintessentially ideological. Everybody learns some combination, some version, of the rules of racial classification, and of their own racial identity, often without obvious teaching or conscious inculcation. Race becomes common sense – a way of comprehending, explaining, and acting in the world (Ore, 2006, p.23).

Toni Morrison in her book, *playing in the dark: whiteness and the literary imagination*, discusses the process of *becoming* through literary expression for

descendants of African slaves in a society that believes they have “had no significant place or consequence in the origin and the development of that culture’s literature” (Morrison, 1992, p. 5). For Morrison, the concept of what she calls American Africanism, was a social creation that grew out of the need by the white male dominated forces of this country to maintain their sense of Americanness. (p. 6). “Africanism has become, in the Eurocentric tradition that American education favors, both a way of talking about and a way of policing matters of class, sexual license, and repression, formations and exercises of power, and meditations on ethics and accountability” (p.7). This is the social construction of a marginalized and racialized other that has emerged as a justification for the hegemony based on exclusion and restriction and practiced by a dominant culture.

The psychology of the Negro was studied by psychiatrist John E. Lind and used as a baseline for understanding how “...the white mind probably operated at an earlier point in evolutionary history” (Cross, 1991, p.3). The Lind study was one of the first in a series of studies on the psychology of the Negro and the apparent self-hatred exhibited by members of the race when examined in opposition to valuation of self as displayed by Whites. *The Show Me Test* of Eugene and Ruth Horowitz supported the idea of self-hatred on the part of Blacks as they selected White dolls and pictures over those displaying Negro features. The couple used the Show Me Test to trace the concept of self through the social attitudes and perceptions of race at the time. Despite inconsistencies in the research data, the Horowitz’s study was used as supportive evidence of self-hatred among not only Negro children, but the results were generalized to include all Negroes in general.

Ruth Horowitz had doubts about the generalization of the findings and found that she was very interested in two aspects of self-development; social attitude and personality. Her continued research on the topic of identity formation led to the development of and the conceptualization of the terms, group identity (GI), personal identity (PI), and self-concept (SC). For Ruth Horowitz "...a positive SC depends on the person's having a positive group identity, which in turn will be reflected in a positive personality: SC (+) = GI (+) + PI (+)" (Cross, 1991, p. 13).

In 1947 Kenneth and Mamie Clark, two Negro psychologists, continued this research methodology by asking young children to demonstrate racial awareness and preferences. Children were asked to choose a doll that they would like to play with, that looks nice, or that is a nice color. In instance after instance, the young children picked the white doll. The Clark's research was used as supportive documentation of the separate but unequal ruling that became the Brown v. Board of Education ruling.

Kiri Davis, a young filmmaker, reenacted the Clark study in 2005. The film, an exploration into the self-images of young Black females, discovered amazingly similar results today to the findings of the Clarks over fifty years ago. Despite these findings among young children, the Clarks discovered through additional questions that by age seven the trend of White racial preference began to change. Just as with the Nettles & Pleck study, and contrary to the self-hatred theory, African American children were shown in several studies, overall, to have a healthy and positive self-concept (Allen, 2001; Bethel, 1999; Jackson, 1999; Parham, White & Ajamu, 2000). To begin to discover the impact of race and racial attitudes on the development of identity as framed within the social structure, you must first have an idea of race's historical timeline of our country.

The Civil War occurred as the final straw for a nation in the grips of polarization. Drastically divergent views on a variety of topics were beginning to create a schism in the new nation's identity of self. Topics such as economics, industrialization, the role of religion, and the role of education, the rise of technology and the growth of mass media machines were beginning to occupy the conversations of and between friends. These topics were also the platforms of discussions among political leaders of the day. The nation was transforming from an existence centered on individual states to a collective nation and persons in power were keenly aware of the growing pains associated with that transformation. The ideologies associated with the rise of nationalism, the advent of all things industrial and modern were juxtaposed against those things that were seen as representative of the traditional, rural, and simpler existence.

Southern plantation owners, southern leaders, living through the defeat of the Civil War, found themselves on the outskirts of the societal ring, on the fringes of what was being defined as a new national order of existence. Unable to find morally acceptable ways to continue the free slave labor pool and additionally locked in an economic battle for the control of that labor pool, former slaveholders searched for ways "...to assert a unified regional identity – a collectivity across the class divides between slaveholders and non-slaveholders – against a mounting northern antagonism" (Hale, 1998, p. 5).

Slavery and/or citizenship had been identities existent within legal and political parameters. The status of the slave, until the Civil War, was grounded in law, the same laws dealing with property, rather than an identity born of race and skin color. Although it happened on rare occasions, slaves could legally become freed individuals through an

existent legal and economic process or through the good graces of liberal slave owners.

The concept or institution of slavery had not been completely ensconced within the identity of race. Slavery had to this point been a matter of status or lack thereof. Freedom and the associative rights were brought into the ongoing discussion of citizenship.

However, the end of slavery made the concept of freedom a convoluted one.

“Emancipation changed everything, with its infinite promise, made anything possible and nothing certain” (Hale, 1998, p. 15). What would this new society look like without slaves and the institution of slavery? How would the grounds of citizenship be established and measured? The previously linked concepts of slavery and bondage were brought into question with the end of the Civil War. The white southerner’s perceptions of freedom, privilege, superiority and national acceptance were all called into doubt with the creation of freed slaves.

Race provided the answer and became the link, the bridge to the new rise in nationalism, which the southern plantation owners were in search of. Race became the best “...way to mediate the fragmentation of modernity and still enjoy its freedom” (Hale, 1998, p. 8). A young nation, desperately searching for an identity, desperately trying to come to grips with the speed of the journey toward industrialization and the rampant use of new technologies, found race a convenient tool in the battle for identity by a confused southern and national social order. The divisions being felt by a young nation were easily mended and bridged by the establishment identities based in physical separateness. Race and racial identities became the southerner’s entrée onto the journey of conversations leading toward a new nation.

The social construct of race was born. New and negative identities and meanings of Blackness were created. Born from the need to create a zone of nationalistic comfort and acceptance, to mend the wounds of a divided nation; born of the need to seek comfort in a unified social structure; born of the need to create the grounds upon which to build a new national identity; born of the need to establish a "...conception of collective white identity" (Hale, 1998, p. 5), and sense of self in direct contrast to *the other* in the fray of a nation in flux. Born of the need to remain a dominant and controlling group, it was "...racial identity that became the paramount spatial mediation of modernity within the newly reunited nation" (Hale, 1998, p. 7).

Race became a created culture, a backdrop against which the formation of a new social order would be built. Collective identities of whiteness bridged the voids of ideological differences across gender, class, and regional differences. Blacks became the common antagonists in the unfolding national drama and the collective representation of all that it meant to be *less than* what it meant to be a color representative of all that is negative.

These newly constructed sets of identities were quickly spread and cemented upon the psyche of the new Americans through the growth of the industries of mass marketing and mass media. Magazines, newspapers, radios and traveling shows were all contributing factors in the new Americans' view of the African American, a view that established the separate spaces, a view that resulted in a means of cultural, social, educational and economic control by the whites.

William Cross Jr. (1991) presents research which examines not only the individual development of Black identity; it also positions the developmental framework

within a chronological timeline. Cross outlines the various phases of personal identity (PI) as a process which occurs over time and proceeds through five stages. Cross has called the process an experience, the Negro-to-Black Conversion Experience. Cross views the transformation as “a psychology of becoming Black” (p. 41) or the process of *Nigrescence*, “a French word that means the process of becoming Black” (p. 147).

Stage one of the transformation is entitled pre-encounter. It is during this phase that *being* is viewed in opposition to European concepts. Yet to experience the freedom of mind necessary to see and comprehend the lies of schooling and institutional education, African Americans in this phase of identity development “are politically naïve...and there is an extreme dependency on white leadership” (Cross, 1971, p.16).

Stage two, encounter, is the result of an event or experience that forces an awakening of and an awareness of the Black condition in this country. The encounter phase forces a reexamination of previously held negative stereotypes and beliefs concerning Blacks. Guilt and anger are characteristic of this phase as a reaction to dominant culture hegemony and acculturation.

Stage three in the transformation is immersion-emersion. This phase of the transformation is characterized by a total immersion in all thing Black and beautiful. “Everything of value must be Black or relevant to Blackness” (p.18). This phase is often accompanied with creative displays of personal expression and a search for personal purity and freedom.

It is during stage four that continuation or regression is likely to occur. This is the internalization phase and is experienced in one of three ways, each dependent upon the duration and intensity of the immersion phase. Disappointment and rejection may appear

in the fourth stage if immersion was accompanied with a negative Black experience, thus validating previous inferiority beliefs from phase one. Experiences of hopelessness may also occur at this stage if signs of progress and potential are not witnessed during the immersion stage. The person retreats to feelings of nihilism and loses faith in all human potential whether Black or White. There may also be a fixation with phase three, a desire to remain in the Black Power phase. Or finally, internalization may occur. Members at this stage “internalize and incorporate aspects of the immersion-emersion experience into their self-concept” (Cross, 1971, p. 21).

Finally, during stage five, internalization-commitment, the person reconciles the newly developed identity. The person incorporates the new knowledge, new behavior, and new identity into their daily life. They become more at ease with each phase of the developmental process and are able to commit to a plan of active community involvement, change, and advancement. A person at this stage has moved “beyond rhetoric and into action and defines change in terms of the masses of Black people rather than the advancement of a few” (Cross, 1971, p. 23). There exists, at this level, a positive identity formation, rather than as an approximation of an example of Whiteness, that is in a progressive state of development. It is described as the period when “both the structural integration and the temporal stability of his self images are simultaneously increasing over any given period of time” (Hauser and Kasendorf, 1983, pp. 27-28).

Beverly Tatum (1997) adds James Marcia’s four identity statuses as additional considerations in the exploration of identity. Status one is called *diffuse*. It is characterized by minimal exploration and “no psychological commitment” (p. 53). Status two, *foreclosed*, represents a period of commitment to roles and belief systems without a

consideration or questioning of alternatives. Status three, *moratorium*, is characterized by active exploration of roles and beliefs without commitment. Finally, status four, labeled as *achieved*, is defined as having reached a state of personal commitment “to a particular dimension of identity following a period of high exploration” (p. 53).

Parham (1993) presents a theory of Black identity as being essentially African in nature (Allen, 2001; Franklin, 1992). African Americans share a genetic, as well as a spiritual connection to their African ancestors. That spirit is ensconced in an African based culture. It is through our culture that we come to know ourselves, our world, and our reality. Parham presents a model of identity formation that begins with the individual surrounded by culture. Each individual then moves along one of two paths toward identity integrity. Both paths involve a progression through environment before veering off in different directions. One path leads to a positive self-concept due to supportive interactions. The other path leads to the levels of *Nigrescence* as a result of unsupportive or hostile personal interactions. I would suggest, as was the case with our integrative experiences, that a dramatic change in the individual’s environment presents an additional path toward identity formation. This would be especially pivotal during the normally confusing period of adolescence. In the absence of a supportive cultural foundation during early childhood (such as the support received in a Jump Rope Community), it might also stall or postpone the progression through the stages of *Nigrescence*.

Parham also suggests that an individual’s path toward identity formation may be more cyclical in nature. Individuals may move through the stages of *Nigrescence* more than once, making their path toward integrity of identity less linear, as suggested by

Cross' stages of identity formation. Parham also adds the hypothesis that "if the core system of ones personality is nurtured developmentally in a supportive environment, the personality achieves full expression in terms of a congruent pattern with African American culture" (p. 41). Jump Rope Communities hold the potentiality to promote and support positive identity formation for African Americans.

The linking of personal identity (PI) to components of African culture also serves to create ties to social identity theory and group orientation theory. This creates unique considerations for African Americans who live in communities that are multidimensional at best and are often devoid of any positive role models at worst. If the group's collective identity (Allen, 2001) is a negative one, the odds are increased that the personal identity will also be negative for the individuals within that group. African Americans living in a negatively racialized society must battle against these perceptions on both a personal and community level.

These theoretical constructions of Black identity demonstrate its fluid nature, as well as its sensitivity to external forces. The constructions exist as descriptions for the general population of African American males and females. The idea or the theory that Blackness is a mind set creates a community of males and females of color as a group in opposition to the respective gender representatives from the White race. There exists for African American women an entirely separate phenomenon with respect to identity. This distinction occurs at the intersection of race and gender, the double consciousness of being both Black and female (Davies, 1994) and not a Black male or White female.

Jump-The-Shot: Resiliency

Angel,

Devil,

Angel,

Devil,

Angel...

We must change in order to survive. Pearl Bailey

Jump-The-Shot (Loredo, 1996) is a version of the jump rope game that requires coping, an ability to beat the odds, and a quick recovery in order to face the next round of challenges. To play, an ender ties a sneaker to one end of the rope and then stands between two players or in the middle of a circle of players. The ender spins while holding the rope close to the ground. The players jump over the attached sneaker as it spins by while chanting, Angel, Devil, Angel. The game continues as the ender spins the rope faster and higher. As each player is “doomed to be whatever she misses on,” (Loredo, 1996, p. 225) an angel or a devil. Each jumper must, function in the face of pressure not to be labeled a devil, adapt to the changing conditions of the game, and recover quickly in order to clear the approaching sneaker. Each jumper must display some level of resiliency in order to achieve and remain an active participant in the game.

Achievement, accomplishment, motivation and competence are goals listed by those committed to the education of children in our schools. They are also positive descriptions applied to groups of students; students who are described as self-starters, determined, and having high levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy. These terms are increasingly becoming uncharacteristic descriptions used to describe African American

students. The labels applied to this group of students often convey deficient or negative connotations; struggling, at-risk, failing, unmotivated, or incapable.

Despite these negative expectations, African American students do succeed, do achieve, are motivated, competent, and accomplished. There is a growing interest in African American students who, not only display positive attitudes, they also exhibit high levels of competence and achievement. The body of research reporting on these students who succeed in the face of adversity is also growing (Barbarin, 1993; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990; Miller, 1999; Nettles & Pleck, 1996; Siddle-Walker, 1996). Resilience, the ability to succeed despite circumstances and institutional forces which all but insure their failure, “the manifestation of competence despite the presence of stressful life events or circumstances” (Floyd, 1996, p. 181) is an area of research which highlights the potential for and the possibility of achievement.

The formal study of resilience as a body of educational research is relatively new. The questions surrounding why some children *make-it* and others *fall through the cracks* are numerous and ever present. Why do students from seemingly deficient and at-risk environments succeed? How do these students rebound at each challenge and present high levels of personal resilience to achieve? There seems to be growing consensus on the factors and conditions that support the development of achievement through the phenomena of resilience.

First what is meant by resilience? Simply stated, resilience is the positive response to risk (Constantine & Blackmon, 2002; Floyd, 1996; Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1984; Garmezy, 1991; Nettles & Pleck, 1996). Resilience as defined by Masten, Best & Garmezy (1990) is the ability to function in the face of stress and

overwhelming odds of failure. Nettles and Pleck (1996) continue this definition in their efforts to design strategies and programs which enhance resilience in Black adolescents. Their work highlights the three types of resilience.

The first, 'overcoming the odds,' captures the popular notion of resilience as a quality of particular personal strength within an individual. Risk factors are defined as correlates of negative or poor outcomes. The second concept of resilience is coping, or sustained, competent functioning in the presence of chronic or acute major life stressors...The third refers to recovery from trauma (p. 157).

For the purposes of this research, I will focus on the first and the second types of resilience, overcoming the odds and functioning in the presence of life stressors; in the case of our oral histories race and culture shock serve as the stressors. The use of resilience in this project to examine the four oral histories is an important supportive component of academic success and triumph.

Despite overcoming not only the odds of attaining academic excellence during our tenure at AIS, gaining admission into the school proved to be a challenge and test of endurance. My admission journey included attendance at a series of teas and luncheons held as a screening process at the homes of alumnae on the Main Line. I was also subjected to a series of visits with psychiatrists and psychologists as the state of my mental health and academic potential was evaluated.

Once admitted, racial, social, economic, and academic differences coupled with the pressure of high expectations of success on the part family and friends became daily stressors. My educational psyche suffered greatly during my first year at Irwins. I

remember the disturbing transformation from my position and identity as a “straight A” student in my home community school, to a student who struggled to earn “Bs” and Cs.” I longed for the day when my name would be announced at the AIS honor roll assemblies held at the end of each academic quarter. It would be an entire year of questionable grades and self-doubt before I began turning the “Cs” into “Bs” and the “Bs” into “As”.

Throughout my year of self doubt my mother’s support and encouragement never wavered. What she lacked in softness and hugs of comfort she made up for in understanding. The fear of disappointment and reprisals at the opening of each report card quickly disappeared with the asking of one simple question, “Are you trying your best?” My mother’s unending support and assurances that “It will come,” represent one of the protective factors consistent in the development of resiliency (Constantine & Blackmon, 2002; Floyd, 1996; Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1984; Garmezy, 1991; Nettles & Pleck, 1996), that of a supportive family (Floyd, 1996; Rutter, 1987). In each of the studies on resiliency the researchers consistently positioned protective factors as buffers against the potential debilitating effects of toxic environments and/or personal stressors. The support of academic endeavors by family members consistently ranked as an important protective factor. Additional factors shown to reduce the effect of risk factors include “favorable personality traits...and external support (Floyd, 1996, p. 184).

The personal traits listed as contributing to the development of protective factors included generosity, perseverance, optimism, believe in the power of hard work, and a strong “internal locus of control, or belief that forces shaping one’s life are largely within one’s own control” (Floyd, 1996, p. 183). Children who demonstrate high levels of resiliency are also confident in their eventual ability to succeed and have a generally high

opinion of themselves and their abilities. This high level of self-efficacy translates into motivation, achievement, and competence. It also translates into persistence despite adversity and the expression of verbal doubts by outsiders.

The capability of students to overcome the odds of academic failure and their ability to minimize risk factors are also related to the aforementioned phenomenon of identity formation, community participation, and a strong external support network, i.e. teachers, preachers, and peers. The combination of shared geography, shared values, shared heritage and shared organizations (Billingsley, 1992), served to create students with high levels of cultural awareness and ethnic identification. Many students in the research studies on resilience were active members of the community and were confident with who they were as African Americans, as well as exhibiting a pride in their cultural heritage. These students also possessed peer relationships that encouraged and supported their efforts for educational advancement.

The concepts of racial socialization and pride were not only positive, they were directly linked to higher “self-esteem and social competence” (Constantine & Blackmon, 2002, p. 325). These are particularly important concepts with students who possess high levels of racism awareness. The relational connection between positive innate personality traits, strong parental support, and the generational dissemination of racial values and practices combine to create resiliency among African American students who possess life stressors and environmental situations which should spell failure.

The concept of resiliency is particularly important for African American females who find that they must battle the stressors caused by not only the negative experiences of race, they must also fight battles de to class, gender, and economics. The uniqueness of

African American female experience in integrative situations creates new questions surrounding the phenomena of educational and cultural resilience. We must attempt to overcome the odds and function in the face of stressors that relate to the multiple jeopardy, multiple consciousness (King, 1988) of existences as African American females. Resilience for us means sharing the battle of low expectations on a racial front with African American males. It also means a similar battle of lower social status that we share with White female. There are the stressors caused by the unique combination of race, gender, and low socioeconomic status and in favor of positive racial socialization that African American females must learn to battle against and triumph over. Family, friends, and role models become even more important for this segment of the population.

The awareness of triumphant voices as models, our women of wisdom (Wade-Gayles, 2006) and the addition of new oral histories become vitally important for successive generations of African American females seeking to beat the odds and display excellence despite life's stressors. As the cultural storytellers, the generational link to our heritage of griots, and as those responsible for sharing the cultural lessons and values our ability to internalize and practice resilient strategies is important to working for and moving the race forward (Hull, Scott & Smith, 1982; Jones, 1985; Williams, 2005; Zinn & Dill, 1994).

CHAPTER 3

LET'S GET JUMPIN': TOOLS OF THE GAME

Good Morning to you Joseph

Good Morning to you too.

What is your intention?

I want to be a doctor

You can't be a doctor.

I will be a doctor!

Well, Jump shamador my darling,

Jump shamador my dear.

When we played Double Dutch the best type of rope wasn't a rope at all; it was telephone wire. Friends and jumping companions who had relatives employed by the phone company held a slightly elevated status in the world of jump rope. They could more easily get their hands on a length of rope. The rest of us would watch and wait for the phone repairman to visit the neighborhood and put our begging skills to work.

The wire had enough weight to cut through the air and to hold the rhythm set by the enders. It could also cut legs and arms if you failed to move to the established beat or raise your feet high enough. The wire also came covered in a wide assortment of plastic coatings and graded weights. Most important of all – the telephone wire was the best at making the tap-whoosh-tap sound as it cut through the air and hit the pavement.

In addition to the wire rope, you needed a great pair of sneakers. Keds or Converse, especially Chuck Taylor's, were the popular choice during my childhood. One summer my mother failed to understand the associated status in jump rope footwear and purchased a pair of sneakers affectionately called BoBo's. These were the discount version of the real things. My mother's frugality far outweighed my desire to follow the fashion trend. I was severely teased on the first day of their unveiling. Were it not for my jumping skills and my decorative creativity I might have spent the summer sitting on the curb in shame and exclusion. Rather than let my mother's budget sideline me, I combined my needlework skills with some glue and my mother's extra buttons and bobbles to create an original pair of jumping sneakers. While the trend did not catch on, the sneakers were so unusual and my defensive tongue so quick that they were never an issue after that first embarrassing day.

The final requirement for a jump rope session was an interruption-free location. The best locations for a long morning or afternoon of jump rope were paved areas away from foot or car traffic. My friends and I played Double Dutch and jumped rope in the small street, beside my grandmother's row house in West Philadelphia. The street was too narrow for cars, so we were able to hone our skills for hours on end with few interruptions. We also played on the street in front of our family home close enough to the curb to allow cars to pass and far enough away to prevent the curb from interrupting the flow of the ropes. Style, skill, individuality, and a sisterly togetherness were the consistent tools of the jump rope game.

Mary Mack, All Dressed in Black: Critical Race Theory

Race has become metaphorical, a way of referring to and disguising forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than biological “race” ever was.

Toni Morrison

*Miss Mary Mack, Mack, Mack,
All dressed in black, black, black,
With silver buttons, buttons, buttons,
All down her back, back, back.
She went upstairs to make her bed,
She made a mistake and bumped her head;
She went downstairs to wash the dishes,
She made a mistake and washed her wishes;
She went outside to hang her clothes,
She made a mistake and hung her nose.*

Mary Mack’s existence is one of confusion and incompetence. Try as she might to complete a task, she is faced with one mistake after another. If we were to create a persona of Mary as a Black female, her ineptness would be acknowledged and accepted due to the negative societal construction of race and racial characteristics. Mary, despite her best wishes, as an African American female would have her mistakes highlighted, rather than receive praise and validation based on her honest attempts.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) contends that race is pervasive, “normal, not aberrant” in American society (Bell, 2000). The roots of Critical Race Theory (CRT) are embedded in legal debates that grew out of the search for racial justice potentialities as a result of the civil rights movement. It is through the application of this theory as a lens through which to view American society and social stratifications that we are able to see that African Americans and other minorities exist in a less-than position in American society. The pervasiveness of personal, cultural and institutional racism which manifests as an erasure of all things minority (Hansman, Spencer, Grant, & Jackson, 1999) has created a sub society that is measured against and exists in contradiction to the dominant culture.

This position of perceived diminished value has caused African Americans to seek the codes of power through educational access and to challenge racial oppression while attempting to create self-definitions based on cultural concepts and values. This search has, in some cases, caused divides in personal, cultural development and integrity due to the limited level of minority recognition and empowerment in our nation’s schools. Despite the mere presence of diverse cultural groups in our nation’s schools, they remain powerless as our schools are established to serve and maintain the interests of those in power. As such, the institution of education exists as both the panacea for and one source of the negative effects of racism experienced by many minority students.

Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1995; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) is more than a rehashed notion of Black Power and has reached well beyond the simplified characterizations of big house and field slaves when trying to position African Americans based on their beliefs, perceived social contribution,

and economic status. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001) “racism is ordinary, not aberrational” (p. 7) and “race and races are products of social thought and relations” (p. 7).

CRT exists to remind the greater social and political sphere of differences and exactly how deeply issues of cultural power and racial ideology remain an entrenched social construction in the fabric of American life. It is a theoretical attempt at self-definition, on their own terms, by those in positions of minority position. The challenge for CRT is one of semantics and vocabulary. How do you use the language of those in position of oppressor to expose, describe and dismantle the oppression? How do you address the problem of the color line (DuBois, 1903) when the controlling segment of the population refuses to admit the existence of a linear division? How do you enter into dialogue on the topic of race which those in the big house refuse to acknowledge as having any social or political value?

CRT maintains the omnipresence of race in society and challenges the right to not only talk about race but also the right to hold the “discussion of race in the classroom” (Prendergast, 2003, p. 99). It is also viewed as an intellectual movement that is a part of a “long tradition of human resistance and liberation,” as well as a “tension-ridden fusion of theoretical self-reflection, formal innovation, radical politics, existential evaluation, reconstructive experimentation, and vocational anguish” (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995, p. xi). CRT provides an outlet for divergent viewpoints on the impact that race has on the daily existences of African Americans. In recognizing the power of the word, as well as the power of the legal pen, CRT uses the word to highlight the injustices exacted upon a segment of the population in United States. This segment has been

silenced by the claim that all men are created and treated equally under the gaze of blind justice and yet are resigned to live in the margins due to the economic, social, and educational exclusion that is borne of racial exclusion.

The roots of Critical Race Theory (CRT) are embedded in legal debates that grew out of the search for racial justice as a result of the civil rights movement. From the first skirmish of the modern movement with the bus boycott in Baton Rouge, Louisiana in June 1953 to the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, the battle has been over the rights of self determination, cultural recognition and acceptance. That battle continues in Critical Race Theory and bases its critique on three main contentions.

The first contends that race is pervasive, “normal, not aberrant” and is “an ingrained feature of our landscape” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, p. xvi). Under these conditions, only the excessive or extreme forms of racial abuse reach the level of societal attention and awareness. The general public fails to see racial strife due to existence in positions of privilege. As a result, the daily instances of racism, and a desire on the part of White America to believe that race is color blind, confine African Americans and other minorities to exist in the margins of society in the United States. The pervasiveness of personal, cultural and institutional racism which manifests as an erasure of all things minority (Hansman, Spencer, Grant, & Jackson, 1999) has created a sub society that is measured against and exists in contradiction to the dominant culture.

The second premise begins from the belief that every culture, due to its desire to exist and thrive, constructs its own social structure and social reality. These structures are created through rules, perceptions, and practices to promote and protect its self-interests. African Americans find themselves trying to exist and thrive in a culture and social

structure that was not designed to include or validate their existence. This has resulted in multiple levels of oppression experienced by African Americans; social standing, economic clout, and the recognition of varied forms of literacy as proof of educational capability. African Americans who attempt to challenge this oppression often resort to the method of discourse and meaning making that they find most comfortable, that of storytelling and oratory communication. The social structure of the African American community often exists in direct opposition to that of the White community and as such is rarely fixed and stagnant, “we construct it with words, stories, and silence. But we need not acquiesce in arrangements that are unfair and one-sided. By writing and speaking against them, we may hope to contribute to a better, fairer world” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, p. xvii). This premise has come under fire by mainstream critics who fail to see the validity of stories told from places of positionality. This critique can be explained by taking a look at the third premise of CRT.

The third premise of CRT is described as interest convergence. This concept holds that African Americans will only be encouraged to succeed or receive racial advances when the advances suit and promote White self-interests as well. It is this premise that has raised the question of merit or interest convergence when applied to our attendance at AIS. Who benefited from our attendance and subsequent graduation? What were the expected returns on investment? To whom do we owe the debt of repayment?

Critical Race Theory exists to remind the greater social and political sphere of differences among the population. It also highlights the depth at which issues of cultural power and racial ideology remain entrenched in the fabric of American life (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). “Racism is as healthy today as it was during the

enlightenment” (Morrison, 1992, p. 63). Critical Race Theory exists to provide a forum for expressing perspectives, beliefs and examples of racial power and hegemony. It also recognizes that *the other*, those who would fill the ranks of the marginalized, is situated in society a variety of different ways, and as such should not have their unique struggles generalized or conceptualized by those in the dominant group of power. This avoidance of generalization will also be applied to the varied stories and perspectives of the participants in my study. Despite our collective membership in the club of the class of 1975 as African American women, no one voice will be supplanted over the others or viewed as *the word* of representation for an entire race or segregated segment of the population.

The examination of the stories that result from our education within the culturally contradictory confines of a racially and gendered one-dimension school require a critical format and lens. The tenets of CRT will provide the illuminating lens through which to examine, highlight, and give the power of word to our racial, gendered, cultural, and economic views as unique and distinct African American women. The narrative views on diversity and difference will serve as our means of linking curricular theory of hope for an equitable education for all students with the triumphant spirit of hope based in the reality of removing the barriers to its implementation through the power of the word.

Critical Race Theory, with its roots in Critical Legal Studies, exists to remind the greater social and political sphere of differences and exactly how deeply issues of cultural power and racial ideology remain entrenched in the fabric of American life (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). “Racism is as healthy today as it was during the enlightenment” (Morrison, 1992, p. 63). Critical Race Theory exists to provide a forum

for expressing perspectives, beliefs and examples of racial power and hegemony. It also recognizes that *the other*, those who would fill the ranks of the marginalized, is situated in society a variety of different ways, and as such should not have their unique struggles generalized or conceptualized by those in the dominant group of power. Described by Cornel West as a:

...comprehensive movement in thought and life – created primarily, though not exclusively, by progressive intellectuals of color – compels us to confront critically the most explosive issue in American civilization: the historical centrality and complicity of law in upholding white supremacy (and concomitant hierarchies of gender, class, and sexual orientation). (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995, p. xi)

Ladson-Billings sees CRT as a method of addressing "...the continued legitimacy of oppressive structures in American society" (Ladson-Billings, 2003, p. 8). In Ladson-Billings' estimation CRT sees race and racism as normal and entangled in the social fabric of this country. "Race has become metaphorical – a way of referring to and disguising forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than biological 'race' ever was" (Morrison, 1992, p. 63). CRT departs from Critical Legal Studies in its use of storytelling and personal experiences to analyze the cultural, political, and social struggles borne of socially constructed racial differences. Liberalism, stands as one of the main barriers to raising race to a conscious level. The "...ambivalence toward race-consciousness is best understood as a symptom of liberalism's continued investment in meritocratic ideology and its unacknowledged resistance to reaching any deep understanding of the myriad

ways racism continues to limit the realization of goals such as equal opportunity” (Crenshaw, et al, 1995, p. xxix). Liberalism, with its “...emphasis on incrementalism” (Ladson-Billings, 2003, p. 9) is critiqued through CRT due to the need for drastic and far reaching changes to the political and social status quo. Ladson-Billings also uses CRT to make visible the existent racism in the educational curriculum, the educational profession, and the educational policies. Ladson-Billings, recognizing that there are different viewpoints within CRT with respect to destroying oppression. Audre Lorde asserts that “...the master’s tools will never be used to dismantle the master’s house” yet Henry Louis Gates (1997) asserts that it is *only* those tools that must be used to liberate the oppressed. Ladson-Billings advises against attempts at conceptualizing or generalizing fearing that these constructions will only serve to defeat the purpose of liberation.

Critical race theory serves as the bridge connecting black feminist thought with critical literacy. Critical race theory has several tenets that well relate to our stories and concerns as multicultural educators, and serves as a continual reminder for us to engage the perspectives of those who have much to teach. Akin to black feminist thought, critical race theory builds on everyday experiences influenced by viewpoints with an understanding that individual narratives are powerful tools in knowing (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

African Americans will remain in marginalized positions as long as the significance of *knowledge as property* (and Whiteness as representative of that property) fails to register as a vital conceptual component of sociopolitical education and social liberation. Privilege, in particular White privilege has been set as the standard and

remains set by laws which help to "...ensure the perpetuation of privilege" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, p. 658). Knowledge as property, as established by the dominant racial group becomes normalized and associated with the privileged access and is measured against characteristics held in common by those so privileged. Included in this privilege which places people of color on the fringes is the "...power to ignore race, when white is the race, is a privilege, a societal advantage" (p. 661). When race is associated with a variety of concepts including, food, color, culture, language, and experiences, the privilege that is Whiteness must be made visible in order to begin the process of recognition, validation, and social liberation for those who sit on the fringes claiming only outsider-within status.

A, My Name is Aisha: Black Feminist Thought

A my name is Aisha,

My husband's name is Amir.

We live in Alabama.

And we sell Apples.

Only the Black woman can say, "When and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole Negro race enters with me" Anna Julia Cooper

We, the Black women of today, must accept the full weight of a legacy wrought in blood by our mothers in chains...heirs to a tradition of supreme perseverance and heroic resistance. Angela Davis

A, My name is Aisha, not Alice and not Adrienne or Agnes. A name claims a space. It is a representation of the sum of the self. A name is not given as a measurement against or as a sign of negation. While it is not provided as a symbol of opposition, the choice of name as a representation of culture, language, or home community can indeed serve as a statement of resistance. This is the type of resistance from and resistance against the practices originated during slavery of providing identifying names for slaves upon their purchase. These provided names established the slave as property of a slave owner or a specific plantation. The process of providing slaves with short, impersonal, and informal names also served as a way of denying and showing a complete disregard for the slave's African heritage. The naming practice was also a way of demeaning the slave and served as a way of establishing the slave owner's authority. Many of the provided names were taken from Greek or Roman mythology. Later, during the 18th and 19th centuries Biblical names were often chosen. Names were chosen that did not have formal equivalents to continue the process of informality and servitude. To maintain the informality, surnames were rarely provided to slaves. Often names were chosen based on physical characteristics or personality traits. Once a name was used to identify a slave, its association was almost exclusively for slaves from that point. Retrieved April 2, 2007 from <http://www.afrolumens.org/slavery/names.html>

Descendants of slaves have chosen to reclaim their spaces of self by reclaiming the naming process. African Americans recognize that a name is given as an illustration, an expression, a demonstration of self and self-designation. It holds a place even when the person is not physically present. The mention of a name evokes memories of physical characteristics and shared experiences. If your name is called out without your presence,

those who are aware of you and your existence will, through memory, be able to pull up a visual replication, a type of memory hologram. If your name is mispronounced, those who are familiar with the correct pronunciation will feel a level of dis-ease with the alteration. The mispronunciation causes a personal disconnect. It fails to present you in your absence and your absence fails to provide you with the opportunity for correction. The caller has altered the space that is claimed through naming. The power of your name, the power of your name to claim a particular space has been changed in the mis-speaking. The authority provided through naming and the ability to name one's self implies a certain level of resistance; resistance through a claim of visibility; through experiences shared through story; through the power of a self claimed name representative of a unique set of lived experiences.

The stories shared with a people are stories about their people. Their personas are as unique as their names. Their names are attached to history and to heritage. These names have not been given as a convenience for ease of pronunciation, they have not been spoken, and sung, and highlighted at the bequest of those who would change the essence of the person through mispronunciation. For the oppressed names, representations of self, space markers in time should not be co-opted by those who would deny independent interpretations of oppressive experiences. The names are spaces held in history until awakened through memory or story, to assume places in the present, to exist as a visual replication, a hologram of cultural history; in the case of African American women a history of struggle and resistance.

As modern day griots, the storytellers of people and a people's history, African American women bear a unique responsibility of naming, of making a space in the world

for an individual spirit. In the tradition of Black Feminist Thought, naming, self-naming, serves as one of the examples of “strategies of everyday resistance” (Collins, 1989, p. 745). As keepers and transmitters of the cultural word, African American women have continued to not only play pivotal “roles in the development of family, education, and religion but also developed a woman’s network that was a foundation of strength, leaders, and mutual aid.” (Zinn & Dill, 1994, p. 235). Serving as the generational link between royal ancestral beginnings and the struggles of historical and current conditions of slavery, African American women continue to remain ever diligent in efforts to expand the field of Black feminist perspectives begun by our brave pioneering ancestors.

This work is in answer to that historical call to represent cultural expectations and obligations. It is as bell hooks (1989) reminds us, “our collective responsibility as individual black women committed to feminist movement to work at making spaces where black women who are just beginning to explore feminist issues can do so without fear of hostile treatment, quick judgments, dismissals, etc.” (P. 181).

Just as with the early slaves, bravery and courage are required of African American female scholars who find that they face opposition from a number of fronts; the tenets of the White feminist movement, White males beliefs of inferiority and as objects of ownership, and Black male sexism tensions. African American women must endeavor to “realize the inherently contradictory and antagonistic nature of the conditions under which we do our work. These working conditions exist in a structure not only elitist and racist, but deeply misogynist” (Gaunt, 2006, p. xxiv). Feminist work, African American feminist work, is difficult due to external forces that seek to confine and define it. It is lonely in that the external forces have prevented the formation of a collective base in the

academy, the home of theoretical development and praxis. It is necessary because of the need for political recognition and address that surround the unique issues experienced by women of color. Despite the obstacles, African American women must continue the work begun during slavery – working for the race.

Until a recent fascination with, availability and recognition of the works by early African American feminists we had little to emulate and even fewer from whom to draw strength. Maria Stewart, Harriet Jacobs (Linda Brent), Ida B. Wells, and Anna Julia Cooper carved a space distinct from white female feminism and male sexism upon which to lay the counter foundation of African American female self definition. Their contemporary counterparts – Audre Lorde, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Geneva Gay, bell hooks, Lisa Delpit, Vanessa Siddle-Walker, Joyce King, and Patricia Hill-Collins have continued to expand the boundaries of what counts as relevant research. They have also continued to expand definitions of knowledge and to dismantle negative intellectual stereotypes while seeking to define “...investigations of self in a society which through racial, sexual, and class oppression systematically denies our existence” (Hull, Scott, & Smith, 1982, p. xviii). Some of us must remain brave (Hull, Scott, & Smith, 1982) as we continue the struggle to define our own brands of knowledge and seek to create methodological frameworks within which to display and examine them.

Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000), through its politics of self defined empowerment, self-determination, self-definition, self-reliance, and self expression will be used to examine the potential role that race and a gender segregated environment played in the resilience of cultural spirit and intellectual achievement of these four women. Black Feminist Thought will also be used as the lens through which to view the

search for personal and social empowerment while critiquing the historical injustices endured by women of color in the hopes of discovering social justice potentialities through education. An overlay of oral history will reflect and capture these women's "efforts to come to terms with lived experiences within intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and religion" (Collins, 2000, p. 9).

