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The Voices of Reason: Counterstories of the Urbanization of a Suburban Black School in Georgia

Shana Hunt

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THE VOICES OF REASON: COUNTERSTORIES OF THE URBANIZATION OF A
SUBURBAN BLACK SCHOOL IN GEORGIA

by

SHANA HUNT

(Under the Direction of Ming Fang He)

ABSTRACT

This inquiry explores the discrepancy of educational opportunities in a Black suburban public school near Atlanta, Georgia. Predominately Black suburban schools in the South have become increasingly similar to Black urban schools. Both Black urban and suburban schools have become places of complacency for teachers and students. There is an incessant fluctuation of teachers and an increase in low expectations for academic success in Black suburban schools. Both Black urban and suburban schools have limited funding while White schools, many times less than ten miles away, experience the benefits of magnet programs, cutting-edge technology and rigorous curricula. Many Black suburban schools mimic the oppressive curriculum of the Black urban schools used and discussed in many studies (Kozol,2001; Kozol, 2005; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2007).

Drawing on the works of critical race theory (Bell, 1992; Rousseau & Dixson, 2006; Douglass Horsford & Grosland, 2013; Decuir and Dixson, 2004), education of Blacks in the South (Morris and Monroe, 2004; Anderson 1988; Siddle-Walker, 1996; Siddle-Walker and Snarey, 2004), race (Siddle-Walker and Tompkins, 2004;West, 2001;

Steinberg and Kincheloe, 2007; Walker and Snarey, 2004), class (Kozol, 2000, 2005; Warikoo and Carter, 2009) and commodification (Bowles & Gintis, 1926; Kozol, 1991, 2000, 2005), I examine the issues in Black suburban schools and show how they are related to issues of oppression and disenfranchisement as seen in urban schools. I examine the steps taken by the school and school system to eliminate chances of academic success for Black students in this predominately Black school, which include a lack of funding, a lack of competent and caring teachers, and a lack of materials and educational prospects

I use counterstorytelling (Love, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1999, 2000; Delgado, 1989; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) and fiction (Connelly, He, & Phillion, 2008; Hurston , 1937; Bell, 2005) to explore the desire for students to find their way to success within a school that expected them to fail. I have fictionalized the characters and the timeline of events, but have maintained the exactitude of the lack of support from the school despite the personal drive of the students.

INDEX WORDS: Suburban schools, Black Students, Critical Race Theory, Counterstorytelling, Fiction, Education of Blacks in the South, Inequitable Education, Racism, Urbanization

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SCHOOL IN GEORGIA

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DEDICATION

My mother, Almeda Huckabee Hunt

My mother supported my decision to teach without reservation. When I was assigned to the school with the worst reputation in the county, she held back her very strong opinions and supported me with everything from bulletin boards to financing special events for my students. My mother was also the one to ask when I planned to start and complete my final personal educational goal and earn a doctorate. Unfortunately she died shortly after I started the program, but I know this milestone, which I know was for both of us, will make her smile.

My daughter, Cameron Hunt-Clark

My daughter dictates my every move and thought and I am so blessed to have been granted the responsibility and pleasure of giving birth and raising her. There were times when I wanted to give up on this degree, but knowing that she wanted me to finish 'the paper' has led me to this point.

All of the students that allowed me the opportunity to take a peak in their lives

My students have shared with me their dreams, frustrations, and strange humor. They have shaped the way I teach and how I interact with my students. I know, regardless of my formal education, that the education that has affected who I am as a teacher is due largely to my students.

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My Dissertation Committee

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Read more, so you can join the ranks.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	7
PROLOGUE	11
CHAPTER	
1 THE WAY IT WAS: BEING A SUBURBAN BLACK--INTRODUCTION	
Key Research Issues	14
Autobiographical Roots of My Inquiry.....	16
Introducing Characters in Novellas	24
2 WHY IT IS WHAT IT IS-LITERATURE REVIEW	
Literature Review.....	26
Critical Race Theory	27
Education of Blacks in the South.....	40
Race.....	49
Class	58
Urbanization.....	61
Commodification	63
3 IF ONLY THEY WOULD LISTEN, WE HAVE PLENTY TO SAY: METHODOLOGY	
Counterstorytelling	66
Fiction	69
Collecting Counterstories.....	74
Exemplary Studies	77
Significance of Study.....	79

4	KNOWING THEIR WORTH: COUNTERSTORIES OF THE URBANIZED SUBURBAN BLACK STUDENTS	
	Prelude	81
	First Day Of School	84
	So, This Is How It Works Here.....	99
	Interlude	113
	Family Ties	118
	What We Really Want	132
	What You Want And What You Get	141
	Because We Care So Much.....	152
	Interlude	157
	How Are We Going To Make This Work?.....	160
	We've Got This!	166
	And The Truth Is Revealed.....	172
	Spring Semester	180
	Can I Get Some Help Here!	190
	This Is Only A Test.....	197
	Why This Can't Work.....	203
	We Gave It Our Best.....	212
	Postlude.....	220
5	WHAT'S THE POINT IF YOU ARE BLACK AND POOR: REFLECTION OF INQUIRY	221
6	EPILOGUE.....	241
	REFERENCES	246

PROLOGUE

In the past fifteen years, I have had the opportunity to work in two public schools and one community college. The experiences shaped the way I teach my students and the efforts I make to stay current as an educator and to maintain a positive and effective relationship with my students. Of all the students that I have taught, the students in my first school stand out the most to me. It may be because they were at the beginning of my teaching career or it may be because of the observations I made regarding their education. The students in my first school were Black and that seemed to dictate the type of education they received. Their opportunities for a good and effective education were elusive, yet I met students that did the best they could to achieve academic success.

My first few years of teaching introduced me to something I was not expecting to find, a suburban school that operated as an urban school. Despite the fact that the school was located in the middle of a neighborhood of houses and mature trees, the inside of the school looked and operated like the schools I visited in the inner-city of Atlanta. The roof leaked, the windows were broken and the power went off without warning. The teachers openly admitted that they did not care if their students were successful in their classes and many did very little in the classroom to help their students learn (Kozol, 1991, 2000, 2005; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2007) . The administrators turned a blind eye to the violence and drug use at the school and they ignored the apathy of care that many of the teachers displayed. It was a paradox; a school in suburbia was not supposed to function in the manner of an urban school.

It became clear through conversations with teachers that the same beliefs about inner-city Black students dictated the way the students in my school were regarded. “They don’t want to learn,” and “You can’t expect anything from these kids” were common phrases to describe the students. The teachers’ remarks reminded me of the studies I read in graduate school about Black students and their inability or lack of desire to work. It appeared to me, that many of the personnel of the school had accepted these stories rather than getting to know the desires and capabilities of their students. But I did not find this to be true. I met students that did not reflect the majoritarian stories of education. They may have been Black and not from the best economic situations, but they valued their education and had dreams that included having a college education and a career. But, the school was preparing them for jobs. They were not being prepared for jobs that would allow them to move up the social ladder, but were being prepared for jobs that would keep them in a lower rung of the social ladder.

The students I modeled my characters after represent many students in the school that defied the majoritarian stories of the race and school. They had goals beyond high school and sought out resources to help them reach those goals. They did not want the environment that appeared to curtail their potential and squash their goals have the final say on their future. They did not want the pre-prescribed future that the school offered: servitude and poverty; they aimed for success and found pockets of support within the school to help them achieve their dreams. Their truth did not support the school’s expectations for the students. Their lives were not what was described in educational textbooks discussing Black students. Their stories should have been heard if the teachers really wanted to help the students (Love, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1999, 2000; Delgado,

1989; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). The stories of their efforts to find academic success was necessary if there was going to be any improvement in the school.

I have observed that many of the issues that Black students face in public school have very little to do with their intelligence and have more to do with their skin color and socio-economic status. Using critical race theory as the theoretical framework and the counterstory telling and fiction as the methodology, I illustrate that the root cause of mis-education of Blacks is racism compounded with classism, sexism, colonialism, and other forms of oppression. Any effort to improve the situation of Black students and education has to include the voices of those Black students if there is to be any meaningful progression of equity and equality.

CHAPTER ONE

THE WAY IT WAS:

BEING A SUBURBAN BLACK SCHOOL--INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to explore how the urbanization of a Black suburban public school near Atlanta perpetuates social and economic oppression and disenfranchisement to another generation of Blacks in the school community. Predominately Black suburban schools in the South have become increasingly similar to Black urban schools. Both Black urban and suburban schools have become places of oppressive compliance. The school observed had constant personnel changes and continuous low expectations for academic success for Black students. Both Black urban and suburban schools have limited funding and lack the benefits of magnet programs, cutting-edge technology and rigorous curricula. Many Black suburban schools mimic the oppressive curriculum of the Black urban schools (Kozol, 2001; Kozol, 2005; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2007). This would lead one to believe what many Black students in the school believed, that Blacks have a lower aptitude and should not expect school to benefit their lives (O'Conner, Lewis and Mueller 2007).

Key Research Issues

Much has been written about why some students perform better in schools than others. This is of great importance to students of color. Historically they have been educationally disenfranchised. The blame is usually put on the students. It is their fault because they do not want to learn, they do not have parental support, the students' lack the desire to learn or they are not genetically inclined to be successful in school (Ogbu &

Simons, 1998). Their problems with school and learning were rooted in racism that manifested itself in several ways. Urban Black schools tend to receive less funding, novice teachers, and curricula that promote test-taking skills versus curricula that promote thinking and creativity. The same was true for this particular school. The school created an environment that supported violence, drug abuse, and low academic and social expectations. The school was filled with teachers that did not care about the future of their students because they are not of the same social class (Anyon, 2005). The students were also assigned administrators that were riding out their time to retirement and therefore, made little effort to make changes that led to progress within the schools (Mikell, 2012). The end result was less Black students graduating from high school, fewer Black students attending college and even fewer graduating from college. Unlike many of the schools discussed in other research, it was not in the city. It was in a suburban area and it was a failure to its students and its community.

The questions of importance to me are how the students who were a product of the schools in the community viewed their future and how they prepared or were prepared for life after school. Secondly, how and why did a Black suburban school have more characteristics of an urban Black school that did not empower its students? Could students manage to reach their personal academic goals in an environment that did not offer them support? Some of the students had high goals despite what the climate of the school dictated, but their goals and dreams were not enough. Was it possible for them to find success or reach their dreams when the people that were supposed to help them were teaching them and showing them how to fail? Their lack of support by the school that

was charged to prepare them for a life, a career and a future appeared to be failing to honor its only obligation.

Autobiographical Roots of My Inquiry

The passion of my research derives from my first few years teaching at a public school. What I expected and what I experienced was a contrast. My expectation was to enter a school that was preparing students for the ‘real world’ or college. What I found was a school that was preparing students to fail in college or hold subordinate, blue collar positions in the ‘real world’. What was most shocking was that the climate of the school did not permeate success. Many of the teachers did not seem to care about the success of their students. The administrators ignored misconduct of teachers and students.

Subsequently, it was no surprise to find that many of the students did not see the purpose of completing school, because they did not see the value in having an education. Initially, my thoughts were, ‘this is a bad year’, but over the course of the next 4 years I learned that this was the norm for Black students in Black schools. The teachers had traded the future of their students for a steady paycheck and medical benefits. I watched two entire classes drop out of school. I saw half of a senior class march across a stage to receive a certificate of attendance and listened to other students tell tales of how they failed out of junior college because they were not competent in basic algebra or essay writing. These experiences were very different than what I was told to expect in my pre-service education classes and I was very disappointed and ashamed.

My first job after completing graduate school was as a researcher at Georgia State University. I worked on a grant that was with the American Cancer Society. I went to

elementary schools that were part of Atlanta Public Schools. My job was to help tweak a curriculum, train teachers, and go into the schools and teach fourth graders about the importance of eating fruits and vegetables. In order to qualify to be a part of the grant, the schools had to be in low-income area, which meant that 99% of my students were Black and many of the teachers were Black. It was a fun job, but the more I got involved in the schools and the classrooms, the more I was in awe of what was going on in public schools. At the time, Atlanta had a policy that threatened to remove teachers whose students did not do well on the ITBS and rewarded teachers with bonuses when their students did do well on the test. I discovered some teachers were giving the students the answers on the test, others were changing the answers on the test, and still others that were actually stressed out because they hoped they taught their students everything they needed to know to do well on the test. In my naivety, I was shocked. I sat in classes and watched fourth graders struggle with easy words that most 1st graders should know. I watched as the teachers of some of these students called them stupid and told them that they did not have a future. I watched students give up on education. I realized while working with these schools that I needed to get into public school and teach to use my two degrees the way I initially planned. I applied to the county that I grew up in and not soon after applying I was called in for an interview. The school that needed a teacher immediately was considered the worst school in the county. The previous teacher left one day near the beginning of the semester, and rumor was she chose to lose her teaching license instead of returning to the school. I was eager to get in the classroom full-time and make up for some of the things I had witnessed in Atlanta. I took the position with visions of changing lives and making a difference.

My experiences for the remainder of that school year, in conjunction with my experiences in Atlanta Public Schools, have determined my research. I watched teachers purposefully destroy dreams and I saw students give up on their aspirations. I learned that some schools, like my school, did not matter. They were not even important enough for sports. It was the wasteland for bad teachers, new teachers, foreign teachers, furtive administrators, and students that had been kicked out of other schools. I realized that very few people in the school expected success for the majority of the students. Students were allowed to come to class high and drunk. Most of the administrators and teachers did not make a big deal about students that were late to class or those that they knew were skipping class. I also questioned why so many students did not seem to value their education and I realized it was because many of them had shared experiences with my 4th graders in Atlanta. They had been broken years before they reached high school.

I am the product of this school system that once boasted that it was a premier school system. Parents moved into the county so their children could get a quality education that was up-to date, relevant, well-rounded and effective. It is one of the fastest growing Black communities in the South. Despite the growth of the Black population and the growth of Black wealth, the school system reflected the schools prior to *Brown vs. Board of Education*. The expectation for Black students was to fail in school which limited their social and economic mobility. The schools were resegregated, but unlike the segregated Black schools prior to 1965, the care and high expectations for Black students did not exist. Black students experienced failure and disenfranchisement. Throughout the county the replication of failure could be found in low scores in state and national standardized exams. As Murrell (2009) states,

inequality of per-pupil funding disparities in the quality of teachers, inequality of scholastic resources, and unequal access to educational capital - it can be argued that the popular characterization of America's educational challenge as one of 'closing the gap' may actually serve to perpetuate, rather than eliminate, the achievement gap... (p. 89)

In the last 15 years that premier education that the school system was known for has gone from decent to adequate, to being put on probation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). I saw how the system was declining my first year of teaching high school in this district. The standards were lowered: expectations were minimal; student participation was not expected; teacher morale was low and there was a general sense of apathy throughout the school. This was in the schools on the south side of this suburban county; the northern schools still held to the ideal of being a premier school system. Similarly, the funding supported one side of the county academically and financially, and the other side was told to do the best that they could. Students in this school were compared to students in other schools in the district and the nation even though there was a lack of equality in resources and education; the students were expected to learn with less. Additionally, for these students, whose options for learning were not readily available, the academic expectations diminished when administrators and district leaders did not see the same progress as seen locally or nationally. These students found themselves in a recreation of early American schools. They were in school to "enter the world of work performing routinized tasks, rather than pursue advanced education and professions requiring critical analysis or creative thinking." (Tatum, 2007, p. 41) Their school was expected to fail; it was intended to be institutions that reproduce

social inequality (Kane and Kyyro, 2001). Other teachers had adopted the distinct characteristics of “uncle tomming” and used the black students in their care as a way to move up the social ladder of education. They wanted the favor of white superiors and used the school and the students as a way to show their loyalty to the white stereotypes regarding Black students. It was these Black teachers that encouraged their Black students to pursue or settle for blue-collar or industrial jobs instead of reaching for careers that require higher education (Ogbu, 1983). Many of the administrators and teachers seemed to embrace the negative stereotypes surrounding Blacks. Subsequently, the teachers and administrators had low expectations of the students because they believed or were told their students were from a culture of poverty. Like teachers in urban schools, they displayed conduct that insinuated a belief that their students were not motivated to aspire for high academic achievement (Howard, 2010; Mikell, 2012). This lack of expectations tended to have an effect on the students’ belief and lower their desire to want to find success. This left the students with two options: accept what the limited education and negative stereotypes the school offered, or find a way to defy the climate of the school and seek out success (Robinson and Biran, 2006; Jackson, 2001).

I came to the school as a new teacher that had all the dreams and desires to change lives. I was going to work long hours and listen to every student to ensure that they had every opportunity to learn new skills that they could use, not only in my class, but in their other classes in high school and beyond. So imagine my surprise to walk into a school in shambles in less than five miles from where I grew up. Very few people cared about the success of the students. The expectation for most students was failure. Students were allowed to roam the halls and still pass their classes. Students were allowed to miss

three consecutive weeks of school without a legally excusable reason and make-up all of their assignments. Students were allowed to leave school to have sex or abuse drugs, and return with very little or no recourse. This was not all of the students. There were students who generally cared about their future and their education, but it was difficult for them to navigate in a school with so many distractions. They had to seek out opportunities for a good education on their own. It was hard for them to see beyond high school though many of them had ambitions to go to college. There were only a few teachers that encouraged them to work harder and work regardless of the school's wide acceptance of a lackadaisical atmosphere. They had to search for teachers that would help them understand a new concept. They had to find someone to help them improve their reading or writing skills because this kind of help was not offered to them by most of the teachers or any programs in the school. They had to search for anyone who would explain the differences in a bachelor's in Science and a bachelor's in Arts because their counselors would not or could not help them. They had to ask teachers to help them fill out their FAFSA forms. Though these things were offered in other schools in the northern part of the district, the school system nor the local administration saw no need to offer it to the students in this school because they were supposed to be employees to the students in the northern part of the county (Kozol, 1991).

I begin to take notes on what I saw that I did not believe was appropriate for a public school. Though some of these students were obviously not going to complete high school because the system had done its job of breaking their spirit and drive, there were many that could have completed high school if they could figure out how to navigate through the abyss of drugs, sex, violence, and apathy at the school. I knew all of them

would not go to college, but I believed all of them had the right to make that decision, but the curriculum was not preparing them to graduate from high school or enroll and graduate from a two or four year college or university. Those that did were always a shock to the teachers and administrators. Very few were expected to make such an accomplishment, and many that did make it to college were athletes or members of the band. For many of the students, school had become a place where they learned that they held little value to society (Steele, 1992).

My first few years of teaching left me with a plethora of questions. What made this school less important to the county than other schools in the county? Why were some of the Black schools better than others? Why had apathy become commonplace for both the teachers and the students? How did the curriculum impact the climate of the school and the expectations the students had for themselves and their teachers? How were students that valued their education supposed to thrive in a school that did not offer them academic support? I realized that what had changed was the design and purpose of the school for minority students. The schools in the system were being tracked. Similar to tracking students in different classes, schools on the south side of the county were lowering the standards of learning for predominately Black schools (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). Schools that track students in classes lower standards for the students that are usually poor and minority, and the county was doing the same thing. It lowered the standards for school achievement and success in poor and minority neighborhoods. As Jeannie Oakes (2005) states,

[S]tudents placed in average and low-track classes do not develop positive attitudes. Rather than help students feel more comfortable about themselves, the

tracking process seems to foster lowered self-esteem among these teenagers. Further exacerbating these negative self-perceptions are the attitudes of many teachers...Students in low-track classes have been found to have lower aspirations are more often to have their plans for the future frustrated. (p. 8)

The school's curriculum produced students that did not desire to achieve academic success. The curriculum looked much like what Carter G. Woodson described in *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (1933), education for Black children was to teach them to understand the values, norms and societal expectations for them as a minority race. Most of the classes did not offer opportunities for students to explore issues in great depth, interaction with teachers was limited in exchange for worksheets and book work. This in turn means that the students' attitudes about school and self-esteem are lowered (Parker, Deyhle, and Villenas, 1999). The perception of many teachers was that these students had no future that required them to receive a good education; therefore, there was no expectation that the students would work hard or try to pass their assignments. The students learned to believe this about themselves and many gave up or lowered their aspirations. The teachers' view of these students further intensified the issue of low self-esteem because they lowered their expectations for students. Thus, the intent of the dominating race is realized by controlling the thinking of the minority students, the dominating race controls the actions and mobility of the minority students (Woodson, 1933).

Despite all of this intentional opposition for Black student's academic success, some wanted to gain the evasive educational and cultural capital needed to graduate from high school and attend college. They recognized that their future and opportunity for

success was something they had to fight to attain. These black students consciously made an effort to move beyond the school's expectation for them to maintain the status quo (Feire, 2001). These students became aware of their identity as an individual and not collectively as a race (Robinson and Biran, 2006). They embraced their rich history, and recognized that historically Blacks have succeeded when they were expected to fail. They used this knowledge and took advantage of any resources available that could enhance their education and success. These students did not accept the belief that Blacks excelled in sports and music exclusively, but believed they could find success in careers that required the use of their intelligence. Research shows that the only way to reverse the achievement gap found in schools like this is to change the climate of the school that has been created by uncaring administrators and teachers that are not invested in educating the poor or the Black (Irving & Hudley, 2008; Ladson-Billings & Brown, 2007). This school was filled with a few types of teachers: teachers that were not qualified, teachers that were on provisional certificates or lacked basic preparation for the subject they were assigned to teach or teachers that declared that the students were not teachable because of preconceived notions about their poor Black students (Mikell, 2012). Additionally, this school had a high turnover of teachers and administrators which limited the students' sense of trust and security (Howard, 2010). This can no longer be the standard in predominately Black or poor schools if the school system truly wants all students to be successful.

Introducing Characters in Novellas

The novella that follows delves into the lives of several students in a suburban Black public high school. The composite characters share their experiences in their high

school that was not helping them reach their personal goals. All of the students wanted more from their school in the form of support and rigor. Some of them had the same background, and others were outsiders and saw the contrast in what was expected of them as students. Jerome is a football player who has attended schools in the high school cluster. He dreams of playing football in college and of creating a less stressful life than he and his mother have. Tanisha is also a product of the high school cluster. She has a sister that attends a university, and Tanisha dreams of following in her sister's footsteps and leaving her dysfunctional home. Shenika is Tanisha's best friend, and her support system in school. She dreams of being the first person in her family to go to college. Rasheed appears to be the average student in his high school. He has spent time in the youth detention center, and has an unstable home life. Benard is Rasheed's closest friend. The boys have known each other since kindergarten, and have managed to make many of the same mistakes in school and at home. The boys are honest with each other, which helps both of them change their way of thinking about school. Kasey is the only student that is not a product of the high school cluster. She has relocated from Virginia where she attended a predominantly Black school. She has to deal with the culture shock of her new school. All of the students have a teacher in common, Cassidy. She is new to the school, and to teaching high school and also experiences surprises regarding the expectations and curriculum of the school.

CHAPTER TWO

WHY IT IS WHAT IT IS: LITERATURE REVIEW

There are six bodies of literature that are relevant to my inquiry: (1) critical race theory; (2) the education of Blacks in the South; (3) race; (4) class; (5) urbanization; and (6) commodification. Critical race theory addresses the maintenance of White superiority through laws and education (Vaught, 2005). Even with the school reform rhetoric, education for Blacks is still inadequate if the goal is for social equality in America. Black students in the South have had to fight, demand, and settle on an education that has traditionally held them in a subordinate class. Jim Crow laws, Rosenwald schools, and separate and unequal schooling is the inheritance of Black students attempting to move to a higher social and political plane. This inequality in education lends to Blacks maintaining a position in a lower social class. Unlike the liberalism beliefs of many whites that meritocracy determines a person's availability to success; Blacks find that their worth has been determined by the color of their skin, the economical worth of their parents and their location within a city or in a suburb (Zamudio, Russell, & Bridgeman, 2010). Students in Black urban schools have long been labeled as at-risk, troubled, disadvantaged or special needs; this same labeling is taking place in Black suburban schools and is affecting the reversal of the movement to ensure equality in education. "[E]quality of opportunity in the United States would mean that all members of society are given equal chance to enter any occupation or social class and will occupy their particular positions because of merit and not from family wealth, heredity, or special cultural advantages." (Bass & Gerstl-Pepin, 2010, p. 917) Many Black schools have become a place where students were taught to devalue their lives and their education.

Using meritocracy to determine who should be successful, attention is taken away from the choices that are made by schools to push some students to success and to push other students to failure. Critical race theorists scrutinize education's majoritarian narrative of meritocracy that validate and legitimize why Black schools are continuously at the bottom of the educational hierarchy (Zamudio, Russell, & Bridgeman, 2010). Black students are taught that their place in this world has already been determined, and that they need to concentrate on getting and keeping good blue-collar jobs. Their education has been sold to the corporations that expect to make life-long, blind, consumers that, though they will never make a lot of money, will make a lot of money for those corporations that invested in their second-rate education.

Critical Race Theory: Theoretical Framework

Ladson-Billings and Tate, (1995) draw attention to the fact that "Schooling inequalities are a logical and predictable result of racialized society in which discussions of race and racism continue to be muted and marginalized" Critical race theorists work to eliminate racism which, in turn, will eliminate subordination of people of color (Yosso, Parker, Solorzano, Lynn, 2004). Tate (1997) explains that,

both educational research and the law have often characterized 'raced' people as intellectually inferiors and raised doubts about the benefit of equitable social investment in education and other social services. This paradigmatic kinship built on conceptions of inferiority suggests the need for a theory of that explicates the role of race in education and the law (p. 202)

CRT explains the issues of race and racism in education and the affect it has on what students of color gain from education. It identifies how racism in schools works to benefit Whites and creates and/or maintains a subordinated class or people of color. It shows that the dominant group has a stake in the continuance of inequality that maintains their privilege. CRT exposes the façade of equality that many Whites feel they have given Blacks and other minorities by showing that the ideology surrounding different laws benefit Whites and perpetuate unequal opportunities for minority social groups (Kane and Kyyro, 2001). In the south these opportunities of inequality create a form of oppression in the education of Black students and limited movement in the social strata (Morris and Monroe, 2009). White families hold five times the accumulated net assets of medium Black families, due to slavery, sharecropping, Jim Crow laws and discriminatory housing and lending laws (Epstein, 2012). Yet, when many people claim that the reason there is a lack of overall success for Black students is because they choose and accept failure. Critical race counterstories offer narratives of those that have been marginalized socially because of their race. Counterstories challenge the discourse that has ignored or distorted the lived experience of minorities in a variety of arenas, including education. (Yosso, Parker, Solorzano, Lynn, 2004)

Many Whites believe that Blacks should be happy with whatever they have, which in many cases is what Whites are willing to give them. I discovered that my school mirrored what Rousseau and Dixson (2006), described in their narrative *The First Day of School*. The school year starts with a startling change for two urban schools. The predominately Black school has had a make-over; ceilings have been repaired, class rooms are furnished with new computers, college preparatory classes are offered, and the

school is staffed with caring teachers. In contrast, the predominately white school now had computers missing and computers that did not work, permanent substitute teachers, a lack of college preparatory classes offered and dilapidated textbooks. The school system changed the schools and provided the Black school the resources and curricula that would help them find academic and social success. In contrast, the White school experienced how their counterparts' school helped them maintain White hegemony. Eventually, the White parents complained; they believed, because of their whiteness and the value of their homes, that they had a right to better schools and academic offerings for their children. Equality of education for all students was not their primary concern.

Unlike the attempt in Rousseau and Dixson's narrative, the school district where I taught decided to give the Black students and the Black community the least educational opportunities. They offered the Black students an education that offered little hope for the Black students to achieve the 'American Dream'; I learned that the school had become the dumping ground for the school system. It sent troubled teachers from other schools; it transferred administrators that were preparing to retire, it sent problem students that did not live in the neighborhood to enroll in the school. The district leaders heard the complaints of parents about the leaking ceilings and lack of technology and did nothing to appease the parents or assist the students. The community found that the expectations were lowered by the teachers and the school-wide focus was on discipline, rather than rigor (Fernandez, 2002). These issues showed that even after the ruling of *Brown* there is still not equality in education. There was still not equality in what students learned, which meant that there was a group whose education prepared them for a higher status academically, and there was a group whose education prepared them for a lower status

that lacked opportunities for success academically. Black students in this school found themselves in the latter group. They found themselves in this group because historically their presence in America was involuntary; they did not choose to be American, they were forced to be American and then punished for being different. According to Ogbu and Simons, (1998) involuntary minorities "...are less economically successful than voluntary minorities, usually experienc[ing] greater and more persistent cultural and language difficulties and do less well in school" (p. 166). The students' lack of obtaining cultural capital lessened their opportunities to be successful educationally and socially. Carter G. Woodson, in *The Mis-education of the Negro*, explains how the Black education helps maintain an oppressed and obedient Black lower class:

The so-called modern education, with all its defects, however, does others so much more good than it does the Negro, because it has been worked out in conformity to the needs of those who have enslaved and oppressed weaker people...No systematic effort towards change has been possible, for taught the same economics, history, philosophy, literature and religion which have established the present code of morals, the Negro's mind has been brought under the control of the oppressor. The problem of holding the Negro down, therefore, is easily solved. When you control a man's thinking, you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him to stand here or go yonder. He will find his "proper place" and will stay in it. (p. ix)

The students in the school where I taught were the benefactors of their oppressors' form of education. They were "marginalized to the extent that they are excluded from society's economy and networks of care and expelled from useful participation in social life"

(Duncan, 2002, p. 133). Their behavior was “predictable, albeit unfortunate, outcome of a reasonably fair system (Duncan, 2002, p. 134). Many students accepted the unfair system and perpetuated the beliefs of their oppressors. They were in a school that was full of teachers that were not qualified, lacked efficacy, or did not believe these Black students deserved or were capable of a good education. Over time, the presence of such teachers discouraged the students and confirmed the stereotypes they heard about themselves (Douglass Horsford & Grosland, 2013). Liberal education reform alleged that new measures were designed to provide Black students with reforms to promote achievement, but these reform measures provided access without insuring the quality of their education (Zamudio, Russell, & Bridgeman, 2010). Their school was to serve as another way to maintain White hegemony (Watts and Erevelles, 2004). They had been written off as nonchalant, un-teachable thugs. No one expected anything from them and over time, many of them learned not to expect anything from themselves or the world. Many gave up before they started. The students found it difficult to believe in themselves, and try to improve their situation when the school was telling them that they were not worth the air they were breathing.

Many Black students gravitated to role models that were a part of the popular culture: movie stars, rappers, and professional athletes and they shunned Black professionals like politicians and businessmen because they believed they have sold out their race by adopting White values and characteristics (Obgu and Simons, 1998). Unfortunately, these students could not look to their teachers and administrators to balance or contradict the negative role models they have embraced. Instead, they were taught by teachers that did not see them as worthy of an equal or equitable education

(Kozol, 1991). American schools hail that education is the 'equalizer', an institute that "is seen as a commodity that helps transform life changes, improve economic prospects, change the outlooks to promising possibilities and reduce the gap between the have and the have-nots (Howard, 2010, p. 9) That is, unless the student is Black. Many Black schools have become the newest and easiest form of institutional racism; nihilistic ideals in the form of lessons and mandates can be issued daily in order to maintain a lower, subordinate Black class (West, 1994). West defines nihilism as "the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying, meaningless, hopelessness and (most importantly) lovelessness" (p14). Over time these ideas have become ingrained in the minds of many Black students by the time many of them reach high school. This meant Black students, that may have at one time been encouraged to go to college by family or teachers, have given up their dreams. Instead, they hoped that they would make it in sports, planned to become beauticians or mechanics, or settled into a life that would not offer them a lot of opportunities to achieve the American dream. Peer relationships became more important than academic achievement and if school officials did not offer an alternative to the socialization defined by stereotypical behavior, students succeeded in becoming socially accepted, but educationally inept. Because they were tracked once because of the neighborhood they lived in and then again because of their ability or behavior. This tracking encouraged many of their students to lower their aspirations. They accepted their place in the 'hierarchical and authoritarian' society (Oakes, 2005, p. 144). Over time, many teachers in this school were indoctrinated to accept deficit-based thinking, and believed their type of students were "not fit for academic success and social uplift" (Howard, 2010, p. 29). Yet, in this chaos of compliance there were students who tried to

balance their peers, home life, and education, but because their peers had learned to devalue education, these high achieving students were either swayed to give up or became ostracized by their peers and labeled as nerds, teacher pets, or sell-outs (Walker 2006).

In regards to their education, racism and oppression was easily justified and maintained by location and property. C. I. Harris in *Whiteness as property*, (1995) outlines how property functions in the interest of whites. Property functions on three levels of rights or privilege: possession through exclusivity (white privilege), use, and disposition. The students in the predominately Black school became easy prey for the continuance of racism and oppressive actions. The property value of their homes was lower and school officials and law makers believed that, because values were lower, the education the students were offered did commensurate the value of their homes and not what they needed (Torres, 1998; Bass & Gerstl-Pepin, 2010). Schools and low-income communities tend to be underfunded even in rich school systems. This lack of funding means that the quality of the education is also poor, which in turn creates very little opportunities for the students (Jackson, 2001). “The policies procedures, rules, and regulations that result in these substantively different in-school experiences between [Black] and White children seem natural and normal, and seem to seldom be questioned by teachers, counselors, principals, and other school personnel.” (Love, 2013, p. 229) What was not addressed was that the opportunities to be educated and compensated for work was limited for Blacks who were one generation removed from Jim Crow laws, peonage and legalized racist segregation. CRT analyzes the educational inequality received by Black students as well as their lack of access to high quality rigorous

curricula that are offered exclusively to White schools and White students (Decuir and Dixson, 2004). The school district claimed that it cared about all of its students and offered parents of students in these schools programs that appeared to benefit the student, but the type of curricula offered to my students did not reflect this claim. Historically, the education of Black students in publicly funded schools in the South has been limited to an industrial education (Morris and Monroe, 2009). In the case of my school system, once the kinks were worked out of any new programs and they showed that students were learning better or more, the programs were either removed from the school or sent to a predominately White school. The programs are replaced with curricula that focused on conformity and required minimal knowledge of basic skills for completion (Gay, 1990).

Observing education through a critical race lens allows for an examination of racism as it relates to the discourse, practices and constructions of education (Yosso, et al). Kane and Kyyro (2001) stated that, “By masking the existence of inequalities, defining them as good, or construing them as inevitable, ideologies and the beliefs derived from them can legitimate and perpetuate unequal relationships between social groups (710). John Ogbu (1998) explains in his cultural ecological theory that there are two forces working against Black students: the system and community forces. The system, which can be the school district or system, determines through curriculum and programs, how and what Black students will learn. The system defines and implements the policies and pedagogy that determines the future credentials and social opportunities beyond education. One would think that the implementations would be equal for all students regardless of their race or economic status, yet the “legacy of inequality in U.S. education...explains the different levels of outcomes across racial and social class

groups” (Howard, 2010, p. 31). Love (2004), points out that when Black students’ performance surpasses that of white students, the teachers of the Black students are reassigned to different schools or fired. Too much success can result in Black schools closing. CRT suggests that, “race should be the center of focus and change educational researchers to critique school practices and policies that are both overtly and covertly racist (DeCurit and Dixson, 2004). Without this focus and change in the educational outcomes, education for many Black students results in an inequality in employment opportunities, which in turn results in inequality of wealth (Conley, 1994), which continues the cycle of inequality of Blacks for future generations (Hale, 2001).

Some parents complained that the Black suburban schools did not have good teachers; many of the teachers in the schools were young, inexperienced, and/or foreign teachers. Others were seasoned teachers with antiquated teaching practices and archaic notions about Black students. These teachers became warm bodies to babysit rather than to prepare students for life beyond high school (Dixson and Rousseau, 2005).

Schools serving poor children are both strangled and condemned as they attempt to hire teachers. They are not allowed to hire the urban equivalent of the private school teacher- someone passionately committed and competent in teaching bilingual, nonwhite, non-affluent students. Yet, they cannot find enough people with credentials to fill the schools, and many of those they do find flee after a month or a year because they are either afraid of the students or unprepared for the demands of the job. (Epstein, 2012, p. 67)

Many are not invested in the success of all of their students; if the teacher does not value the future of the students in their classroom they do not make attempt or practice techniques that will increase student success (Hale, 2001). Critical Race Theory addresses the instances of interest convergence within schools as well as the perpetual White hegemony that dictates how and what Black students learn. Derrick Bell explained the racism within our society and how whites benefit from maintaining racism "...we fool ourselves when we argue that whites do not know what racial subordination does to its victims...They may not know the details of the harm or its scope, but they *know*. Knowing is the key to racism's greatest value to individual whites and to the interests in maintaining the racial status quo" (Bell, 1992, p. 151). Education safeguards White privilege by limiting the cultural capital that is necessary to effectively participate in American society, and that has proven to be necessary to excel academically beyond high school. School administrators and policy makers claim that there is as much equity as possible in Black and White education because it correlates the value of the neighborhoods and the expected social status of privilege and under privilege of the students (Kozol, 1991). Even though *Brown* was presented as a way to equalize education for all students, many students and communities are waiting for equality in education (Yosso et. al. 2007).

