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ABSTRACT

SPEAKING HIS MIND: COUNTERSTORIES ON RACE, SCHOOLING, AND THE
ALIENATION OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES

by Adonica Aria Jones-Parks

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the counterstories of African-American males who have dropped out of school and record their experiences in their own voice of how their schooling impacted their current life circumstances. The emergent themes from their stories support the literature that four factors contribute to Black males' dropping out of school: 1) negative teacher and administration perception of Black males; 2) labeling and sorting through the use of special education and academic tracking; 3) resistance to schooling due to the insidious practices taking place in schools; and 4) alienation from schooling because of racist, oppressive practices. This study found that the overall story of African-American males in their schooling experiences is one of absence of caring from teachers, administration, and the school system.

SPEAKING HIS MIND: COUNTERSTORIES ON RACE, SCHOOLING, AND THE
ALIENATION OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES

A DISSERTATION

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This dissertation is dedicated to

*my mother Annie M. Carter Tillman and my spouse
Anthony L. Parks for their unconditional love
and unwavering support of my dreams*

and

*the African-American male youth and men everywhere
who are struggling to find who they are-their "true" selves
so that they can visualize and actualize their dreams and tell
their own stories of struggle, survival, and renaissance.*

In memory of

*the Africans who were brought involuntarily to the shores of
America, enslaved, suffered through brutal and dehumanizing
North American slavery, and died so that African-Americans
may live. We must not forget!*

and

*Soror Erica J. Holloman, Doctoral Candidate
University of Louisville
Sunrise, 1.22.76
Sunset, 6.15.11*

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My Story

"The Past is Prologue."
-Building of the National Archives, Washington, D.C.

The aforementioned quote on the Building of the National Archives and paraphrased by Vice-president Joe Biden in a debate prior to the historic election of our nation's first African-American president struck a place in me because I translate it to mean that the past is the basis of our current reality. It is my past experiences as a novice teacher who moved to veteran status in teaching and now serving as a veteran administrator that serves as my current reality in urban education and scholarship on the doctoral level. My time in the field has actually yielded more questions than answers about the American educational system--why do academic, social, and economic disparities exist among some groups of students, what can be done to save the children who are facing educational malpractice on a daily basis, and how did this happen?

Therefore, my 'veteran' status in the field of education is somewhat of a misnomer because I don't have all the answers and each year, new challenges emerge and the established challenges are rarely corrected. Each year, in my mind I revert to the 'novice' status. It is a chaotic cycle and if the adults who are supposed to have the answers to the questions plaguing the schooling of young people are baffled, imagine the disconcertion students feel in many of America's school settings. As I progressed in my career I felt that something was terribly wrong and these feelings were so profound and troubling that I decided to go on a quest to find out what was wrong, why policies and practices are so disparate, unjust, and criminal in America's educational system, who was being adversely affected the greatest, and could public education be saved--can the students be saved?

I have been a teacher and administrator for over fifteen years in a public school district that serves approximately 80 percent African-American students and approximately 60 percent of the total student population is considered economically disadvantaged, meaning this demographic receives free/reduced lunch and are considered impoverished by federal guidelines. My first teaching assignment was in the true inner

city, a school that sat in the heart of several housing projects. As an African-American woman coming from a middle class, I thought I had a plan for teaching English. However, nothing can prepare a teacher, even one who looks like the students she is serving, for the realities of poverty, crime, drug abuse, mis-education, hopelessness, and familial dysfunction on the high end of the dysfunctional continuum. I realized quickly that I could not change the students to fit my skill sets, knowledge, background and experiences, and perceptions; instead, I had to adapt to meet them where they were and still endeavor to teach them so they can ascend above and beyond their circumstances.

When I entered administration as a high school assistant principal in 2003, I was assigned to a magnet grade 4-12 school where performing arts were the focus. While the student population of this school was diverse racially, culturally, and socio-economically, African-American males were not significantly represented. After a year at this selective school, I was non-renewed but through Divine intervention, I was able to return to my administrative position and was assigned to a high school in the midst of redesign. I left a magnet school that sat in the heart of an impoverished area of downtown to a school that was not located in the inner city but had the characteristics of the inner city school. It was if I had been transported back to my first teaching assignment downtown. There was nothing diverse about this school-it was 99 percent African-American and had slightly more than 50 percent male students. The special education population was significant, at 30 percent or higher. Because of the lack of success of this school, a committee and the district believed that redesigning the school with a sizeable grant from the Gates Foundation would help improve the dismal graduation rate, drop out rate, and discipline issues, while providing students some skills that would earn them viable employment and college opportunities post-high school. This high school would be for Grades 9 through 12 and would include three vocational technical academies that would prepare students for careers in these fields. Yes, vocation education was back, but with somewhat of a twist: there was a significant technological component attached to each program that would provide students with cutting edge training on computers in the context of academic and vocational experiences.

When I arrived and joined a very progressive-thinking African-American male principal, Grade 10 was being added. It was my understanding that the initial year for the

new high school was difficult; the principal left after the first year, gangs were rampant in the school that only had 200 students, and the students did not have books. Additionally, the building could not accommodate electrically the new technology being installed. There was a positive note: a new building was being constructed that would provide the technical resources and state-of-the-art labs for the career technical programs. Always cautious about 'new' programs, I remained hopeful that the students would get what they needed academically to become economically independent and attend college.

Before the students arrived for the 2004-05 school year, the principal said, "I am telling you now, it's going to be off the hook for a while." Translation: we had to get control of the discipline and create a culture and climate that would allow some work to get done. He was not distorting the truth; if I were to tell people some of the things we experienced, they would think we were bearing false witness. Fighting, especially among girls, gang activity that had come into the school from the 'hood, poverty, homelessness, and other pathologies: you name it, we had it. In retrospect, everything starts in the 'hood and climaxes in the school setting and we have to attempt to maintain a safe environment. As we worked diligently to change culture and climate, curriculum and instruction was also a priority. I remember the principal and I spending long hours, leaving at 8 p.m. sometimes, evaluating ourselves and the school's situation, discussing pedagogy that would work for our particular school, and trying to figure out how to bring success to a mass number of students who have not experienced success, in school or in life. Change in culture and climate was more than getting discipline under control and incidents of negative behavior minimized; it was making students the focus of our work, motivating and supporting staff who were committed, and providing opportunities for students to embrace success in their studies and in school-related activities. Effective teaching, curricula that engaged the students, creating a safe place for students, and co-curricular activities available to students to keep them off the streets were also priorities.

In a school that was 99 percent African-American and 50 percent African-American male, of course more Blacks are going to be suspended/expelled and more will be in special education classes because of the homogeneity. But did this have to be? Why are so many Black males being suspended or expelled? Why are more African-American males sitting in self-contained special education classes and have Individual Education

Progams (IEPs) than any other demographic regardless of the population of the school? Why are African-American males referred to the office for disciplinary issues in disproportionate numbers? Why are these students failing classes and not attending school, which is the pre-cursor to dropping out of high school? Four years later and in a new building, the same issues still persist. The school has approximately 35 percent of its students identified as special education. We are still losing Black young men to the streets and to death, few are graduating and going to college, a significant number of them are in special education classes, and they are still being referred and suspended disproportionately more than other groups. More than a few African-American males already have had contact with the legal system and have probation officers and juvenile records. Sadly, these issues are the norm across the country in most of America's schools--suburban, urban, inner city urban, and rural.

Had I not been assigned to this school and became conscious of these disturbing trends, I am not sure I would be sitting in a doctoral program seeking answers to these very questions. When I began questioning these phenomena, it was not acceptable to me to simply blame African-American males' issues on them, their families, their choices, and friends, and on poverty. While these are all significant pieces to the lack of schooling African-American males are receiving, there is something larger looming over the state of African-American males failure to thrive in America's schools. They are not committing suicide academically; African-American males are being destroyed by what I call *academic homicide*. And it is America's burden to bear because when I began examining these issues, they definitely were not unique to my school; it was and continues to be nationwide situation of epidemic and genocidal proportions. How can the same inflictions face the same group of people through out the nation's schools and little, if anything, is being done to avert a tragedy already in progress?

It is these very questions that have ignited my passion to seek answers and save as many African-American males as possible because a race of people depends on it. When I interviewed for the doctoral program at Miami University, I articulated my concerns about the crises facing African-American males and the need for something powerful, radical, and progressive to re-direct this potential *educational genocide* of Black males; six years later, this crises still drives me, fueling my desire to use my scholarly and social

activism to help them save themselves from mis-education, cultural starvation, mental slavery, and hopelessness so that they grow up to be the men their African heritage prepared them to be.

CHAPTER 1

"We have to do with the past only as we can make it useful to the present and the future."

-Frederick Douglass

Problem Statement

Historical Background

The United States has experienced an event that few expected to see considering that this country's government only 146 years ago ended one of the most horrific acts of dehumanization in history, North American slavery, ended the desegregation of schools fifty-four years ago, and gave African-American citizens the right to vote only forty-three years ago: the election of the first African-American US president, President Barack Obama. It would seem that the Black community's struggle can lighten as African-Americans are beginning to believe in Dr. King's statement that "we shall overcome."

As the past meets the present and propels the nation forward, the dilemma remains as to how to improve the American education system and close the achievement gap between White and African-American students after the Supreme Court ruled that school systems were legally operating a two-tier system of education that was inherently separate and unequal, thus overturning the practice (Black Issues in Higher Education, 2004; Patterson, 2001). Despite the noble intentions of this historic ruling, African-American students in public schools in most urban areas are currently segregated and are exposed to unjust and racist practices (Bell, 2004; Kharem, 2006; Kunjufu, 2002; Olgetree, 2004).

As a result, there is significant and disturbing evidence that the American education system, which was designed to school the masses, has created a system that marginalized African-American students and continues to do so currently. African-American males in particular have never been supported academically, culturally, and socially by this system, and as a result are often alienated and excluded from school and subsequently, excluded from society.

To maintain a social hierarchy rooted in White supremacist ideology, racism became and remains the foundation of every social institution in America, and public education serves as the primary agent for whites to maintain their dominance while controlling the masses of African-American people through indoctrination and miseducation (Kharem, 2006). Woodson (1990) states, "When you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his "proper place" and will stay in it" (p. xi). Mainstream school administration discourse continues to preserve White cultural dominance in schools through exclusionary acts which silence African-American voices and maintain their subordinate status.