Black Feminist Thought emerged as a method of adding the examination of race, the concerns of African American and other women of color to the conversations dealing with women's issues. Black feminist perspectives and forms of oppression are as varied as the subjects who experience them. Some focus on the interactions of race, gender, and class as methods of oppression. Others focus on the oppression caused by existence in a patriarchal culture. Still others merely point to class and class relationships as having the most significant impact on the experiences of African American women in the United States. "Black women's varied life experiences depend on their relationship to the means of production and control of distribution goods and services. Inclusive in this conceptualization of class are income, education, and status." (Hamer & Neville, 1998, p.27).

Feminist thought, Black Feminist Thought, in an effort to exact change through an appeal to and a mobilization of the masses, must be approachable in its theory and its praxis. It must be radical in its application, if not merely for the recognition value, for the ability to provide possible avenues of discussion and alternative discourses. Black Feminist Thought must have as its aim a freedom of thought at all levels of femalehood in order to explicate the body from existences characterized by assault, oppression, and exterior naming.

Without liberatory feminist theory, there can be no effective feminist movement. To fulfill this purpose, feminist theory must provide a structure of analysis and thought that synthesizes that which is most visionary in feminist thinking, talk, and discourse – those models of change that emerge from our understanding of sexism and sexist oppression in everyday life, coupled with strategies of resistance that effectively eradicate domination and engage us fully in a liberatory praxis (hooks, 1989, p.35).

Feminist thought, feminist theory, and feminist philosophy that exists solely as repartee between colleagues in the classrooms of higher education holds little chance of acceptance by or change at the grass root level. Our goal is to combine theory with these oral histories in order to, as bell hooks (1989) suggests, “take that abstraction and articulate it in a language that renders it accessible” (p. 39). The oral histories must be captured in print to do as Barbara Christian (1985) suggests the intentional *work* of theorizing; to create as Toni Morrison has said of her writing, create a story that we want to read.

Black Feminism and the practice of theorizing about the situations and dilemmas facing African American women must be discussed in the everyday of life, in terms that can be understood in the everyday of life. Theory exists in the everyday. It is in the responses to the everyday challenges faced by African American women as they move through their daily lives. It is in the recognition of respect or disrespect at the behest of male coworkers. It is in the recognition of exclusion from conversations. It is in the recognition of demeaning comments as a participant in a conversation. It is in the

strategies created to deal with issues and experiences that arise as a result of gender, sexism, class, language, education, economics, and race. Black Feminist Thought recognizes the acts of resistance in the small, everyday choices, battles and struggles.

Our time at AIS helped us to see the differences in class based on income, education, and status. We were also able to see firsthand the connections and commonalities that exist between all women in a society dominated by men. Yet, we were also able to witness and were often forced to live out the dual existence that many African American women are forced to live. Anna Julia Cooper, a nineteenth century former slave, educator, and activist, describes this dual existence as challenging in two areas, gender and race. Our position is either viewed as aligning with White females or African American males. Our voices betray the misalignment with either.

Attending an all girl school brought certain commonalities and connections with our White sisters. Yet, due to the issues of race, class, and socio-economic standing these connections were not strong enough to warrant possession of a voting and participatory voice in the decision making process. Despite this dual existence, as African American women we were often designated to invisible status. Not seen as full voting partners in the feminist revolution, not fully seen by the families in the homes that we cleaned and cook for, not seen in political arenas, and not seen outside of the many classrooms that we found ourselves integrating. This invisible status, this lack of voice lies at the heart of my search for an illuminating path to the personal. We seek to be heard, to be valued, to be individualized, and to be seen in the darkness.

Our structure lies within the understandings of Black Feminist Thought as a means of resistance against oppression. Black Feminist Thought analyzes issues by

integrating concerns as a result of existences regulated by class, gender, and race. It recognizes the belief that these issues have influenced knowledge as well as the status of outsiders within positionality. The epistemology of Black Feminist Thought is based on experiences developed through epistemic privilege from living as double outsiders, a societal outsider in terms of race and gender. These experiences directly and indirectly influence how individuals live, interact and learn. This is a standpoint for African American women that challenges and disrupts the prevailing philosophical and theoretical viewpoints and discourses which seek to define, or name, this oppressed subgroup of American society.

Black Feminist Thought seeks to challenge the belief that “subordinate groups identify with the powerful and have no valid independent interpretation of their own oppression” (Collins, 1989, p. 746). This assumption, once again, brings to mind Audre Lorde’s master’s tools scenario and question, Are we able to dismantle the master’s house using the master’s tools? If our identities of Blackness have become so entwined with and are perceived as the antithesis of Whiteness, how are we to bring down the oppressor without in turn causing our own demise? Additionally, if our attempts at self theorizing, self interpretations are judged to be insufficient and substandard by those representing the dominant (and accepted) theoretical or interpretive standpoint, how is serious change or challenge ever to occur? This last question relates to the second challenge facing Black Feminist Thought with respect to attempts at the establishment of our own theoretical positioning. This creates a theorizing and philosophizing catch-22 for African American females. Possessive of the ability, unique political and social experiences, and the strategies of resistance to interpret our positions within a racist and

gendered society, but because of our positions as subordinate individuals who are oppressed racially and due to gender, we are viewed as incapable of expressing that very subordination.

Our ability to express in our own words or through the tools of the master, not only our oppression, but also our strategies for resisting that oppression, stands as a challenge to groups of power. Black Feminist Thought or consciousness is dangerous to the powers of the dominant society in our ability to name, to carve out a theoretical standpoint and vantage point that is contradictory to the established set of norms. It is dangerous in “that self-defined standpoints can stimulate oppressed groups to resist their domination” (Collins, 1989, p. 749), and create existences that alter the superficial reality of dominant group superiority. A knowledge of self, an ability to self name, become small but powerful acts of resistance and encourages African American women to value their own perspectives and beliefs. This knowledge of self and connection to a greater, more established framework of black feminist thinking provides African American women with a divergent view of themselves and supports the valuation of their “own subjective knowledge base” (p. 750). Black Feminist Thought captures and expresses, in a philosophical and theoretical manner a consciousness, a way of knowing and coming to be known, a naming that already exists.

This knowledge of self and the world is multi-faceted and is not to be limited to a genderized viewpoint, “using gender as the primary or single analytic category in feminist methodology is problematic...when it asserts that gender is *the*, rather than *a* foundational form of domination” (Bloom, 1998, p. 140). The added challenge for African American women who wish to articulate self and position according to Carole

Boyce Davies is “because the politics of race is so ubiquitous, so overt and overwhelming that they shift and subsume all other discourses ... [they] can be victimized by both the system and the men, their children and others in their lives precisely because of their race and gender combination” (1994, p. 30). bell hooks adds an additional layer of challenge to the dilemma faced by African American women in her submission that “sexism directly shapes and determines relations of power in our private lives, in familiar social spaces, in that most intimate context – home – and in that most intimate sphere of relations – family (1989, p. 21)

Black Feminist Thought perspectives and experiences influence the ability of African American women to see themselves as participants in the conversations surrounding issues of race, diversity of perspectives, and knowledge as they become aware of and confident the power of their own voice. This theoretical positioning provides a path through the existence of double-(multiple) consciousness without the “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (Britzman, 1998, p. 110). Through Black Feminist Thought African American women are able to recognize their unique perspectives of knowledge and knowing on two different levels. One level “includes the everyday, taken-for-granted knowledge shared by members of a given group... a second level of knowledge, the more specialized knowledge furnished by experts who are part of a group and who express the group’s standpoint” (Collins, 1989, p. 750). Our stories are presented as an attempt at personal convergence, definition, and recognition. We will examine in them the “urge to promote growth and the urge to inhibit growth – that provides a practical setting for feminist critique, resistance, and transformation” (hooks, 1989, p.21).

Oliver Twist, He Can't Do This: Critical Literacy

Oliver Twist, he can't do this,

So what's the use of trying?

Number One: Touch your tongue.

Number Two: Touch your shoe.

Number Three: Bend your knee.

Number Four: Touch the floor.

Number Five: Wave good-bye.

Number Six: Do the splits.

Good-bye, Oliver Twist.

Mother said that I must always be intolerant of ignorance, but understanding of illiteracy. That some people, unable to go to school, were more educated and more intelligent than college professors. Maya Angelou

Language is power. The power exists in the ability to manipulate language in order to communicate and direct. The directions which we receive and respond to, as well as, the directions that we in turn provide speaks to our development of self. Without the power to dissuade through the use of language, we become defined by and live at the mercy of those who do.

We are what we say and do. The ways we speak and are spoken to help shape us into the people we become. Through words and other actions, we build ourselves in a world that is building us. We can remake ourselves and society, if we choose, through alternative words and dissident projects. This is where critical

literacy begins – words that question a world not yet finished, just, or humane. Critical literacy thus challenges the status quo in an effort to discover alternative paths for social and self-development (Shor, 1999, p. 1)

Literacy or literate capacity has come to mean the ability to read the written word, to decode an established and socially agreed upon set of symbols and abstractions meant to represent speech. Literacy, according to the dominant culture is an ability to demonstrate proficiency in what societal powers have designated as normed language. This capacity to manipulate the forms of expression deemed to be standard translates into access to social and class codes. P. Dowling has labeled these elaborated and restricted codes (2004).

Proficiency at standard spelling is an outgrowth of the importance placed on the written word by members of the dominant culture. Literacy holds a different meaning, a different level of cultural weight, and takes on a critical nature for those not locked into the use of the written word as a major form of communication. Orality is also a power in its ability to challenge the standard conception of knowledge and social development.

In my world teachers and preachers were the word masters and the power brokers. They used words to instruct and to lift up. I witnessed the power of call and response interplay in church each Sunday as the preacher used this method of verbal back and forth to engage his parishioners from the pulpit. I also witnessed this form of connection and relationship on the neighborhood streets as friends displayed their mental and verbal acuity selling “wolf tickets” or while *playin’ the dozens*; “Man you so slow it takes you an hour to make minute rice!” Religious lessons of right, wrong, and should be were delivered right alongside practical life lessons of quick wit and humor.

Storytelling was also a major part of my young world. Seated at the feet of teachers during Sunday school, grandparents after Sunday meals, or teachers during the week, we were regaled with oral stories that were used to educate, entertain, and to warn. Topics included dangerous habits, elder respect, proper behavior in public, and life pursuits. I listened to dialogue on the radio and television to determine hidden meanings in voice tones, pitch, inflection, and intonation. My siblings and I also listened, unobserved from our hiding places between the balusters of the staircase, to the stories shared among the elders on Saturday evenings between cold beers and card thumping games of Pinochle. We listened from the archway of the kitchen to the sounds of fear and caution shared between my mother and her mother on hearing the news of Martin Luther King Junior's assassination. We listened to stories about change, stories about how things once were, stories about who to trust, and to stories about the struggles that lay ahead. These stories have laid the foundation of my personal oral history. Capturing them as oral vignettes and adding words as backdrop will preserve them for future generations to examine in my absence.

These stories held real characters, struggling through real trials, and were always followed with real suggestions of advice and warning. It was in listening to these stories that we learned about *Uncle Charlie*, the signs of racial betrayal and societal disappointment, and the spirit of hope eternal in the shadow of cultural despair. I remember being shuttled into an upstairs bedroom when two White men dressed in Black suits came to speak to my grandfather. In the listened to the words through the door I learned enough to piece together a warning. An employee at ARCO, he had dared to speak of unionization with his coworkers. As frightening as that visit was, what still sits

in my memory is the anger and spirit that my grandmother expressed when the two men entered and failed to remove their hats. Intimidation was one thing, respect in a person's house was quite another.

We learned the meanings of signs and omens – a neighbor never had any money due to her practice of leaving her pocketbook on the floor; family members were walking on eggshells and wondering who would be the next to die after a bird flew into the house of a cousin; my grandmother yelled that the house was poor enough without a relative making it worse by eating while standing; and a male relative received the angry looks of family members when he inadvertently placed his hat on the bed.

The stories we heard from our perches at the top of the stairs were also about us. We held a verbal and active place in our family's history's and as such knew that our lives held importance. We listened as proud parents mentioned the triumphs of and hopes for their children – academic, athletic, musical, and artistic markers were being placed at schools all over the city. We listened to stories of the missed potential of our parents and learned that in each of us our parents and grandparents heard different versions of hope, and saw the faces of a different future. These stories provided the scripts and the direction for the plays of our lives; the acts, the cues, and the stage blocking all formed the basis of our cultural theory for life and living through storied connection.

Words were also used to prepare and instruct. We read the Bible in church and books in school. I read with fascination the words in books recommended by teachers and wondered about an author's reasoning in deciding to use one word and not another. These paper substitutes for journeys to far off places caused speculation about the source of their orthographic inspiration. Had they, much like Rembrandt's portrayal of the

Evangelist Matthew, received their motivation from the snatched whispers of angels or was it a skill that could be acquired through human efforts?

In the face of such celestial stimulus for writing, I struggled with explanations for the intentional use of words as weapons and instruments of control. I can distinctly remember the first time a word was hurled at me with such venom that despite never having heard the word before that moment, I was certain it was meant to cause pain. Words do indeed have power.

My personal and educative passions have involved words and the ability of humans to connect through the use of words and meaningful dialogue. African Americans come to know, come to be known, through the power and respect given to the oral word. I am a descendant of verbal people, an individual who comes to understanding through oral connections and relationships. My life is “filled with narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments of time and space, and reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities” (Clandinin and Connelly, p. 17).

That fascination with words helped me to create quiet worlds of adventure and refuge. I enjoyed listening to speech, enjoyed the interplay of discussion, and enjoyed the distinct non-verbal-yet-verbal bodily expressions that accompanied each person’s discourse. I could easily get lost in a stranger’s conversation from across a restaurant, on a bus, or at an event in the park. My mind would create entire lives for the discussants based on the few words that I had managed to overhear. Even today after several overseas postings, my husband has deduced that I attempted to learn enough of the language of our host country so as not to be locked out of the conversations of strangers.

I was one of those thinking children that caused everyone to question my thoughts and my motives. Contemplative, precocious, stuck-up were terms that I often heard my mother defend on my behalf. My grandmother put it plainly, as only grandmothers can do; I was simply a nosey child. After putting me in my place with such a direct statement, she would then whisper in my ear that my curiosity was the reason for my smarts as well. This is the grandmother who also provided me with a simple lesson of life and learning, "In life," she said, "You are either learning or teaching. When you stop doing one or the other you may as well be dead." Words, spoken words, have kept me alive. Words, spoken words, have helped me to keep the conversations and the discussions of self discovery and relational connections alive as well. Our literacy is held in the spoken word. It is through the elevated position of the spoken word in the African American community that we challenge the status quo of the dominant culture's preference for the written word as *the* path to knowledge and self-definition.

Walter Ong (2002) in his book *Orality and Literacy* quotes noted linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's description of writing as possessing varying degrees of "usefulness, shortcomings, and dangers" (p. 5). Writing, the residue of verbal thought and oral speech, has created a false sense of communication, connection, and relationship. The social importance and the cultural status conferred upon the skill of writing, has created a dependency based on perceived usefulness. The inability of the written word to capture in real time the full measure of emotions in flux, thoughts in transition, and spontaneous reactions highlights its shortcomings. The ability of the written word to be used as a weapon of limitation, a creation of marginalized existences based on artificial

standards of dominance, and an embedding of those limitations on the psyche of an entire culture highlights its incredible danger.

The strong oral tradition of connection, relation, and cultural continuation embedded in the educational heritage of the African American community has been positioned as “beneath serious scholarly attention” and “essentially unskillful and not worth serious study” (Ong, 2002, p. 8, p. 10). Critical Literacy Theory, (Delpit, 1995; Freire, 1987; Heath, 1983; Ong, 2002; Shor, 1992, 1999; Tatum, 1997; Wink, 2004), is the recognition of the ability of words (often written words) to shape our worlds and our selves. Critical literacy involves the use of communicative discourses to disrupt, define, and establish worlds and places in them. Beverly Tatum (1997) highlights the positionality of Black adolescents through negative discourses in her book, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* The creation of deficient racial identities through the reception of negatively internalized messages serves to make race a point of salience for Black adolescents. Tatum explains that as race is not a point of salience for White adolescents, it stifles discussions surrounding the pains and struggles experienced by Black youth as a result of their positioning due to race. The inability to connect Black pain with White awareness through the discussion creates a social disconnect. “Many people of color are tired of talking, frustrated that talk has not lead to enough constructive action or meaningful social change” (Tatum, 1997, p. xix). Rather than attempt to talk with a group that does not recognize the challenges of race, adolescents of color self segregate and talk with those who share a common heritage through literacy based in struggle.

Critical Literacy will be used to examine the extent to which the use of language has been used as a tool for the construction of self. In the case of African Americans this has meant a negative or deficient construction of self when compared against the dominant construction of the Eurocentric self. It will be used to provide alternative paths to and widen the parameters of what counts as literacy, what counts as social and personal development, coming to know and understanding our worlds.

Critical literacy traces its bloodline back to the works of Paulo Freire. Freire believed that educators should place greater emphasis on teaching students to think about and question their existence. This viewpoint was based on his belief that the oppressed often failed to recognize their devalued positions. It is only through authentic dialogue that a “pedagogy of the oppressed, a pedagogy which must be forged *with*, not *for* the oppressed” can be created (1970/2000, p. 48). In this way the ideas, experiences, words, and ideals of the students are validated and included in curriculum as valuable knowledge. Words and language have the power to transform. “Critical literacy transcends conventional notions of reading and writing to incorporate critical thinking, questioning, and transformation of self or one’s world” (McDaniel, 2004. p. 474).

All cultures use communication to create connection. The type of communication created and chosen to facilitate relational interaction reflects directly the values of that culture. The chosen form of communication impacts the way those in the culture experience and come to know, read, and position themselves in the world. There is a direct relational connection between the type and quality of relationships and the culture’s partiality toward the written or oral word. The socially constructed value placed upon the literacy of the written word by the dominant culture, the assessment of

knowledge based upon the ability to decode the word, and the devalued positioning of other forms of cultural literacies has resulted in the politicized nature of language and literacy. As a result a segment of the population is unable to translate their divergent personal, cultural and social literacies into transformative power, cultural wealth or socially validated ways of coming to know (Wink, 2004) and understand.

Coming to know through literacy involves an awakening of an awareness of the word. Phonemic awareness is a major part of a group of meta-linguistic skills associated with literacy and language acquisition. Phonemic awareness means that a child is aware of the fact that the spoken word is made up of unique and individual sounds. Poems, poetry and chants represent some of our earliest memories with the spoken word. Nursery rhymes, rhyming games and rhyming phrases are some of a child's earliest examples of phonemic representation.

Jump rope rhymes are also included in this body of early exposure. They are based on beats and rhythm, much the same as the beats, rhythm and syllabication of the language (Gathercole & Willis, 1991; Snider, 1997; Wood, 2000). The repetitive nature, the familiar rhyme, the predictive nature, and the cadence of jump rope rhymes, help to develop a child's sensitivity to and awareness of phonemic classification and distinction (Levy, 2001). This awareness is culturally set and sensitive to cultural rhythms and aesthetics.

The nature of poetry (Gable, 1999), poems and chants is such that children are able to anticipate words, ideas, and meaning through the predictable rhyming patterns. The rhyme, repetition and rhythm of the jump rope lyrics, in conjunction with the predictable beat of the ropes hitting the ground, provides children with the ability to

anticipate meaning, upcoming words, syllabication, and intonation. Children are provided with cultural models with regard to expressions, delivery and oral presentation.

This oral presentation or the telling of cultural tales and stories has been done for centuries. It is a generational way of sharing and passing knowledge. The words and chants are internalized, connections to self and community are made, and they become channeled in the memory as experiences to build upon at a later time (Britzman, 1998). This technique was especially important during difficult economic times, when resources were limited or non-existent. In the insular confines of the jump rope community, these chants provide the necessary learning scaffolding and prompt feelings of success while breaking the legacy of negative literacy ability.

Gloria Ladson-Billings brings voice to the modern movement of critical literacy. In recognizing the “political aspect of literacy” (Freire, 1987, p. 56), and the inherent power in the acquisition of the word, she places orate literacy at the center of her search to identify tangible traits exhibited by successful teachers of African American children, teachers she calls Dreamkeepers. In her essay entitled, *Racialized Discourses and Ethnic Epistemologies* (2003) she provides a distinction between the Eurocentric and Afrocentric situated epistemologies. There is the view that epistemology means a “way of knowing.” She posits that epistemology is a complete “system of knowing.” The Eurocentric epistemology rests with the individual. The individual derives meaning and personal validation through familiarity with language abstractions of speech on paper.

On the other hand, the Afrocentric epistemology is centered on relationships. Writer and speaker are considered inadequate terms in Afrocentric culture. “Composer encompasses both writer and speaker, yet does not privilege one over the other” (Moss,

2003, p. 139). Ladson-Billings gives us the term, *Ubuntu*, 'I am because *we* are.' An individual's sense of self, knowledge, and viewing the world are all derived through and contingent upon relationships with others; "the only way to exist in the world is through others" (Sidorkin, 2002, p. 94). The community of learners becomes the key to *knowing*. If the perception of societal power is tied to written text, the Eurocentric form of literacy, then the concepts of literacy that are not positioned in and based upon the individual nature of the written word are viewed as worthy only of diminished value. The orate society's tradition, similar to those found in jump rope communities, is an ever moving course of awareness to be shared and discussed, of oral discussions, dialogue, discourse.

bell hooks, in *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, recognizes the power of reading and writing as the power which leads to higher education, the ability to move toward a greater understanding of the power inherent in literacy and the ability to leave markers for others to follow. She continues the explanation of the recognized power in the word, the power to make connections between language, culture, power and access when she states, "...we have to work to find ways to teach and share knowledge in a manner that does not reinforce existing structures of domination..." (hooks, 2003, p. 45).

Lisa Delpit argues that students in the classroom should be taught strategies and skills that good readers use to gain meaning in order to avoid falling prey to the dominant structures of domination. They must also be taught the skills of the game, "...must be taught Standard English if they are to succeed educationally," (1998, p. xiv), and must be exposed to the *silenced dialogue*, what she calls the *culture of power* (1995, p. 24); the ability to recognize and interpret the non-verbal clues of communication in order to begin the process of dismantling the bounds of oppression.

Language once uttered stands still in the silence. It validates and serves as a marker of our lived experiences, a mile marker of sorts. There is power in the ability to claim understanding in the language of your culture, the language of your being. Language is the medium through which we are able to connect the generational dots of culture. It embodies the incredible potential and ability to make connections, to impact the present and leave a marker of the self in that moment of the journey. The journey, while collective at times, is composed of singular, subjective perspectives and experiences along the way. The journey moves along to each potential exit, with hope of discovery, an assessment of the destination and anticipation of future excursions. Each individual voice, each subject operating in a series of events, a series of personal histories, represents what Paulo Freire calls “the language of possibility” (Freire, 1987, p. 56).

Language represents the potential placement of cultural markers along the highway of lived experiences. It stands as the convergence of the personal with the external, the self with the world, the crossing of borders into the known and unknown, the new and the newly acquired, the promise of potential and acceptance ever mindful of the fear of reprisal, rejection and worse yet, disregard. In all of it rests the possibility to connect, the possibility of discovery, the possibility to become.

The use of that language to convey meaning, thoughts, insights and hope, to place a marker, across cultures, across the boundaries and borders of dominant and repressive groups, represents the ability to transition into literacy. The journey toward the permanent placement of a road sign to be read by future passengers. Inherent in the possibility of literacy, the movement toward literacy, the creation of literacy through a cultural context,

is the desire and ability to add the marginalized voice to the conversation of societal existence, to become a *must see* destination or exit upon the journey. Ira Shor tells us that "...literacy in daily life is mostly conversational exchanges tied to immediate experience..." (Shor, 1991, p. 221). Bob Fecho continues the description of this journey toward literacy as the ability "...to understand ourselves in relation to the world around us. This making of meaning goes beyond decoding and comprehension because it expects students to come to understandings of themselves as individuals occupying a range of social spaces." (Fecho, 2004, p. 96). Pinar and others have labeled this journey as *currere*, the journey of relevant experiences, lived experiences (Greene, 1978; Pinar, 2004). Literacy, for African Americans lives in the spaces of lived experiences, in the conversations of connections.

A child's ability to occupy a space, to claim a space as his/her own, to place a marker, depends largely upon the ability to recognize the sense of power created from and by the use of language. Victoria Purcell-Gates describes this as "literacy knowledge" (Delpit, 2002, p. 124). The ability to understand, comprehend, make meaning of language does indeed help us to make connections to the world and the spaces we occupy.

Phonemic awareness is a major ingredient in the acquisition of literacy knowledge, a major part of a group of meta-linguistic skills associated with literacy and linguistics. This acquired skill enables a child to determine that words exist as representations of objects and that each word is made up of sounds that are as unique and individual as the trees in the forest. Pre-readers, those on the journey toward literacy, must develop the skills necessary to translate the early knowledge of images, the

unspoken yet verbal, into word sounds, then into letters of the alphabet and letters of the alphabet into representative sounds of the language. (Bourassa & Treiman, 2001). It is at this point that the child ceases to be lost in the world; the forest begins to come alive, to breathe. The child is at the starting point of the journey, at the Here.

Reading, interpreting the word is a dynamic, individual pursuit that involves attachment to a person's experiences and analysis of the word's significance as it relates to those experiences. This makes the recognition of the cultural context vitally important to the creation of meaning and the establishment of validation and freedom from the colonizing domination of slavery. Charles Taylor expresses the importance of cultural identity when he states that "...we are formed by recognition" (Taylor, 1992 p. 64) Yet, Freire recognized that within the context of being or becoming it is impossible to "...be divorced from the historical continuity. Knowledge has historicity. It never is, it is always in the process of being" (Freire, 2004, p. 31). We are all the sum of our lived experiences and each connected experience exists in a historical moment. These moments remain defined by and connected to strands of temporal influences.

The starting point of the journey toward literacy for African Americans, the journey toward being, began as they emerged from slavery determined to learn to read and write. These Blacks, among them Ida B. Wells, believed "...fervently in the promise of Black citizenship and accomplishment" (Dray, 2003, p. 53). The Blacks of the time were resolute in their desire to speak up and out, to discover their voice. The freed slaves were determined to hear the message in the words and determined to add their own voices as markers along the journey to literacy, determined to understand as Frederick Douglass "...understood that knowledge could be a path to freedom" (Takaki, 1993, p.

123). It was in the segregated and newly emancipated South that former slaves would legitimate their culture by beginning the journey from the point of freedom and liberation as they moved toward the destination of an accepted cultural literacy.

This journey toward literacy did not take place without roadblocks and detours along the way. Ronald Takaki in *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* sheds some light on the political determination of the dominant class and power structure to prevent Blacks from receiving the words of education, “Learning will spoil the best nigger in the world” (Takaki, 1993, p.123). Political and legislative measures were enacted to prevent not only the education of Blacks, but also the mixing of the races on any level. Grace Elizabeth Hale discusses the desires by whites to use the supposed inferiority of Blacks to justify the necessary separate spaces between Blacks and whites and to “...keep Blacks in their place” (Hale, 1998, p. 3). These fears prompted the creation of segregated schools, bolstered by the May 18, 1896 Louisiana Supreme Court ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson* which made legal the system of separate but equal segregation in America until the landmark, 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling.

Recognizing the “political aspect of literacy” (Freire, 1987, p. 56), and the inherent power in the acquisition of the word, the first newly freed slaves were resolved to stand as trees in the forest. They would stand ready and braced against the winds of the time, anxious to serve as unspoken yet verbal reminders, well read markers along the journey. bell hooks, in *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, recognizes the power of reading and writing as the power which leads to higher education, the ability to move toward a greater understanding of the power inherent in literacy and the ability to leave markers for others to follow.

These newly freed slaves recognized that power. They knew that questions of literacy must be asked and answered within the context of the culture. The signs must be seen as verbal in the unspoken and well read in the unwritten. They also understood that "...literacy cannot require that the reading of the word be done in the colonizer's language" (Freire, 1987, p. 57). bell hooks describes this as "...the decolonization of ways of knowing" (hooks, 2003, p. 3). Wexler calls this a battle with the iron cage of existence, of Western subjectivity (Wexler, 1996). Derridian philosophy provides us with one of the keys to the iron cages created by the colonization of Western standards and norms. In addition to knowing ourselves well enough to prevent the formation of self by destructive, repressive forces, we must know not only the subject, but also know where it comes from (Peters, 2003, p.61). It is in knowing the history of the African American, in knowing and respecting the cultural traditions of the African American that the gates to the iron cage will be thrown open. It is in this acceptance of self that the process of dismantling the subjective sovereignty of European colonialism, the process of decolonization can occur.

Critical literacy provides voice to the silenced as their divergent ways of coming to know are accepted and valued in the classroom environment. Opportunities to critically discuss and share present themselves everyday in the classroom. My research seeks to bring to light the varied opportunities for critical responses, critical analysis, increased awareness, and social action existent in validating varied forms of literacy in the classroom. If students are provided with opportunities to express thoughts and question their learning in the form of music, art, photography, sculpture, or verbal

depiction, education becomes personal and participatory and the search for social action becomes passionate. In this way, the teacher becomes learner and the learner teacher.

Liberation from marginalized states of existence was found in the form of literacy, access to literacy and the ability to add value to divergent forms of literacy expression. Literacy, standard and socially accepted forms of language in both the spoken and written formats, could be converted to power. Ladson-Billings questions the power attached to the concept of literacy when she asks the question, “Literacy for what?” in her article entitled *Liberatory Consequences of Literacy: A Case of Culturally Relevant Instruction for African American Students*. If literacy represents the key to access and power, and if it is as Joan Wink would argue it is, “...neither value free or purely functional; on the contrary, cultural empowerment through literacy [was] viewed as a necessary prelude to collective action to effectuate social transformation” (Wink, 2002, p. 380), then orate cultures must seek a place at the table of discussion in order to demand full recognition, value, and inclusion in the ranks of societal hierarchies (Ladson-Billings, 1992a).

The journey toward literacy and connection for African Americans has proceeded due to the inclusion of common ingredients existent in abundance, cultural aesthetics used as expression and the language to facilitate discussion. African American’s use of art, music, dance, fabric, drama, and photography as mediums of expression and definition of self are examples of what Addison Gayle Jr. included in the theory of the Black Aesthetic (1972). These tenets of Black aesthetic or literacy, based on the use of the arts as expression highlights the African American’s refusal to “separate literature from life” (p. 4). Within this community of discovery and hope there existed language, a

common language and way of understanding that transcended the socially constructed confines placed on differing and marginalized cultures.

Jump rope chants support those in the community with an introductory lesson plan and objective for early literacy awareness. Surrounded by the language of the jump rope, young children were coaxed and eased into the world of words long before they ever entered school. The sense of community, prompted by the playing of the jump rope and the early exposures to language, laid the foundation for a child's background knowledge in the world of words on the familiar ground of orality.

Tell Me, Tell Me, Tell Me True: Oral History

"A" my name is Alex,

My sister's name is Anna.

We grow lots of apples

In the state of Alabapple.

"B" my name is Bonnie,

My brother's name is Brendan.

We grow lots of Belly Beans

In the town of Buffaleen.

I need to keep thinking and analyzing, and have that transformed into a piece of paper. Besides, if we as African American women don't write our own books, then other folks will continue to define us. Johnnetta Cole

There is Black history untold in the memories of the hundreds of thousands of grandmothers, grandfathers, great-aunts. Alex Haley

This is an example of the type of jump rope rhyme that involves manipulation of the alphabet. While the rhyme requires the ability to think quickly on your feet as you jump, it is also used to tell a story as unique as the jumper. The rhyme also provides the jumper with the ability to self name, self create, and self define in an oral display of language manipulation. Each time the words are chosen and then uttered, they claim a place in the present and leave a marker for memories to return to in the future. If written, captured through interview and with the assistance of modern technology, we are able to preserve the created story of self for others to enjoy and gain examples of knowledge and experience. The oral history of a jumper in session is here for the there of the future through memory.

On a recent morning walk I paused to watch the demolition of one of the few remaining houses along the road. The sign next to the road read advertised the impending arrival of yet another gated town house community that would call Lenox Road its future home. When we first moved to Atlanta this tree-lined road provided the main connective thoroughfare from the I-85 Highway to Lenox Mall. At that time there were only single family homes lining either side of the road. The news reports at the time brought the disagreements between neighbors into our living rooms. At issue was the preservation of the road's heritage as compared with those who sought to accept the developer's price in return for an opportunity to redirect that history. One by one, or two to three at a time, most of the neighbors sold to the developers leaving only a handful of single-family homes as a reminder of the road's earlier personality. Today, this same stretch of road is home to one condominium and town home complex after another. When I relate the evolution of the road to newcomers to Atlanta they are surprised to learn of the road's

history and transformation. They are also unaware of the struggle and of the resistance carried out by some of the roads previous occupants.

As I watched the demolition, recognized the smell of pine from the falling trees and the skeletal frame of the house, I wondered about the previous occupants of the home. I wondered what their lives had been like in this house that was rapidly disappearing. I wondered about the events that had been shared, the struggles, the triumphs, and the memories made. I wondered who, if anyone knew of their existence and of their particular story. As the only one on the road that morning, aside from the demolition workers, I wondered if anyone cared. Had the occupants of this house become what Toni Morrison (1987) calls “disremembered and unaccounted for” in her book *Beloved* (p. 274).

These thoughts came rushing back to me as I sat down to enjoy lunch at the table identified as Class of 1975. It was our twenty-fifth class reunion. We had just completed a tour of the school. While I was amazed to see the physical changes to the school – a new Fine Arts and Science wing, laptop library carrels for every student in the library extension, and a state of the art weight room in what used to be home to the volley-ball team – I was most surprised to see the increased number of “brown” faces walking the halls of

our alma mater. Aware of the alumna presence on campus, these brown faces seemed equally surprised to see me.

I stopped to introduce myself to a young lady sitting on a couch in the alcove where we used to play cards and put the finishing touches on assignments before class. She explained that she was a rising senior. We chatted about the school and her college plans for a bit before her curiosity got the best of her. She asked me to explain the reason for my visit to the school that Friday morning. Her “You are kidding!” response and motions to other “brown” faces to join us let me know instantly the status of our history in this place that had been our educational home for six years. We had been disremembered and were currently in a state of *unaccount*. Not only were our names no longer known, our stories had not been told to the point of *rememory*. Our story had not been a story to pass on. (Morrison, 1987) Oral History, an active process of interviewing and recording seeks to preserve such histories and removes the cloak of invisibility in the capture. Oral History provides a methodology for collecting and preserving these unique personal stories.

“Memory is the core of oral history, from which meaning can be extracted and preserved.” (Ritchie, 2003, p. 19). It is “the subject as well as the source of oral history” (Perks & Thompson, 1998, p. 211) and is used as a tool of the present to interpret events and experiences from the past. Oral history is a reflective and fluid attempt at creating meaningful accounts through the storied lives of those relating the tales. The stories can be used as a tool through which to create social, educational, and cultural generalizations.

Stories have been passed from generation to generation in oral form for as long as there has been communication. Oral history has existed from the time the first story was recorded and preserved in a tangible form for future generation to enjoy and learn from. This methodology has a history that dates back to China’s Zhou dynasty when scribes

first captured *sayings*. The process has appealed to peoples and cultures the world over. Despite a the late formation of formal Oral History organization in 1967, the method has been used to capture the memories of accounts relating to the American Revolution, the American Civil War, Reconstruction, post-Apartheid South Africa, and post war survival accounts from Europe to South America to Russia and Australia. Presidents have used the method to sway public opinion. Authors have used the methodology to not only serve as the research for their written work; they have also served as the inspiration for the average person to collect their family histories with elders who still have stories to tell.

Oral history recognizes and inhabits the personal perspective without judgment or opinion. In fact, the variety of memories, accounts, and sources captured by the interviews on the same event adds to the richness of the preservation, as well as the interpretation. This methodology suits the personal, passionate, and participatory nature of this research project. The connection and relation that currently exists between me and the other participants helps me to build upon, extend, and delve into deeper understandings as a result of shared memories and relationships. We do indeed possess “multiple ownership of the same past.” (Zinsser, 1998, p.6)

Oral histories are narrative in nature and are “threads that tie together bits of data” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 69) from a subject’s life experiences. Despite the placement of oral histories from minority classes among the tradition of folktales (Portelli, 1998), this type of memory transferal is recognized as a method of transmitting experiential and historical information. Among the bits of information surrounding a known event, oral histories provide deeper insights, personal aspects and additional details; “they always cast new light on unexplored areas” of the event and “tell us not just

what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did” (p.36). Narrative inquirers recognize that human lives are a series of individual vignettes possessive of the potential, through relation, to serve as personal markers in multiple existences, the past, the present and the future. The collection of those stories, the oral representations of those experiential snapshots, is captured in a more tangible and long-lasting format, such as print, audio or video tape. Narrative inquirers gather information, delve into the questions that arise in living life, and position that information within the greater scheme of human interaction, societal stratification, political alignment, social structuring, and access to resources that provide for democratic existences within each parameter.

Oral history also provides for and creates spaces to capture differences in perceptions which are based in gender, age, race, and ethnicity. Differences in language usage, bodily communication, and social protocols all have a direct impact on the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. The ability of the interviewer to connect, on some level, with the participants creates an environment of comfort. An environment of trust is created and the ease with which participants share information is increased.

If perceptions, beliefs, and lived experiences form the basis of a person’s reality, then the use of stories as the backdrop for exploration by narrative inquiry researchers stands as a viable method for the exploration into the parameters that impact the human existence, the strive for validation and recognition. "Humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and collectively, lead storied lives. Thus, the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world," (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

The oral, storytelling traditions of the African American community will be used to capture the experiences of myself and my classmates as I search for social justice potentialities in educational integration and desegregation. Narrative Inquiry will be used in a critical nature as I move beyond the framework provided by Clandinin and Connelly in order to incorporate the political aspects of race, literacy and feminist theory.