Through narratives, students that have been oppressed through education can express and explain their "objective situation and [their] awareness of themselves and of the world with and which they exist. One cannot expect positive results from an educational political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world" (Freire, 2001, p. 95) as viewed by the oppressed. CRT brings forth the voice of

the races that have been purposefully overlooked and socially subjugated and “...to engage the reader in democratic deliberation concerning the ironies and contradictions associated with laws constructed to appease White self-interest rather than address notions of equity” with the use of storytelling (Tate, 1997, p. 218). A counter-narrative can introduce or reiterate viewpoints from the historically oppressed in an effort to create a society that does not rely on the limited and heavily edited point of view of Whites. The counter-narrative gives a voice to the oppressed, from their experiences and challenges the beliefs of equality or fairness that the dominant culture writes about in journals and discusses in conferences (Ortiz & Jani, 2010).

CRT addresses this distrust of education for minorities with five tenets of education: the intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination; challenge to the dominate ideology; commitment to social justice; centrality of experiential knowledge and transdisciplinary perspective. The use of CRT in education recognizes that racism is a permanent and fundamental part of how American society functions (Crenshaw, 1991; Yosso, et al, 2004) and seeks to challenge the White privilege and show how it masks the self-interest, power and maintenance of privilege for Whites through curriculum (Bell, 1987; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Solorazano, 1997). CRT renders how interest convergence helps maintain racism within schools in regards to civil laws such as *Brown* (Bell, 1987; Yosso, et al, 2004; Dixson and Rousseau, 2005) and shows that “inferior educational outcomes are tolerated for African American children day in and day out in inner-city, suburban and private settings” (Hale, 2001, xx). Narratives that draw on the experiences of Blacks within education shed additional insight on the discrepancies in education for students of color and white students.

Additionally, narratives can shed a new light on how education promotes racial subordination through curriculum and school structure (Ogbu and Simons 1998; Yosso, et al, 2004).

“In the United States, African Americans, Latinos, native peoples, new immigrant populations and similar subordinated populations have consistently pointed out how the elite groups manipulate education to convince the American public to view social inequalities of race, class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality as natural, normal, and inevitable” (Hill-Collins, 2009, pg. 7). Their lived experiences include deliberate denial of entitlements, privileges and opportunities that are the norm for Whites. This control of limited social mobility of Blacks exists for Whites merely because of the color of their skin (Love, 2010). Critical race theory acknowledges how race influences education. Race, as defined by Yosso et al (2004), is a “socially constructed category created to differentiate groups primarily on the basis of skin color, phenotype, ethnicity, and culture for the purpose of showing the superiority or dominance of one group over another. Pinar, (2004), explains that race determines the discrepancies in funding and educational expectations in predominately Black schools, especially in the South. Bell (2004) points out “statistics on resegregation...painfully underscore the fact that many [B]lack and Hispanic children are enrolled in schools as separate and probably more unequal than those their parents and grandparents attended under the era of ‘separate but equal’ (pg. 114).

[C]ritical race theory challenges the traditional claims that educational institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity. Critical race scholars argue that these traditional claims act as a

camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in U.S. society. (Solozano and Yosso, 2002, p. 26)

Black students are overrepresented in special education, expulsion, and suspension rates which decreases their opportunity for positive educational experiences. The experiences of being continuously suspended or being referred to special education can contribute to a lack of value placed on attending or completing school (Jackson, 2001). Students in poor areas or from families that have a limited education tend to learn the negative stereotypes associated with their own race. Students are left to accept the negative stereotypes of lack of competency or drive or they must vehemently find a way to define themselves and go against the stories told about them (Douglass Horsford & Grosland, 2013). Without someone to shatter those negative images, the student embraces and perpetuates the stereotypes as opposed to forging their own path or defining themselves. Students perpetuate this in the language they use and the jokes they tell each other regarding Blacks being dumb or lazy (Tatum, 1999). They perpetuate the stereotypes by not trying in classes because they have been trained to expect their teachers to overlook their lack of work and pass them regardless of their effort or ability. They perpetuate this by not graduating from high school or not having enough skills to go to college or complete a collegiate program. They learn to accept a lesser education in the form of a trade because the education and preparation needed to complete high school and/or college was not provided to them

Education of Blacks in the South

Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments...It is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities, even service in the armed forces. It is the very foundation of good citizenship... In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms...

Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483(1954) (Brown 1)

The South is essential when examining the racial, political, cultural and economic influence on Black education (Morris and Monroe, 2004). On February 17, 1960, John Sibley, the head of the Georgia General Assembly Committee of Schools, told the committee that he “understood that, while none of them agreed with the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling, it was the law of the land and if the people worked together, they could ‘modify the evils of the decision’” (Roche, 2010, p. 88). Elite Whites saw *Brown* as a way to maintain their securities by eliminating the publicly known “apartheid-style public segregation, while leaving the fabric of de facto economic, residential, and educational segregation largely untouched.” (Gillborn, 2013, p. 134) In the 1960’s and 1970’s Whites retaliated. Their fear or hatred of their children learning side-by-side with Black students was more than they could handle. White parents packed up their children, left their comfortable homes in suburbia and moved further from the city because schools were being desegregated. These white parents believed that Black students were being bused into their schools and lowering the standards for academic excellence. They

believed because Black families were buying homes in their neighborhoods their property values would fall, so they left the neighborhoods (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). This was White flight. Whites saw the value of their children's education threatened; they saw their social status threatened by the invasion of Black children (Renzulli and Evans, 2005; Jackson, 2001). They created charter schools for their children and took funding from their children's former school to maintain their newly formed segregated schools (Kozol, 2005). What they left behind were schools that had a history of being successful but were forced to become schools that mirrored predominately Black urban schools that produced students that were shunned from leading, but trained to follow.

After the 14th amendment, Blacks sought the education they were denied while enslaved. Many established Black schools to educate the young and old (Spring, 2007; Anderson, 1988). The school year was limited to before and after harvest times because most students were children of sharecroppers. The schools were not supplied with the best books, nor did the schools have all the equipment that one would deem important for a quality education, but the drive to learn was present in the students and the drive to teach was present in the teachers. Eventually, the government acknowledged that it was responsible for providing a free education to Black students like White and immigrant children (Spring, 2007).

Not surprisingly, funds for Black schools were not equal to that of White schools, nor were Black students expected to receive the same education. Anderson (1988) points out that whites believed the curricula for Black students should teach youth to have "few wants" and to stay in their "natural environment"(p. 84). This belief was fundamental to White southerners that relied on the cheap or free labor of Blacks. Without a labor forced

populated by Blacks, the economy of the south was in jeopardy. Blacks who could read a contract, contest an unjust law, or calculate their wages circumvented the potential economic opportunities for Whites and gave Blacks potential opportunities of political and economic mobility (Anderson, 1988). After Reconstruction, Black parents and Black community members were eager for Black students to go to school even if it meant that they would be the victims of double taxation.

They had no choice but to pay both direct and indirect taxes for public education. Southern public school authorities diverted school taxes largely to the development of white public education. Blacks then resorted to making private contributions to finance public schools. “To have their privately financed schools recognized and even partially supported by state and local school authorities, black southerners had to deed to the state their contributions of money, land, and school equipment” (Anderson, 1988, p. 156). By 1920, not only were Blacks victims of double taxation, but, even with Black funding, the education of the students reflected the southern ideology of Black subordination, a system that curtailed the choices of Blacks and was overtly unequal.

Whites that did support the education of southern Blacks were supporters of the Hampton-Tuskegee ideology, which basically convinced Blacks into believing that they were inferior to Whites and should willingly and happily accept subordinate roles and menial jobs (Ascoli, 2006). Dubois, in *Souls of Black Folks*, states that the industrial education model endorsed by Booker T. Washington, dictates that Blacks give up their political power, assertion of civil rights and prospects of a higher education. Though many Blacks worked hard to raise money to fund Rosenwald schools, by 1916 many Black public schools in the south had classical and college preparatory curricula

(Anderson, 1998; Siddle-Walker, 1996). Segregated Black schools had “affective traits, institutional policies, and community support that helped Black children learn in spite of the neglect their schools received from white school boards.... [T]he schools are remembered as having atmospheres where ‘support, encouragement, and rigid standards’ combined to enhance students’ self-worth and increase their aspirations to achieve (Siddle-Walker, 1996, p. 3). Segregated Black schools were places where Black children felt safe and they knew that their teachers held high expectations for their students (Douglass Horsford & Grosland, 2013). This belief was evident in schools in Georgia (Harris & Taylor, 1999). Black students understood that there were high expectations of achievement and moral integrity by their teachers, their community and their parents. Students performed because there was an expectation of excellence and the students knew that the teachers believed that they could be successful (Wiggin, 2007).

In 1923, before the ruling of *Brown*, in an effort to level the educational plane for Black students, my county made attempts to improve the education of Black students by establishing Jeanes Supervisors. Jeanes Supervisors were funded by Anna T. Jeanes, a white philanthropist and humanitarian, to educate black students in the south. Under their supervision, several schools were established for Black students, and the living and learning conditions of Black students were improved (Harris and Taylor, 1999). These six women made great strides in improving the level of education Black students received despite Jim Crow laws, racism, and legal segregation of schools by raising funds to construct schools and purchase equipment that was not provided by the state (Spring, 2004). The children under their supervision thrived personally and academically by becoming better prepared to deal with real-life skills beyond school. Like many

segregated schools in the South, Black teachers and administrators worked tirelessly to make sure that their Black students could compete academically, politically, and socially with their white counterparts; “African American educators in segregated schools noted that African American children needed opportunities to develop their interests and talents because the segregated society in which they lived limited enrichment opportunities.” (Roche, p. 86) Despite the fact that Black students did not have equal materials, facility or learning conditions as White students in the same county, students were taught by teachers, administrators and clergy to value their education and work towards improving their current situation and community (Harris and Taylor, 1999; Siddle-Walker and Snarey, 2004). Social studies teachers made sure students registered to vote when they turned 18; artistic events were scheduled in communities to showcase the talents and knowledge of students (Harris and Taylor, 1999). It was common knowledge of the Black leaders and administrators that “race [was] foremost the most prominent feature” (West, 1994, p. 8) that determined how they and their students were categorized. Students had opportunity to thrive in public schools and in society. Despite this understanding, many Black parents wanted to integrate schools in order for their children to have the same opportunity academically as White children. In an effort to evade the possibility of equal education, Georgia made efforts to create tax credits to parents that would not integrate (Roche, 2010, p. 77) and eventually developed a committee to dissuade Blacks and Whites from supporting integration.

In 1960, Georgia’s governor, Earnest Vandiver, Jr. created the General Assembly Committee on Schools. The purpose of the committee, which was better known as the Sibley Commission, was to support the massive resistance of desegregation in Georgia

schools. The popular notion of the time in Georgia was to cut off state funds to schools that integrated. Though Vandiver eventually repealed the bill that interrupted state funding to integrated schools he, and the Sibley Commission, created or introduced tactics that would allow schools to decelerate integration (Roche, 2010). The provisions required by the Office of Education further delayed the integration of schools in Georgia. In 1964, the Johnson administration only required a survey of “the lack of availability of equal education opportunities for individuals by reason of race” (Rothstein, 2013, p. 3) instead of investigating schools and districts that refused to integrate schools. By 1969, the Black population in Dekalb County was not more than 5%, so in adherence to the *Brown* ruling, Black schools were closed and the students were integrated into White schools. After the *Brown* ruling, “the attention and resources of the nation were diverted from equal education for [Black] children and directed to desegregating schools and classrooms. The educational attainment of [Black] children was given the back burner.” (Love, 2010, p. 243)

During the mid-1980s, the Black population had accelerated to 65% of the total county population, but much of the growth was concentrated in the southern part of the county; white families migrated to the northern part of the county, thus re-segregating schools. In 1976, by court order, a biracial committee was established to integrate schools. One of the programs initiated by the committee was the Majority to Minority program, which allowed 4,500 students over 12 years to attend majority white schools that showed more academic success. In 1989, while still under court supervision, the school system designed a magnet program with a 50/50 percent racial balance. In 1996, the county was declared unitary by the court, and was no longer under court supervision;

by 1999, the Majority to Minority program was dissolved and schools became re-segregated (DeKalb). This effort to desegregate schools “absolve[ed] Whites of responsibility for creating, maintaining, and dismantling a society designed to advance their social, political, and economic advantage over the needs and interests of non-Whites.” (Donner, 2011, p. 542). In 2001, No Child Left Behind reauthorized Title 1 of 1965’s Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which was created to eliminate poverty through compensatory education programs for culturally disadvantage youth (Meier and Wood, 2004). NCLB, instead of concentrating on one group, encompassed all public school students needing help. Additionally, multicultural education, which would have granted more students the feeling of belonging to school and society, was reduced or eliminated in exchange for standardized tests and state regulated curriculum (Spring, 2011).

No Child Left Behind ignored research on why many students did not find success in school. Research regarding social reasons for students dropping out of school, the effect of media, the inequities of communities with distinct minority populations, and faulty curriculum designs for ‘at risk’ schools were not used when redesigning the act (Meier and Wood, 2004). The widening of the achievement gap between Black students and White students is, according to Wiggan, (2007), because of the “combination of the growing emphasis on standardized measures of achievement, a key feature of [NCLB]...It is evident that all students do not receive the same treatment with regard to education, but they are all expected, nevertheless, to produce similar outcomes.” (p. 322) Instead of focusing on the problems of education that created the achievement gap, NCLB concentrated on blaming teachers and students for the academic failure. The

influence of societal and cultural inequities was not considered (Bass & Gerstl-Pepin, 2010). By failing to acknowledge the influence such as structural and cultural racism and generational poverty only creates more of an achievement gap by not focusing on the true reason for academic failure of Black students (Bass & Gerstl-Pepin, 2010).

No Child Left Behind placed the burden of academic progress on the students and teachers in the form of testing. This focus on students and teachers allowed school policy makers to avoid acknowledging decades of inequities that prevented closing the achievement gap (Bass & Gerstl-Pepin, 2010; Darling Hammond, 2004). The structure of test-and punish for accountability only encourages inequities in education and has not been proven to be effective in closing the achievement gap (Neill, 2008). Kozol, in *The Shame of the Nation* (2005), claims that the concentration of accountability testing, reintroduction of rote learning and the absence of history, music and art has created “state determined cognitive decapitation” (119) within urban and minority schools. Darling Hammond (2004), points out

Schools serving large numbers of low-income students and students of color have larger class sizes, fewer teachers and counselors, fewer and lower-quality academic courses, extracurricular activities, books, materials, supplies, and computers, libraries, and special services. Spending is so severely inadequate in the growing number of ‘apartheid’ schools serving more than 90% ‘minority students...’ (6-7)

NCLB, as implemented increases the dropout and pushout rate, reduces access to education for minority students, and maintains inequity in education by limiting or

underfunding schools that have the neediest students (Meier and Wood, 2004). It takes the art of teaching away from teachers in exchange for rote teaching. This eliminates the opportunities for teachers to actually teach their students their subjects and forces them to teach the test (Wood, 2004). Additionally, NCLB increased the class sizes, provided fewer teachers, counselors and academic rigor in exchange for rote-oriented education in Black schools (Wood, 2004).

White flight and No Child Left Behind created a new type of school. Over the last decade, schools have become re-segregated in many communities within the county; the northern part of the county has schools that are predominately White, while the schools on the southern part of the county are now predominately Black. It was not the urban Black schools that were dilapidated, rundown buildings that held students that were taught little, chastised greatly and were expected to give up on education or accept their place as subordinates in America. The education and treatment of Black students beginning in elementary school discouraged some students from believing they could be successful in high school, and other students learned from their educational experiences that the social and economic system is not based on ability, but race or economic status (Wiggans, 2007). There was a “quiet reversal of *Brown*” (Orfield & Eaton, 1996) with the creation of a new type of suburban school, one that reflected urban schools known for high crime rates, higher dropout rates and low expectations for high school completion (Kozol, 1991; Horsford & Grosland, 2013). These re-segregated schools or ‘apartheid schools’ (Ladson Billings, 2006) are the Black suburban schools. Schools that were once known as premier schools that produced students worthy of ivy-league schools now produce very few graduates and those that do graduate are ill prepared for the college.

Their education was limited to basic punctuation rules in language arts class, memorization of concepts and equations in science and mathematics, and skewed lessons of history in social studies. If they were quiet and provided the right answers on the test most of the time they would graduate from high school, but they would not have learned anything (Anyon, 1980). Self-expression was not demanded or even desired of them. Questioning text, history or concepts were not expected nor preferred. In contrast, the school on the northern part of the same school system encouraged creativity, connected concepts to real world experiences, and encouraged students to question and analyzes the things being taught to them. This is a result of “more states shortchange[ing] their highest minority districts[...] high minority districts receive less money for each child than in low minority districts” (Education Trust, 2005, p. 2). Students in Black schools were “penalized by lack of rigorous curricula” (Love, 2010, p. 231) as Love, (2010) points out as follows.

[In majoritarian stories] the disadvantage is shifted from the system, which fails to provide rigorous curriculum, to African American students, whose performance reflects their lack of engagement with rigorous curricula. The students are then labeled disadvantaged, rather than the system being labeled as faulty for its failure to provide a rigorous curriculum for students. (p.231)

Race

Racism, as Guinier (2004) described, is “the maintenance of, and acquiescence in, racialized hierarchies governing resource distribution...[it] has not functioned simply through evil or irrational prejudice; it has been an artifact of geographic, political, and

economic interests” (98). Historically, these interests have been exclusively for the benefit of Whites and were perpetuated through laws. A new form of institutional racism is the urbanization of suburban schools. Despite efforts created through laws and state mandates to level the opportunities for education, race determines who should succeed and how their success is defined. Most people would like to say that race is not important, that it does not still shape the opportunities of Americans, but it does and can be seen every day in education. Coates, in *Covert Racism* (2011), explains that racism is very much like the matrix in the movie *Matrix*:

We also live in a kind of matrix, a racial matrix that serves to create and preserve an illusion of reality. In this illusion, differences in outcomes associated with racial hierarchies are defined as the natural or normal functioning of a democratic system based upon meritocracy. This racial matrix, long identified with American and western social structure, has its own rules and realities. Similarly, within the racial matrix, one must make a conscious choice to “unplug” or risk living experiencing illusion as reality within the confines of the Matrix (1).

Race has traditionally been an important factor in education, but typically, for Blacks it has not intentionally been critical in the improvement of social mobility for Blacks.

Derrick Bell, in *Silent Covenants* (2004) called the ruling of *Brown*, which was to serve as an equalizer for public education, the “magnificent mirage” (p. 4). Schools were still serving the purpose of oppressing Black children in an effort to maintain the status quo. The word equality is used to make schools appear equal, but they are not. Black students tend to perform poorly in schools, not because of mental inability or lack of desire, but because they have not been taught (Horsford, 2009). This lack of quality education and

educational support has contributed to more Black students not completing high school or failing to matriculate in colleges and universities. Schools still place Black students in lower achievement classes, more Black students find themselves in special education classes, and more are labeled as discipline problems. In *Race Matters* (2001), Cornell West explains, that despite the beliefs of many progressives, race does still matter. Howard (2010), in *Why race and culture matter in schools: closing the achievement gap in America's classrooms*, explains

There is still a 'discrepancy in the educational outcomes between various student groups, namely African American... This suggest that race still matters. The racial gap in educational performance and attainment sheds an ominous cloud on the idea that education is the equalizer in the United States. (p. 10)

A school that encourages nihilistic behavior and initiates nihilistic practices guarantee that there will be an oppressed Black class; it becomes another component of a system that places advantages and disadvantages on race (Wellman, 1971). Vaught, in *Racism, public schooling and the entrenchment of White supremacy* (2011), adds that educational policy and practice for Black students preserves social inequity as an act of White supremacy. If the inequitable curricula offered to Black students failed to show improvement, the blame was put on the students and not the curricula or the teachers (Bass & Gerstl-Pepin, 2010). The students lost any teachers who were invested in their education and are 'taught' by teachers that are not certified or qualified to teach and were not dedicated to the teaching of students, especially Black students (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Education, for Blacks has become a way to protect the life and liberties of Whites. Through the lens of critical race theory, I intend to address the inequality and new form

of urbanization that was taking place in the county I have lived in my entire life and have taught in for several years.

My first years in education were eye-opening. I was in a school where very little was expected from the Black teenagers that represented 99% of the population. The school had given up on 95% of the students. I learned through observations and conversations that the Black schools in the suburbs were consistently poor in attendance and academic aptitude, but excelled in athletics and issues of discipline.

This history of segregated schooling among African Americans in the South provides an important template on which to analyze the current experiences of African Americans in schools. Consider an example. The seamless delivery of messages of caring to African American children that occurred historically raises powerful questions in contemporary discussions about the role of a strong caring teacher who rallies his or her relational prowess to foster student development, while the larger institutional message seems to be the antithesis of care. For example, the ongoing higher percentages of African Americans being tracked into nonacademic curricula and of receiving suspensions, and the lower percentages of African American children in academic clubs all send powerful institutional messages about the place of African American children within the school. (Siddle-Walker & Tompkins, 2004, p. 91)

According to Ogbu and Simon's (1998) research, Black students, who are involuntary minorities, see their school as worse than White schools and see no reason for this lack of inequality in structure and education other than discrimination. They do

not share the same belief as Whites and immigrants that hard work and good grades will secure social mobility and success beyond school. Instead, they base their opportunities for success on the stories of discrimination and racism that their families and communities experience in housing and the workplace. (1998).

Many supporters of school desegregation believed that “desegregation would increase opportunities of Blacks [but], desegregation did not benefit the entire black community uniformly” (Marble, 1998, p. 150). Education for many Black students had become “the fault line that separates those who will prosper from those who cannot.” (as cited in Spring, 2011, p. 449) The students learn to perpetuate the negative stereotypes and images associated with being black and expect very little from school or themselves (Tatum, 1999). Over time the perpetration of these negative images of Blacks and their lack of ability to learn dominates the atmosphere of the school, thus, the curricula is tweaked to further exacerbate students that are comfortable with being subordinate. They are not encouraged to think out of the box, but to be complacent in their academic performance. The urbanized suburban school produced Black students that expect little from life and accepted their placement in America as laborers (Sizemore, 2008; Kunjufu, 2002). In contrast, traditional suburban schools, which are predominately white, prepare students for college with unlimited resources in the classroom, extracurricular programs that encourage independence, and intellectual competence (Steinberg and Kincheloe, 2007). These schools honor the belief that “education offers its recipients better prospects for economic and social mobility, and an improved quality of life” (Howard, 2010, p. 9). The urbanized suburban school is the latest trend in segregated schools. Unlike the desegregated schools of the 1960’s, the school does not support Black students and does

not prepare them socially or academically for an occupation or economic stability. Before schools were desegregated, Black schools were full of teachers and administrators that cared about the welfare and future of their Black students. The students worked hard because they knew their teachers cared for them and expected success from them (Walker and Snarey, 2004). Currently, some Black schools have consciously and unconsciously adopted the ideology of maintaining social and political inferiority for Black students by lowering standards and condoning student apathy (Maran, 2000; Anderson, 1988; Kunjufu, 2002). Barbara Love, in her counterstory, “Equity and excellence in education” (2010), uses historical characters to explain why many Black students do not find success in school after the *Brown* ruling. One of Love’s characters, Ms. Gamble, explains that the reason that Black students are not receiving an equal education is because of the beliefs of the school.

As far as I can see, where there are teachers who believe in the ability of children to learn, teachers who believe in their own efficacy as a teacher to teach, teachers who are willing to create curriculum that excites and engages children as learners and as co-creators of knowledge, then our children excel in their academics. (p. 242)

Unfortunately, for many Black students in my school, this type of teacher and this type of education did not exist. Without caring teachers to negate the discrimination and social marginalization experienced by many Black students, the students were disconnected from education and dropped out of school (Bass & Gerstl-Pepin, 2010). According to Ladson-Billings, (2012),

[S]uccess in a classroom of African American students rests on three propositions: focus on student learning, development of cultural competence, and promotion of sociopolitical consciousness. It did not rest on tinkering with the curriculum or demanding absolute quiet or having everyone wear a uniform. It rests on a teacher who believes deeply in the intellectual capability of the student and his or her own efficacious abilities. (p. 119)

Unfortunately, the students did not experience many teachers that cared or a curriculum that had been developed to enhance who they were or promoted achievement. Instead they received the worst that the school system has to offer. “A belief that [Black] students cannot expect equal educational services or access to the opportunity structure in the United States may have created both lowered expectations for the benefit of educational achievement and a devaluation of striving for achievement among [Black] adolescents”(Irving and Hudley, 2008, p. 679). As a result, these students invested more of their effort and time in their appearance, their social life, and non-academic activities (Graham, Taylor, and Hudley, 1998).

We need to encourage children to take more math and science, and to make sure those courses are rigorous enough to compete with other nations...If we ensure that America’s children succeed in life, they will ensure that America succeeds in the world. (US Dept. of Education, 2006, p. 1)

Unfortunately, this encouragement is not offered to many Black students. Jonathan Kozol, in *The Shame of a Nation* (2005), describes schools in urban New York that are substandard in the structure of the facility and in the education of the students.

The same types of students can be found in this urbanized suburban school. Minority urban schools are usually overcrowded, have limited resources, lack of support and constant change within the school, e.g. teachers, rules, curriculums and administrators (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 2007). As Kozol points out, schools with these characteristics incentivize the students. The curriculum relies on stimulating the acquisitional desires of the students, but limits instruction that teach for state mandated tests. These students “...obtain an education in a system that thwarts their opportunities, stunts their potential, and has preconceived notions of their abilities” (Jackson, 2001, p. 22) Traditional practices are dismissed for “strategies of preference for children of subordinated people [.]” (272). Minority students in urban schools “have lived their lives acutely aware of who they are *not*...” (Steinberg and Kincheloe, 2007, p. 50), they come to understand that the world does not believe they are not worthy of the same educational opportunities as Whites. They are aware that the privileges awarded to Whites they will never attain. These students, because of their color, are now tracked into classes that will result in blue-collar workers instead of college graduates. Douglass Horsford and Grosland, (2013), point out that students that have positive racial identity and have a desire to achieve gain these positivisms from racially conscious teachers. The curriculum that teachers present to them is based on a preconceived notion of their lack of ability and their lack of desire to learn (Jackson, 2001). These teachers have heard the majoritarian stories of Whites that speak of White privilege as normal and acceptable. They have heard the falsehoods that there is educational impartiality and a neutral stance in educational policies for all students (Villenas, Deyhle, & Parker, 1999). These teachers use these stories when dealing with minorities education and base their lessons and

expectations for Black students. In many cases, even Black teachers retell majoritarian stories about their own students to justify why they are not dedicating the time and effort needed to teach students that have been taught to believe they are inferior to Whites and incapable of learning (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002). They are taught to believe that they are not worthy of dreaming big because their schools teach them to believe in very little besides mediocrity. They have accepted the belief that they cannot determine or create their future. Carter G. Woodson (1933), explained how an inferior education can help maintain the status quo when he stated:

If you can control a man's thinking, you don't have to worry about his actions. If you can determine what a man thinks, you do not have worry about what he will do. If you can make a man believe that he is inferior, you don't have to compel him to seek an inferior status, he will do so without being told and if you can make a man believe that he is justly an outcast, you don't have to order him to the back door, he will go to the back door on his own and if there is no back door, the very nature of the man will demand that you build one. (p. 71)

“Schooling is one of the most crucial experiences for children. It contributes to the social and psychological development as well as their educational achievement and future educational attainment and lifestyle.” (Jackson, 2001, p. 60) School has become a “sorting machine” (Spring, 1976). Black students find that they are left out of opportunities for academic advancement, which hinder their opportunities for social movement.

The different educational opportunities schools provide to students become the boundaries within which what different students learn must be confined. Further, if these opportunities both in and out of school, then the differences in learning that schools help produce have profound social and economic as well as educational consequences for students. (Oakes, 2005, p. 74)

Students, because of the education they are allotted, discover when they leave school that their roles in the society and their place in the world was determined and/or forced by someone else: their teachers and their administrators. The outcome has been Black students that are classified as high school seniors that have reading, science and mathematics skills equivalent to a 13 year old white student. The students lack the cultural capital to navigate in the world because their school managed to concentrate on oppressing minority students, by limiting their access to higher learning, curtailing the requirements for mastery to a lower standard, and allowing more opportunities for failure instead of allowing them opportunities for success (Cokely, et al, 2011).

Class

“Our educational system today is in the hands of its last organized enemy, which is class, greed, and selfishness based upon economic privilege. To slay that monster is to set free all the future”

Upton Sinclair (1922, p.478)

Lower class citizens do not have the same choices or privileges as other classes. In an interview with Larry Hayes (1992), Jonathan Kozol explained the choice of the poor verses the affluent,

It is very much like the situation on an airplane. Everybody on the plane has a choice of dinners. The coach passengers usually get two unappetizing choices; their first-class passengers have a choice of steak, roast beef, or lobster. But everybody has a choice. The difference in the quality of choices is determined literary by class. (p.335)

Limits of choice can make poor Blacks believe that they are freely choosing to take up trades in mechanics and cosmetology because the choice of becoming accountants lawyers or engineers is not given to them. Parents and students may be aware that their opportunities are limited, but because socially, they are in a class that is not allotted the same choices in the quality of education are forced to accept the educational opportunities of their class and social status. In Kozol's *Ordinary Resurrections* (2000), explains how race and class determine the value of a student's life and future:

Despite the many ways in which this issue has been clouded, nonetheless, there are few areas in which the value we attribute to a child's life may be so clearly measured as in the decisions that we make about the money we believe it's worth investing in the education of one person's child as opposed to that of someone else's child. (p.44)

Historically, public education was created to further stratify immigrants and poor individuals, which included Blacks, in order to maintain social class. The current standardized curricula used in schools ignore the inequities of education for Blacks and instead continues to perpetuate the stereotypical belief that Blacks are not capable of learning the same as Whites (McKay, 2010). Schools have become cultural actors with

ideologies, rules and codes that maintain social hierarchies (Warikoo and Carter, 2009). Yosso (2002) views the traditional curriculum used in public schools as based on an unacknowledged political agenda to maintain white privilege by limiting “access to knowledge” (p.102) and perpetuating inequality. Furthermore, current curricula alienates Blacks from an education that could provide them with the cultural capital and formal education they will need to compete nationally if, and when they graduate from high school.

Kozol has identified eight educational theories that affect the learning outcome of minority students: theory of value; theory of knowledge; theory of human nature; theory of learning; theory of transmission; theory of society; theory of opportunity; and theory of consensus (Bove, 2011). The theory of value examines how the lack of universal literacy diminishes the opportunities for social mobility for Black students. Kozol questions how society can thrive when many of its members are not given opportunities for academic success. The theory of knowledge relies on the outcome of theory of value. Knowledge is acquired through literacy, which provides the skills necessary to function and survive in society. Without knowledge there is little chance for survival. Knowledge, according to Kozol’s theory of human nature, cannot be acquired if students are not in an environment that they feel safe and free to be themselves, nor can they acquire knowledge if they are not receptive to an environment that does not challenge them. Many of Kozol’s studies show the lack of liberal education in Black schools, which goes against the theory of learning. The curricula used in the school did not encourage students to work to their potential, but the students were trained to take state and national assessments that did not necessitate critical thought and exclude students from the

exposure of cultural capital. The theory of transmission explains how knowledge is delivered to students through imitation and instruction. If the environment does not promote positive instruction or models, students cannot be expected to transmit positive learning outcomes. The hierarchy of society dictates the learning outcome of poor students and students of color. The theory of society addresses the role social class plays in the expectations of educational outcomes for Blacks. Blacks have been on the bottom of the social ladder for several hundred years and the use of subordinate education helps to preserve their low social status. The theory of opportunity stresses the importance of Black students receiving the materials, classes, and instructors that will offer them equal opportunities 'to compete on an equal footing' (2005) for academic and social success as their White counterparts. The opportunity for academic success, historically, has not been available to Black students in urban schools. Over the last twenty years, this lack of opportunity has also been found in Black suburban schools. The school where I taught was not provided with the qualified teachers or adequate resources and materials. Kozol makes the point in the theory of consensus that society has chosen to turn a blind eye to the lack of equality for Black students in public education.

Urbanization

The south has expanded from rural towns and villages to large cities. With this expansion, Blacks moved from rural environments to urban communities in hopes of better opportunities for higher paying jobs and better education (Bullard & Thomas, 1989). Atlanta expanded from an Indian village named Standing Peachtree to a sprawling city known for the second largest airport in the world, the home of several Fortune 500 companies, the home to more than thirty foreign consuls, and has the largest

amount of federal employees that can only be rivaled by Washington , D.C. (Bullard & Thomas, 1989). Despite the growth and success of the city and surrounding suburban communities, Blacks still suffer from lower employment opportunities, sub-par education, limits in transportation, and segregated housing. Part of this is due to white flight. Whites moved out of the city and took with them stores, banks, supermarkets pharmacies and theaters. They left liquor stores behind for the poor and Black that had no choice but to remain in the city (Anyon, 2005). The lack of businesses and the abundance of low income housing decreased funding for schools responsible for educating Black students

Despite the economic growth of the city, many Blacks are not able to find jobs within the city limits. This is due to their lack of education or skills that are required within this white-collar city. The city is divided by Interstate -20 that runs east to west through Atlanta. Most Whites live on the northern side of the city, while Blacks find themselves living in the south part of the city. The southern half has been passed over in efforts of economic development, which in turn, means that Blacks have seen fewer opportunities for economic and social growth (Bullard & Thomas, 1989). The limits of the transit system, exclude Blacks living within the southern half of the city to find or maintain employment in the northern part of the city or the suburban communities immediately outside of the city. Ironically, it is these areas that are expanding in employment, desired housing, and exceptional schools. The current transit system also eliminates opportunities for limited-skilled Blacks seeking employment because it does not go beyond the inner city, even though many factory and blue-collar jobs are beyond the city limits and the hours of operation are not conducive to jobs that require late night

or over-night work hours (Bullard & Thomas, 1989; Preston, H, 2006). Housing in these areas usually cost more than the amount employees in these blue-collar positions can afford, further exacerbating the limits of economic stability or growth within the Black community.

Low income people of color also have to find ways to survive in urban settings with the limited availability of transportation. Though many large cities offer public transportation, most of the transit systems do not offer the residents of the city many options outside of the city. Most systems do not go out of the city, where, as of late, many of the jobs are available. As stated earlier, many of the white collar jobs have moved to communities located immediately outside of cities. Those that rely on public transportation find that the jobs that they may want or the jobs that they know will help them and their family move up financially are located in an area that they cannot reach (Anyon, 2005). This means that they are stuck in the few low-wages, entry-level jobs that will keep them in a state of poverty.

The increase of public housing equates to less funding in urban schools. “Confining low-income people of color to housing in poor urban neighborhoods and low-income minority suburbs also produces segregated, low-income, schools...”(Anyon, 2005, p. 95)

Commodification

Curricula for Black schools differ from white schools in regards to the type of classes offered and the expected outcomes at class completion. White schools offer their students calculus and European history. In contrast, Black schools encourage their

students to take business math and keyboarding (Kozol, 2000). Counselors and teachers in the Black schools tell students they can succeed, but the teachers' and counselor's idea of success for Black students plateaus with passing state mandated test and high school completion.

Urban schools approach the education of their Black students with the belief that Black students do not want the same education as Whites nor can they be expected to learn the same as White students. With this in mind, Black schools, urban and suburban, have created special educational tracks for the Black students. The end result should not necessarily be a college ready graduate, as much as it should produce able-bodies that can go out in the work place and make money for someone else (Kozol, 2005). Bowles and Gintis in *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational reform and contradictions of economic life*, (1976), put out that liberal education has been organized to maintain and legitimize inequality in order to meet the needs of maintaining a capitalistic society. Liberal arts curricula for Black schools have been replaced with rote learning for test preparation. The result of this is students that cannot read, cannot create and articulate original ideas, and students that do not see that their investment in education will offer them more than their parents or grandparents. These schools are allowed to exist because Whites do not want their children to be educated with Blacks. These schools exist to hold Blacks in a position of subordination and control (Kozol, 1991).

Schools, like the one I worked in, experienced obvious commodification. Channel One, a 12 minute 'news' show, was required for students to view in the time of the school day which had been previously known as study hall. The show featured a few stories of interest to some students and it showed advertisements from Burger King to Snickers. In

return for forcing students to watch this show, schools received a satellite on loan and televisions for all academic classrooms (Kozol, 2005). The gain for corporate America was the forced viewing of advertisements that almost guaranteed that the viewers would unintentionally become or stay consumers to the various brands being peddled, which, at the time it was used in schools, was an 80 million dollar profit for the same affluent group that wanted to maintain a lower class of workers and not earners.