When the Civil War ended and African-Americans were released from slavery, for a period of time there was a concerted effort to transition freed Blacks into society, and education was one of the tools employed to indoctrinate Blacks into the dominant White society (Watkins, 2001). Slavery created enormous wealth for the South and once slavery ended, the industrialized North exploded. In the South, sharecropping replaced chattel slavery and White planters had no intentions of altering the social order of the South. However, former slaves desired literacy and pushed for universal schooling that would be state-enforced. African-Americans sought support from the Freedmen's Bureau, Republican politicians, and northern missionary organizations to receive a state-sponsored education. This movement, however, was not agreeable to Southern landowners who believed that funding universal schooling would upset the social order and give Blacks political, social, and economic power (Anderson, 1988). African-Americans desired control over their education because the "values of self-help and self-determination underlay the ex-slaves' educational movement" (p.5). Equally important was that this struggle represented their expression of freedom and these characteristics fueled their efforts in educating themselves.

When northern missionaries arrived in the South, they expected the former slaves to be barbaric and uncivilized, and their work would include teaching them how to act in a civilized society. However, when they arrived, they found that Blacks had established their own schools with Black teachers and were vehemently opposed to White Northern control over their education. One illustration of this self-reliance was the efforts of

Georgia's ex-slaves, who formed a committee of Black leaders to meet with the Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton and General William T. Sherman to garner support for the education of freed Blacks. From this conference, a plan emerged that would establish an organized system of free schools for ex-slaves, Anderson states, "In 1865 Afro-American leaders formed the Georgia Educational Association to supervise schools in districts throughout the state, to establish school policies, and to raise funds to help finance the cost of education" (p. 11). As a result of this association, African-Americans maintained full or partial operation of over two-thirds of their schools, owned fifty-seven buildings, and fully or partially financed ninety-six of 123 day and evening schools. Another effort to maintain Black self-reliance for their education was the formation of Sabbath schools, which were church-sponsored schools that operated in the evenings and on weekends. These schools were predominantly supported by the Black community and had an all-Black teaching staff. Contrary to what mainstream historians may articulate, former slaves' efforts in the school movement extended beyond their need to control their educational destiny; they were, in essence, trailblazers in the creation of universal, state constitutional public education in the South.

The freedmen's progressive efforts in the educational movement were met with significant resistance from the planter class, who were land- and slave- owners prior to the end of the Civil War and continued to control the economic, political, and social structure of the South. Subsequently, the postwar planters did not subscribe to the notion of Black education and northern interference in efforts to school Blacks universally. Anderson (1988) asserts, "Faced with the possibilities of moving toward a northern-style system of free labor and mass literacy or remaining with their coercive mode of labor allocation and control, the planters chose the labor-repressive system, which rested at least partially on the absence of formal schooling among agricultural and domestic labors" (p. 21). Planters lamented that ex-slaves were not reliable, disobeyed orders, and did not comply with their labor contracts, so their argument was that schooling did not address the labor problem. Southern planters, in an effort to counter the progressiveness of the Black universal schooling effort, reverted to tactics such as refusing to rent buildings for classes, preventing White teachers from boarding in homes, and threatening to evict parents from their homes if they sent their children to school.

A significant reason why White planters were opposed to universal education for Blacks was that they relied on child labor, and thus thwarted any efforts to create free public schooling for Blacks. Because White planters had significant influence politically, legally, and economically, they were able to prevent the further development of public education for African-Americans. Planters "stressed low taxation, opposed compulsory school attendance laws, blocked the passage of new laws that would strengthen the constitutional basis of public education, and generally discouraged the expansion of public school opportunities"(p. 23). Furthermore, they engaged in labor practices designed to impede Blacks' quest for free public education. For example, planters "established a system of coercive labor designed to reduce wages, to restrict labor mobility, to protect individual planters from competition with other employers, and to force blacks to sign repressive labor contracts" (p. 24). Yet, their efforts could not eradicate the progress former slaves made in pursuit of universal schooling, so in the 1870s and 1880s, Whites employed a different tactic to control African-Americans by using education to sustain the southern racial, social and economic order. They viewed the concept of public education as a means to enhance southern industrialization by using schools to produce obedient, skilled workers who accepted the southern caste system based on race and division of labor. Watkins (2001) writes:

> In the realm of political sociology, Marxian and radical theorists explain that the predominating economic system greatly influences and shapes the culture, ideas, and institutions that surround it. Societal institutions thus are tied to the means and relationships of production. Ideas and institutions that do not conform to the dominant relationships of production receive little or no support within the system. Thus, the culture of individualism and property rights is inextricably connected to capitalist society. Institutions of the state, of association, and of worship, to be sanctioned, must confirm to the economic base (p. 10).

Watkins further asserts:

Education thus becomes a most important component within modern society. It includes both a developmental and a sociopolitical mission. Developmentally, industrial and technological society requires a level of cognitive and intellectual performance not required in feudal and agrarian society. Socially and politically, those who hold power attempt to forge a society ideologically accepting of their economic and cultural agenda, which is often inimical to the vast majority who remain propertyless (p. 11).

Therefore, the dominant group had to manipulate the institutions that surrounded them according to its needs to maintain social, political, and economic dominance. An industrial education such as the one provided at the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Virginia was a model that would prepare African-Americans for work in the southern industries as well as for their subordinate status in society.

Realizing that resisting Blacks' efforts for an education could result in northern intervention and fuel Black resistance, southern Whites suggested a special education for Blacks and became interested in the curriculum being developed by General Samuel Armstrong at Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute. Watkins states, "This new curriculum offered the possibility of adapting black education to the particular needs and interests of the South's dominant-class whites. Hence those southern and northern whites who thought it wiser to redirect the social purpose of freedmen's education rather than attempt to destroy it rallied to this new model of special instruction" (Anderson, 1988, p. 31).

Hampton was founded in April 1868 by General Samuel Armstrong, a White missionary, soldier, and educator, in collaboration with the American Missionary Association. The Hampton model resembled the industrial training that was a part of reform schools that began in the 1820s in some northern cities. As one of the White "architects of Black education," Armstrong envisioned a school that would reconstruct and reform the lives of African-Americans from slavery into a "social order rooted in apartheid, economic exploitation, oppression, and inequality" (Watkins, 2001, p. 43). Hampton was a "normal school," one that trained African-Americans to become teachers. It was not designed to be a trade or technical school, but manual labor was employed to teach students "steady work habits, practical knowledge, and Christian morals" (Anderson, 1988, p. 35). Students who attended a normal school were elementary school

graduates who desired two additional years of schooling and teacher preparation courses that would lead to a common school teaching certificate. Students who attended normal schools were usually less educated, older, and more socially and economically disadvantaged students who attended college.

Armstrong's ideology was significant to the formation of Black education because in his accommodation of Blacks by providing them an education, the education was designed for subordination in southern society, and on the backs of Black labor, the new South was rebuilt. Black teachers would be used to inculcate in their own that the lowest position on the social, racial, and economic hierarchy was Blacks' proper place. Armstrong was concerned with the moral development of African-Americans and not with their intellectual development because they needed to learn civility, moral character, and socialization that they lacked because their race made them barbaric and intellectually inferior (Anderson, 1988; Watkins, 2001). The Hampton idea, designed by Armstrong, manipulated the thinking of African-Americans and in a society controlled by White supremacist ideology, a certain number of people are given the necessary skills "to carry out the work desirable to the needs of the dominant group to maintain their racial and socioeconomic dominance (Kharem, 2006). Armstrong excluded, for example, classical studies from the curriculum because he believed it would elevate African-Americans towards higher levels of professional life, political awareness, and freedom and that would upset the social and racial hierarchy. Therefore, African-American students were imbued with notions of remaining steadfast in their place in southern society.

Armstrong's most famous protégé, or infamous depending on how one examines his legacy, was Booker T. Washington. Washington was a graduate of Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute and considered Armstrong a mentor and from his indoctrination to accommodationist education for ex-slaves, he established Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in 1881. The "Hampton-Tuskegee Idea" was an educational ideology that was in complete opposition to the activism of former slaves who desired to create a universal system of education for them that led to economic, social, and educational independence from Whites. Washington completely supported Armstrong's belief that Blacks' place was in the South and that they should become trained in agricultural and

domestic labor positions because he believed Blacks would still progress economically. This belief contradicted the Black intellectuals, who viewed this notion as a "blueprint for black subordination" (Anderson, 1988, p. 102). Washington and progressive African-Americans clashed over the appropriate system for educating African-Americans; however, he continued his mission to provide an education for southern Blacks even if it meant accommodating racial subordination and sacrificing their political and social rights. Washington believed in minimizing racial conflict by keeping Blacks separate and unequal because he believed that southern Blacks could move ahead in life by learning skills needed to build the new South, while learning to be good citizens who possessed strong morals and Christian convictions.

To advance his educational philosophy, Washington engaged northern philanthropists, who financially supported Tuskegee because they endorsed the idea of training African-Americans to work for their industries. The philanthropists set up Washington as the spokesman for the black race, and used their influence, political clout, and money to advertise the Hampton-Tuskegee model in newspapers and magazines, and developed huge endowment funds for Tuskegee while making sure that money was available to keep the institute operating. Philanthropists such as Robert Ogden, William Baldwin, the Rockefellers, and Thomas Jesse Jones, were significant White architects of Black education. Northern philanthropists were also White supremacists like the Southern planters and business owners, considered Blacks to be ignorant, inferior, and child-like; therefore, they needed someone to teach them and show them how to act, think, and work. However, northern philanthropists and southern business owners disagreed on the problem of educating Blacks. Northerners supported a school system controlled by Whites so that economic progress would continue for a society moving towards industrialization but still keep Blacks controlled and subordinate. Southerners believed that providing some sort of universal education for African-Americans would lead to demands for political and equal rights; rebellion would result if Blacks attained any form of power in Southern society. Anderson (1988) writes:

The northern philanthropists failed to grasp the fundamental difference between their society based on class stratification and southern society based on a racially qualified form of the more general subordination of the laboring class. Racism was rampant in both societies, but the organized structures of domination and subordination differed in form and content. The principle of one-man-one-vote held no significant racial implications in hew York, where the philanthropists lived, but in South Carolina, where Ben Tillman [senator] lived, it meant, theoretically, black control of the state (pp.98-99).

Regardless of the divergent educational ideologies of the industrial philanthropists and southern planters, they agreed that the country, post-Civil War, had to be unified and prosper economically. They also agreed that Blacks had to be controlled and were to remain disenfranchised and that education would be the instrument for social control and continued White supremacy.