A critical examination of these histories will enable me to present the multiple intersections of self, and subordination of self, through personal stories and interactions. Wildman and Davis (2000) describe this multidimensionality as a Koosh ball. Every individual exists at the center of these multiple intersections, where many strands meet, similar to a Koosh ball...each person is embedded in a matrix of categories that interact in different contexts...but looking at one strand does not really help anyone to see the shape of the whole ball or the whole person (p. 662).

A critique of oral history is that personal accounts are too subjective and biased (Perks & Thompson, 1998; Ritchie, 2003). The objectivity of data and historical documentation is preferred by traditional researchers and historians over eyewitness accounts which may change to suit the best interests of the interviewee. History is subjective and recognizes the frailty of memory. "The best projects were those that cast their nets wide, recording as many different participants in events or members of a community as possible," (Ritchie, 2003, p. 24) in order to minimize the reliance on one or two accounts. History is also oral in its beginning as eyewitness accounts. Oral history brings a different type of credibility to the presentation of events as recorded, processed, interpreted, and archived sessions. It should also be treated in the same manner as other

forms of evidence, with caution and a curiosity for additional supportive information to support and complete the presented historical picture.

The use of these oral histories to present the whole self from divergent viewpoints based on personal knowledge grounded in gender, race, and cultural literacy will challenge dominant conceptions of truth. The varied nature of narrative is well suited to the varied nature and positions of the subjects of this research. The collection of stories from these triumphant African American women will add to the layers of potential explanations used to understand the ways in which racial and cultural identity formation in Jump Rope Communities contribute to the integrative school success of African American women?

CHAPTER 4

CHOREOGRAPHING THE SESSION: BEST FOOT FORWARD

Jumping rope, playing Double Dutch involves a “complicated combination of foot and hand moves. Balancing and timing are tricky too.” (Loredo, 1996, p. 31). In order to be successful you must be willing to put your best foot forward, to respect the history, the heritage, and the traditions of the game. Learning the steps, the moves, and the tricks to jump rope is not an easy task. Learning to master the game amidst the onslaught of the twirling ropes is equivalent to learning your self and your world amidst the onslaught of racism, only adds to the level of accomplishment and the personal connection to something greater than a single jumper. When each member puts their best foot forward the jump rope session experiences success through a series of choreographed moves and interplays.

The choreographing of a community as it is in constant flux requires the coordination of different people and organizations. The continuity of that community amidst the daily onslaught of issues relating to racism, gender, and classism is dependent upon the coordination of various members and support personnel. Churches, educators, women’s groups, volunteer organizations, and community services all play vital roles. These contributing members must be willing to put their best feet forward to continue to move the race forward. Working for the race (Bullock, 1967; Collier-Thomas & Franklin, 2001; Stewart, 1987; Zinn & Dill, 1994), a movement that began during slavery while dismissing or downplaying the negative discourses so prevalent in our society as they relate to the African American community and African American individuals.

As students of and from segregated Jump Rope Communities we were encouraged by our teachers to be ever mindful of putting our best foot forward; of doin' right by our families, our communities, and our churches. We were provided with an interesting combination of tools, tips, and warnings to *make it out there*. Our tools consisted of an education by both teachers and parents in cultural awareness and social correctness. In school and at home learned the value of hard work, dedication, and determination. Our tips came in the form of the clichés that are wrapped in hope and promise – you can make it if you try hard enough, with an education you can do anything and be anyone that you choose, an education is something that no one can take from you, you can always come back home. The related warnings grew out of a desire to protect, as well as result of the fears amassed after years of cultural and racial denial – don't give *the man* a reason to hate you, don't call attention to yourself, don't expect *the man* to give you a thing, and remember to look in the mirror each morning before you leave home to see the color of the face that we would be judged by. Our parents, our teachers, our Yemajás sought to prepare us for the racialized world. They sought to instill in us the drive of racial uplift, of continuing to move the race forward. We learned that this would be a long struggle but would begin with a single step. We learned that as African American children it would have to be our best step, our best foot forward.

Keep the Kettle Boiling: Educational Heritage

In (your town's name)

There is a school,

In that school

There is a class,

*In that class,
There is a desk,
In that desk,
There is a book,
In that book,
There is a picture,
In that picture,
There is a ghost!*

We are the only racial group within the United States ever forbidden by law to read and write. Alice Childress

O, ye daughters of Africa, awake! awake! arise! No longer sleep nor slumber, but distinguish yourselves. Show forth to the world that ye are endowed with noble and exalted faculties. O, ye daughters of Africa! What have ye done to immortalize your names beyond the grave? What examples have ye set before the rising generation? What foundation have ye laid for generations yet unborn? Maria Stewart (1831)

In the jump rope game called Keep the Kettle Boiling skippers run through turning ropes one after another as their names are called. The two enders set the pace of the game through the speed of the turning rope. They are also responsible for gauging the skill and ability levels of the skippers and matching the pace to suit their needs. The game involves concentration on the skippers who run through in front of you and a connection with the skipper yet to come through behind you. Expected performance is demonstrated and followed as each entering skipper models the behavior set by the preceding skipper who is in turn aware of the model they are establishing for those to follow. Personal

contributions to the session are patterned after a heritage of attempts and successes, demonstrations, efforts, and a thirst for knowledge.

I witnessed firsthand that thirst for knowledge and the rich educational heritage while living on the continent. Doris, our housekeeper, took care of our family more than she took care of the house. Her family's compound was about a sixty minute drive or a three to four hour walk and bus ride from our home. I was thrilled and excited when Doris invited me to pay a visit to her home, to the family compound. Based on Doris' suggestion, I purchased books for the children on the compound.

The drive through the countryside in Swaziland is a feast for the eyes. Rolling green hills, endless pine forests, and the bluest of blue skies are interrupted only by a passing white cloud. Doris, a woman with a fifth grade education and able to speak six languages and several African dialects, was unusually quiet on our drive out to her family compound. When I commented on her silence she remarked that she had never before been provided with an opportunity to simply observe her country, to see its beauty. She too had been taken in by its splendor. We then talked about her life, family, children, and customs. It was on that long drive that I learned a bit about a few of the Swazi traditions. Men, married under the Swazi traditional ceremony, were permitted to take as many wives as they could care for. Women in Swaziland were subordinate to their husbands in all matters. We were required to get her husband's permission in order to apply for a passport so that Doris could travel with us to the United States. A woman's power and status changed should she gave birth to a son. She would then become the mother of the heir and entitled to all of the benefits and status afforded her son through the father. Doris was the mother of two daughters and held virtually no power in the family of her husband

or in society in general. Her eldest child a son had been murdered by her husband's second wife shortly after giving birth to her own son.

After the shock of this story I was happy to see the approaching compound and the change in her demeanor. As we approached the compound her expression became lighter and I could tell that she was happy to be home. I was excited about the opportunity to get to know her in her home environment – to get to know her her.

I was treated like a long lost relative; hugged and kissed as though I had been missing for some time. After touring the main hut, a grass and clay beehive hut, we sat for a while under the tress outside. It was then that I passed out the gifts of books to the children. I had assumed that these would be children who could read the words on the pages of the books that I had chosen. These children who could tend the family's herd of goats, collect wood for the evening meal fire, tend the family garden and help in the fields, care for younger siblings and older relatives, run for miles in their bare feet, had yet to be trained in the translation of the symbols that lay on the pages of the books I provided. That lack of training, as with the freed slaves in post civil war America, did not diminish their interest, their enthusiasm, or their eagerness to become connected to the power of the word.

I watched one young child in particular. She had curtsied and smiled when I handed her a book. She then darted off to sit under a tree all alone. At first she clutched the book to her chest as if to feel the warmth of its power. She glanced about to be certain that no one would intrude on or disturb her moment with the book. She then opened the book and while rubbing the palm of her hand over each of the pages, she smiled the most wonderfully satisfied smile. The book was upside down but that did not seem to matter.

Each page seemed to open a door onto a wondrous world never before explored and yet too enticing to turn away from. After palming the last page she once again held the book to her chest and closed her eyes. She opened her eyes and held the book up as if she could not believe her luck that the book was still in her possession. She then began the palming process anew. I realized that I had become involved in her excitement and could feel her joy. It was in that instant that I realized the desire to learn exists in every child and every child had the right to experience that same level of awe and wonder. The educational heritage, desire, and passion all lives on in the descendants of slaves in this country today.

William Watkins (1996) discusses the challenge and the hope that exists for African Americans in their quest to keep the educational heritage kettle boiling. Watkins attributes the reason for hope to the African American “rich intellectual tradition of theory and practice;” he attributes the challenge to “our collective amnesia” and the “long history of slavery and segregation” that have combined to prevent “us from explaining African American education in the same terms as the white community does” (p.5). Add to this the attribution of the miseducation of African Americans (Watkins, 1996; Woodson, 1990) to a racial and political arrangement unique to the United States. “The politics of colonialism, slavery, and the subsistence labor practices of the corporate-industrial United States” (p.6), have created the need to examine the educational heritage of African Americans within an ideological framework that highlights its resilience despite the politics of race, power, and domination that have resulted in periods of oppression, exclusion, hegemony, and acculturation.

It was not until I had begun my educational journey as a doctoral student that I recognized the existence of gaps in that education. It was then that I realized I possessed no ammunition of names, no arsenal of narratives or speeches, no awareness of organized struggle, and no sisterly examples to follow through the ropes when discussions turned to the educational heritage. It was at this stage of my education that I discovered the disruptive works of Anna Julia Cooper (1892, 1988) as *A Voice from the South*; Maria Stewart (1831-1879, 1987), *America's First Black Woman Political Writer; The Life and Religious Experience* of Jarena Lee (1836); Harriet Wilson (1859, 2005) and *Our Nig*; Harriet Jacobs (1861, 2001) and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl; The Two Offers* of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1859, 2003); *Life on the Sea Islands* with Charlotte Forten (1864, 2003) and the story of Mattie Jackson, a slave in the waning days of institutionalized slavery.

Mattie, whose story of bravery and resistance came to represent all of absent stories that had been excluded from my education. Her triumphant struggle for literacy and eventual freedom in the face of repeated brutality was told to and written down by a free and literate black woman and lived for me on the pages of Heather Williams' (2005) book entitled *Self-Taught: African American Education In Slavery and Freedom*. Mattie and her mother learned to *listen hard and remember well* (p. 9) the conversations of the White slave owner they heard while working in the Big House on the Lewis plantation. This skill proved invaluable to the survival of the slaves as they sought freedom, literacy, and an awareness of their worlds.

Such eavesdropping constituted a vital and accessible component of the intelligence network within slave communities. So important as literacy

was to the slaves who employed it in the service of their own freedom or for the benefit of others, enslaved African Americans also had other ways of knowing. They relied heavily on oral and aural systems of information. Those with access to white people's conversations listened closely when masters gathered and developed acute skills of perception and memory (p. 9).

Mattie's eavesdropping skills were combined with her ability to read enough to decipher the messages of imminent civil war in the newspapers. The Lewis family added to Mattie's store of information by making editorial comments after reading articles in the papers of the time. The Union soldiers added to the growing levels of literacy awareness by supplying the slaves with newspapers; newspapers that were filled with information that slaves could use against their owners. Mattie used her newly acquired information and skills to escape to a nearby Union army arsenal where she sought and received asylum and shelter. Literacy and the fight for literacy had become the "terrain on which slaves and slave owners waged a perpetual struggle for control." (p. 13).

That battle for control curricular control, recognition, awareness, and access continues even today. The recognition of African American heritage and historical contributions has been confined to exploration during the shortest month of the western calendar. It is then that children of color, of African decent are able to open books and see themselves rather than the ghosts that have replaced their proud academic heritage. Even with Carter G. Woodson's legacy of the dedication of a month devoted to African American awareness, descendants of Mattie Jackson, Maria Stewart, Jarena Lee, Harriet

Wilson, Harriet Jacobs, Charlotte Forten, and Anna Julia Cooper are receiving educations filled with gaps of a proud academic heritage of struggle and accomplishment.

That academic heritage did not begin with the Middle Passage as educators who practice the multicultural method of the heroes and holidays would have us believe. Europeans have marveled at and tried to suppress the accomplishments of African cultures for centuries. From their first glimpses of the ancient cities of Mapungubwe in South Africa and Great Zimbabwe in Zimbabwe, European explorers have created counter stories designed to justify their efforts of oppression and to distort, suppress, and disallow the truth of capability and civilization among African nations. The great temples at Abu Simbel in Nubia (or Kush as it is named in the Bible) stand as not only a testament to Ramses and his queen Nefertari, they also stand as architectural marvels. The civilizations that existed and thrived along the Nile river; the commercial and cultural exchanges based on the lingua franca of Swahili and KiSwahili established trade routes to supply products of textiles, iron working, fish, music, food, and social customs along the coastlines of Kenya and Tanzania; the towns of Gedi, Aksum, and Kumasi; the ancient manuscripts of Timbuktu are home to wonders that still draw the curiosity of archeologists; the art and architecture of the Bantu and Shona people; and the rich languages that have provided the world with words from various African languages such as gumbo, goober, banana, yam, zombie, gorilla, canary, oasis and bark are all examples of the rich heritage in existence long before the arrival of the European conquerors (from PBS *Wonders of the African World* with Henry Louis Gates Jr.).

Not only did African cultures exist long before the arrival of slave ships on their shores, they prospered and flourished after reaching these shores despite the horrors of

slavery and attempts at the eradication of that culture. The Black aesthetic continues on these shores in the form of literature, music, orality, dance, art, theater, poetry, This section of the project is presented as a counter story to the belief that all African Americans emerged from slavery and as individuals incapable of learning.

Carter G. Woodson's published the results of a census on free Black households in 1830. He discovered more than one tenth of all Blacks during the antebellum period were free (Hill, 1999). That freedom served as a direct threat to the captivity of mind and body desired by slave owners of the time. Capability was not the issue. Inability due to the legal prohibitions of the time prevented slaves from literacy access held in the printed word. Inability due to the codes created to restrict and confine prevented Blacks of the time from gaining access to the languages and classrooms that were representative of freedom. A control of the word and the literacy of freedom held within the word meant a control of the process and system of bondage. Property, slaves were indeed viewed as property, did not and could not have a mind. A literate slave would expose the horror and the cruelty of the system of slavery.

The task would not be an easy one as the young nation waged a battle with its historical and outwardly righteous conscious. A young nation built upon an ethic of freedom and rights as humans would choose a path leading to cultural hegemony when property and benefits afforded through social privilege were at stake. During the final years of the eighteenth century the leadership of the new nation wrestled with the concept of public school education for the masses. In 1787, enslaved children comprised approximately forty percent of the total child population in the state of Virginia. At the point in history when the nation and its leaders could have turned toward social justice

for its enslaved members, the decision to save the civilization based on privilege was made instead. That civilization “depended as much, if not more, on the containment and repression of literate culture among its enslaved population as it did on the diffusion of literate culture among its free population” (Anderson, 1988, p. 1).

This nation’s Constitution was written to protect and maintain the property of those who sat in positions of dominant culture privilege. Weary from property and self-determination battles with England, the crafters of the Constitution sought to display a show of force and colonial autonomy. It was designed to establish the parameters of access to property and power, who should possess that access, and who should determine and maintain the hierarchies of power for generations to come. The ultimate goal, after years of fighting with England for the right to decide, anything viewed as property was to be protected from any form of insurgency – even those from within the shores – at all costs. Slaves, at the time of the writing, were classified as property, and as such had no claim to access, nor was this ever an intended pursuit under the original penning of the document that shaped this young nation.

It would be as a result of determination despite control and violence and conversely what Henry Bullock (1967) calls sentimental attachments between slave and master that “the entire history of Negro education was actually begun” (p. 6). Plantations in the South had grown to become complete entities unto themselves, complete with a social structure based on slave duties and responsibilities. It was within the expanding slave system and rising costs for slaves sold at market that masters of slaves came to realize the potential value in training slaves already owned. Loyal and trustworthy slaves began to receive specialized training in the crafts of construction, carpentry, weaving,

sewing, and blacksmithery. The costs for training were offset by the practice of hiring out these slaves to those in need of specialized services. Quite unwittingly, these training plantations became the first sites of what Booker T. Washington called industrial schools. This type of plantation also helped to create a system of leadership and the beginning phases of a new middle-class among the slave population (Bullock 1967). The permissiveness and reliance on the skilled labor of the slaves on the part of slave owners led to an increase in the number of manumissions. It was also the beginning of educational opportunities for select slaves; slaves that Bullock and Ladson-Billings (2005) refer to as those who work in the big house. Many of these educated slaves, through the attainment of their own freedom, would begin the tradition of working for the race (Zinn and Dill, 1994) and its freedom through education.

Heather Williams (2005) lists the anti-literacy statutes and the prohibitive language of several southern states in antebellum south. Citizens found to be instrumental in attempting “to teach, any slave within this State to read or write, the use of figures excepted, or shall give or sell to such slaves any books or pamphlets” (p. 206) faced potential punishments of fines, imprisonment, whippings, or even death. The initial statutes focused on slaves. The reach of later statutes was extended to include free blacks. In an additional effort to prevent the formation of clandestine schools, statutes were also created to classify religious gatherings and any group meetings of Negroes before dawn as unlawful.

Regardless of the laws and customs established to deny slaves the opportunity to learn to read and write many slaves did gain access during the period we know as slavery. Ronald Butchart (1988) in his article “*Outthinking and Outflanking the Owners of the*

World”: *A Historiography of the African American Struggle for Education* sheds light on the documentation of this determination by Black historians who wrote histories from the Negro perspective. Due to the efforts of historians such as Carter G. Woodson (1919) – *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861*; Richard Wright (1894) – *A Brief Sketch of Negro Education in Georgia*; W. E. B. DuBois (1903) – *The Souls of Black Folks*; and Thomas Jesse Jones (1917) – *Negro Education: A Study of the Private and Higher Schools for Colored People in the U.S.*, African Americans have been provided with a legacy of “black struggle for learning and its ability to contribute to action for the emancipation of black America” (Butchart, 1988, p. 334).

Despite the declined access, enslaved Blacks and newly freed slaves recognized the word as the ticket to literacy. Literacy of the word represented “the means to write a pass to freedom, to learn of abolitionist activities, or to read the Bible” (Williams, 2005, p. 7). Literacy also represented a desire to become; to become more than the definition and designation supplied by the enslavers. James Anderson demonstrated this curiosity in the book, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860 – 1935*. Former slaves “...emerged from slavery with a strong belief in the desirability of learning to read and write” (Anderson, 1988, p.5). Recognizing the power of the word as the power to transcend generations, the power to separate and distinguish cultures, the power that had been guarded for so long, newly freed slaves would fight long and hard to establish systems of schooling for themselves and their children. They sought to create the desired educational system within the framework of established cultural traditions. They sought the opportunity to leave a cultural marker for others to follow. For Blacks in America this

meant the "...slaves' oral traditions, their music, and their religious outlook" (Spring, 2002, p. 29).

Former slaves continued to press for state supported educational opportunities and funds. The Freedman's Bureau, established in 1865, through a federal act and positioned under the regulation of the War Department, began a movement by freed slaves to focus on "their self-reliance and deep-seated desire to control and sustain schools for themselves and their children" (Anderson, 1988, p. 5). Despite the attempts at control and guidance by northern missionaries, as well as their belief that slaves were "little more than uncivilized victims who needed to be taught the values and rules of society" (p.6), they quickly discovered that the freed slaves were more than capable of establishing "their own educational collectives and associations, staffed schools entirely with black teachers, and were unwilling to allow their educational movement to be controlled by 'civilized' Yankees" (p. 6). A system of Native schools or common schools were started, managed, and manned by freed slaves despite reports of support on the part of Yankee benevolence and assistance. When federal support was withdrawn, freedmen took up the ropes and created educational organizations that would transform federal schools into free local schools. The Louisiana Educational Relief Association and the Georgia Educational Association, organizations created to raise funds for the support of Negro education, served as models for other states to follow in the round of keep the kettle boiling. These organizations raised money to purchase and build schools so "that the freedman shall establish schools in their own counties and neighborhoods, to be supported entirely by the colored people" (p. 11).

The freed slaves established *Sabbath and Native Schools* throughout the South to deliver the power of the word, to pass on the great cultural wealth, to as many adults and children as possible. The Sabbath Schools, some of the first examples of segregated schools for the children of former slaves were established with the assistance of the churches in the south. To Janice Hale the church “is the key institution in the crafting of the Village” (Hale, 2001, p. 154). The Sabbath Schools, church-related and sponsored schools, some of the first schools created for freed slaves, were a logical outgrowth of a strong segment of the Black community at the time of liberation. It was in the church that Blacks sought and found solace and direction during slavery. It was natural that they would also turn to the church for strength and direction with regard to education in light of emancipation. Many of these schools, due to their religious nature and affiliations, fell out of the purview of agencies designed to monitor public education at and around the turn of the century. The institution that had served as a refuge during slavery and as a beacon of hope, now served as “... a source of stability and as a vehicle for change in the African American community” (Hale, p. 154).

The Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) which was organized in 1955, the Inter Civic Council (ICC), organized in Tallahassee in 1956, the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR), organized in Birmingham in 1956, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which organized in Atlanta in 1957 as a result of Black churches becoming organizations of social power in urban communities, stand as milestones placed along the historical timeline of the African American resistance movement.

The Native Schools were founded and maintained by and were set up to be used exclusively by former slaves (Anderson, 1988, p. 7). Unable to attend Common Schools for whites, prevented by law and accepted winds of the time, schools in Louisiana, North and South Carolina, Alabama, Texas, Mississippi began springing up as early as 1860. The fact that these schools, often without organized financial support, grew to include instruction by nearly 200 teachers for over nine thousand children and two thousand adults, is a testament to the African-American desire to learn and curious attitude (Anderson, 1988). It was in these segregated schools that children and adults alike sought to use lived experiences to answer the questions posed by the mile markers as to the meaning and progression of the journey. It would be lived experiences, generational markers in a cultural context that would establish the messages and stops along the journey. It would be lived experiences, within a cultural framework, that would leave markers as to the very direction of the journey toward becoming, toward valued cultural literacy. What both of these types of schools held in common was the inclusion of and celebration of the African American culture with regard to the journey toward literacy. They learned that connections in school could and would be made between learning and life, between community and self or between the culturally rich past and hopeful future.

The educational heritage of the African American community includes the establishment of the American Negro Academy (ANA) in Washington, D.C. in 1897. The Academy in general was committed to “the building of Black civilization” and in particular the goals were to “publish, disseminate information on the harsh conditions of African American life, build a Black intellectual community, encourage the intellectual development of Black youth, and issue the truth about Black life in America” (Shujaa,

1996, p.8). The founding members of this academy were considered some of the intellectual heavyweights of African descent of the time; Alexander Crummell, Francis Grimké, W. E. B. DuBois, William Croghan, William Scarborough, John Cromwell and later added members included, John Hope, Alain Locke, James Weldon Johnson, and Carter G. Woodson.

The ANA saw racial uplift to mean a (de) and (re) construction of “literature, identity, art, music, and an education” (p.8). The ANA and Henry Morehouse saw the classical university training in the liberal sciences as the path toward racial uplift. Morehouse saw the philosophy of economic, social, and political leadership as the means to move the race forward. He was the first to use the words “talented tenth” that were later popularized by DuBois in his writings and speeches on the desired education for Blacks. “In all the ages the mighty impulses that have propelled a people onward in their progressive career, have proceeded from a few gifted souls. The *Talented Tenth* should be trained to ‘analyze and to generalize’ by an education that would produce thoroughly disciplined minds” (Anderson, 1988, p. 243).

This type of education and racial movement was in viewed by many as being in direct opposition to Booker T. Washington and the Hampton-Tuskegee accommodationist model of education. Washington saw vocational and agricultural training as the path toward the real need for economic survival in the Black community. He saw the embedded nature of racism, race division, and the economic might and discretion of the Whites as a major hindrance to the acceptance of Blacks in academia, politics, or the greater societal hierarchy. Washington believed that given the social structure, it would be through accommodation, compromise, and the provision of needed

services that Blacks would survive, let alone prosper intellectually. He saw the training of teachers to then train the youth in vocational pursuits as the path to racial uplift. The discussion caused by this historical chasm in educational paths remains today.

Missing in all of the discussions surrounding liberal vs. vocational educational training, a talented tenth, or an academy devoted to academic and cultural deconstruction with African Americans as the subject is the African American female voice. Not for lack of qualified contributors, not for lack of passionate desires to affect a change in the condition of racial suffering, African American women were excluded from the organizations of men and the resultant discussions.

Mary Mcleod Bethune stands out as one of the exceptions. Her contributions to the field of Black education and the Civil Rights Movement helped to earn her the title of First Lady of the Race or Mother of the Race. She used her oratory prowess to cause changes in the educational system by “using the political system to her advantage, and participating in freedom-fighting organizations” (Collier-Thomas & Franklin, 2001, p. 12). As a true educator, Bethune placed the best interests of the students before any philosophical standpoint or ideology. She used her positions, membership in, and affiliations with organizations such as the National Council of Negro Women (which she founded in 1935) and the Federal Council on Negro Affairs, (the mostly male dominated organizations known as the Black Cabinet), to combine educational grants with vocational training, to bring “‘together for unified thought and action all Negroes high in government authority’ in service to the race” (p.12). She founded an elementary school that later became the Bethune-Cookman College as a tangible tool in the fight for racial and educational uplift. Bethune used the door metaphor to discuss issues of exclusion,

segregation, and civil rights. Her speech entitled Closed Doors was a challenge aimed at White American to open the doors so long closed on the educational and social opportunities for Black Americans.

Families from Jump Rope Communities continued the tradition of placing a premium on education as a way to improve their daily condition and the condition of the race as a whole. Education, Takaki's key to freedom, Wexler's key to the cage, and DuBois' life beyond the veil, was viewed by members of Jump Rope Communities as a way to transcend the boundaries of social class, as well as the resultant economic disparities caused by an education that was anything except separate but equal (Payne, 2005). Education, the key to the cage, in the Jump Rope Communities, was viewed as a way to obtain a share of the American dream, the *40 acres and a mule* (Takaki, 1993) long promised, yet short on delivery by the dominant culture in power.

The segregated schools were merely extensions of the community that held fast to a common culture and common hopes for the extension of that culture. Cultural, historical, racial and perceptual connections were made between students and teachers that needed no lesson plan, essential questions or culminating event to tap into those connections. Our teachers spoke the same language and were a part of the same conscious and historical stream of memory from which we had all emerged (Bowers, 1995; Haymes, 1995; Morris, 2001; Pinar, 2004). Our teachers structured "lessons to engage and connect students to their communities and classroom; Black teachers created classroom environments based on mutual respect as a way to acknowledge and validate their students" (Irvine, 2002, p. 43). Teachers in segregated communities of the time knew the background knowledge of their students, had actually played a part in shaping

it, and framed questions in manners that spoke to those experiences through dialogue and connection. Cultural, historical, racial and perceptual connections were made between the students and the teachers that needed no lesson plan, essential questions or culminating event to tap into those connections. Unlike our enslaved ancestors, in the security of our segregated community school we were free to examine the material in a context that allowed for our free expressions of and further discoveries of self. This student-teacher connection is situated in an ethic of care and an educational heritage begun during slavery that strives today to keep the kettle of education boiling as a model for those who follow as they run through the ropes.

Eggbeater: Divergent Literacies

Aliah jumped in the fire

Fire so hot, jumped in a pot

Pot so little, jumped in a kettle

Kettle so black, jumped in a crack

Crack so high, jumped to the sky

Sky so blue, jumped in a canoe

Canoe so shallow, jumped in the tallow

Tallow so hard, jumped in the lard

Lard so soft, jumped in the loft

Loft so rotten, fell in the cotton

Cotton so white, she stayed all night.

Each person has a literature inside them. Anna Deavere Smith

Our history and individuality as a people not only provide material for masterly treatment, but would seem to make a Race Literature a necessity as an outlet for unnaturally suppressed inner lives which our people have been compelled to lead.

Victoria Earle Matthews

Eggbeater requires practice and coordination between two distinct and separate jumpers. As the rope of one jumper reaches its highest point, the rope of the other jumper should be passing under their feet. Initially, it is best to practice side-by-side until the timing is just right. Once the individual timing has been established and practiced the jumpers turn slightly toward each other and continue to jump with the ropes just missing each other. (Loredo, 1996). Each jumper is able to establish and perfect their own unique style and technique within the coordinated and choreographed rhythm of the jump rope session. That individual style may be maintained or conveyed through a picture in the mind's eye, an internal song, a personal dance, a beat, a chant, or an expressive fashion. It is through that individual, divergent style that a jumper comes to know and understand their place between the ropes. It is through personal expression between the ropes that each jumper comes to know themselves.

Aliah, the subject in the jump rope chant, in search of her place in the world is jumping from one unwelcome fire to another or one attempted literacy to another. It is through the experimentation and exploration of a variety of literacies that she will come to know her world and her unique self. In a just and inclusive world she would not need, nor be required to settle for an existence and an understanding of the world as blackness masked in cottony white.

My personal search for a place in the world began to end when I packed our family's home in Singapore and joined my husband in Swaziland in July of 1994. He had moved to the kingdom at the beginning of April of the same year. Uncertainty surrounding the reactions to the impending national elections had prompted the company to move many of the wives from South Africa to temporary homes in neighboring Swaziland. It was impossible to reach Swaziland without traveling through South Africa. For this reason, the girls and I were to remain in Singapore until the company could evaluate the potential level of threat caused by an unsettled political and domestic climate in South Africa. Despite violence in Natal where fifteen African National Conference (ANC) workers were shot and mutilated, a refusal by the Inkatha party to participate in the elections, and compromises that brought the colonizing British to the South African nation as mediators, Mr. de Klerk conceded defeat on May 2, 1994. Mrs. Coretta Scott King was on the podium the evening of Nelson Mandela's victory speech. It was a speech that appealed for a concerted fight against the ravages of repression and called for "reconciliation, of binding the wounds of the country, of engendering trust and confidence" (Mandela, 1994, p. 612). Our family lived in Swaziland for four years following that historical election.

I remember feeling nervous and fearful for our girls as the plane taxied to at stop at the airport in Johannesburg. I also remember feeling ashamed as I acknowledged that fear at the outset of this posting while I had not felt that emotion at the start of our posting to Singapore. The United States' media campaign of negative images of the Southern African people during the years of Apartheid and in the months leading up to the election rushed through my mind. We were met by my husband and after clearing

customs ventured into the city to enjoy a meal while we waited for the daily flight to neighboring Swaziland. My unfounded fears were dissuaded the minute we were greeted by our waitress at the restaurant. The young girl recognized and was instantly thrilled with our American accent. We were welcomed by many members of the restaurant staff. They conveyed their gratitude for our presence in their rebuilding country and expressed a hope that we would let everyone know back in the United States that they were not brutal animals. By the end of the meal I realized my fears had been manufactured and fed by a media with its headquarters thousands of miles from the reality that I experienced in this young lady's home country.

The country of Swaziland, our adopted home to-be looked incredibly green and welcoming from the window of the airplane. We disembarked from the plane and I was greeted with a "Welcome home Sissy!" Any pre-existing fears melted away with that greeting. I would come to know and love this small kingdom that adopted us as members of their jump rope community. I would learn much about myself and the African links to my identity as we visited other African countries during our stay on the continent. I would come to know and love my me. I would come to recognize the physical features of my family in the African features. I would come to recognize the origins of our rhythm and the connection to the music and beat that has taken up residence in the drum for centuries; our sense of color and style that can be seen in the textile patterns and combinations, our foods, our physicality, our ingenuity, entrepreneurial spirit, and our connective community experiences that the Middle Passage between West Africa and the New World could not erase. This stay in a strange yet familiar land had forced me to recognize gaps in my sphere of literacies, my education, my sphere of coming to know

my person, coming to know *my me*. My me exists in the way that we sing, the way that we speak, and laugh, and dance, and run, and connect through artistic expression.

We give *much props* to the artists among us and recognize that it is through our artistic expression that we feel a relationship with the African culture and are able to draw strength from the connection. In so doing we find that we can claim self, add voice, and know place despite oppression, suppression, and battles of resistance. It does indeed take a village to *raise* up a child; it was in this village that I too was raised up. I was presented with a first hand opportunity to experience the variety of divergent literacies, ways of coming to know the world, through ancestral connections in the real lives, community, and discussion with members of the Swazi people.

Language once uttered stands still in the silence and changes that place forever. It validates and serves as a marker of our lived experiences, a mile marker of sorts. Language embodies the incredible potential and ability to make connections, to impact the present and leave a marker of the self in that moment of the journey. The journey, while collective at times, is composed of singular, subjective perspectives and experiences along the way. The journey moves along to each potential exit, with hope of discovery, an assessment of the destination and anticipation of future excursions. Each individual voice, each subject operating in a series of events, a series of personal histories, represents what Paulo Freire calls “the language of possibility” (Freire, 1987, p. 56). Language represents the potential placement of cultural markers along the highway of lived experiences. It stands as the convergence of the personal with the external, the self with the world, the crossing of borders into the known and unknown, the new and the newly acquired, the promise of potential and acceptance ever mindful of the fear of

reprisal, rejection and worse yet, disregard. In all of it rests the possibility to connect, the possibility of discovery, the possibility to become.

The use of that language to convey meaning, thoughts, insights and hope, to place a marker, across cultures, across the boundaries and borders of dominant and repressive groups, represents the ability to transition into literacy. The journey toward the permanent placement of a road sign to be read by future passengers. Inherent in the possibility of literacy, the movement toward literacy, the creation of literacy through a cultural context, is the desire and ability to add the personal voice to the conversation of societal existence, to become a *must see* destination or exit upon the journey. Ira Shor tells us that "...literacy in daily life is mostly conversational exchanges tied to immediate experience..." (Shor, 1991, p. 221). Bob Fecho continues the description of this journey toward literacy as the ability "...to understand ourselves in relation to the world around us. This making of meaning goes beyond decoding and comprehension because it expects students to come to understandings of themselves as individuals occupying a range of social spaces." (Fecho, 2004, p. 96). Pinar and others have labeled this journey as *currere*, the journey of relevant experiences, lived experiences (Greene, 1978, Pinar, 2004). Literacy lives in the spaces of lived experiences, in the conversations of connections, in the many forms of literacy that create identity and placement in the world.

Addison Gayle Jr.'s work, *The Black Aesthetic* (1972), presents that Blacks cannot arrive at an understanding of self and a world that recognizes self by embarking on a journey through the literary mainstream. Whites, representatives of the literary mainstream "cannot be expected to recognize and to empathize with the subtleties and significance of black style and technique" (p.11). Black style, technique, and cognition

occur through a wide assortment of literacies. Each is possessive of its own unique connections to social and cultural memory; each is possessive of its own unique language; each is possessive of its own unique subtleties that contribute to the forward movement of the race in the face of alienation and marginalization. Girls jumping Double Dutch and adding their own stylized expressions, techniques, and individual personalities through movement represents the union of the Black Aesthetic with the current days of cultural and artistic expression.

Jane Roland Martin (2002) calls this *cultural wealth* in her book *Cultural Miseducation: In Search of a Democratic Solution*. It is the preservation of, the continuation of, the compilation of all that one generation has to pass onto the next. It is inclusive of connected conversations and cultures. It will take the acceptance and recognition of divergent literacies to stop the continuation of educational colonialism and recognize that for some coming to know may mean kinetic orality or artistic expression.

Forms of entertainment were the basis of creative expression, connection, and communication. Card games, singing, dancing, photography, sports, talking, and writing were all encouraged, practiced and shared. Card games such as Bid Whist and Pinochle were played with such enthusiasm and passion that the mere act of throwing your cards on the table became an art form. The possessor of the winning card would stand up to thump the card on the table as a living exclamation with just enough force to cause it to spin on top of the unsuspecting rejects. Impromptu singing in the Doo Wop sound and dancing the Cakewalk often accompanied the deep-into-the-night card game sessions. Pearl Primus and Judith Jamison choreographed and combined the African with Caribbean dance forms, while Carrie Mae Weems and James Van DerZee captured the

world through the lens of a camera and an African American eye. Sojourner Truth and Hallie Quinn Brown, Harriet E. Adams Wilson, Frances E. W. Harper, and Anna Julia Cooper provided examples of Black women as verbal, philosophical, and ideological strength. Creative expression as entertainment as literacy and as voice has been the method of cultural connection and community among African Americans.

The combination of voice and story has once again regained its stature as the center of the African American community with the rise in popularity of Spoken Word sessions. A combination of poetry, rhythm, and acting the participants in these sessions rely on experiential connections to evoke relational reactions. Topics for spoken word pieces are snatched from the lived experiences of the artist. Love, heartache, struggle, pain, children, hope, and triumph are topics that remind the listeners of the Blues, of Jazz, of expression and connection through the lyric that is the word. Spoken Word artists express their knowledge of the world through their poems and come to know their place in the world through the reactions to their poems. Each session typically has a favorite or favored artist. Expectations of verbal acuity serve to position the Spoken Word artist within the folds of the listening community. Who they are, their *sombodiness*, within that circle is defined by that circle and the reactions received by that circle. Their knowledge of, awareness of, and connection to the world is made through their Spoken Word.

Cornel West's (1989) assessment of *sombodiness* as expressed through the unique black musical styling touches on an aspect of African American culture that connects "social memory and action." (Gaunt, 2006, p. 5). Music is one of the keys to the culture, the expression, the connection, and the resistance of the African American culture in general and for African American females in particular. For females music and

games based on music “offered insight into the learned ways of being that foster and reflect individual and group identity within African American communities.” (p. 13).

Music has a “visceral, emotional, and intellectual impact on the listener” (Morrison, 1992, p. viii). Music and the aesthetic of African American music harkens back to the dual expressions of resistance and hope that was captured in slave and gospel songs. Music served as the connective twine and the emotional tool for expression during the Civil Rights movement. There were the songs of the movement, *We Shall Overcome*, as well as the songs that were popular during the movement – Jackie Wilson’s *Lonely Teardrops*, Barrett Strong’s *Money, That’s What I Want*, and The Miracles’ *Shop Around*. The Motown sound came to symbolize the dreams of a generation, the soul of a people.

Today that tradition and spirit of music as resistance, music as self expression, lives in popular culture and the lyrics of Jill Scott, India Arie, Beyoncé, and Mary J. Blige. Messages of hope, of love, of relationship, and of strength are recurring themes in their music. Jill Scott promotes persistence and determination in her listeners as she encourages them to hold fast to dreams and try, and try a few more times. India Arie’s sings of her refusal to be defined by her hair or limited by cultural standards and expectations set by White America. Beyoncé sings of following her own voice and of dreams whose time has come. Mary J. sings a song of tomorrow and hope with no more drama and no more pain.