The South has not been kind to Blacks. Slavery, Jim Crow laws, peonage, and a lack of civil rights have created a race that is continuously fighting for rights guaranteed by the Constitution. Critical Race theory exposes the continued injustice plagued by Blacks by calling to attention the continued use of racist practices that ensure a subordinate race that will maintain its place on the social ladder as working class consumers. The students in the school where I taught unconsciously experienced racism in the form of a less than stellar education. They were discouraged from wanting to achieve academic success, but were trained to be blind consumers that would settle for mediocrity in life because mediocrity was the only choice they had because they were Black.

CHAPTER THREE

IF ONLY THEY WOULD LISTEN, WE HAVE PLENTY TO SAY:

METHODOLOGY

Counterstorytelling

“The cultural standpoints of those persons who experience the social, political, economic and educational consequences of unequal power relations must be privileged over the assumed knowledge of those who are positioned outside of these experiences.” (Tillman, 2002, p. 6)

Majoritarian stories are used by the majority group to undermine or sabotage the efforts of Blacks to acquire the resources required for high academic achievement (Love, 2010). Majoritarian stories provide stock explanations of Black inferiority in education as a means to maintain intellectual dominance and social privilege (Delgado & Villapando, 2002). These stories claim that Blacks are “lazy, inherently criminal, drug addicted, sex fiends, who do not value education or take care of their communities” (Zamudio, Russell, & Bridgeman, 2010, p. 145). Majoritarian stories make White privilege indistinct by making it appear normal, this is done with maneuvers such as “fostering invisibility, making assumptions of what is normative and universal, promoting the perspective that schools are neutral and apolitical, promoting the myth of meritocracy, endorsing the notion that there is equal educational opportunity for all, referencing dominants as ‘people’ while ‘othering’ subordinates” (Love, 2010, 229). These stories claim that all students have the opportunity of equal access to educational opportunity, and opportunities to meet the standards set by NCLB and the state. Yet, these stories

disregard the academic apartheid ingrained in Black schools (Yosso, 2002, p. 97).

Ladson-Billings, (1999), points out that the majoritarian stories of Black inferiority are internalized by Black students and teachers of Black students. Whites, in turn, can revel in the maintenance of their power. These stories “reduce expectations of people of color and the poor and promote a socially constructed cycle of socially reproduced generational poverty” (Bass and Gerstl-Pepin, 2010, p. 915).

Counterstorytelling creates opportunities to challenge the dominant story by exploring racism that, for the dominant culture, is imperceptible or disregarded. Counterstories allow the marginalized to have voice that can debunk the accepted and reinforced stories by the dominant culture (Vaught, 2011; Williams, 2004).

Stories, parables, chronicles, and narratives are powerful means for destroying mindset-the bundle of presuppositions, received wisdoms, and shared understandings against a background of which legal and political (and educational) discourse takes place...Ideology-the received wisdom-makes current social arrangements seem fair and natural (Delgado, 1989, p. 2413)

Counterstorytelling challenges the “grand narratives of Whiteness and its self-characterization as the norm.” (Ladson-Billings, 2000) Counterstories discredit Whites’ stock explanations that are used to maintain their power and privilege (Love, 2010). The majoritarian stories told by the majority group not only concentrate on the failures or deficiencies of Blacks but also supports the values and beliefs of superiority that justify a continuance of inequality in education (Love, 2010). When educational researchers are examining Blacks and their achievement, the tendency is to concentrate on the failure of

Black students in contrast to the success of White students (Love, 2010). As an adopted methodology of CRT, counterstorytelling serves to bridge the gap between the lives of people of color and Whites (Delgado and Stefanic, 2001). Secondly, counterstorytelling provides the opportunity for Blacks and other people of color to “name their own reality” (Ladson-Billings, 1999) instead of allowing the reality of the dominant group to dictate the success and failures of Blacks (Love, 2010). Additionally, “counterstories can disrupt and challenge the totalizing, erasing discourse of dominant White society in transformative and liberatory ways” (Vaught, 2011), and can draw attention to contradictions in the majoritarian stories.

There are three ways in which critical race theorist present counterstories: personal narratives, other people’s narratives, and composite narratives (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Personal narratives are autobiographical stories of social and political experiences of racism. Other people’s narratives are biographical stories of people’s experience with racism positioned in a socio-historical perspective. This form of counterstories is the most commonly used format in CRT (DeCuir-Gunby & Walker-Devose, 2013). Composite narratives use a variety of sources for data to formulate stories dealing with experiences of racism within political, historical and social contexts (DeCuir-Gunby & Walker-Devose, 2013). This form can be a combination of personal and other people’s narratives to create counterstories that dispute the majoritarian stories prevalent in educational texts.

Fiction

Historically, stories about race and racism have been told and interpreted by Whites. Solorzano and Yosso (2002) describe these stories as majoritarian stories. These are “stories that are not just stories of racial privilege, they are also stories of gender, class, and other forms of privilege. As such, they are stories that carry layers of assumptions that persons in positions of racialized privilege bring with them to discussions of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of subordination.” (28) This standard of superiority for Whites and subordination for people of color is present in the lessons pre-service teachers learn about in school and is often the theme of conferences for teachers working in predominately minority schools (29). They are informed that there is a correlation between darker skin and poverty, that communities of color are familiar and comfortable with violent acts, and that the schools in these communities are bad schools so their expectations for these students should be lowered. These stories are used to misrepresent and mute the experiences of people of color within schools. This muting of their voices trains them to refrain from using their voices to tell of their experiences of being a minority in school and in the world they live in.

The use of fiction as a form inquiry can provide a less formal way of examining and exploring issues in curriculum. “The use of fiction and dialogue allows the author to explore the tension that exists between essentializing and particularizing a character, phenomenon, or situation, while also imagining toward possibility- considering those things that could be.” (Connelly, He, & Phillion, 2008, p. 88). Fiction allows the reader to be transformed by the text and allows for self-reexamination, which may sway or alter the beliefs and behavior of the reader (McAfee Brown, 1992). *Their Eyes Were Watching*

God, written by Zora Neale Hurston, is a great example of how issues that may be difficult to broach in an average conversation can be examined and generate discussions. In the novel, Janie, the protagonist of the story, listens in disagreement to Mrs. Turner about the benefits of being a lighter complexioned Black woman:

Tain't de poorness, it's de color and de features. Who want any ole black baby layin' up in de baby buggy lookin' lak uh fly in buttermilk?. . . Look at me! Ah ain't got no flat nose and liver lips. Ah'm uh featured woman. Ah got white folks' features in may face. (1937, p. 141-142)

By introducing the topic of complexion and race by one of the characters, the reader can digest and respond to the issues mentioned in their own time and may also feel more comfortable discussing the character's opinions or ideas and later their own.

Additionally, this particular issue, how Blacks treat other Blacks, though it may be widely practiced, is not recognized as relevant in the education and treatment of Black students and Black teachers, or in the way Blacks treat other Blacks in the workplace. Using Hurston's characters to remind or bring attention to a form of racism that exists, can open the door for developing a new way of thinking.

Unlike purely traditional academic writing, fiction opens a dialogue without seeming to be forceful. Fiction allows for the reader to interpret based on their experiences and interpretation and this can create more well-balanced dialogue. Additionally, fiction inquiry can address omissions and blatant *mistellings* of the past. Much of the history of Blacks in the early parts of American history has either been omitted or misconstrued by mass publishers of history books as well as the media. The

work of Toni Morrison provides insight into the lives of Blacks that have been overlooked or ignored because the major issues of Blacks, in the eyes of others, could not be as complex and meaningful as other races represented in history. The use of fiction gives meaning and understanding to a younger generation that may not receive a historical education that reflects their present and past because, without fiction and stories, “the things that used to hold African American communities together are no longer there” (Dimitriadis and McCarthy, 2001, p. 78) Morrison’s response to this lack of community is to write novels of “reintegration and reconstitution of a community of lost souls” (78).

Through fiction, inquiry issues of race and inequalities can further be explored. Critical Race Theory (CRT) examines how Blacks are being marginalized and discriminated against in institutes designed to educate. Critical race theorists believe that racism is a natural component of American society (Delgado, 1995) and is therefore, natural in American society and requires those who want to fight for equality to expose racism in its various forms (Ladson Billings, 1999). "...CRT seeks to uncover the ways that the ideology of White supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in the United States...CRT is committed to not only understanding the relations of power that exist to changing them (Ladson-Billings & Brown, 2008, p. 154).

The use of storytelling or fiction in Critical Race Theory provides a more comfortable platform to present a complex and sometimes uncomfortable dialogue (Lee, 2005). CRT uses narrative, storytelling, and personal experiences from marginalized and silenced groups and individuals to illustrate the faults of education and minorities and

challenge the official narrative. By using narrative and storytelling, the perspectives of race and inequality can be viewed from the vantage point of the minority rather than the acceptably skewed (in most cases) view point of Whites (Bell, 2005). The short story, “The Chronicle of the Sacrificed Black Schoolchildren” by Derrick Bell, is a prime example of a fictional story that conveys the beliefs and perceptions of Blacks in America in a manner that is not too conflicting for Whites and others to read. The sheer desire for readers to find out the final outcome of such a bizarre and consequential situation entices completion of the story with the hope that the children will be found and the community will see the politics, power, and public and private enterprise involved in the education of students. CRT attempts to bring forth the voice of the races that have been purposefully overlooked and socially subjugated and “...to engage the reader in democratic deliberation concerning the ironies and contradictions associated with laws constructed to appease White self-interest rather than address notions of equity” (Tate, 1997, p. 218). Storytelling, in most cases, is a harmless way to introduce or reiterate viewpoints from the historical oppressed in an effort to create a society that is not reliant on race to establish a position of power or social standing.

By using narrative in the form of fiction to address issues of Critical Race Theory, teachers and students can learn to create and participate in a discourse regarding issues within their schools and communities. Hurston and Bell have given voice to those who have been underrepresented or misrepresented in a society that has alienated them. Fiction gives voice to those that are constantly trying to penetrate and become respected members of society. Curriculum is designed for two reasons: to enhance a social norm that has been in place for generations, and curriculum to maintain a lower stratum for

minorities and others chosen to be excluded from the 'American Dream'. In order to decrease the discrepancy in educational institutions and the use of a curriculum designed to exclude or downplay issues of race and the hidden curriculum, there needs to be a dialogue that recognizes the issues in schools and there has to be discussions in communities and schools that can benefit from being heard and represented.

Fiction as a counter story is a powerful tool to dismantle the beliefs and rhetoric associated with students of color. "The dominant group tells stories that are designed to 'remind it of its identity in relation to outgroups and provide a form of shared reality in which its own superior scholarship position is seen as natural (Dixson and Rousseau, 2005, p. 11). The counter story is the aversion to this belief. The use of the counterstory through fiction gives a voice to those students and teachers of color who do not see their world and future through the same lens as the dominant culture. Mikell, (2012), points out that the counter story as fiction allows for the issues of racism and disenfranchisement that are prevalent in Black communities that are rarely discussed can be brought to light with the hope of eliminating the negative stereotypes that have affected the education of Black students. The counter story is an attempt to tell the stories that have been overlooked or told from a skewed and self-serving White point of view in academia.

I enter this research with multiple 'selves' (Chapman, 2005); I enter it as a teacher, a mentor, an observer and as a Black woman. The students' experiences that I highlight are students that I had the pleasure of getting to know during my tenure at this school. Three students came from other states and their experiences at their old school and their new school were conflicting. They both recognized the differences in the

expectations for students in this school and other schools they had been enrolled in and other schools that they had the opportunity to visit while playing sports. Five of the students had always been a part of this community. They were victims of an inequitable education and they did not even recognize it, which made it almost impossible to combat it. My composite characters are a combination of experiences and observations of two teenage boys and four teenage girls.

Collecting Counterstories

I chose to get information about the students through conversations that I had with them, and interviews I had with them formally and informally. I mentored all of these students while they were in high school and have maintained relationships with them as they have ventured into adulthood. Some of the data has come from conversations of frustration when they realized that their education had not prepared them for their goals beyond school. Much of the information used has come from the interviews that I had with the students and were done on the phone, and a few were done face-to-face. Some were questionnaires over the Internet via email. All were followed up with a phone call. Additionally, I used notes that I took while I was teaching at this high school. A lot of the students that I portray in the following pages are students I am still in contact with, and we have talked frequently about our experiences at this school. I tried to ask questions that were not leading, but I did use comments made by the students to delve into issues that they experienced in the school.

1. What were your expectations from high school?
2. Did Towers meet your expectations as a high school?
3. Do you think the school really expected you all to be successful?

4. Do you think the teachers cared about your success?
5. Do you think the school system wanted you to be successful?
6. Did the climate of the school (atmosphere) support success? Did it support determination?
7. Did you feel that you were being prepared to go to college?
8. Did you feel that you were being prepared to get a job in the 'real world'?
9. Do you think the school (not individual teachers) supported your dreams while you were in school and your dreams for after you graduated?
10. What was important to the school (sports, band, test scores, image, etc)?
11. Describe the worst teacher/class(es) you had.
12. Describe the best teacher(s)/class(es) you experienced.
13. Describe a typical day at school?
14. Describe the typical student at the school.
15. Describe the typical teacher at the school.
16. Describe the typical administrator at the school.
17. Do you think the counselors helped prepare you to be successful at school and help you graduate?
18. You graduated _years ago. Do you feel that you were prepared for the next stage in your life?
19. Do you think your experiences at the school were the same as a Black student at Druid Hills or Dunwoody?

The questions I asked the students were general. I asked what the expectations were in school and if the expectations in this particular school were met. I asked about their favorite teacher and their worst teachers, their favorite classes and their least

favorite classes. I asked them the best experiences they had in high school and the worst experiences. I also asked if they thought that they would be in whatever situation they were currently in when they were in high school. I asked them how their high school experiences or learning shaped who they are and what they were doing in their lives currently. Many of them gave me insight in classes that I had not been a part of. They shared with me stories of teachers that clearly did not care and administrators that allowed chaos in the school. Though I was aware of many problems within the school, I did not know that the students were aware of as much as I was, and in some cases more than I was aware of. This knowledge and these experiences help them define themselves as students and helped shape what they thought was a good citizen or role model and that was not always good for them.

I reviewed the students' answers from the interviews as well as the notes compiled from face-to-face and phone conversations, and found several common themes with the students' experiences and home life (Cook, 2013). Students that shared several themes and experiences were used to create the composite character. I wrote out short outlines for each composite character based on the notes and themes. These composite characters' stories were then intertwined to show the themes that were found. I chose to do this over the course of one school year to allow for the particular difficulties and struggles of the characters were evident and to show how the teachers and administrators interacted with students. Additionally, I incorporated the mannerisms and phrasing of the students when creating the composite characters to give the characters depth and to give them a distinct voice (Cook, 2013). I also created composite characters for the teachers that the students mentioned in our conversations and in their interview questions. I found

common themes regarding how the students were treated, and what was expected of them in various classes. I concentrated on the students' point of view to show how the students were treated and the effectiveness of the teachers and administrators that were charged with shaping their future through education (Mikell, 2013). The students' stories were fictionalized and rearranged to fit one academic year and to stress the experiences of the students.

Exemplary Studies

“Unto the third & fourth generation of African-Americans: Kaleb Norris’s stories of generational poverty and inequality in the South” (2008), by Derrick Tennial, provides an excellent example of the use of critical race theory and the methodology of counterstorytelling through fiction. Tennial recalled different events from his youth, which led him to question some of the actions or inactions of his family. He took these recollections and had recorded conversations with his family members regarding their education and the opportunities for his family to move out of poverty. Tennial uses fictional narratives as a “tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32) in Memphis, Tennessee.

Questioning the African-American experience through my family’s cross-generational experiences in poverty and various educational, political, and public policies has caused dis-ease. I have occupied contradictory spaces addressing issues of power, ownership of knowledge, and political and economic contexts. By presenting an African-American perspective, my research sought to reveal flaws in the dominant culture’s ideology. (p. 40)

Tennial concludes that the educational, political, and public policies that were established for poor people and people of color hindered his family from finding academic success. Instead of creating possibilities for social movement, the policies in place held his family in a place of poverty. He does note that, unlike the majoritarian stories told about the poor, that his family did recognize the importance of education, but had to do what was necessary (drop out of school) in order to survive in a society that had turned its back on them when he states. “I always thought that my family had choices; however, the choices they were presented only maintained the status quo in American society, thus perpetuating the cycle of generational poverty in my family” (p. 223). Tennial expresses the importance of making classrooms culturally relevant so that students are encouraged to evaluate and question the economic system and policies of their community and nation.

“And then the wall rose: Counter narratives of elementary Black males’ experience of schooling in urban Georgia”, (2013) by Katrina Michelle Seay explores the issues of prejudice, tracking, and racism in an urban elementary public school. The focus is on Black males and how the school has tracked them into remedial classes, ultimately setting the tone for the rest of their academic tenure. Many Black males become discouraged with education and drop out of school, or accept the misconstrued belief that they are not worthy of a good education. Seay (2013) examines how the majoritarian stories of Black males hinder academic achievement and further exacerbate oppression and inequality within the Black community.

Seay (2013) uses counterstorytelling to demonstrate how majoritarian stories hurt Black boys by observing the beliefs of White superiority and marginalizing the needs and

abilities of Black students. She found that counter to the majoritarian stories, the students were not the reason that they were not finding academic success. The fault fell on the teachers and administrators that were more concerned with test scores and less on if their students learned anything. Additionally, the schools labeled the Black males and behavior problems which eliminated the idea that these students should learn in school, instead they were controlled.

Significance of Study

My dissertation research is significant in presenting similarities of urban schools and suburban Black schools. Regardless of location, Black students in Black schools are not receiving the same educational opportunities as White students; this inequity is no longer limited to schools within the limits of large cities. Most of the books that I read while working on this last degree discussed issues with black students in urban settings. I thought this was unsettling because most of my experiences with black students were in suburban settings. Ironically, all the research that I found dealt primarily with students in urban settings were known to have issues of poverty, socioeconomics, and family. What I found while teaching at this particular high school was that the same lack of care or concern for the success of these black students was the same that was found in urban schools. The students in these suburban schools still lack the quality curriculum, were still being taught the test, were being given teachers that were new to teaching, were given teachers that were at the end of their tenure as a teacher or classified as bad teachers, they were not given the same extracurricular activities, nor were they ever expected to excel academically. The purpose of my research is to show the illusion of suburban schools and how students are set up to fail not because they lack ability, but because they are Black. Additionally, I will like to show how some students attempted to

persevere and thrive in a climate that expected failure, and the results of their attempts. In the situations below, the outcomes are not what one would see in a Hollywood movie. Many of them do not go to college or graduate from college despite all the efforts to do better and to remove themselves from their situation. The students that I say were part of the machine actually fared the worst. The students that came from other schools in other states that experienced a different type of learning and different expectations or had people who expected more from them actually fared better than those who had always been in this community and always in the schools. So, the point of this is to show that it is not just urban schools that are hurting minority students, but suburban schools as well. Furthermore, it is important to note that some of the very teachers that many people would expect to help the students, Black teachers, are the ones that have also become part of the mechanism of oppression, and have accepted failure from children from their own race.

I think teachers who are starting off will benefit from this research. Additionally, I think teachers who are teaching students in suburban schools or minority students would also benefit from it. Most of the literature available to teachers place students in urban areas or minority students in a negative light and blames the parents or the student. Much of the literature currently available place the lack of student success on socioeconomics and skin color, and not on the other factors within the school that may affect the students' education such as the school system or the teachers' opinion of the students. There are many people and factors that influence student success that are not present in Black suburban schools, thus maintaining the status quo or inequity and inequality beyond education.

CHAPTER FOUR
KNOWING THEIR WORTH:
COUNTERSTORIES OF THE URBANIZED SUBURBAN BLACK STUDENTS

Prelude

In this chapter I introduce counterstories that illustrate the frustration of students that sought academic success. They found a variety of obstacles within the school, but each student made an effort to not let the pitfalls of the school dictated their educational achievement. I begin by providing background on the school and the current state of the school. All the major characters are then introduced. Within the following novellas, the conflicts of the characters and the resolutions they seek are explored in the voice of the students. Their choices are examined through their thoughts and conversations with their peers and teachers. There are two interludes within the text to highlight events experienced by the students and to provide analysis of the events and their effect on the students.

Venable High School is situated in the middle of a neighborhood southeast of Atlanta. The school opened in 1963 and had an all-White population until the early 80s when Blacks began moving to the suburbs. White flight was instantaneous with the first Black family moved into the neighborhood. The neighborhood of ranch homes was a place of pride for Dekalb County. It was featured in local papers and hailed as a great mix of neighborhood and commerce. When the school opened, a Rich's store was less than two miles away, there was also a movie theater, a shopping center and an A&P grocery store. The developer of the neighborhood was known for designing houses that were spacious and aesthetically appealing. Most of the homes had a one-car carport and were

built on a slab. In the 1980's, the neighborhood still looked the way it did in 1963, except now there were Blacks in the homes and more cars. The school also had not changed. Most of the windows were original to the school. The heating and cooling system was the same one that was installed in 1963. The heat and air had to be turned on from a remote location and did not work in every classroom. The high school's principal was a Black man that was a former gym teacher. The faculty was mostly Black; there were roughly eight White teachers in the school and fifty Black teachers.

The climate of the Venable High School had changed over the years, as well. Once the school was known for a rigorous curriculum, but as Whites moved out and Blacks moved in the curriculum changed. The school that was once known for its foreign language program that included Chinese, Japanese, Latin and German, now only had one French teacher and two Spanish teachers. The debate team that was once hailed as county champions was absent from the school, so were the school newspaper, the literary magazine and the book club. Now the school had football, band, track and cross-country, soccer, golf and tennis. There was no debate team, nor did anyone seem concerned that it was the only school in the county without one. Most students were not aware that other schools had newspapers and spread the news, fact and fiction, through the halls and in the locker rooms.

This is a fictionalization of several students I met during my first few years of teaching high school. In most cases, I am recounting events and conversations that I was involved in or was told by the students involved. Long before I planned on working on my dissertation I began taking notes on what I saw and experienced at this school.

Additionally, I have stayed in touch with several students and had informal conversations and interviews about their high school experiences.

I have five major characters, all of which are Black. Cassidy Huckabee is the new teacher who has to learn the reality of teaching and the reality of teaching in a Black school differing greatly from what she was taught to expect in graduate school. She also has to battle with an atmosphere of low expectations of both students and teachers. She has contact with all of the students while she is learning the unwritten rules and expectations for her students at Venable High.

Kasey is a student that, through a forced relocation, is new to the school and a predominately Black environment. She came from a predominately white school in Virginia where she was active in many sports and clubs. She is a combination of two students I met that both relocated from other states. The new environment was a culture shock for them and it took them some time to adjust to the climate of the school. Additionally, both were dealing with the acceptance of their sexual orientation within a culture that did not always embrace homosexuality. Both students, in attempt to fit into the nonchalant atmosphere, both stopped performing to their ability and found themselves becoming someone they knew was not them. Fortunately, they found friends and teachers to help redirect them.

Jerome, Tanisha, and Rasheed are all products of atmosphere of the schools in this community. All three had known each other since elementary school, though they did not run in the same crowds. Jerome could not read very well in the 11th grade. He was a popular football player and was well liked by his teachers and peers. He lived with his

mother. He never mentioned his father in conversations. He knew he needed to go to college to avoid the frustration of low wages for long hours. He knew his inability to read well might prevent him from doing more than his mother.

Rasheed spent most of his time in the county's youth detention center. He also lived with his mother. He was popular too, but more so for his revolving admission to the county youth detention center. Though his mother was not very supportive, he had a grandmother that encouraged him to complete school and to go to college.

Tanisha is a combination of two students. They were both well-behaved driven girls. Both girls were popular with students. The teachers liked them because they were hard workers and respected their teachers and peers. Both girls lived with their mother and whoever their mother was in love with at the time. Both had to work to pay for their extra-curricular activities as well as her clothes and shoes and sometimes the bills of their mothers.

Of the four students highlighted, three graduated from high school, two went to four year colleges, and one graduated with a Bachelor in Science.

The first day of school

Cassidy Huckabee stood next to the door of classroom A-11; it was her first day of teaching at James R. Venable High School. She stood outside the classroom as the students ran up and hugged each other or dapped each other out as they shuffled to class. Cassidy, 25, had previously worked at a junior college teaching literature before she decided that she wanted to give back to her community by teaching high school in the same county where she graduated from high school. She watched the students,

speculating which she would see in her class and wondered what her first day of teaching high school would be like. She did not have a class first period, but she was told by the teacher whose room she was sharing that she was supposed to stand out in the hall between bells to help manage the halls. He was sitting at his desk sipping coffee. After the tardy bell sounded, she walked back into the classroom and sat at one of the student desks where she had placed the lesson plans she was told to follow. She flipped through the pages and opened the textbook to review the text one more time. She was a bit nervous, the students did not look like the high school students she remembered from being in high school seven years ago, nor did they look like the college students she had previously taught.

“I heard you graduated from University of Georgia. You must be smart,” Mr. Napier blurted out. She looked up at him.

“Yes, for grad school. I did my undergrad at Paine College in Augusta,” she replied, not really sure what to make of the statement.

“You ready to teach these hoodlums? They are a bunch of knuckleheads that don’t give a damn. Look, remember to go in there and be serious. Don’t show fear and don’t show leniency. These kids don’t respect you if you are nice and they will tear up the room if you give them any down time, so make sure that you have something for them to do for the whole period. They aren’t use to free time, so don’t give them a lot. I’m sure they taught you to be a creative at UGA, but you won’t be able to do that with these kids. Just teach the curriculum and some of them will get it.”

“Yes, sir,” she replied wondering what his experiences were in the classroom. He seemed very jaded for the first day of a new school year. She wondered why he was still teaching if he did not like the students.

“Do you have everything you need? Chalk, books...”

Cassidy glanced at her classroom on wheels. She was assigned to float to different classrooms throughout the day. Her cart had all of the essentials, chalk, pens, markers, her grade book, and 60 textbooks.

“Do you have any referrals? You write their asses up for everything. That will get them out of the classroom for a few days and give you some peace.” He opened a drawer at his desk and pulled out a pile of triplicate forms. “Here, if you need more they’re in this drawer or you can get some from the main office. There ain’t nothing wrong with writing them up if they are giving you a hard time. A lot of these kids ain’t worth a damn, but we gotta put up with them until they get put out or they drop out.” he said, as he handed her a stack of referral forms.

“I hope they are not that bad.”

“You’ll see. But, I think you will be alright. Just go in like a drill sergeant and make sure you stay that way.” Cassidy smiled at him and pretended to look over the form. When she walked in the building that morning, she was prepared to teach teenagers. He made it sound like she was going to teach convicts and that made her a bit nervous. Her friends and family had tried to discourage her from taking the teaching post at Venable; the reputation of the school was known throughout the county. The graduation rate was the lowest in the county, the dropout rate was the highest in the county, and there were reports weekly of drugs, alcohol and gang activity. Her boyfriend

told her to stay at the college; her father told her to go to law school. Her mother was the only person that supported her decision to teach in the school and even she told Cassidy that if she only did one year, she would have accomplished a lot. Her mom was disappointed to find out that she would not have a classroom because she wanted to help her put up her bulletin boards.

She put the forms on her utility cart and flipped through her teacher's edition and reviewed her schedule and room assignments until the bell sounded for her first class. While she stood in the hall and watched students walk into the classroom Mr. Napier walked up to her, "Do you want me to sit in this class, just in case you need me?"

"No, sir. I think I will be okay."

"Well, just press the button by the door if you need help. Security or the police will come down if you need anything."

"Thank you." Cassidy smiled at him. He smiled back and walked down the hall with a bag of popcorn. Her heart began to race thinking about all the warnings she had heard from Napier and everyone else that knew she was teaching in that school.

"Good morning," she said as she walked into the classroom and closed the door, "my name is Cassidy Huckabee and you are in 10th grade literature," Cassidy surveyed the room. A few students smiled at her, some looked disinterested, but most of them looked like regular high school students. The hoodlums she was expecting were not in her 2nd period class.

Cassidy sat at the desk exhausted. It was the end of the first day of school and she was feeling an exhaustion that was new to her. She had to push her utility cart to each class which including going up and down a slight hill in the hall. She had to spend her

lunch getting more books because the cart could not hold more than the sixty she had. Unfortunately, those books did not get her through 4th period. She had to modify her first lesson because she did not have enough books until after lunch. She made the students complete journals while she handed out all the paperwork the school made her give the students, gave an overview of the class, went over classroom rules, and then introduced the format of her class. The students were not disinterested and unruly like Mr. Napier has led her to believe. There were a few that talked while she was talking, but for the most part they were attentive and respectful. That was her first three classes. The last two were held in the same classroom and they were a bit rambunctious. They talked about who they had seen while they were in juvenile detention and what threats their probation officers had made. They were shocked when Cassidy handed out books and gave them their first writing assignment. One student in shock, asked, “you must be new here...we not supposed to do work during the first week of school.” Another student, Rasheed, coming to Cassidy’s defense replied, “shut the hell up man, you missed most of last year cuz you was in jail, so you don’t know what the hell is going on.”

“Ah fuck you man, you don’t know what I did last year.”

Cassidy jumped into the conversation, “Gentleman, this is a conversation that needs to occur outside of the classroom, on your own time. While you are in here with me you need to refrain from that type of language and not speculate on what you think each other did this summer.”

Rasheed looked at Cassidy and picked up his pen to write. The other student put his head down mumbling. Cassidy decided not to force him to write since he seemed

aggravated. She handed out books while the students wrote their expectations for the year.

Cassidy pulled out the folder with the journal entries for Rasheed's class. She flipped through them and realized that half of the students did not write more than a paragraph. She read a few and realized that many of them did not know what a paragraph was, nor did they know what a sentence should look like. She had pages full of run-ons and fragments. Rasheed's was the only one that looked like what a 9th grader should be capable of writing. He had one paragraph and it was full of complete sentences. She read it:

My expectations for the year.

I expect to get passing grades this year so I will be in the 11th grade next year. I am turning 17 in a few months and I don't want to be a 10th grader forever. I expect to make good grades this semester because I am fed up with my moms and P. O. fussing at me about not doing the work. I just need to stay out of trouble because the work ain't that hard. I expect to learn something in this class cause the teacher seems to be about business unlike some of my other teachers. I hope that I will not let these scrubs around here upset me and put me back in the ydc.

Cassidy smiled at his expectations and read a few more papers before deciding that she needed to review sentence structure when she met her class tomorrow.

Kasey walked down the hall looking up for the letter C. It was her first day at Venable High and she was completely lost. Her first class, according to the schedule,

was in C-12. She was on the A hall and had walked the length, thinking C would intersect at some point.

“Do you need help?” a woman asked her

“Yes, I am looking for C-12,” Kasey said relieved.

“Turn around, make a left and then a right. It will be towards the end of the hall.”

Kasey turned around and followed the instructions. It was actually the last class on the hall. She walked in and found a desk in the front and close to the door. She sat down and watched other students enter and speak to each other. The bell sounded and the teacher walked in and sat behind her desk. “Good morning class. For those of you that do not know, I am Dr. Scott and this is biology. I will hand out the syllabus in a few minutes, but I want to go over a few class rules first. This class is what you want it to be. If you do the work, you will get an A. If you don’t do the work, you will get an F. If you come to class on time, you will get an A. If you are late, I will give you detention and you will get an F for your daily grade. I don’t tolerate disrespect, so get yourself together before you walk in here.”

Kasey sat back in her desk as Dr. Scott surveyed the room.

“Hey, Angela, how’s your mom?”

“She is good Dr. Scott”

“Tell her I said hello.”

“I will.”

“Mr. Rockfort, if I have any problems out of you, I will call your grandmother. You know we go to the same church and she has already told me to keep an eye out for you.” The young man put his head down in embarrassment.

Dr. Scott found Kasey in the corner. “What is your name young lady?”

“Kasey Colbert.”

“Are you new to the school?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“Well welcome Miss Colbert”

“Thank you.”

“Okay, let’s get down to business.” Dr. Scott stood up and picked up a pile of papers. “Here is your syllabus. Look over it and if you have any questions ask them now. Tomorrow you will have a quiz over the syllabus, so make sure you study for it tonight. You see you will need a 2-inch three-ringed binder, notebook paper, color pencils, markers, blue or black ink pens and glue. Your book for this class will stay in the classroom. If you want to check it out overnight, just ask before the end of the class.”

Kasey picked up the packet of papers and flipped through them. There was a long list of rules, an outline of what was to be covered for the semester, and a short overview of the class. Biology was not a class she looked forward to and the syllabus did not ease her mind.

“I am passing around a few forms for you to sign. One is stating that you received your syllabus and the other is saying that I went over the classroom rules. It is kinda like the contract for the class, so if you break any of the rules I will remind you of the contract you signed.”

Kasey looked at Dr. Scott. The rules she gave were kind of vague she thought. Be respectful and come to class on time, but the list of rules on the syllabus was a lot longer than what she said.

“Make sure you have your notebook by the end of the week. I have weekly notebook checks. If your notebook is in order you will receive an A for the day. If it is a mess, you’ll get an F for your daily grade.”

“Keep a neat notebook means an A, on time means an A, respectful means an A. Maybe this class wouldn’t be that bad,” Kasey thought.

Tanisha walked through the front door of Venable High. “Hey, Ms. Clafell,” she said as she ran up and hugged the security guard.

“Hey smiley. How was your summer?”

“Good, all I did was work. I am saving up to buy a car.”

“Oh really, how much have you saved so far?”

“700 dollars. It should be more, but I had to shop for school, clothes, shoes and school supplies.”

“At least you are being responsible with the money. Don’t blow it on parties and stuff you don’t need.”

“My sister tells me that all the time.”

“How is your sister? Is she still at UGA?”

“Yep, she is a junior this year. She’s okay.”

“Good, I’ll see you around okay.”

“Okay, Ms. Clafel. I’ll see you later.”

Tanisha walked into the gym and looked around for her best friend, Shenika. She spotted her sitting on the stage talking to Gerald, a basketball player.

As she walked across the gym she stopped and hugged classmates she had not seen since school dismissed in the spring.

“Hey, guys, what’s going on?”

“Hey girl, we were talking about a party this weekend after the game. Wanna go?” Darrian asked.

“I have to work this weekend. But, I’m off Saturday night, so maybe we can find something to do then.”

“Cool. Did you see Candace’s shoes? They look like something you would wear.”

“Where is she...oh I see her, those are cute.”

“I knew it. Do you have your schedule? I wonder if we have any classes together.”

Tanisha pulled her class schedule out of her oversized purse and handed it to her best friend. Shenika scanned the schedule. She got her schedule off of the stage floor and scanned it comparing it to Tanisha’s.

“It looks like we have Lit. together. I don’t know who Huckabee is, but we have her 2nd period. Whoever gets there first saves the seat for the other one.”

“Okay...” Terrance grabbed Tanisha from behind and kissed her cheek. “Who is this?” She asked smiling. Terrance turned her around so she could see him, “You missed me didn’t you?”

“I didn’t have time to miss you; you were at my job every time I was. How many pairs of shoes do you have now?”

“You know me. I gotta match my clothes. But, I need the Jordans when they come out, so put some 13s up for me.”

“I can’t do that, but I can buy them when they come in if I am at work.”

“Works for me, I’ll give you the money tomorrow.”

“Okay,” Tanisha said as she ran up and hugged Samar.

“What’s up girl?” Samar asked.

“Nothing, how have you been? I was shocked I didn’t see you in the mall this summer.”

“No, I have been working two jobs. I work at IHOP, you guys should come by. ”

“Why are you working so much?” Tanisha asked.

“I have to pay all my dues, junior dues, dance team, basketball, and maybe track.

“I am thinking about running track too,” Shenika chimed in.

“Ya’ll can have all that running, I’mma do soccer again and be done with. It is a short season, but it will look good on my college applications.

“Yeah, I guess we need to start think about that...”

The girls hugged each other at the sound of the first bell, and walked to their first class.

Jerome dapped his friends as he walked down the hall. “What’s up, man?” He asked as he strolled down the hall to his first period class. This was his third year at Venable, his first year playing varsity football, and he was happy to be back at school. Summer had been uneventful for him with the exception of football practice. His mom did not want him hanging out with his friends after his cousin was shot at the beginning of the summer, so he was stuck in the apartment when he was not at practice.

“What’s up JB?” Terrance asked, as he caught up with his friend.

“Not, much man. Who do you have now?”

“Mrs. McMillan for math.”

“Me to man, this is going to be a breeze, you know she likes football players.”

“Yeah, I need a good grade so maybe my mom will help me get a car.”

“Man that would be phat if you got a car, we could hang out all night...how is your cousin?”

“He is okay. He is not going to be able to walk, but he seems to be taking it okay.”