In Northern cities, African-Americans faced similar struggles as African-American southerners to obtain education. As urban educational systems became standardized to address the growing demands of a more industrialized and technological modern society, schools became "essential because it adapted people to the new disciplines and incentives of the urban-industrial order"(Tyack, 1974, p. 29). To advance this new society, businesses were designed using a bureaucratic model and for factories to be productive, schools had to be aligned as well. This "one best system" (Tyack, 1974) would classify students based on their socio-economic and racial status, and the school systems would function efficiently like a factory. In addition, students were taught using a prescribed course of student and standard tests. If students were considered deviant or uncontrollable, and usually these were the children perceived to be at the bottom of the social hierarchy, compulsory education was implemented to maintain control over this particular group of students. Boston was significant in advancing the concept of compulsory education. Officials targeted poor, immigrant children and forced them to attend "special" schools that were separate from other social groups. When Blacks in Boston complained that their children had to attend Black-only schools and not their neighborhood schools, the school committee informed them that they already had

"schools for special instruction" (p. 69) and the white children of the a particular social category had intermediate schools for schooling.

Tyack (1974) states, "During the nineteenth century no group in the United States had a greater faith in the equalizing power of schooling or a clearer understanding of the democratic promise of public education than did black Americans" (p. 110). As former slaves believed, northern blacks viewed the education of Black people as an opportunity to level the playing field, so to speak, economically, socially, and politically. Equally important, the acquisition of education was empowering and symbolized freedom for African-Americans. However, White control of the nation's educational system thwarted attempts to obtain an equal education. Tyack writes:

> …across the nation many of the whites who controlled systems of public education excluded, segregated, or cheated black pupils. Negroes learned that the educational system that was to homogenize other Americans was not meant for them. As in other spheres of their lives, they learned that constantly they had to fight for rights that were supposedly guaranteed to them by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments and by democratic principles (p. 110).

Because of the racism and alienation felt by Black children from White schools, many African-American communities believed that a "separate but equal" approach would protect their children from the prejudice of White teachers and students while preparing students for obtaining good jobs. However, in other communities, African-Americans desired the integration of schools because the separate schools were not equal. While the attempts of northern African-Americans to obtain a quality education were valiant, the Constitution of the United States did not uphold their rights to a public education.

Consequently, the problem of Black education became an issue for the states to decide, and many states through various legislative acts prevented Black children from being schooled with White children. Or, if a city banned segregation, they imposed other exclusive and racist practices. For example, in New York City, "for twenty-two years after mandatory segregation was discontinued in 1873, no black teachers were hired in that school system"(Tyack, 1974, p. 117). Therefore, a Black teacher had a better chance of maintaining employment if they consented to working in separate, unequal Black schools. Hegemony, a concept developed by Italian Marxist and philosopher Antonio Gramsci, argues that "rulership cannot be based solely on coercion but also requires a

large degree of consent" (Joseph, 2003, p. 36). White dominance in institutions such as education through laws and practices designed to racially and socially exclude African-Americans forced Blacks to acquiesce for the best interest of Black children.

Entering the 20th century, African-American families in the southern and northern states continued to struggle for their right to receive an education. In southern states in particular, Jim Crow or Black Codes laws were enacted to maintain a racial caste system designed to keep Blacks in the position of second class status permanently. This caste system was established around 1865 and remained in effect until mid-1960s. *Jim Crow* was a caricature of a black man created by a white minstrel in 1828 to entertain Whites, but by the end of the 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century, Jim Crow had come to "symbolize a systematic political, legal and social repression of African-Americans" (Ogletree, 2004, p. 97). In 1873, the Supreme Court ruling in the *Slaughter-House Cases* established two tiers of citizenship, one for Blacks and one for Whites and interpreted the 14th Amendment that citizenship was only guaranteed nationally and states could determine the citizenship of people. The legalization of segregation and second class citizenry for Blacks led to terrorizing from Whites. African-Americans were excluded politically and had no recourse when Whites committed violent acts towards them. Blacks were lynched in record numbers, literally run out of towns so Whites could claim Blacks' land as their own, and economically, Blacks were forced into dependency on Whites. Education alongside Whites was not an option, north or south. In 1890, the Supreme Court's decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* upheld "separate but equal" policies, which constitutionally legalized segregation (Black Issues in Higher Education, 2004). Separate accommodations for African-Americans and Whites were anything but equal, particularly in schools. For Southern Blacks particularly but not exclusively, the creation of their own community within the larger sphere of racialized community somewhat lessened the oppression of White tyranny. Segregated schools allowed them to remain independent and maintain some control over their lives and future and in many towns, African-Americans established their own churches, community groups and organizations, and took care of their own.

African-Americans have held the belief since becoming enslaved that education is freedom, and experiencing the extreme assault of the dominant group to prevent access to

education, verified the significance of schooling and education. Since segregation and discrimination had been legally sanctioned by the Supreme Court, a National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) attorney used legal action to dismantle segregation in public education. Charles Houston, a graduate of Harvard Law School joined the Howard Law School faculty and was directed to conduct research on the status of black lawyers and law schools in the United States (Ogletree, 2004). From this research, he prepared a report that outlined the vision for Howard Law School, and his vision included a cadre of gifted lawyers who specialized in civil rights litigation to wage a war against institutionalized racism. When Houston was appointed to the NAACP legal counsel, he developed a three-prong approach for the war against racism:

> first, to solidify a nationwide network of African-American lawyers to file "test case" litigation against segregation practices; second, to build precedential support for a direct constitutional attack against segregation through this carefully targeted litigation; and third, to organize local black communities in broad, unified support of legal, political, and social action against ongoing discriminatory practices (pp. 116-117).

Houston's "Dream Team" of attorneys argued numerous cases before taking on the monumentally historic *Brown* case. Houston wanted to focus on segregation in education and the blatant inequities in schools. Ogletree (2004) states:

> Himself the product of a first-rate education, he[Houston] saw quality education as the essential preparation for life and believed that poor, inadequate schools placed a lifelong handicap on many American blacks, both in competing economically and in seeking equal rights. To Houston, segregation and inequities in American schools represented the worst symptom of American racism: in addition to denoting that African-Americans were legally an inferior caste, school segregation reinforced and contributed to the perpetuation of that caste system (p. 117).

Houston and his team focused on three types of desegregation cases: desegregation of state graduate and professional schools; equalization of salary between Black and White teachers; and, equalization of school facilities for Black and White elementary and

secondary schools. The success of litigation in these cases was the precursor for the *Brown* decision.

The NAACP was victorious in numerous salary equalization cases as they placed pressure on states' discrimination practices. However, the NAACP desired a victory on the federal level in the United States Supreme Court, and found it in the *Missouri ex rel Gaines v. Canada.* Lloyd Gaines was an African-American graduate from Lincoln University who was denied admission to the University of Missouri Law School. The school offered to establish a separate law school for him or pay tuition for Gaines to attend law school in another state that accepted African-Americans (Patterson, 2001). Gaines wanted to attend the University of Missouri Law School and sued. The case was defeated in state trial court and the Missouri Supreme Court ruled that awarding Gaines an out-of-state scholarship to the law school provided equal education for black students. *Gaines* was appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court where Justice Hughes "found that the right to equal protection was a personal one, which one state could not pass off to another" and the Court "held that Missouri had an obligation to provide Gaines with a graduate school education, and it ordered the admission of Gaines to the in-state law school" (Ogletree, 2004, p. 121). In response, in 1939 the university began establishing a poorly funded, inferior law school for blacks, which forced the NAACP to prepare for litigation once again. However, Gaines had disappeared mysteriously and the NAACP had no plaintiff.

Another significant case, *Sipuel v. Oklahoma,* focused on a young woman named Ada Louise Sipuel, who wanted to attend the University of Oklahoma Law School but was denied. In 1948, the Court, using *Gaines* as precedence, ruled that the school must provide her with the same education as white students. University of Oklahoma established a black law school, and Thurgood Marshall challenged this action but lost. Sipuel eventually was admitted to the all white law school, and that was because the state found it too expensive to operate a separate black law school. Two other higher education cases strengthened the foundation for *Brown.* In June 1950, the Supreme Court ruled on the same day in *Sweatt v. Painter* and *McLaurin v. Oklahoma*. Heman Sweatt was a mail carrier who sought admission to the University of Texas Law School but was denied based on race. The state established a separate school in a basement but

"[b]ecause Sweatt had not chance of an equal legal education in the state's pathetically inadequate law school for blacks, he was ordered admitted to the University of Texas Law School…the first time that the Court had told a state to admit a black person to an all-white educational institution" (Patterson, 2001, p. 17). In *McLaurin,* George McLaurin applied to University of Oklahoma to pursue a doctorate in education. He was admitted but had to take classes in "an anteroom off the regular classrooms where course work was given. In the library, McLaurin was made to sit at a segregated desk behind a pile of newspapers in the mezzanine"(p. 17). He was also segregated in the cafeteria, having to eat at different times than whites and in a dirty alcove. McLaurin felt that he could not do effective work in this segregated, humiliating environment and the Court agreed. Even with victories in the Supreme Court, the NAACP needed to dismantle the policy and practice of segregation. The *Brown* case and subsequent decision became the catalyst for change.

Brown was comprised of five separate cases but combined under a single name, *Brown et al v. Board of Education of Topeka et al.* Olivia Brown was the first plaintiff listed in the case, and the five cases collectively focused on racial segregation in public education and the doctrine of separate and unequal, which was sanctioned in *Plessy.* "By overturning Plessy, the Supreme Court ended America's fifty-eight-year-long practice of legal racial segregation in public schools and paved the way for the integration of America's public school systems," states Chism (Black Issues in Higher Education et al, 2004, p. 7). The NAACP's legal team effectively argued before the Supreme Court that segregated schools were inherently unjust for Black children, unequal compared to the education being received by White children, and the legalization of segregation was un-Constitutional. This ruling was one of the most significant in this country's history as it was the impetus for overturning segregation and discriminatory practices in other institutions of American society.

In the *Brown II* ruling, courts decided what remedy was needed to desegregate and integrate public education, and ordered it done "with all deliberate speed." To delay integration and maintain the long history of racial segregation, many Southern states worked around the decision with acts such as closing schools, providing tuition for white children to attend private schools, and blocking transfers of students between white and

black schools. Ogletree (2004) states that the school system in the South remained mostly segregated ten years after the 1954 *Brown* decision and in northern states, "many school districts refused to provide racial data that could be used to measure segregation; northern segregation remained unaffected until the mid-1970s" (p. 128). Valiant Black students who attempted to attend schools with White children were met with serious and at times, violent, resistance from White mobs who assembled to keep them from entering schools. Judges in the south who adhered to the *Brown* ruling were subjected to threats and intimidation. In other instances to preserve the segregated way of life, cities and municipalities engaged in the practice of rezoning to isolate Black residents and politically, they initiated a political appointment system that would prevent liberals who desired integration from holding public office. Lawsuits were filed across the country to challenge segregated schools with school districts being mandated to desegregate their schools. The impact of desegregation was profound.