Drama and pain are expressive components of the arts that African Americans have used to position themselves in the world. After suffering through the pain and rejection by White ballet companies due to her nontraditional African American figure and her nontraditional dance style, Nena Gilreath co-founded Ballethnic, an African

inspired dance company. Young men and women of learn methods of expressive sombodiness through a combination of African dance styles and classical ballet. Similar to the Dance Theater of Harlem and Alvin Ailey Dance Theater, Ballethnic combines dance, music, history, and theater to tell stories of hope, empowerment, and community. The company provides a forum for the unique expressive style of African Americans. It also recognizes the uniqueness of the African American body as the choreographers arrange dances and moves that highlight, rather than disparage, the full hips, thick arms, and solid legs. The dancers in this company come to know experiences of positivism and capability as dancers. They read the world from a dancer's perspective. They surmise and deduce based on the turn of the feet, the movement of the hands, the erectness of the back, and the flexibility of the body. Ballethnic provides a forum for cultural expression in plain view and for the express connection with and enjoyment by the greater African American community.

Expression in plain view was the objective of the signs, symbols, and images of African American quilts. In the African American community these quilts are held as the “visual equivalent of blues, jazz, or gospel, rich with color and symbolism” (Wahlman, 2001, p. 25). These quilts have been studied as tangible links to the aesthetics expressed in African textiles and textile creations. Maude Wahlman has identified seven distinguishing and connecting characteristics of the African American quilt. While the Anglo-American quilt making tradition is a long standing one, the Afro-American tradition is linked to the African continent through the following: vertical strips, bright colors, large designs, asymmetry, improvisation, multiple patterning, symbolic forms (p.7). African American quilts also share similar uses of religious textiles and spiritual

symbols to convey information. Knowledge, resistance, and opposition have been encoded in these symbols of cultural literacy. The debate continues as to whether or not quilts were actually used as signs and messages along the Underground Railroad. I am not surprised by the refusal of White historians to document the secret stories, the secret messages and iconography held within the quilts. These were stories that they were never meant to know or understand. Jacqueline Tobin and Raymond Dobard's *Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and The Underground Railroad* chronicles the legacy of the African American quilt as a tool of divergent literacy during a period of exclusion from the written word due to the horrors and degradation of slavery.

Ozella McDaniel William's Quilt Code was recited in story form. As such, it is opened to scrutiny, rebuttal, and denial by a dominant society that places value in all things coded through the written word. Ozella's Quilt Code, as it is called by the authors of *Hidden in Plain View* is a code that defies. Rather than gaining power through exclusion, the Quilt Code gained its power through addition and inclusion. Each additional slave who came to know the code, who came to recognize the signs, who came to an awareness of the symbols increased the power of the code and decreased the power of the slave owners to capture the spirit of a people.

That spirit was expressed in the naming of the various quilt patterns. "Some quilts served as billboards or banners for women to express their social or moral convictions through the names and meanings they gave the patterns" (Tobin & Dobard, 1999, p. 28). The concept of quilts as cultural story and African American communities as story is only recently beginning to surface. Members of the community seem anxious

to stir up old messes as they no longer live in fear of retribution by malicious Whites and doubting relatives.

These stories are being relayed and captured in divergent literary forms – song, dance, photography, and quilt. African American quilts were a version of the African *lukasa* board. The Luba people (Congo/Zaire) use the *lukasa* boards as a form of memory board. The colorful beads hold messages that can only be read by those trained in its language. The stitches in an African American quilt have been encoded to hold similar messages. In this way African American quilts and the messages they hold have come to be known as fabric griots (Tobin & Dobard, 1999). Invisibility is visible; connection and relation to Africa exist in plain view despite every attempt by enslaving colonists to thwart the road to literacy.

African men were the traditional and primary textile artists. It was African American women who continued the traditions of textile expressions during slavery and “preserved many African textile traditions and passed them on from generation to generation over several hundred years” (Wahlman, 2001, p. 25). African and African American textile creations have many aesthetic traditions and elements in common. The use of strips sewn together, the combinations of certain colors in the strips, and the combination of strips into patchwork patterns are links common to both communities of quilters.

Quilts and the improvisation of the quilted patterns were also used to convey social status, political power, prestige, and wealth of the wearer (Wahlman, 2001). The practice of layering multiple patterns by the quilters in Surinam is used to create a special costume for women called a *meki Sanni*, which translates to mean, she makes the moves

(p. 40). Appliquéd patterns, the use of religious symbols, and protective charms sewn into the quilts all combined to create verbal manuscripts and divergent examples of literacy in the form of quilts.

Another medium of expression or cultural manuscript was through what is known in mainstream society as the culinary arts; in the hood it is known as burnin'. The ability to use your pots and pans as expressive tools, tools of communication and connection is a gift in many communities. It is an art form in the African American community; the basis of gatherings that links the current generation with past generations through the creative use of thrown away food scraps for survival.

My great-aunt Bennie's position in the small community town of Monroe, North Carolina was bolstered by her ability to *fry up a yard bird* and *throw down* in the kitchen. No one cooked as well as my Aunt Bennie and we enjoyed a level of status through our relational connection to her. At one time the matriarch of the family and of her church, Miss Bennie was known to put pounds on even the skinniest child within a matter of weeks.

The pastor of her church enjoyed Sunday meals in her dining room. I remember not being able to taste or sample any of the dishes that had played havoc with my nose all morning long until after the pastor had said grace and was seated with his full plate in front of him. It was at that point that the talking and testifying would begin. It was then that I would hear the stories of relatives long since gone and of the times shared while they were alive. Cooking was her form of worldly literacy. It was how she gauged the world and how her world gauged her. A good meal meant could be had at a variety of social gatherings. A great meal meant many visitors, great conversation, and long periods

of community fellowship. It was from my great-aunt and her sister, my maternal grandmother, my personal Yemájás (King & Ladson-Billings, 2005), that I acquired my cookin' skills. As their personal sou chef, I was content to string the beans, shuck the corn, pass the butter, and knead the bread in order to secure my entrée and gain access to the secrets of the kitchen. I am often asked to bring a batch of Mom Mom's yeast rolls to family gatherings and dinners with friends. It was at their elbows, in that small back kitchen, that I gained an education in the practices and ways of the world not offered in a textbook or classroom. Cooking, for these sisters, had been an entrée into many worlds outside of the small confines of Monroe, North Carolina. Cooking, for these sisters, had been one of their literacies of power, status, and survival.

Cooking was used as tool of entrée, adaptation and survival for many of the females during slavery. A female slave who displayed cooking skills could be moved to service in the Big House. While "being in the house did not mean that one was *of* the house" (Ladson-Billings, 2005, p. 4), it did afford a level of perceived power and privilege in the slave hierarchy. A female slave in the kitchen took on an additional responsibility that of caretaker for the master and his family, as well as the caretaker for the supportive slave community. Today we call this figure a Jemima. Joyce King and Ladson-Billings call her a Yemájá. Yemájá, a religious figure in the Yoruba tradition, is similar to the saints of Catholicism. She possesses an ethic of care and healing. Yemájá was regarded

...as a life-giver whose compassion was a healing force rescuing the faithful from all trouble. One of the legends of the enslaved African was that Yemájá allowed herself to be captured so that she could be brought to

the Americas to minister to her people. A connection between the pronunciation of her name, ‘Yay-ma-Jah’ and a familiar slavery personality, Jemima (as in Aunt Jemima), helps us see some interesting connections. The fictional Aunt Jemima has been derided as a negative stereotype of the fat, asexual, ‘mammy’ figure often depicted in Hollywood films such as *Gone With the Wind* or *Pinky*... Aunt Jemima has recently been restored to her more spiritual roots as a caregiver, not of White oppressors but of her own people (King & Ladson-Billings, 2005, p.27).

A slave with cooking talents had access to the master and his family; an access not enjoyed by the average field slave. In addition, a female slave could use that access to supply extra and leftover food to her family and the greater slave community in a practice that came to be known as the *service pan*. The pan was expanded in a relational proportion to the female slave’s abilities and skills. Cooking skills and food management could be used to challenge the “master’s authority in direct ways. As the persons in charge of food preparation for both whites and their own families, women at times clandestinely fed runaways in an effort to keep them out of harm’s way for as long as possible” (Jones, 1985, p. 31). That access was used as a type of identity formation and consolidation in the face of the domination and control of slavery. A slave with cooking skills held a certain degree of power or persuasion over a family that had become accustomed to enjoying those skills. Cooking became a way for a female slave to “enjoy the praise of [white] family and neighbors for her culinary skills” (p. 5) as well as a

framework for her individual identity outside of the identity defined by the world of slavery. Cooking and cooking well was a skill that could easily translate as a means of income generation or as an item in the barter economy that was commonplace during and after slavery. This rhyme, with its origins in the Yoruba tribe of Africa, speaks of cooking as a generational connective thread and a representation of the ethic of care existent in the African American community.

I will cook some food for my little baby,

I will feed my baby, oh my little child

And my child will feed e when I'm old and tired

Yes, my child will care for me when I'm in need.

Like the sheep that feeds its lamb, I'll feed my child.

Like the sheep that feeds its lamb, I'll feed my child.

I will cook some food for my little baby

I will feed my baby, Oh, my little child

Coming to know in the African American community must take into account not only the knowledge deemed important by the culture of power (Delpit, 1988), but also the knowledge that will facilitate the critique of that same culture of power as it impacts societal norms, values, mores and institutions that reproduce the status quo of social inequities. Within the cultural framework spaces to share, spaces and opportunities for conversation, spaces to become must be established. Coming to know, becoming, must also provide the ability to read the world, be fully aware of instances of what Freire calls *conscientization*, and take the necessary action to move that world in the direction of social justice and knowledge validation.

This desire to become exists in the conversations, the connections made and the exposure to and inclusion of a wider range of lived experiences. William Reynolds in his book, *Curriculum: a river runs through it*, recognizes the incredible power in the conversation, in the potential connections, in the inclusion of various lived experiences, and the divergent forms of knowledge when he discusses "...the many diverse voices and perspectives [that] add complexity and richness to the field and no one voice can capture that richness" (Reynolds, 2003, p. 86). The spaces necessary to become must provide for the conversation, the connections, and the divergent forms of cultural tastes.

Rock the Baby: Segregation

I won't go to Macy's any more, more, more,

There's a great big policeman at the door, door, door.

He grabs you by the collar,

And makes you pay a dollar.

I won't go to Macy's any more, more, more.

Racial segregation, discrimination, and degradation are no unanticipated accidents in the nation's history. They stem logically and directly from the legacy that the founding father's bestowed upon contemporary America. John Hope Franklin

Rock the Baby (Loredo, 1996) jumping rope begins with a solitary jumper and two enders. The enders swing the rope from side to side as the skipper clears the rope. There is no turning of the rope overhead, only the raising of the rope for each successive

jumper. The enders continue to raise the ropes higher and higher until someone misses and is put out of the game.

Jump rope chants serve as a rhythmical, verbal, rallying call to a time of African American struggle, resistance, and verbal connection. This chant reminds us of societal exclusion and separate entrances; one for Whites and another for Coloreds. Chants sing of the African American's singular existence as a double reality. Forced to battle in a world of legally imposed double standards, the split-self was no match for the representatives empowered to enforce those laws of separate existences; the policemen, attorneys, and judges during the period of separate but equal.

Segregation, or the rules of segregation, is very similar to this jump rope game. African Americans viewed their existence in a racist society as a game with ever changing rules and expectations. With each successive jump, or attempt at competition leading to a mastery of the game, the rope would be raised higher and higher. From the position of lone skipper, the enders held the power and ability to determine the pace and difficulty of the game.

Rather than fight for entrance into establishments or neighborhoods taken for granted by Whites, parallel or worlds defined by pluralism (Blackwell, 1991; hooks, 2003) were created in places of safe harbor for African Americans, the Jump Rope Community; a place created *with unity*. These less than existences and worlds were maintained through du jour and de facto practices of segregation. Segregation, the system of separate and distinct existences, prevented the dual journey toward the creation of a just society. It also prevented the occurrence of a conversation that might have taken this country down a vastly different path toward inclusion and true integration. Jim Crow

laws, Black Codes, and tools of intimidation combined to create a system designed to uphold and maintain White domination. Separate entrances, separate facilities, separate worlds created an invisible yet powerful line woven into the fabric of the United States; the color line. The color line continues to be the problem and the challenge for the twenty-first century just as Du Bois (1903) claimed that it was for the twentieth century.

Blacks and Whites existed in strained worlds of harmony and co-existence in the years immediately following the Civil War. From positions of property, for a brief period on the front end of the Reconstruction era and before the White community shook off the shock of the war, former slaves actively sought access to the state-supported public education available in the southern states in the period from 1860 – 1880. This time period coincides with the emancipation of slaves. Between the years of 1860 – 1870 the freed slaves enjoyed the benefits of freedom – citizenship, the right to maintain the profits earned through the pursuits of their labor, and the right to vote. These freedoms would be short lived as federal, state, local governments, and extralegal organizations created policies to prevent the freed slaves from enjoying the benefits of first class and full-citizenship (Anderson, 1988). With the denial of the right to vote and the implementation of the Black Codes, the march toward freedom through education and suffrage came to a screeching halt for the freed slaves.

Since that time the mixing of the races after violent and racially charged incidents has often produced destructive and deadly results. These clashes have scared the landscape of this country's history and highlighted the disparity of resources and the application of justice among the country's minorities and lower class. The resultant anger and frustration is played out as riots and revolts on national television and in our nation's

newspapers. Gregory Squires (1994) shares a reaction by Jimmy Carter to the Rodney King racial clash and subsequent Los Angeles riots. The quote appeared in the Milwaukee Journal in November of 1992 and highlights the social and residential pluralism existent in the United States.

I think it might be good that the disturbances or riots took place in Los Angeles. It woke America up to the fact that there are two Americas... We have slowly but surely built two New Yorks, two Washingtons, two Los Angeleses, two Atlantas. And quite often, they don't even know each other.

*The flowers were gaily singing,
The birds were in full bloom,
When I went to the cellar.
To look for an upstairs room.
I saw two thousand miles away
A house just out of sight.
It stood between two more
Its wall were black all painted white.*

White supremacy holds to the belief that White people are racially superior in every way and every category. This claimed identity creates positions dominant and dominating entitlement in society. A belief system that operates from this vantage point sees everything else as other and possessive of diminished value. Existences are defined through relational scales based on the ever changing rules set by the dominant culture. Systems of inequality, inequity, segregation, and racism create realities of opposition and

negation in daily life existences. What *is*, what remains for members of non-white heritage are contradictions defined through hegemony, identities and positions only recognized through walled characteristics – walls that are black but seen only when painted white?

Walled existences are unique in their interpretive duality. Like good fences, they can be constructed to keep the unwanted and unfamiliar out. They can also be constructed to keep the safe and familiar in. The result, in either case, is the creation of dual worlds, dual parallel existences sharing a wall that represents limited access and any potential for relational connection.

My familial dreams were confined to the home that was also my kingdom. I have been told, on more than one occasion, that I moved through life with an air of royalty treating those in my immediate court as royal subjects. I told anyone who would listen that I had not spoiled myself. I am certain that my royal attitude had a little to do with being the first born and the first grandchild on my mother's side of the family. Everyone important to me either resided in or visited this royal municipality. Mother, father, and two siblings, a younger sister and brother who arrived three and six years later, created the first ring of love and support. Two sets of grandparents and ten aunts and uncles formed the next ring of protection. The number of aunties and uncles meant a steady stream of cousins, pretend cousins, as well as the come and go aunties and uncles due to the uncertainties of courtship. Our house out in the 'burbs was a frequent meeting point for the extended family. It was away from the confines of the inner city, there was a huge playground behind the house, complete with a large brick bar-be-cue grill, and neighbors

who looked just like us. They also shared a love of the same type of music, cars, and foods.

Purchasing this house in the suburbs had been a feat of property ownership by my parents in the late 1950's. The early years their marriage had been spent living with my mother's parents in order to save enough money for a down payment on a dream home. My mother worked as a secretary for a pharmaceutical company and my father as a carpenter in his father's construction company. My impending birth, three years after their marriage, accelerated the search for a home of their own.

Their search had taken them to several different geographic sections surrounding the city of Philadelphia. Initial phone calls would lead to plans for on-site visits of the intended property. The on-site visits would turn to rejection in the form of apologies for wasted time or a miscommunication regarding presumed availability. It seemed that every house that my parents inquired about would be mysteriously sold by the time they arrived for their scheduled appointment? It was the 1950's, too soon after Brown and too far into the practice of housing segregation based loosely on legal justifications. In an effort to protect white communities and prevent any further influx of minorities, African Americans face what David Hatchett calls housing access barriers (1995). Planning and zoning stipulations regulated larger lot sizes, made building homes more expensive and thereby drove up purchase prices. Homeowners association fees also managed to prevent minorities from purchasing homes in certain areas. The quest for the suburban dream came at an additional price for many African Americans.

In some cases the costs were less obvious and subtle in nature, while others created far-reaching and long lasting consequences. Also included in suburban

homeowners' packets of the time was an unwritten, verbal agreement not to sell their home to racial minorities. Police harassment, unfriendly neighbors and behind the scenes jobs with little to no public contact, which offered less pay and fewer benefits were all subtle aspects of the dream that awaited many trailblazing African American families. Whites who did try to sell were often ostracized and victimized as well. These tactics, coupled with the attraction of urban businesses to suburban areas, all but insured the autonomy of the suburban communities as they employed people who live nearby and locked even the African Americans who could pay the financial price out of access to the available material resources offered through suburban life. Legal maneuvering and a negligent silence on the part of Whites, who could have raised questions as to fairness and justice, meant that the racist practices continued. The end result meant that many African Americans unwilling to wage personal and financial battles for access were prevented from choosing the location of making their American home ownership dream a reality.

My mother shared this story of the struggle for home ownership as an African American with me many years later. We had passed one of those very houses on the drive out to an alumna's home for afternoon tea. I would later be told that the tea had actually been an interview session, one of the many interview and evaluation sessions I would undergo as screening process for admittance to the new school. The house, I was told, was located no more than a five-minute walk from what we hoped would be my new school. I remember taking a mind's-eye picture of the house. I can still see the large front yard, tall stone pillars covered in ivy and the winding driveway leading up to a tall black door with a brass knocker. As we passed it I compared this could-have-been house with

our own home; small redbrick row house with no pillars, no ivy, and a driveway barely large enough for one vehicle at the rear of the house. Completing this mental comparison of worldly kingdoms brought about my first feelings of a *less than* existence.

All of the houses in our little neighborhood looked exactly the same from the outside. The entire street-cum-neighborhood consisted of four sections of seven co-joined houses. There was a *cut through* to the field behind the houses every seven houses. The houses that flanked the cut-thrus inherited larger yards and the challenge of trying to prevent the neighborhood children from using this private property as a shorter route from the front to the back. Despite parental warnings, fences and boxwood hedges a good game of hide-and-seek or when running to the unlocked front door and from a fight caused bloody nose, the cut through was used by every child along our street who sought a quick route from front to back or back to front.

Each seven row house section was constructed from the same red brick; each had a large bay window that peered out from the living room and two upstairs windows that looked out from the room that nearly everyone called the front bedroom. All of the houses at one time had large oak trees in the center of the postage stamp front yards. Many of them were being removed due to the damage the root systems were doing to the homes' septic systems. The single expression of individuality came in the door design and the color of the shutters that framed each window. Years later my father would use his construction skills to build my mother the front porch that she requested each year for Christmas. The porch would further set our house apart from the repetitive facades. As distinctive a feature as that porch would be, it too would be framed with the same red brick as the row houses. As distinctive as our houses had been when compared to others

in the city's center, the comparison to the house left me feeling less than and wondering for the first time about a life in this might-have-been house.

This house, merely a construction of mortar and stone, had momentarily rocked my foundation and caused me to question. Questions of fairness, justice, right, and wrong entered my head as we drove down that tree-lined street. If my parents had possessed the requisite capital how could they have been turned away before the process had even begun? Were my parents not good enough? Would I be considered good enough for the new school and the children who surely attended from houses much like the might-have-been house?

My mother must have read my facial expressions and sensed the consternation caused by the comparison and the story. She immediately provided me with a caution and a lesson. "An education is something that no one will ever be able to take from you. You go get what they will give and then you buy a house wherever you want to live." I went to that tea that afternoon and did my best to impress the alumnae at that and the other functions that served as informal interview sessions. When the *getting of what they had to give* got tough academically and the lack of invitations to social events hurt even more, I would remember the charge handed to me by my mother on our drive through the Main Line that afternoon. I would remember lessons learned in our red brick, segregated community that was small and large at the same time; small enough to ensure security and large enough to encourage dreams. Replaying that conversation in the car that afternoon would always give me strength for the journey.

The North became a beacon for the New Negro. St. Louis, Detroit, Chicago, and New York became havens of cultural consciousness; segregated home communities

capable of absorbing the double consciousness, double existence of the new Negro. Segregated through legal means, divided through racial constructions, the new Negro sought lives away from the South and in communities that promised support and hope. It is within the close-knit boundaries of the inner city that African Americans, fleeing from the poverty of the Deep South during the *great migration*, found cultural, social and familial connections of comfort. The inner cities of the north became collective pools of ethnic ideas and ideals, wishes and dreams, and plans and promises of a better world, a more equal world.

Like most northern cities, Philadelphia became “a sign of hope” (Bloom, 1998, pp.11, 153), home to a few of those whispered dreams and promises. It was here that migratory souls sought to construct what Leslie Bloom calls empowerment, personal, cultural and generational. Philly is a city that is *tight* geographically. Housing huge populations in a small area required the architects of the city to build homes attached to one another, lined up row after row and then labeled *row houses*. Opposing sides of the same street meant vastly different neighborhoods. Yet, the concept of *neighbor* and *neighborhood* held significance in the northern cities of the time. There were neighborhood stores, churches and schools, often divided along racial and ethnic lines, yet dependent upon one another. Stephen Haymes (1995) writes of this symbiosis when he introduces us to Carol Stack’s “ethic of cooperation” (Haymes 1995, p. 12), which deals with the relationship of need and survival in the poor communities of the inner city.

Every town has its north and south sides, its *other side of the tracks*, its south of the highway side and conversely, its upper side. This split existence was prevalent in the racially divided and segregated south. The African Americans lived on the other side, the

south side of town. Charles Ogeltree discusses the separate existence in his book *All Deliberate Speed*. The community existed while deep in the throws of “...the evils of segregation... Largely separated from whites and lacking equal resources, but content with our existence. Despite de facto segregation and prejudice, the residents south of the tracks developed a nurturing community and survived through perseverance and resourcefulness” (Ogletree, 2004, p. 19) and through the creation of separate spaces.

The separate spaces that had served Blacks well during the days of slavery would contribute to their social undoing, their segregated existence. Grace Hale (1998), in *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South* calls these necessary spaces;

Despite their social existence as property, slaves had managed to carve love and even joy from the block of their oppression. ‘Slave music, slave religion, slave folk beliefs – the entire sacred world of the black slave,’ in the historian Lawrence Levine’s words, had created a ‘necessary space between the slaves and their owners and were the means of preventing legal slavery from becoming spiritual slavery.’ The freedpeople now wanted both to cross and to preserve this space, to bring what they had created under slavery into freedom, to weld their strength with literacy and mobility, the golden fruits that they had been denied (p. 16).

Unfortunately, in an effort to maintain the construction of racial differences and domination, Whites of the time had filled the spaces with their own images of the slaves. These were the images, in post Civil War America, of laziness, simplemindedness, and blind loyalty to White slave owners. Unaccustomed to the parameters of freedom, the newly freed slaves complied with the constructions of Black identities in exchange for

more food, greater movement, and less work. The freed slaves, who for so long had hidden their real selves for fear of retribution and violence, now found that they would need to continue to hide under the masks created by the protagonists of the oppression. These masks or *darky acts* only contributed to the perception of the uneducated Black by the whites in power; the dark skin became synonymous with slavery, bondage, and oppression. The act of degradation that had for so many painful years, prevented vengeful slave owners from inflicting harm or dismantling the spirit, now served as the very road block to cultural self-determination, self-identification, and self-appraisal. The traveling minstrel shows, with actors in blackface, presented a gross depiction of the African American. The visual became synonymous with ignorance and antonymous with self-determination.

These newly constructed sets of identities were quickly spread and cemented upon the psyche of the new Americans through the growth of the industries of mass marketing and mass media. Magazines, newspapers, radios and traveling shows were all contributing factors in the new Americans' view of the African American, a view that established the separate spaces, a view that resulted in a means of cultural, social, educational and economic control by the whites.

Aspects of African American cultural literacy, cultural lived experiences, and acts of self-preservation were now being used to prevent a seat on the journey toward social justice and inclusion. The act, the catch-22 of donning a mask for self-preservation in and out of slavery, had made the freed slaves painfully aware of the changing rules of game to suit the whims and desires of the enders, just as in a Rock the Baby jump rope game. It was during this period of ever-changing rules of the game and the frequency of

turning the traditions and divergent literacies created to survive the horrors of slavery against them, that the freed slaves took the aforementioned traditions underground.

The necessary space and acts of feeble-mindedness that had been created as a tool of self-preservation during slavery now served to provide the fuel for the white population's belief that separate existences, based on skin color, was needed to establish a collective white identity. Segregation was also deemed as necessary to prevent the mixing of races on any level of societal existence. The 1896 ruling of *Plessy v. Ferguson* established the legal framework for separate but equal facilities. The ruling against Homer Plessy, a racially mixed man, who sought to challenge the 1890 Louisiana law of separate street cars served as the watershed case for the establishment of Jim Crow laws and the "For Colored" and "For Whites" signs that became a divisive period in this country's racial history. Segregation was born and proceeded to force upon a group of peoples "...an inferior status – a sense of worthlessness, which was wholly illegitimate, but which [we] have striven all [our] lives to overcome" (Taulbert, 1995, p. 5).

Whites also created segregation as a reaction to the determination of the freed slaves to achieve levels of self-determination through education. A growing middle-class of Blacks led by a determination of the part of the Talented Tenth (Anderson, 1988; Hale, 1998; Du Bois, 1903; Shujaaa, 1996) and leaders determined to move the race forward (DuBois, 1903; Zinn & Dill, 1994) added to the growing level of discomfort on the part of Whites. Blacks had learned to turn inward to their segregated community "for the enactment of their liberty" (Hale, 1998, p. 19). The freed slaves, despite growing incidents of violence and legal forms of oppression, decided to seek "advancement in the church, in business, in the arts, and in education" (Hale, 1998, pp. 19, 20). The New

Negro had forced a regulatory reaction from the Whites to create a New South; one that would define Whiteness in terms of Blackness, and Blackness in terms of exclusion.

And whites responded to this increasing diversity and this rising black middle class with fear, violent reprisals, and state legislation – their floundering attempts to build a new racial order. Whites created a culture of segregation in large part to counter black success, to make a myth of absolute racial difference, to stop the rising (Hale, 1998, p.21).

Internal battles among the New Negro and opposing educational camps also contributed to the creation of roadblocks to stop the rising of the freed slaves during the period of Reconstruction. Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Marcus Garvey presented differing viewpoints on how best to solve the *color line and Negro problem* (Du Bois, 1903) of the twentieth century. Booker T. Washington, an acknowledged leader of the Negro race at the turn of the twentieth century, advocated a plan of submission, accommodation, and acquiescence. It is believed that he based this tactic on a fear of complete reversal of freedom and an escalation of violence against the New Negro on the part of frightened Whites. Washington supported an industrial, or practical, educational system for the Negro as a means of compromise and accommodation (Anderson, 1988; Bullock, 1970; Hale, 1998; Shujaa, 1996; Woodson, 1933). Washington, as the man, proved to be as controversial and misunderstood as was the objectives of his Hampton-Tuskegee education model. In his mind, some type of education was better than the alternative of no education due to a return to the repression of access due to slavery.

Washington's educational model emphasis on the teaching of manual labor habits of mind and preparation for practical employment in the service industry has been criticized. This type of training was viewed as another form of mask creation for the New Negro. Others have highlighted the training of teachers who would later serve as the leaders and guiders of the race. Despite the confusion surrounding his ideals of practical education, Washington's may have used his accommodating slave act to the benefit of the Negro population as he secured financial backing for his school through the support of several liberal and wealthy Northerners.

Marcus Garvey, Jamaican-born, brought the Black nationalist ideas of emigration to Africa to Harlem in 1916. His Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) sought to create a new world back on the continent where Blacks could create and control their own government and way of life. "Facing an increasingly hegemonic white form of racial essentialism, unpunished white violence, and an expansive and legally mandated separation, northern blacks embraced Garvey and the UNIA's brand of nationalist Pan-Africanism, a global collectivity of all current and former African peoples." (Hale, 1998, p. 28). Unfortunately, Garvey would be deported and his Black Star shipping line would fall to corruption before any of his followers could make any attempts at unifying their double selves on the African continent.

W.E.B. Du Bois and his beliefs represented a type of middle ground between the accommodationism of Washington and the Black Nationalism of Garvey. Du Bois placed his beliefs in the educational and intellectual potential of the New Negro through the access to educational opportunities provided through integration. Du Bois, stopped short

of integration at all costs when he asked the prophetic question in an essay that appeared in *The Journal of Negro Education* in 1935, “Does the Negro Need Separate Schools?”

He did not discard his connection to an African heritage but sought to establish a greater level of recognition and acceptance of the contributions made by Blacks to the country of their captivity and birth. Du Bois was one of the first to highlight the double consciousness, the double life of the American Black. Du Bois used his education to chronicle the lives and experiences of the African American. He sought to demonstrate the capability of the race. His educational successes and societal critique through his published essays and books, while viewed as the exception to the colored race rather than the rule, served to intensify the Whites mistrust of an educated Negro. Du Bois posited that the problem of the twentieth century would be the color line. “If Whites no longer owned African American bodies, they had new, more flexible means of maintaining a different power.” (Hale, 1998, p. 23). That power proved to be the establishment of separate and unequal existences for Blacks and Whites. Segregation was and is about maintaining control. The construction of race and racial identities made the lines of delineation easy to recognize and uphold.

Over the Rainbow: Civil Rights

I was standing on the corner,

Not doing any harm.

Along came the policeman

Who took me by the arm.

He took me round the corner,

And he rang a little bell.

*Along came a police car
And took me to my cell
I woke up in the morning
And looked up at the wall
The cooties and the bedbugs
Were playing a game of ball
The score was six to nothing
The bedbugs were ahead
The cooties hit a homerun
And knocked me out of bed.*

The civil rights movement that rearranged the social order of this country did not emanate from the halls of the Harvards and the Princetons and Cornells. It came from simple unlettered people who learned that they had the right to stand tall and that nobody can ride a back that isn't bent. Dorothy Cotton, Civil Rights Activist

Over the Rainbow (Loredo, 1996) jumping requires the coordination of five jumpers and enders. There is a single jumper in the center who jumps with her own personal rope. On either side of this lone jumper are two enders turning a slightly longer rope over the center jumper. On either side of these two enders are two additional enders with an even longer rope that turns over the other two enders and the center jumper. The three ropes turning in unison creates an impressive vision of twirling ropes and jumpers. It is a different jump rope vision, an attention grabbing jump rope vision that presents an alternative to the standard form of jumping. It is radical in its methodology yet well

within the bounds of jumping definition. At the center of the multiple ropes is the lone female jumper – the whip in the whirlwind (Collier-Thomas & Franklin, 2001, p. 1).

This jump rope rhyme tells the story of random persecution prior to the Civil Rights era as defined by the years between 1954 and 1965. The landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 to the march between Selma and Montgomery Alabama in 1965, stand as the defining events of a movement. Historians have taken up the task of documenting the unique experiences of the Civil Rights era and movement. These historians have presented interpretive, critical, and summative analyses of the events, personalities, and consequences of this historical period from a variety of different perspectives. The movement, the ability to establish and maintain formal and informal communication networks among African Americans and those sympathetic to the cause, to organize and mobilize masses of African Americans for the united cause of civil and human rights has been labeled collective behavior theory or approach (Morris, 1984). Historians have surmised that collective behavior often leads to social transformation and change. It is a movement that has been captured in a variety of texts and from a variety of perspectives.

Aldon Morris' (1984) *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* focuses on the impact of the masses and the local organizations at the community level on the movement. Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer (1990) collaborated to present *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s*. This text is based on the television series, *Eyes on the Prize* and is a collection of stories. Captured through interviews are the recollections of the movement, what the authors call an *event-driven oral history*. It is in

their memories that the authors have sought personal truths about this period in American history. John Lewis' (1998) *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* is a firsthand, frontline account of participation in the movement. Lewis' chronicles and shares his experiences of brutality as a lieutenant and student leader in the non-violent movement that sought the extension of basic human rights to every citizen of this country. Lewis shares his reactions to hearing King speak for the first time, the power in his voice, to his being "shaken to the core" (p. 57) at the news of the murder of Emmett Till to his elation over the Brown decision. Bettye Collier-Thomas and V. P. Franklin (1999, 2001) have presented two books on the period, *My Soul is a Witness: A Chronology of the Civil Rights Era, 1954 – 1965* and *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Back Power Movement*.

The call for civil and human rights in the United States is a call that could have been avoided on at least two separate occasions had the political leaders of the time not backed away from their opportunities to do the right thing. The First Continental Congress met in Philadelphia in 1774 and established the discontinuation of the slave trade as one of its goals. States, such as Georgia, had originally added the prohibition of slavery into its state charter. When the founding fathers met to write the Constitution in 1787, rather than abolish slavery with the wave of the pen, the crafters "wrote slavery into law, declaring that each save, for purposes of taxation and representation, would count as three-fifths a person" (Hampton & Fayer, 1990, p. xxiii). Additionally, the proposal by Congressman Thaddeus Stevens and Senator Charles Sumner to seize slaveholder land and offer forty acres and a mule as reparations for generations of slavery and oppression was met with such great objection that the envisioned reconstruction of

the south failed to happen. Once again the young nation failed to meet the challenge and backed away from an opportunity to mend the racial divide and erase the color line. The images of the Jim Crow caricature and the weight of Jim Crow legislation prevented equality among the races in a country that created the dual race constructs. (Hampton & Fayer, 1990). African Americans learned that activism, active resistance and thoughtful demands would be their path toward recognition.

Activism and activists played key roles in the development of the movement as early as 1909 – 1910 with the creation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The NAACP was organized by a group of Black and White intellectuals who were committed to addressing racism and racist policies aimed toward the Black community. This interracial, northern-based organization was composed of well-educated and wealthy professionals, many of whom opposed the “...accommodationist politics of Booker T. Washington” (Morris, 1984, p. 13). Many of the Black founders of the NAACP had been previous members of the more militant Niagara Movement, founded several years earlier by W. E. B. DuBois. While the Niagara Movement shared many of the same goals, the NAACP was formed specifically for the express purpose of fighting for equal rights for Black Americans through education of and about Blacks through the use of mass media campaigns, non-violent persuasion, and legal recourses. While the NAACP celebrated several legal battles in its early years, many believe that due to its well educated, professional, and largely White membership it was out of touch with the general Black population. As such, the NAACP found it necessary to develop ties with the Black churches in both the North and the South in order to further the movement of resistance and protest.

The Black church, a fixture in the community and operating outside of the White established power structure, provided the organizational link to the masses of Blacks. As early as 1787, abolitionists Richard Allen and Absalom Jones viewed the church as the Negro's spiritual key to human liberation. Allen and Jones created the Free African Society in Philadelphia. This organization later became the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The church had been instrumental in the direction, financial support, and mobilization of the Baton Rouge Bus Boycott (1953) and the Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955) and provided the perfect environment for NAACP membership drives and for circulating the organization's information. The church often served as the financial support for local chapters with many ministers serving as chapter presidents. Each local chapter meeting brought a network of local community leaders, business people, professionals, and everyday people together with national members, who were lawyers, doctors, and scholars entrenched in and eager to expand the movement of empowerment through political development.

The formation and creation of a local chapter required alignment with the national organization. Establishment of a chapter provided opportunities for local leaders to learn the structure, protocol, bylaws, and procedures of a national organization that could in turn be incorporated into the establishment a church's structure and method of operation. In this way local community members were exposed to aspects of the culture of power as it related to organizational formation, structure and operation. It would be this exposure to and familiarity with the culture of power that would provide the organization with the tools necessary to withstand official attempts to destroy the organization through legal injunctions, violent attacks, and economic maneuvers after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of*

Education ruling and especially between the years 1956 – 1959. Weakened, but not destroyed by these tactics, the NAACP remained one of the major forces demanding social equality through resistance and protests in the Civil Rights Movement.

The movement expanded and gained momentum during the 1940s. The original March on Washington Movement (MOWM), organized in 1941, was a demonstration of the ability to organize mass numbers of Blacks for collective protest. As early as 1943 and in response to the negative backlash from the march, A. Philip Randolph, the organizer of the MOWM, called for future demonstrations to be modeled after Gandhi's passive resistance movement. The MOWM played a part in the formation of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in 1942. Influential, non-violent supporters such as James Farmer, Bayard Rustin, and E.D. Nixon were thrust into key positions as leaders of the modern Civil Rights Movement.

The movement was not a random series of events. It was organized and continually established organizations to suit the geographic or political needs of the time. The Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) which was organized in 1955; the Inter Civic Council (ICC), organized in Tallahassee in 1956; the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR), organized in Birmingham in 1956; Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which organized in Atlanta in 1957 were all organized as a result of Black churches becoming centers of social power in urban communities. This organization became the structural and political arm of the Black church. It was under the direction and guidance of the SCLC that "...new mass movements would be organized around gaining the franchise" (Morris, 1984, p. 101).

The effort was entitled the Crusade for Citizenship Program and it brought several new personalities to the forefront of Civil Rights history.

Obligations to the movement of resistance and change saw the development of linked relationships between the major civil rights organizations – SCLC, NAACP and CORE. James Weldon Johnson, the NAACP’s first Black executive secretary “...wrote in 1934 that in order for Blacks to be liberated they should pool their resources and protest into a single unit” (Morris, 1984, p. 120). The different organizations appealed to different aspects and interests of the Black population in the various geographic sections of the United States. In attempting to merge philosophies, energies and strategies of the major protest organizations, Blacks began to experience the power of a united front in the pursuit of social justice and equality.