“Man, that was one messed up night. Those scrubs could have told him that they were with some guys. They were just looking for some drama.”

“Yeah, he wouldn’t have talked to them, but he knew one of them from middle school.”

“It was fucked up man.”

“Yeah, my mom wouldn’t let me go anywhere this summer.”

“Well, the season starts this week and she will have to let up some.”

“I hope so, but moms has been trippin. I don’t think it is going to be like last year.”

“Well at least you know she cares. My mom wants me out of the house. You know I spent the weekend at Shameka’s house while her parents were out of town.”

“Cuttin?”

“You know it, that bitch don’t care about nothing.”

Jerome and Terrance walked in the classroom and walked to the last two seats in the back of the classroom.

The bell sounded as soon as they sat down. A few students strolled in after the bell. Terrance propped his feet on the desk in front of him. Ms. McMillan walked in.

“Terrance get your feet off of the desk. Good morning class.”

Terrance smiled at Jerome as he removed his feet. “This is Algebra, and for those that do not know, I am Mrs. McMillan. Jerome, can you and Terrance help me hand out some papers?”

Jerome and Terrance got up and swaggered to the front of the room. She handed each of them a pile of papers and they passed them out, speaking to all the girls as they did so.

“You will need a notebook for this class and all work needs to be done in pencil. If it is done in pen I will not grade it. You will get your textbooks in two week. This week we will review basic mathematics and start with more complex problems next week. Terrance when you are done handing those out, please hand out these packets.” Terrance walked back to the front to the room and took the papers Ms. McMillan pointed to.

“I want you to work on this for thirty minutes and then we will go over it. This will show me what we need to work on this week.”

Jerome looked at the paper. It looked pretty easy, multiplication, percentages, and some fractions. He pulled the pencil out of his back pocket and started to work.

Tanisha walked into Cassidy’s class room and looked for Shenika. She dropped her purse on the floor next to her desk and sat down.

“Where is the teacher?” Tanisha whispered to Shenika.

“She was in the hall when I came in, maybe you didn’t see her.”

“Is she Black?”

“Yeah.” Tanisha responded as the bell sounded

“Good morning class. My name is Cassidy Huckabee, and this is American Literature. Before we get started I want to tell you a little bit about me. I am a product of this school system. I went to Paine College for my undergraduate degree, from there I went to University of Georgia for graduate school. I taught at Georgia State, and I currently teach as an adjunct instructor for Georgia Perimeter College. This is an advance level class, so I am going to teach you like I do my college classes. There will be a great deal of reading and a great deal of writing. By the time you finish the class you will know how to write a critical analysis and short essays. You will know how to make a strong argument and be able to back it up with evidence from a variety of texts. My intent is to prepare you for college, and that may not always be fun or easy, but I promise you that you will appreciate it when you go to college. How many of you have already started to look at colleges?” A few people raised their hands. “We will have to spend a few days making sure you have a plan for your senior year. Okay, with that said, I would like to hand out your syllabus. Take one and pass it around. Look over it and if you have any questions ask now.”

Tanisha sat back and looked over the syllabus. “Papers...a lot of papers,” she thought “She ain’t no joke.” She scanned the room and noticed that some of her classmates looked upset at the amount of work they were supposed to do over the semester. She looked at Shenika; Shenika looked back at her and shrugged her shoulders.

Cassidy walked back the front of the classroom and looked at the students that believed they were the best of the best at Venable High. Some looked back at her and frowned. She smiled at them.

“Okay, there are a pile of papers I need to hand out, so let’s get that over with. While you are reading and signing those papers I will hand out your textbooks. You will have an assignment today, so let’s try to quickly complete the business stuff.”

Tanisha pulled a pen out of her purse and grabbed a pack of papers and handed them to Shenika. She skimmed the first page and signed her name.

Tanisha grabbed their purses and literature book. Shenika sighed.

When they got out in the hall they heard classmates complaining.

“She has to be out of her mind if she thinks I’m a do all that work. We are supposed to read a few stories and answer a few questions.”

“Did you see we have to do a seven pager research paper?”

“I’ve never written a research paper before; I don’t know how she expects us to do one. We aint in college yet!” Stacy, a basketball player, said.

Tanisha chimed in, “Isn’t that the point? To get us ready for college. Ya’ll always complaining. My sister is in college and she says all she does is read books and write papers. This should be good practice.”

“We don’t need to practice, we’ll just figure it out.” Stacy yipped back.

“Whatever boy, I am going to take advantage of someone that has taught college classes.”

“You know Tanisha, sometimes you can be such an ass-kisser.”

“That aint’ kissing butt, it is just...you know what, I am not going to keep talking to your ignorant butt.” Tanisha said and walked in the opposite direction of Stacy to look for her Spanish class.

Tanisha met Shenika at her locker after the final bell of the day. “How were the rest of your classes?” Tanisha asked.

“Okay I guess, it looks like literature is going to be the hardest class, but I don’t think I mind it too much, it might be good for us.”

“Well it might be good for us, but some people don’t like it. Jessica said she was going to tell her dad about Miss Huckabee, and you know he is always up here trying to change things.”

“Why is she mad?”

“She says it is too much work.”

“We haven’t even gotten it yet, what is she complaining about?” Shenika asked perplexed.

“Girl, some people just like to complain. Jakeisha said she going to see Mrs. Hillard to see if she can get out the class. I ain’t worried about it.”

“Me either, I don’t have anything to do but school, so it doesn’t matter.” Shenika responded.

So, this is how it works here

Cassidy sat in the back of the media center and watched the teachers as they chatted before the faculty meeting. A heavy set Black woman walked to the back and sat down next to Cassidy.

“How is it going?” the woman asked.

“It’s okay,’ Cassidy responded.

“I’m sorry, I know we met during preplanning, but I am sure you don’t remember my name. Sabrina Jackson. I teach reading and 9th grade literature on the F hall.”

“Oh, yeah, we did meet. Sorry, I am horrible with names,” Cassidy smiled at her.

“Don’t worry about it. Let me know if you need anything. I was in your shoes last year. I came in the middle of the year. The teacher I replaced just refused to come back one day and after three months of subs I was hired to finish the year.”

“So, is this technically your first year teaching?”

“Yep, technically it is, I wasn’t sure if I wanted to come back here. Some of the kids can piss you off, but since I am new I cannot transfer to a new school for three years.”

“Really? You cannot transfer until after three years? Even if you are not happy here?” Cassidy asked astounded.

“You can go to a new school system or find another job in another field, but you cannot go to another school.”

“That kinda sucks. ”

“That does suck. It is not good for teachers or students. You see that lady in the green dress?” Sabrina nodded to a woman in the front, “this is her third year here. I promise you she will be putting in for a transfer. She hates it here and everyone knows it. She doesn’t even teach that much. Last year I floated in her classroom and I would get there a few minutes early since it was right after my planning period. Anyway, the kids could bring in videos and watch them in class. I would be psst’d if my child came to school to watch R-rated movies.”

“She is not worried about getting in trouble?”

“Girl, they know she doesn’t teach. You are going to see a lot of that around here.” Sabrina said.

“Good afternoon, let’s get started so you guys can go home. The first few days have gone well. No fights, and attendance seems to be average. Please be advised that the counselors will be modifying schedules for about two weeks, so try to hold out on any major assignments until next month. I have heard complaints about the heat. The county said that the hall without air should have it by the end of next week. I know most of the windows are broken and won’t open but for those of you that can open windows feel free. The PTSA has asked that the teachers’ pay dues. Currently there are 10 teachers active in the PTSA. The first PTSA meeting will be mandatory for teachers, so mark your calendars. I talked to the county office today about our shortage of books...those of you with low inventory will have to use class sets; the county told me that they are ordering new books for next year, so they are not going to buy more books for our students. I have talked with other schools that have decreased in attendance and I am negotiating borrowing some of their books. Apparently there are no more science or mathematic books in the warehouse, so, try to hold on to what we have, because who knows when we will see more books from the county. With that said, NO HOMEWORK...we cannot penalize the students that do not have their own books, plus most of them don’t do the homework anyway...I guess my point is this...if you cut out homework averages which tend to be low, we can increase their overall average and get more kids passing. Plan your classes to allow students to complete all of their work in class.”

A hand shot up.

“Yes, Mrs. Sanders. ”

“So you want us to take time away from lecturing and instruction to give them time to work on all of their assignments in class? We won’t cover half of the material.”

“Modify your lessons so students can complete work in class. If that means shortening lessons, you figure out the fat to cut and keep whatever they will need to score well on the Georgia high school graduation test.”

There was mumbling.

“Look, I know that many of you do not like hearing about the test, but the new mandate, No Child Left Behind, is going to cut funding and possibly close the school if the students do not score well on these tests. The test is what is going to keep you employed, so find a way to keep your job. There are plenty of people trying to leave corporate America and get a provisional to teach...they want your job and they will teach the test, so you decide what is more important, eating every day or teaching what you want until after the test ”

“That’s some bullshit,” Sabrina mumbled, “these kids need to know more than how to take a damn test.”

Cassidy started to agree with Sabrina, but kept her thoughts to herself. She sat back to listen to the remainder of the meeting.

Kasey walked down the hall towards her first period class. There was excitement in the hall; everyone was talking about the fight that happened before school. Two guys were arguing and they broke into a fight. Kasey was expecting the two coaches to stop them. She was in awe when not only did they let the two boys fight; they let other boys

join in. The security officer and school police officer ran in and broke up the fight. By the time it was over there were seven guys in the fight, 2 on 5.

Kasey was not use to violent fights. She saw blood and torn shirts and was amazed that someone was willing to hurt someone so early in the morning.

“Man, he kicked his ass.”

“His boys will be up here this afternoon to handle those muthafuckas, they ain’t gonna let shit go down like that.”

“I’m going to stay after so I see it. Terry ain’t going to be playing.”

Kasey listened to the two guys walking next to her. She looked up to make sure she was in front of the right room and walked away from the chaos of the hall.

“Did you see the fight?” A girl asked her as she sat in her seat.

“Yeah, that is pretty messed up”

“Yeah, what is messed up is that they jumped Demetrius. D’s brother use to go here last year. He is deep in the Folks gang. His brother is in it to. The Crips had no business messing with him. D’s brother likes guns and knives. It ain’t gonna be pretty.”

“You think they will come on campus?”

“They will try, but security knows what is going on. Plus, Coach Folley is in the Crips, he will probably have the guys out of here before the day is over.”

“What do you mean Coach Folley is in the Crips? He is in a high school gang?”

“He is in the Crips, at least that is the rumor, Crips are everywhere and they have been trying to take over the school for the last few years.”

“To do what?”

“Where you from girl, drugs, girls, respect...”

“Good morning, let’s get started. I need you guys to pull out your notebooks and grab a book. Turn to page 33, read the section on cells, and look over the parts of the cell. Get a sheet from my desk and draw your own cell. Make sure it looks like the one in the book and then I need you to label it. You should have color pencils. If you don’t have any ask your neighbor to share. You need to have this done by the end of the period and I will tell you where to put it in your notebook. Angela did you tell your mom what I said?”

Kasey tuned Dr. Scott out as she got out her notebook. So far she had a list of vocabulary words and a chart of cell structure and functions. She got up and picked up the worksheet that already had a cell shape on it. She grabbed a biology book as she headed back to her desk.

“Can I borrow your pencils?” Angela asked Kasey.

“Yeah,” Kasey reached in her bag and pulled out her pencils.

“This is the easiest class. She knows we are not going to read the chapter. We are just going to look at the picture and talk.”

“Yeah, but that is not going to help us with the test.”

“What? Her tests? She gives a study guide with all the answers a few days before the test. You just copy them over and use them on the test. All of her test are open-notebook. You do the work and have it set up right and you get an A on the test.”

“Really? This class is not going to be hard at all.”

“Nope, just don’t lose your notebook. People start stealing them near the end of the semester.” Angela said as she grabbed a blue color pencil off Kasey’s desk.

Jerome slid in his desk; he was a few minutes late to class. He hung out in the gym after the fight to recap it with his friends.

“Mr. Gunther, thank you for joining us. Grab a book and get started on the warm-up.”

Jerome looked up at the projector screen, and squinted.

“Jerome why don’t you move closer to the board if you are going to squint?” Ms. McMillan said.

Jerome got up and walked to the first desk in the middle row and sat down.

“You might do better in the front.”

“Yes, ma’am”

Jerome wrote down the problem and began working it out.

“Are you playing Friday Jerome?” Ms. McMillan asked, sitting behind her desk.

“Yes, ma’am”

“I will make sure I get some good shots of you since this is your first varsity game. This is going to be a tough game Friday. ”

“Yeah, Shinholster High ain’t no joke.”

“Ya’ll gonna get slaughtered.” Sherri said from the back of the room. “I ain’t even gonna go. The band ain’t hitting on nothing, and ya’ll gonna get your butts beat. I’m going to Southwest’s game.”

“Shut up Sherri, don’ nobody care where your lame ass goes,” Terrance yelled at Sherri.

“She just mad cause she ain’t apart of nothing.” Leslie chimed in.

“Ain’t nothing to do at this lame school but play ball, cheer or be in that whack band. My cousin’s school has all types of stuff to do, she is on the debate team. We ain’t got nothing here.”

“Yeah, cuz they know we ain’t gonna do all that. What we know about debating?”

“Okay, I guess from all the talking you guys are through with the warm-up. Jerome, what did you get.”

“10, but I don’t think it is right.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t know, I just don’t; it was too easy.”

“Well you are right. How many others got 10?”

A few students raised their hands.

“Jerome, go to the projector and show us how you got your answer.”

Jerome slid out of his desk and walked up to the projector. He picked up the marker and sighed. “So...can I just write it out or do I have to explain it?” he asked.

“You write it out and Terrance you explain it.” Terrance stood up in the back of the room and smoothed out his shirt.

“Whatever,” Sherri said.

“Shut up you scrub, stop hating. Gone bro.”

Jerome started working the problem and his friend explained his steps.

“Good job fellas, let’s get started on the work for the day.”

Jerome walked back to his desk and faked high-fived Terrance.

“I hope you guys do that well at the game Friday.”

Cassidy was sitting in her borrowed desk when there was a knock on the door. She looked through the small window and saw one of the assistant principals looking at her. She got up, walked to the door and opened it.

“Yes, sir.” Cassidy said. She heard students moan.

“They think I am here to get one of them. I just came by to formally introduce myself. I’m Rodney Wilkson, I am over discipline for 9th and 10th grade. Though you teach 11th grade in addition to 9th and 10th, most of your students are still classified as 10th grades, which means they fall under my jurisdiction. I looked over your roster and for the most part you have pretty good kids, but your last two classes are full of...well...students that have gotten lost in the hype of their neighborhood. So, if you have any problems with them let me know. I will have a security guard on the hall just in case.”

“Thank you, Mr. Wilkson. My afternoon crew is interesting.”

“There are some good kids in there, I will try to help weed out the ones that have no hope. There are one or two that are going to turn 21 this semester, they are only here to collect a check. I heard you taught at a college before coming here...the kids need to know that there is more out there beyond high school. I hope you will instill the importance of higher ed. to them. Some of them have no idea what is waiting for them when they leave here.”

Cassidy heard a sigh, she looked around to see John dropping his pen and sitting back.

“He can be saved, if he gets out of his own way.” Mr. Wilkson said as he motioned to John.

“John will be fine, thank you.”

“My office is at the end of the G hall if you need anything. Have a good class.” He smiled and pulled the door. Cassidy turned around and faced her class. “Okay, warm-up is over. Someone read the quote and tell me what it means.” Several students raised their hands. Cassidy looked at John’s paper, he had a paragraph written down, but his hand was down. She called on one of the students that raised their hand. “Tequila, read it first. ”

“It is not the length of life, but the depth of life Ralph Waldo Emerson. Okay, so...it means that it does not matter how long you live it is what you do with your life.”

“Can you explain?”

“You know, like what you do, have kids get married, have a good job.”

“Anyone else have anything to add? John, you have written a lot. Do you agree with Tequila?”

John sighed as he sat up in his desk, “it is about more than being married and having kids, depth is like deepness, so it means that things that you do that have meaning. I guess the things you do to help other people is part of that too.” He slouched back in his chair.

“I think the two of you together explained that one, good job. Bring your logs up before the end of the period and I will sign them. Five for each of you.” John smiled briefly at finding out that he had earned extra points.

Jerome walked into his 4th period class thinking about lunch. He did not grab anything before he left the house and his stomach was growling. He sat in his desk and pulled out a sheet of paper and his pen and looked at the screen to complete the warm-up.

It was a brainteaser, two paragraphs about a missing hat. He hated brainteasers. He knew he was a weak reader, and it annoyed him that he could not always participate on those days.

“Okay guys, who’s ready to give me the answer?”

Jerome looked around and no one raised their hand. “Must be tough.” He attempted to read it, he got the gist of it, a missing hat from a park bench and three suspects. He studied the two paragraphs while waiting for someone to answer the question. Eventually, Angela raised her hand with the answer. “More points for her,” Jerome thought.

“Alright, pull out your books and turn to William Bradford’s biography. We will read this, popcorn style and then we will take some notes.” Jerome slouched in his desk, he hoped no one called on him. No luck, Francis called him to read the second paragraph. He sighed as he began. He struggled with the words. He did not have the rhythm that Francis had and he knew everyone heard it. He was so relieved when he read the last sentence. He looked up from the book and scanned the room, “Damon.” Damon sighed and looked down in the book trying to find where Jerome left off.

When the bell for third lunch rang, everyone got up except for Jerome. He sat in his seat and waited for everyone to leave the room. When everyone was gone, he got up and went to Cassidy’s desk. “Ms. Huckabee, can I ask you something?”

“Sure, what’s up?”

“Do you think I read okay?”

Cassidy paused at the question. She did not want to hurt his feelings, but she promised her students that she would always be honest with them. “I think you could work on improving your reading. You don’t seem comfortable reading out loud.”

“I don’t like reading out loud. Some of the words seem hard. I know I should know them because everyone else does...I think I need to work on my reading.”

“Well, that I can help you with. I think we just need to work on your vocabulary, and let you practice reading more.”

“Can you help me during lunch? I can’t stay after during football season?”

“We’ll start tomorrow. Go grab lunch and see if you can bring something to snack on tomorrow during lunch.”

“Thanks Ms. Huckabee.”

“No, problem. Go eat.”

Cassidy pulled out her lunch, a turkey sandwich and a bag of multigrain chips and sat back in her desk. She had 24 hours to figure out how to help Jerome.

Jerome pulled a bag of chips and a pack of cookies out of his pocket.

“That is not lunch?”

“Yeah, my mom didn’t cook last night so I grabbed this out of the snack machine this morning.

“Snack machines are for snacks, not lunch. Here, take half of my sandwich. It is a little boring, just cheese and turkey, but it is better than what you have.”

Jerome smiled, and took the sandwich. “Thanks.”

“So, while you are eating I want you to read this newspaper article and underline any words you do not know how to pronounce or words that you cannot define.”

Cassidy grabbed a folder from the other side of her desk and handed it to him.

“This is homework. We will talk about it later.”

Jerome sat back in his desk and took a bite from the sandwich. He picked up the pen and started to underline words. “So, Ms. Huckabee, how is this going to help?”

“Well, we’ll know what you need help with. I’ll know where to start. The plan is to see if you are having issues with reading aloud or reading period. A lot of times not knowing the word, or not knowing how to pronounce a word makes reading difficult.”

Jerome nodded his head and took another bite of the sandwich. He picked up the pen again and underlined a word. He opened his bag of chips and stuffed a few in his mouth.

“How long have you noticed you have trouble reading?”

“I don’t know, maybe middle school. The teachers just stopped calling on me. It didn’t bother me then, but it is kinda embarrassing to let people hear me read now. Plus I want to go to college, hopefully on a football scholarship and I know I need to read.”

“We’ll improve your reading. Let me know when you are done. We only have about ten minutes before lunch is over.” Cassidy said, as she crunched on a chip. She got up and walked over to his desk to look at the words he had underlined. “Okay, let’s read the words...well you read the words and I’ll help you if you need it. Then I need you to define the words that you know or think you know.”

Jerome sat up and began reading his words.

Kasey pulled out her notebook and waited for Dr. Scott to start class. She was sitting at her desk showing Angela pictures of her granddaughter. The class waited quietly for a few minutes before Dr. Scott acknowledged that the late bell had sounded.

“Good morning class. Pull out your notebooks and make sure they are in order. If you look on the board, you will see the order that all of your work should be in in your

notebook. Make sure you have it in that in order. I'll give you about ten minutes and then we are having a notebook check." Dr. Scott returned to her pictures.

Kasey looked at the board and flipped through her notebook to make sure everything was in order. A minute later, she closed her notebook and waited. Fifteen minutes later Dr. Scott stood up from behind her desk with her grade book. "Take out a sheet of paper and number it from one to five. "

Kasey yanked a sheet of notebook paper out of her notebook and waited.

"Number one, what should be the first page of your notebook?"

Kasey looked at the board. The order was still there. "Is she joking?" Kasey wrote down the answer.

"What is the answer to the third question on your second worksheet?" Dr. Scott asked as she walked between the rows of desks.

"What are the parts of the cell? Start from the center and work your way out."

A student raised her hand, "Yes, Laquasha?"

"Can I use the notebook?"

"It is a notebook quiz, which means you can use your notebook."

"Fourth question, what is an amoeba? Make sure you use the definition in the book." She waited a minute. Students flipped pages in their notebooks looking for the answers. After a few minutes she gave the final question. "What is a microorganism? When you are done send, your paper to the front of the row and I will collect them.

Kasey copied the definition from her notebook onto her paper. She wrote her name at the top of her paper and sent it to the front of her row. Dr. Scott collected the

papers and redistributed them. “Take out a color pencil and you will grade the quizzes yourself.”

She went over the quiz, and told the students to mark the amount right over the five. Afterwards, the students returned the graded papers to their owners and Dr. Scott called out everyone’s name so they could tell her their grade to be recorded in her grade book.

Kasey sat in awe. “How could anybody get a bad grade on the quiz?” she thought. The order of the notebook was on the board. Dr. Scott gave the answer for every assignment that was in the notebook. The only thing that might not be in everyone’s notebook might be the vocabulary words. Kasey felt frustrated. How was she going to learn biology if they were not required to learn anything? How was she going to pass the graduation test if she didn’t learn anything in the class? She did not have a book, she had a notebook to study from and she had a teacher that did not require them to learn anything. She was going to have to figure out how to do it on her own.

Interlude

Cassidy’s introduction to Venable High was not what she was expecting. She was expecting students who were unruly and unwilling to learn. Though those students did exist, she did not see their behavior to be purely instinct. Conversations with Mr. Napier and conversations she overheard in the teacher’s lounge led her to believe that the forces that were pushing the students to give up were the teachers and administrators who were charged with preparing their future. Mr. Napier and others were preparing the students for a life of jobs with low hourly wages and no job security. Similar to the urban schools that Cassidy had read about in graduate school, her students were not in a school that

wanted them to be successful. Outside of the door of her fourth period class the roof leaked when it rained. When she left the school four years later the leak had grown and several others had appeared throughout the building. The heat did not work in all of the classrooms, nor the air conditioning. Students found it very difficult to write a five-paragraph essay or conjugate verbs when they were sitting in classrooms with extreme temperatures.

Kasey found her new school to be a place of great anxiety. Initially she liked her classes, but soon she learned that there was very little intent for her to actually learn anything. She would have to teach Biology to herself; Dr. Scott was not going to teach her anything. Dr. Scott spent her class time discussing her grandchildren and calling the students lazy failures. Within the same breath, she would brag about the private school education her two sons received. Kasey did find two classes she enjoyed, literature and computer science. Though the curriculum for her computer science class did not parallel the class she could not wait to take at her old school, she did find it interesting. In addition to adjusting to a new school, Kasey was also adjusting to living in one room with her mother and younger sister. She was living in a house with people she did not know well and was uncomfortable at home and in school. Kasey was dealing with the shock of being in an all-Black school, something she had never experienced before. She did share their language or the likes. She dressed differently, spoke well, and did not share the same interests as most of her peers. Despite all of this, she knew she had to make the best of the situation. She knew she wanted to be an aerospace engineer and that she wanted to work for NASA. She was concerned that she was not learning as much as she did in her previous school and eventually started teaching herself.

Kasey once asked her mom about the move to Georgia, and more specifically, to the community that they were in. Her mother told her that her father was not helping financially, so their funds were limited. Her mother also told her that when she had visited friends in this community maybe a decade earlier, the schools were highly rated and people were actually selling their homes in other counties so their children could go to one of the better districts in metropolitan Atlanta. Kasey knew her mom was stressed working two jobs to save up enough for them to get an apartment. She knew her mom was also still dealing with the divorce and her younger sister's frustration with not being with her dad. Kasey did not tell her mother about the lack of learning in her new school. She tried to compensate her education with extra reading and hoped everything would work out for her.

Jerome was friends with everyone, which worked to his advantage when he needed help in some of his classes. He could not see the board all of the time and he knew he did not read well. But, because he was a nice guy, teachers would give him passing grades in his classes. This is how he made it the 11th grade reading on a 3rd or 4th grade level. He knew his skills were low, and he knew his teachers knew his skills were low when they skipped over him for read-alouds in the class. Jerome hoped his skills on the football field were enough to get him into a college. He did not care what college; he just wanted to get a college degree. He knew that the only way to do better than his mother was doing was to get a college degree. He saw how his mother worked and he knew the fruits of her labor were small and tasteless. He knew that his mother had completed high school, but her diploma did not give her many options for work, so he

had, years earlier set his sights on a college degree which would mean better pay and steady hours.

Tanisha had every intention of making the most of her high school experience. She had watched her older sister be crowned homecoming queen, prom queen while she served as captain of the soccer team, and president of the Student Government Association. Currently, her sister was matriculating at the University of Georgia and Tanisha wanted to follow in her footsteps, but like Jerome, her skills did not commensurate with being an 11th grader. She had received mostly A's and B's because she was a sweet person. She always smiled and looked at the brighter parts of life. She was a favorite among all her teachers, so they looked the other way when she did not show that she had mastered the skills necessary to move forward. The school had her to believe that she was a bright student, capable of getting into UGA. She believed this because her counselors would put her in advance level classes. What she did not know, but Cassidy eventually did discover, was that advance level classes did not mean that the students were smarter or prepared for the rigor of working towards a college degree; advance level classes were for students that did not have referrals from teachers. It meant that students came to class on time and were respectful. The curriculum was not rigorous enough for a student preparing for college. In actuality, the curriculum was more like the general curriculum designed for students that would stop their education with just a high school diploma.

Rasheed was placed in the standard type of class at Venable High. Most of the students in his classes were victims of years of hearing that they were not going to

graduate from high school, and that they were not going to have good jobs if they had jobs at all. Mikells, (2012), points out that,

Many times our students, especially children of color, are abused on many levels. They are constantly told they are not smart and they are lazy. This is not always verbal. It can also be felt or experienced in how they are treated. What do they do? How do they respond? They either ignore what others say and succeed or they become disruptive, dumb, and lazy. Many of them see no positive future for themselves. (173)

Most of the students in Rasheed's classes had given up on education and were in school because their probation officers made them come to school or because they had not figured out what to do with the rest of their lives. They had resolved to the notion that they would not find success in school since it was clearly stated regularly by many of their teachers that they were failures unworthy of happiness and peace of mind. Rasheed's peers acted out in class because they were frustrated. They were angry that someone else had decided their fate. Many of them were beginning to recognize what was happening to them in their school, but they were not sure what to do to rectify their situation, and many did not know if there was time to change their fates (Cutts, 2012). The schools that they had attended for years had decided based on one bad day or one bad week that they did not have a positive future. They were constantly told that they were "no good nigga's" or "not worthy of the air they breathe" by teachers like Dr. Scott and Mr. Napier. They were victims of disenfranchisement and negligence.

Their blackness and their location in the county had determined their fate. They were not expected to learn and they were not expected to graduate. They were expected to give up and fail. Many of them did. Rasheed fought this fate. He believed his grandmother who said he possessed possibilities for success. He decided that he did not want to be like the rest of his classmates. He fought back by bucking the status quo in his classes. He started to bring his books, notebook paper, and pencils. He completed his homework and turned in his assignments. His friends noticed and some of them decided that they too were going to have some control of their fate. They were going to fight for a bright future. The problem was, for many of them it was too late. Age was not on their side, nor was the school. They had been dubbed failures and the school was not willing to release them from that title. They were not going to learn because most of their teachers were not going to teach them. They were going to fail because they were supposed to in order to maintain the status quo of Black subordination.

Family Ties

Rasheed walked into the classroom after being stuck at home for three days.

“Where you been nigga?” Benard asked as he dapped out Rasheed.

“Man, my mom was tripping, I got suspended for one day and she made me stay home for two more days because she didn’t believe that it was for one day. Mr. Wilkson called her and told her it was for one day, and she didn’t care, she said I wasn’t doing anything anyway so I should stay home and watch my cousin’s daughter while she was working.”

“Man, that sucks, but you ain’t missed nothing. This bitch here is trying to make us read and shit, I ain’t with that.”

“Man, it is a literature class, what do you expect?”

“Last year and the year before that the teachers just read everything to us. Half these mofos can’t read, you know how long it takes to read a page?”

“Well just volunteer to read and we can get through it faster.”

“I guess you right. We have to write today. You need to read the story you missed yesterday. You know what sucks?” Benard asked as he slouched in his desk.

“What?” Rasheed asked.

“This is my third time in this class. I am a junior sitting in a 9th grade literature class. The stories are the same and everything.” Benard said frustrated.

“Well, maybe if we keep our asses out of trouble we can pass the class, and catch up with everyone else.” Rasheed said as he got up to pick up two textbooks. When he walked back to his seat next to Benard he noticed that he looked even more frustrated.

“What’s up man?” He asked.

“Even if we pass the class, we will still be two years behind. I’m not gonna be 20 years old sitting in a junior class. I’ll be 18 next month. This shit sucks!”

“Well let’s try anyway, if it helps us stay out of the YDC, I am with it. Plus, if you are going to be 18 next month you need to try to make this school thing work. If you get in trouble after next month your record sticks, and you might get put out of school. Then what will you do?”

“Sling like my cousin, I ain’t gonna be 20 in high school.”

Rasheed conceded, “I hear ya. What story do I need to read?” he asked as the tardy bell sounded.

“Good afternoon class, welcome back Rasheed. You were missed.” Cassidy said as she turned on the overhead projector.

“Start on the warm-up class, I will take roll and then I will catch Rasheed up on what he missed.” Some students pulled out their notebook and others looked around for someone to ask to borrow paper or pens.

Benard pulled out his paper from his back pocket and tried to flatten it out. “You need some paper?” He asked Rasheed.

“Naw, I bought a folder over the weekend.”

“Aw nigga, look at you trying to look like a nerd.” Benard smiled.

“My mentor said the nerds are the one rolling in the dough...legally. I figured if I look the part it might work for me.

“I’m with that...I might get my own folder.” Benard responded upbeat. “Do you think your mentor means that you can be a nerd and bring in huge stacks of money?”

“I guess, I don’t think he would’ve said it if he didn’t think so.”

“Do you think he can be my mentor too?” Benard asked.

Rasheed smiled at the thought, “Naw, man. I think I am all he can handle right now.”

Tanisha walked into her literature class and sat down next to Shenika.

“What’s wrong?” Shenika asked Tanisha.

“I’m just tired. I didn’t get home from work until 12:30 and I had to finish my math homework and read for my history class.”

“Why don’t you cut back on your hours?”

“Yeah, Im’ma ask my manager tomorrow if I can just work weekends like I do during soccer season. My sister told me that my junior year was going to be busy and I believe her now. There’s more reading, and I need to get more involved in the afterschool stuff.”

“Yeah, I have two meetings this week in addition to flag practice.” Shenika replied.

Tanisha pulled out her notebook and looked up on the screen to complete the warm-up. After the bell sounded, Cassidy walked in, “Good morning class. Finish the warm-up and give me a few minutes to check attendance.”

“Tanisha wrote a few lines and dropped her pen on the desk and sat back in her desk. Shenika looked at her and whispered, “you need to slow down.”

“I know.”

“So what is the answer?” Cassidy asked as she walked from behind the desk.

Tanisha and Shenika both raised their hands. Cassidy looked around and called Jessica.

“13” Jessica yelled.

“Close, but not right. Anyone else? Shenika.”

“12?” she asked.

“I need you to know. Is your answer 12?” Cassidy asked.

“Yes. I am sure about 12.” Tanisha said looking over her paper.

“You are correct. I owe you. Good job.” Tanisha smiled. “Okay. I think it is time we write. I am preparing you for essays later, so let’s work on thesis statements today. We have read several stories and journals in the past few weeks. What I want you to do is

find a common theme in three of them and write a thesis statement for your first essay.”

Cassidy heard Stacy moan from the back of the classroom. “Now all of you claim you are going to college and I promise you that you cannot get any type of degree without writing. So let’s figure out how to master the essay and your life after me will be smooth.” Cassidy said as she smiled and walked to the board.

Cassidy sat at her small desk in Mr. Napier’s room grading papers. He was sitting at his desk sipping coffee. “So how is it going? It’s been a few weeks now. What do you think of the school?” Mr. Napier asked as he sat back in his chair.

“Well the school is a school. The kids are okay. I think I like most of my classes. I have found my rhythm.”

“Well, whatever rhythm you have you will lose soon enough. They’ll surprise you with something and then the shit will be all over the place.”

Cassidy wasn’t sure who ‘they’ were, but she did not want to ask. She learned very early that, though Mr. Napier was a nice guy, he did not think favorable of the students, school, or teaching. He was preparing to retire for a third time, he had retired from the military, a bank, and he was now teaching to pay for graduate school for one son, and helping another buy a house. His opinion of the students was very negative despite the fact that he grew up in a neighborhood similar to theirs in New Orleans. He, like many of the other Black teachers, forgot that their beginnings were humble and that there were dedicated people in their lives that helped them reach beyond their families, neighborhoods, socioeconomics, and skin color.

Cassidy walked into her first class of the day. Two boys were arguing in the middle of the classroom.

“You betta watch what you say nigga, you fucking with the wrong muthafucka.”

Ronald said with his hands bald into a fist.

“I’m talking to the brother of a fag, what you gonna do pussy boy?”

Cassidy walked close to the boys. “I’m sorry to interrupt you two, but the conversation you are having is inappropriate, and disrespectful to me and the rest of the class. This is my time, so I suggest you sit down and get over whatever seems to be bothering both of you. Ronald looked at Cassidy in disbelief. He was 6’1 and weighed 250lbs. Cassidy walked back to the front of the classroom. “Ronald and Martell apologize for their disturbance. I will give you guys a few extra minutes. Ronald, I believe you are close to having 20 points in warm-ups so I suggest you take advantage of this one, I think it is right up your alley.

Ronald sat down and picked up his pen and looked at the screen. He turned and glared at Martell. “Ronald,” Cassidy said,” when you are done let me know and I will start class.”

Ronald read the assignment and jotted down his response.

Cassidy walked into the department chairs classroom. There were books and piles of paper everywhere. She found a desk in the middle of the classroom and sat down with her tea and notebook.

“Ms. Huckabee, sign in and grab the packet on the table. We have to go over No Child Left Behind and AYP. You and a few other teachers will be the first affected by this thing.” Catherine Yancey stated, as she leaned on her desk.

Cassidy got up and picked up the packet, as she walked back to her desk Sabrina walked in. “Where are you sitting? Oh I see your mug.” Sabrina said as she signed in and grabbed the packet.

“Girl, I had a day,” Sabrina said as she sat down in the desk next to Cassidy.

“Two of my students came to class high and the smell was so strong I think I got a contact high. I felt giddy until after lunch...and I had the munchies.” She giggled.

“What happen to the students?” Cassidy asked.

“Well, you know they both denied being high, smiling the whole time. I grabbed one of the security guards in the hall, and they called them out. They sent one back into the classroom, I think the other one went home. Neither one of them do anything in class. They don’t pay attention in class, and they are never on time. I’m just shocked that they would get high so early in the morning.”

“When was it?” Cassidy asked.

“Second period. I think they got high on campus because I saw both of them before first period.”

“Wow, that’s pretty bold.” Cassidy said shocked.

“Not really, the security guards find kids all over campus smoking and having sex. There is no shame in being caught. The new thing is to go to the cutty house.”

“What is a cutty house?” Cassidy asked. She had heard students say cutty and refer to a cutty house, but she was not sure what it meant.