After the *Brown* decision of 1954 declared separate and unequal education illegal, attempted integration of schools caused many Black teachers and administrators to lose their positions because Black students had to attend White schools and African-American teachers and administrators could not gain access to White schools as educators (Bell, 1983; Black Issues in Higher Education, 2004; Kharem, 2006). It is not an accident that over 70 percent of teaching positions in this country are held by White females. Once African-American children were forced into a predominantly White learning environment, Black students were treated as intellectually, culturally, and socially inferior, and culturally biased standardized tests and culturally irrelevant curricula reify these notions. Lack of exposure to African-American educators who were in tune to their emotional, psychological, cultural, and academic needs hurt Black children. The achievement gap between White and African-American students was disproportionate and continues to be disproportionate. Because of 'White flight' and 'middle-class Black flight' to suburban, more affluent communities with schools to match, many African-American students were left in schools that were substandard and lacking in resources, including quality teachers. This resegregation was not the intent of the *Brown* but by any means necessary, institutional racism and individuals who uphold racist views were

formidable in maintaining a two-tier system of education which was and continues to be separate and inequitable.

The impact of desegregation, failed attempts to integrate, and resegregation of schools have been particularly destructive for African-American males in America's educational system, historically and currently. Regardless of schools settings--urban, urban inner-city, suburban, or rural—Black males are significantly behind White males and females and Black females in educational attainment. Statistical data have revealed that African-American males' educational experiences in America's schools have improved little, if at all. The drop-out rate for Black males is as high as 50 percent in many US cities, over 30 percent of them are categorized as students with disabilities, and a disproportionate number of African-American males are suspended and/or expelled compared to other groups (Hopkins, 1997; Noguera, 2003; Smith, 2004; Teacher's College, 2005). Racist and exclusionary practices in schools have silenced and alienated African-American males. The reality is that African-American males were left behind, have not caught up, and unless revolutionary change occurs to counter the invidious policies and practices undergirding our nation's schools, Black males will never get ahead and will in essence, disappear from many of our schools.

The practice of excluding African-American males from schooling and education is born of American society that has at the core of its institutions—legal, economic, political, social, and educational—a racist ideology that continues to be entrenched in these institutions. This ideology, which is 'normal,' affirms the continuation of discriminatory, inequitable, and destructive practices that marginalize, demoralize, and ultimately alienates certain groups of people, "the others" and these concepts were the basis of the creation of Critical Race Theory. The social institution of education exists to maintain the existing social order, a social order born of slavery that continues to live as perpetual social hierarchy that maintains Black males' place at the lowest level. Furthermore, the schooling they receive perpetuates this social inferiority, even though some African-American males have 'made it' through school and become educated. Unfortunately for most Black males, they are invisible and just as race is normal, the exclusion of males from full, equitable participation in schooling and education is normal.

It is not enough to attribute the plight of African-American males' negative experiences in America's schools on racism and how racist, exclusionary practices have historically alienated African-American males from schooling; it is equally important to examine how marginalized Black males growing up in the shadow of this history perceive and understand their schooling experiences, and particularly the impact of race on those experiences.

Purpose of Study

1) The purpose of this study is to examine African-American males' experiences of alienation and how schooling has played a part in this process.

2) The purpose of this study is to highlight the voices of African-American males to explore their experiences in developing an understanding of schooling and the role these experiences have played in their current life circumstances. There is a significant body of research and critique on the failure of Black males in schools and how to reverse the failure; however, little discourse is available to examine how alienated African-American males understand their experiences in school.

Research Questions

1) How do African-American males who have not graduated from high school understand their experiences of schooling and how have these experiences contributed to their circumstances?

2) What factors do African-American males identify as barriers to achieving success in school?

3) What do African-American males believe should happen to improve the schooling experiences of this select group?

Overview of the Study

"Those who have been denied their primordial right to speak their word must first reclaim this right and prevent the continuation of this dehumanizing aggression."

-Paulo Freire (1970, p. 88)

In order to answer the questions that I have proposed, I will draw on Critical Race Theory as a lens to present, explain, and critique the issues raised that will lead to possible answers and solutions to alienation of African-American males in schools. Race and racism in contemporary society remains a significantly powerful social construct that was legitimized through laws, and this is the basis for Critical Race Theory (CRT).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theory grounded in the examination of how race, racism, and power connect and impact economic, legal, political, social, and educational institutions, and this theoretical framework posits that racism is embedded in society and its institutions, making it normal and a fixed part of America's landscape. CRT challenges one to explore the realism and permanence of race and the role race plays in every aspect of American society, and the theory employs storytelling methodology that gives marginalized, oppressed Black people a means of confronting racial oppression through their voice while countering the stories, assumptions, stereotypes, and myths fabricated by the dominant group.

Delgado and Stefancic (2001) outline five (5) tenets of CRT: (1) the normalcy of racism (racial realism)--Race is embedded in society—its language, laws, structures; (2) race is a social construction--there is no biological basis for race; (3) differential racialization--the dominant society racializes different minority groups at different times, usually a response to economics; (4) interest convergence/structural determinism—racialized groups receive some benefits as long as the dominant group's interests are met; and (5) voice-of-color thesis—people of color through their experiences of oppression have unique perspectives and voice to tell their stories of racism. Additionally, intersectionality is another theme presented in CRT. Intersectionality explores how race, gender, class, national origin, and sexual orientation intersect and plays out in various settings. Critical Race Theory attempts to understand the sociohistorical phenomenon of race in American society and the social hierarchies that have resulted from a racialized state in order to commence a transformation. CRT includes an activist component that is not usually found in other scholarly pursuits because this movement not only desires to comprehend the social aspect of race but endeavors to transform society and eradicate the racial hierarchies.

Critical Race Theory developed in the mid-1970s from Critical Legal Studies when numerous lawyers, activists, and legal scholars concluded that racial reform in the United States was not progressing, and in some cases was regressing, and determined that new theories and strategies were needed to challenge and defeat more subtle yet equally subversive forms of racism that were emerging (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Parker, Deyhle & Villenas, 1999). Critical Legal Studies was instrumental in translating legal doctrine in order to expose how the law has legitimized and supported the country's class structure due to inconsistencies in legal doctrine. However, CRT goes further than Critical Legal Studies in that it includes racism in its critique of American society because CRT believes that race is embedded in America's social order and is, therefore, a permanent—and natural-- part of American society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Solorzano (in Dixson & Rousseau, 2006) provides five (5) tenets of CRT as the theory relates to the educational field that "should inform theory, research, pedagogy, curriculum, and policy:(1) the intercentricity of race and racism; (2) the challenge to dominant ideology; (3) the commitment to social justice; (4) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (5) the utilization of interdisciplinary approaches" (p. 171). CRT in the field of education "challenges the ways race and racism affect educational structures, practices, and discourses" (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006, p. 172). Schooling has the capacity to liberate oppressed and marginalized students, yet American schooling continues to subjugate and disenfranchise non-Whites, particularly African-American males, thus perpetuating racist ideology.

Through the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory, I will explore how African-American males understand their experiences as they moved through the schooling pipeline and how these experiences have impacted their current circumstances. Their stories, told in their own words, will provide a voice to a group who has been silenced and alienated in our nation's schools. Equally important, I will be able to examine their experiences through the critical lens of CRT and attempt to critique the practices, policies, and perceptions that have developed from racism that may contribute to Black males' experiences.

CHAPTER 2

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."
-Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Review of Related Literature

A History of Invisibility…Race Stories from the Souls of Black Men

If one were to examine African-American literature written by conscious Black authors Dr. W.E.B. Dubois, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Malcolm X, and Dr. Huey P. Newton, the notions of alienation and otherness have a historical foundation and remain instruments of domination, oppression, and destruction. Their experiences occurred at different times in America's pernicious racial history; however, African-American males' current reality and experiences, particularly in our nation's schools, is a persistent reminder that they are, perhaps permanently, oppressed and alienated.

In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Dubois wrote, "I remember well when the shadow swept across me" (p. 7). That shadow was not verbalized by the use of a racial slur or an overt act such as a cross-burning in front of his home; in fact, to some, the act toward him would seem innocuous. When Dubois was a young boy in school in New England, the classmates would purchase postcards and exchange them. A new girl was in the class, and when he attempted to give her a card, she simply dismissed him with a glance. Not a word was said, but at that moment, the "shadow" of racism enveloped Dubois. He was dismissed, cast out, and alienated, his identity shaped by how the dominant group perceived him.

Dubois effectively utilizes light/dark imagery to describe a society divided clearly by racial lines. Whites were privileged to experience the bluest of skies, the sunlight, and "dazzling opportunities," while the world of Blacks continued to be overcast and in a permanent shadow. Dubois states, "With other black boys the strife was not so fiercely sunny: their youth shrunk into tasteless sycophancy, or into silent hatred of the pale world about them and mocking of everything white; or wasted itself in a bitter cry, Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house?" (p. 8). Dubois continued to lament the duality of Black people in White America, referring to Blacks as the "sons of night who must plod darkly on in resignation" and must "watch the streak of blue

above"(p. 8).   Yet, Dubois asserts that while alienated from the world that the Black slave labor built, silenced behind a veil of racial oppression, and defined by Whites, Black people can be empowered and find their place in this contradictory world by being himself, "merg[ing] his double self into a better and truer self"(p. 9). Through this self-consciousness, the Black man achieves a self-awareness and realizes his true identity, which is not one crafted by the white world.

"I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me," writes Ralph Ellison in his autobiography *Invisible Man* (1947, p. 3).   This invisibility, according to Ellison, is "[a] matter of construction of the inner eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality."   The social construction of race developed from Whites' perception of inferior non-Whites based on physical characteristics and phenotype and this became their "reality" for the oppression of African-Americans and other People of Color and the permanence of racism and White dominance.   Dubois questions how a Black man feels to be a problem; Ellison refers to being Black in America as invisible, a "phantom" moving in an out of society.