It is through the work of Collier-Thomas and Franklin’s work that we are presented with a compilation of the contributions made by African American women personalities before, during, and after the period recognized as the Civil Rights era. We come to see the work done by Black women and the organizations of Black women to open doors closed to educational and social access, remove segregating signs, and to move the race forward. Many of these women did so without much fanfare and celebrity. Just as in the aforementioned story of Yemajá offered by Ladson-Billing’s and King (2005), these women used their energy and position to “minister to the people” (p. 27) during this period of social change.

There was much work done by a number of Black women on behalf of the race prior to the period that has been designated as the Civil Rights Era. One such Yemajá was Mrs. Septima Poinsette Clark. Born in Charleston, South Carolina in 1898, Mrs. Clark

received her education in segregated schools and was determined to one day become a teacher. She realized her dream in 1916 and taught in the public school system in South Carolina. Her refusal to negate her membership with the NAACP caused her to lose her job after forty years of teaching experience. She then went to work for the Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, Tennessee. The Highlander Folk School would be the site of future Civil Rights planning meetings. Mrs. Clark would provide her shoulders as a part of the support foundation upon which to rest the future of the movement.

Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, a suffragist from New England, provided another set of shoulders upon which to rest the future movement of the race through the creation of Negro women's organizations. Ruffin, the wife of the first African American man to graduate from Harvard, used her organizational and activist skills to establish her own place in history. She served on the Board of Moral Education in Massachusetts, the School Suffrage Association in the same state. Ruffin recognized something that my grandmother used to say, "the family goes as the mother goes." Ruffin was committed to development of the Negro woman as a method of developing the race as a whole. In 1894 she established the Era Club or New Era Club as it has also been called, and its monthly newsletter, *The Women's Era*, as a response to her desire to aid in the development of Negro women. In the face of continued exclusion on the part of all-white women's organizations, one of the missions of the organization was to bring together the large number of educated and cultured African-American women in a forum that provided support and encouragement in a racialized society. Her speech at the founding meeting held at the Charles Street A. M. E. Church in Boston in 1895 was a demonstration of

ability to affect change and an offer of camaraderie and solidarity in the struggle faced by women in this country.

We want, we ask the active interest of our men, and, too, we are not drawing the color line; we are women, American women, as intensely interested in all that pertains to us as such as all other American women: we are not alienating or withdrawing, we are only coming to the front, willing to join any others in the same work and cordially inviting and welcoming any others to join us <http://www.blackpast.org> (Retrieved March 26, 2007).

In 1896 this group merged with the Colored Women's League of Washington, forming the National Association of Colored Women. Ruffin was elected first vice-president. She went on to form the Boston Branch of the National Association and continued to press for organizational strength where Negro women could “feel the cheer and inspiration of meeting each other; ...to gain the courage and fresh life that comes from the mingling of congenial souls, of those working for the same ends. [and] to talk over not only those things which are of vital importance to us as women, but also the things that are of special interest to us as colored women.” <http://www.blackpast.org>

The National Association of Colored Women (NACW), The National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) organized by Mary McLeod Bethune in 1935, the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority's Non-Partisan Council and the many local chapters of these organizations took up the call to fight racial discrimination in a variety of different institutions in this country prior to civil rights becoming a buzz movement. (Collier-Thomas & Franklin, 2001).

Ella Baker was another of the unsung heroines who willingly supplied her shoulders as foundational support for the future movement. It is reported that the stories that her grandmother told of slave revolts served as the seeds of her passion for social justice and activism. She received additional training from her mother, Georgianna Baker who “preached and practiced an activist woman-centered faith which was an extension of the Social Gospel doctrine” (Collier-Thomas & Franklin, 2001, p. 45). It was from her mother and the Social Doctrine that she learned service through the empowerment of others.

From her arrival in Harlem in the late 1920s after graduating from Shaw University, Baker’s life was one of political activism. She used her voice as a tool of protest against societal injustice and to encourage solidarity among Black students. Baker protested Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia, spoke out on behalf of Black domestics during the Depression, explored socialism as an alternative to capitalism, and helped launch the Young Negroes Cooperative League to look at issues facing the poor. Devoted to the development of black economic power through collective planning, this organization was one of many that she would either join or found. She began her involvement with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1940. In 1957 Baker organized the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC) at the behest of Martin Luther King, Jr. She worked tirelessly for the Black Freedom Movement raising money for the Montgomery Bus Boycott. She remained at the SCLC for two years, leaving after the Greensboro sit-ins to organize a new student activist group at Shaw University, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). It was with this group that she conveyed the sense of history and connection in the struggles and acts of

resistance during the early days of the Civil and Human Rights movements. She educated students in the system of resistance to be certain that they understood that the events of the movement did not occur through happenstance. (Collier-Thomas & Franklin, 2001). The launching of the Montgomery Bus Boycott was a pivotal event in the Civil Rights Movement that many have thought over the years simply happened when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat. Many of the movement's actions were planned at movement halfway houses. One such house was the Highlander Folk School.

A movement halfway house is an established group or organization that is only partially integrated into the larger society because its participants are actively involved in efforts to bring about a desired change in society. The American Friends Service Committee, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, The War Resisters League, and the Highlander Folk School are examples of modern American movement halfway houses. (Morris, 1984, p. 139)

The Highlander Folk School served as a movement halfway house; a safe haven for leaders of the movement to meet and plan strategy. The Highlander Folk School, founded by the Socratic leader Myles Horton, served as a civil rights movement halfway house in three ways. It provided a location where Black leadership could come together to confer and plan, it served as a model for the successful integration of society by facilitating "interpersonal relationships of social equality through the use of music, poetry, song, and dance (Morris, 1984, p. 148), and it developed a wide ranging mass educational program that it shared with the SCLC and the NAACP. The Highlander School served as the catalyst for those who sought to make a societal difference yet were missing the manpower or the educational programs to see the plans through to fruition.

Rosa Parks, four months before the Montgomery boycott, had visited the Highlander to plan her moment of resistance as a result of her long affiliation with the civil rights movement.

Despite the solidarity felt by Negro women of the time on a variety of gender issues, there existed strains of conflict among the membership based on many of the growing conflicts existent in the African American community itself. Issues of race were obvious; what was less obvious were the issues of race based on skin tones and shades. Class, educational attainment, economic status, geographic location, and sexual orientation were issues that fell below the radar set to signal racial tensions. World War II would serve to rally the interests and the energies of the various groups in their attention to ending the discriminatory practices of the Armed Forces.

Alpha Kappa Alpha, the first Greek-lettered sorority for African American women was founded in 1908 as an organization dedicated to “the problems of girls and women” and to taking “action related to the needs, interests, and potentialities of the community in which the group is situated” (Collier-Thomas & Franklin, 2001, p. 28). This organization was the first African American group to hire a full-time lobbyist to seek and pursue legislation that served and reflected the best interests of the African American community in general and African American women in particular. They worked with Mary McLeod Bethune to push for greater African American participation in the National Defense Program. They also fought for non-discriminatory practices in the inclusion of African American women in the WAVES, WACS, SPARS, and the Women Marines. (Collier-Thomas & Franklin, 2001).

Anti-lynching legislation and voter registration became additional unifying issue for the various women's groups. Bethune's NCNW's convention in 1947 drafted and endorsed the Ten-Point Program. This was to be the beginning of the Civil Rights legislation and movement. The plan called for the following:

1) to remove all restrictions on voting in elections and primaries, 2) to end restrictive covenants and similar devices to maintain segregation in housing, 3) to make lynching a federal crime, 4) to provide increased federal funding for education on a nondiscriminatory basis, 5) to outlaw discrimination in employment on the basis of race, creed, color, or national origin, 6) to support the efforts of the United Nations to maintain world order and peace, 7) to participate in food distribution programs to peoples and countries in need, 8) an amendment to the Social Security Act which would extend its benefits to domestic and agricultural workers, 10) to the establishment of programs to prevent and control juvenile delinquency" (Collier-Thomas & Franklin, 2001, pp. 35, 36).

Harry Truman followed these ten points up with his presentation at the 1948 Democratic Convention of the four American Principles – 1) the right of full and equal political participation, 2) the right to equal opportunity of employment, 3) the right to security of person, 4) and the right of equal treatment in the service and defense industries" (Collier-Thomas & Franklin, 2001, p. 36). Outraged Southern delegates opposed the new principles and formed the Dixiecrat Party with Senator Strom Thurmon as their nominee. The NCNW's national registration drive in the northern and Midwestern states is credited with contributing greatly to Truman's election victory in 1948. Truman would sign into law Executive Order 9981 banning racial segregation in

the Armed Forces. Southern Democrats would later block the anti-lynching and anti-poll tax American Principle initiatives in Congress.

Despite the political setback in 1948, the movement would be propelled forward due to victory of the legal battle that was *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954; the courage of Rosa Parks in 1955; the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1956; the Little Rock Nine and the Civil Rights Act in 1957; the election of Adam Clayton Powell Jr. to the U. S. Congress in 1958; the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (USCCR) recommended the suspension of federal funds for colleges and universities with discriminatory admission practices in 1959; the sit-in movements in 1960, the desegregation of the University of Georgia after the admittance of Charlayne Hunter and Hamilton Holmes in 1961; the admittance of James Meredith to the University of Mississippi in 1962; The Battle of Birmingham and protest marches of 1963; the Civil Rights Act of 1964; and the Selma to Montgomery March and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. There remains much work to be done but the many players in the movement have laid the groundwork and provided shoulders strong enough to serve as foundational support.

Chase the Fox: Desegregation and Integration

Teacher nearly had a fit

When I learned the alphabet.

Seems I wasn't very bright –

I could never get it right.

I always got stuck after

A, B, C, D...

*“When the schools were integrated it made things worse” William Falk, *Rooted in Place**

Chase the Fox (Loredo, 1996) is a jump rope game similar to follow-the-leader. The leader, in this case, is the fox. The fox runs through the turning rope and is followed by all of the other players so as not to touch the rope. Once all of the players have run through the fox runs back through the rope in the other direction with all of the players following again. The third time through the fox jumps once and each of the players must also jump once. The fox jumps twice, then three times, and so on with the players repeating the fox's actions. Any player who misses is replaced by an ender and the game continues.

The process of desegregation, a legal solution to a societal condition, is very similar to the game Chase the Fox. In this real-life game those in positions of societal dominance serve as the fox establishing the pace of the game, the moves of the game, and the number of required jumps. As establishers of the requirements they serve as the self-proclaimed standard bearers and all others follow suit. Desegregation, a form of chase the fox, put African Americans in the position of chaser. After years of separate and unequal, the opportunity to at least see the fox seemed worth the chase.

Certain that the education offered at The Agnes Irwin School was one that we could copy, we chased the fox from our segregated communities to the small community of Rosemont, Pennsylvania. I remember being excited about the impending shopping trip to purchase the required middle school uniform. We had not seen pictures of the uniform prior to the shopping trip. Include in my acceptance packet had been a list of uniform stores in the area. The printed directions explained that we were to ask for the middle

school uniform for Agnes Irwin at any one of the stores. All that we had when we entered the store was a list of requisite pieces.

I remember traveling with my mother and my younger sister to a small shop that displayed nurse's uniforms and several plaid skirts in the window. I would later learn that these skirts were actually called kilts. I would later wear a blue, grey, yellow and white plaid kilt with matching button-down oxford blouses as the upper school uniform.

The store was overstocked and smelled of old cardboard. We had a hard time finding someone to whom we could direct our requests and questions. My sister and I remained at the front of the store while my mother made her way through the crowded store. She caught sight of an elderly, white-haired woman as she emerged from the stockroom. From our spot near the front of the store I could hear my mother explaining her required inventory of items. She periodically referred to the list provided by the school of the required pieces. Her explanation took on a personal note as she explained that she was here to purchase the middle school uniform for Agnes Irwin for her daughter. The woman, shorter than my mother, had yet to see the two of us at the front of the store. The white-haired lady had agreed to follow my mother to the front of the store where we stood in order to get her daughter's measurements. I remember matching confused looks with this stranger as she approached; I was confused by her obvious look of surprise as she laid eyes on the two of us standing near the front of the store. The woman looked around with equal confusion until my mother motioned for me to come forward. While the stranger's next question seemed to clear up the confusion for my mother, it left me even more perplexed. "I thought you said the uniform was for your daughter?" The woman had obviously been confused by my mother's fair complexion.

My mother, whose father was a White Irishman and whose mother was equally fair could easily have *passed* for White herself. In the car ride home from the uniform store my mother would tell us the story of her childhood neighbor who had been bold enough to ask my great-grandmother, Eliza, about the complexion of her children. My mother would continue the story by saying Eliza would throw her hand on her hip, look the person dead in the eye, and announce that even a black cow gives white milk. My sister, brother, and I, on the other hand, as my grandmother Ruth, daughter of Eliza, was proud of saying, were a beautiful ice-tea brown having been kissed by our father's dark chocolate complexion.

As I stepped forward the white-haired woman seemed to have recovered enough to ask my mother if she was sure about the name of the school. As if to prove the school selection, my mother presented her with my acceptance letter and the list of required uniform items. It was then that the white-haired woman asked my mother if she knew that this was *The Agnes Irwin School* located in Rosemont. My mother assured her that was indeed the correct school and that we were indeed here to purchase the necessary uniform items. Once armed with the purchased items and as we were leaving the store my mother announced to the white-haired woman that there would be a few more of *us* coming to purchase uniforms from her store so she might want to get herself ready. The mad, pinched lip look on my mother's face as we left the store remained there for the entire ride home. It seemed that our venture into integration would be met with a few surprised and inquiring looks.

Our arrival at AIS, our run through the integrative ropes, was indeed met with looks of surprise, curiosity, and even shock. We would later learn of the controversy that

our impending arrival had caused among the families of the enrolled students. Despite the surprise, the disapproval, and the questions that greeted our arrival at AIS, we donned that middle school uniform that signaled to everyone in our home communities that we no longer held segregated school membership and signaled to the new community that, as at the uniform store, we were indeed coming. The navy blue tunic with its three front and back pleats, served as a symbol of our integrative ticket. The look of uniformity was completed with a navy blue sash made from the same fabric to hold down the pleats before tying in the back. We wore white or yellow bobby-socks in the warm weather and navy blue knee-high socks in the winter with black and white saddle shoes. The length of the uniform was determined by the end of your fingertips when kneeling on the floor. There were frequent uniform checks to prevent the mini-skirt craze from seeping through the front door of this traditional educational bastion. We remained ever diligent in our desire to chase the fox through the flying ropes as we attempted to match the fox step for step in our search for our version of an integrated education.

On the surface desegregation provided a glimpse into another world of educational possibility and promise, life beyond the veil (DuBois, 1903). A vision of Sara Lightfoot's good high school comes to mind. "Connected to these fixed images are the perceived qualities of intelligence, success, academic achievement, and sophistication" (1983, p. 134). Desegregation however, in the rhythm of reality, the ingrained aspects of racism which is defined as power plus racial prejudice (Hansman, Spencer, Grant, & Jackson, M., 1999), provided controlled advances for a limited number of minorities at a pace regulated by the self-interests of the dominant White culture.

Ira Reid (1954) provided an analysis of desegregation and integration that helps to explain the interconnectedness of these processes. The article appearing in the *Journal of Negro Education* entitled *Integration: Ideal, Process, and Situation* positions these processes in the greater social context and is prophetic in its exploration of the potential for success and explanations for the failures we have seen in recent years. Integration and desegregation are related due to the stages of interdependent progression that humans proceed through in societies composed of multiple stratifications and classifications – i.e. racial, social, economic, age, gender, class, religion, and culture. Reid describes integration as:

...the mutual appreciation, conservation, and use of all the institutions and values which a society regards as right and just. It is based on two principle: that in a polyglot society men must overcome prejudices and discriminations against races, classes, and religions in order to get along, and; that this ideal can be realized only as it is brought into the experience of living (p.348).

Integration, the possibility of integration, is a process that leads to the achievement of greater levels of social status equality for the members of the oppressed subgroup. As a process it supposes and relies upon certain assumptions. The first assumption is that divergent groups, despite the cause of the difference, are willing to come together in a group setting or situation to begin a process of change. Despite the idealism associated with an integration of ideas and beliefs, the actual practice, the nitty-gritty of the doing may leave the groups far apart both physically or philosophically. The perceived cost of compromise or conciliation may be view as too high a price on a variety

of levels, most importantly cost to integrity of self or the cost to integrity of the group. The cost to self and group identification is magnified during adolescents for students on both sides of the racial divide. It is intensified for African American adolescents who, due to living in a racialized society, must think of that identity in terms of race. African American females must add gender as an additional layer of identification examination. The inability of members from divergent groups to get past the “you people” classifications in daily speech and daily interactions makes the attempt to come together a very difficult one. Instead we are left with Beverly Tatum’s (1997) racial exploration and question, “*Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*” There exists safety in racial and cultural familiarity. The cost of venturing out is often repaid with oppositional assaults from both sides of the color line; one side for daring to leave, the other side for daring to enter.

The second assumption, once the groups have been brought together, supposes that group attitudes and beliefs can be synchronized or harmonized. This is a difficult assumption to actualize due to the nature of divergent grouping. As stated in the previous sections on identity formation and cultural community, there are values and beliefs that help to establish a communal body of validated knowledge. As a result of sociopolitical and racial forces in play, members of the divergent groups on either side of the color line have formed communal consciousnesses due to positions of oppressed and oppressor, Blackness in terms of Whiteness. Despite the complexity and diversity that exists among each divergent group, members share a consensus of structures, values, and goals along the path toward community knowledge validation. The challenge for the second assumption of integration lies in the ability to synchronize these beliefs and values that

have become entrenched, embedded, and established as a direct result of the experiences ensuing from the establishment of segregated dual existences. Once separated due to legal and social practices, once divided due to divergent routes to literacy, once alienated due to socially created perceptions, convergence and union of beliefs require levels of shared control and levels of acquiescence on the part of both groups.

The third assumption of integration deals with this concept of control. The ability to precipitate integration assumes that “there are certain differences, such as those of social and economic disparities, which depend on situations beyond the control and achievement of any subgroup and which depend upon total community action” (Reid, 1954, p. 348). The White subgroup has created positions of control and disparity through the establishment of social, economic, and political structures designed to maintain dominance. The action on the part of one subgroup to block out or control the other makes it difficult to work through this final integrative assumption. A search for joint partnership, joint progression, and joint incorporation based on common goals is difficult at best in a social system based on oppression of a subgroup of oppressed citizenry. Rather than look at integration as a long-term process of adjustment and familiarization, an integrative stalemate is the result.

Desegregation is offered up as the prerequisite or what Reid (1954) has labeled as the *neutralizing process*, before full integration can occur. Due to the historical separate and unequal status of Black and White subgroups, this is the process that “must occur when groups have been prevented from having this harmonious relation because of edicts, or customs which have regulated and determined the status of a particular group in society” (p. 348). The legal forbiddance to teach slaves to read and write, Plessy and the

establishment of separate but equal, Jim Crow, de facto and de jure segregation, voting disenfranchisement, Black Codes, the legal support of residential and educational segregation all qualify as edict and customs that have served to prevent the development of harmonious relations. Desegregation is presented as a type of social purgatory, a period of cultural atonement and reparation. This process provides an opportunity for both subgroups to begin to dismantle the cultural and communal boundaries that have served to separate rather than ameliorate.

Brown v. Board of Education heralded the promise of a better, more equal life for many African Americans. African American parents were convinced that the move to the other side of the tracks, to the other school, would mean all things better; better housing, consumer goods, better education and a better, brighter future. Many families fled the urban cities leaving skeletal remains of jump rope communities in their wake. The jump rope was silenced and with it went the connection to our communal rhythm. We severed our ties with the collective (Doolittle, 2004) and were left to forge a path on our own. As we ran from the spiritual nature of culture and race, our *sparks* were once again scattered (Wexler, 1996) and as William Watkins (1996) suggests the move has caused African Americans to lose “sight of our history” (p. 5).

We created a maze of contradictions. Black and White Americans danced a fancy and often dangerous do-si-do. In our steps forward, abrupt turns, sharp spins, and reverses, we became our own befuddlement. The country hailed Althea Gibson, the rangy tennis player who was the first Black female to win the U.S. Women’s Singles. President Dwight Eisenhower sent U.S. paratroopers to protect Black school children in Little Rock,

Arkansas, and South Carolina's Senator Strom Thurmond harangued for 24 hours and 18 minutes to prevent the passage in Congress of the Civil Rights Commission's Voting Rights Bill (Angelou, 1981, p. 3).

Desegregation, as an idea, represented hope and possibility. Desegregation, a legal band-aid for a social wound caused by the knife that is racism, caused far more confusion and nebulosity than the justices and attorneys associated with *Brown* could have imagined. David Purpel expresses this search as a "...struggle to find meaning and create a morally sound and spiritually satisfying path to personal fulfillment, cultural richness and social justice" (1995, p. 190). Purpel goes on to tell us that this journey will be fraught with the struggle that comes from charting a course in unknown waters, when both the journey and the destination are filled with the promise of unfulfilled possibility.

The promise of possibility was lost in the discarded urban cities. Over-crowded conditions, traffic congestion, scarcity of food, a decline in personal services and rising crime caused many African Americans to leave the once nurturing arms of the urban inner cities (Cashin, 2004). A decrease in the numbers of inner city industrial jobs due to high union pay scales and overseas contracts, also contributed to the *black 'burbs flight* (Cashin, 2004; Hatchett, 1995). A broader selection of job opportunities, with higher pay scales, attracted many who fled the cities and sought refuge in the economically prosperous suburbs.

Ironically, many of the reasons that had caused the migration of African Americans from the South to the North, were now causing a similar flight from the inner cities to the safer confines of the metropolitan suburbs. African Americans fled the urban

community in search of many of the same freedoms and rights that were enjoyed without question by European Americans. In short, African Americans left in search of educational, economic, and social access. This oppressed subgroup sought access to the promises and benefits of an integrated workplace, public and private institutions that catered to personal and community interests. Additionally, they sought access to a longer list of opportunities for their children (Carnahan, 2003; Cashin, 2004; Haymes, 1995; Hatchett, 1995; Murphy, 1995).

What actually awaited many African Americans were unfulfilled promises and dreams (Bankston & Caldas, 2002; Bell, 2004; Cashin, 2004; Clotfelter, 2004; Haskins, 1998; Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003; Irons, 2002; Shujaa, 1996; Tatum, 1987). The large influx of financially able Africans Americans into the suburbs caused further white flight from many of the first line suburban communities. What ensued was a loss of the tax base provided by businesses in the area and this resulted in reductions in municipal services (Carnahan, 2003; Cashin, 2004; Haymes, 1995; Hatchett, 1995; Murphy, 1995). African Americans were left to face many of the same problems, in the suburbs, as those faced in the urban communities from which they fled.

Desegregation and integration “are functions of human relations. These functions are determined by the nature of our human resources, the early training and development of individuals, the functions and processes of our social institutions, and the needs of the nation as a whole” (Reid, 1954, p. 354). As a result of *Brown v. Board of Education* the institution of education served as the site for the experiment that was desegregation and integration.

While the motives for desegregation may have been earnest in their attempt at bridging a social divide, the actual implementation fell short of completion. The challenge for these social processes lay in the perception of mutual benefit and desires by all members of the affected subgroups. The group holding positions of dominance and control, the foxes being chased, possessed little incentive to alter their personal or community status. The group holding positions of subordination while possessive of desires to gain access, these desires, in many cases, did not prove strong enough to sacrifice home community membership and affiliation.

Double Dutch: Single Gender Education

All in together girls

its fine weather girls

when is your birthday

please jump in (now really fast)

January, February, March, April, May, June,

July, August, September, October, November, December

All out together girls

its fine weather girls

when is your birthday

please jump out

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, etc., etc., etc.

Double Dutch (Loredo, 1996) requires twice the work and practice, is twice the challenge, and creates twice the confusion of jump rope. It is also twice as much fun in its

ability to create twice the excitement. Just as with jump rope, you need two enders, however, Double Dutch requires two ropes instead of one. This means twice the jumping on alternate feet and twice the level of concentration. The enders turn the ropes, which alternate in position with one missing the other much like the beaters on a mixer. The enders turn the ropes with one hand turning clockwise and the other hand turning the rope in a counterclockwise direction. A concerted series of moves, of ups, downs, twists, and turns combine to create a Double Dutch session. Practice and collaboration are required of every member of a Double Dutch session. It is an exercise in creative aesthetics. It is an exercise in perseverance. It is an exercise in the contradictions inherent in concentration.

Contradictions exist in the determined pursuits of concentration. My grandparents were known to taunt their Pinochle opponents who displayed any hesitation on the next card to play, "Think long, play wrong!" Athletes have been encouraged to simply *do* what they have trained long and hard to master. Teachers encourage students to follow the brain's first chosen answer rather than over analyze and justify each answer as a test taking strategy. Certainties give way to questions and doubt when we ponder too long and too hard.

My parents had assured me in the months leading up to my first day at Agnes Irwin that the move from my local school to the new private school was the right thing to do – a certainty. We had concentrated on making it past the alumna interviews. We had concentrated on surviving the psychological and intellectual examinations. We had concentrated on securing the necessary supplies and uniforms. We were certain. Yet, as I rode the P & W High Speed Line from the 69th Street Terminal to the Villanova station

those certainties gave way to question and doubt; they gave way to contradictions that lay just below the surface.

It was September 1969. This was a special and historical September. Not only because four young African American adolescent females were about to embark upon an integrative experience that would change their lives as well as the lives of those connected with The Agnes Irwin School. This particular September marked the one hundred year anniversary of the Agnes Irwin School. It was September 1969. It was a month that would give way to the contradictions and questions that lay beneath the certainties of a founder's intentions.

Founded as the Young Ladies' School of Philadelphia in 1869 by Agnes Irwin, the school's history was built upon the foundations of two buildings on Delancey Place. The winter 2007 issue of the AIS Magazine celebrates the memories of Agnes Irwin's ladies who graduated from the Delancey Place location. The magazine compares life in the two old buildings to Bel Kaufman's *Up the Down Staircase*. It is an interesting comparison, an interesting paradox amidst the certainty of bringing a quality education to women at a time in history when doing so was not the norm. The care, concern, and high expectations of the faculty at the Delancey Place location mirror the enthusiasm and eventual respected nature of Kaufman's main character Sylvia Barrett. The setting in both cases is an inner-city school. However, the similarities end there. Kaufman paints a picture of Sylvia Barrett trying to reach her students at a dysfunctional school through literature and writing in the face of an indifferent administration and student body. Conversely, while also being exposed to classical literature, the students on Delancey

Place received their lessons from an impassioned faculty and headmistress. They do so with the utmost decorum and demureness expected of Miss Irwin's ladies.

Living alumnae present us with a glimpse into life on Delancey Place. These trailblazing women describe the up and down staircases of the two buildings with the lunchroom located in the basement. They share memories of uniform checks by Miss Nat who made sure that Miss Irwin's ladies did not wear high heeled shoes and played sports in their large blue serge bloomers and white sailor collared blouses. Visiting The Gypsy Tearoom on nearby Market Street, lunching at the drugstore, and shopping at John Wanamaker's or Rittenhouse Square while dressed in the requisite hat and white gloves were favorite pastimes. Memories also included playing field hockey on the fields at City Line and Belmont Avenues. The commute to school for some of Irwin's ladies included pony cart rides from Blue Bell to Reading Terminal and trains from Lansdowne, Paoli, or Ardmore to Suburban Station and walking across Rittenhouse Square. The school moved to Wynnewood and then to its current location on Ithan Avenue in Rosemont Pennsylvania. Miss Irwin later became the first dean of Radcliffe College. She remains highly regarded as a pioneer in single gender education.

The Agnes Irwin School remains one of the top college preparatory schools, focused on the needs of girls, in the country. Today, a visit to its website reveals the continued commitment to hard work, a passion for doing things that you love, and a responsibility to give back to the community on the part of Miss Irwin's ladies. The school boasts a well-rounded academic and aesthetic centered experience. State-of-the-art science center, library, and gym have contributed to the largest number of National Merit Finalists among private schools in the Philadelphia area, 21% of the senior class are

recruited as college athletes, forty-seven AP Scholars with three National AP Scholars, and awards for national competitions in Greek, Latin, French and Spanish. Awards have also been earned for their work in robotics, placing 5th out of sixty-four teams at the Naval Academy's annual robotics competition. The arts are also nurtured at AIS through opportunities to sing, dance, and create a wide range of art from the visual through to the functional mediums. The West-Wike on-campus Theater has hosted in-house theatrical productions as well as productions that are a collaborative effort among surrounding private schools. The school recently welcomed poet Nikki Giovanni the West-Wike Theater to share her insights on civil rights, equality, and the ability of the self to make a positive difference in the lives others.

Making a difference, developing opinions, fighting for causes of justice, and giving back remain hallmarks of the AIS experience. The preparation for addressing issues that affect the community begins in the Lower School and becomes a bit more focused with public speaking classes in the seventh grade. Senior Assemblies require each student in the graduating class to present a consciousness-raising presentation to the faculty and student body. The multi-media presentations practice and ensuing discussion help to prepare seniors to address future public speaking opportunities with poise and confidence. Seniors are also expected to participate in The Special Studies Programs. It is through this program that AIS seniors take up the mantle of community outreach and community service. Past service projects have found seniors working for an orphanage in the Dominican Republic, an eye care clinic in Guatemala, experiencing the Mexican culture through the home-stay program in Cuernavaca, building Habitat for Humanity homes in the south, or creating a documentary film on the lives of girls from the Makah

reservation. The faculty, staff, and administration at the Agnes Irwin have remained focused on Miss Irwin's dream of providing a quality education for a segment of the population that continues to serve as the barometer of society's progress; its women. Due to its small size the members of the AIS faculty are able to provide the girls in their care with personalized attention, personalized care; to provide the concentration necessary to meet the needs of each student. Yet, within that concentration exists the potential for contradiction, the potential for questions and uncertainty. This was the case for four African American females who arrived at the doors of Agnes Irwin in 1969. Historically, it has also been the case for many girls who have sought to receive an equal and just education in our nation's schools.

Concentration has been the focus, as well as the justification for single gender schools and education. The brains of girls and boys develop along different paths or trajectories. The benefits of all-girl schools deal specifically with that divergent development. By examining both the theory and the reality of women's education, we gain a better understanding of the goals and purposes of education in general. Agnes Irwin, a believer in the potential of young women, recognized that by examining the formal education of young women-future mothers of future citizens-seemed the best way to instill in individuals those values essential to the well-being of society. Environments that create situations and structures that cater to and are supportive of those trajectories, are at the very least, deserving of examination and further research.

An examination of the benefits of an all-girl education begin with an increase in academic focus and move through to an increase in participation in sports and extra-curricular activities. Without boys to serve as a distraction, girls focus on performance

rather than appearance; faculty members are focused solely on the educational, social, developmental, and emotional needs of girls; girls are encouraged to take academic risks, inclusive of higher level math and science; girls are provided with opportunities to develop leadership skills; girls are provided with strong female role models to serve as inspiration of the high expectations they are encouraged to have for themselves.

Retrieved April 27, 2007 from Agnes Irwin School <http://www.agnesirwin.org>.

In October of 2006 the United States Department of Education, published new regulations dealing with single-sex education as a result of a provision in the No Child Left Behind legislation to legalize single-gender education. Schools and districts could use sections 5131(a) (23) and 5131 (c) of NCLB to justify single-gender education as long s they met three main criteria:

- 1) provide a rationale for offering a single-gender class in that subject. A variety of rationales are acceptable, e.g. if very few girls have taken computer science in the past, the school could offer a girls-only computer science class;
- 2) provide a coeducational class in the same subject at the same school;
- 3) conduct a review every two years to determine whether single-sex classes are still necessary to remedy whatever inequity prompted the school to offer the single-sex class in the first place.

According to the National Association for Single Sex Public Education (NASSPE) “girls in single-sex educational settings are more likely to take classes in math, science, and information technology. Boys in single-sex schools are more likely to pursue interests in art, music, drama, and foreign languages. Both girls and boys have

more freedom to explore their own interests and abilities in single-gender classrooms.”

Retrieved April 28, 2007 from National Association for Single Sex Public Education

<http://www.singlesexschools.org/legal.html>

In the spring of 2003 an article entitled *The Single Sex* appeared in the April issue of District Administration. The article focused on the separate gender educational practices at the Thurgood Marshall Elementary School in Seattle Washington. Thurgood Marshall, a failing school in 1999, celebrated three years of single-gender education and three years of climbing test scores. During that period of time the school community, 95% minority, witnessed an increase in both their statewide Reading, Writing, Math, and Listening scores between the years 1999-2002. Despite a slight decrease in Math scores between the 2000-2001 school year, the school has seen Reading scores go from 27% to 60.6% Meeting State Standards; Writing scores have moved from 13.5% to 51.5%; Math scores dropped from 10.8% to 9.8% before rising to 45.5%; Listening scores climbed from 37.8% to 57.6%.

The principal of Thurgood Marshall, Benjamin Wright, acknowledges the unique challenges facing a failing school with an overwhelmingly minority population. He also happens to believe in the positive impact of a single-gender education in predominantly minority and low-income communities. An administrator who believes and practices the philosophy of starting from the child, Wright recognizes the differences inherent in the way that boys and girls learn. He also recognizes the interplay between the sexes that interferes with learning; the silencing of genders on the part of teachers who failed to understand their distinct learning and interaction practices; and the challenges of self-

esteem suffered by both genders in content specific areas due to low teacher expectations or poor training in teaching practices designed to support and encourage.

Despite the successes experienced by Thurgood Marshall Elementary, and many more single-gender schools across the nation, there are those studying the practice, just as with the separate but equal doctrine, who worry about the equality and equity of resources provided to separated gender-based educational programs. The National Organization of Women points to a history of inequities in job training programs, college sports, and professional sports as a cause for concern as we watch the number of single gender educational programs increase this country. Inequality and inequity are issues that Principal Wright addresses each day as he and his staff wrestles with the challenges of providing a quality education for a segment of the population that because of the pervasiveness of race and racism struggles against societal inequities on a daily basis.

When we think of educational inequality we usually think of race versus race, urban versus suburban, affluent versus poor, public versus private or regular education versus special education. Rarely does the general public think of the inequality as it relates to the type and quality of the education received by girls versus boys. However, “sitting in the same classrooms, reading the same textbooks, listening to the same teacher, boys and girls receive very different educations. From grade school through graduate school, female students are more likely to be invisible members of the classroom” (Sadker & Sadker, 1995, p.1). Girls enter the elementary classroom outperforming boys in every category and through a system of what Sadker & Sadker call “benign neglect” (p. 44) and silencing, they leave school twelve or thirteen years later underperforming boys in every category and content area. Even though girls make up a majority of the

student population and currently hold a 48% stake in the work force, their needs are currently not being met as they transition from elementary school to middle and high schools. The trend continues at the college and graduate school levels.

Textbooks and curricular choices are male dominated in both representation and perspective. Teacher interaction, beginning at the elementary level, along with class discussions and engagement allows for and permits the boys to shout out answers and opinions in a time frame that favors the quick reaction method favored by boys. Teachers are happy to have boys participate and are often more forgiving of the impromptu outbursts. Girls, as teacher pleasers and rule followers, rarely shout out answers unless called upon to do so. As students move into the middle and high school setting, where the teaching force changes from predominantly female to increasing numbers of male teachers, the dynamics in the classroom also changes. Teaching strategies, role models, behavioral expectations, and achievement expectations shift from being female focused to male focused. Even standardized tests demonstrate a male preference with a greater number of male references and male interests. This is a phenomenon that is rooted in the historical framework of this country's educational system.

The U.S. system of education was merely an extension of the European framework that the early settlers brought with them. There, as well, as here, education was maintained under the purview of men and for the express purpose of the training of men. Education was the institution that fed and fueled the work force. Women were viewed as physically, mentally, and morally inferior to men. Unlike their male counterparts who would find positions in the work force, a woman's place, due to her frailties, was limited to the home. As such, girls were barred from the rooms of education

as a means of providing a career outside of the home. Education for women was expected to improve the quality of their domestic home life making them honorable wives and mothers. The role of women was seen as fulfilling an important civic function – the rearing of future patriotic and responsible male citizenry. The education of women was seen merely as a means to control the function of families and therefore the society.

Many studies point to the home and a child's first teachers as the start of the educational disparity between girls and boys (Hrabowski, Maton, Greene, & Greif, 2002; Orenstein, 2004; Rimm, 1999; Sadker 1994). Girls are often taught to be polite, caring, and nurturing. They receive toys to reinforce these expectations. Boys are expected to stand their ground and learn aggressiveness and demonstrative, rather than weak and lenient behaviors. They receive toys that require manipulations, active inquiry-based involvement. Due to these early lessons in behavioral socialization girls arrive at school with a firm grasp on many of the social and verbal skills, while boys arrive well versed in many of the physical skills. Girls are expected to sit quietly and attend to their tasks thus providing the teacher with extra time to work with the boys. This is the beginning of the silencing trend that many girls will fall victim to during the course of their educational journeys. This is the beginning of the trend of benign neglect.

This benign neglect results in girls receiving less attention, less time, less interaction, less feedback, and less instruction from the teacher. Three of the areas critical to student growth, praise, remediation, and direction are often neglected for girls as they become victims of their own socialization. Girls learn best in cooperative settings that focus on discussion, writing, and interpersonal opportunities. Expressive in nature, they enjoy the sharing of ideas with the process of learning far outweighing the answer. As

teacher pleasers and as they continue the lessons learned at home, they watch and wait silently for the teacher to find time for them. This lack of critical academic interaction between the teacher and female students affects a wide range of developmental processes. Inquiry methods, discussions and interactions that serve as strategy checks and balances are ill developed. Critical thinking skills, self-confidence, and self-esteem are also negatively affected for girls. This has a direct impact on the skills and strategies needed for success in Math and Science classes. These areas of study are often known as and dominated by males. Students who attend higher level math and science courses are perceived as smart by their peers. This has the cascading effect of creating higher self-esteem, higher levels of confidence, and increased desires to participate in even higher and harder courses. This translates into better standardized test scores in the content areas that many colleges focus on which translates into a wider pool of college choices, which translates into a wider employment pool and better career choices.