“Well, if a girl is cutting, she is having sex and there apparently is a house in the neighborhood that is opening for sex and drug use. I hear the mom is at home and allows the kids to drop in and do whatever they want. I don’t know if it is true about the mom, but I know kids leave campus and come back. They are not going to Wendy’s for a burger”

“I guess this is everyone,” Catherine said as she stood up. “So, we have a lot to cover. The Georgia High School Writing test is coming up in a few weeks and the 11th grade teachers need to make sure the students are prepared. It is the same test; it just means more now since our accreditation is dependent on how well the students do on the test. So, make sure the students know how to write a thesis statement and a decent 5-paragraph essay. Make sure the students show up for the test. Give them extra credit or a quiz grade for showing up. I have some worksheets if you need some guidance on how to teach the essay format in the front. Since I mentioned it already, AYP is Adequate Yearly Progress. Basically, this means that our students are broken into subgroups based on race, and in our case, special education, and all the subgroups must meet the minimum in attendance, academic performance, and test scores. If the students do not do well, then the school can be closed and the students will have to go to other schools. The English department is pretty strong, so I am not worried about the students not doing well on the test, but we need to make sure that everybody passes. We have students that have transferred from other schools and we have students that were sent here from the alternative school. You need to drill, drill, drill for the next few weeks. The Language Arts part is being revised, so I have no idea what it will look like, but just make sure you cover everything in the curriculum the county recommends. Any questions so far?”

Everyone flipped through the packet and shook their heads no.

“We have a shortage of ninth grade books. I have about five left in the bookroom and I am sure we are going to have a few more students added to our rolls in the next few weeks. So we need to figure out what to do when we run out of books. I have had to deal with one family that has come into school three weeks late. They want make up work for the first three weeks because they were visiting family in Puerto Rico. I personally don’t think they should get to make up work, but I talked to administration today and they said that the teachers involved should allow them six weeks to make up the work. If you are a teacher of one of the Peñas you have until the end of the week, or two days to give them all of their make-up work.” A few teachers sighed. “So Cathy, let me make sure I have this correct...I am supposed to scrounge up make-up work for three weeks for a student who has not done anything since they got here and, if they turn anything in, grade it whenever they decide to turn it in?” Sarah asked.

“I’m afraid so. I have taught two of the Peñas, school is not a priority for them so I don’t expect you will get much or anything back from them. The mom is making a big deal about this, so the administration is making her happy. They know the due date for all their work, so if you get it to them by Friday, they know exactly when it is due. I would actually have them sign something saying they have received it so there are no questions later.”

“I can’t believe this...” Sarah Madden mumbled

“Make sure you turn in your lesson plans for the next week by Thursday. The administration has complained that too many teachers, not necessarily the English department, are writing students up. If the student is a constant disruption than they want

you to write a referral, otherwise they would like for you to handle it in the classroom. Apparently, disciplinary action can also be a negative mark with AYP.

“So concentrate on making sure the students do well on the test and don’t write kids up if I want to keep my job?” Sarah asked.

“Yep.”

Jerome walked into the classroom dapping out his friends. “Man, good job on the game man. I can’t believe ya’ll were able to score on them twice.”

“Thanks man, it was a tough game, and it felt good even though we lost.” Jerome said.

“Yeah, but ya’ll looked good. We might have a team this season.” Jadon said to Jerome as he sat down. Jerome walked to his seat and sat down as the bell sounded.

“Good morning. Jerome, good job on the game. I have some great shots of you that I am going to share with the yearbook. I can print some out for you if you want. ”

“Thanks Miss McMillan.”

“Where’s Terrance?” McMillan asked.

“I don’t know. I didn’t see him in the gym this morning.”

“Oh, okay. I have a quiz for you today. Take out a sheet of paper and answer the following equations.” Miss McMillan said as she turned on the overhead projector.

Jerome pulled out a sheet paper and squinted at the overhead projector. He copied down the problems and began to work the equations.

After about 15 minutes, Miss McMillan got up from behind her desk and walked between the desks looking at the work of the students. She stopped by a few of the boys’

desks and pointed out things they were doing wrong and gave them advice. She looked at the papers of her female students, but she did not point out mistakes or give them advice. Terrance burst into the room as Miss McMillan returned to her desk. “What’s up Miss McMillan!” The entire class looked up from their desks.

“Have a seat Terrance.” She said. He walked to the back of the classroom and dapped off a few friends on his way.

He sat down and leaned over to Jerome’s desk. “Hey man, let me have a sheet of paper.” Jerome could smell the marijuana on his clothes, “Man, you could have at least changed your shirt or sprayed some cologne on. I don’t want no contact high off of you.”

“Whatever, man. I was just celebrating that touch down.”

“Man, that was two days ago.”

“Been celebrating all weekend. You should have come out with us man.”

“You know I don’t get down like that.”

“Well, whatever. I’m about to ace this damn quiz.” Terrance licked his lips and started to copy the equations down.

Kasey walked into the house. It wasn’t her house. She and her mother and sister were staying in a friend’s house; they were all staying in one room. Kasey slept on the floor while her mother and younger sister slept in the bed. Her parents had split up months ago and her mother, at the last minute, moved from Virginia to Georgia two weeks before the school year began. She was angry with her parents. She was angry they were no longer together, she was angry that the divorce meant she had to leave her friends and her home. She moved from a four-bedroom house. She shared a bathroom

with her sister. She had posters all over her walls. She had a refrigerator that always had snacks and drinks in it. She could practice soccer in her backyard with the goal her dad had installed for her when she was in middle school. Now, she had all of her clothes in a giant plastic bin. She had to share a bathroom with 5 other people. Her mother was always telling her to not eat too much now. She kept some snacks for her and her sister in the plastic bin in their room. She was living in a house that was not hers, in a state she did not like, and she could not talk to her dad about any of it.

She walked back to her room and opened the door. Her sister was sitting on her pallet on the floor working on her homework.

“Hey Krystal, how was school today.”

“It was okay, nothing spectacular. Same thing, half of the class asked to go to bathroom and took thirty minutes to come back. They were high when they came back to the classroom so the teacher cussed out the whole class and gave us extra homework.”

Krystal said a bit miffed.

“Are you serious? She didn’t send them to the office?”

“She would have had to send half the class. They do it all the time, no one cares about that. I saw two people have sex when I went to the bathroom today. Won’t be using the bathroom at school anymore...”

“Did you tell someone?”

“No, I hear kids have sex all the time. I don’t think they care about that either. I hate that school. I wish we could go home.”

“Krys, you know the house is gone, and mom found a job here. We don’t have enough money to move into a different neighborhood...we don’t have enough money for an apartment. Hopefully this won’t be forever.”

“Ya’ll keep saying that. We have been here for almost two months. How much money do we need to move?”

“It’s more to it than what you understand.”

“That’s what you keep saying, but understand this...I hate it here!” Krystal said as she slammed closed her book and began to cry. Kasey sat on the floor next to her and pulled her close to her. She let her cry for a few minutes while she asked herself the same questions. How much longer were they going to have to live in chaos? Her mom worked, came home and went to sleep. She did not help Krystal with her homework. She did not ask how their day was. She told them to keep the room clean and stay out of everybody’s way. She told them to turn down the TV. She told them to be quiet; she did not tell them when they were moving into their own home. “Okay, that is not going to help. Finish your homework so I can look over it. I think we have some hot pockets I can warm up for dinner.”

Tanisha knocked on the front door of her house. She waited a few minutes for someone to turn on a light. It began to drizzle. She knocked on the door again. “I need to get a battery for the doorbell.” She sighed. She waited. No lights came on in the house. She banged on the door. After a few minutes, she saw the light in the living room come on. “Bout time.” She turned around and waved at her friend in the car and watched it back away when she heard someone unlock the front door. “Thank you,” she said as she

watched her stepdad walk back to her parent's room. He did not respond. She went into the kitchen to find a snack. She found a bag of chips and grabbed soda from the fridge and headed to her room.

She sat her book bag on her bed, turned on the TV, sat down in the only chair in her room and opened the bag of chips. She watched Jay Leno's monologue before she grabbed her bag to do her homework. Just as she opened her math book her mom walked in. "I don't want you waking Carl up to let you in the house anymore." Her mother said looking a bit miffed.

"You haven't given me a new key. You changed the locks last week, and didn't give me a key."

"You need to get one made then."

"I know, can you take me to have one made this weekend?"

"Tanisha, I have things to do besides running all over town running errands for you."

"I know, but you won't give me your key to let me have a copy made. I don't any other way to get a copy made."

"I need you to figure it out before you have to work tomorrow night. You come banging on my door again, and I'll leave your ass out there." Her mother said as she walked out of her room.

Tanisha sighed. Her mother was not making sense. She thought about quitting her job so she would not have to deal with her mother's foolishness, but she knew that if she did not work she would not have the things she wanted and needed for school. She also

knew that not working would mean that she had to spend more time in her mother's house, getting on her mother's nerves.

What we really want

“What's up Miss Huckabee?” Rasheed asked as he passed Cassidy standing outside of the classroom door. “Good afternoon Rasheed. The warm-up for the day is all you. Go ahead and get started on it.”

“On it.” Rasheed said. He hit Francine in the head lightly as he walked to his desk.

“Nigga!”

“Whatever Fran, you know I'm just messing with you. You always flexing.”

“You keep your hands offa my weave. This was hundred dollars.”

“You should have kept your money. That don't look like no hundred dollar weave.” Benard said as he walked to his desk and nodded his head to Rasheed.

“Man, leave that scrub alone. Miss H. said the warm -up was all me. Let's check it out and see if we can beat Latrice. She always gets these things.” Rasheed said opening his folder.

“You gotta few, man.” Benard said pulling his folder out of his back pocket

“She almost has 60 points. She can change one of her F's on a quiz to a passing grade or two depending on the grades. I am trying to get out of this class this year. I need to get some points to erase those zeroes from when I was out dealing with my damn mom. She can be a bitch man.” Rasheed said shaking his head.

Rasheed's mother was a recovering drug addict, but she traded her addiction of drugs for alcohol. She was violent when she was drunk, which was most nights. Rasheed

tried to stay away from home because if his mother saw him she would pick a fight. He allowed her to hit him, without him hitting her, but his patience was running low. He asked his grandmother if he could live with her, but she said he had to finish the school year with good grades. If he could pass all of his classes she would allow him to live with her and go to the school in her neighborhood. He knew a few people from her neighborhood, the kids were cool and hung out at the same places he did, but somehow they managed to have good grades. They were on track to graduate on time and they were talking about going to college. Rasheed had given up on college. His grandmother had always expressed her desire for him attending a college; she always claimed he was smart enough to go to any college. He used to believe her, but after spending two years in 9th grade classes, he started to believe that she was just saying what grandmothers were supposed to say.

Cassidy walked into the classroom. “Okay guys, you have about a minute while I take roll and then we can go over the warm-up.” After she completed the attendance she looked up. “Okay, who wants to go first?” Rasheed’s hand popped up immediately. “Rasheed.”

Rasheed smiled at Benard. He got up and smoothed out his shirt. “The note says. ‘The missing box is in the library.’”

“Good job Rasheed. Can you explain how you got the answer?”

“Very simple...”he smoothed his shirt again smiling.

“Whatever, just tell us how nigga.” Latrice said.

“The letters are off by one. So the next letter in the alphabet is the letter you are supposed to use. Like I said, very simple. Thank you, no applause.” He said as he sat down. Latrice shot an evil look at him.

“You get five points for that. Put it on your log and I’ll sign it in a bit. Today we are starting the section on non-fiction. At the end of this unit I would like you to write a work of non-fiction. You can interview a friend or family member or write an autobiographical narrative. I know all of you have taken this class at least once, so we are not going to spend a great deal of time on the stories, which will give you more time to write. I want you to think about a life changing moment as we read the stories. I want you to write your narrative about something that is important to you, like a first basket in basketball, winning the spelling bee, moving, or maybe the loss of someone through death or a move will be a good story. So just think while we are reading.”

A few of the students pulled their books from under their desks. Rasheed got up and grabbed one of the extra books off of Cassidy’s cart. “Rasheed, where’s your book?” Cassidy asked.

“In my locker.”

“It’s not going to do you much good in your locker.”

“I know, but you were looking out for me and had a copy on the cart.” Rasheed said smiling as he sat down.

Cassidy decided to save the conversation for after class and opened her book to start the class.

Jerome walked out of Dr. Scott's classroom and fell in stride with Melinda. "Hey Melinda, what's up?"

Melinda was caught off guard; she glanced at Jerome and smiled, "Hey Jerome. Nothing"

"You coming to the game this weekend?"

"Are you starting?"

"That's the plan." Jerome said smiling at her. "We're going to IHOP afterwards, if you want to go with us."

"Who else is going?"

"Me, Terrance, Sameka, Adrian, DJ, and Francesca. At least that is all we have talked to about it. Everybody else is probably going to the club, but that is not really my scene."

"Let me check with my mom, but that sounds cool. I'll let you know." She said as she turned and walked into her next class."

Jerome walked to his American history class with a grin on his face. He sat in the back of the class and propped his foot up on the desk in front of him. His teacher was sitting at the desk reading the newspaper. A few students walked in and sat down as the tardy bell sounded. The class sat and talked for several minutes before the teacher acknowledged that they were in the class.

"Alright guys. Get your books out. I'm not going to waste my time trying to discuss this stuff with you. I doubt any of you read last night. So, read the next chapter in the book and answer the questions at the end of the chapter. Turn in the questions at the end class. Be quiet, and we'll all have a good day."

He sat back down at his desk and picked up the newspaper. Jerome strained to see the small print on the board in front of him. He leaned over and looked at Latrice's book to find the page he was supposed to start reading. Jerome attempted to read the first page, but lost focus and stared at the floor for twenty minutes. Latrice slapped his shoulder, "You better read boy. You know he don't play about the questions." she whispered. Jerome stared at the book. He flipped to the questions at the end of the chapter and read the first question. He raised his hand. Mr. Holiford did not look up from his paper. Jerome cleared his throat and waited. After a few minutes of waiting Jerome spoke, "Excuse me Mr. Holiford." Mr. Holiford looked up from his paper. "Yes."

"How many reason do I need to write down for the war?"

"All of them."

"I only saw two. Is that how many there are?"

"You'll find out when I grade your paper." Mr. Holiford said. He went back to reading his newspaper.

"That was helpful," Jerome mumbled under his breath. Mr. Holiford glanced at him and went back to reading his paper.

Kasey sat in her math class. Her teacher was going over operations and signs. Kasey was a bit annoyed. The last week and a half had been the same kind of lessons. She had been in school for over a month and she was still reviewing what she already knew. Some of her classmates were doing the work and paying attention, but most were doing other things, doodling, writing notes or sleeping. Mrs. McMillan sat on her stool next to the overhead projector and wrote another equation on the transparency, "Okay

guys, take out a sheet of paper, pop quiz. I am giving you four problems. Take your time and remember to do all of the steps.”

Kasey pulled out a sheet of paper and wrote the equations down. In a few minutes she had solved all of the problems. She looked around her. Some people were not attempting the quiz and the few she saw, were struggling with the first equation. Kasey raised her hand.

“Yes Kasey,” Ms. McMillan asked.

“Can I go and see my counselor?”

“What for sweetie?”

“I need to ask her something about my schedule. I have completed the quiz. ”

“I’m sorry Kasey, I can only send you to the counseling office if it is an emergency. Your schedule is not considered an emergency. They will meet with you one time during the semester and you can ask about your schedule or you can make an appointment with them before or after school. Kasey sat back in her desk and waited. Kasey waited for everyone to settle down in the band room. Their band teacher promised to give them the new music for homecoming. Kasey was excited to get something new. All they had been playing on the field until now was basic songs and some old R&B songs she was not familiar with. Homecoming was supposed to be the showcase of the best of the band. She hoped she would not be disappointed with whatever she was given.

Mr. Hicks walked in. “Good morning.” Everyone sat up straight in their seats. “The music is being sent around now. We have just a few weeks to lock this down, so let’s get serious about this. Practice after school may be a bit longer until Homecoming, but that all depends on how hard you all work.” Kasey took the sheet music and looked at

the title; it was a Gerald Levert song. Her mother listened to Gerald Levert; she thought at least that a black school the band would play music that she listened to. She was used to show tunes and pop music from her old school. She passed the rest of the music down the row in disappointment.

Rasheed walked into his Spanish class and sat in his assigned seat near the front. He pulled a sheet of paper from his back pocket and unfolded it on his desk. Jasmine slid in her seat next to him and smiled. “What’s up?” he said as he smiled back at her.

“I see you did your homework. I’m proud of you. You said you were going to do better.” Jasmine responded.

“It wasn’t even hard. I could get an A in this class if that is all I have to do. All we had to do was identify the nouns,” Rasheed said sitting back in his desk.

Miss Lubsey, a tiny Jamaican woman with a strong Jamaican accent, stood in the front of the classroom and asked everyone to turn in their work. Rasheed turned around in his desk and waited for the students in his row to pass their work forward. “Today we will go over common verbs. Everybody grab a book from the pile, turn to page 52, and read the first two paragraphs. You will need paper to take notes. You will have a quiz on these verbs on Friday.”

Rasheed leaned over to Jasmine and smiled at her. She knew he was asking for paper so she just ripped out two sheets from her notebook. “Part of being a good student is having your own paper, nigga.”

Rasheed accepted the paper, “I’m going to get a notebook this weekend. I see my grandma, she will get me a notebook if I ask her. ”

“My mom buys a thousand of them at the beginning of every school year I’ll bring you one tomorrow.”

“Thanks Jazz. I appreciate that.”

“As long as you are trying, I’ll help you. You need to stop hanging out with Bernard, he ain’t no good.”

“Naw, he ain’t that bad. I’ve known him for a long time...since 1st grade. That’s my boy.”

“Whatever, he spends more time in juvee than in school. If you want to do better, you need to find better friends, and there are some people that actually care about their grades here. You need to start hanging with them instead of that loser.”

“He has my back, Jazz. I know you probably don’t get that, but it is important to me. Plus, he’s trying too. We have been competing for points in my lit. class.” Rasheed said as he sat back in his seat and began reading his book.

Tanisha walked into Cassidy’s class and scanned the room. “Where is everybody?” she asked Shenika.

“Lacy’s mom chartered a bus to go downtown to protest that boy that was shot. She didn’t get permission from the school, so if something happens she is going to get her ass sued off. Plus, since it is not a school event, whatever work they miss cannot be made up. They were looking for any excuse to not do the quiz today.”

As soon as Shenika completed her sentence, the principal’s voice came over the intercom, “Students, it has come to my attention that a parent has recruited students to go in a bus downtown. This is not a sanctioned school event. Therefore, any work that you missed because you left with this parent cannot be made up. Teachers, students cannot

leave to go on this trip. If they are in your class, please do not allow them to leave.

Students, the school is not responsible for anything that may happen once you leave this campus.”

Tanisha sat in her desk and counted the six other students in the class. Two were football players. They were in class because if they left they would not be able to practice or play in the game Friday. The new girl was sitting in the corner trying to avoid looking at anyone, and Michelle and Santrice did not do anything that might get them in trouble. They were cousins, and most of their family was in jail.

“I guess this is going to be a good day. We don’t have to deal with Ewing and Sampson today.” Tanisha said as she opened her notebook

“I’m sure they were the first ones on the bus. They are lazy. They probably don’t even know what’s going on. They just got on the bus to get out of using their brain.”

Shenika responded.

“Yeah, I know. Sampson hasn’t done one homework assignment this semester. But I bet he will pass all his classes because he is the best player on the basketball team. He is so arrogant...I can’t stand him!”

“Well, let’s enjoy our day off,” Santrice chimed in from the front of the classroom.

“Okay, it looks like we are going to get a lot accomplished today. Give me a minute to mark all of these absences and then we can go over the warm-up and get started on the quiz,” Cassidy said walking into the room.

Kasey sat in her biology class perturbed. Dr. Scott was sitting in the front of the classroom, at her desk, showing a student pictures of her granddaughter. Class had started

twenty minutes earlier and Dr. Scott had told the class to hold on for a minute. Kasey opened her notebook and looked over her notes. She quizzed herself over the new terms she was told to copy in her notebook the day before. She folded the page of her notes over like she learned in her old school. There, everyone was required to use Cornell notes, and now she was used to taking notes and studying using the method. The other students in the class were talking. They were forbidden to put their heads on the desk, unless Dr. Scott told them to put their head down, so a few were nodding off sitting straight up. Kasey studied her notes for ten minutes before Dr. Scott stood up from behind her desk. “Class, you should have grabbed your books and started on your notes. Ya’ll ain’t got time to be hanging out and talking. You know where the books are. You shouldn’t wait on me if you really want to do your work. You have a test next week and you need to have all of your notes in your notebook, so get started.” Dr. Scott said, walking down the middle row. She tapped on a few desks to wake up students as she walked and talked.

“Today, you need to finish your notes for chapter three. I will go over the important things tomorrow, but you need to make sure you have it in your notes before then. Kasey walked back to her desk with her book and hurriedly turned pages. She looked at the clock, there were 20 minutes left in the class. She looked for the words in bold and copied them down with their definitions.

What you want and what you get

Cassidy pushed her cart into Mr. Napier’s classroom. He was erasing his board.

“How’d it go today?” he asked without turning around.

“It was actually a good day. My classes were light; most of the students went to the thing downtown.”

“No their asses didn’t. I went out and looked at who was on the bus. It was only like thirty kids. You know that woman charged them to go? Most of the kids just saw it as a day off. Most them went home or wherever the hell they go when they leave school.”

“Well, wherever they were, they missed their work. I hope it was worth it for them.”

“You mark my words, some damn parent is going to come in here raising hell about their kid missing a test or a quiz and all of them will be asking for make-up work and our sorry principal will make us give them make-up work. That’s why I didn’t teach anything today. I ain’t gonna do double work for these lazy ass kids,” Napier said as he pulled his chair from behind his desk and sat down. He grabbed his bag of popcorn and leaned back in his chair. “You know, when I was coming up we were in segregated schools. We didn’t have half of what these kids got and they don’t know have of what we knew. We had to pay extra money to go to school and work twice as hard to try to get into a college, we weren’t even thinking about getting a scholarship, but the community pulled together and made sure we had what we needed. They have no idea how easy it is for them.” Mr. Napier said throwing a handful of popcorn in his mouth.

“My parents have told me how difficult it was and I know there were many obstacles in your way regarding education. I’m not sure if our students know that, but I think they see other obstacles and just like you and my parents had someone watching out

for you, our students need someone watching out and guiding them.” Cassidy said, not sure if she wanted to start this particular conversation with him.

“These kids are just lazy. Nobody expects anything from these kids, so they let them do what the hell they want to do. These kids ain’t gonna get no real job that requires them to be accountable for anything. I don’t even give them books cause they aint gonna do nothing but loose them. Trust me, don’t waste your time trying to guide them. Save that energy for when you have your own kids.”

“Mr. Napier, I don’t think all of these kids are going to fail. Nor do I think all of them are lazy.” Cassidy interjected.

“There are a few that give a damn. But this school has a way of sucking them in to the wrong things. I have seen brilliant kids walk into this classroom as ninth graders and some of them don’t graduate and others become thugs and end up spending the rest of their time here getting in trouble because they fell into the wrong crowd. This neighborhood breeds shit. Look at their homes; these kids are going to be here doing nothing for the rest of their lives. If they haven’t given up, give them time; they will.”

“Well, I think that is when we are supposed to pull them aside and remind them that they are capable of more than a thug life or that they are capable of graduating.”

“These niggas don’t listen to us.” Mr. Napier said, crunching popcorn. Cassidy grabbed a folder of papers and packed her bag. She could not grade papers with Mr. Napier and his defeatist attitude in the room.

Kasey walked out of the band room and looked for her mom’s car. Other students fell out of the band room behind her yelling and fooling around. She walked towards the

front of the school and sat down on a bench to wait for her mom. A few of the band members followed her and sat at other benches chatting. Kasey pulled out the biology book she had checked out and opened it to the chapter Dr. Scott told them they were responsible for learning. After a few minutes of relative quiet, the football players came out from the locker room pushing each other and yelling. Kasey watched them for a minute before starting back reading.

“Hey chicken head. Why you always in your damn books? You got Dr. Scott.” A player asked Kasey

“First of all, I would appreciate it if you did not call me chicken head. Secondly, what I read is none of your concern.” Kasey responded

“Damn, you ain’t gotta use your fancy white language on me. I know your ass can read. Seriously, everybody passes her class...just keep your notebook together.” He said.

“Yeah, I kinda figured that, but I have to take the Georgia high school graduation test in the spring and I heard that biology is on it. I also heard a lot of people don’t pass the science part; I only want to take the test once.”

“Yeah, I just took that part over last week. That test ain’ no joke. I had to take the social studies part over too, but I think I passed this time.” he said.

“I hope you did.” Kasey said looking back down to her book.

“Sorry about calling you a chicken head. Most of the girls don’t mind when we call them names.”

“It’s okay. My name is Kasey. Since you know my name you can drop the chicken head.”

“Ok. Kasey, have fun studying,” he ran off to catch up with his friends walking away from the school.

Cassidy was in the middle of explaining descriptive words to Rasheed’s class when the principal’s voice came over the intercom. “Teachers, it has come to my attention that some teachers are not allowing the students who went downtown to make up their missed assignments. Please allow students to make up any assignments they missed. If you have any questions you can speak with me after school.”

Cassidy was in awe.

Rasheed spoke up, “well, if I knew I could make up the work, I might’ve taken the day off.”

“Didn’t he make an announcement yesterday saying that anyone that went would receive zeroes? He needs to make up his mind.” Benard said.

“They don’t care about us. They should have made sure no one got on that bus. They don’t care if we learn anything, that is why he changed his mind. Somebody’s mom raised hell and now he is trying to cover his tracks. That’s shady.” Rasheed responded.

Tanisha sat in her math class confused. Miss McMillan was going on a new formula and Tanisha was frustrated because she was lost. She wrote down what Miss McMillan was writing on the overhead projector hoping she could ask Shenika for help after school. Miss McMillan kept talking without looking up at the class. Tanisha looked around, she could tell by other faces, that she was not the only one confused.

“Are there any questions?” Miss McMillan asked looking up from the projector. Tanisha raised her hand, “Where did the three come from?”

“Tanisha, I just went over that. We found out what x is and then divide it by this number. That is where I got three from.” Tanisha could tell that Miss McMillan was upset about her asking a question. She sat back in her desk and stared at her notes. One of the football players next to her raised his hand. Miss McMillan got up from her stool and walked to him. She leaned over him and walked him through her example again. Tanisha tried to listen and follow along from her desk. After she explained the formula, and wrote a new example on the football player’s paper, she walked to her desk and sat down. Tanisha opened her book to complete the assignment on the board, but she doubted she would get one problem correct. She contemplated calling in for work so she could find someone help her with her understand what she missed today.

Cassidy sat in the faculty meeting bored. The principal was going on the new standards that came with NCLB. Most of the teachers were grading papers; very few seemed to be paying attention to him. She leaned over to Sabrina, “How many times is he going to go over this? I know he knows we discussed this in the department meeting because Yancy told us that was what he wanted everyone to discuss.”

Sabrina looked at her and sighed, “He knows that we will be on the failure list. He knows that we won’t make AYP and that he may be out of a job. He keeps going over it hoping that by saying that we are capable of being a good school, we will become one.”

“Why not just fire the teachers that aren’t teaching and demand more from the students?”

“That would mean that he would have to stop flirting with the teachers and take a pay cut.”

“You lost me.” Cassidy said confused.

“He flirts with all the teachers. Rumor has it that he is sleeping with the bookkeeper. But I think you know what flirting is. The way it works in the school system is that the principal has to make \$500 dollars more than the highest paid teacher. Who do you think is the highest paid teacher?” Sabrina asked.

Cassidy scanned the room. There was only one person with a doctorate on staff and she was probably a few years from retirement, Dr. Scott.

“Dr. Scott?”

“You got it. The worst teacher in the school knows that she can do whatever she wants, or for that matter do nothing and she will keep her job.

“That sucks.”

“What sucks is that the kids learn absolutely nothing in her class and fail the graduation test, but she gets to stay here. What sucks is he knows she does not teach and he does nothing about it because he is too busy preserving his salary and chasing women.” Sabrina said falling back in her chair.

“Okay, let’s change the subject...I have a kid who may need glasses. This is a Title One school, is there any assistance for glasses?”

“Yeah, talk to one of the counselors. Well, talk to Haygood, she is the only one who works, and even that is not often. But if she likes the student, she will help you.”

Cassidy scanned the room and saw Haygood nodding off in the corner of the library. She would have to catch her before she disappeared after the meeting.

Jerome waited until everyone left the classroom for lunch before he looked up from his literature book.

“Where’s your lunch?” Cassidy asked him.

Jerome pulled a plastic shopping bag from under his desk and walked up to the front of the classroom and sat across from Cassidy.

“So, did you talk to your mom about taking you to get your eyes checked?”

“Yeah, she said she would find a doctor and make an appointment for me sometime in the next few weeks.” Jerome answered.

“Good. I think that will help you out some. How do you feel about what we are working on? Do you feel any more confident with your reading?” Cassidy asked as she popped a chip in her mouth.

“Yeah, going on the vowel sounds and pronunciation or stuff is helping. It’s like a code. You know the code, you can read.” Jerome said leaning over the desk looking at the sheet of paper Cassidy had given him.

“That is pretty much how it works. But, the English language has a few odd rules...words that don’t follow the rules of other words that look just like it, like live and live. They have the same spelling but different pronunciations. You just have to memorize the odd words. And then there are the silent letters like the p in pneumonia. You just have to become familiar with them. So, you have a short story in front of you. Let’s see what you’ve got.”

Kasey decided she was going to be late for band practice. The song was easy and the band director was never on time. She walked down the main hall looking for the counselor’s office. She pulled the door open and walked in. There were posters with SAT dates on the wall. She saw pamphlets for the Army on the table to the left of her. A lady walked out of the office a bit startled that someone was in there.

“Can I help you?” the woman asked.

“Yes, I need to talk to a counselor about my schedule. I think I am taking a class that I have already taken.” Kasey answered.

“Well, sweetie, if that is the case there is nothing we can do about it now. We just balanced the classes. You will have to wait until next semester.”

“But it is a math class. I can’t start it in the middle of the year.” Kasey responded a bit upset.

“You are right. You will have to wait until next year.” Just as the women finished her sentence another woman walked in the office. The woman that was speaking to Kasey quickly walked back to her office.

“Hi, what do need?” Vernice Haygood asked Kasey.

Kasey turned around to look at her. She was a full-figured woman with what Kasey thought was too much blond weave. “I think I have been put in the wrong class. I transferred from another state, and I think the class names must be different.”

“What’s your name darling?” Haygood asked as she walked towards her office. Kasey fell in step behind her, “Kasey Colbert.”

“You came from Virginia, right”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Give me a second to pull up your schedule. Have a seat.” Ms. Haygood tapped a few keys on the computer keyboard before she looked up to see Kasey’s face for the first time. “How do you like it here?”

“It is different from my old school. I don’t think I know yet how I feel about it here.”

“Well, if you need something come by to see me. It looks like you are on my case load.”

“Ms. McMillan told me that we could not just drop in to the counselor’s office.”

“For most students, that is true. But you are new to the school...the state for that matter. Your grades from your old school are very good. I don’t want you to slip up while you are adjusting. So, if you need to drop in you can. I will write a pass to get you back into class.”

Kasey was surprised. Most of the adults she had met at Venable were not very helpful and very few seemed to care about the students. “Okay, thanks.”

“So, it looks like you are in Algebra II, you think you have taken it before?”

“Yes ma’am, I flipped through the book and everything in it is the stuff I did last year.”

“I see. I will call the school tomorrow and get a description of the class. If you have already taken it I can move you into another class for the semester. There is only one person that teaches the higher level math. I am not sure if we will offer the beginning part next semester. You might have to sit out of math for the year.”

“But I want to be an engineer. I need more math to get into a good school.”

Ms. Haygood sat back in her desk and looked at Kasey. “I will call the school tomorrow and talk to the teacher and see if there is anything we can do. If I don’t send for you tomorrow, drop by here after school and we will see what we can do.”

“Thank you.”

“You are welcome. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Kasey got up and walked out of the office hopeful.

Rasheed was standing in front of the school waiting for Benard to come outside. He watched students horseplaying near the flag pole.

“Sorry, man. I had to talk to that chicken head. What do you want to get into?”

Benard asked.

“I think I’m going to go home and work on that paper for Miss Huckabee. Plus, I need to study for my Spanish quiz.”

“Man, watcha wasting a perfectly good day on school work for?”

“Benard, I thought you said you were going to try to pass all your classes this year. You can’t do that if you don’t try.”

“Yeah, I know, but Mr. Holliford told me today that I wasn’t shit. That punk psst’d me off. I didn’t say anything, but I don’t feel like doing no damn work if I’m gonna pass.”

“Did he really say you weren’t shit?”

“He said I wasn’t worth the air I was breathing. I asked him about a question about the work and he ignored me. I asked him again and said I couldn’t learn anything if he didn’t help me. Then he looked up from his newspaper and said, ‘You have been in this school for four years, you obviously have not learned anything and he would be wasting time on me.’ Then he said I wasn’t worth the air I was breathing.”

“Damn man. You didn’t say anything back?”

“No, I was kinda embarrassed that he called me out in front of everybody. I just pretended to do my work.

“Don’t let that punk change your plans. You said you were going to do better, you have been, don’t stop now. I know, come to my house and we can work on the paper. My grandmother baked me a cake, we can eat some of that.”

“What kind? Lemon pound cake?”

“You know it.”

“Yeah, man, you got cake, I can do a little work.

“What do you think you are going to write about?” Rasheed asked as they walked down the street.”

“Miss Huckabee mentioned a spelling bee. I think I’ll write about the one I won in fifth grade. I even have a title, ‘The last time I felt smart’”

Because we care so much

Cassidy turned on the TV in her studio apartment. The first thing she heard was that there was breaking news regarding a school being on fire. She did not think much of it until she heard the name Venable. She stopped what she was doing and sat at the foot of her bed. She glanced at her clock. It was 6:30. She waited to see if the newscaster was going to say the school was closed. What she gathered was that the fire had started thirty minutes ago and that it was contained to the hall with the gym and the cafeteria. Not many classes were held on that hall, so she thought it was good. She looked at the clock and then at the phone. Surely, someone would call her and tell her not to come in. She dressed just in case. Forty minutes later she got in her car to go to work. No one had called and nothing had been stated about the school closing on the news. She had talked to Sabrina, who was also waiting for some type of notification.

Cassidy walked into Venable. The halls were smoky. Kids were standing outside of the building as their buses dropped them off. She went pass the main office; she did not see anyone around. She walked down the hall towards her first class and saw teachers in their rooms with the doors closed. Sarah stuck her head out of her classroom. “You can come in here to get out of all that smoke.” Cassidy dashed into the classroom and closed the door behind her.

“Apparently the students are coming inside in a few minutes. They are going to come to classrooms on the A-hall and the F-hall since we have the least amount of smoke.” Sarah said as she sat behind her desk.

“I can’t believe that they didn’t close the school today.”

“That idiot didn’t call the county office to tell them about the fire, so the buses dropped the students off, so we have to take them in.”

“We are supposed to hold them all on two halls? It is smoky in here. They should not be in the building.”

“Maybe you should be the principal and not that idiot.” Sarah responded.

A voice came over the intercom announcing that the students were being ushered in and the teachers should all be in a classroom on the A or F-hall to control the students. The voice also said that teachers should take at least 40 students. Sarah got up and peaked out of the window in her door. She waited until she saw the students coming down the hall before she opened her door.

“Come on in, have a seat. No horse playing. Just have a seat. Sit on the heating unit if you need to...it doesn’t work.”

The students walked in the room and sat down. As soon as Sarah closed the door the questions started.”

“Mrs. Madden, why are we here?”

“Why is the school open? That smoke is bad.”

“Are we going to have to stay in here all day?”

“What about lunch? I heard the fire was in the caf.”

“I heard it was the gym.”

“No, gym, that aint cool.”

“Can I just go home? I’m calling my mom.” The girl pulled out her cell phone and started dialing. Sarah stood in front of the classroom and quieted the room.

“Rochelle, put the phone up.”

“But I need to call my mom.”

“No, phones. You know the rules. If you want to call her, you can use the phone on my desk. Now students, I have no idea how long we are going to be in here, so I suggest you all just settle down. Now, I will turn on the television so you can watch that. You can read, listen to your music as long as your neighbor cannot hear it, or you can talk to your neighbor. I don’t want anyone walking around. Find a spot and plan to grow roots.” Most of the students listened to her instructions and settled into a conversation. A few guys start rapping in the back of the classroom. “Fellas, that is too distracting. Find something to do that is more quiet.” Sarah said. The young men acquiesced.

Thirty minutes later the principal's secretary's voice came over the intercom. "Teachers be advised: members of the school board and the area superintendent are here to see the school. Students are to remain in the classrooms until further notice." Sarah sighed. One of the students started wheezing.

"Do you have asthma?" Cassidy asked her.

"Yes."

"Do you have your inhaler?"

"It's in my locker."

"Write down the hall, your locker number, and combination and I will go get it for you."