Ellison begins his autobiography with a race story.   One evening he was walking home and accidentally bumped into a man, whom he describes as a "tall, blond man" (p. 4).   The man called him an insulting name, perhaps nigger or some other racial epithet. In an ironic power struggle, Ellison, a Black man, demanded that the man apologize; the man does not and instead curses him.   Enraged, he beats the man, head-butting him, kicking him, and pulling out a knife to cut his throat.   Before Ellison killed the man, he realized that the man had not actually seen him, even though he was almost killed by a phantom.   Ellison leaves him beaten on the ground.   The next day, the story in the paper reported that a man had been robbed.   Ellison finds humor in this because this "blind fool," who represents White privilege and sees African-Americans through their own constructed reality, was in Ellison's eyes overpowered by an "invisible man."

In Richard Wright's autobiography *Black Boy* (1944), the author's awareness of race emerged as a result of observation and questions that his mother would not answer. His alienation began at an early age with a very strained, almost non-existent relationship with his father.   "He was always a stranger to me; always somehow alien and remote," Wright wrote (p. 10).   When his father left, Wright's family experienced hunger, and he

attributed his "pangs of hunger" to the image of his father. This constant hunger caused Wright to question race, which may have been more of a skin color difference than his realization that he lived in a racialized society because of the social construction of race. He states, "Watching other white people eat would make my empty stomach churn and I would grow vaguely angry. Why could I not eat when I was hungry? Why did I always have to wait until others were through? I could not understand why some people had enough food and others did not"(p. 19). Although young, Wright was onto something: in a racialized society and notes that even poverty is different for whites and blacks. He also received a lesson in triple-consciousness—black, an American, and oppressed in his own land, and powerless. After seeing a chain gang, Wright asks his mother why there are so many black men wearing stripes. She said that "they're harder on black people." Wright, noticing more blacks than whites, inquires as to why the black men will not fight the white men. "But the white men have guns and the black men don't," his mother explains. The social construction of race in America places the Black man in a subordinate position and powerless while White men hold the guns, controlling every institution in society.

Wright's life is full of race stories, and peels back layers of pain, anger, and alienation because he is a Black man in White America. As a teen, he obtained a job to learn the optical trade. While working at the company, two white men began antagonizing him. The final incident resulted in feelings of being exterminated from the human race. One of the men accused him of not referring to the other as Mister." Wright was slapped, subjected to racial epithets and profanity, humiliated, and terrorized. He was told not to come back to the factory. As Wright walked down the street, everything to him was "unreal" and he states, "My wound went deep; I felt that I had been slapped out of the human race" (p. 190). Wright is a stranger in his own house (see Dubois, 1903). His supervisor attempts to have him identify the men who attacked him; however, he realized the futility of identifying them because he was black and in the South. Weeks after the incident at the optical factory, Wright was still reeling and expresses:

> For weeks after that I could not believe in my feelings. My personality was numb, reduced to a lumpish, loose, dissolved state. I was a non-man, something that knew vaguely that it was human but felt that it was not. As time separated me from the experience, I could feel no hate for the men who had driven me from the job. They did not seem to be individual men, but part of a huge, implacable, elemental design toward which hate was futile. What I did feel was a longing to attack. But how? And because I knew of no way to grapple with this thing, I felt doubly cast out (p. 194).

Wright was alienated from a society that had cast him out even though he was still walking and thinking. However, his feelings were dulled. He even referred to himself as "it," dehumanizing himself. Wright was ahead of his time, for he articulates the notion of the permanence of racism, which is some unseen, yet monolithic, impervious design woven into society that can not be penetrated by his hate.

Huey P. Newton, co-founder of the Black Panther Party was born in 1942 and grew up in Oakland, California. For whatever reason, his family moved around the area a lot, which gave Newton a view of the educational system. Because he was young, Newton "did not understand the size or seriousness of the school system's assault on Black people"(p. 17). Anytime he moved and entered a new school he remembered feeling uncomfortable to the point of being ashamed of being Black. Newton states, "This feeling followed me everywhere, without let up. It was a result of the implicit understanding in the system that whites were "smart" and Blacks were "stupid" (ibid). He discusses how in grade school the Black students were forced to read books such as *Little Black Sambo* and the Black Tar Baby story in *Brer Rabbit.* Newton stated that the constant assault on his Blackness cause a "great weight" to settle on him, a "weight of ignorance and inferiority imposed" on him by the school system(p. 18). This self-hatred made him attempt to identify with White men that were portrayed in books and movies as heroic figures who save the world. He loathed his looks, often comparing the perceived attractiveness of White skin and hair to the dark skinned, bad hair unattractive looks of Black people. Newton's confusion about who he was and how White society and a White-controlled school system defined Blacks created hostility within him and consequently led to resistance of the system. Newton states that "[r]ebellion was the only

way we knew to cope with the suffocating, repressive atmosphere that undermined our confidence" (p. 18).

Through out his elementary and high school years, Newton had consistent disciplinary issues and spent more time suspended than in school. When he was in school, teachers found reasons to put him out of class and sometimes, Newton simply walked out. Newton writes

> During those long years in the Oakland public schools, I did not have one teacher who taught me anything relevant to my own life of experience. Not one instructor ever awoke in me a desire to learn more or question or explore the worlds of literature, science, and history. All it did was try to rob me of the sense of my own uniqueness and worth, and in the process they nearly killed my urge to inquire (p. 20).

Newton had one Black teacher his entire K-12 experience, and she taught a cooking class. He liked the class because he could not afford to buy lunch like the White students did and was ashamed to bring a brown paper bag lunch, so he would cook in class and then eat. In high school, Newton had a friend named James Crawford and they resisted the school system together, constantly being ejected from classes and suspended from school. They were in a three-period class with a White female teacher that was referred to as the "dumb class." Only Blacks were in the class and according to Newton, all they did in the class was gamble, horseplay, fight, and get kicked out. There was no learning taking place. To Newton, getting kicked out became "a form of liberation-liberation from the dumb class" (p. 26). In particular, when it was time for him and James to read in class, they really performed to get kicked out of class because they could not read and neither could most of the class. However, Newton was allowed to graduate from high school without learning to read, invisible and illiterate. Newton believed that the school system extinguished the dreams of Black youth. He says this about his friend James:

> James Crawford had his dreams. He dreamed of becoming a great singer. There were days when Melvin and I sat listening for hours while James sang in his beautiful tenor voice. He was also a good cook and dreamed of opening a restaurant. James Crawford was talented, but the educational system and his psychological scars held him back. He never learned to read. To this day he cannot read. His fear of failure was reinforced rather than helped by those charged with his education, and his dreams slipped away. As he became more fearful and frustrated with each passing year, James was finally expelled from school as an "undesirable." Gradually, he sank into alcoholism and has been in and out of state mental hospitals since our school years (p. 27)

Crawford's dreams were destroyed right before his eyes, alienated from school and society because a White-dominated system had dismissed him, Newton, and countless others because they were told that they were inferior and given the onslaught of these messages on a daily basis, Crawford, Newton, and others internalized the perceptions of those in control, thus "killing" these young Black men before they could grow.

These stories are indicative of a society that has perceived and labeled African-American males as socially and intellectually inferior, barbaric, and less than men. African-Americans, men and women, were assigned these labels; however, African-Americans in particular posed a threat to White men because they dominated society's institutions, and this White male supremacy required them to subjugate Black males who were seen as a threat (Hare & Hare, 1991; Kunjufu, 1989). American institutions, particularly education, were created and maintained by White supremacy which operated in a White patriarchal society, and the consequences continue to be felt by African-American males.

The Past Meets Present

"Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past."
-George Orwell.

The research related to African-American males' educational attainment indicates that they are facing serious circumstances in their schooling; to put it simply, Black males are in trouble (Hopkins, 1997; Noguera, 2008; Smith, 2004)). The purpose of this study is to explore how Black males perceive their experience in schools and if these experiences reflect their experiences in society. In addition, based on African-American males' experiences and told in their voice, this research will reveal what they believe should be happening in schools to improve their schooling for this select group.

In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was enacted with the purpose of improving the education of disadvantaged students. This law was reauthorized in 1994 and in 2001, the ESEA was reauthorized for the third time as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). NCLB led to sweeping changes in education to hold states, schools and teachers more accountable for students' achievement through use a variety of

assessments in an effort to close the achievement gap between African-Americans and Whites and Latino/a and White students (Smith, 2002).   While this effort seems noble, there is a crisis in public education that has the potential to impact the future of African-Americans--- the virtual destruction of African-American males in America's schools. The contradiction in this potential genocide is that Black males are visible in schools in terms of attention given to suspending or expelling them, labeling them as special education, however, these injurious acts in fact serve to marginalize African-American males and rendering them alienated and invisible.

Over thirty years ago, there were signs that African-American males were facing dire circumstances. In the 1980s, African-American males comprised 8.5 percent of public school enrollment but represented 36 percent of the special education population, and they represented 37 percent of school suspensions (Kunjufu, 1991). According to the Governor's Commission on Socially Disadvantaged Black Males (1989), 20 percent of all African-American men drop out of high school and in many cities the drop out rate is 50 percent. Of all adult African-American men, 40 percent are functionally illiterate (Jaynes and Williams, 1989), and the college enrollment of Black males dropped by 34,000 between 1976 and 1986, with 609,000 of them in prison and only 436,000 enrolled in college (Kunjufu, 1991). In fact, life for a young Black male was deadly: the leading cause of death for African-American males ages 15-24 was homicide (Center for Disease Control, 1985). The term "endangered species" emerged in reference to the plight of African-American males as if they were animals in danger of being extinct. As dehumanizing as this phrase "endangered species" is towards African-American males, the ideas of alienation and potential annihilation of African-American males are clear.

If the current statistics are an indicator, African-American males are facing what I term *educational genocide*, which is *the systemic practice of systematically limiting and destroying the educational opportunities of certain groups of students and alienating them from quality, equitable, and relevant schooling experiences*, and there has been little improvement in their status. The failure to educate African-American males effectively and successfully will prevent many in this select group from thriving economically, educationally, politically, and socially. What is disturbing is the statistics for Black males in certain categories have either held steady for over twenty years or have worsened.