Girls and boys alike start out on their educational journeys as curious and desirous learners. Yet, when we fail as educators to meet the needs of a large segment of the student body as a result of genderized expectations, then we give rise to the fears expressed by the National Organization of Women who raise concerns about equity in educational access. In cases like this not only does the female educational population fail to meet its potential, so to does the greater American society. We are then forced to settle for a society that is unable to derive full benefits from all of its potential members. Girls must be provided with a voice in the classrooms that can be heard, critiqued, discussed, and amended based on the merit of it participation. Girls must be provided with the tools to break the historical cycle of second class educational students.

The neglect and negative cycle is even more troubling for minority girls. In a study conducted by Linda Grant (1984), minority girls suffer as a result of their gender status and as a result of their racial status. Grant found that they received even less praise than white girls. The type of praise received often had little to do with academics and more to do with social and behavioral skills. Yet, there is hope in the form of educational dreamkeepers, both Black and White. These educators know the secret of challenge, the secret of caring, and the secret of connection through relation. In the face of race, they provide, they instruct, and they learn from their students.

These educators recognize differences in the level of need not only as a result of a difference in gender, but also as a result of race. The challenges, the struggles, and the voices of African American girls were not addressed in the groundbreaking book *Reviving Ophelia* by Mary Pipher. Pipher brought to light the conflict filled life of the adolescent girl. However, it left many girls of color feeling that it missed the mark on our particular stories of pain and anguish. Sara Shandler (1999) and Rebecca Carroll (1997) bring the stories, the pain, the struggle, and the triumph of girls of color to the reader; they bring the stories to educators who recognize the differences in need.

CHAPTER 5

TRIUMPHANT CHANTERS

On a mountain stands a lady.

Who she is, I do not know.

All she wants is gold and silver.

All she wants is Big Fat Joe.

So jump in - - -

And jump out, - - -

On a mountain stands a lady...

"Hold a true friend with both your hands." - Nigerian Proverb

The triumphant nature, the triumphant chant of African American women stems from living and gaining knowledge from those experiences. Our unique subjectivity provides an equally unique perspective. It is a knowledge that emanates from living through a marginalized double consciousness as an inside out and an outside in minority female. Our double marginality places us in positions of opposition and stances that cause us to *jump in* and *jump out* of daily struggles. Our lived struggles and experiences, our daily quests start from various points of quiet determination and determined silence. Yet, even in our marginal states, just as a jumper between the ropes, we stand at the center of potential. We stand as the focus of refusal. We stand out as the lady who knows what she wants. We recognize that what we want, our silver and gold, rests in recognition and continuation.

African American females stand today upon a mountain of female shoulders built stronger over time through a sisterhood of connection. That connection is the result of struggle and sacrifice, as well as determination and directed movement. As a genderized and racialized group, we possess a connection to that heritage of struggle and resistance due to everyday experiences caused by exclusion, conflict, and denial in a White-male dominated society. As a group of women whose progress has at times been slowed due to oppression and erasure, these women have never lost sight of the need for strategies of resistance on behalf of the race. Anna Julia Cooper, Septima Clark, Maria Stewart, Harriet Jacobs, and Ida B. Wells have provided their shoulders as the foundation upon which we have built our current sisterhood. It is from there at the mountain-top of the present that we are able to view both the past and the future. It is from here that we recognize our claimed positions of privilege as the subject of marginalized states, as “a site of radical possibility” (hooks, 1990, p. 341) and are able to set the rhythm of the chant to match our personal chants of resistance and triumph.

In my sister’s voices the unique timbre of our particular chant takes shape. Just as the chapters of Iris Jacob’s (2002) book, our chant is more than skin deep, is greater than our roots, is person to person, is ourselves inside and out, is a sharing of our sorrows. Through my sister’s chants our jump rope journey was revealed. In my sister’s chants the pace, the beat, the rhythm, and the rhyme combined to create a unique chant, a unique theory of struggle, survival, and triumph. In my sister’s chants the stories of our lives combined

our histories, memories, and communities. Our identities were framed by the pace, the beat, the rhythm, and the rhyme; by the question, the determination, the wonder, and the imagination of our unique jump rope chant and session.

Collecting the Chants: Jump Rope History Come Full Circle

My journey to Philadelphia to collect my sister's chants, the oral pieces of my classmates' lives, was filled with excitement, wonder, and the anxiety that was wrapped in the weight of the unknown. Sitting in the Terminal at Hartsfield-Jackson Airport I felt special in my secret mission. Just as it had been thirty plus years ago I was leaving my home community to gather stories and awarenesses from a world that that few had entered.

I had last connected with Joanne at our twentieth class reunion. As the plane touched down I realized that it had already been ten years since that meeting. I had not seen Estelle since our graduating class had gathered to mark its liberation of five years. It had been even longer for Theresa. Our paths had not crossed since our graduation ceremony at Goodhart Hall on the campus of Bryn Mawr College in 1975. We would learn later that weekend that Theresa would be unable to join our mini reunion at Estelle's family home. However, the technology of the modern day speaker phone would provide us with the means to add her voice to our conversation of reflection and connection.

My rational, yet emotional self knew that several of my anxieties were the result of petty and vain considerations. Hair, weight, and fashion concerns darted across my mind as I stood waiting for the airport shuttle. The weather of this Philadelphian April was far more welcoming than the April that had welcomed my arrival to clean out my

family home. Still in need of a shawl over my jacket, I did not feel the need to shelter my hands from the elements. I was in the process of readjusting the shawl when I caught sight of a woman who resembled a longtime friend of my mother. Her totally grey hair and smaller stature caused the question in my tone when I called out her name. She did not stop after the first utterance and I added a bit more certainty to my second attempt. When she turned to focus in on the direction of the voice that claimed relationship I was able to take in a full snapshot of her face. It was indeed her. Under the lines of character and experience was the same caring face belonging to one of my childhood Window Queens. She stood there, taking me all in, with the combined look of judge and guardian. With her smile, and her “Gir-r-r-l!” she became the envoy for each of the protectors from my childhood. Here stood one of my Yemajás; one of the generational sisters of care, connection, and community.

Her warm smile, despite the distance of our lives and the passing years of our experiences displayed proof of the continuing community connection. While I was now approaching the age that she and our other Window Queens had been during the aware years of my childhood memories, for a moment I lapsed back into the role of protected. A simple touch of her hand on my arm for support and the mantle was passed. It was a touch of passage through the connecting of cultural and communal consciousness. In that touch I became the protector and I recognized in this chance meeting the positiveness of the omen. Our sisterly reunion had just received a blessing from a generational sister. The fact that she instantly called me by name surprised and pleased me. My hair, my weight, and my fashion had not betrayed me, but rather said that I could bid farewell to the questions posed by my emotional side. I was home.

It was then that my practical self began to wrestle with the anxieties caused by the pending interviews. I was nervous about my new digital recorder. I had spent the entire two-hour flight reading the technical manual, trying to absorb the content between the snores of the passenger in 17B. Had I remembered extra batteries? Should I have remained true to my technological comfort level and simply purchased the small tape recorder and a supply of miniature cassettes? Would its positioning pick up the verbal nuances without causing an air of formality or subterfuge? Would my questioning techniques guide, strain, stifle, or ease the conversation? Would my classmates add to the pictures, the memories, and the importance of our histories that I had positioned as the basis of my theorized project? Or would their responses add to the doubt that now rang in my head?

Rather than fight this self-created battle alone, I made a phone call to my oldest daughter. A junior at the University of Maryland, she was a mere ninety minute drive away. My mind instantly refocused on this bonus visit and away from the task at hand. Young, smart, and full of youthful potential, her smile at the door of my hotel room was all the reassurance I needed. The sisterly and generational connection that had begun with the chance meeting at the airport continued as my daughter crossed the threshold into my room. I was certain that my rational side would figure it out.

Estelle would echo her recognition as the connecting link between her mother and her two daughters. Joanne was now the link between her mother and her daughter. While Theresa had only sons, she too had become the protector rather than the protected. We each spoke often that weekend of the trials and tribulations of our childhoods. We spoke of the women, the Yemajás, who had steered the course of our personal and educational

lives. We spoke of the hopes, dreams, and struggles of our children and it was through listening to my sisters' voices that I came to once again take comfort and strength in my own. I had come home to the mountain to find my silver and gold. Coming home had allowed me to once again jump into the ropes of a community and a sisterhood of recognition and continuation through a shared past that they understood. I did not need to explain, did not need to speak in guarded code, nor false bravado.

Our heads nodded in agreement that weekend validating emotions, speculations, and adult realizations of that time in our lives that we could discuss with few others. We talked about the raising, the going and the coming back of children. We smiled off into the distance as remembered scenes stood exposed in the present and the dimmed light of Estelle's dining room. I had come home. Our togetherness had reminded me of the *who* that I was. Our togetherness brought my past *who* in contact with a part of my current *who*, the *who* that I have become. We enjoyed the view from our mountain of experience that night. The acknowledgement of smiles, the shoulders that now supported laughter, the "Gir-r-l-l-l do you remember when's" revealed our need for this special time of connection. On our mountain together, we examined *who* we were and we took *who* *who* we had become. We recognized in each other that what we once wanted and *who* we had come to be started from a shared past.

Baking Bread: The Background of Our Comm-Unity

The jump rope session is set by the pace of the rope. Fast, slow, or something in between, the pace of the ropes determines the development of the session. If the enders turn the ropes with a slow pace the jumpers loose interest; too quickly and motivation is the casualty. The beat is added as a steadying backdrop. It is to the beat that each jumper

and ender can come home to when the session gets confusing or foreign. The rhythm keeps the ropes moving with interest and personality. The rhyme is the reason for the entire exercise. It is the union of the voices in the chant that creates a collage of the stories that is both physical and artistic; it is the narrative story that unites the members of the session. The pace, beat, rhythm, and rhyme of our early lives was regulated by a circle of community enders; parents, teachers, friends, and classmates. It also set in progress, the movement, and the development of our later and current lives.

*Du Bois felt little of the emotion that earned Philadelphia the nickname, The City of Brotherly Love, after his demoting appointment to the University of Pennsylvania as an assistant instructor in 1896. Brought in to prove the connection between the rising crime rate and the Negro slums, Du Bois' investigation presented information that stood in direct contradiction to the theory presented by city leaders. He discovered through his thorough investigation that came to be known as *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (1899, 1996) that the plight of the Negro condition in the Seventh Ward was a symptom of rather than the cause of the city's demise. While many Negroes lived in the adjoining Fourth, Fifth, and Eighth Wards, it was upon the habits, lifestyles, and behaviors of the inhabitants occupying the Seventh*

Ward that the character of the Negro for the entire city was based. It was upon the treatment of the Negroes in this ward that the framework for treating

all of the Negroes in Philadelphia was set. It was from this early group of Negroes that the pace of future African American neighborhoods was set.

The Seventh Ward at the time of the study encompassed an area that was bound by the Schuylkill River near Twenty-Fifth Street and extended to Seventh Street. The area

stretched north from Spruce Street down to South Street. It was an area of changing and shifting classes and ethnic groups. As Negroes moved in, Whites moved out, a pattern to be recreated all of the city. The center of Negro life existed in the blocks between Eighth, Pine, Sixth, and South. This area could easily have provided the research data for Ainsworth's collective socialization study. Despite the area being filled with "able-bodied young men and women, all cheerful, some with good-natured open faces, some with traces of crime and excess, a few pinched with poverty" (DuBois, 1996, p. 60) it presented little outward cause for celebration of the cultural condition. It is what lay beneath the exterior and outward façade that Ainsworth missed. In this section some of the wealthiest "best Negro families of the ward lived" (p. 60). Here, many of the southern migrating slaves settled and brought with them the determined character of the Negro and the Negro community.

Despite the gamblers, prostitutes, and petty thieves, the ward was also home to laborers, porters, seamstresses, stevedores, and laundresses who struggled to survive and worked to recreate a community of mutual support. They exemplified Blackwell's community definition and were held together by both internal and external forces. This area also demonstrated Billingsley's community triangulation – common geography, common set of values, and common heritage. The Seventh Ward was one of Philadelphia's original Jump Rope Communities. It was not to last, but the pace of this community would serve as the tap-whoosh-tap for the resultant communities that sprang up in the ashes of the Seventh Ward.

During the 1950s and 1960s under the mayoral leadership of Richardson Dillworth (1956 – 1962) and James H. J. Tate (1962-1972) large sections of the Seventh

Ward were declared slums. This declaration cleared the way for the condemnation classification and also began the federal program under the guise of urban renewal and center-city redevelopment that would change the complexion of the Seventh Ward forever. The objective of the redevelopment plan was to bring whites from the suburbs back into the city's heart and along with it a revitalization of business, trade, commerce, and the tax base for the city. The Penn Center project began with the demolition of what was known as the Chinese Wall that ran along Filbert and divided the city into its north and south sections. The project ended with the mass displacement of the Negro population into the various ethnic neighborhoods developing west of the Schuylkill River and north of Spruce. Our attendance in school coincided with and was impacted by the Penn Project.

Today, like much of Philadelphia, the old Seventh Ward, is a distinct cultural, social, and economic neighborhood. Today, as upper-class whites call this section once regarded as slums home, there is little evidence of the history of original Negro occupants. Philadelphia remains a tightly packed city of neighborhoods shaped by geographic boundaries such as the Delaware

and Schuylkill Rivers, Fairmont Park, or Cobbs Creek. The boundaries helped to create distinct communities. Chestnut Hill, Penn's Landing, Germantown, Mount Airy, North, South, West, and Southwest Philadelphia are sections of the city that have evolved based on the values and customs of the earliest inhabitants to that area. The Italians created Little Italy in South Philly. Chinatown borders South Philly, the Expressway, and the Convention center.

Germantown, one of the oldest settlements of the city is to the north of the city's center. Mt. Airy, to the northwest, boasting the largest concentrations of Jewish households, is also the most culturally diverse section of the city. West Philadelphia became home to many of the city's African Americans as they arrived during the great migration from the south. However, it is North Philadelphia that remains predominantly African American with a small Hispanic segment to the northeast and Whites who have populated the Fairmont-Spring Garden section of North Philly.

*Each section, like our identities, has its own pace, beat, rhythm, and rhyme. The pace and unique character of each district shaped each of us. It is a pace that was developed as a result of exclusion, positioning, and the subsequent quest for survival. These distinct communities exist within the city borders and much like James Loewen's (2005) *Sundown Towns* each ethnic group knows the sections that are welcoming and which sections are only to be visited during the daylight hours. The outward appearance of the area that surrounds Rittenhouse Square and moves down toward the Delaware River gives the impression of integration. Upon closer inspection you will note that it is actually one of desegregation and not integration. There is little sharing of cultures; little sharing of resources; little union.*

Estelle's section of Philadelphia, Wynnefield, is bordered by City Line Avenue, Fairmont Park, Bala Golf Club, and Cardinal Avenue. It is a section of the city that has enjoyed access to upscale shopping, good transportation, proximity to hospitals, and a nature reserve. Saint Joseph College is a part of the neighborhood and adds a campus feel to the area. According to the 1990 census it is a section of Philadelphia that is 49% White, 48% Black, and 3% other. It is geographically a part of West Philadelphia but

lacks the dense, row house feel common to most of that section of the city. With a density rate of only twenty people per acre Wynnefield has a suburban feel to it despite its urban addresses. Many of the large Tudor style stone or stucco homes built around the turn of the twentieth century have views of Fairmont Park from their enclosed porches and patios. Today, it fights to return to its middle-to-upper income community roots.

Joanne's home community was a planned neighborhood. It represented one of the early waves of White suburban flight. The racial mix of this section of the city is currently listed as 36% White and 60% Black. The ratio of Whites to Blacks decreased as more and more Blacks fled the inner city lured by the affordable price of housing and the increase in the quality of life during the expansion of the city's limits. The area's transportation system provided quick access to city by way of the nearby SEPTA rail system. The area is home to large industrial companies as well as the Philadelphia International Airport. The area's proximity to the Philadelphia International Airport has made it a bedroom community for airport employees. Unlike the Wynnefield section of the city, the houses here are the classic row homes or town homes that are more characteristic of Philadelphia. Due to the area's reliance on and hyper-sensitivity to negative fluxes of the nearby industry it is an area of the city that has and continues to suffer through the regional downturns and decline.

Theresa's North Philly is today predominantly African American and Hispanic having been hit hard by waves of White flight and tax base exodus. Historically, this section of the city was little more than a few agricultural communities north of the city proper. The Consolidation Act of 1854 dissolved several of the surrounding local governments and added this northern community to the city of Philadelphia. It became an

industrial and manufacturing hub and home community to the city's working class.

Developers added scores of row homes to house the families of workers who moved to the area to work in the factories of North Philly.

During its heyday the industrialists who had created and founded the new factories and industrial firms built large mansions as a testament to their newly acquired wealth. Many were immigrants who had translated their European trades and expertise into factory created wealth. However, the Great Depression and outsourcing by many of the manufacturing companies brought the collapse of North Philly as an industrial center. Many of the large mansions were sold or were left abandoned by bankrupted owners.

Redlining home loan practices that kept Blacks in this deteriorating section of the city and White flight took its toll on North Philly. A new underclass of Blacks was created as a result. Despite the bleak outlook for the once thriving section of the city, it became a center of Black culture for a time attracting visual and musical artists. The area became a music Mecca and a magnet for Jazz musicians such as John Coltrane and Stan Getz. Today, the expansion of Temple University is driving a revitalization effort of the area.

Wynnetta's Darby Township a suburb, five miles from the border of Philadelphia, was a divided town based on race. Hook Road was the north – south dividing line and Tribbitt Avenue was the east – west border. Considered a middle-class working neighborhood, it is located in the southwest corner of Delaware County. It is surrounded by several small boroughs and townships – Chester, Darby Borough, Folcroft, and Sharon Hill. Many of the original homeowners were White, a part of the first wave of Philadelphians to move out of southwest Philly. They continued to move further west and

north into the next wave of suburbs eventually making our portion of Darby Township predominantly Black. There was very little commerce in the township of fewer than 9,000. A few textile mills in the surrounding townships, nearby oil refineries, a few food preparation factories, and the proximity to the airport served as the major industrial support. As a result, many of the citizens of Darby Township who had moved to the area from Philadelphia returned to jobs in that city each day.

The old Seventh Ward is no longer a destination for today's Blacks. Many are simply passing through on their way to and from. Their access to this area is on specific terms. Their inclusion holds an air of exclusion and geographic confinement. The pace that they move to is not of their own creation. It is a continuation of the history of DuBois' Negro in Philadelphia. As a result of the Seventh Ward community being splintered and scattered across various sections of Philadelphia, that history now includes the demise of the strong and cohesive Jump Rope Communities.

Though distinct and spread out, our sections of the city were connected long before our individual paces were joined at the steps of The Agnes Irwin School. Our family experiences were connected through the pervasiveness of racial tensions of the time; segregated living conditions and minimal racial interactions. We each traveled through, near, or around each other's worlds as a result of the connected webs of family and community. Our neighborhoods shaped and framed many of our early childhood and school memories.

Community Rememories: Jumpers Stirring Up Old Messes

Estelle, Joanne, Theresa, and Wynnetta

My collection of our chants began with a look back to early memories of self and childhood in our home communities. As we shook off the cobwebs of those memories, as we began to stir up those old messes, glimpses into our unique personalities began to emerge. Many of these memories naturally centered on family, friends, school, and community. Our communities were defined by geography, punctuated by shared values and inevitably referred back to a common heritage, that of the Seventh Ward in Philadelphia.

Estelle

So, what do I remember about my early childhood, huh? There's not many memories. No, not many memories at all. Well, one thing that stands out about my early life is living in France and speaking French and enjoying that time. Yeah, that was a good time for me. A couple of siblings came out of that tour – dad was in the military. My Grandparents used to help out with the childcare. Oh, yeah, I remember telling my mom about this little black kid in class who was causing all sorts of trouble, writing on the walls and running around the room. Of course when my mom came up to visit and investigate there was only one little black child in the class. I had been telling on myself to my mom. What a silly kid!

When we came back home my cousins used to make fun of me 'cause I talked funny. I was like, "That's strange." I remember thinking that I thought I talked like them and having to readjust really quickly. I also remember having to go to a real school and not being very happy about that.

At first we lived off of 59th and Walnut. We moved from there after what happened to Junie. Yeah, that was really sad. I'll never forget how nice he was to the family. One night he came running toward the house and got shot. Dad's practice was downstairs at the time. They took him downstairs and tried to revive him but it was too late, they couldn't save him. And then the paramedics came and it was too late for Junie. We moved to Wynnefield the next month.

I think Wynnefield was initially mostly Jewish back then. Then a couple of black families moved in and we were one of them. I remember having a Jewish friend until we went away to school. She stopped coming around for some reason. And now Wynnefield is like it was back on Walnut Street. If you turn on the news there's likely to be a report of some shooting or killing around here. But, now it's coming back with a lot of whites buying houses, fixing them up, and moving back into the neighborhood.

Another memory that I have is that my grandmother was a domestic. She had pride in her cleaning ability; she took pride in that life, it was her life. I can clean a house today if I want to. I know how because of her. She used to put a Bobbi Pin behind the toilet to see if we had really cleaned the bathroom because that's what they used to do to her. There was this one time when we were cleaning the wooden floors. I had put the bucket down on the floor as we were moving through the room. She asked me if I had put the bucket there like that. Then she told me I needed to get some newspaper to put under it and said, "The misses would be mad at you if the bucket left a ring." My mom walked by at that moment and began telling my Nana not to talk to me like that. I just remember my mom saying that cleaning floors was not in my future, that I would

not be cleaning anybody's floors when I grew up. I just remember feeling this generational shift at that moment. That was a defining moment for the three of us.

Joanne

I remember when we moved into our house. It was during Christmas break of first grade. Before that we lived at 57th and Pemberton Streets, which was not too far from Cedar Avenue. I vaguely remember a couple of White families living on our block back then. I don't remember too much of that time. I do remember that one day before we moved I told my mom that I was going to run away from home. Yeah, silly, huh? Because I wasn't allowed to go anywhere, I asked her to watch me cross the street so I could go to Mrs. Brown's house. I know that I must have been around five 'cause we moved when I was six. When we moved I was allowed to cross the street.

I remember when we came out to buy the house. It was a development and they had a street of homes and each street was a different style house. You went to the house on the corner and that's where the office was and you picked out which style of house you liked. Back then they called them row homes. And now they call them town homes and charge you extra for the name. They pulled out this map, I don't know why I remember this, and showed you where the house with the style that you wanted was located. And then they took you to that house to see it. We got out here early and there was hardly anyone else here and you could actually pick out the exact house that you wanted and where you wanted it. They were still doing stuff in the house when we first came to see it. There are still eight of the original owners on the block. My folks' are among them.

My dad told me that it was supposed to be temporary, that we were only supposed to be here for five years. But, my mom like the house and so we stayed. I have strong memories of moving in 'cause it was over Christmas. When we got to the house there wasn't anything in it 'cause we were waiting on the movers. Then we moved in and I was really lonely 'cause at that time it was just me. So every time a family moved in I was the self appointed welcome committee. I would go over and knock on the door to ask if they had any kids. If they said yes I'd ask if they could come out to play. I knew everybody on the block. Eventually, there were a lot of kids on the block.

My sister was born when I was eleven. I pushed her all over the neighborhood in the stroller with a friend whose mother had a baby around the same time as my mom. There wasn't an awful lot to do around here. We used to ride our bikes a lot. There was this pile of dirt next to the last lot in the neighborhood. We called it "The Hill." Right next to it was what we called the Tot Lot for the little kids. We used to try to ride our bikes up and down that mound of dirt. That was all before I went out to Irwins.

My dad was a publisher. He just retired recently. Back then I think he worked for RCA and it had something to do with communications and the government. I was never really sure about what he did and he wasn't very forthcoming with information. But, he used to travel to Alaska a lot to some military base out there.

I think he wanted a Quaker school 'cause of their values I guess. I think someone at work told him about it. When we moved out here my mom didn't drive. So my dad taught her how to drive so she could take me to school. Even after he taught her to drive she didn't do it very well so she didn't want to drive too far. So Lansdowne Friends was the closest Quaker school to where we lived then.

I remember being in kindergarten with Estelle. There were only twelve of us in the class. The school was really small back then. I remember being in kindergarten, being in the classroom, but I don't remember that teacher. I do remember all of my other teachers back then. They were all White. I remember the principal. We used to call her Mrs. Leadbottom. I remember the hikes in the woods and going to meeting every week. Yeah, I remember that. Fifth grade is a vivid memory. That was the year that I got into trouble one day during meeting. We were supposed to be quiet and I got a case of the giggles. I don't remember what happened but I had everyone on our pew giggling. And then my teacher started giggling too. And then it turned to tears 'cause we were trying so hard not to laugh. I'm pretty sure that was my fifth grade teacher. She was nice like that.

Theresa

Where do I start? Early childhood experiences, huh? I grew up in North Philly. I remember summers when from sun up until sun down all that we did was jump rope. That's why I was so thin back then. Yeah, this title resonates with me. If you say plaits or Double Dutch you know it's an ole school sister talking. Today it's braids and do they even do Double Dutch anymore? We jumped until you couldn't even see the rope. You could hear it because it was that telephone wire. But, you couldn't see it. But, you definitely did not want that thing to hit you. We were in with all the girls on the block if you could jump rope. We jumped Double Dutch, drew the Hop Scotch on the street with chalk, and the boys played stick ball. I remember sitting on the steps and plaiting hair.

My father finished High School. He was very smart and felt bitter about the way the Black man was treated. He grew up in Richmond and used to say, "The Black man was held down." He was just so bitter. There was a lot of pain whenever he talked about

his early life. My mother, was ah, you know, only went to the tenth grade. You know, I definitely did not have wealth. When I talk to my sons about my childhood they have no concept. They look at me like “You did what?” When we go back to visit my old neighborhood on Opal Street they are like, “This is where you lived!?” I’d say “Yeah, it was better then.” Then there were families, it was a real neighborhood. You know, Okay, It’s a little rough now that the crack heads have moved in. Back in the day they weren’t crack heads. They were hoodlums and there were families and we were all struggling.

I was truly the ‘Ghetto Girl’ of the group. Half the time my father didn’t even work. I don’t think that anybody knew. For many, many years my parents worked sporadically or not at all. And my mother worked in a garment factory and sometimes she was laid off. But, they made it so that I had what I needed in terms of books and stuff.

Wynnetta

I do not remember moving into our home because I was a baby. But, it was my only home until I went away to college. In researching this project I learned that we were not the first owners of our home like I had always thought. My parents and a few other families, looking for a better place to raise their kids, moved out here from West and North Philly. They bought houses in Darby Township because they were reasonably priced, were well made, and had lots of green spaces for kids. Everyone that moved in had at least two kids. We all grew up together. The original owners were white. They sold and moved further west and north. As they did more and more Black families

moved in until it was a totally segregated, totally Black community. We might have been poor but then so was everyone else so it didn't matter.

I was definitely the tomboy of the neighborhood. My dad had his heart set on a boy when I was born so I was raised with a healthy appreciation for sports. There wasn't anything that the boys could do on the playground that I wouldn't at least try. I have the scarred up knees to prove it.

My early school memories pretty much all center around my family and my home. I used to make my mom and dad tell me about their school and about the time that they met. I remember school and education being safe subjects. My mom used to tell me stories about her schooling and my dad would show me pictures. They both graduated from Dobbins High School in Philadelphia. I can remember looking through their yearbook and my mom would point out all of my aunts and uncles in the pictures. My mom made school sound so exciting and fun that I remember I couldn't wait to start.

My mother would tell me about the time that she spent in the one-room school that her grandmother used to teach in when she lived in North Carolina. School and education were always a part of any conversation about our future. And college was always a part of that future. My mom had bought this blue reading machine that you put this roll of paper in and turned the handle so that only one sentence of words was seen at a time through the window. I was so proud of being able to read the words that I couldn't wait to go to real school and read more than one line at a time.

I was very excited about my first day of school. I wanted to walk to school by myself, without my mom and with the big kids. When she decided to let me go ahead alone I just fell in line with the other kids on the street walking to school. My memories

of that time are of being really happy and loving school. I remember sitting on the left side of the classroom near the back. I think it was because of my last name starting with an "S." My best friend in school had a last name that started with "C" and she was near the front of the room. I remember liking that room because one whole wall was windows. We had metal chairs with tan wooden seats and backs that were really slippery. I remember the school had a cafeteria and taking my milk and lunch money to school tied in a handkerchief everyday.

The cafeteria had a stage. I performed in the Christmas Play on that stage. I was Star Number One. We also had Girl Scout troop meetings in that cafeteria. I don't really remember a playground but there was a huge football field beyond the black top behind the school. I do remember playing kick ball and monkey-in-the-middle on the black top. My favorite school memories were of Field Days. We got out of school all day to run races on the black top. I remember feeling very special when my father would take off from work to come cheer me on.

We went across the street to Couch's store together after school on Fridays to buy pickles and penny candy. We crossed at the crossing guard who used to hold up a red stop sign to make the cars stop so we could cross. There were no traffic lights in Darby Township at the time. My favorite candies were Squirrel Nut Zippers, Peanut Chews, and the wax lips. Couch's also had the best barrel pickles on the planet. When I was hungry I'd spend my money on a pickle instead of candy. But then I would have to walk the fast way home to get the pickle juice off of my hands. We would buy our candy before the crossing guard at the other end of Hook Road left. We walked home a lot of different ways and every Friday we did so while eating out penny candies. Our section

of houses was the farthest away from the school so our candy was always finished before we arrived at the house.

We knew that our after school routine meant doing homework before anything else. Then and only then were we allowed to play on the playground behind the house until mom called us for dinner. I don't ever remember homework taking so long as to prevent playground time. Sometimes we had enough time to come back outside to play after dinner and we knew that we could stay outside until the street lights came on.

Our chores included KP duty – dad was a Marine. We cleaned the entire house every weekend after we returned from ballet, clarinet, and art classes. The three of us rotated on dish and toilet duty. I learned to cook during the time that my mom was sick. My dad used to compliment me no matter what the food tasted like. I am sure that's why I love to cook today.

Memories of my childhood also include our annual camping trips. Those trips always included a neighborhood friend and one cousin. We traveled to Virginia, Canada, Maine, and almost all of New England. Momie would spend weeks doing laundry and grocery shopping for the trip. Dad would pack the tent, the supplies and the suitcases in and on the car the night before. Momie would fry a few chickens and make deviled eggs. We started each trip in our pajamas because Momie and Daddy loved to begin the trip around three or four in the morning. They said that riding on the highway with no one but the trucks was relaxing. It was also their quiet time before we woke to question, complain, fight, and plead. I learned to love these trips because I was able to spend time with my dad. I was impressed with his survival skills and always felt safe out in the wilderness with him in the tent.

Walter Benjamin (1969) presents us with a explanation of storytelling as existing for the pleasure of the connection. For Benjamin the finest stories are not those that provide direct information served up for analysis. My challenge in seeking to add an explanation of chosen memories exists in the danger of altering the memory as it stood at the birth. Our memories, read in concert, read as a collage of experiences, tell a story of family, friends, and the expansion of our sheltered boundaries. Whether a reserved and thoughtful, or an open and connective storyteller, each sharing presents a piece of the puzzle, a piece of the characteristic from which it was shared. To analyze it in many ways defeats the presentation of the story as anything other than a link or strand of connection. Our stories, our memories of our stories are just that, stories. The decision to analyze or connect is a choice for the reader.

Chase the Fox: Segregating our Desegregated Memories

Dr. Martin Luther King gave his 'I Have a Dream' Speech in Mississippi in 1963. Philadelphia had endured race riots in North Philly in 1964. Baltimore, Trenton and Washington, DC had suffered through race riots in 1968. The country was searching for answers to the increasing racial strife at that time. We arrived at Agnes Irwin in 1969 just as the school celebrated its 100th year anniversary. It was a step; a small step toward integration. Our infusion into the school culture instead of an exchange of cultural riches resulted in it becoming a case of desegregation rather than full integration. Yet, studies that compared the impact of racial versus sexual interactions have found that adolescent students were far more likely to segregate along sexual lines than racial. Gender, it would appear, is far more likely a determinant of friendships than race. (Schofield, 1982).

Estelle

I don't really have any memories of segregation or integration. Not as a child, not in the midst of it. I had questions, like why certain friends stopped playing with me. So yeah, there was that pain but that was always there, that difference. But I didn't know it as an awareness of segregation, not as a child.

But, I think those were just kid questions. I learned later that the why had to do with race and stuff.

There was this one incident at the school. We were playing out at the front of the school on that banister and that huge wall of windows. Anyway, remember how we used to slide down that banister? We did it even though we knew we weren't supposed to. I don't remember why we were there. I think it was in between classes or something and I was the only middle-schooler there with some upper school students. There was this man who came by on a tour of the school and asked if our uniforms were due to some racial separation. I have no idea why he went straight to that as an explanation? We explained that it was just because I was in Middle School and they were all in Upper School. Wow, I hadn't thought about that in years. That was a weird moment.

You know how it was. We were focused on getting through, not getting bad grades and pulling our grades up; writing papers, and getting the hell outta there! Yeah, there was the social differences; not getting invited to the parties. I'll never forget that senior, graduation party thing and those girls, and not being invited. I just remember wanting to get through and out.

Joanne

When we moved out here off of Linbergh the area back then was really mixed. The area around it was mostly working class Whites. And they were not real happy to see us move in. That was one of the reasons why my father didn't want me to go to the public school near here. When Blacks kids walked through the neighborhood they used to get jumped by the White kids. So, they stayed on their end and we stayed on our end of the street pretty much. I know that had something to do with why my dad sent me to Lansdowne Friends. I know he was dead set against me going to the public schools around here. Aside from that I was completely oblivious to segregation and stuff like that. I didn't pay much attention to stuff like that. It wasn't a part of my life. I grew up with White kids. Our neighborhood was mixed. Lansdowne Friends was mixed.

But, my mom used to tell us things and as kids we never knew where it was coming from. She used to say things to me like, "Don't ever tell me that you don't like somebody because of the way that they look. If you don't like somebody it better be because of something that they did to you." I remember thinking okay and not understanding what the big deal was? And then she sat me down one day to explain what she meant. Her dad was White and there was a lot of pain in those memories for her. And stuff like that was just not talked about. But, for me it wasn't a big deal.

This all came up again recently when my son had to do a family tree project for his sociology class. I told him that I wasn't going to be able to take

him back too far. And because his professor was White I told him he was going to have to write a disclaimer and explain that he was trying to do the project but we couldn't go back to the Mayflower or to some tribe. His professor was going to have to

understand that a few of his branches were going to be empty. But, no, because our neighborhood was mixed and my school was mixed I didn't have a sense of segregation back then.

Theresa

By the time that I came to Irwins in the ninth grade I definitely had an awareness of segregation, desegregation, and integration. I have to tell you about this, about my awareness. When I first went to elementary school, okay, I went to the local North Philly elementary school. That was T. M. Pierce, for first and second grade. But, then busing came in, Okay. And that's when they were selecting... the school system in Philadelphia was selecting the best and the brightest kids from North Philly and busing them out. So I was one of those kids. I got on a bus in third grade and went to a Jewish elementary school way over in the northeast, Solis-Cohen. So I was plucked out. And I was, again, the only. Back then only the Black kids were brought in. The Black kids were bused in from all over the city. None of the buses took those kids and put them out. And again we thought that this was White, and Jewish, and rich, so it had to be better, right?

That was my experience from the third grade. I remember it all vividly. I remember getting off the bus in third grade and there were posters on the gates and on the telephone poles saying that they didn't want desegregation. They were all anti-desegregation. Can you believe that? I was in third grade so I never went to an all-Black school at all from second grade. Because from there, from Solis-Cohen, and of course I had all A's and from there, I went to Masterman. There was a girl in my church who went to Masterman and I remember everybody thought that was a good school.

Masterman was a lab and college-prep school. Now it's very diverse. Now it's probably about 10% Puerto Rican, probably 30% Black and the rest were White. But, when I was at Masterman at that time did not have a lot of Black students and the ones who came were from all over Philly. They had a lot of Center City kids and Society Hill kids. I remember Masterman being very diverse in terms of economics. I only remember one or a couple of Black teachers. There might have been more but I only remember one or two. I had great grades and everything. I had been skipped a grade. So I was always the desegregation subject, the subject of desegregation. I was always dropped into someplace. I was the desegregation test case.

I was always in a desegregated situation but there was always that feeling that wherever I was wasn't the best so they had to take me out and move me. You know, 'cause I got good grades. They selected the students. There were kids on my block who were not chosen. Because, back then they were in what they used to call the slow class, the slow section. There was this feeling that they were being left behind. They got left behind and we were aware that only certain children were being chosen. We all went up to the neighborhood school together each morning and then some of us got on a bus and some of us didn't.

When I was on the board at Agnes Irwin I discussed the whole integration thing with Penny Moss and Adele Sands. They both said that they didn't do the whole integration thing the right way. If they had it to do all over again they would have been more thoughtful about it. When they brought Janine in by herself she was the only one. At first she wasn't treated very well at all. They were always concerned with protecting her.

I also remember there was a bit of friction between her and you guys when you all arrived in the seventh grade. But, think about it all from her perspective. She had been “The Girl.” She was “Chief Back Girl.” Now, there were these other girls. These ‘Satellite Black Girls.’ Her specialness was gone.

I will always be thankful to Irwins for my life but I fault them in that way that they handled the whole integration thing. When we were there the cultural exchange went one way. We were dropped in there to experience their environment but nothing of our environment was there. There was no Black celebration. We didn’t even have Black literature that we studied in English. Well, yeah, we did do Uncle Tom’s Cabin, but I mean come on?! It was always the European literature, the Renaissance and Reformation. There was nothing affirming, not in Music, it was always European. There was nothing that affirmed us culturally. But, not only that, these White girls who were supposed to gain some benefit, or experience this cultural exchange got nothing. They didn’t get anything because it was all about them. We were expected to come in and absorb it all. They thought that they were helping us by exposing us to their world. And that was good, that was very beneficial to us because that world is the dominant culture. But a lot of interaction that could have been beneficial to everybody was lost and a lot of the affirmation that could have happened for us as Black girls was lost. We had to go home to get that. Thank goodness we could go home. Imagine if we had gone to Shipley or Baldwin as boarders at the time? We had to go home to be reminded of the fact that we had art, music, literature. They could have at least thrown in Richard Wright.