The girl ripped a sheet of paper out of her notebook and wrote down the information Cassidy requested and handed it to her. Sarah slipped out of the classroom in search of the locker. The halls were thick with smoke. She saw the exit doors opened to let in fresh air. Fortunately, the girl's locker was on the A hall. As she was walking back to the classroom with the inhaler, she spotted a group of people in suits escorted by the principal. Cassidy wanted to avoid them, so she quickly walked back into the classroom. She gave the student the inhaler and waited. Periodically a student's name was announced over the intercom stating someone had come to pick them up. Some students just asked to leave to walk home. An hour later the principal's voice came over the intercom announcing that the busses were returning to take students home. Some of the students cheered. Everyone started to get their things together in preparation for their dismissal.

"Do the teachers get to leave too?"

“Probably not. The only reason we get to leave is because it was on the news.”

“Yeah, if it wasn’t on the news we would have had to have classes in all this smoke.”

Students were still talking about the fire a week later. There was not much damage, but the cafeteria and gym were both closed. This meant that the teachers had to house the students every morning before the school started. Some students took advantage of this and went to teacher’s class that they needed help in. Kasey decided the first day that she would try to take advantage of the time and see if she could get some lessons from Dr. Scott. Unfortunately, Dr. Scott did not want to teach as much as she wanted to talk about her grandchildren. Tanisha went to Ms. McMillan and got help in math from her teacher for the first time in the semester. She realized that she had to come early, before the football players, if she wanted help, because Ms. McMillan would stop instructing her if they had their own math questions. Jerome met Cassidy in the library every morning to get more help with reading. Cassidy had talked to Sabrina, the reading coach, about Jerome and had more strategies and materials in order to help him.

Interlude

During the first semester two incidents occurred that put the safety of the students at risk. The first was the unauthorized trip to downtown Atlanta to protest in front of the state capital building. The school had not authorized the trip but did not do a lot to stop the students from getting on the bus. The principal walked out to the bus once, and threatened the students with zeroes for the day if they left. He did not say that they would be suspended for leaving or skipping school. Some students claimed their parents had given them permission to leave and he did not try to get in touch with the student's parents to verify. Most of these students were juniors and seniors because Lacy was a junior. These students had been at Venable long enough to know that the principal's threat was an empty threat. They heard stories or experienced for themselves teachers forced to let students make-up work even though it went against the written rules of the school. Others had learned that all they had to do was to tell their parent to call the school and whatever they had missed would not be counted against them. Fortunately, all of the students returned safely. Much to the chagrin of several teachers, the students were allowed to make up the work they had missed or have their zeroes erased from the grade book. Those teachers that cared about their students and their student's education saw the principal's lack of leadership as a way of showing students that there were not consequences for bad decisions, which to them was the reason why many of their students were not successful in school

The second incident was the fire. Though it was not a big fire, it was enough smoke in the school to keep the students out of the building. The principal did not report the fire to the school board. The Board found out from the news reporters that called their

homes for information. When they arrived to the school, they were surprise to see that most of the students were still in the building. The board members and area superintendent came up with the plan a plan for the students that included having pizza delivered to each classroom for lunch. The principal was reprimanded for both the bus incident and failure to report the fire or arrange for the students to not be in the building. He would remain the principal of the school for another year before he was demoted.

Kasey was able to get her math class changed. Ms. Haygood was very helpful to students that she thought had potential. She had a conversation with the teacher that was teaching the math that Kasey needed to take. After looking at Kasey's grades and a little nudging from Ms. Hayes, the teacher that taught the math class that Kasey should have been place, said the switch, even after school had been in session for weeks, could transfer into the class. Kasey was able to catch up with the class and actually excelled in math.

Jerome, with the help of Cassidy and Sabrina, was able to improve his reading. He struggled because he had missed the basics in phonics. The words he could read he was not really reading. He had memorized words, which made new words or words he did not see regularly difficult for him to decipher. Jerome made a point to volunteer to read out loud in class, which increased his confidence. Though he was doing better, he knew that he needed to read and comprehend better if he was going to do well on the ACT, which was needed to get any football scholarship.

Rasheed was very serious about changing his outlook. His mentor had taken him to meet people who had multiple degrees in varying fields. He stressed the importance of

school and making honest money. Rasheed also wanted to prove to his grandmother that he was serious about school. He knew the only way he was going to get away from his alcoholic mother was to show his grandmother that he was capable of all that she believed he was capable of achieving. Rasheed was completing all of his assignments, refraining from the games and confusion of his peers, and paying attention in all of his classes. He was also trying to encourage his oldest friend, Benard, to give school an honest try.

Benard's parents both worked long shifts and tried to keep up with their kids and their schooling. Benard saw how hard his parents worked and knew that the only way to avoid living their lives was to do better than they had in school. His mother had completed high school and his dad had dropped out and got his GED. Both of them worked at the GM factory that made minivans; so, they were able to provide their kids with a decent life.

The English department was the strongest department in the school. Of the seven teachers in the department, five of them really made an effort to teach their students and improve their possibilities for the future. The department chair and the gifted teacher were the weakest links in the department. They were also the only two White people in the department. The department chair only taught seniors and stopped teaching them anything the second semester. The gifted teacher had very small classes and allowed the students to roam the halls when they should have been in his class. He, too, did not show much passion for his students. He spent most of his time in the classroom telling his students about his exploits from fifteen years earlier. Despite these two teachers, the department had very high scores for both the Georgia High School Graduation Writing Test and the Georgia High School Graduation subject test. So, the stress that the principal

as creating about making AYP did not apply to the department as long as the students showed up to school for the tests.

How are we going to make this thing work?

Cassidy followed Mrs. Yancy into the book room. She needed two books for two students that were added to her sixth period class. She noticed a large set of African-American literature books.

“Is it possible for me to grab one of these books to look through?” she asked Mrs. Yancy. She was thinking it might be a good alternative text for her two afternoon classes. Most of the students in those classes had taken the same class twice. She thought maybe a change in the stories would inspire some of them to do more in class.

“Sure, I’ll just need to sign it out to you.”

Cassidy filled out the form on the clipboard hanging on the back of the door. There was a page for each teacher that listed the books and the amounts of each book they had been given at the beginning of the year.

Kasey was sitting in her math class when she noticed a girl with a soccer shirt on. After class she caught up with the girl.

“Excuse me, there is a soccer team here?”

“Yeah, we start practice next semester. Have you played before?” the girl asked.

“Yeah, I have been playing since I was around four or five. My dad played in college.” Kasey answered.

“You should come out. The coach’s classroom is right there. You want me to introduce you?”

“Sure.”

The girls walked into the Ms. Coar's classroom. She was standing near the door flipping through a book.

"Coach, this is Kasey. She wants to play soccer next semester."

"Good afternoon coach...How are you coach?"

"Sorry, coach. How are you doing today?" the girl responded smiling.

"I'm fine. Thank you for asking. Nice to meet you Kasey." Ms. Coar said extending her hand. Kasey shook it as she smiled.

"Have you played before?" Ms. Coar asked.

"Yes ma'am. I have played for over ten years. When does practice start?"

"We can't start until February, but I also coach the swim team if you want to start conditioning. We practice from four to five-thirty everyday"

"There is a pool here?" Kasey asked surprised.

"No, there is only one school with a pool on this side of town. We have to share it with all the other schools that have teams. We get a bus to take us over there, and it brings us back. We are usually back here before 6pm. If you are interested, drop by after school. You two need to get to class now. Nice meeting you Kasey."

"You too, coach." Kasey and the girl walked out of the class and down the hall.

"What's wrong with you girl?" Shenika asked Tanisha.

"I'm tired and frustrated. My mom wouldn't let me in last night, so I had to go to my neighbor's house to use the phone to call someone to pick me up. Fernando picked me up. I slept on the sofa at his house, and he took me back this morning to get a change of clothes."

"Why didn't she let you in?"

“She says it disturbs Frank. But she want give me a key. I don’t think she wants me to work. Which doesn’t make sense, since she doesn’t want to give me any money. She was always complaining that I was spending all of her money. That’s why I got a job!” Tanisha was clearly frustrated. The girl that constantly had a smile on her face, and a positive attitude to accompany it was on the verge of tears.

“You want me to ask my mom if you can stay with us for a few days?”

“No, Fernando’s mom said I could stay there on the nights I work; she gets home about the same time I get off, so she can pick me up and I won’t be disturbing her.”

Fernando was Tanisha’s boyfriend of over a year. He was the type of boyfriend every mother would want for their daughter. He was part of the M-to-M program, and went to school on the northern part of the county. He was in the process to applying to colleges and taking the ASVAB. He and his mother were both supportive of Tanisha’s desire to go to the University of Georgia like her sister; so both of them did what they could to fill in the places her mother and stepfather ignored.

“I’m sorry you are having to do all this. If you need anything else, you know I will help you.”

“You know my mom didn’t ask where I spent the night?”

“Well, that sucks, but I’m not really surprised. Your mom has never shown you as much attention as your sister.” Shenika responded. Tanisha’s face dropped.

“Yeah, I know. It doesn’t matter what I do.”

“Well, my mom told me we have to live for ourselves. You work hard in school because you have a goal. Don’t worry about what your mom thinks. You only have to live with her for two more years.”

“Yeah, I guess.” Tanisha responded contemplatively. “I just need to do me. You want to stay after school and work on the paper for Miss Huckabee?”

“I have a meeting at 3:30, so I will work on it until then. I wish the library stayed open later than 3:45.”

“I know. Fernando’s school library stays open to five on some days, and every day when the juniors have to write their research paper.”

“It might be because the kids stay after school to work. These guys don’t care that much about doing work after school when most of the teachers don’t take it up. What’s the point unless you want to do it for your own practice?”

“Yeah, I guess you are right. I’ll see you after school then.” Tanisha said as she turned down the hall for her next class.

Rasheed slid into his desk and pulled out his folder to complete the warm-up. “What’s up Benard?” Rasheed asked his friend.

“Nothing man.”

Rasheed noticed that Benard was not as enthusiastic as he normally was. “You not gonna do the warm-up? You are close to getting that first quiz grade changed.”

“Yeah. My counselor called me into office today. She said if I didn’t pass all my classes this semester that she was gonna recommend I go to Open Campus, or I will have to get my GED.”

“Well, I guess you know what you gotta do.”

“Man, I don’t know the last time I passed all of my classes.”

“You can though. Remember how you aced everything in elementary school...you even out did me the first year of middle school.”

“Yeah, that was a long time ago. A lot of shit has changed since then. You know the last time I felt good about school was in the sixth grade. That jerk we had in the seventh grade sucked. He was always talking bout how we weren’t gonna be shit, and he was the one that wasn’t teaching us anything.”

“Yeah, and we had Mrs. Sommers who let us skip class so she didn’t have to grade our papers. She was lazy as hell.” Rahseed said shaking his head.

“That school sucked. There were only a few people that cared about what we did. We could have burned down the place. If they got their check they wouldn’t have cared.” Benard said.

“Do the warm-up man; give it a try.” Rasheed said as he lightly punched Benard’s shoulder.

Jerome walked into his American history class and sat in his seat. Mr. Holiford, one of the few White teachers in the school, was sitting behind his desk reading the paper. Jerome knew there was a test scheduled for the day but was hoping that Mr. Holiford would change the date since he had not talked to his students all week. Once a week Mr. Holiford would get up from behind his desk, and lecture over whatever he chapter questions he had assigned. Usually, the lectures were more about off of the wall events. Seldom did he cover what was deemed important by the textbook’s questions at the end of each chapter. Most of the students chose not to listen to his lecture because it just confused them when it was time to take a test. Jerome flipped through the notes Tasha had given him earlier in the week, just in case.

Mr. Holiford stood up as the bell sounded, and grabbed a pile of papers on the corner of his desk. “You have the class period to complete the test. Clear your desks of everything except for a blue or black pen. No one should talk, and your eyes should stay on your own paper. Pass these back.” He handed the stack of tests to a girl sitting in the front of the room. He sat back down behind his desk and picked up the newspaper.

Jerome stuck his notebook under his desk, and waited for the exams to make it to his row. He tried to remember what Ms. Huckabee told him about relaxing. He was feeling more confident about reading, but he knew that if he got stressed about the test he would forget to take his time. He had failed the first two tests, and he knew that he needed to pass the next two. Once he had the test, he took a deep breath before looking at the first question.

“I hear that too many of you are giving homework. Let’s avoid giving homework whenever we can.” the principal said to the group of teachers. Sarah rolled her eyes. Cassidy smiled at her. Cassidy sat with the two strongest teachers in the building. She rotated into each of their rooms during the day, and once they found out she was stuck with Mr. Napier in the morning, they offered to let her work in their rooms if the distraction of them teaching was not too much. Cassidy welcomed the idea to get to see how they conducted their classes, and to avoid having to hear Mr. Napier’s negative comments about the students.

“We have a new staff member. Mr. Reeves is coming from Lithonia High. He will run the in-school-suspension and serve as a sub when needed. He will also work with the football team. Welcome Mr. Reeves.”

A small Black man stood up. Cassidy recognized him immediately. He was her assistant track coach when she was in high school. Sarah leaned over to her and whispered, "I heard he got caught with a student; that's why he is here." Cassidy normally did not give rumors much credit, but she knew that he was a little too familiar with the girls on the track team when he coached her years ago. She did not respond to Sarah; she turned her attention back to the principal.

We've got this!

Tanisha sat at one of the computers in the library. She was typing her compare and contrast paper. This was the first teacher she had had that required her to type her papers.

"Hey girl." Shenika said dropping her book bag on the floor next to her.

"The librarian said she will be here until 4:30 today. There are some kinds of meetings today, so there will be people in and out, but we can stay." Tanisha told her friend.

"Wow, that's good. We might be able to finish it. I was thinking I was going to have to come a few mornings to get this done."

"Yeah, you know I was thinking that Ms. Huckabee is not like most of the teachers here. She is making us type our papers; she is getting us ready for college. My sister is always telling me about some paper she typing at UGA. Plus, Miss Huckabee went to UGA so she knows what is expected."

Cassidy walked down the A-hall dodging all of the buckets scattered in the hallway. Some of them were almost full of the water that was dripping from the roof of

the building. She walked in Mrs. Yancey's classroom. Catherine was sitting behind her desk sipping a cup of coffee.

"Mrs. Yancey, I looked over the African-American literature book this weekend. There are several good selections in it..."

"Yes, I thought it would be a good addition to the books we already have."

"I was wondering if next semester I could use it, in addition to the literature book the students already have, for my two repeater classes. Both classes are small so I will not need more than twenty. I won't issue them, just let the students borrow them off of the cart when we use them."

"We only have a hundred of those books. That is why they are in the book room. I don't want students to take them home or lose them." Mrs. Yancey stopped for a moment, "No, I don't think it would be a good idea to use those books with those two classes. I would prefer to use those books with my classes. No, you'll have to stick to the books that they have. Half those kids have not read what is in there anyway; they don't need new books."

"Okay. I was just thinking a change of text may encourage some of them."

"I'll be honest with you; those kids will not notice a new book versus their old book. Just follow the curriculum I gave you and hopefully so of them will get it this time." Catherine said smiling.

Cassidy walked out of her classroom confused. The book she had borrowed was stamped and dated four years earlier. She could not believe that the books had not been used by any student in the four years the school had owned the set.

Tanisha and Shenika walked out of Cassidy's class. "What did you make on the paper? Tanisha asked.

"85."

"I got an 84. I thought it was a lot worse. There was so much purple writing on it; I thought I had failed." Tanisha responded.

"Me too, but the stuff she wrote made sense. I made a lot of little mistakes."

"She told us what we were supposed to do it. I saw that I did some of the stuff she told us not to do. Next time I'll make an A." Tanisha said as she opened her locker.

Cassidy walked into the only computer lab in the building for the first time. She scanned the room. There were around twenty-five computers, though she had a suspicion all of them were not functioning since there were a few black screens among the blue screens. She looked for the notebook so she could sign up to bring her classes in for a few days. Her fear was that the lab was probably booked for the rest of the semester. To her surprise, the lab was opened for at least three weeks. She decided to take advantage of the availability and signed all her classes up for the next four days.

"Where we going Miss H.?" Rasheed asked as he hopped in line in front of Latrice.

"We are going to the computer lab to revise and publish your papers."

Rasheed looked at Cassidy bewildered. A few other students turned around and looked at her. Benard said what all of the students were thinking, "Do they know we are coming to the lab? We don't usually get to use the computers."

"I'm not sure who 'they' is, but yes, you are signed up to be in the lab for the next few days. You need to get familiar with computers because, unlike some older people, I

know they are not going anywhere. You need to know how to use them and you need to know how to type. Most jobs require some typing or computer use.” Cassidy said as she pushed her cart towards the door, “Let’s go.”

“If the computer has a black screen that means it is not working. I am not going to assign you all to a computer, but if there is too much talking, I will reassign some of your seats.” The students sat down. Some knew how to locate the *Word* icon and clicked on it and pulled out their papers to type. Cassidy had to go around to several of the students and help them open *Word* and directed them to type what was written on their notebook paper.

Jerome walked into his science class. His teacher had not been to school in three weeks, so he was not surprised to see a substitute teacher sitting at the desk. There was a rumor that he had quit, but the classes were told that he was very sick. Jerome grabbed a book from the pile near the front of the room and sat down expecting to get another packet to complete by the end of the week.

“Good morning, my name is Mr. Sengupta. I will be your teacher for the rest of the semester.”

Jerome squinted his eyes hoping it would help him understand Mr. Sengupta. The teacher was speaking slowly, aware that his accent was difficult to comprehend sometimes, but based on the expressions on the students’ faces he knew that they were either in shock or they did not understand what he said. Despite that he went on, “I am from India where I was a scientist. I am very familiar with chemistry and I am honored to be your teacher.” Mr. Sengupta paused to let the students take in what he said.

Jerome looked at Mr. Sengupta in awe. He understood about half of what he had said. Mr. Sengupta began speaking again and Jerome squinted his eyes again, in an effort to understand him.

Kasey decided not to go to band practice. Her band director told her that she could not become first chair because he had decided last year who he would name as first chair for next year. She was hurt that she did not have a chance to show her talent and she was frustrated because the music was too easy. She sat on a bench and watched the buses drive off. “Hey.” Kasey looked up to see Angela from her biology class. “You not going to band practice today?” she asked.

“No, I think I can miss a day or two.”

“What are you getting ready to do then?” Angela asked.

“I guess go home. I need to read for my literature class and I have some math that I need to work on.”

“Why don’t you go with us to Wendy’s and then you can go home and do all that. If you are going to skip band, you should at least make it worth something. I think you might like my friends.”

Kasey thought about the proposal. She did not hang out, mainly because she did not feel she fit in with the majority of her peers. But, she was tired of that little room she shared with her mother and sister and she could not see any harm in a burger from Wendy’s. “Sure. Where are your friends?”

Angela waved to a group standing under a tree. Kasey had seen all of them around the school. Two were clearly lesbians and there was one gay boy leaning against the tree.

One of the girls was clearly out in the school; she wore something with an rainbow on it every day and Kasey admired that. Her old school was very receptive to homosexuals, but she was not sure how it would be in an all-Black school and community. Kasey picked up her book bag and followed Angela to the tree.

Tanisha sat on the sofa at her boyfriend's house. She was happy to not have to worry about dealing with her mom, but she was still hurt that her mom did not seem to worry about where she was or how she was doing. She decided to give Fernando's mom some money when she got paid to help pay bills and for gas since she picked her from work. She pulled out her first paper and looked over the notes that Miss Huckabee had written on her paper. She thought it was cool that Miss Huckabee was taking them to the computer lab to revise the paper and start on their next assignment. She could only remember going into the lab once before, with Mrs. Madden to work on a test prep program.

Tanisha looked over the essay and pulled out her notebook to start her rough draft for her next essay. Miss Huckabee had given the class a silly topic. She looked over the topic and instructions:

If you were going to space for three years and you could only take three items, what would you take with you. Do not worry about food, oxygen or water, that will be provided. The items should be personal and able to store in a regular size suitcase. Be sure you have a three point thesis statement and three supporting details for each item.

Tanisha contemplated what she would bring. Miss Huckabee told the class that she would bring a very long book, that made sense to Tanisha, but she did not know any long books.

She could only think of one book she liked, it was the last book she was assigned to read. She knew a fifth grade book would not keep occupied for three years. She settled on her favorite CD, a picture of her sister and a DVD of her favorite movie.

Cassidy had given all of her classes the same essay topic. She thought using their imagination would be a good way to lead them into the essay writing process. She was surprised to find that many of the student did not have anything other than their cell phones or MP3 players of value to them. She discovered most of them could not think of the last book they had completed or they thought reading in space would be boring. A few wanted to bring their favorite pair of shoes. Several wanted to bring a picture of a family member and a few wanted to bring their gaming system. Cassidy did not discourage them from adding any items to their list as long as they could explain why they would need or want it for three years in space. Surprisingly, the students grasped the three point thesis statement and enjoyed writing and sharing their essays. She hoped the practice would help them when it was time to take the Georgia High School Writing Test.

And the truth is revealed

It was a few weeks after the GHSWT and the students and some seniors were preparing to take the make-up portion of various parts of the subject graduation test. Cassidy was standing in the hall talking to Sarah when a young lady stopped by to speak.

“Hey Mrs. Madden.”

“Hey Bianca. What are you doing up here.”

“I’m taking the science part of the graduation test today. It is the only part left I need to pass.”

“Have you been studying?”

“Yes, ma’am. My dad had friend of his come and help me with it. Hopefully this time I get it right. It is kinda hard to get a job without my high school diploma and a still want to go to college.”

“Well, take your time and remember everything you have been taught and you should be just fine.” Sarah said smiling at Bianca.

“Thanks. Are you teaching my sister this year?”

“No, she is in Miss Huckabee’s class.” Sarah said turning towards Cassidy.

“I hear you are making her read and write a lot.”

“Guilty.”

“Good, I have talked to some of my friends that went off to college and they are not doing so great because they did not have to do much reading and writing while they were here. Hopefully it will be different for my sister. I gotta go. I’ll see you later Mrs. Madden.” Bianca walked down the hall.

“This has to be her 7th or 8th time taking this test. It’s pathetic.” Sarah sighed.

“How old is she?”

“I think twenty. I had her come in after school to help her with the ELA. She had Yancey for two years; Yancey used to teach juniors and seniors. ELA was the first section she passed.”

“What about the other subjects?”

“We asked McMillan if she would tutor her, but she said she did not have time to tutor anyone other than the football and basketball players. I think one of her friends helped her over the summer. She had Scott for two years too. I’m sure you have heard how much learning goes on in her classroom.”

“Yeah, the students have mentioned how easy it is to get an A in her class.”

“You know what pisses me off, she and Napier were poor Black kids and know how much their education helped them get out of their poverty, but they are the main ones not helping these kids. You would think they would be doing more than us, but all they do is collect a damn check. That’s why this girl hasn’t passed this test. And instead of helping her, I guarantee if you go into the lounge later on they will be asking why she hasn’t passed the test yet. Anyway, I hope she passes this time so she can get on with her life.”

Jerome walked into class wearing his new glasses. He sat down at his desk and read the warm-up. His confidence was spilling over. Cassidy walked into the room, “Don’t you look sharp!” she said to Jerome. He smiled. “I guess you will be all over this warm-up; its math, your favorite subject. She took roll while she waited on her students to complete their first assignment. When she looked up from the computer four hands shot up, including Jerome. “Jerome, you can go first.”

Jerome pulled his lunch out of his pocket after the students left the classroom for lunch.

“So what do you think Miss Huckabee?”

“What do you think?” she asked pulling out her sandwich.

“I can see things I didn’t even recognize before. I really couldn’t see.”

“So, how do words look now?”

“A lot clearer. I think I can read faster now. Isn’t that funny?”

“No, you don’t have to spend so much time deciphering letters and sounds anymore. I think your practice and new spectacles together mean a better reader.”

“So, you don’t think I need to come in here for lunch anymore?”

“No, I think you can still improve more. But, I do think you will enjoy reading more now. So how about I give you a book to read at home or before practice or a game. The more you practice the easier reading will become.” Cassidy said reaching to the middle shelf of her cart. She pulled out a book with a picture of Terry Bradshaw on the cover. “I have only read a few chapters. His style is pretty easy, plus, I thought you would like the subject matter.”

“Yeah, you know I like football. Where’d you find this book?” Jerome asked taking it from her.

“Borders bookstore. I bought it a few weeks ago for you. I figured you could read it over Christmas break. But, when I saw you today, I figured you were ready. Take your time and read it. It is yours so if you have words you want to highlight or underline feel free to write in the book.” Jerome smiled as he flipped through the book. “We’ll read over selections from your lit. book or the newspaper for the rest of the semester.” Cassidy said biting her sandwich.

“How are your other classes going?” Cassidy asked Jerome.

“Math is easy. My science class is gonna be a challenge though. We have a new teacher and I can’t understand what he is saying half the time.”

“What do you mean?”

“He is from India and he has a serious accent. I think he knows English, it is just hard to understand what he is saying.”

“Gupta or something?” Cassidy asked.

“Sengupta. I think he is nice, just hard to understand. I think he knows we don’t understand him all the time, so he writes a lot on the board or overhead projector.

“He was introduced at the last faculty meeting. He seemed nice. I am glad to hear that he is trying to work with you guys. Are you guys being respectful?”

“Well, there are a few guys that give him a hard time. They are always repeating what he says in an accent, but Rochelle is in there and she shuts them down.”

“I don’t want to hear that you guys are making it difficult for him. You are leader, so set an example and maybe those other guys will get the message.”

“Yes, ma’am” Rick said picking up his new book again.

Rasheed walked into his history class. He tapped a few girls on the head as he passed by them and walked to his desk. Mr. Laney, his history teacher walked in as the bell rang.

“Take out a few sheets of notebook paper. You are going to take notes. The information on this video will be on your next test, so be sure you take good notes. There should be no talking and I am not going to stop and rewind if you miss something.” Mr. Laney pressed play on the VCR and turned off the lights. Only the students closest to the window had enough light to see their paper.

Rasheed immediately recognized the PBS logo; his grandmother kept her televisions on PBS. When he visited her, he would always find himself enthralled in a show she was watching. This show was about the Civil war. Rasheed knew he could not get everything on his paper, so he decided to concentrate on names of battles and dates. He glanced around the room and noticed that the kids furthest from the window were

straining to see their paper; many put their heads down in resignation. He raised his hand. “Mr. Laney. Can you turn on a light. It is kinda dark in here.”

“No, it looks like you have enough light. If the kids that need light don’t care to mention it to me,” he scanned the darker part of the room for some type of response, “I’m not going to worry about it.”

Rasheed waited for one of his peers from the other side of the room to say something, but they did not. Mr. Laney had a reputation of going off on students. He would curse a student out without blinking. Rasheed was used to people cursing him out. His mom would do it when she was drunk and when she was sober. He did not mind standing up for his classmates. Mr. Laney pulled out his pile of write-up slips from his top desk drawer. Everyone knew that was his way of saying shut-up. Rasheed had done a good job of staying out of trouble at school; so, he turned back to the television screen and started jotting down notes.

Kasey walked out of the school building looking for Angela and Catrina. She spotted them under the tree. She stopped for a second and contemplated going to band practice. It was the week of homecoming and she knew the music, but not the marching formations. The thought of hanging out with her new friends was more enticing than sitting in the band room for hours while her band members played around. Just as she turned towards the tree she remembered that her attendance in band was part of her grade. Even though band was just an elective, she did not want a bad grade in band to ruin her G.P.A.; she knew she need all A’s and B’s if she wanted to get into a good college. She turned around and walked towards the band room.

Kasey walked into Dr. Scott's office with a bag of barbecue potato chips and her notebook. Today was their exam and their unauthorized Christmas party. She walked to her desk listening to her peers discuss their plans for the weekend and coming weeks. Kasey was a bit jealous that they were so excited about being away from school. Kasey was not looking forward to staying in the one room she shared with her mother and sister. Her mom's friend was nice, but her daughter, who went to school with her, was a little too much for her. She liked her music loud and had embraced the ghetto fabulous mentality. She wore blond weave and spoke loudly. Kasey wanted to be friends with her, since they lived in the same house, but she found it difficult to relate to the music, TV shows and clothing that appealed to her. She loathed the idea of watching TV and reading all day in the same room where she had to sleep on the floor. She was angry that her father did not send money for her and her sister to go to Virginia for the break. She was angry that her mother had not made enough money to get an apartment. She hated that she was not enjoying her new school.

Dr. Scott was sitting behind her desk showing Angela the outfits she purchased for her granddaughter as Christmas gifts. The rest of the class sat around chatting waiting for their exam, so they could start their party.

Tanisha walked down the hall with Shenika. "Are you sure your mom is okay with me coming to stay with you during the Christmas break?" Tanisha asked Shenika.

Girl, my mom loves Christmas. The more the merrier. She'll just see you as an extra set of hands in the kitchen. Besides, between you working and being and

Fernando's, it's not like you are going to be around much. It might be nice to have you to hang out with at the house though. I get tired of my two brothers." Shenika said as she opened her locker.

"I just can't believe that my mom told me to 'stay where ever I was'. She is going to Texas with Carl. My sister is going to Savannah with one of her friends because my mom told her not to come home. Who doesn't want to spend Christmas with their daughters?" Tanisha asked leaning against a set of lockers.

"I know. I can't believe it either. But, I promise you, you will have a good time at my house. When my cousins come over it is always a party. Plus, I got you a Christmas gift." Shenika said smiling. She closed her locker and the two walked to class.

Rahseed walked out of his Spanish class. He felt confident that he, not only passed the exam, but passed it with an A. He was glad that he had made more effort this semester. He and Benard had spent more time completing work and studying and, if they did well on their exams, they would both pass all of their classes. Rasheed knew that passing would mean that he was closer to moving out of his mother's house and moving into his grandmother's house. A new school, he thought, would help him reach his goal of going to college and making legal money. He also knew that if Benard passed his classes, he would not dropout and start selling drugs like his brothers and cousins.

Santrice tapped him on his shoulder. "How did you do?" she asked.

"I aced that joint." Rasheed said smiling. "I have math with Ms. McMillan next, so you know I've got that one in the bag. After today I get to hang out with my grandma for two weeks."

“You aint staying with your mom?”

“Hell no! She’ll be drunk until Christmas. She’ll sober up for Christmas day and hit it again after she leaves my grandma’s house. My grandma will take me shopping and cook...and bake. She makes the best cakes.”

“Sounds cool.”

“It is. I can’t wait to get away from my mom. It’s like a freakin real vacation.”

Rasheed said as he walked down the hall.

Jerome stared at the exam. He had no idea what Mr. Holiford was asking. He did not recall reading any of the answers to the questions that he was looking at. He and a few friends had spent the weekend studying their notes in preparation for the exam. No one expected to pass, they just hoped that their F wasn’t low enough to make them pass the class. He had flipped through the entire exam, one-hundred and twenty questions, and found only twenty that he knew the answer to or could make an educated guess to answer. Mr. Holiford was standing up walking around the classroom. He had a smirk on his face that annoyed Jerome. Mr. Holiford had spent most of the semester ignoring the students, but on the day of the exam he gave them their full attention.

Spring Semester

Tanisha walked into the gym looking for Shenika. She found her sitting on the stage talking to Terrance and Jerome.

“Hey, ya’ll.”

“Hey, Tanisha. What’s going on girl?” Terrance asked check her out.

“Boy, you need to keep your eyes on your girlfriend and not me.”

“You shouldn’t be so fine then.” Terrance said smiling.

“He’s just messing with you, Tanisha. He knows Shameka would kick his ass if he even thought about someone else.” Jerome said. All of them smiled as Terrance walked away from the group

“Shenika, have you talked to anyone about the SAT? I talked to my sister last night and she said that we need to take it in the spring. We need to sign up for it soon.”

“Yeah, I know about it. I thought we took it our senior year, though.”

“Samar said we need to look into now. How were we supposed to know about this? If I hadn’t talk to my sister we would have missed it. It would suck that I couldn’t go to college because we didn’t know when to take the test.” Tanisha said.

Tanisha stopped in front of Miss Huckabee. “Miss Huckabee, can I ask you something?”

“Sure.”

“Do you know about the SAT?”

“Unfortunately yes, I didn’t enjoy that part of high school.” Cassidy said smiling.

“I talked to my sister last night and she said that I need to take the SAT in the fall. Where do I sign up for it?”

“I think you can register on-line, but the counselor’s office should have bulletins with the prices and dates.”

“Oh, I’ll go after school.”

“Go now. Write a pass and I’ll sign it. Bring back a few just in case other people are looking for information on the test too.”

Tanisha walked into the class and returned to Cassidy with a sheet of paper. Cassidy signed it, “You’ll miss the warm-up, but I think that this is more important.”

Tanisha returned a few minutes after the bell. She handed a stack of SAT bulletins to Cassidy and walked to her desk. She placed a bulletin on Shenika's desk. Cassidy stood up from the desk. "First of all, welcome back from your winter break. I hope you all are well rested. We have a lot to do this semester. Since this is a college preparatory class, I think it is important that you are preparing for college academically, but you also need to make sure you follow the process to get in to most colleges and universities. Tanisha asked about the SAT a few minutes ago. How many of you are aware that you need to take it?" Most of the students raised their hands. "How many of you are aware that there are certain scores required to get in certain schools?" A few less students raised their hands. "Most juniors, which you are, take the SAT in the spring of their junior year. Tanisha can you find the April/May testing date and see what the deadline is for registration?" Tanisha looked at the dates on the front page.

"The deadline is February first." Tanisha said amazed. "that is just few weeks from now." She said frantically.

"You have time, don't stress out in yet. If you are interested in registering for the exam, Tanisha brought extra bulletins for some of you. I am sure there are plenty available in the counselor's office. If you don't think you are prepared I suggest you take the test to see what is on it and to see what you may need to concentrate on for summer. You all should apply to colleges in the fall of your senior year, and you will need SAT scores to send with your applications." Cassidy scanned the room. Students were clearly stressed about the information she just shared. "If you need help, you can see your counselor or I can meet with you after school."

“Why are we just hearing this? Shouldn’t our counselors have told us this stuff when we met with them last year? I’ve got a lot to do.” Tanisha was clearly stressed.

“Don’t worry, every junior planning to go to college is doing the same thing about now. You are not the first and you won’t be the last to stress about this. Make a plan, set some deadlines and it will be okay. I think there are waivers for the registration if you qualify...” Cassidy was interrupted by a knock on the door. She opened the door to find Ms. Haygood at the door.

“Miss Huckabee, you sent Tanisha down to the office for information on the SAT?”

“Yes, she was wondering when she should register to take it.”

“Can I address your class briefly?”

“Sure.”

Miss Haygood walked into the room, smiling at several students. “Good morning class. I was planning on having a junior meeting in a few weeks to go over this, but some of you are planning early, so I just thought I would give you a little information. If you are planning on going to college you need to take the ACT or the SAT. There are dates for each exam posted in the counselor’s office. You will have to fill out the FASFA form in the Fall, those forms are located in the office as well. If you receive free or reduced lunch, I can give you a waiver to take either the SAT or ACT. Additionally, when you start to apply to colleges, if you are free or reduced, I can give you a waiver for the application fee. Just come by before or after school if you have questions.” Ms. Haygood smiled at Cassidy. “I just wanted to make sure they were aware what they needed to do. Thank you,” Ms. Haygood said as she walked out of the door.

“Any other questions?” Cassidy asked. Every student raised their hand.

“What’s the difference between the ACT and SAT?”

“You have to pay to take this test?”

“You have to pay to apply for college?”

“How many times can I take the SAT?”

“What is a FASFA form?”

Kasey sat staring at the computer in her computer science class. Her teacher, Miss Lightfoot, was giving list of movies that students had brought in to watch. Kasey pulled up the program that they worked on last semester and pulled out the book that she used to for the class in the previous semester. Her peers chose the movie *Friday*. Mrs. Lightfoot popped the VHS in the VCR and pressed play.

“If you want to play cards, do it in the back of the classroom and do not disturb those that are watching the movie. Kasey, what are you doing at the computer? Pull your chair around so you can watch the movie.” Mrs. Lightfoot said.

“I was just gonna run this program again. I thought about something over the break and I wanted to see what it would do if I changed some variables.”

“I’m not giving out grades for the first two or three weeks of school. So, if you do anything don’t ask me to help you and don’t expect a grade.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

She sat down behind her computer and pulled up her class on Phoenix University online

Jerome noticed he was squinting his eyes even though he had his glasses on. He realized he was squinting in an effort to understand Mr. Sengupta. He looked at the notes

on the board and the diagram on the screen. He squinted again... “centrifuge,...he tried to make out what Mr. Sengupta was explaining. He knew that whatever he was saying was important because Mr. Sengupta mentioned the Georgia High School Graduation Test when he started his lecture. The test was in a few weeks and Jerome was a bit stressed that he was not going to do well. He knew he would do fine with the mathematics portion of the test, but he was still concerned about literature and social studies, which he heard had a lot of reading on it. He was also concerned about the science, biology, he heard, was the majority of the test, and he knew, between Dr. Scott and Mr. Sengupta, that he was not prepared.