In 2000-2001, Black males comprised 8.6 percent of America's public school enrollment but were 20 percent of students classified as mentally retarded, 21 percent of students classified as emotionally disturbed, 12 percent of those with a specific learning disability, and 15 percent of those placed in special education; in some cities, the percentage is 30 percent (Smith, 2004). Additionally, Black males comprise 23 percent of suspensions and 22 percent of expulsions (Hopkins, 1997; Smith, 2004). African-American students are three times more likely than White students to be placed in special education but are half as likely to be in gifted programs (Teachers College, 2005). The drop out rate for African-American males in many of America's cities is 50 percent while 60 percent of incarcerated youth under the age of eighteen are African-American males; more Black males receive the GED in prison than graduate from high school in many US cities (Schott Foundation, 2006, 2004; Smith, 2004, 2002). For African-American males ages 15-34, homicide remains the leading cause of death, with a lifetime risk of violent death of one in 27 for Black males compared to one in 205 for White males (Mitchell, Bush & Bush, 2002; Teacher College, 2005). According to the Justice Policy Institute's report on education and incarceration (Western, Schiraldi & Ziedenberg, 2003), in 1999, 52 percent of African-American males who had dropped out of high school had prison records by their early thirties. Sadly, African-American males are in a precarious, if not deadly situation; indeed, they are in trouble and on the verge of disappearing from the classrooms and hallways of schools. Porter (1997) defines *genocide* as "the systematic elimination of a people, the killing of the life germ or seed" (p. 29). He also contends that before the physical body dies, one's "essence" or soul dies. In the context of education, African-American males are facing what I call an *educational genocide*, their intellectual growth stunted and who they are as Black males is de-valued and dismissed because America's educational policies and practices of exclusion have contributed to their alienation from schooling and the pursuit of education.

White Supremacy and Racism

"The American house of racism has been remodeled somewhat over time—generally in response to protests from the oppressed—but its formidable foundation remains firmly in place."

-Joe R. Feagin

When the Europeans colonized America, they rationalized their exploitation and subjugation of other humans by declaring them inferior based on physical and biological characteristics, intellect, and religious and cultural differences (Feagin, 2000). Based on the pseudo-biological beliefs of Europeans, social hierarchies designed to create and maintain European dominance remain embedded in American society currently. Smedley (1999) discusses the "social distance" that is a result of race. She states, "It is structured into the social system through residential separation; differential education, training, and income; and informal restrictions against socializing, intermarriage, and common membership in various organizations, including, most visibly, the church" (p. 22). Race remains a salient part of America's social structure.

European Ideology and Race in America

The English explored opportunities to colonize North America in the sixteenth century (Allen, 1994; Smedley, 1999). In the 1580s, Walter Raleigh obtained a patent to establish a colony in America, which later became the state of Virginia. Raleigh's explorers found Roanoke Island and its inhabitants. In 1585, another explorer Richard Grenville arrived on the island, where he encountered Native Americans and burned a village and cornfields. Grenville left a party of men to further explore Roanoke but when Francis Drake arrived the next year, the men decided to return to England with him. Another attempt to settle Roanoke Island occurred in 1587 when explorers arrived with women and children to establish an English colony. John White was elected as the governor of the settlement; however, when he returned to England for supplies and returned to Roanoke, the settlement had disappeared.

The exploitation and virtual destruction of the Native Americans was a gradual process. Initially, the Indians were generous toward the English, providing them with food and supplies. However, when some of the colonists began to encroach on their land, take food, and ignore their customs and rights, the Indians retracted their support. The English also believed the reports from the Spanish and Portuguese explorers' perceptions of the Indians as savage, crafty, and prone to strange and lewd behaviors and customs (Smedley, 1999). The conflict between the Native Americans and English became overtly hostile. The turning point in the escalating conflict occurred in 1622 when some

colonists murdered a well-known Indian leader. The Indians in retribution attacked the Chesapeake Colony, killing a quarter of the English. In retaliation, the English destroyed villages, burned crops, and captured Indians and forced them into slavery.   Those who were not killed or enslaved escaped north into French territories and some Indians, the ones considered "friendly," were bound to reservations (Feagin, 2000).

The early colonization of America and the subsequent conflicts between the indigenous people of North America and the English immigrants established the foundation of race in American society. The English believed that they were a superior nation, and their goal was to conquer the "savages" and control the New World through commerce and acquisition of land and resources by force. Smedley (1999) states:

> Having already formulated an image of "savagery" that helped to justify uninhibited brutality toward the native population, it was but a small step for the English to transform colonial society to one based on chattel slavery. The institution of slavery provided the foundation for the further magnification of human differences, which the English came to express as "race" (p. 88).

When the first Africans arrived in Jamestown in 1619 as laborers in the English colonies, their eventual descent into permanent slavery was an attempt to tame the "savages" from Africa, the Africans' skin color symbolizing the sin and savagery from which the English had a "divine calling" to redeem them.

Africans in America, Enslavement, and the Permanence of Race

Contrary to mainstream accounts of the explorers who came to North America, Africans participated in forays to the "New World" with the Spanish, Portuguese, and French (Smedley, 1999). In understanding the formation of race and establishment of American slavery, one must also recognize that Africans did not explore the New World with the English; in fact, the English had little contact with Africans until the mid-seventeenth century. Smedley cites John Hope Franklin, who states, "Negroes did not accompany the English on their explorations in the New World" (in Smedley, 1999, p. 91). The English ventured to Africa for the business of trading and other enterprises. In the 1500s as the English focused on overseas business expansion, a few of them engaged

in slave trading. However, as other Europeans used Africans as laborers to build economic wealth, the English realized the opportunity and brought Africans to America.

In 1619, the English colony of Jamestown received Africans, who had been purchased from a Dutch ship (Feagin, 2000). As the tobacco industry grew in America and the sugar plantations in the Caribbean flourished, Europeans needed more African labor. During the initial economic development of America, it remains unclear to historians if the Africans were considered slaves or servants. In fact, European servants were working in Jamestown as well. However, utilizing White men and women as indentured servants became problematic (see Allen, 1994). More of them were living longer and became free and the wealthy colonists needed permanent labor. Additionally, many White indentured servants were not pleased with being exploited by the wealthy planters and began to rebel. The Bacon's Rebellion in 1676 enlightened the wealthy planters to the dissatisfaction that the servants, black and white, felt in being exploited. The social order in place in the Jamestown colony disintegrated because the servants united against the exploitation. After the rebellion was quelled, planters realized that black slavery was the answer. Another factor that led to permanent black slavery was the poor labor Indians and Europeans provided. For example, the Indians that remained were not immune to Old World diseases and the Irish servants had little knowledge in tropical cultivation and were considered too rebellious. The wealthy planters turned their attention to the Africans, who were in large supply, considered cheap labor, and considered controllable (Allen, 1994).

Therefore, toward the end of the seventeenth century as social and economic transformations took place, the status of Africans became defined (Smedley, 1999):

> Through the passage of various laws, "Negroes" were separated out from other servants and gradually reduced to the status of permanent hereditary slavery. A date frequently noted by historians to mark the first official recognition of permanent slave status in law is 1661, when the Virginia assembly passed an act making a servant who ran away with a Negro responsible for serving the time of the Negro slave. However, North American slavery was not the result of a single law or a single court decision, but of numerous individual acts, decisions, and practices that over time became codified into the legal framework of colonial society (p. 94).

Laws were established to restrict the rights of Africans, including the right to bear arms, own property, and marry. Eventually they were denied the right to vote and were legally enslaved for life, becoming chattel property of Whites (Feagin, 2000; Smedley, 1999). The Africans' physical differences also played a part in their relegation to permanent slave labor status. It was at this point that the social construction of race developed and became embedded in American society.

The biological characteristics of Africans and their enslaved status were determined by what Feagin (2000) calls "color coding." In the early seventeenth century, English colonists referred to themselves as "Christian" and Africans were called "negroes." At this point, the term *Negro* referred to their African descent and not their race; however, the colonists began to distinguish between their white skin and purity and that of the Africans', who were darker. Feagin notes

> Gradually, color and other physical characteristics became central to an ideology rationalizing exploitation and oppression. In the prevailing European view, the enslaved status of most black Americans was fundamental: African Americans were inferior because they were enslaved, and they were enslaved because they were inferior. The expansion of enslavement and color typing developed side by side, with one reinforcing the other (p. 75).

This color coding was shaped largely by Christian doctrine that used religious light and dark imagery to delineate one group of people from another. Evil was dark and sinister while white represented purity and brightness. Concomitantly, "Africans and African Americans were viewed as physically, aesthetically, morally, and mentally inferior to whites-differences that were regarded more or less permanent" (Feagin, 2000, p. 75). Not only was the Black race created, but the white race was also formed, the latter establishing itself as the hegemonic group.

One of the implications that resulted from permanently enslaving Africans was the common ground Europeans established between the freed European servants and wealthy planters. To maintain order in the colony, the wealthy planters offered concessions to the rebellious, poorer whites such as land. Smedley (1999) references Allen, who asserts that using Africans as permanent slaves opened social and economic doors for other Europeans who had been servants; however, "until the end of the seventeenth century they had not yet imposed *social* meanings on them" (p. 108).

However, with the classes of whites joining forces, they formed a white race and with laws established to disenfranchise Africans, "[i]t was the political notions of separateness and difference that formed the substratum out of which were formed the social categories that came to be designated as "races" in North America" (p. 109). Omi and Winant (1994) referred to the United States during this period of racial formation as a "racial dictatorship" (p. 65). The racial categories were assigned characteristics--an identity--to them that promoted a social system of white dominance and power that resulted in a racial ideology that continues to permeate American culture.

Schools: Agents of White Supremacy

"The inequalities of education children of color and the poor have to live with are institutional, socioeconomic, and ideological expressions of a white supremacist capitalist society."

-Dr. Haroon Kharem (2006, p. 23)

How did Black males' crises in schooling reach this point? One of the causes leading to the alienation of Black males in schooling is *systemic racism* which Feagin (2000) defines as a "diverse assortment of racist practices; the unjustly gained economic and political power of whites; the continuing resource inequalities; and the white-racist ideologies, attitudes, and institutions created to preserve white advantages and power" (p. 16). Feagin also states that systemic racism "involves recurring and unequal relationships between groups and individuals" (p. 19). The systemic practice of exploiting, oppressing, and marginalizing African-Americans has created the permanence of racism (Bell, 1992). Permanent, systemic racism is embedded in America's institutions—social, political, financial, educational, and even the media, and this institutional racism allows whites to maintain dominance over those deemed inferior (Hacker, 2003).

Omi and Winant define *race* as a "concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies" (1994, p. 55). This definition contradicts the belief that biological characteristics determine one's racial identity. Race is socially and historically constructed, and there is no biological support for categorizing humans based on race (Feagin, 2000; Lopez, 1996; Omi & Winant,

1994; Smedley, 1999). The dominant group's belief that the physical features of a person determines their place in society established and sustains the ideology of white supremacy, which is not only socially constructed but also legally constructed (Kharem, 2006; Lopez, 1996). Kharem (2006) defines *white supremacy* as a

> discourse and system of ideas that denigrates ad exploits the people it relegates to the margins of society. White supremacy is also a 'way of seeing' espoused by the intelligentsia and spurious intellectuals—their theories, in turn, are transformed into public policy with the help of their political and civil service sympathizers. It affirms white people as being genetically superior and privileged, thus inheriting the right to claim the lion's share of the world's resources and to dehumanize others within a system of economic domination and exploitation (p. 1)

White supremacist doctrine is the foundation of America's schools since whites established schools in post-Civil War for the dual purpose of training blacks in normal schools to exploit their labor for white economic wealth and to keep blacks in an inferior status; in essence, this practice coupled with Jim Crow laws continued to legalize racism. More disturbing, the post-*Brown* era demonstrates that America has, in fact, a two-tiered educational system, separate and unequal, that benefits white, socio-economically advantaged students. Consequently, black students, significantly African-American males, are being left behind.