I’ve always wondered about the why of the integration at Irwins. The riots were in ’68. I know the counselor at Masterman saying that she had been contacted about

students who might qualify for a scholarship. That inquiry came into a school in the northeast section of Philadelphia. So I think there was a deliberate effort on the part of Irwins to recruit students of color. But they really missed an opportunity with us to make it something incredible.

Wynnetta

I don't remember there being any differences in the people in town or at school. Everybody around me looked like me. It was such a small community. My world was only composed of a few people. My whole world, as a child, was pretty much Black. I guess because of that I had privilege of a different type. I didn't know anything else except that Black folk could do everything. I thought that was just the way the world was too. My mom worked in the Commissioner's office. She knew everybody so everybody knew us.

Everything in my world revolved around Lincoln Elementary or the firehouse or the playground behind our house. We did everything back there, kickball, basketball, baseball, touch football, swings, climbed tees, hide-n-seek. We jumped rope out front in the street for some reason. I guess because it was a nice flat surface.

The only time I remember even noticing kids who were different was when we went to Ballet School at Settlement Music School in South Philly every Saturday. Even then I don't think it was a big deal. I just remember not being able to make my foot point quite like the other girls in the class and not being able to do a full cartwheel.

My mom used to tell us stories about growing up in the south and having to go into different doors and drink out of different fountains. My dad used to tease her by saying he had married a Redbone. She would get so mad and turn red that I thought

that's what the nickname meant. Whenever we complained about her making us do something or go somewhere in a strange part of the city she would tell us that we were lucky to even have the opportunity.

My awareness of race came later from my mother and her struggles with it as a biracial child and woman. She would talk about it but I could always tell that there was still some anger and pain there. She tried to explain it by saying because her dad was White and because of her red hair and light skin that she grew up being too White for the Black kids and too Black for the White kids. She grew up lonely and an only child until she was nineteen and a few months away from getting married. She would caution us to judge people by what was inside and not to dislike somebody simply because of skin color.

Then around the fourth or fifth grade a new family moved into the neighborhood. They had four sons. It was a big deal for a while that their dad was black and their mom was white. She was from Germany. We hardly ever saw either of their parents. The curiosity didn't last very long once we found out they could play basketball, baseball, and football. We didn't care what color they were.

We were old enough to know that our lives would be different yet young enough not to know the degrees of difference. We were aware of the opportunity that we were being provided at Irwins. We knew that we were Chasing the Fox through the ropes. The school's integrative attempt had provided us with an opportunity to lift the veil and partake of the lesson, the culture of power and privilege. While we might see that world, while we might learn from that world our visual differences and their perceived differences would allow us each to come only so close to being a part of that world. At the

time I believe we were ultimately focused on homework, grades, tests, and conjugating French and Latin verbs. Segregation and integration were grown-up discussions. Trying to develop strategies to avoid getting jumped or beat-up resided in our discussions of trying to get through the day to day.

Getting In and Out of the Ropes: Alternate Foot Jumping

Each jump rope session has a unique personality that is set by the beat. Whether up on the down, or down on the up, the beat of the ropes combines with the bodily beat of the jumpers and enders to provide the life of the session. The tap-whoosh-tap, the beat, provides the background for the jumps and the pulse of the chant. If the beat is too subtle, enders will fall off of the necessary pace to keep the ropes moving. If the beat is too strong or too overpowering the voices, the individual components, are no longer able to be heard.

Travel to and from our home communities, our Jump Rope Communities highlighted the double consciousness of our existences. Leaving our home communities to attend school meant leaving its familiar pace. Venturing out was a necessary journey in order to avoid internal racial conflicts and growing community dangers. Venturing out was also a strategy of progress. Our parents each saw that the internal pace of our home communities could no longer match the expanding pace of the educational hopes that they held for us.

The beat of the jump rope, the tap-whoosh-tap of our education changed from one of community familiarity to educational survival. Our personal and cultural beats were stilled as we learned the down on the up beat, the unique rhythmic stress of The Agnes Irwin School, in order to successfully navigate our new jump rope sessions.

We each arrived at Agnes Irwin in search of something as a result of the urging, the sacrifice, or the support of key figures in our lives. Our certainties centered on the move being something unknown and something different. Our hopes centered on it being something better. Our admittance into the community at Irwins either caused an exclusion from the community at home or a difficult time navigating the community at Irwins. Getting in and out of the ropes, in and out of the two communities required a series of alternate foot jumping.

Estelle

I went to a Friends school for a bit and then out to Irwins. Friends only went up to the sixth grade at the time. I think I went to a Quaker school 'cause mom was in education and knew about where she wanted us to go. I'm pretty sure it was Irwins for the same reason. She was a teacher up in Norristown and then served as the Superintendent up there for a while. Mom just handled all of that stuff.

I don't remember having any problems going back and forth between our worlds...I never really had any issues with the uniform as a source of attention on the train. I remember I just muddled through it all on the train ride home. But, not many of the white kids stayed on the train as it went from stop to stop – Rosemont, Haverford, Ardmore on to the Wynnewood stop. And I had the Shipleys and Baldwinites get on the train with us in their uniforms and I guess I never really thought about it. I do remember that after all of the white kids got off we were the only ones left with the domestics; us in our uniforms and them in theirs.

Now I remember problems as I started my medical career. You know there's the usual stuff. I remember this residency assignment. I got assigned to this racist in

Delaware with a deep southern accent, who took one look at me and said “Well not only do we have to work with a red dot, pointing at this woman from India, now we have to work with a coon too!” I remember turning around to the nurse and asking her what a coon was and her saying that it wasn’t something nice. I remember leaving and getting written up for leaving an assignment. That man is the reason that I wear dreds today because he didn’t like the braids and beads that I was wearing at the time. It’s amazing that that still goes on today.

Yeah, there was this one time that the hospital had a White patient come in and demand that she not have any Blacks touch her. And the hospital gave in. They removed a couple of nurses from her rotation and shifted everybody around. I was livid when I found out and of course when I asked people to stand up or to sign my petition everybody was like “Ah, um, ah.” No one wanted to do anything about it. The hospital said it was an isolated incident and showed me a copy of a letter that they said they sent to the woman’s family. It said something about the hospital being a non-discriminatory hospital and that if the patient had issue with that, she should go to another hospital. But, you never know if they really sent it. It’s hard to believe that officials still cave to those type of racist demands and pressure, but they do. I still can’t believe it.

Joanne

I don’t remember why I went to Irwins. I guess it was the next thing to do, the next place to go. My dad made all of the decisions in the household, including where we went to school. I think the principal at Lansdowne Friends recommended that I go to Irwins. But, once I started going to Irwins that’s when all of my problems in the neighborhood started.

I had more of a problem in my neighborhood than I did at Agnes Irwin. I never felt at Agnes Irwin that I wasn't accepted or that I was any different than anyone else going to Agnes Irwin. That I think was a credit to Irwins in one way. In another way it kinda set you up because you figured that every White person was going to treat you that way. And we know that they didn't and don't. I mean I never had a problem with anything until afterwards and not even then cause Princeton had pretty much the same kinda person.

The main problem with going to Irwins was that you had to try to be two different people, ya know? I had a real problem in my neighborhood. I had to be two different people. I was the different one. Aside from the one girlfriend who lived down the street and a friend that I still have today from that time, I had only two people in the neighborhood who would talk to me. I had like no friends in the neighborhood because everybody went to the same schools. If they didn't go to the local public schools they went to West Catholic or they would go to a different Catholic school, but to go to a prep school back then, oh no.

I remember being picked on even in the summer time. Kids in my neighborhood back then were cruel. They would all get together and do stuff and leave me out. They used to have dances and my mother would ask me if I was panning to go and I would ask her what for? Life for me was more of a problem here than it was for me out there.

Theresa

My parents had really no idea about anything to do with private schools, or schools on the Main Line or anything like that. That was just not something that they knew or understood or had experience with. I was the first one in the family to go

straight from high school to college. No one in my family understands me. Some of my siblings have gone back since I did it. But, when I went through the whole Irwins thing no one in my family had any idea about me and what I was going through.

When Irwins came up my mom didn't really understand the process. When the counselor explained that it was a god thing and that it would help me to go places and do things her antennae went up. She said we're going to make this happen for me. She was smart like that. She thought since it was all White it was real good. She and I went around and did all of what we needed to do for the testing. I remember those psychological tests.

We had to take every mode of transportation moving to get from North Philly out to Rosemont for my interview at Irwins. Then once I got in at one point I was taking the train from Suburban Station. That was very expensive but it was very direct. For a period of time I used to work in a bakery on the weekends to make enough money just to pay for the transportation. Then I even tried to take the number two bus to someplace and then another train and that was even cheaper than the train from Suburban Station. I remember that one year I lived with my older sister in Sharon Hill and I used to get a ride with you and your dad. I just remember his truck and that he had some kind of business that required a truck. When I look back on that period I am not really clear about how I got back and forth to school or to her house. I was never really sure about that train and if I wasn't with you I was lost totally. But, they thought that was cheaper than getting to school from North Philly. My mom was determined to make it work.

I had girlfriends on Opal Street where I grew up. We were friends from before school, from 3, 4, 5 years old; the block girls. But, when I was chosen to go out and

none of them were bused, that caused a big rift. It was the same for my sisters too. That caused an even bigger rift, I think than the problems dealing with me being disliked because of being light skinned with long hair. That was a big problem on Opal Street. They hated me and I was always on the cusp of being in or out with them. I was always trying to fit in with those girls on Opal Street. Double Dutch helped but it did not help that I was light, with long hair and I went to a different school. The minute I started being bused the very girls who used to be my friends started to pick on me, pull my hair, and threatened me. They used the street chalk to write mean things about me and it was all because I was bused. It was all because I was chosen. They used to beat me up because I was chosen. It was all a horrible thing that was done to Black children because the kids who weren't chosen felt like sh__! I guess they wanted to make us feel like they did? Looking back on it, there was always something wrong with you. Either you weren't smart enough to be put out of the group, by being bused. Or you were too smart for the group and you got bused. Either way the kids who weren't picked, the kids who were left behind felt like crap. By the time I went to Agnes Irwin, I was already on the outs with the girls on the block. I was long gone by then.

I was like Joanne, I had very few friends in my home neighborhood. I was clearly different and moving on a different path. I recently connected with a girlfriend from Opal Street. Her sister used to kick my a__ but we were friends. Crazy, I know. She had a baby when she was fifteen and was into her whole thing. We were on different paths. When we connected she said that she hated my guts back then and resented me. We talked about that. We talked about desegregation. To this day it happened in a way that I don't like. Desegregation happened based on certain kids being selected. That was held

out as something that was going to make your life better; that this was going to make your future better. But, what about those other kids? What about the kids who weren't chosen? Why weren't their schools made better?

We were the ones who were chosen and the rest were left behind. We were the ones who were able to get out of the Back inner city. Some of those girls are still on Opal Street and it is not a pretty sight.

Wynnetta

My mom was working in the commissioner's office by then. My mom could talk to and with anybody. She used to find out more stuff just by listening to other people's conversations. When one of the commissioners mentioned that his daughter was going to Agnes Irwin School she pumped him for all of the application and interview information that he would give her. The next thing I knew I was going off to do interviews and buy uniforms. My dad didn't want us to go. They had a fight about e going. I think he thought that when he said no she would let the idea go. But, my mom had made up her mind. She worked three jobs to help pay for the part that the scholarship to Irwins didn't pay. She worked a day job, a night job, and a weekend job just to pay our portion of the tuition after the scholarship.

There was also the school bus accident. My mom was already thinking about someplace else to put us in school. That entire ordeal left her angry with the school system. She was always saying that she just wanted something better for us. Not many of the kids graduating from Darby Township High were going off to college. And college was a major thing for my mom. So the timing on Irwins was perfect.

Irwins made it very easy to be involved in a lot of different things if you wanted. There was something for everyone out there. A lot of the extra stuff was after school until around five or six o'clock. That meant not getting home until six or seven. I was having a pretty tough time back in my neighborhood so I would stay for just about everything that the school had to offer to avoid going home. Once I was home I usually had so much homework to do that I didn't have time to play outside anyway. I lived in two different worlds and they collided at the 69th street terminal. That's where I would change from my street clothes into my uniform on the way out to Irwins and then out of my uniform and back into my street clothes on my way back home. I quickly learned that the uniform was a dead giveaway that I was a preppie and that was a definite invitation for a beat down. The loaded book bag was bad enough but the uniform was a blazing signal of difference.

The workload at Irwins was incredible. I know that part of the time I was hiding in my books at home. It seemed that nobody understood me. Not my friends back home and not my family. Even still, I was also trying to make sure that I didn't disappoint my parents. I spent a lot of time being afraid about that. So I wasn't as concerned about not having friends at home anymore. I was more afraid of failing out of school and no longer seeing that proud look on my parents' faces when we celebrated another Irwins accomplishment.

I really only had one main friend at home, Rhonda. She had her own demons to battle. She was always being punished for something. Her mom used to cut off one of her plaits if she did the smallest thing wrong. Her mom was just cruel to her. But, she was the only one who never treated me any differently from the time that I went to

public school to the time that I went out to Irwins. She would ask me to tell her all about my life out there. I really think she was genuinely curious about a world that could be so different from anything that we knew.

For a time I was friends with the girls who used to go to Catholic school. From my neighborhood, where all of the kids went to the neighborhood public schools, they were the closest thing I had to comrades in the struggle. My equalizer at home, when I did venture out to play with the neighborhood kids, was the jump rope. I could jump Double Dutch like crazy and so long as I was jumping rope no one was jumping me.

We each found our way to Irwins. My mother believed that Irwins found its way to us. She was convinced that this was the world that I had been preparing for during my entire life to that point. While this may have been a world that was waiting on us to find it, it was not a world that my home world was ready to release us to. I believe that my transition among the four of us was the most difficult. Unaware of classrooms filled with anyone other than neighbors and little brown children who looked just like me; unaware of teachers who did not look like me, my transition was not like those experienced by my classmates. And yet, we each experienced the pain and the sense of lonely outsider within status in both of our worlds.

Through the Tunnel: Rememories of Irwins

Our memories, our rememories of Irwins have been viewed through the tunnel of time. We each remembered bits, pieces and snatches of the events that made up a good deal of our adolescent world between the years of 1969 and 1975. The struggle to capture those stories was due to a combination of memory loss and a desire to shed light on the best of the times. The content of our story spoke to the importance of the event.

We had indeed made history, or better yet, herstory, when we arrived at Agnes Irwin as the school community marked its hundredth year anniversary. The significance of the event was not foremost in our day to day. The significance of the event did not impact the expectations of our teachers. We were held to the same high standards and expected to deliver on the chance taken in our admittance.

In the revisiting, the retelling, and the sharing an effort was being made to define and claim. Our stories demonstrated the self defined empowerment, self-determination, self-definition, self-reliance, and self expression of Black Feminist Thought. However, missing from the stories was our cultural literacies. Curriculum, European based curriculum, became the literacy of our expression. We were determined to excel through the literacy of academics.

Despite the pervasiveness of race in the greater society that surrounded this school and the existence of our racial differences, race was rarely discussed. The non-discussion was a privilege that was theirs to claim. We were visitors in their world so our race was not viewed as their problem. The discussion of our race and cultural difference at that time in history served little to no purpose. Our cultural contributions were not viewed as possessive of social capital. There was a perceived diminished value of our culture and as a result there existed little interest convergence on the part of the world that was Agnes Irwin. Our memories, our social structures, our experiences were merged in their vocabulary, their literacies, and their components of importance. Save for the few who ventured into our home communities our Irwin classmates did not feel as Clara Silverstein (2004) who “felt privileged getting an insider’s glimpse into a black person’s real life”(p. 43).

Among the four of us Estelle was the closest to that population in class and economic level. The child of degreed and professional parents their world was not a new one to her. Agnes Irwin was not a gift, it was merely a means to an end. As a result, I believe she was intimidating to them. She became our dissenting voice, our voice of question, our voice of demands. She was our radical. We did not know enough of her courage at the time to support and surround our sister of defiance. Estelle had learned the same lesson as bell hooks. She knew that "it is not necessary to give yourself over to them to learn" (1990, p. 342). For that she paid a price of double exclusion. For that her memories throughout this journey down memory lane are guarded and painful.

Estelle

I remember our assemblies and marching down to the hall and waiting to sit down together, at once and thinking wow, you are not in Kansas anymore. They were wild. The whole experience at Irwins was wild. I did not enjoy my time there.

I also remember we had this one classmate who used to like to stir the pot. I remember her telling me that a lot of folks didn't want us there, that they were nervous about us coming. You could tell that some of them had been told by their parents to be nice to us. I remember I was invited to sleep over at one classmate's house. I think she invited me over because she thought it was a cool thing to do; a cool way of showing that some of them could be nice to us. The next day she told me that her house boy was upset and thought that I should not have been there; that Blacks and whites shouldn't mix their worlds.

She kept asking me what he meant by that like I was supposed to know. She brought that up again at our last reunion. That was kinda strange that she still had that in

her memory. That she would bring that up again in mixed company was really weird. And now she is a teacher at a Friends school. The whole thing made me wonder, “What was that all about?”

Wynnetta, I remember we were lab partners in Science with Mrs. Gulden right? I remember that I liked doing the dissecting and you liked doing the writing. I was very happy to do the dissecting and you were very happy to do the lab notes. Yeah, now that was a partnership that worked for me. I loved doing the cutting but hated writing it all up.

Joanne

I remembered really liking Agnes Irwins. No, I take that back. I really liked it after the seventh grade. Seventh grade was tough because for the first time in my life I failed at something. It was tough for me but it was tougher for my father. I don't remember being all that bent out of shape about it. We were doing this crazy Math and I didn't understand it. That was when I first met Mr. Gardner. He became my math tutor because I bombed Math. After going from being a straight 'A' student to that was really hard. And then they had the nerve to mail home the report cards.

I remember one year I knew I was getting a bad grade in something and I decided to intercept the mail. Now, you know that wasn't very smart. You and I both know that because my father was spending his money he wants to see what he paid for. I read the report card, tore it up and dropped it in the trash at 69th Street Terminal. I knew it couldn't make it to my house from there. Then my father starting asking questions and he kept asking, and asking. Then he told me to go by the front desk and ask for a copy. I was shocked! I didn't even know that they had copies. That never even dawned on me.

That made it worse. Then I had to go by the office and ask Mrs. Jacobs for a copy of my report card and then I had to hand-deliver that bad report card to my father. UGLY!!

Ugly! I thought the world was going to cave in because of his reaction. That's when I met Mr. Gardner because the school hooked me up with him as a tutor and I spent the summer of seventh grade doing homework while everyone else was outside playing. Seventh grade was the last time that school was hard for me and that was only in Math. The A's came easy for me. I didn't have to work hard just a lot. I enjoyed Agnes Irwin.

Out there I got invited to classmate's homes. For the most part their parents were nice. We did have that one mom who hated us and let us know it.

There were a few who carried it off well and we found out later, as we grew older, that many of them were undercover bigots. I remember some of them sharing stories about their moms and the shame that they felt about their parents' attitudes and the words that they used to describe us. I remember the freedom we had during senior year to leave during breaks. I used to go home with Gay West almost every day for lunch. Her mom was so nice to me. I remember getting lost in her house every time I tried to find the bathroom. Her housekeeper, who spoke no English, used to fix us lunch everyday. I just remember having a great time at Irwins.

I remember feeling bad when we did stuff at school and everyone else's parents came up to the school and I would look out in the audience and not see them. I know it was far but I remember thinking that they sent me out there, the least they could do was come out there for stuff that I did. My mom would never come up to the school. She said she didn't feel comfortable there. I didn't understand that because when I was at Lansdowne Friends she stayed up there. She was even the teacher's aid when I was in

second grade. But, then I have to remember that my sister was born right before I went into the sixth grade. I remember doing all of the artsy stuff like Glee Club and Drama. Because all of that was after school I used to have to sleep over at a friend's house out there if there was a concert or something She use to tell me that she wasn't coming all the way out there to pick me up at that hour of the night. She did come once; up to Episcopal when I was in Brigadoon. That was the only time that she came. My father rarely came.

Theresa

My earliest memories of Irwins are of my interview with Mrs. Lenox. Her office was so dark with all of that dark wood. She had this light on her desk. We sat on the couch in her office. My interview was the first time that I went into that office. We used to sit out in the hall in line waiting for her to tell us our grades.

When I arrived in the ninth grade my comfort level went up when I saw the three of you. I didn't know what to expect and just seeing you guys made me feel a bit more relaxed and much more comfortable in that environment. Had I come there and not see any of you it would have put my guard up quite a bit.

I remember not doing my Senior assembly as scheduled. All of the people who didn't do their assembly were called up to do something together. I think there were six of us. We were supposed to speak extemporaneously. We were supposed to plan something and I just didn't get around to it. I just remembered being mortified about the whole process.

What a lot of people may not know about my time at Irwins was that I had no money, zero money. The school paid for my eyeglasses, my class ring, my graduation

gown, and all of my books. Mrs. Woodward took care of everything. My parents could not even afford to buy my uniforms. I was given a slight allowance from the school to buy the supplies that I needed.

I could go to Mrs. Sands and tell her that I need something for school and she would handle it. I was sick one day and needed some antibiotics. I told Mrs. Sands and she had Vivian drive me to the pharmacy. My prescription was discretely paid for. I just remember that all of that was handled very discreetly. I was the grateful ghetto girl while at Irwins.

We used to bring in kids from North Philly to tutor them. They couldn't believe at first that I went to the school. Then I started riding their bus back home with them because their school wasn't too far from where I lived. I remember that one of our classmates who also joined the class in ninth grade telling me that the only other Black person in her life besides me was her Nanny. That floored me. I couldn't believe that in this day and age. But, there it was. She did come to my house in North Philly. Her mother brought her by and I used to visit her house in Society Hill.

When you look back on it Agnes Irwin was work; it was work all the time. I also remember when we used to visit each other. There was this special bond, this special connection. It was like you could exhale then. Getting outside of Agnes Irwin was necessary to relate to one another.

My Big Sister was Julie Soloff. She came to North Philly to pick me up. She took me to see Marcel Marceau together. I just remember working on the weekends to earn a little extra money to pay for the train fare to school each week. The homework is also a major memory. I was just determined to do well out there.

Wynnetta

I really liked it at Irwins. I have memories of French and Latin, the all glass cafeteria, the bridge to the senior parking lot, and the senior lounge with couches, a TV, and fridge. I have memories of the big and little gyms, the stacked stone exterior and the lower school house that George Washington slept in. I have memories of Vivian, George, and Andy, the housekeeper, the handyman, and the bus driver, with whom I connected on the first day of school. I have memories of Mr. Rapp who brought history alive when he dressed as Henry VIII, Mr. Brown our Math teacher who looked like Dustin Hoffman, and Mrs. Trickey who sprayed it when she said it. My memories include the freedom to sign myself out and away from campus when I did not have a class as a junior and senior. That time, for me, was spent at the local sandwich shop with my friend Lynn. We had arranged our schedules to mirror each other's.

Irwins was so different from anything that I knew; houses with driveways longer than my street at home, springs in the foyer (even learning the word foyer) and house boys and girls. Girls with celebrity fathers and moms who all seemed to wear the same outfits, wrap skirts printed with frogs or flowers in either pink, green, blue, or purple, pearl necklaces, wooden handled purses, and ballet slippers. Yet, I don't remember struggling socially. As we moved through the years I also learned that some of the girls envied me my time with my parents. Many of my classmates were being raised by the very house boys and girls who cleaned their homes. While we may not have had the excesses that our classmates had in terms of wealth and privilege our parents were always present in our lives.

I struggled through seventh grade for other reasons. That was really a tough year for me academically. The transfer from straight “A’s” to actually coming close to failing a couple of subjects was really hard to take. The school culture was so very different at Irwins. They had an honor demerit system. You were supposed to report on yourself if you broke a rule. Classes were different too. There was a lot of talking. Not just the teachers talked, they expected us to talk too. We were expected to have opinions, to stand for something, and to defend the stance. We talked about everything. And we wrote about everything as well. We also had study hall but it was different. We could sit outside or in the library, or in the halls. I just remember having a lot more freedom at Irwins.

Theresa remembers me being the popular one out of the bunch. I think what helped was the Big Sister program that they had at Irwins. We were each assigned an upper class student to show us around, to help us out. It was a great program because you had at least one person that you knew you could call on if you had a problem or just needed to talk. My Big Sister was one of the most popular students in the school. She made sure that I learned all of the ins and outs of the school. She taught me how to survive at Irwins without going crazy. We had a lot in common and that helped a lot. I had a lot of different interests and that helped me to have friends from a variety of different circles at Irwins rather than with a specific clique of girls. Lynn Baruch was one of the few girls to come home with me. She also introduced me to Yoga. I’m not sure if it was just curiosity or what. I was really impressed by her coming and that we remained friends after the visit.

I also played sports and that was a big help. In the fall I played field hockey with Mrs. Kaiser, in the winter I played basketball with Mrs. Kaiser, and in the spring I played lacrosse with Mrs. Kaiser. I wasn't musical or theatrical like Joanne and Estelle but I was artsy. I could dance but had done that for ten years at Settlement and no longer had any interest in that area. I did take every photography class that Mr. Ross taught and would take the jewelry classes offered during the Special Studies Programs.

But, my best memory of Irwins involves my dad. The school had Father-Daughter Day every spring. I was so excited that my dad was planning to come. Then I found out that Madame Knauer was going to ask the fathers to read a passage during French class so that they could see what we were doing each day. I was petrified. I was also angry at her. This was the same woman who had asked me what kind of a name was Wynnetta when we first met. Then she wanted to call me some silly French name instead. I thought about my grandmother's lesson on White folks and nicknames and insisted that she call me by my given name. That defiance earned me my first trip to the headmistress' office. That's when I knew that I was going to love Mrs. Lenox. She said that my explanation was a sound one and instructed Madame Knauer to call me by my given name.

Anyway Dad and Daughter Day arrived. We were sitting in class and I was dreading the embarrassment that she was about to make my father experience. When it was his turn he simply said that he didn't have much use for French in his line of work but that letters were letters and he would read it with his best Philly accent. All of the other dads laughed. And I was never more proud of my dad than I was at that very moment. He came back to every Father-Daughter Day during my years at Irwins.

“The great difficulty lies in trying to transpose last night’s moment to a day which has no knowledge of it” (Newman, 2000, p. 223). On our own our memories, our rememories had great difficulty being transposed onto the screen of the current day. Supported by each other and prompted by classmate’s recollections that filled in our own personal gaps we managed to paint a more complete picture of our time at Irwins. With our eyes of today we were able to discern the incredible differences between our worlds on the Main Line and our worlds back in our home communities. Despite those differences we were each able to carve out a piece of that world to claim as refuge. It might have been singing, sports, dance, or academics. It was our way of coping. These literacies were our way of asserting our voice in a world that was accustomed to only their own.

Yemajás: Protective Support, Resilient Spirits

Our inclusion into Irwins mirrored the evolution of the Seventh Ward. This is the historical backdrop that shaped our early educational experiences. We each arrived at Agnes Irwin with different early childhood experiences, different experiences based on race, difference, exclusion, and inclusion, a different cultural beat. During our time at Irwins, the differing beat caused our jump ropes to remain stilled. However, we each possessed a Dreamkeeper, a central figure in our lives who through their impact and support or encouragement helped us each to once again move the ropes to our triumphant chants.

These figures provided us each with the necessary support in the face of stress and conflict to stay the course. We have come to question the intent on the part of the powers to be at the time of our admittance into Irwins. Were we expected to survive and

thrive or was this merely an experiment in the political correctness of the day. Were we the checks in the boxes on the federal form that asked questions about student body diversity?

Whatever the intent we showed great resilience of spirit and ability in our determination to as Estelle has put it, "Get it done and get the h__ _ outta there!" We did overcome the odds of poverty and exclusion. We did defeat the risk factors that spoke to distance, lack of family awareness, and academic struggles. We each recognized the imprint of the hands of our Dreamkeepers on our backs as the protective and supportive factors in our survival. We also recognized the care, concern, and high expectations of the faculty and staff at Irwins. They were concerned about us as young women. They were unaware of our needs as young women of color but were certain in the drive to provide us with the codes of access and power that would at least let us determine our path on our own terms. No matter their original intent they pushed just as hard, pulled just as determinately, and smiled just as proudly at our successes as did our Yemajás.

Estelle

I would have to say that my mom had the greatest impact on my education. Yes, definitely my mom because she kept her foot up my a ___. She was always on me about school and my education. Definitely, yeah, it would have to be my mom. You know she stayed on me about everything, books, papers, everything. But there were many others who had a part in the journey. Like this professor who made me do research in areas that I had no earthly interest. It made me a better doctor.

And then there was CORE and Mrs. Goppelt and Mrs. Trickey. You know thank heavens for CORE. How many papers did we have to write for CORE? And they still have CORE at Irwins. How many papers did we wait until the last minute to write? We had all week to write them and waited until the last night. I remember writing a paper for a medical journal and the editors telling me that they didn't have to fix or change too many things. They said that they had never had that happen before and they wanted to know where I learned to write like that? I told Mrs. Goppelt that when I saw her at the reunion. Yeah, they both told us that our writing was a reflection on the school and on them and that we were not going to embarrass either. That's where we learned how to write; Mrs. Goppelt and Mrs. Trickey. Yeah, they made sure that we were prepared.

Joanne

For me it would have to be our Headmistress, Anne Lenox. She definitely had the most positive impact on my education because she kept pushing. She was an incredible Headmistress. She was not the type of woman that you disappointed. She was a big woman, 6 feet plus in those big, clunky heels. She was a Marine Drill Sergeant and we could definitely see that. I was scared to death of her but she was a wonderful woman. And I always knew that she cared.

Now, you know, I would have to say that my father had a negative impact on my education. He used to expect A's. Fortunately the A's came easy for me. He was the type of person who if you had a report card full of A's and one A- he would point to the A- and ask you what happened here. He rarely, almost never, acknowledged the good work and focused on the negative and your deficits. My mom would at least be the one

to tell me that I did well. Other than that she didn't figure too much into the impact part of the picture.

Theresa

I would have to say that Mrs. Waters definitely had the greatest impact on my life. I would have to go back to my ninth grade teacher, Mrs. Waters. She really opened up my eyes. She really opened my eyes to a whole different avenue; a whole different life that I didn't even know existed. I often wonder what would have happened if I had been absent that day? I like to think that she would have come to find me. What if she had not told me to go see the guidance counselor about the scholarship to Irwins? That announcement in class was clearly a turning point in my life. Agnes Irwin has certainly led to a lot of different things in my life. There's no question about that. I was going to go to Overbrook High School. But, I think there was a certain pecking order to the whole college thing. I don't know. Now, maybe I could have gone to Princeton from Overbrook but probably not. But, I'm pretty sure it was certainly easier to go to Princeton from Irwins.

And, of course, I'd have to say my mom. Even though my mom only had a tenth grade education, she knew an angle when she heard it. She was real crafted when it came to making things happen.

Wynnetta

My mother and my grandmothers would have to be the people that had the greatest impact on my education. Education was a really big thing for all of them. They were all insistent that I recognize the things that a woman could do on her own. It was especially a big thing for my mother. My mom used to always say that "You can do bad

all by yourself.” She lived her life as an example of what a woman could do. Even though she never went to college she always talked about us going to college. She used to say that high school was just the first step. She used to pretend that I was a doctor. Even though I would tell her that I was going to be a teacher someday she would joke around and pretend that she was a patient and call me Dr. Wynnetta. She planted that seed early on in my life. She would make me say it with her. She used to say it so often that I started to believe it. I also knew it served no purpose to fight with mom. She was always right.

She was always reading something. I think she belonged to every mail order book club there was. When I started to read she signed me up for a book club. I used to love it when the books would arrive in the mail. She always told me stories about her school in North Carolina. I remember when she went back to school at OIC. She had decided to go back to work and needed to improve her secretarial skills. It was a training center founded by Reverend Leon Sullivan to help Blacks get the skills they needed to help themselves. My father was really upset with her going back to school so that she could go back to work. But my mom was stubborn like that. She also taught me in that defiance that a woman could do anything that she set her mind to do.

She came to everything that I did at Irwins. When she couldn't come she sent my dad or my grandmother. I felt very supported by my family during my time at Irwins and I know that was because of my mom's courage and determination to make that all happen for me.

We can each point to at least one protector factor, one supportive spirit who made a positive impact on our arrival at and progression through Irwins. We discussed

questions of intent on the part of Irwins. What had been the motivation to include us? Had it been money? Had it been a desire to do the right thing? Had it been an awakening of consciousness or conscience? Were we supposed to be more than a check next to the line that read, "Attempt at integration attempted?" Were we expected to survive? We knew that the board at Agnes Irwin discussed and pondered the implications of every decision made at that school. Our arrival had been a planned maneuver. We each had different motivations to make the choice a worthwhile one. Each motivation came in the form of a protective Yemajá, our protective force against the storm of difference. Whether expected to achieve or not, we each possessed the resilience necessary to become triumphant spirits in the face of great struggle.

Keep the Kettle Boiling: Our Educational Heritage

Our educational heritage, as a group, is a tale of success and achievement and continues the rich heritage of enlightenment started by the freed slaves. We each recognized the expectations of not only the environment that we had been placed in but also the expectations, dreams, and hopes of our families. College was an unknown endeavor for two of us. For Theresa and me, we would be the first in our immediate families to attend college. For Joanne it would mean an attempt at completing the dream begun by her father. We had arrived at a point of reflection and connection. As we made college choices we recognized our individual and collective parts in keeping the kettle boiling. We had, as William Watkins writes, brought to life the rich intellectual tradition of theory and practice.

Our accomplishments at this point in our education included students on the high and highest honor rolls at the school, National Merit Scholars, Advanced Placement

Scholars, and Foreign Language awards. Our personal contributions to the portion of this jump rope session were patterned after a heritage of attempts and successes, demonstrations, efforts, and a thirst for additional knowledge. We were nearing the completion of our session at Irwins and planning new sessions at colleges that would serve as our next communities. The process, however, would not be without a few pains and false starts. It would nonetheless be a continuation of our connection to our cultural educational heritage.

Estelle

I applied and got into Carnegie-Mellon. Yeah, I went there to major in Engineering. They had expressed an interest in me joining in their singing group and I wanted to change my major to Music. My Dad said that's nice but I'm not paying for that. So then I transferred. Lincoln and Howard had this six-year BS-MD program. I've always been interested in medicine. That worked out.

Joanne

Another thing that I remember was the whole college thing. At first I really wanted to go to the University of Hawaii. I just wanted to get away. And then my father blackmailed me. I had asked for a baby sister forever. And then when I was eleven she was born. My father said that if I went to Hawaii I could only come home once a year. He knew that I was not going to be away from her for that long.

I remember Mrs. Woodward wanted me to apply to the Ivy's. I was a National Merit Scholar and had scored out of freshman English on my AP exam. I had received a scholarship to Penn and decided that wasn't going to work when my dad said that I could live at home. I couldn't get away from home fast enough. I was going to go to

Ithaca. I had my heart set on Ithaca and getting away. I remember being close to Madeline McNeil. We were in Drama Club together. She was attending Princeton and convinced me to apply. We ended up being room mates my freshman year at Princeton. I remember that by the time she convinced me to apply the deadline was near. I remember writing my essay and getting ready to mail it off when my dad got involved. My dad and I had a fight over that application. He wanted to edit the essay because he was a publisher and I didn't want him to. I just remember feeling that it was my application. He refused to sign it or give me the application fee I remember writing the whole story on the application as the explanation for my father's missing signature. I was so mad at my father. And then my mother wrote the check for the application fee. Then I took it to the post office and stood in line to make sure that it was postmarked before the deadline. When I didn't discuss the application anymore he thought that the matter was done. And then the cancelled check for the application fee came back. He and my mother got into it then but by then it was done. I didn't say anything else about it until I got accepted.

Now, you remember how frugal my dad was? He had already sent in the acceptance fee to Ithaca. I knew that there was no way that I was going to go anywhere else except Ithaca since he had sent in his money. Then Mrs. Lenox called me into her office and asked what I was planning to do. I explained the deal with my dad's non-refundable check. After I left she called my dad. When he came home from work he gave me a check for Princeton. I wrote a letter to Ithaca explaining the situation and they actually returned his check.

The whole college thing brought out some of my father's old demons. I think because my dad never finished college he wanted to be sure that his kids did better. He was big on education and you had to go to college and I think he had to make sure for him and whatever was going on with him he had to make sure that his kids did better than anyone else's kids in his family.

Education was an obsession with him. I remember when we came home we changed our clothes, did homework until it was time to eat dinner, and then we went back upstairs to do more homework until it was time to go to bed. When we came home from school we didn't go outside, we didn't watch TV. You literally did nothing but homework from the time we came home until the time we went to bed. If there was something that a teacher at Irwins wanted us to watch on TV I would have to ask the teacher for a note explaining the assignment. I used to be so embarrassed to have to ask Mr. Rapp for a note just to watch TV. I didn't really want to go to Princeton but after all of that I felt like I had been backed into a corner. I didn't like it but I went. I didn't want to go to Princeton and a lot of people don't understand when I say that. But I didn't want to really go anywhere. I was ti-i-red of working. I didn't want to do that anymore. If the truth had been told, I think I was just tired. One of the main reasons why I didn't apply to too many colleges was that I didn't really want to go anywhere and have to work again. I did want to get away from home, I really did. I don't tell people that I didn't want to go to Princeton. You can't tell people that. They think something is wrong with you. It was not for me. I've never been back. I know a lot of folks who go back for reunions, but I've never been back. The other thing that might have stopped me from going to Princeton was if I knew then what I found out later was that my dad informed

me of his four year plan. I didn't get the four year speech from my father until I was half way through my senior year. Princeton was like a prep school. Now it's different, but back then it was like a prep school. The only thing you were prepared to do when you left Princeton was to go to grad school, unless you were in engineering. And then you got your job at NASA and made your money. You weren't prepared to get a job. That's not what they were there for. Everyone was going to grad school.