“Are there any questions?” Mr. Sengupta asked.

Jerome raised his hand, “Is what you said in the book?”

“Yes. You can review with the book. I am in process to make worksheet for you to use to study for your exam.” Jerome prayed the worksheet was written in English.

Rasheed walked into class and slid into the desk next to Benard. “What’s up.”

Benard put down his pencil and looked at Rasheed. “Nigga, you know I am concentrating. Why you comin in here bothering me?” Benard asked smiling.

“Man, just because you passed all your classes don’t make you some kinda genius.”

“Aye, I got an A, three B’s and two C’s. Sounds like I’m workin on being a genius. Don’t be a hater.”

“You forgot I passed all my classes too.”

“Yeah, whatever.” Rasheed said pulling out his folder. “Shut up so I can answer the warm-up and beat Santrice to some points.”

Kasey knocked on the door of Coach Coar's classroom. "Hey. Kasey, right?" Coach Coar asked.

"Yes ma'am. I heard the announcement yesterday about soccer. I wanted to try-out for the team."

"We don't have tryouts. You just need to get a physical and have your parent sign the permission slip. We start in a few weeks. I'll have a meeting after school sometime next week." Coach Coar said as she searched her desk for the soccer packet.

"You don't have to try out for the team?" Kasey asked surprised. Her previous school not only had tryouts but several phases of cuts before anyone could make the team.

"No, unfortunately we don't have enough girls to eliminate anyone. We have had a pretty strong team despite the fact that most of the girls have to play the majority of the game."

"Oh, well I guess I'll see you next week."

"Okay. I'm glad you came by."

Cassidy was going over the symbolism in "The life you save may be your own", when she heard a knock on the door. She saw Jerome standing at the door; she motioned with her hand for him to come in. He waited patiently for her to finish her thought.

"Yes sir." She said as she turned from her class.

"Dr. Scott sent me down here to see if I had any work for you."

Cassidy looked at him for a few seconds before she responded. "Have you been assigned to ISS or something?" she asked perplexed.

“No. She just sent us all to go around to teachers that we have to get work. She says she wants to make sure we are passing all of our classes.” Jerome said a bit embarrassed.

“Well, I think I gave you a book to read. Do you have it?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Well...are you supposed to do your work in here?”

“I can or I can do it in her room.”

“I have a lot to cover, so it might be hard for you to concentrate. Finish a chapter and be prepared to discuss it with me after lunch.” Cassidy said.

“Yes, ma’am. See ya later Miss H.” Jerome said and he walked out of the classroom.

Ten minutes later, two other students from Dr. Scott’s class disturbed Cassidy and her class to ask for additional work.

Cassidy ran into Sabrina in the copy room. “Hey Sabrina.”

“Oh, hey girl. How’s it going?”

“Ok, I’m trying to make sure I have reviewed all the literary devices and grammar rules for the test. Some of the kids are stressing it.” Cassidy said as she sat at a desk.

“Girl, I wouldn’t worry about it. The kids do pretty well on the language arts section. If they are stressed it is because of the other subjects. Half of them have had Scott, and they are realizing that they don’t know much about science. Some are worried because they have had Holiford or Jenkins for history civics, and neither one of them teach anything.”

“Yeah, I guess they are kinda screwed if they got a teacher that doesn’t care.”

“Girl, that’s half of the teachers here. You stick around; you’ll see.”

“One of my students told me that he has the new teacher, the one from India. He says he can’t understand what he is saying half of the time.”

“I’m not surprised. We had two here last year in the math department. The kids complained all the time.”

“I have spoken with Mr. Sengupta, his accent is not that bad to me.”

“Yeah, well you went to school and met all kind of people from different backgrounds. Our kids don’t know any other culture than the culture that they have between Jackson Road and Sherman drive. They haven’t heard any accents to develop an ear for it.”

“I’m surprised that teachers from other countries want to come here.”

“Trust me they don’t. The two math teachers we had last year left. The administration does not help them out with classroom management. They actually wrote one of them up three times for making kids that were disruptive sit in a desk outside to complete their assignments.”

“What else were they supposed to do?”

“According to Mrs. Ansley, he was supposed to keep him in the classroom and let him be a disturbance.”

“So, she didn’t want any learning to take place.” Cassidy asked.

“If they wanted them to learn they would have hired some teachers that could teach our students.”

“True.”

“Half these folks are babysitters. We know that, the students know that and that’s why the kids are stressed about the test. If they don’t pass, they don’t graduate. Most of them don’t mind being here, but they want to know they can leave...with a diploma.” Sabrina said as she collected her copies from the copy machine.

Tanisha sat in Coach Coar’s classroom waiting for the meeting to start. She saw a few girls from last year’s team. She saw a few girls she had not seen playing soccer before, including Kasey. After a few minutes, Coach Coar walked in.

“Good afternoon ladies. For those of you that may not know me, I am Coach Coar. I coach the Varsity and junior varsity soccer teams. We will start practice in two weeks, but you cannot practice if you haven’t turned in your physical or your permission slip. I will also need to see your grades. Grab a progress report on your way out and have your teachers fill it out with your averages. You need to have passing grades in all of your classes to play.” A hand shot up, “I know most sports let you play with five passing classes, but I like to know that my girls are passing all of their classes. If you are failing I will put you on probation for two weeks with mandatory study hall.” The hand went down. Practice will start at four. That gives you time to complete some homework and dress out for practice. If you are not on the field at four-o’clock, you do not practice. If you are not dressed out, you do not practice. If I hear about you cutting up in any of your classes you do not play any of the games scheduled for that week. Are there any questions so far?”

One of the girls raised her hand. “Do you have the schedule, Coach?”

“No, the schedule will be made next week. You can come by and pick it up or wait until the first day of practice to get it.”

“Are we getting new uniforms this season?”

“No. Unfortunately no. I was hoping we would get a larger budget this year, but we are working with the money we raised last year. With that said, I want to talk about dues. Soccer dues will be fifty dollars. That will include the cleats we will be wearing this year and a t-shirt that we will be selling as a fundraiser this year.”

“Is the shirt hot?”

“I’m not sure what you considered hot, but it is a nice shirt. A few of your teammates helped me pick it out. Changing subjects, you can only miss practice twice. If you are absent from school you need to show me your excused absence sheet sometime during the day. Any more questions?”

“Can we go out and run on our own to get conditioned until practice starts?”

“Yes, I cannot be outside while you are conditioning, but you can run to get in shape.”

“Ya’ll want to meet on the track at 3:45 to run and practice dribbling?” a girl asked the team. A few girls responded yes. “Bring a soccer ball and we can start tomorrow.” The girl responded to their agreement.

“Does everyone know everyone?” Coach Coar asked. “You guys go around the room and introduce yourselves and the positions you prefer to play.”

Can I get some help here!

Tansiha waited until her classmates left before she approached Ms. McMillian. “Excuse me, Ms. McMillan. I was wondering if you could work with me on the math we

have been going over. I barely passed last semester, and I need to pass this semester, hopefully with a better grade.”

Ms. McMillan sighed. “Tanisha, you need to pay attention in class. I don’t have time to reteach you after I have spent 50 minutes teaching you in class.”

“I have taken all the notes and gotten help from some of my friends, but I can’t keep up all the time in class.”

“Tanisha, I don’t have time to help you keep up in class.”

“I can come after school. I have asked my manager to cut my hours...”

“I only the football and basketball players after school. If you need additional help you need to hire a tutor or pay attention in class.” Ms. McMillan said as she walked to the door of her classroom. Tanisha left the classroom dejected.

Jerome was grateful that Mr. Sengupta had created a study guide for the class. The notes followed the book and gave examples and explanations that made more sense to Jerome than the book. He sat in his desk looking over his notes. Mr. Sengupta was giving them a practice GHSGT today.

“Good morning class.” Mr. Sengupta said walking away from the computer where he had just completed taking roll. “I will give you twenty minutes to work on the practice test and then we will go over the answers. Jerome took a deep breath and waited for the exam.

Mr. Sengupta stopped the class exactly twenty minutes after he told the students that they could begin the practice exam. “Let us look at the first question. Can anyone give me the answer?” A few hands flew up. He pointed to Bianca, who gave the correct answer. “Let us go over the question. What is being asked?” Sheldon raised his hand and

provided the answer. “Next, we need to figure out the formula that is needed to figure out the answer. Work the problem. Let us do it together.” He went over the process of solving the problem and mistakes that the students should try not to make. He also referred to examples on the study guide he had given the class. Jerome squinted while he was listening. He was happy Mr. Sengupta was going over each question. He thought he was a great teacher, except that he could not understand him most of the time. “If we could have a teacher like Mr. Sengupta, that we could understand,” he thought.

Kasey was reading the next chapter in her biology book. Dr. Scott was talking to Angela in the front of the room. Half of the class was gone. Some were roaming the halls and some were visiting other teachers for work. Kasey was caught up in all of her classes and she was thankful for that. Since soccer season had started, she did not have enough time to check out the biology book everyday so she could study at home. She was worried about the graduation test. She had heard stories about people scoring 200 out of 500 on the science portion. There was even a rumor that there was a girl that was twenty still coming up three times a year to take the test because she failed it her junior year at Venable. Kasey knew that she needed to score well on all four parts of the test and she was really concerned that she was not prepared for it. Dr. Scott had not taught much other than the parts of the cell. Spring semester in her class seemed to be less productive than the fall semester.

“Kasey, are you sure you don’t need to go to any of your teachers to get make-up work?”

“No, ma’am. I am reading the biology book.”

“I didn’t assign any reading.”

“I know. I just wanted to make sure I was ready for the graduation test. I was just reviewing.”

“If you look in that top drawer,” she pointed to a file cabinet near the window, “I have practice graduation tests in there you can take one home with you. You can write on it, I have plenty.”

“Thank you Dr. Scott,” Kasey said as she got up and walked to the file cabinet. She found the thick packets. She took one and returned to her desk. She flipped through the packet. There was a page with the answers in the back. She read some of the questions and realized that the chapter she had just begun to read was a large portion of the test. She was shocked. Dr. Scott did not appear to be concerned that she had not covered half of the book with the class. Kasey put the packet under her book and continued to read.

Cassidy stood in front of the class explaining plagiarism. The students were preparing to begin their research for the research paper all 11th graders were mandated to write. She gave the class examples of plagiarism, some were obvious, others were not so obvious. She went over how to take notes on notecards and how to set up their bibliography page. “Are there any questions?” Cassidy asked. Many of the students looked terrified. “Don’t worry, it is not as bad as it sounds. It is a process you are not familiar with, but if you plan on going to college, it is a process you need to become very comfortable with doing.”

Tanisha raised her hand. “How many pages will the paper have to be again?”

“Five to seven pages. This does not include your title page or your bibliography/works cited pages. If you take good notes and follow the format I am going to go over tomorrow, five pages will not be hard to write. I am concerned that you all learn the process, so, when you go to college, it is not foreign to you. Some of you may find you like doing research. I discovered that I preferred researching more than writing when I was in college.” Cassidy said. She turned on the overhead projector. “I have a list of topics for you to choose from. Take a minute or two to look over them and raise your hand when you see a topic you want. I am allowing only two people to have the same topic.” The class was silent. Some were staring at the projector screen and others were writing. “I have checked with the librarians and there are plenty of sources for the topics I have provided. Hopefully that will ease some minds.” Cassidy waited for someone to raise their hand or ask a question. After another minute of silence three hands shot up.

“Yes, Tanisha.”

“Can I do the third topic about Edgar Allen Poe?”

“Ah, man. That’s the one I wanted.” Sean said from the other side of the room.

“Both of you can do it.” Cassidy said as she wrote their names next to the topic. “The first thing I would do is to look in your textbook and reread, or read for the first time the selections provided and then we can have a quick chat about where you want to go with your paper after we have spent a day or two researching in the library.” Tanisha enthusiastically opened her book. A few other hands went up.

Rasheed walked down the hall smiling at the girls and dapping the boys. He saw Benard as soon as he turned the corner. “What up nigga?” he said to Benard.

“Bullshit.”

“What do you mean, man?” Rasheed asked as he fell into stride with Benard.

“My counselor called me in today for our yearly meeting.”

“That should be a good meeting since you passed all your classes last semester.

What’s the problem?”

“The problem is one of the classes I passed, I passed two years ago, so it doesn’t count. Then she told me that even if I pass all my classes this semester, I won’t be able to graduate unless I go to summer school.” Benard said as he and Rasheed walked into the computer lab.

“How many classes do you have to take?” Rasheed asked.

“Two. Well she said I could take one, but if I wanted to give myself a little room if I fail a class I need to take two. Don’t nobody want to spend summer in school. I’ve been in school my whole life!”

“Come on man, we been doing good. Don’t let that mess up this semester.”

“It don’t matter if I don’t go to summer school. She said one class will cost \$500. I aint got \$500. My mom gonna cuss my ass out if I come asking for \$500. This is some bullshit!” Benard said as he opened his essay on the computer.

“Five hundred? So if you take two classes it will be a ‘G’. That’s messed up”

“I gotta figure out how to get the money. It felt good passing everything last semester and this semester...I’m doing good. I kinda like some of my classes. This class is my favorite.”

“Yeah, Ms. H is cool. She is different from a lot of these mofos.”

“Who you telling. I gotta B in her class and I acutally enjoyed doing it.”

“So, keep doing it man. This is our year man.”

“Yeah, I gotta come up with that money, and I gotta get it soon. She said I have to register before school is out.”

“You gonna look for a job?”

“Naw, I aint gonna get no job around here. I can ask my cousin if I can work for him for a while.”

“Wait man, don’t he sling?”

“Yeah, but I can get the money in time to register.”

“Man, don’t do that. We’ll come up with something else”

“What else am I gonna do?”

“Ask your mom or your cousin. Isn’t he always telling you to get your shit together? He might give you some of it if you ask.” Rasheed said.

“Yeah, I guess. I just don’t want to do all this for nothing.”

“We’ll figure something out. We got this, man!”

Cassidy walked into the computer lab. All of her students were in front of the computer with their essays on the screen.

“Well, I guess you guys are ready to get this over with. I’ll give you fifteen minutes to finish composing and then you will print your essay and give it to a neighbor to proof. I’ll pass out the peer editing form after I take attendance. I’ll leave you to your writing.” Cassidy said smiling when she noticed two students standing in the door of the classroom.

“Yes, Tricia and Perry.”

“Dr. Scott sent us to see if you have any work for us.”

This is only a test

Tanisha was nervous. She had a good breakfast, more than she usually has, and made a point to get a good night sleep. It was the first day of the Graduation test. She walked into the gym to find Shenika. She found Shenika sitting next to Jerome on the stage reviewing their study guide.

“Ya’ll ready?” Tanisha asked as she hopped on the stage on the other side of Shenika.

“I guess. I’m just looking over the literary terms again.” Shenika said as she handed the page to Jerome. “Did you stay up late studying?”

“No, I was in the bed at ten o’clock. I got off work early and went over everything again before I went to bed. Fernando’s mom fixed me eggs and grits with biscuits this morning. It’s been a long time since I had a big breakfast.”

“I’m coming over there tomorrow for breakfast.” Jerome said.

“I know. I was nice. I think we will be fine. Miss Huckabee said we were ready.”

Kasey walked into her testing room. She looked around and found one of the girls from the soccer team sitting in the corner. She sat in a seat next to her.

“I am dreading this,” the girl told Kasey.

“I think it is a state of mind. If you paid attention in class, you should be fine. But, I like English, so maybe that’s not fair to say.”

“I hate reading. The stuff we read is so lame.”

“Well, you have to find something you like. My mom used to bring us books home from her friends. Some of things I liked; some of it I didn’t, but I read it. My dad wouldn’t let us watch a lot of TV.”

“I can’t imagine not watching TV. That’s all we do in our house.”

“Yeah, now I watch more than I used too. Just take your time and read the questions. Miss Huckabee showed us how people miss questions because they don’t read the entire question.”

“Yeah, that’s the plan.”

Sarah Madden walked in the classroom with the testing materials and closed the door.

Jerome walked into the cafeteria exhausted. He was the last person in his testing group to finish the test. He realized that he was stilling wearing his glasses and took them off while searching his pocket for the case. He grabbed a tray and walked through the line. Rasheed was in line in front of him.

“What up Rome?”

“Hey Rasheed, what’s going on man?”

“You know me.”

“Yeah, did you test this morning?”

“Naw, man, I’m behind a year. I couldn’t get my shit together. But, I’m on a mission now. I’ll take it next year. How was it?” Rasheed asked.

“It wasn’t that bad. Just a lot of reading. Man, it was a lot of reading. I think that’s how they get you. You get tired of reading all that stuff and just start answering questions.”

“Well, they know we aint use to reading, that’s why they put it on there. So we can fail.”

“For real man?” Jerome said grabbing a fork

“That’s what my mentor says. They setting us up because we Black. They don’t want us to go to college or get good jobs. When he said that I thought about all these mofos around here that don’t teach us. Most of us just take it because we used to it, but, I don’t want to be like my mom or my cousins. I gotta get my shit together so I can get out of here.”

“I hear that. I hope I pass all the parts so I can get out of here too.” Jerome said, swiping his lunch card.

Kasey opened the science test booklet. She read the first question: biology. She was glad, that despite Dr. Scott’s lack of instruction, she had read the entire biology book and completed the study guide. She glanced around the classroom at frustrated faces. Jerome was in the same classroom as Kasey. His heart began to race when he looked at the first few questions on the biology test. He sighed. He knew Mr. Sengupta had covered this question, but he was not sure of the answer. He tried to think back over the study guide and notes in his head. He looked at the next question; he had no idea what he was being asked. He read it again thinking he was not reading closely. He still did not know what he was being asked. He sighed and sat back in his desk frustrated and disappointed.

Students rushed into the computer lab. Tanisha was sitting at her computer looking over her research paper so she could print it out and turn it in.

“Hey girl,” Shenika said dropping her purse on the desk next to Tanisha. I’ll look over yours in about ten minutes. My mom looked over mine last night and found a lot of mistakes. I gotta fix it before Miss Huckabee does final call.”

“I know. She said we were starting something new today. I don’t think she is going to give us a lot of time to work on this.”

“I’m glad it will be over after today.” Shenika said pulling out her edited copy.

“Well, at least for now. When we go to college we are going to have to do this all the time. Remember?”

“Don’t even mention it.” Shenika stopped typing and looked at Tanisha. “How is it going? I haven’t seen you much since you are playing soccer and living with Fernando”

“I know. This has been a busy semester. The graduation test, soccer, getting ready to take the SAT...I am looking forward to summer.”

“All you gonna to do is work.”

“Um, I’m taking care of myself now. I need to work. I don’t know how long I can stay with Fernando and his mom. I might have to get my own place.”

“Girl, I hope not. You are in high school. You shouldn’t be worried about paying rent.”

“Who you telling? But just in case, I need to be ready.” Tanisha said looking at the computer screen.

Cassidy opened a folder and pulled out a stack of research papers. She scanned the cover page of the one on top and flipped the page to read the paper. At first glance she thought one of her students was trying to be creative by adding pictures until she realized that the student had literally cut and paste the entire paper. The parts that were not cut out of an

unknown book was hand written. Cassidy flipped the pages in awe. Her classes had spent six weeks researching and writing. She created check points for the students to make sure that they were on track. Most students met the goals, but a few students, including the one whose paper she was attempting to grade, had excuses for not completing the check point goals. She marked an 'F' on the first page of text and wrote the definition of plagiarism with arrows pointing to the portions that were glued onto the page.

Tanisha sat in her math class annoyed. Ms. McMillan was ignoring her questions but answering all of the football players' questions. She knew she was not going to pass the class if she did not score a 'B' on the final exam. She was getting help from friends after school and her boyfriend was trying to tutor her as well, but she could not understand why her teacher did not want to help her. Ms. McMillan sat down behind her desk. She picked up a red pen and started grading papers. Tanisha turned around to the football sitting behind her, "You know how to do this stuff?" she asked him.

"Yeah, I think I got it. What are you stuck on?"

"Where did she get the three from?"

He leaned closer and went over the problem with her again.

Sarah tapped on Cassidy's desk. "I have a job for you." She said.

"Yes, ma'am." Cassidy said looking up.

"Can you help me with the valedictorian and salutatorian speeches this year. My husband is having surgery and I won't have the time I normally do to help them formulate and edit."

“Sure, that’s fine. When do they start?”

“The grades will be out in a few weeks; we’ll know then, but I have an idea of who it will be. If I am right, we are going to have our work cut out for us.”

“If they are that bad, why are they valedictorian and salutatorian?”

Sarah laughed. “This is your first year here; you’ll see how things work around here.”

Rasheed sat in his seat and pulled out his folder. “What up Nard,” he said to Benard.

“Nothing much. Trying to get this warm-up so I can get some of them points back on that essay I messed up on.”

“I told you to proofread man.”

“I know, I just felt good about it.”

“It was good, you just needed to check your spelling and stop using so many commas.” Rasheed said laughing. “I talked to my grandma last night. She said if I pull off this semester, I can move in with her in the summer.”

“For real? That’s what’s up!”

“Yeah, I know. Just a few more weeks and I can get away from my crazy mom.”

Rasheed said smiling.

“I think I figured out where to get the money for summer school.”

“Yeah, what you got up?”

“I’ll tell you when I know for sure.” Benard said writing on his notebook paper.

“Now, leave me alone nigga so I can get these points. You know, you are my competition. You trying to distract me.”

Why this can't work

Cassidy found a note from Mrs. Ansley, the assistant principal over curriculum in her mailbox. The letter asked her to meet with her at the beginning of her planning period. It did not say what the meeting was about, nor did it say if she needed to bring anything. She and Mrs. Ansley were friendly to one another. Mrs. Ansley had made a point of telling Cassidy how she was impressed with her classroom management. Cassidy walked to the office not really sure what to expect. To her surprise Mrs. Ansley had a parent in her office with her. Cassidy knocked on the opened door.

“Come in Miss Huckabee.” Mrs. Ansley said. “This is Mr. Johnson, Shequila’s dad.”

“Good morning,” Cassidy said extending her hand. He glared back at her.

“Have a seat.” Mrs. Ansley said. Cassidy sat next to Mr. Johnson in the tiny office, unclear of what to expect. “It has come to my attention that Mr. Johnson’s daughter is in your class. She came home upset about her grade on her research paper. She was upset and so is Mr. Johnson.”

Cassidy was wondering what she should say. The paper was a paper made entirely of cut and pasted material. Parts were hand written and Shequila had failed to complete the check point assignments. “Yes, she did receive a failing grade on the research paper. She did not follow the instructions I outlined at the beginning of the assignment and she did not complete the assignments I put in place to help the students complete the assignment successfully.” Cassidy said to Mrs. Ansley. She was too uncomfortable to look at Mr. Johnson since she knew that he was still glaring at her.

“I don’t understand how she failed. She said you wouldn’t give her the paper back.”

“That is true. I have not graded all of the papers yet. I want to give them all out at the same time. I was planning on letting them edit it for an additional 10 points if they wanted to, but it had to be done in class. I will have them editing day Wednesday of next week.”

“So you still have her paper?” Mrs. Ansley asked.

“Yes, would you like to see it?”

“Yes, can you go to your classroom and grab it for us.?”

Cassidy quickly left the office shaking. This was the first time she had been called in the office about a student’s grade. She found the paper and walked back to the office. As she got closer to the office she heard Mrs. Ansley tell Mr. Johnson that Cassidy was a new teacher and had clearly made a mistake. Cassidy took a deep breath and walked back into the office. She handed the paper to Mrs. Ansley before she sat down.

Mrs. Ansley took the paper and flipped through the pages. The pages made cracking noises as he flipped through it because of all of the glue used to attach portions of a book. She ran her hands over a few pages to confirm that the text has actually been pasted onto the paper. She flipped through a few more pages and found the hand written pages. She scanned a few sentences before she handed the pages to Mr. Johnson. He flipped through the pages and his face showed that he knew his daughter deserved the grade she received.

“Did you give her enough time to work on this? I can’t see her turning in the type of work unless you didn’t give her enough time.” Mr. Johnson said shoving the paper to Cassidy.

“All juniors spend six weeks working on the research paper. I went over plagiarism with the students and made them take notes on what counts as plagiarism on a notecard to keep with their research notecards. Additionally, I took them to the library or the computer lab to work to complete the paper. I gave them assignments that served as check points to make sure that they were schedule to complete the paper. Shequila did not turn in the smaller assignments, I sent a deficiency home to you regarding her failure to complete these assignments.” Cassidy handed him a signed copy of the deficiency with the failing grades listed. Mr. Johnson looked at the deficiency before giving it back to Cassidy.

“That’s not my signature. My wife must’ve signed it.” He said.

“So it appears that Shequila did not tell you the whole truth about her grade,” Mrs. Ansley said.

“I don’t care if she lied about what she didn’t do. She ain’t getting no ‘F’ in this class. She said she will probably fail the class.” He said angrily.

Cassidy waited for Mrs. Ansley to say something. She did not, instead she looked at Cassidy.

“Mr. Johnson, I understand your frustration, but you saw the paper. She cut pages out of a book and turned them in as her own words. She had the same amount of time as the rest of my students to complete the paper. She did not take advantage of the time she had in class to write her paper.”

“I don’t care about the other students, I’m talking about my daughter.” His voice was elevated. “What did you do to make sure my daughter completed the paper?”

“I gave her due dates and I gave her time in class to complete the assignments.”

“Did you stand over her to make sure she did everything?” He stood up. Cassidy scooted back from him.

“Mr. Johnson, what do you want to accomplish today?” Mrs. Ansley asked.

“I want this half ass teacher to give my daughter the grade she deserves. If she had to cut pages out of a book to turn in as her paper, it is the teacher’s fault!”

“So, do you want her to write the paper and turn it in for a better grade...”

“Hell no! She ain’t got another six weeks to write a good paper. This teacher needs to give her a passing grade on all the assignments because she didn’t make sure my daughter did her work.”

“Mr. Johnson. I will make sure that your daughter receives a better grade on this assignment. Miss Huckabee is new to teaching and may not have done everything she could to help your daughter write a passing paper. I will call you in a few days and let you know what will be done.” Mrs. Ansley said standing up and extending her hand.

Cassidy sat in shock. Mr. Johnson shook Mrs. Ansley’s hand and walked out of the office, he muttered ‘bitch’ as he passed Cassidy.

Cassidy sat in the seat, not sure what she should do.

“Miss Huckabee, I know that you probably did everything you could to make sure all of your students did well on this assignment. I have observed your class several times and you are very thorough. Mr. Johnson is angry because his daughter did not complete the assignment. He is angry because she got caught cheating. He will cause a lot of

problems if we do not do anything about it soon. Give her a 'C' on the paper and make sure she passes the class."

"But what about the fact that she plagiarized a paper? What about the students who actually wrote the paper and earned a 'C'?" Cassidy asked.

"In the big scheme of things, what does it matter? Her grades have probably been inflated for years. They both think that she deserves a passing grade, so give it to them. Don't stay up at night thinking about this. Some students aren't worth the worry. Any questions?" Mrs. Ansley asked smiling.

Cassidy realized that the meeting was over. She had been ordered to pass a student and told not to care that she was not helping this student in the long run.

"No, I'll take care of it."

"When you change her grades slide a print out of her new average in my box. I'll call her father in on Friday."

Cassidy walked out of the office confused and disappointed.

Rasheed walked into his literature class. He sat in his desk and pulled out his folder to complete the warm-up. After a few minutes he looked at the door waiting for Benard to walk in. When the bell sounded and Benard was not in his desk he looked around to figure out who would know where he was.

"Hey chicken head." He said to Buffy a girl who he knew messed around with Benard.

"What nigga?" she responded.

"Where's your boy?" he asked.

"What kinda friend are you? You aint heard? He got locked up."

“For what?” Rasheed asked. He was surprised to hear that Benard was involved in something that would get him in trouble since they had both vowed to stay out of trouble and pass all their classes.

“Breaking and entering.”

“For real?” Rasheed asked.

“Yeah, his cousin said he needed money for something, but he didn’t want to sling to get it. He should have then his ass wouldn’t be in jail.”

“Is he in juve?”

“Naw, he’s at the hotel DC. His mom is trying to get him out. But, she ain’t got no money, so he’ll probably be there for a while.”

Rasheed knew what the money was for. Benard told him he had figured out a way to go to summer school.

Jerome sat in his desk as his classmates walked out of the classroom to go to lunch.

Cassidy noticed.

“Are we having a working lunch today?” She asked as she grabbed her lunch.

“No, I just don’t feel like going in there today.”

“Going to the cafeteria? Why not?”

“We got our scores back from the graduation test.”

“How did you do?”

“I passed the English part, barely. Actually I passed everything except for the science. I was nowhere near passing. I’m gonna have to take it again over the summer. I just don’t want to hear everybody else talking about their scores”

“Well, do you know what parts you need to work on?”

“Yeah, biology and chemistry. I knew I didn’t know anything. I felt so stupid and my scores just proved it.”

“Jerome, you are not stupid. You were smart enough to ask for help with your reading. You are smart enough to pass the test. You just need to study more. Maybe you can find someone that did well on that section to tutor you.”

“Yeah, I guess. I’m just pissed. I was just hoping I passed so I could have a good summer. Last summer wasn’t good, but I thought passing the test would make this a summer without stress.”

“Well, you mentioned that you were having a tough time understanding your chemistry teacher. Who did you have for biology? Maybe you can go to them for tutoring.”

“Mr. Senguta is good. It’s just his accent. I can’t understand him sometimes. I had Dr. Scott for biology. I ain’t ever seen her tutor anybody, but I’ll ask.” Jerome said sighing.

“Be positive. You passed the other parts, so you will pass this section too. You’ll figure it out.”

“I guess you’re right.” Jerome stood up. “I’m going to grab something to eat.”

“Okay. It is okay if you are a minute or two late. We’ll talk about this later”

Cassidy stared at the graduation speech. She could not find one grammatically correct sentence. A period separated a string of run-on sentences and fragments. She read the paper a second time attempt to find a coherent sentence. She had underlined misspelled words and had crossed through incorrect verb usage. She wondered how this

student was named the valedictorian. There was nothing on the speech in front of that indicated that the student had passed any English class. Sarah walked into the classroom just as Cassidy sat back in her desk.

“So, what do you think?” she asked.

“Did you look at this?” Cassidy asked.

“She brought it to me first. I told her it needed to be edited. She had too many fragments and incoherent sentences for me to even attempt to edit it.”

“So, you mean this is the edited version?” Cassidy asked handing the speech to Sarah.

Sarah skimmed the speech. “This crap is worse than the one she showed me. Maybe she didn’t know what I meant when I said fragment.”

“How is that possible? You guys are very thorough. There is no way you can be named the valedictorian if she cannot write a five-paragraph essay?”

“She was labeled gifted when she got here so she was in your know who’s class. You know how her teachers. Surprisingly, she did not do enough for him and was put out of gifted and had Yancey for two years. Yancey piloted a different curriculum and she had 10th and 11th graders. Then she turned around and had her again for British lit. That’s how she got to be valedictorian.

Cassidy was in disbelief. The student that was supposedly the best student out of all the senior class but could not write an essay, yet she was receiving the highest honor that insinuated that not only could she write, but that that she could write well.

Cassidy sat contemplating how she could change the failing grade for the student that had plagiarized her research paper. Not only did Mrs. Ansley want her to change the grade on her research paper, she also wanted her to change the grades on all the check point grades that the student failed to complete. Cassidy was told the student was to receive a 'C' in the class, regardless of what she really earned.

"Hey, Huckabee. What are you stressed out about in here?" Sarah asked standing at the door of the classroom.

"Ansley is making me change a grade."

"Why?"

"The student plagiarized a paper, so I gave her a zero. Her dad complained and accused me of being the reason why his daughter cheated. Rather than backing me up, Ansley said that I was at fault and promised the parent that his daughter was going to pass the class. So now I have to change her grade and submit her new grades by the end of the day." Cassidy said, clearly frustrated.

"I hate to tell you this, but, that happens a lot here. If the parent complains, the parent gets what he or she wants. That's why our valedictorian is our valedictorian."

"How is that helping these kids?"

"It's not. But the parents here believe that good grades are all their kids need. They don't care if their students actually learned anything."

"That defeats the purpose of being here."

"For whom? You or them?"

"Both, I guess. The point of education is lost if the only thing that matters is what is on their report card."

“You are in the minority with that type of thinking here. Venable is not the school that is supposed to produce scholars. We are told to push them out and maintain a decent graduation rate. Change the grades. Be mad about it for an hour and then meet us at Los Arcos. I retire in two years, so I will put up with this bullshit. You need to get out of here before you turn into one of these teachers that don’t care.” Sarah said and walked away. Cassidy changed all of the failing grades to 75s and printed the new grade report.

We gave it our best

Rasheed looked at the empty desk next to him. Benard’s mom had not been able to raise the money to bail her son out of jail. Consequently, Benard was spending his second week in the county jail. Rasheed knew that Benard could handle himself in juvenile detention, but he had no idea if he could handle himself in jail with grown men. The whole story eventually came out. Some of Rasheed’s peers thought Benard was stupid to break into a house so he could get money for summer school. They believed that breaking into a house should warrant new shoes or a car. Other peers thought that Benard’s attempt to get money for school was noble and hoped that the judge would see that he was trying to do something good. Rasheed knew his friend was going to have to do time and he knew that his friend would not finish high school.

Tanisha stared at the question. “What the heck are they talking about?” she asked herself. She was in the third hour of the SAT. She and a few of her friends had taken the advice of one of their teachers and signed up so they could see what the test looked like. She was angry. She knew that if she did not do well on this test she would not get into

UGA. She knew she did not do well on the math parts and she did not feel that she did well on the analogies.

“Man, that was hard as hell.” Shenika said to Tanisha as she sat down on the bench outside of the school.

“I know. I didn’t know half of that stuff. How am I going to get into school if I can’t pass the test to get in?” Tanisha asked. “My sister said it was hard, but...that was past hard.”

“Well at least we know what it looks like. We need to study this summer.”

“We need to learn some words. Did you know any of those words?”

“A few of them that we went over in English class, but most of them were new to me.” Shenika said. “If we need to know these words to get into college you think we would know more than we did.”

“I know. Were we supposed to learn those words on our own or were we supposed to learn them in class?” Tanisha asked.

“I don’t know. I thought I did a pretty good job of paying attention in class. I get good grades, but, wow! That test made me feel stupid.”

“Girl, you know you are not stupid. We just weren’t ready for the test. But we will be in the fall.” Tanisha said smiling and playfully leaning onto her bestfriend.

Kasey walked into Ms. Haygood’s office.

“Hey darling. How has it been going for you,” Ms. Haygood asked Kasey as she sat down.

“Okay I guess.”

“I checked your grades. You had a pretty good first semester. I see you did well in that math class too.”

“Yes, thank you for getting me in it.” Kasey said.

“So, today we are going to look over your transcript and see where you should be placed next year. It looks like you are on course to graduate on time. So that is good news. I don’t get to say that as often as I would like.”

Kasey had never thought about not graduating on time, so the thought that many of her peers might not graduate on time caught her off guard.

“You have room for two electives next year. Do you have any idea what you want to take?”

“I want to be an aerospace engineer. Are there any are math classes I could take or a mechanics class?”

Ms. Haygood looked at Kasey for a few seconds. “No, we don’t offer many math classes and the only way to take a mechanics class is to change your diploma choice, which would mean you could not got to college. You can take an art class or home economics. You already have band, so we can keep that.”

“Actually, I don’t want to do band next year. Is there another computer science class I could take or a different foreign language?”

“We have French and Spanish. Mrs. Wallace is the only computer science teacher we have, she does not offer much. Oh,” Hayes said, thinking of something” We will have newspaper next year. And there is yearbook. You have a good GPA. Let’s try to find something that will help you maintain that average and show some diversity on your transcript.”

Kasey thought about it for a few seconds. She knew that all she had was soccer and band to show for diversity. “Okay, that will be okay.”

“Good. Do you enjoy Ms. Huckabee?”

“Yes, that’s probably my favorite class.”

“Well, this will be good news. She is the teacher and advisor for the journalism class and newspaper. I think that will be a good experience for you.”

Kasey smiled. “When do I need to start applying to colleges?”

“Do you have any idea where you want to go?”

“Tuskegee, Georgia Tech and University of Texas. My dad just moved to Alabama, so I can go to Tuskegee without having to pay out of state tuition or I can stay here for Georgia Tech. Texas is my top choice, if I can get some scholarships for there I will probably go there instead.”

“Oh, that is good that you have thought about it. You need to sign up for the SAT sometime soon and apply to the schools you think you want to attend at the end of the summer.”

“I took the SAT a few weeks ago. Ms. Huckabee suggested that we take it to see what it was like.”

“What did you think?”

“It was long, and some parts were tough, but I think I did okay. I am going to take it again in a few months. My mom said she would get me a study book.”