When the dominant group established a caste system based on phenotype and the images of blackness and black men were those of sin, immorality, almost ape-like, and intellectually inferior. They were a curse and a freak of nature. Scientific racism, as spurious as it was, was employed to reduce African-Americans to a level of mental retardation with negative character traits because of differences in white and black people based on biology and nature. Translated, African-American people were incapable of being more than docile, simple workers for whites because on the biological hierarchy, they were a lower form. Hence, this perpetuated the belief that whites were supreme and blacks were inferior and needed to be controlled. Schooling is an institution that could uphold these ideas, and white supremacist doctrine was and continues to serve as the foundation of public education.

In his study of the major white architects of black education, Watkins (2001) states that this pseudo theory imbued in white dominance presented the "human difference as the rationale for inequality" (p. 39). These differences justified whites' exploitation of black labor for economic control and social dominance; therefore, African-Americans' disenfranchisement and segregation by whites were justified. Public schooling currently demonstrates that the philosophy and practices of white supremacist education have not subsided but are insidious and disingenuous. Schools are designed to inculcate America's school children, white and students of color, with the dominant group's cultural values, norms, and beliefs. The purpose of schooling in these ideas is to maintain the existing social order and force "others" to assimilate to the white culture (Kharem, 2006; Shujaa, 1994; Tyack, 1974). Shujaa (1994) defines *schooling* as a "process intended [author's emphasis] to perpetuate and maintain the society's existing power relations and the institutional structures that support those arrangements" and distinguishes it from *education*, which he defines as "the process of transmitting from one generation to the next knowledge of values, aesthetics, spiritual beliefs, and all things that give a particular cultural orientation its uniqueness" (p. 15). In this context, it is clear that the resegregation of America's public schools post-*Brown* has interfered with and halted the transmission of the knowledge and history that is unique to Blacks. In its place is schooling dominated by white culture and norms. Kharem (2006) states:

> For colonized African-Americans, the poor and other nonwhite children, school is no more than mindless drills for standardized multiple choice exams that "comb" away anything in the mind that would lead to a true learning experience. This schooling does not encourage critical thinking or any sense of community among students. Instead, it promotes a passive nature of obedience, indoctrinating nonwhites, working class and poor students not to inquire why events happen or how those events affect and shape society, but to accept and memorize certain predetermined facts and the dates of events (p. 24).

Kharem asserts that policymakers and school officials uphold the use of standards-based education and testing to improve achievement of American students which in turn improves nation's economy place in global competition. However, he believes that these tools have not benefited nonwhite students, especially those in inner city and urban

schools. In more affluent districts, students are expected to critically think and are exposed to literature, arts, and numerous course offerings while poor nonwhite students are taught isolated skills to take a test, given a prescribed curriculum, tracked, and the discipline and control of students is a major focus. These practices will improve this group of students' economic status and quality of life, which white culture has determined for them (Tyack, 1974; Woodson, 1933).

Ogbu (1994) discusses the concept of *social stratification*, which is "a society in which there is a differential relationship between members of its constituent groups and the society's fundamental resources" and in this type of society, he states that "there is usually an overarching ideology, a folk or/and scientific "theory" embodying the dominant group's rationalizations or explanations of the hierarchical ordering of the groups" (p. 266). Ogbu posits that the subordinate groups do not accept these rationalizations generally, but they can not escape the influences of them. In social stratification, there are several types of stratification: social class, ethnic, racial, caste, and gender. In examining white supremacy and education, racial stratification is significant. Ogbu defines *racial stratification* as "the hierarchical organization of *socially defined "races" or groups* (as distinct from biologically defines "races" or groups) on the basis of assumed inborn differences in *status honor* or *moral worth*, symbolized in the United States by skin color (p. 268). The dominant group assigns a value to a group's skin color and these racial groups are "visible, recognized, and named" and they are also "permanent"(p. 269). Ogbu states that the racial groups may integrate [with the dominant group], but "assimilation is *not* [author's emphasis] an option, at least for black Americans" (p. 269). Given white dominance in the institution of education, African-American students in schools, more significantly those in urban districts with high levels of nonwhites and students in poverty, do not have equal access to resources like their counterparts, are for the most part segregated, and are perceived as intellectually and socially inferior, hence the practice of tracking, restricting access to college preparatory classes, and misdiagnoses of students for special education.

In Critical Race Theory, issues such as curriculum, instruction, assessment, and school funding are means in which the dominant group promotes White supremacy According to Ladson-Billings (in Parker, Deyhle & Villenas, 1999), the standardization

of curriculum silences other ethnic groups, particularly African-Americans. Other perspectives are diminished in favor of the White perspective, which is considered the standard to follow. Additionally, many curricula promote a color-blind perspective by celebrating diversity, which on the surface is not negative; however, information is sometimes omitted, de-emphasized, or distorted. For example, Ladson-Billings states that "students are taught erroneously that "we are all immigrants" and African American, Indigenous, and Chicano students are left with the guilt of failing to rise above their immigrant status like 'every other group'"(p. 22). Instructionally, schools continue to employ one-size-fits-all pedagogical practices without regard to students' cultural background and learning styles. Not only are African-American students subjected to a traditional curriculum, they are subjected to non-innovative and uninspiring instruction.

In the area of assessment, critical race theorists believe that assessments being utilized in education are tools to legitimize the dominant group's belief that African-American students are intellectually inferior and are not capable of learning. Another critical area of education for critical race theorists is school funding. According to Ladson-Billings (in Parker, Deyhle & Villenas, 1999), "CRT argues that inequality in school funding is a function of institutional and structural racism" (p.24). Many school districts rely on property taxes to fund them. In a community that has higher wealth, the schools are funded more than a school in the inner city. School districts with more wealth in the form of property are afforded new facilities, more resources such as books, technology, and field experiences, while schools in poorer communities are dilapidated and usually lack books, computers, and even certified teachers.

Owning property is a powerful tool because with it, comes privilege, that is, white privilege. According to Harris, White identity received property status and the "possession of property includes the rights of use and enjoyment" (in Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995, p. 282) with the "legal right to exclude others from the privileges inhering in whiteness" (p. 283). White dominance and control of intellectual property have denied African-American students the right to benefit from and enjoy a culturally relevant and challenging curriculum and innovative and exemplary instruction. Property attainment in affluent districts has created an abundance of funding for excellent, state-of-the-art facilities, numerous elective courses that include artistic and

literary enrichment, while excluding the property-less in urban districts with high levels of impoverished students from new facilities and resources.

Chesley (2007) defines *alienation* as a "term used in research to describe the conditions of being separated from society, fragmented, or discontinuous" (p. 179). She states that alienation is a "condition of the invisible" (p. 183). African-American males in schools encounter student alienation, the alienation of being profiled and labeled in the school as a thug, troublemaker, or unintelligent, and leave school to confront social alienation, which gets them profiled according to the dominant culture's perception. It is a double-edged sword. This bi-polarization wreaks havoc on the potential of African-American males.

The Research Speaks
Perception of African-American Males in Schools

"As another has well said, to handicap a student by teaching him that his black face is a curse and that his struggle to change his condition is hopeless is the worst sort of lynching."

-Dr. Carter G. Woodson

Historical and socio-cultural analyses indicate that a significant challenge confronting African-American males in schools is the perception the teachers and the school system have of them. Noguera (2008) states that although African-American males make up a small percentage of the United States population, they "occupy a large spaces within the American psyche and imagination"(p. xi). According to Noguera, Black males "have served as the ultimate 'other'" (ibid). If one reviews the history of African-American males at the onset of North American slavery, they were seen as barbaric, intellectually inferior, existing to breed, violent, heathens, sexual deviants, and their masculinity was to be feared (Feagin, 2000; Smedley, 1999; Watkins, 2001). It is this fear that has fueled the need to control their minds, bodies, and emasculate them.

Today's teaching force is predominantly female and White (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003-2004) and White female teachers comprise 83 percent of the nation's elementary teachers (Harry & Anderson, 1995; Kunjufu, 2002). However, the majority of White and White female teachers are teaching majority non-White students.

Unfortunately, the *Brown* decision was supposed to level the playing field for African-American students in schools but the ruling has not minimized the negative perceptions and injustice they continue to experience in schools (Kuykendall, 2004). For African-American males, the perceptions many White teachers have of them are further supported by the distorted images that are displayed in the media and literature, which characterize Black males as dangerous, criminal, incapable of learning, and sexually and physically aggressive (Feagin, 2000; Hopkins, 1997; Noguera, 2008).

This perception has even led to some White females falsely accusing Black men of heinous crimes, which has been a historical phenomenon. Many Black men in the past have been lynched for allegedly looking at White women and/or falsely accused of raping them. History once again meets present. From time to time, we see on television cases in which a helpless White woman accuses an African-American man of some violent or depraved crime when in fact he is innocent, and the White woman *is* the guilty one. For example in Pennsylvania in 2010, a White woman faked a kidnapping of her and her daughter by a Black man who hit her SUV and then kidnapped the child. She fabricated this alleged abduction to cover her criminal acts of stealing someone's identification, theft, and embezzlement (Celizic, 2009). In a 1994 case, South Carolinian Susan Smith accused a Black man of kidnapping her two children when in fact she had murdered her two sons by driving them into a lake. In 1989, a Black man was the scapegoat to cover up a White husband's murder of his pregnant wife, alleging that a Black man carjacked him and the wife (Terry, 2009).

Today's media has become a conduit for Black male exploitation and "demonization" (Ferguson, 2000). More disturbing is that every day in the United States a Black boy is "scapegoated" and "demonized" in schools based on how many of the White teachers perceive them. Even when some educators and social activists refer to African-American males as being an "endangered species," the image is one of Black males having animalistic characteristics and being on the verge of extinction like some wildlife species. Because of the negative perceptions of Black people and Black males in particular that are ingrained in the racial landscape, Black males' criminal acts towards White women seem real to the dominant group. Likewise, White teachers' perceptions of

African-American males in schools are an extension of the historical racial beliefs that, sadly, remain prevalent today, and the literature supports this insidious practice.