My father never told me that this was the end of the ride and that I was not getting any more. I remember being like, what am I supposed to do now. Everyone was going to grad school because that's what you did. I remember the MCAT's and the GRE's were all being given the same weekend and I was the only one walking around on campus. I remember being so angry at not knowing that this was coming. It was at that point for the first time in my education that I felt different from everyone else. I remember being angry at Princeton for not preparing me. I know now that it was not their fault. They've been there forever and that's what they do and they do it well. The main reason that I wanted to grad school was because I couldn't go and everyone that I knew was going. I was mad at Princeton because I didn't want to get angry at my father. I did that later. I went into Princeton not expecting to graduate because I knew good and darn well that I couldn't get through Princeton. My first semester I got a B, C, D, and an F. I did well to do that because I hardly ever went to class. My freshman year I lived with sophomores. They had the program figured out and I acted like I did too. I remember Theresa lived over in the freshman dorms. I was a Psych major. Now, my dad is the one who keeps telling me that I need to go back to school. I never really knew what I wanted to be when I grew up and then I grew up and it didn't matter. I got a job in Social Work after

college and then another job in the same field. I just have an undergrad degree from Princeton in Psychology. My husband is a Social Worker. I work in the children's mental health field as a Program Analyst. As such, I mostly develop, monitor and analyze children's mental health programs for the city of Philadelphia. I also sit on the Women's and Children's Death Review Committees (Homicide, Non-Homicide and Infant). I know I help out with the lives of a few kids but it's just a job, it's not a career. What I have now is a job and it's always been just a job for me. Now I think it's too late to do anything else.

Theresa

My mother with her uneducated self was still very quick learning. When I was graduating and thinking about college... ah, my mother's from Virginia. And she said 'if you're going to go to college you have to apply to Sweet Briar. I remember looking at her like she was crazy. I told her that I was applying to an Ivy League college. She didn't know anything about the Ivy League but she knew about Sweet Briar. She told me, "I know something about this. All the rich White girls in Virginia got to Sweet Briar. It's tops honey, top of the line!" Now, my mom didn't know anything about the Ivy League. When and where she grew up all the White girls of privilege went to Sweet Briar. That's what she knew. She had such a limited understanding of my world and when we had that conversation I understood that. I understood her frame of reference.

All I had to say was that all of the elite White folks went to Ivy League schools and she understood. She used to sit out on the front steps with her friends and tell them that I was applying to colleges. That alone was wild enough. But, then she would hit them with the Ivy League and that would go "What!!" Then she would explain that it

was the top. She was so proud. She adopted that as her own and then she was educating them. She was at every graduation. She had never been to anything like that. It was a strange ride for her.

I was kinda strange to my whole family; to my siblings too. They would ask me “How did you do all of this?” I really didn’t know. It was just what I knew to do. My parents didn’t plant seeds. If you told them that you wanted to do something they would go along with it and encourage you but they didn’t come up with the ideas. My brother looked at me at the graduation from Irwins and said “Where did you come from? Not only are you going to college, but you’re going to Princeton.” At the time Princeton was only a few years from going co-ed. So, here I was this little Black girl from North Philly going to Princeton. I didn’t know that until I got there. My brother remembers Princeton being this bastion of white male privilege.

Laura Morris convinced me to apply to Princeton. I was in the senior lounge working on college applications. When Laura saw that I was applying to Harvard she told me to send in an application to Princeton. Chrissy Hawke’s father did my interview. When she heard that I was applying to Princeton she told me that he did all of the alumnae interviews in the Philadelphia area. My brother drove me to her house for the interview. Mrs. Woodward arranged for all of my fee waivers for all of my college applications. I went on to Princeton. I majored in economics at Princeton then went straight to Columbia Law School. After I graduated from law school I worked at a law firm and got married. My mom helped to take care of our son. I was working an incredible number of hours on Wall Street but it was exciting. She reminded me of my job as a mother. I went to work at Prudential in order to have more normal hours.

Wynnetta

Mrs. Woodward, had a huge impact on my education. I don't think she meant to but she did. It was college application time. My parents had not been to college and kinda left the whole application thing up to me and whatever Irwins told them they needed to do. My mom was able to fill in the financial aid paperwork because by then she was the accountant for daddy's business. But, aside from that they left it all pretty much up to me.

I had my heart set on Bucknell University at the time. I had gone up there for a visit and really liked the campus and the program. When I had my advising conference with Mrs. Woodward she recommended that I apply to a few other colleges. When I suggested UVA and the University of Pennsylvania she recommended Lincoln, Howard, and Fisk University. At the time I didn't know anything about those schools. When I looked them up and saw that they were Black colleges I remember being confused by the suggestion. At first I remember feeling really hurt and angry. I thought, Hey, wait a minute. I've been out here doing the same work, getting the same education as everyone else, then why shouldn't I apply to the same colleges?

That's when I said to myself that I was going to apply to every school that she tried to talk me out of. I wasn't even thinking about Penn at the time and then suddenly I really wanted to go. I really didn't want to go to a college that was going to require me to work as hard as I had worked at Irwins. I was tired of the late homework nights and the full book bag and the never ending papers. But, I got wrapped up in this racial pride thing. I was also the type that never liked to be told that I couldn't or wouldn't do something. I showed her each of my acceptance letters.

I did go to Penn and it lasted all of two years before I dropped out. Going from a class of forty-eight to a freshman class of over two thousand was more than I could handle. When I went back to school it was to a place that I knew I could handle. I went back to Bennett College, an all-Black, all-female southern college. I did really well there and worked my tail off to finish in half the time. Turns out Mrs. Woodward was smarter than I gave her credit for.

Our culture's proud and determined educational heritage was very much a part of our jump rope session. Education had been presented to each of us as a means to a better end. Education remained for our families the key to the cage, the ticket out and up. Despite the costs to friendships and connections to home communities we took our opportunity to reap the benefits of education seriously. We were each determined to continue that link and move the race forward by doing it proud.

Chanting and Rhythms: Jump Rope Lessons and Advice

At one point our dinner conversation centered on the fact that we were each about to celebrate a major birthday. We had arrived at one of life's milestones when you are expected to know a little something about life. As a group of high school classmates this was a strange realization. We were discussing high school memories, we were reliving our lives before the age of twenty and yet we were situated in a current cycle of history placing us in positions of advice givers. In our realization of our current position came the question, "In our living of history, in our doing of history had we managed to pass that history onto our children, onto the next generation?" Irwins had been so big on giving back to the community. What had we returned? What had we passed on? Had we created distances between ourselves and our home communities when in fact there were

none? What were we doing to encourage the next generation to grow, challenge, nourish, and be nourished? Had we recognized the uniqueness of our positions as African American mothers and women raising African American children in a racialized society? Had we recognized that the “subjective experience of mothering/motherhood is inextricably linked to the sociocultural concern of racial ethnic communities – one does not exist without the other” (Collins, 1994, p. 47). Had we held onto enough kept history, enough cultural stories to pass them on?

Estelle

My advice would be to get a mentor – someone you trust who can guide you. I had my dad but that was different. I wish that I could have had someone out there in front to ask questions, to tell me stuff, you know? Yes, definitely. We need those folks out there for us and with us. I would tell them all to get a good mentor, someone you can trust who knows a thing or two about what you’ll be going through. I wish I had had that.

I would also tell them to always be prepared, remember it’s all about the process. You know how it is. You have to always be prepared. I remember being asked to speak at a doctor’s convention on HPV. I prepared for it for about 6 weeks to make sure that I was ready. Doctors aren’t like the general public. The general public wants you to come and just talk to them, they want to love you. Doctors want you to trip up. So I knew that I had to have my act together. The night before we were at the dinner and someone asked me if I was ready with my speech on health disparities. I was shocked! I had been asked to speak on HPV. I was so upset I had to leave the dinner. I went back to the room

and thank heavens for the internet and CORE and Mrs. Goppelt. I got that 45 minute presentation together and did ok.

Joanne

Advice that I would give young women would be to know your options. I would tell them to find out as much as possible about their realistic options before making decisions about college. That's a whole part of your life that will have a huge impact on your life. My mom passed on those bits of advice about race and struggle. I'd like to believe that I passed that all onto my kids. I'd like to think that they're going to be okay in the world.

Theresa

My advice to young Blacks is to get into controlling things. As a parent and as a concerned Black mother I am worried about this generation. The whole Hip Hop, thug culture has me scared. Every parent wants their children to do better than they did. I want that for this next generation as well. But, I am worried that because we have insulated this generation, because we have taken them away from the community, I am worried that they will not be prepared to deal with the realities of the racial world. It is so pervasive. The world is not going to be as comforting for them as we have been for them. Our kids don't know about Double Dutch. Our kids don't know about that stuff. What worries me is that our kids don't know their history.

Look at this whole Don Imus thing. The fact that he thought he could call women who are in college at Rutgers University, who are some of the most accomplished among us, dismissed them as nappy headed ho's just out of turn is frightening. To just denigrate them with one simple word, to make them feel worthless, like trash is

unconscionable. And for what? Because you think you can and no one will care if you do. There is something far bigger than these isolated instances going on in this country right now. Right here in Detroit with the whole Affirmative Action thing being voted into the constitution. We have a viable Black candidate for the presidency. We have all of these Black CEO's and Blacks going to these elite schools even though it's supposed to be so hard to get in and the costs are so high. I think white folks are like, "Wait a minute! That's enough!" So then you get these Don Imus speeches just to remind us of who they think we are.

I tell young people all the time to understand that issues of race, arguments about race were a part of the very founding of this nation. They had arguments at the negotiations of the Declaration of Independence over race. Don't be fooled. I don't believe that American will ever be color blind. It is too much a part of the very fabric of our lives. But, I tell them let that be someone else's problem. Let that be someone else's weight. Don't be fooled, don't let it limit you, don't let that stop you. So yes, my advice would be to get into controlling stuff and controlling your own destiny.

Wynnetta

My advice would be to follow your heart, listen to your little voice, and follow your bliss. I'd also tell them to get to know your history. Get to know history period, so you won't repeat the stupid stuff and so you won't let anybody fool you. Find out about the history that they are not telling you about in school. Ask questions. Get to know about our strong educational heritage. Find out, ask questions. Have those conversations with yourself early in life about what you want to do and surround yourself with people who have dreams. Never stop learning. That advice was given to me by my grandmother

and I think it's still true. She told me that you are either doing one of two things in life. You are either teaching or learning. When you stop doing either you may as well be dead. The other piece of advice would be to give back.

We realized when answering this question that it created many more related questions, "Had we done enough to lay the mile markers for the next generation of triumphant chanters?" We discussed the wisdoms, the kept histories that our mothers had shared with us. We recognized that we had been provided with links to a culture's shared story of struggle and resistance. We discussed the worlds that our children were a part of. We knew that our educational paths had taken us down a road very different than those traveled by friends who had been 'left behind.' And yet, we each found that we still shared cultural strategies with our children that included advice on getting a good education, never forgetting where and who you come from, and never forgetting to look in the mirror to see what they see before they get to know you. But, was this enough? We wondered if in our period of lost connection caused by our time at Irwins if we had become the final chapter or was there time left to share the chants of a people's struggle. We wondered, "Had we made things better for our children or just different?" "What had we done with the ticket that we had been given?" Had we done enough to sustain and move the race forward? If nothing else, the raising of the questions served as an awakening, a rallying call to make sure that we did.

Our Triumphant Chanting: Jump Rope Triumphs

This was the hardest section of the project. We had each been so busy in the living of it that we had not stepped back to take it all in. We had not taken the time to take stock. We also recognized that our triumphs had not come without a price; we

recognized that our triumphs had been earned in the struggle that was desegregation and integration. We also recognized that our battle, our struggles were far from over and yet as Estelle put it, "I know that I should continue to be vocal but I also recognize that I can't do so at my own peril. I recognize the dilemma. And I guess I am a little bit tired of the fight."

We are women who are accomplished as a doctor, a lawyer, a social worker, and a teacher. We are examples of Hine and Thompson's 'new Black woman, "...intelligent, well educated, well dressed, and of course, successful in her chosen field" (1998). And yet, we each lamented the need to do more; the awareness that the job of transferring the stories is far from done. We were together to recognize our shared experiences of integrative struggle. Our coming together to capture our stories represented a collective triumph.

Women are, in fact, caught in a very real contradiction. Throughout the course of history, they have been mute, and it is doubtless by virtue of this mutism that men have been able to speak and write. As long as women remain silent, they will be outside the historical process. But, if they begin to speak and to write as men do, they will enter history subdued and alienated; it is a history that, logically speaking, their speech should disrupt.

Xavière Gauthier

Estelle

I just learned that I have a Sandwich named after me. I don't know how important that is but I think it's kinda cool. I guess I'm kinda proud of being the first African American female in obstetrics and gynecologist at the hospital in Delaware. Yeah, I'd have to say that I am proud of my academic and my professional accomplishments. But

I'd like to do more for African American men. This country is failing them and we as Black women need to do something about that.

Joanne

I'm probably most proud of all that I did at Irwins. I enjoyed my time out there. I would say that I'm more proud of that than my time at Princeton. I'm really not that proud of what I do for a living. It's just a job.

Theresa

I am proud of the fact that I can now make the lives of my sons so much better and easier than my life was. But, I'm not so sure that's better.

Academically I'm very proud of the achievements that I've had along the way. You know, getting good grades while at Irwins, having highest honors time after time and then graduating from Agnes Irwin, graduating from Princeton, and graduating from Columbia Law School. I also thought I could do it. But, I don't know why I had that confidence. Because I didn't know anyone else who had done it; certainly not anyone in my family. I've always had this sense that I could do it. But, where does that come from. It's not like I could say 'cause my parents did it or my uncles did it.

Wynnetta

I guess I am proud of the fact that I have provided my daughters with a real-life version of options and determination. I am proud of the fact that they have been with me on this journey. I am also proud of them and their accomplishments. They know that they can do, be, and go based on their desires and determination. I'd like to think that I had a little something to do with that. I'm proud of my teaching career and the lives that

I know I touched in a positive way. I'm also proud of the fact that I have achieved a dream. I know that if you dream it you can do it. I feel great satisfaction in that.

This is a part of our story. This is a part of our history. It speaks to the struggles felt when leaving, the struggles endured when arriving, and the struggles felt in returning to the memories of each. Our triumphs are left to the readers interpretations. The act of bringing the story home, in putting it down on paper, and in joining our voices in a personal jump rope chant has been one of shared accomplishment and triumph.

Fortune teller, fortune teller, Please tell me, What do you think, I'm going to be?

Butcher, baker, undertaker, Tightwad, tailor, bow-legged sailor,

Rock Star, painter, cowpoke, thief, Doctor, lawyer, teacher, chief!

CHAPTER 6

IMPROVISING COMMUNITY AMONG THE ROPES

Everybody, Everybody

Come on in.

The first one misses,

Must take my end.

Trust the instinct to the end though you can render no reason.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Stars Overhead: Interpretation and Significance

The Stars Overhead jump rope game begins with the jumper in a crouched position. The enders begin turning the ropes above the jumper's head. Upon the enders signal the jumper stands up to jump while they simultaneously begin turning the ropes so that they pass below the jumper's feet. Timing, trust, and coordination are major considerations of Stars Overhead. The sense of community exists in the rotation of opportunities; if a jumper misses they take their turn as an ender. There is great significance in the ability of the enders and the jumpers to interpret each other's intent, movement, desire, and capability. Success of the session, much like the stars overhead, hangs on the ability of the team members to assess the environment and make a way through the turning ropes.

Four young African American girls made their way through the turning ropes that was integration as a result of a combined team of parental hope and student resilience. Cultural capital, double consciousness, education as the key to the cage, and parental

awareness of generational progress each played a part in the success of our jump rope session.

We learned the power of cultural capital as we were shown the ropes of our new environment by cultural allies. Big Sisters, guidance counselors, Headmistresses, classmates all shared in providing each of us with clues, strategies, and tactics for making the transition from the segregated to integrated, from the perception of culturally deficit to culturally credited educational communities. As we struggled to make sense of our emerging adolescent identities, a common struggle across ethnicities and cultures, we developed resilient strategies to facilitate our existence in two worlds.

One such strategy was the development of a Double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903). We learned to create alternate existences in order to survive and thrive in our two merging and diverging worlds of existence; one world of home and one other world of school. Attire, vocabulary, mannerisms, diction, and artistic expressions (inclusive of Double Dutch) were each formats that we adapted to suit the environment. The adaptation, the code-switching, was a necessary strategy while we each searched for the unique path, the unique line of flight to our merged and reconciled personality. Our personalities would take years to reconcile.

Reconciliation lay in the belief in the power of education to uplift and transform. Our parents each put their faith in the power of education, the power of a privileged education as a means of breaking through and gaining access. Our parents recognized that despite the fears, despite the financial and personal costs to self, the end would justify the means. Our parents saw it as their job to provide for and create opportunities for a world better than the one in which they had lived. Generational progress and a continuation of

cultural ability provided the justification of our parental choices as they pushed us into possibility through integration and away from the limitations of a segregated public school system.

A cloud, much like the ropes, hangs over the educational futures of our African American youth who find themselves in various types of segregated existences despite the historic, politically charged ruling that was *Brown v Board of Education*. In the wake of other political foray into education, *No Child Left Behind*, growing racial, cultural, class and social diversity is occurring in our schools. A parallel phenomenon is occurring, that relates directly to the educational expectations for those students, as we witness the decline in numbers of minority teachers who possess generational pride and cultural expertise as it relates to educational expectations.

African Americans will remain in marginalized positions as long as the significance of *knowledge as property* (and Whiteness as representative of that property) fails to register as a vital conceptual component of sociopolitical education and social liberation. Privilege, in particular White privilege has been set as the standard and remains set by laws which help to "...ensure the perpetuation of privilege" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, p. 658). Knowledge as property, as established by the dominant racial group becomes normalized and associated with the privileged access and is measured against characteristics held in common by those so privileged. Included in this privilege which places people of color on the fringes is the "...power to ignore race, when white is the race, is a privilege, a societal advantage" (p. 661). When race is associated with a variety of concepts including, food, color, culture, language, and experiences, the

privilege that is Whiteness must be made visible in order to begin the process of recognition, validation, and social liberation for those in non-dominant positions.

I am as concerned as Gloria Ladson-Billings with the *way* that we teach the curriculum presented to us as educators. This is the crux of what affects our students, their perceptions of what counts as knowledge, and their beliefs about how they and their lives fit into the realm of valued information. Critical pedagogy seeks to create environments where the question rules. Critical pedagogy seeks to create environments where becoming (Wink, 2000) is just as important as being and knowledge recognized as culturally, socially and politically framed, is valued through these distinct frameworks. Ladson-Billings' examination and position of pedagogy and knowledge viewed through the critical lens is very much aligned with the viewpoint espoused by Henry Giroux. According to Giroux critical pedagogy seeks to

...create new forms of knowledge through its emphasis on breaking down disciplines and creating interdisciplinary knowledge; raise questions about the relationships between the margins and centers of power in schools and is concerned about how to provide a way of reading history as a part of a larger project of reclaiming power and identity, particularly those shaped around the categories of race, gender, class, and ethnicity; rejects the distinction between high and popular culture so as to make curriculum knowledge responsive to the everyday knowledge that constitutes peoples' lived histories differently; illuminates the primacy of the ethical in defining the language that teachers and others use to produce particular

cultural practices. Retrieved November 12, 2006 from

<http://www.edb.utexas.edu/faculty/scheurich/proj3/index2.html>

Critical pedagogy, explores the questions of whose interests, whose access, and whose future endeavors toward a democratic existence does the school actually serve? Should the school serve as resource for the specific community that it serves? Should the school view the greater community as a true partner in the determination of exactly what is considered valuable knowledge and curriculum within a cultural and environmental framework? Should the school set about the political process of effecting social justice and liberation in the face of the dominant group's desire to maintain the status quo? Should the school play a part in *lifting the veil* of access to information that has been deemed value-laden despite practices of subterfuge and segregation that have been viewed as *universally accepted* by the dominant group (DuBois, 1934; Orfield & Eaton, 1996; Wink, 2002)? Should the school be used at a "...strategic site for addressing social problems and helping students understand what it means to exercise rights and responsibilities as critical citizens actively engaged in forms of social learning that expand human capacities for compassion, empathy, and solidarity?" (Torres, 1998) *Will the school serve itself up as one of the master's tools to be used to tear down the master's house?* The teacher, who recognizes the political nature of their position, (Freire, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1994, 1995) stands on the precipice of potential social, cultural, political, and historical change though the tool that is education.

There exists a need for understanding, of coming to know, of becoming that is experienced through the implementation of critical pedagogy. This form of understanding must be grounded in what Ladson-Billings describes as *Afrocentric* ways of knowing and

experiencing the world (Ladson-Billings, 1992a). In this cultural perspective, this matter of taste, conceptions of knowledge and coming to know are socially situated and constructed. The culturally relevant conceptions of knowledge are collaborative and socially grounded. Knowledge is viewed as fluid, flexible, and validated through joint participation, partnership, and ownership. Knowledge is also viewed as the joint responsibility of self and the community.

If institutions ignore their constituents, which consist of their students and the larger society that the institution serves, they reproduce the status quo, thus further marginalizing minorities. This form of educational practice leads to institutional racism and the maintenance of power and privilege for those who traditionally have held this power, relegating those without power and privilege as outsiders to the borders of education and society in general. (Hansman, Spencer, Grant, & Jackson, 1999).

Despite National Education Association (NEA) research that suggests an increase in minority academic performance when taught by teachers from their own ethnic group, the number of African American teachers, at 6%, has reached its lowest rate since 1971, with only 5% of teachers coming from the ranks of Hispanics, Asians or other minority groups. Moreover, 40% of the nation's schools list no minority members on staff at all. Four out of every ten students in today's classrooms is a minority, yet according to the NEA, an overwhelming 89% of the American teaching force is White; the face of today's educator typically belongs to a female who is White, married, religious, and is on average 43 years old (NEA, 2002).

The face, as well as the landscape, of the institution of education in the United States is increasingly becoming more *resegregated*. Operating below the radar of media

and societal attention, our schools are experiencing resegregation at rates rivaling those not seen since the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* desegregation ruling (Orfield, 2001, 1997). The racial configuration among teachers and students alike has converged to make New York the most widely segregated district in the nation, and Atlanta a district where 75% of the students attend a school that is 90% or more racially segregated. Additionally, each year over 30% of the White teaching force will leave a school that has a minority population of 70% or more after teaching there for just one year (Urban Institute, 2006).

A White teaching force, a lack of highly qualified, experienced teachers in schools serving minority students, and a resegregated student population has combined to have a negative impact on social justice potentiality and the ability of minority students to gain access to the dominant culture of power through an equal education. The phenomenon of resegregation has also had an impact on the graduation rate of minority students. J. P. Greene (2001) at the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, states the national graduation rate declined from 71% to 68% nationally, 50% for African Americans, and 53% for Hispanics in 2001, before rising slightly to 70% nationally, 55% and 53% respectively in 2003. The Urban Institute (2006) provides an even bleaker view of the trend in graduation rates. Students who receive their education in urban schools situated in high poverty, racially segregated school districts drop out at rates of 15% to 18%; these students number as many as seven out of every eight minority students in the New York school district. In light of these statistics, minority students in general, and African American children in particular, face a variety of challenges as they seek to

prepare for an economic and social future based on the receiving of an adequate education in our nation's schools.

One of my concerns stems from the training of our minority teachers by educators from the dominant culture. If those training future teachers of color operate from positions of unaware privilege are they also transferring concepts of deficit attached to students of color along with the concepts of European dominance? What will happen to the ethic of culture care long a standard in the segregated classrooms headed by minority teachers? If the omnipresence of race and racial inequities are not a part of the teacher prep discussion, how will the predominant numbers of White teachers handle the topic and related concerns when released to their own classrooms? Who will pass on those warnings, strategies, and lessons to a racialized segment of the population erased by color-blind teachers who fail to see the struggle from their positions of privilege? Who will hold the minority teachers to task with respect to cultural heritage when they are judged and measured by standards that do not include kept histories or minority culture? Who will teach our teachers about the rich cultural and educational heritages of the minority populations if it is not included in the text? As our country 'browns' who will tell our children that they will need to work twice as hard to get half as far?

Additionally, with the preponderance of middle-class white teachers in the classrooms across the country, growing numbers of this group of educators, due to the perceptions of equal education for all, are either unaware of the need or unwilling to adapt their teaching practices to meet the divergent needs of the students who now sit at desks in the many U. S. classrooms. An awareness, acceptance and celebration of cultural achievement, perceived educational ability and lowered expectations and must take place

in the educational community in order to break the system of maintaining the status quo. The hope is that an examination of the personal and cultural experiences of Jump Rope Community members will provide insights that may hold educational significance.

While a teacher plays an important role in the educational attainment levels of students once they arrive at school, the encouragement offered to children to receive, and even pursue a high school diploma falls on the shoulders of parents, family members, and respected peers. The impact of peer, societal, and community influences, or the property of organizations (Nettles, 1998), plays an important role in the creation of efficacy and resilience in students who exist in situations of risk. Ainsworth (2002) examined the impact of the neighborhood on the potential educational achievement of children living in poverty.

If an education is viewed as a method of preparing and providing students with the power for active participation in society, then those involved in the institution of education must recognize its inherent political, economic, and social power. Educational power brokers must recognize the power of the institution to distribute or deny transformational information; its power to maintain the myopic status quo or dismantle the established system of reproduction; its power to serve as a potential training ground for social prejudice or social justice. “This knowledge of possibilities is an especially valuable resource in the political life” (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 86) that is associated with the institution of education. James Baldwin (1985) wrote in *The Price of the Ticket*,

The paradox of education is precisely this – that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated. The purpose of education, finally, is to create in a person the

ability to look at the world for himself, to make his own decisions... To ask questions of the universe, and then learn to live with those questions, is the way he achieves his own identity. But no society is really anxious to have that kind of person around. What societies really, ideally, want is a citizenry which will simply obey the rules of society. If a society succeeds in this, that society is about to perish. The obligation of anyone who thinks of himself as responsible is to examine society and try to fight it – at no matter what risk. This is the only hope that society has. This is the only way societies change (p. 326).

Teaching, by virtue of the curricular mandates, curricular choices, and curricular dispositions is a political act based on the posing and seeking of challenging questions within dominant culture parameters. Teaching, a naturally narrative profession, is also a collective, assembled performance (Christensen, 2000), a linking, through dialogue, of personal experiences, dreams, and expectations with mentors, storied lives of students and teachers alike. Teaching, as such, possesses the power and ability to use the classroom to unlearn and relearn (Wink, 2000); to open doors in the mind (Ayers, 1998) by providing students with the tools to see attempts by the dominant culture to colonize the minds of students through the secret education (Dorfman, 1983) and social blueprints (Christensen, 2000) of reproduction. The content of what teachers teach, how they teach, and for what reason do they teach must be placed within the context of the students' varied lived stories; for "content without context is pretext," (radio communication Tavis Smiley on the Tom Joyner Morning Show, January, 2006).

Educators, as representatives of the institution of education and as a collection of their personally situated storied experiences, must understand the potential dichotomy of their position. The choices they make in the classroom can either serve to perpetuate or end the effects of social hegemony by teaching against the grain (Ayers, 1998) of standard practice. They stand at once as political beings and harbingers of hope; able to be either agents of domination or liberation, agents of negative expectations based on racial stereotypes or at-promise possibility, agents of mandate or potentiality, agents of reproduction or cultural validation (Freire, 1985). Educators must also recognize that in deciding upon their preferred positioning, they stand as the point of intersection between two worlds – the story of the institution’s culture and the varied cultural stories and experiences of their students.

The educator, as the point of cultural intersection, must recognize their own storied experiences and make personal decisions that wield societal impact – to shape the varied experiences into a predetermined institutional mold or to recognize, validate, and provide the tools of voice for each unique set of experiences on their quest toward the actualization of social justice through education. Teachers must recognize the political nature of their position and choose to educate on behalf of their students, rather than in spite of their students. This path creates opportunities for dialogue and discussion between teacher and student and increases the chances for discovery of social justice (Ayers, 2004) through education and a reconstruction of divergent worlds.

The contribution of this particular research study, to the expanding field of curriculum studies, was in the examination and use of the cultural experiences borne of segregated Jump Rope Communities (JRC) as the backdrop for the research into the

discovery of culturally relevant pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1995b); the impact of those experiences on the desire, the ability, and the determination to obtain access to the restricted codes of school (Bourdieu, 1991, 2000; Nash, 2004; Olssen, 2004) and the greater social structure; the impact of the ability and responsibility of culturally and socially divergent educators to provide access to those codes as a method of serving as cultural allies for socially silenced students; and the impact of the receipt of the codes on the definition, expectations, and expression of self with respect to greater cultural, social, and economic existences.

One of the main areas of focus was the exploration and valuation of varied forms of literacy into hierarchical structures and perceptions of power; cultural literacy, family literacy, community literacy, music literacy, artistic literacy, historical literacy, and oral literacy. Literacy, varied literacy, grounded in multiplicities, emotion and relation will be explored; communicative literacy, transformative literacy, cultural literacy, translate into different ways of being, different ways of understanding, different ways of accessing knowledge and different ways of reading the world. The art, music, food, communication, mannerisms and oral histories all serve to form cultural literacy. Conversations, intonations, expectations and generalizations of a group with shared heritage also serve to create cultural literacy.

The ways that the word is understood and is read is grounded in social perspectives, dispositions and cultural experiences. In exploring varied literacies, my research will also attempt to prevent a societal neglect of "...rich critical traditions in many non-Western philosophical cultures" (Nussbaum, 1997, p. 132). Each form of literacy has its own sets of rules, uses, and own levels of cultural valuation. Functional

literacy, the language of the streets, the language of home and the home community; academic literacy, the language of schools and institutions of higher learning; constructive literacy, the Eurocentric language of the written word; cultural literacy, the language of a particular culture, its values, its hopes and its struggles will be explored. Critical literacy will take the research inward on a search for personal meanings, personal *lines of flight* (Reynolds, 2004), leading to social forms of liberation through expression (Wink, 2004).

This research project also sought to provide information for teacher education programs with respect to the types of literature taught, the types of literacy included, the inclusion of “feminist theory [that] can be appropriately reworked into a set of useful practices for engaging with actual strategies for teaching and learning” (McWilliam, 1994, p. 39). As the representatives of the teaching profession become more and more one dimensional racially and the student population becomes more and more diverse, we need teachers who are committed to actually seeing the children who sit before them. Unlike the children who acquire invisible status in Lightfoot’s Highland Park and “pass through unnoticed” (1983, p. 149), we need a “teacher to be wide-awake and fully present in her teaching” (Ayers, 1998, p.21). We need teachers who recognize the power of their position to ask the tough questions that challenge cultural and institutional racism and who will guide her students as they seek answers together through a dialogue of acceptance. With “inquiry as stance, the focus is on how teacher candidates work within the professional communities to construct local knowledge, open their decision-making strategies to critique, wrestle with multiple perspectives, and use the research of others as generative of new questions and strategies” (Cochran-Smith, 2004, p. 111).

Why was this project worth pursuing? Why are African Americans and minorities failing in school? Why is the academic, economic, and social gap widening? Why has the access to quality education in our urban areas declined? Why have the nations schools resegregated? Why are the achievements by students of color questioned by those on both sides of the

color line; acting white and never white enough? What has happened to the ethic of care once so prevalent in the segregated community? How will we come to recognize our own methodologies, epistemologies, and ontologies if we continue to situate our stories among and measure them against established parameters of whiteness? How will we learn to write new stories; learn to appreciate the struggle in existing stories, if the stories which need to be told are silenced by a fear of stirring up old messes? The existence of these and countless related questions stand as suggestions of cultural struggle and as rationales for pursuing this project.

The younger generation has been told that they should feel pride and gratitude for the stories of the sacrifices made by their parents and ancestors. How can they be expected to take pride in, feel gratitude for, and experience a connection to the latest chapter of a story without ever having read or been made aware of the introduction or first chapters? How do you recommend a story that has not been captured or shared? How do you recommend a story that we are wrestling to understand?

The questions and inquiries raised in my research inquiry may have far reaching impact on the institution of education, the social consciousness level of educators, and the level of access to social, economic, and educational factor provided to students and families from varied Jump Rope Communities. Additionally, the strength and capability

of members from Jump Rope Communities, may serve as a launching site for the creation of curriculum strategies and content that is culturally engaging and provides sites for both personal and critical inquiry (Thompson, 2004). The characteristics of the various communities stand as points of contact and connection rather than exclusion from positions of privilege.

Within this capitalistic system, this system that survives on a supply of laborers and managers, this research will look into “who pays the tab” (Compton-Lilly, 2004 p. 115) for education? What is the currency used to pay for the democratic distribution of educational access? What aspects of self, culture, and community are to be surrendered in the pursuit of social justice through education? I am most interested in the continuing search for the answer to the question, at what cost access? As this search is a personal endeavor the research must also be personal. As this search requires the passion and determination only found in active participation and connection, the research must “be bound up with memory” (Morrison, 1990, p. 305).

Memory, just as this research project, is personal, is participatory, and is an extremely passionate journey into and beyond societal attempts at confinement due to the pervasiveness of race. I seek to improve the condition of the African American in our nation’s schools by heeding Schwab’s call *to do good* through research rather than simply attempting to theorize well (He, 2003). Our story is unique to us in the living of it. It is common to us all as a story of the greater human agency. It is common to us all in the desire to receive a quality education in a society that preaches equity and justice.

It is with sincere hope that in our collective and common jump rope session as a social structure that we will arrive at a point where as African Americans will see

ourselves as kings and queens who are able to stand at ease in the creation of a social reality that includes justice and a story that *we like the best*.

Kings and Queens and partners two,

Here are the things that you must do:

Stand at ease.

Bend your knees.

Salute to the east.

Bow to the west.

Shake to the one,

That you like best.

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APPENDIX A
INFORMED CONSENT

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF Curriculum, Foundations, and Reading

Title of Project: Self, Others, and Jump Rope Communities: The Triumphs of African American Females

Principal Investigator: Wynnetta Scott-Simmons, Doctoral Student, Georgia Southern University

Project Supervisor: Dr. Ming Fang He, Professor, Georgia Southern University

The purpose of this research is to explore the impact of educational integration on the cultural identity and academic success of African American adolescent females. Also explored will be the impact of integration on the ability of African American women to serve as transmitters of cultural heritage and to pass on the lessons of triumph learned as a community faced with the struggles of segregation, communities I have termed Jump Rope Communities. The information will provide teacher educators with insights into meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse student population through the creation of culturally relevant, inclusive, and engaging pedagogy.

This letter is to formally request your permission and assistance with this research project. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any time. The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How does racial and cultural identity formation in home communities impact the integrative success of African American women?
2. How does educational desegregation and integration impact the ability of African American women to maintain their cultural identity?
3. What part did the cultural literacy lessons learned in segregated home communities contribute to integrative success?

Your contribution to this research will include phone conversations, email communications, story telling, frequent talks and conversations, collection of school artifacts, and the participation in tape-recorded, individual and group interview sessions, each lasting approximately one hour. Questions are designed to prompt and encourage each participant to tell their story and to preserve the triumphant lessons for future students. If you agree to participate, please sign and date the consent form and return it in the envelope provided. A copy of this form will be returned to you for your records.

The benefits of this study to participants will include an opportunity to for your personal stories of integration, struggle, and triumph to be preserved. Participation will also provide each of us with an opportunity to revisit, reconnect, and reflect upon this segment of our educational lives. The collection and examination of your personal vignettes may provide

current and future educators with insights into how to include the oral literacies of students from diverse backgrounds, to not only teach them more effectively, but also in a manner that is more socially and culturally just.

The only risk associated with your participation in this study is identification as a participant. Pseudonyms for your name and the focus school will not be used. As a result, *one essential qualifier will be that you decline anonymity*. All transcripts of the interviews and field texts will be provided for your approval. Any requested changes will be made prior to the analysis or publication of the data. Additionally, all results of this research will be made available to each participant upon completion of the project. You will have an opportunity to approve the text submitted for publication. At the conclusion of the project, all original artifacts will be returned to participants. All audio tapes, transcripts, and field notes will be stored in a locked file cabinet until 2011. No one will have nor be provided with access to these files.

Should you have any further questions or concerns about this research project, please call me at (404) 816-9869 or email me at love2learn@bellsouth.net. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Ming Fang He at (912) 871-1546 or mfhe@georgiasouthern.edu. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-486-7758.

There are no costs that may result from participation in this research. Neither will any compensation result from participation in this project.

Again, participation in this project is completely voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time without penalty simply by informing me of your intent to decline to answer questions posed.

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

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

Title of Project: Self, Others, and Jump Rope Community: The Triumphs of African American Women

Principal Investigator: Wynnetta Scott-Simmons, 2 Vale Close NE, Atlanta, GA 30324
(404) 816 – 9869 (Home) (770) 861 – 0514 (Cell)
love2learn@bellsouth.net

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Ming Fang He, Curriculum, Foundations, and Reading, College of Education
P.O. Box: 8144, Statesboro, GA 30460-8144
(912) 871-1546 mfhe@georgiasouthern.edu

Participant Signature

Date

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

Investigator Signature

Date

APPENDIX B

IRB COMPLETION CERTIFICATE



Human Participant Protections Education for Research Teams

This is to certify that

Wynnetta Scott-Simmons

has completed the **Human Participants Protection Education for Research Teams** online course, sponsored by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), on 12/18/2006.

This course included the following:

- key historical events and current issues that impact guidelines and legislation on human participant protection in research.
- ethical principles and guidelines that should assist in resolving the ethical issues inherent in the conduct of research with human participants.
- the use of key ethical principles and federal regulations to protect human participants at various stages in the research process.
- a description of guidelines for the protection of special populations in research.
- a definition of informed consent and components necessary for a valid consent.
- a description of the role of the IRB in the research process.
- the roles, responsibilities, and interactions of federal agencies, institutions, and researchers in conducting research with human participants.

National Institutes of Health
<http://www.nih.gov>

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF Curriculum, Foundations, and Reading

Title of Project: Self, Others, and Jump Rope Communities: The Triumphs of African American Females

Principal Investigator: Wynnetta Scott-Simmons, Doctoral Student, Georgia Southern University

Project Supervisor: Dr. Ming Fang He, Professor, Georgia Southern University

1. What is your educational background? Could you tell me some stories about your early childhood experiences? In terms of your early childhood life, please describe your home community and your experiences growing up there. Describe any awareness you may have had regarding your experience of segregation, desegregation, and integration.
2. Would you tell me some stories about your experiences at school, in your family, and in your community?
3. If you were to give academic and professional advice to young African American females, what would it be?
4. Who would you say had the greatest impact on your education and why?
5. What are you most proud of academically and professionally?