“It sounds like you have a plan and you are serious about your education. Let me know if I can help you...a recommendation or extra transcripts. Ms. Haygood said smiling.

“Thank you.” Kasey responded.

“So, let’s map out your senior year.”

Jerome walked into the classroom and placed a book on Cassidy’s desk. He sat down at his desk and pulled out his notebook. Cassidy walked in, noticed the book and smiled. Jerome had completed two books in one year.

“You heard who the valedictorian is?” Shenika asked Tanisha as they walked into their literature class.

“Yeah, Jennifer. I don’t know how. She doesn’t do anything in class but talk about people and start rumors.” Tanisha said as she sat in her desk.

“Cheating. She has Maurice write her papers and Leo and Jocelyn let her copy off of them. She doesn’t even hide it. She’ll tell anybody that she doesn’t do anything.”

“That’s not fair. We work hard for our grades and she just uses folks to get good grades. Leo and Jocelyn should be mad. Jocelyn does her work and she has to settle for salutatorian. I know she works hard and she is involved in everything.”

“She is probably pissed off. I’m sure she had no idea that this was going to happen.”

“I know I won’t be valedictorian or salutatorian, but I want it to be fair. I can’t believe she cheated her way through school and now she is walking around like she earned it.”

Tanisha said as she opened her notebook and started her warm-up.

Kasey sat in her last class of the year. Her teacher was not giving them a final exam. Her classmates were playing cards and some were watch a movie. Kasey sat alone

at a computer finishing up a project she started at the beginning of the semester. Her teacher did offer to help her and loaded a program for Kasey to use. Her classmates checked on periodically during the semester and one offered to help, but when her favorite movie was chosen she abandoned the project. Kasey actually preferred to walk by herself, so she had not bothered to ask the girl to help when the movie was over.

“You been working on this thing all year girl.” Sean said as he sat next to Kasey.

“Yeah, it has been interesting. I hope I can finish it today.”

“Why you working on this anyway? You know Mrs. Lightfoot is not going to fail anybody. This is an easy class, just don’t bother her.”

“I know, but I just wanted to do something. We sit in here every day with the computers and I want to go into engineering, so programing is kinda important for me to know.” Kasey responded not looking away from the computer screen.

“For real? Engineering is tough aint it?”

“Yeah, I guess, but that is what I have always wanted.”

“Where’d you get the idea that idea? Nobody else in this class wants to be an engineering.” Sean said a bit intrigued.

“My dad took me to an air show when I was young. I heard the roaring of the plane engines and I was hooked. I wanted to build something that could make that sound and I wanted to know that I built something that defied gravity and flew, not matter how heavy it was.”

“Cool. I use to want to be an architect, but I eventually gave it up. Every teacher ever told about that dream, told me to lower my standards. So eventually I gave it up.”

“Are you bad in math?” Kasey asked looking at him.

“No, I love math.”

“So, why did they tell you you couldn’t be an architect?”

“I dunno, my brothers didn’t graduate from high school. I think some of them thought I was like them.”

“That’s not fair. You and your brothers are different people.”

“Yeah, but my family has a reputation of being rough, thugs. I don’t think it matters if I am different.”

“So, what are you going to do when you finish school?”

“Probably go to technical school. Learn plumbing or electrical.”

“Why not go into construction? You can kinda work in architecture. My uncle is a contractor; he is always walking around with blueprints.”

“For real? You gotta go to college for that?”

“I don’t know. I don’t think my uncle went to college.”

“I’mma look into that.” Sean said sitting back in his chair thinking. “Preciate that girl. That might work.” He watched her work and asked a few questions for the next hour and a half.

Jerome walked out of the door of Venable High School. He had two books in his hand that Miss Huckabee bought for him to read over the summer. He also had a schedule from his counselor about review dates and the retake date for the science portion of the GHSGT. He had asked Dr. Scott if she could help him review for the test. She gave him the review packet to help him study for the test and wished him good luck. Jerome made

arrangements with Mr. Sengupta to help him once a week until the test. He hoped one-on-one that it would be easier to comprehend him.

Rasheed walked out of the building a bit sad. He had found out the day before that his friend Benard was going to have to do some time in jail, two to three years. The news had actually dampened his good news: his grandmother was happy with his grades and was letting him move in with her with the contingency that he would pass all his classes at his new school. His mentor had arranged for a summer program at Morehouse College which started in a week. He had a week to move in with his grandmother and get ready to live on a college campus. He was happy to leave Venable and the neighborhood. His fear was that he would never see his best friend again.

Tanisha stood at the curb waiting for Fernando to take her to work. Shenika bumped her from behind.

“How was your last exam?”

“It was okay. Art was actually cool. I hope I passed all of my classes.”

“Girl, you know you did.”

“I don’t know. I was struggling in math.” Tanisha said frowning.

“I thought Nando was helping you.”

“He did help, it was still hard. I just kept getting confused and frustrated. Math might keep me out of UGA. My grades need to be on point for that school.”

“Well, you did your best. If you don’t get into UGA you will get in somewhere else.”

“Yeah, I guess. I just wish I felt better about us going to school. That SAT is still bothering me. My score was so low.”

“Mine too, but we are going to study our butts off for it and take it again in the fall. We got this girl.” Shenika said bumping into her friend.

Postlude

The students, despite many of their teachers, had a good school year. The students managed to find different ways to get the help they needed in their classes and found teachers that they could reach out for help. Unfortunately, the help they found was not, in every instance, found in time and the result would be eventual failure for some of the students. Yet, if the personnel had made the efforts to help the students academically, many of the obstacles that the students had to endure could have been avoided. The structure of the school impaired the students from making any academic or social progress if they relied solely on their teachers and administrators. The teachers and the policy makers helped the school maintain a lower class of Blacks by not properly preparing them for state mandated exams that would determine if the students could graduate and by not preparing the students for life after high school.

CHAPTER FIVE

WHAT'S THE POINT IF YOU ARE BLACK AND POOR:

REFLECTION OF INQUIRY

In this chapter, I explore six findings that emerged from the study. (1) There was a lack of equality and equity for the students in resources and faculty. The students were not taught by the most qualified or caring teachers in the school system, nor were they presented with curricula that demanded rigor or discipline. (2) Many of the teachers and administrators in the school did not support their students academically; rather they became the oppressors of the students they were hired to inspire and empower. (3) Through assignments of personnel, the school system helped maintain the status quo by preserving a school that prepared students to fail. (4) Despite the efforts of some students to earn a good education and/or go to college, it was difficult or impossible for them to find the support they needed to reach their goals. (5) The neighborhood and the socioeconomic status of the students dictated how the students were treated and what they learned, which further eliminated their chances of obtaining academic success. (6) The majoritarian stories embraced by many of the teachers were not the narratives of their students. The counter stories of the disenfranchised students could have changed the landscape of the school and improved the chances for their success.

This is an inquiry into the tactics used to continue to disenfranchise and oppress students in a suburban Black school outside Atlanta, Georgia. Theoretically drawing on the works of critical race theory (Bell, 1992; Rousseau & Dixson, 2006; Douglass Horsford & Grosland, 2013; Decuir and Dixson, 2004), education of Blacks in the South (Morris and Monroe, 2004; Anderson 1988; Siddle-Walker, 1996; Siddle-Walker and

Snarey, 2004), race (Siddle-Walker and Tompkins, 2004; West, 2001; Steinberg and Kincheloe, 2007; Walker and Snarey, 2004), class (Kozol, 2000, 2005; Warikoo and Carter, 2009), urbanization (Anyon, 2005; Bullard & Thomas, 1989; Preston, H, 2006, Kozol, 2005) and commodification (Bowles & Gintis, 1926; Kozol, 1991, 2000, 2005), I explored how and why this Black suburban public school reduced opportunities for academic success students. I challenge the majoritarian narratives that claim that Black students in a low socioeconomic community do not seek rigor in high school or an education beyond high school (Zamudio, Russell, & Bridgeman, 2010; Love, 2010; Seay, 2013; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Vaught, 2011) and encourages teachers to perpetuate underachievement and oppression within the school.

Methodologically drawing from the works of counterstorytelling (Bell, 1987; 2005; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Vaught, 2011; Williams, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Delgado and Stefanic, 2001; DeCuir-Gunby & Walker-Devose, 2013) and fiction (He, 2003; Morrison, 1992; Delgado 1989; Tennial, 2008, Seay, 2013; Hurston, 1937; Bell, 2005) to tell the collected perspectives of six students in a Black suburban public school that experienced an education in a school that did not prepare them for life after high school. I created composite characters from interviews and conversations with the students to create a counterstory that provides insight to their experiences within the walls of their high school. These students were believed, by their teachers and administrators, to be unconscious to their lackluster education. It was this belief that prevented many of them from attending college. Yet, the students were aware that they needed more if they were to attend a college and university. Each student found a way to make up for their deficient education, but for most of them, it was too late. The stories

were interwoven to show the similar struggles that the students had, even though the teachers they were in contact may have varied. Using counterstories allowed me to tell the stories of students that were disenfranchised by the school system and school that was appointed to educate them (Vaught, 2011; Williams, 2004; Delgado, 1989; Love, 2010).

I used critical race theory to show how the policies and practices of the school mimicked those of an urban Black school, and how they affected the educational outcome of the students within the school. CRT exposes the issues of racism in education, and the affect this education based on race affects them. It shows how this belief works to maintain a subordinated class of Blacks regardless of the location of the school or the desire of the students. The students were aware that their school was not like the schools in the northern part of the county through conversations with other teenagers; they recognized that there was inequality in the resources available to them and the classes that were offered. CRT exposes the lack of equality that many Whites claim exist in education (Kane and Kyyro, 2001).

The students in the work of fiction were victims of a system designed to keep them in inferior positions in society. The school that their parents sent them to was part of a system that promoted self-degradation and complacency. Though the school was located within a suburban neighborhood, the racial and economic make-up of the community gave the teachers, the administrators, and school official's permission to continue to disenfranchise Black students. The administrators knew there were teachers that did not teach the designated curricula. They also knew that by not following the curricula that many students would flunk out of school because they could not pass the Georgia High School Graduation Test if they did not give up on school before the test.

The school condoned behavior that did not encourage success. Symbols of an urban setting like gangs were allowed to not only be present in the school, but to actually operate on school grounds. Two teachers were actually still active members of the gangs and arranged for the students to have access to the locker room for sexing girls into the gangs. Administrators turned a blind eye to gang members selling drugs on campus as well. Students were allowed to leave campus to go to the 'cutty house' to have sex or get high and were allowed to return to school if they wanted. If the 'cutty house' house was too far to walk, students could smoke or have sex in the bathrooms or behind the trailers. If students came to school high or drunk, an administrator would send the student back to class with the warning to never do it again. It got to the point for many teachers that they just learned to deal with the smell of marijuana or the drunken expressions of a 15 year old teenager.

There was only one assistant principal that demanded that students behave appropriately; he was demoted to a teacher because he suspended too many students. The school preferred to have a record of low suspension, which meant that students that were not willing to follow the rules of the school were allowed to attend and disrupt classes for those students that did want to learn. There were several instances when a student was caught cheating or turned in a plagiarized assignment, but if the parent complained the grade had to be changed to a passing grade which taught the students that effort was not necessary to pass a class. Mrs. Ansley serves as the composite character for most of the administrators in the school. Many would say that they cared about the students and they would say that they wanted the students to be successful but they would do things that were contrary to those words. Behind closed doors, they told me and a few

other teachers that I was close to, that we should not waste our time on many of our students because they were not going to leave their community (Bass & Gerstl-Pepin, 2010). It appeared that their belief dictated their behavior. Students were not required to be accountable; they could skip classes for an entire semester or not complete any work in a class, and receive a passing grade. What was important to many of the administrators was the data that was turned in for AYP. This meant data had to be changed at the end of the year. Students were dropped from the roll during the Georgia High School Graduation Test and End of Course tests, so that they would not count against the school. The students would be re-enrolled after testing, many times without the students knowing. The mantra for the administrators to the teachers was to do what needed to be done to keep their job. The concept of the students learning anything or moving beyond high school was the least of their concerns.

There were students that did not care about their education, but many did. These students did their work and participated in after school activities. They managed to balance difficulties at home and the frustration of not receiving academic support in some of their classes. Some students were doing this because they believed that was the expectation of their family members, others because they had their own personal goals. Others worked hard and participated in after school activities because at some point in their lives, they decided they wanted to go to college and they heard that they needed good grades on their transcripts and activities and clubs listed on their college applications. Yet, they found that they did not have the proper resources or teachers to help them reach their goals. Many of the students had friends or relatives in other schools and knew that there was a difference in what was offered to them and what their friends

and family had in their schools. Tanisha's boyfriend attended a school in the northern part of the county, and she was shocked at times at what he had available to him. Her school had only one computer lab, and his school had several labs. Other students knew that their school did not offer the same types of classes that their friends and family had in the northern part of the county. To many, the biggest difference was the quality of teacher that the students at Venable had available to them. They knew that other schools had teachers that worked with students before and after school. Through conversations, they knew that there were teachers who loved teaching their classes and offered a range of activities to help the students master new concepts.

Some of the students questioned their teachers as to why there was a difference in the offerings of teachers and courses. They knew that the opportunities for education that they were receiving, were not equal to other students at other schools (**Finding 1**). Some teachers, like Mr. Napier, told them that it was because they did not deserve good teachers and special classes. Others teachers just ignored responding at all. But, the students would respond with something they had learned in their short lives, "cause we Black". They recognized from being called 'damn niggas' to their face that some teachers did not think that they were entitled to a good education or respect as an individual. Students did not embrace their teachers' belief and tried to prove that they were not the stereotype that was constantly thrown on them. These did their best without having text books or proper equipment for labs. They learned how to write papers without having access to the internet or computers. They took advantage of their friends and family members that had resources that they did not have. Granted, this was not all the students. Some had embraced the stereotypes associated with the school and the community; they

joined gangs, did drugs on campus and did not make any attempts to complete class assignments. Yet, others knew that those stereotypes did not reflect who they were or what they wanted to be. Many of those students wanted to go to different schools to disassociate themselves with the negative stereotypes. Others chose to complain to their administrators, only to be told that the better teachers they wanted or different classes they requested were not available to them.

Students had to accept that they would not receive the same opportunities of other students in their county because they lived in the wrong neighborhood, and because they were Black. They had to accept teachers that did not care for them, teachers that were not good at teaching, and teachers that did not want to teach (Warikoo & Carter, 2009). They settled for teachers that were sent to the school for previous improprieties because the school system did not want to terminate them, or because the system could not terminate them. The athletes had to visit schools with state of the art facilities, and play against teams that had new uniforms while they played in outdated facilities and uniforms.

The irony of the beliefs of many of the teachers is that they were Black and many were first generation college graduates. Yet, rather than helping students reach the same goals they had achieved, they told the students that “I got mine; now you get yours”, however, they did not offer the support or instruction they needed to “get theirs”. Instead, they gave them seat work, allowed the students to play cards or watch movies, or allowed the students to leave class at their leisure. These were the teachers that gave all of their students ‘A’s or changed grades, without reservation, at the request of an administrator. The teachers refused to help students that asked for help if they were not one of their preferred students (McMillan) or because they simply did not want to help the students

pass their classes or learn the material that they were required to know. Unfortunately, many of these teachers taught core classes, which meant that the students would not do well on the GHSGT or the ECOT. This, in turn, meant that the students would not graduate with their class, if they graduated at all.

The many of the Black teachers were the teachers that were doing the least for their students. They called their students niggers to their face when addressing them and they told their students that they were not going to be successful in high school and in life. These teachers had internalized the ideas of some whites about Black teenagers being thugs and not caring about their education, and were actually helping to perpetuate the ideas by the way they conducted their classes and interacted with their students. These teachers had taken the positions of what Ogbu, (1983) referred to as ‘uncle tomming’. In order to maintain their status and comfortable income, they were undermining the academic progress of their students as a way to be submissive with the school system that employed them. They believed that maintaining the status quo was more important than helping their Black students make strides in opportunities for social mobility. They became the oppressors of their Black students, instead of helping to liberate them from the school system that was oppressing them (Freire, 2001). These teachers, that understood how it felt to want to remove themselves from an oppressive environment, chose to ignore the frustration they experienced to keep their own students from finding success (**Finding 2**). Their pay check and job security was worth more than the future of their race and community.

Teachers like Dr. Scott and Mr. Napier were first generation college graduates; Mr. Napier with the help of the GI Bill, and Dr. Scott with a partial scholarship to a

historical Black college. The two were known to sit in the teachers' lounge and reminisce about how hard their lives were when they were younger, and how luck or friends and family helped them move out of their stagnant communities so they could earn a college education. Despite their history, they did not want to help the next generation make the same strides they made. They based their decision not to help their students on the fact that they were, in the words of Mr. Napier, "no good niggas". These two teachers lived in nice homes and, with the help of their spouses, were able to send their children to private schools and colleges or universities. They looked at the values of their students, (clothes and shoes), they looked at their students' immediate community, and they looked at their families and determined that their students were not worthy of the same opportunities that they were given. Teachers like this taught students to want something for nothing.

Bringing an organized notebook to class everyday earned students an 'A' in biology, it did not matter if the students knew the parts of the cell or the steps of photosynthesis. Not bothering the teacher while she worked on her graduate degree, earned other students an 'A' in computer science. These teachers taught the students to not ask questions and seek help. They discouraged questions while they were lecturing. They discouraged students asking for help after school. Yet, these same teachers were the first to say that the students were lazy and incapable of learning anything. These teachers taught their students not to care. They allowed their students to come into class late, sleep in class, or play cards instead of completing assignments. These teachers taught students that there were no consequences for bad decisions or breaking the rules. Students were allowed to disrespect one another, fight and come to class under the influence of a narcotic or alcohol.

There were other teachers that resented they were assigned to Venable High, and took their resentment out on the students by not teaching. Mr. Holliford, one of the only white teachers in the novella, made no effort to teach his students. He was waiting to retire, and did not want to start over in a new school. He was curt and annoyed when students asked questions and made no effort to make sure the students understood the material he covered. Mrs. Lightfoot was more concerned with advancing her own career, and chose not to teach the students that were assigned to her. Instead of teaching the students how to use computers or design programs, she opted to let the students go against the rules of the school and play cards and/or watch 'R' rated movies while she worked. She was not concerned that the students that passed through her classroom would not be competent in basic computer skills, nor that the lack of these skills would hinder their chances of earning or maintaining decent wage jobs. Neither teacher worried about how their lack of teaching may affect their students' opportunities to graduate from high school or how it might affect them beyond the walls of the school. Bianca was evidence of the teachers' lack of concern, "...I have talked to some of my friends that went off to college and they are not doing so great because they did not have to do much reading and writing while they were here. Hopefully it will be different for my sister." She hoped that the teachers that had failed her, eliminating her chances of passing the graduation test and graduating, would have changed their ways for the students that followed her. Students that graduated from the school may be seen as incompetent, once they left school, but many of the teachers did not acknowledge, did not recognize or did not care about the part they played in maintaining or creating incompetent young adults.

The administrators also did a disservice to the students. Instead of ensuring that their students were receiving the best education they could, they concerned themselves with making sure that the parents were happy. They fostered a culture within the school by promoting indolence and supported maintaining the social and economic hierarchy (Warikoo & Carter, 2009). The grade change that Cassidy was required to make at the request of the assistant principal was not unusual. It was common knowledge to the students that if they wanted a grade changed all they needed to do was have a parent come to the school and complain, or make a threat to call the board of education. This knowledge did not inspire students to work hard or study for exams. Instead, the leaders of the school, through their actions taught the students to believe that they could do nothing, and earn whatever grade they wanted without working to earn it. Rasheed was making efforts to change his future. However, he recognized that, despite his efforts, he did not have the support of many of his teachers when he stated, “They don’t care if we learn anything.” Other administrators were caught up in the lifestyle of their students, and condone gang activity and violence on campus. The fight that was overlooked by an administrator and the teachers was typical behavior. Students planned to fight on campus because they knew that they would not be punished. Additionally, students that came to school under the influence of alcohol or drugs were allowed to stay in class. They were not reprimanded which condone the use of both within the school. Counselors placed students in classes they had already taken and passed, and refuse to move them until the end of the semester. This caused several students to either graduate late or encouraged them to drop out because they did not see the end of the schooling in their near future. The counselor’s only scheduled to meet with students once a year. They would meet with

seniors and freshman in the fall, and sophomores and juniors in the spring. This arrangement left many students discombobulated when they discovered that they were not really classified as juniors, or that they would need an additional semester or two to graduate. The counselors discouraged students from dropping into the counselor office to have talks or ask questions. Other than the annual visit with the counselors, students only saw their counselor if there was a referral sent by teachers. Students could not access their counselors for advice or counseling on their own. This lack of contact with the counselors left students that were trying to graduate from school to figure the steps and requirements on their own. The problem with this approach was that many were clueless as to what they really needed. Some thought just passing classes with 'C's was enough to get into the college of their choice. Other students had to seek help from other sources, all of which were not reliable, to figure out what they had to do to apply to college. Those that were not pursuing college degrees had to base their future careers on what they saw in their community. Most wanted to be mechanics or beauticians. They were not aware that there were other certificates they could earn at technical schools, or that they needed to be able to pass a basic math and language arts class to get their certification.

The culmination of these three different groups of adults impacted how the students saw themselves and dictated their actions and inactions. By the time the students had reached high school, they had come into contact with several other versions of the same type of adults and they have started to believe that school is not for them, or they have become comfortable with not actually working in class to earn a grade. Their middle school teachers were carbon copies of many of the teachers they experienced in high school. In turn, the teachers, administrators and counselors, expect, without knowing their

students that their students, do not care about learning and advancing beyond a high school education.

The behavior of the students was not the only component to this design of failure. The lack of strong and rigorous curricula not only lessened chances of failing the state mandated exams, but it did not help students that completed high school find success in college (**Finding 3**). Advance level classes did not mean the students were smart or even college material. Advance level classes mean the student was not a discipline issue or their parents demanded they be placed in the higher level classes. There were several students that could not write a complete essay without fragments and run-on sentences. The valedictorian of the senior class was not able to compose a coherent speech for graduation, but she received all A's in her language art classes. Because students like her were labeled as advance, they believed that they were truly smart and capable of getting into college and receive multiple degrees. The valedictorian and salutatorian both flunked out of a four-year college by the end of their freshman year. The valedictorian flunked out of a community college as well. This failure was the result in an inflated sense of intelligence and the fact that the students had experienced years of getting away with teachers overlooking cheating gave some students a false sense of security. Tanisha echoed the frustration of many of the students that were working hard on their grades in a conversation with Shenika regarding the valedictorian, "I know I won't be valedictorian or salutatorian, but I want it to be fair. I can't believe she cheated her way through school and now she is walking around like she earned it." Situations like this frustrated students that cared about their grades and their futures, but it also motivated them to work harder.

Part of this failure to find success in college was due to the watered-down curricula allowed by many teachers. Like many urban Black schools, the classes were executed in a way that would encourage student success (Kozol, 1991, 2005; Anyon, 2005). Students did not have the supplies they needed to complete basic science experiments. The home economic classes were discouraged from cooking more than twice a semester. Most students did not have the opportunity to use the one computer lab in the building. If they did go to the lab, there was no guarantee that there would be enough working computers for all of the class to use. Teachers were discouraged from giving homework because the students could not or would not complete the assignments. Teachers were encouraged to only cover the bare minimum in classes because the students were ‘not going to do anything with their lives’ (Kozol, 2005; Anyon, 2005). Many teachers appreciated this belief because they were not required to do anything or modify anything. Dr. Scott was an example of this practice. While she thought it was important that her sons and grandchildren received a good education, she did not believe the students that she was charged with deserved to have the same good education. Some of this may have been because of her personal beliefs about the neighborhood her students lived in, or because they did not have a lot of money. But, Dr. Scott was not alone in her way of thinking; the climate of the school nurture the belief of mediocrity through the curriculum offered and the teachers that were assigned to teach many of the students (Anyon, 2005). Delpit (2005), points out students that are not taught to be critical thinkers becomes “the trainable low-level functionary of the dominant society, simply the grease that keeps the institutions which orchestrate his or her oppression running smoothly.” (19) Dr. Scott, through her lack of teaching and instruction, insured

that her students were limited to a state of oppression. Not only did Dr. Scott and other teachers not share their own knowledge to empower their students, but by not providing students with the proper materials, they denied their students the opportunity to learn on their own.

Teachers were discouraged from deviating from the prescribed curriculum. Though the school had other resources and supplemental materials to enhance and enrich classes, the department chairs did not prompt any deviation from the curriculum. If the curriculum allotted two days to cover a concept, the teachers were expected to spend two days on the concept, and then move on to the next concept. The problem with this was that a large portion of the class could be, and many times were, left behind to figure out what they did not understand. Delpit, (1995) has pointed out that the best way to teach students is to make what they are learning relatable. Teaching literature to an all-Black class with an African-American literature book could have helped the students connect to the literature, and see another type of Black American. Instead of enhancing their students' knowledge of their own culture and help them garner the skills necessary to pass their literature class, the books that could have changed the outlook of the students regarding their education, the resources were collecting dust in the book room.

Aside from the teachers, the physical school was more like an urban school than a school one would expect to find in a suburban neighborhood. The students had to dodge water dripping from the ceiling while passing classes. Students and teachers were forced to sit in classrooms without air conditioner or heat. Many of the students did not have pride in their school because they recognized that there was not much to be proud of (Kozol, 2005; Rousseau, & Dixson, 2006). The financial allotment for extra-curricular

activities was minimal, which meant students had to pay an enormous amount to participate or the amount of activities provided were limited.

Students that wanted to find success at Venable had to find teachers that were willing to help them even if they were not their student. Many students recognized that there were more teachers that did not care about their students' lives beyond high school; those students that were serious about college had to find and build relationships with the few teachers they believed did care about them (**Finding 4**). Miss McMillan only helped the male students in her class. Several of the girls that wanted to pass the class or pass the GHSGT had to seek help from other teachers before or after school because, as Miss McMillan stated, "I don't have time to help you." Dr. Scott was fully aware that the principals were not going to fire her for not teaching students the information needed to pass the GHSGT, nor have basic knowledge of physical science and biology. Even though she knew she had students that were not familiar with studying on their own, she expected them to study the notebook she check periodically. Usually, by the end of the first semester, she would send her students out of the room to 'make-up' work in other classes or to hang out with other teachers. If her entire class was 'out' she would go to the teacher's lounge and brag about her children and grandchildren. Initially, students loved her and her class until they realized their junior year that they were not prepared to take the GHSGT, which meant that they might not graduate. Kasey recognized the importance of learning what Dr. Scott was not teaching and prepared herself for the test. Unfortunately, some of the students took advantage of Dr. Scotts lack of teaching and paid for it on the day of the GHSGT science test.

Ms. Hayes, showed through scheduling of sharing information that she did not expect many of her students to attend college. The counselor waited until late in the spring semester to share vital information about college entrance requirements to their juniors. Once the information was shared, students had to complete the complicated SAT registration and FASFA forms on their own. Either their counselors felt that providing oral information in thirty minutes was all their students needed, or the counselors did not want to make the time to help their students apply to college.

Many teachers were very open about how they felt about their students. It could be heard in their comments and seen in how they taught. Many teachers justified their actions on the community (**Finding 5**). They did not believe it was worth their time to educate students that lived in smaller, less expensive homes. They believed that their students were going to follow in the footsteps of their parents, and work in blue collar fields. Mr. Napier tried to convince Cassidy of this when he explained, “these kids are going to be here doing nothing for the rest of their lives. If they haven’t given up, give them time; they will.” Most of the students lived in homes that their parents’ owned, but to the teachers, that lived in nicer neighborhoods, in bigger homes, did not believe the students valued their homes, community or their education. This was also seen in how the school district distributed funds. Additionally, the school did not receive the necessary resources, for core classes. Many classes were conducted with just one class set of books. This meant that students could not take books home to study or to complete assignments. This lack of books limited what teachers could cover in class because students had to take part of the class to complete book assignments. When teachers questioned the lack of

resources the response echoed Mr. Napier, “they aint gonna do nothing with the books, you just wasting your time giving them books.”

Mr. Napier was the strongest advocate of the majoritarian stories. His conversations with Cassidy, a first year teacher, could have changed how she saw her students and how she taught them. He referred to the students as “hoodlums” and “knuckleheads that don’t give a damn.” If Cassidy had taken Mr. Napier’s comments without getting to know her students, the comments could have determined what she expected from her students and how she taught them. The school had preconceived ideas regarding what the students wanted and how hard the students were willing to work to reach their goals. Administrators and teachers had internalized majoritarian stories they heard and read in their teacher training or from meetings and conversations within the school. **(Finding 6)** Very few student voices were heard within the walls of the school. Many teachers dismissed their students when they told them that they had dreams of becoming an engineer or working in forensic science. They dismissed their students when they asked for additional help or wanted more work. These teachers believed that their Black students were the embodiment of all the negative words written and uttered about Black students, and they refused to help their students change the commentary (Delgado & Villapando, 2002; Love, 2010). But, if the teachers had listened, they would have learned that their students were determined to do better than their parents. Many of the students not only wanted to go to college, but they were doing everything they knew to do to make sure they did go to college. They would have learned that their students had many personal issues and obstacle that they privately worked around while maintaining good grades. The teachers would have learned that their students were aware that the

odds were stacked against them, but they did not let it discourage them (Vaught, 2011; Williams, 2004). The students had to quietly fight for opportunities for triumph while their teachers loudly told them that those same students would never become any more than their community represented.

Students who really wanted to go to college had to figure out how to make it happen on their own. They had to talk to friends from other schools that offered college night. These were informational sessions for students and parents that explained the process for applying to colleges and universities. There were tutorials explaining how to write the entrance exams and how to fill out the FASFA forms. Students at Venable High that wanted to go to college had to ask around and find friends or family members that may have gone to college for assistance. College night was not offered to them; students were not informed when countywide college nights were offered at the local malls. Few colleges came to visit the school. What was always present was every branch of the Armed Forces. The presence of the Armed Forces became so consistent that many students believed that their only option after high school was serving. Those that wanted to go to college found teachers that had supported them in classes for assistance and not their counselors.

Venable and schools like it mirror those of urban minority schools. The schools are ill-equipped and the curriculum is not demanding. The students that have the fewest advantages have teachers assigned to them that offer the fewest opportunities for a good education. Many of their teachers do not believe in their students, and many do not care what happens to them beyond their class. Instead of lifting the students up with encouragement, these teachers have settled into a stagnant place of apathy. This apathy

passes on to students that, at one point, believed they were capable of being good students and graduating from high school and college. Many of their teachers, over the course of four or five years, have negatively influenced their students to strive for less, and to not believe that their presence, socio-economic status, or race warrant a quality education. This is not the education that the students want or deserve. It was what others wanted to give them because of their race and their neighborhood. It was not fair to the students or the community because instead of giving the students a chance, it continued a state of Black oppression which was contradictory to the wants of the community and students.

EPILOGUE

Tanisha, Shenika, Jerome, and Kasey graduated from Venable High School.

Tanisha graduated with a 3.2 GPA. She took the SAT three times but her score was never high enough for her to get into the University of Georgia. She took several odd jobs before becoming a stripper at one of the high class gentlemen's clubs in Atlanta. She took classes off and on for several years at a local junior college with the hopes of getting into a four-year college. She became disheartened when she was forced to leave the junior college because she had depleted all of her attempts for Math 97, a remedial math class. Shenika was accepted into a four-year university in southern Georgia. She completed three years before dropping out because she could not handle the pressure and rigor of her major classes. She went to a junior college and earned her associate degree as an early-childhood teacher. Jerome entered the same junior college as Tanisha. He dropped out after his second semester after failing to pass the three learning support classes he was required to take. He took a job at a warehouse after working at a few fast food restaurants and eventually joined the army. He gave up on going to college. Kasey was the only of the students profiled to complete college. She received her Bachelors of Science in Aerospace Engineering. She took a job with GE after interning with them and NASA. She is currently working on her Masters in the same field, and working for a major engineering company. Rasheed, the only student that did not graduate from Venable, graduated from the school in his grandmother's neighborhood. Despite his low grades at Venable, he performed well in his new environment. Yet, despite all of his efforts, he could not improve his GPA enough to get into a four-year college. He attended

a junior college and received his associate degree in Criminal Justice. He is currently working as a security guard at the CDC.

A few years after the students graduated, the school received its fourth principal in nine years. The new principal channeled the principal, Joe Louis Clark, from the 1989 film *Lean on me*. He took one semester to familiarize himself with the teachers before he made changes. Dr. Scott was transferred to a new school two years before she planned to retire. Mr. Holiford chose to retire a year early to avoid a transfer. Ms. McMillan, who had already reached the required thirty years, was forced to retire. Mr. Sengupta found a job in his field, and left the teaching profession permanently after completing a year and a half at Venable.

Venable has not changed much over the years. It is still considered the worst school in the school district. The school has a new principal, but much is the same in regards to the education of the students that populate the school. The reputation of the school has prompted many students to find alternative schooling as a way to avoid attending Venable High. The school was ‘remodeled’ a few years ago, but the leaks in the roof are still present. The school is still known for low test scores, a low graduation rate and a high drop-out rate. Though the teachers and administrators have changed in name, the school is very much the same.

I entered this research to explore the issues of inequality of education in my county. My first few years of teaching in public school shocked and disappointed me. Through this exploration, I have realized that the students were not at fault for their failures in school. The system was responsible for providing them with the tools they needed to be successful and productive citizens. Unfortunately, there were more adults in

the school that did *not* believe in them than did. Many of the students I encountered had fallen victim to the beliefs of the school and school system that the color of their skin and their community meant that they were not worthy or capable of a good education. Most of them never saw the inside of a junior college or a four year university. This knowledge frustrates and disheartens me.

The voices of students in Black schools are often dismissed and overshadowed by the voices of those who do not know them or their dreams. One-sided research and archaic beliefs have dictated how many Black students are regarded and destroyed the future for students who at one time had a dream to do more and become more than their family or their community. Many of these students would welcome the opportunity for someone to truly sit down and listen to what they want, and most want someone to help them find a way to reach their dreams. In schools like Venable there needs to a modification in the way the teachers approach and view their students. Many of the teachers at Venable did not care about the educational outcome of their students. A major characteristic of an effective teacher is a teacher that cares about her students. Teachers should want a positive outcome for their students' educations regardless of their students' races or home addresses. Teachers should get to know their students and not assume that stereotypes about their students are accurate. By basing their interaction with their students on stereotypes, the teachers do not allow themselves to have a true and effective relationship with their students. Teachers in low income or predominately minority schools should be required to take an inventory of their own bias towards their students and have discussions on how those bias hurt the students and the school in the

long term. Many of the issues at Venable existed because of personal baggage that the teachers brought to the classroom and not issues that the students brought to the teachers.

The biggest issue that the school needs is to acknowledge that a structure of power exist power without a good education and cultural capital. Many of the teachers believed that they had ascended the social ladder and were better than their students; they did not believe that their students had the capabilities to benefit from social mobility. They did not recognize that they were helping to perpetuate those structures by maintaining a lower class. This lack of acknowledgement curtails any progress that the teachers had made personally. Black schools need to study the behavior and beliefs of the teachers that worked in Black schools prior to integration to witness the care and respect that was the foundation of the students' education. and Black students in Black schools, urban or suburban, are not privileged to that I learned that despite the negativity that my students experienced, many found a way to try to find their way on their own. Though I know this is worthy, I wish that there were more than just a few students that fought against their school and proved to the faculty that they did care. I hope the voices of these students, though they all did not find success, can shed light on what many Black students want and expect from their public education. My mother often spoke of the racism she experienced in rural Alabama because she was Black. She told me how the books that her one room school inherited were filled with derogatory words like 'nigger'. She worked hard to send her children to schools that would allow her children to receive an education based on their merits, and not the color of their skin. It pleased her to know that her dreams for her children to go to college were possible. She would have been disappointed to know that the education her children received was not the education that

many Black kids in the surrounding communities mirrored that of her childhood. Racism and class dominated how students were taught, and dictated their futures.

Critical race theory acknowledges that racism is part of the fabric of America. Racism dominates who has opportunities to be successful and in many cases, happy. The voices of the underprivileged and disenfranchised need to be heard. The experiences of my students at their high school should have been different. They should have been surrounded by teachers that believed in them. They should have been surrounded by adults that had their best interests in mind. The adults should have wanted to know what their students wanted to get from school instead of guessing. The students should have had a voice in their future. The students should have had the opportunity to a variety of classes and resources to help them meet their dreams beyond high school. Instead their voices were silenced and their dreams were disregarded. My ancestors died, fought and marched for their descendants to have the opportunity to dream without hindrance, and to excel based on merit alone to be the reason for success. I still question why so many Black teachers turned their back on their own race even though they had witnessed and experienced a life without support or hope. I hope that the voices of my students will cause others to reassess their beliefs about Black students, and their potential to be successful in school and in life.

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