According to Kuykendall (2004), "Blacks and Hispanics are still being seen as passive, docile, dependent, non-enterprising, inferior, and less attractive than Whites (p. 13). When teachers have these attitudes and perceptions, their actions demonstrate their beliefs. They do not provide rigorous, challenging assignments, encourage students to do their best, and teachers sometimes humiliate students in the classroom or make comments that students lack academic ability and/or will not do well in life. When students hear this constantly, they begin to internalize these perceptions and then own them (Fordham, 1996). Girabaldi, in his research on African-American males in New Orleans, found that 95 percent of the Black males surveyed expected to graduate but 40 percent responded that their teachers did not set high enough goals for them to reach and 60 percent felt that their teachers should push them more (1992). It is well documented that the majority of the nation's teaching force is White and female, therefore the young men surveyed may have fallen victim to teachers' negative perceptions about their view of school and their ability to learn. Girabaldi (1992) states, "Teachers who hold negative perceptions can inadvertently "turn off" Black male students who have high abilities, positive self-concepts, and outstanding personal expectations, and who set achievable aspirations"(p. 8).

Donaldo Madeco (1994), a critical theorist, went to several Navajo schools and as the Anglo teachers explained the English curriculum to his group, he noticed that the four years of high school English were not distinguishable and did not involve much writing or reading, so he inquired why the skills taught in ninth grade were taught repeatedly through grade twelve. The English teacher stated that the Navajo kids "are not readers, by nature" (p.149) and that they have trouble acquiring English skills. Macedo refers to this kind of schooling as "education so as not to educate" (p. 150), and he saw more of the same type of instruction taking place on other reservations notes that the schooling taking place on the reservations "is the same colonial model that fails most of the subordinate students in urban schools" (1994, p. 150).

Claude Steele (1997) looks at the effects of racial stereotypes on academic performance, looking specifically at student attitudes towards testing. He refers to a

social-psychological threat as one "that arises when one is in a situation or doing something for which a negative stereotype about one's group applies. This predicament threatens one with being negatively stereotyped, with being judged or treated stereotypically, or with the prospect of conforming to the stereotype" (p. 614). He found that students are vulnerable to prevailing stereotypes and perceptions already in place in relation to their intellectual ability. Steele calls this threat a *stereotype threat*, which "is a situational threat—a threat in the air—that, in general form, can affect the members of any group about who, a negative stereotype exists…Where bad stereotypes about these groups apply, members of these groups can fear being reduced to that stereotype" (ibid). In other words, if there is a prevailing stereotype that Black boys do not know how to write essays and have identified with this stereotype that has been attached to them, the emotional reaction from having to write an essay could derail their performance on the essay. Steele determined that students can and usually do internalize and are prone to becoming victims of racial stereotypes related to intellectual ability which are placed upon them by the dominant group controlling schooling spaces (in Noguera, 2008; Steele, 1997).

Along these lines, Ogbu explains *racial stratification* and its impact on Black schooling. *Racial stratification* is "the hierarchical organization of *socially defined "races" or groups* [author's emphasis] (as distinct from biologically defined "races" or groups) on the basis of assumed inborn differences in *status honor* or *moral worth* [author's emphasis], symbolized in the United States by skin color (1994, pp. 268-269). This racial stratification accounts for the way in which African-American students are perceived and treated in schools. Ogbu refers to treatments such as "tracking, testing and misclassification, representation or non-representation in textbooks and curriculum. Cultural, linguistic and intellectual denigration is also part of the problem" (p.287). He explains how Black students' "own perceptions and responses to their schooling in the context of their overall experience of racial subordination" (p. 288) can negatively impact their education. For African-American males, the negative perceptions based on race that teachers have about them along with insidious policies and practices in place can prove disastrous for them because not only do the dominant group hold negative perceptions of

Black males, but the Black males conform and perform to the stereotypes and perceptions held about them.

Davis and Jordan (1994) present their findings in research concerning how a school's context, structure, and experiences can affect African-American males' success and failure in middle and high school. Using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) of 1988, the researchers selected eighth and tenth grade African-American males to determine patterns of relationships consistent with the success and failure rate of this particular group of students. There were several salient findings: 1) in terms of achievement, the findings suggest that urban Black males in middle schools are worse off than their counterparts in suburban and rural school settings; 2) Black males academically performed poorly because the focus in schools was on discipline and less focus on motivating the students; 3) "teacher absences had the strongest association with Black male achievement, indicating that the failure of teachers to show up for work was often symptomatic of poor performance among Black males" (p. 581); and 4) for the African-American males in high school, "when teachers' perception of accountability for the success or failure of their students was low, Black male performance dropped" (p. 583). The researchers suggest that this may have occurred because of "teachers' perceived inability to effect change in their students' lives" (ibid).

Statistically speaking, Black boys are in trouble when it comes to schooling and encountering the barriers, both visible and invisible, that they face every day in a school setting and in American society. As noted earlier, 50 percent or more of African-American males in many major cities are dropping out of school, are being suspended or expelled more than any other group, and are being labeled as having emotional disturbances and/or learning disabilities and placed in the special education track (Smith, 2004). Noguera (2003) suggests that "processes and influences involved in the construction of Black male identity should be at the center of analyses of school performance because it is on the basis of their identities that Black males are presumed to be at risk, marginal, and endangered in school and throughout American society" (p. 442). Teacher and societal perceptions of Black males as soon as they walk through the classroom door can set them up for success or failure. In fact, not only will teachers

determine the academic placement of Black males in "higher" or "lower" classes and special education based on achievement data, but their decisions are also based on their perceptions of a Black male student's appearance, language, style, and the way in which he carries himself (Artiles et al., 2002; Ferguson, 2000; Harry & Anderson, 1995; Noguera, 2003).

While African-American males are in the process of discovering who they are as young Black men, it appears that schools have already created an identity for them based on race. Ferguson (2000), who conducted ethnographic research into the impact of race on Black boys' identity, says that *race* is "a system for organizing social difference and as a device for reproducing inequality in contemporary United States. Race continues to be a ready-made filter for interpreting events, informing social interactions, and grounding identities and identification in school"(p. 17).

From Perception to Labeling, Sorting, and on Track for Failure
"When you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions. You don't have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his "proper place" and stay in it."
-Dr. Carter G. Woodson

Within school systems, teachers and the personnel who influence students' learning opportunities and overall schooling experiences wield a certain level of power- the power to lift up students or the power to destroy. When students' schooling experiences rests on the perceptions that teachers have of them, these perceptions lead to other practices that can marginalize certain students (Ferguson, 2000). Research has shown that many African-American male students are perceived negatively by schools and teachers, and the lack of engaging and culturally relevant instruction and curricula and the absence of cultural proficiency to work with Black males have had significant repercussions for them. Vaught (2011) writes that "[l]abels serve as ideological and structural gateways to the effective maintenance of racial hegemony" (p. 148).

The research is clear: African-American males are dropping out in record numbers, being suspended or expelled in disproportionate numbers, being tracked into low-functioning classes, and being labeled for special education more often than their

White peers (Davis & Jordan, 1995; Harry & Anderson, 1995; Kunjufu, 1989; Oakes, 2005). Davis and Jordan state that "inequities in schooling experiences have potentially broad consequences for students' future educational attainment, employment, and family relations. Access to academic experiences through the curriculum, teachers, and other school activities is of particular importance for students such as African-American males, who are already marginalized in school settings"(p. 570). However, once African-American males are labeled as "a problem", emotionally disturbed, or unable to learn, they are sorted into certain classes where they are excluded from school, even though they may be inside the building.

Labeling also maintains White privilege and supremacy over the institution of education. Harris (1995) asserts that Whiteness as a form of property offers White people unfettered privileges, including the right to control the institution of education and the individuals who receive schooling. To maintain hegemony, White privilege allows the predominantly White teaching force to control which educational spaces students will occupy. Attaching a label to a child serves this purpose, becoming "gateways to the predictable early termination of school or the school-to-prison pipeline, among multiple caste-based trajectories (Vaught, 2011, p. 148). Furthermore, Vaught refers to labeling as a form of *racist hate speech,* the use of words and messages "to debase, humiliate, threaten, or harm people of Color" and the "messages of racist hate speech are not merely individual insults, but draw on both historical and contemporary practices of racial power and violence—structural, bodily, and psychological. They are meant to put people of Color in their place in the racial order" (p. 149). *Racist hate speech* can take the form of actions because they communicate as well, and some actions devalue or dismiss certain students. Therefore, the practice of academic tracking and placing exorbitant number of African-American males in special education is an example of racist hate speech.

Academic Tracking

Jeannie Oakes (2005) defines *tracking* as "the process whereby students are divided into categories so that they can be assigned in groups to various kinds of classes" (p. 3). Oakes states that tracking is the same as *sorting*, which is also a practice of "sorting of students that have certain predictable characteristics" (ibid). Kuykendall

(2004) asserts that the following student differences impact teachers' perceptions which in turn lead to the sorting of students: prior achievement, prior behavior, prior placement, socioeconomic status, language ability, physical attributes, gender, and race/ethnicity (p. 16). Ferguson (2000) states:

> Teacher perceptions of students are grounded in their own location in social categories of race, class, and gender. They make sense of their interactions with pupils and the conditions of their work from these social locations. Teachers bring different experiences and knowledge of racial structures into school that provide a framework from which to interpret, to organize information, to act…In the case of African American boys, misbehavior is likely to be interpreted as symptomatic of ominous criminal proclivities. Because of this, teachers are more likely to pay attention to and punish rule breaking, as "moral" and "pragmatic" reasons for acting converge with criteria of culpability. On the basis of "moral" reasons, teachers use troublemakers as exemplars to mark boundaries of transgressive behavior; this also has practical effects on general classroom order" (p. 89)

Again, it is important to recognize that the majority of teachers in the United States are women and predominantly White women, yet the majority of the students they teach are non-White (Harry & Anderson, 1994). It is from these social spaces that teachers begin to create labels for Black male students, where the Black male's behavior, linguistics, presentation, and academic performance are juxtaposed with the perception of how the ideal student (i.e. White male student) should perform academically, act in terms of behavior, present himself, and use appropriate linguistics. If an African-American male student does not fit into the role of the teacher's version of the ideal student, there will be friction between the student and teacher within the confines of the classroom and in the overall school space.

Ford, Grantham, and Bailey (in Polite & Davis, 1999) discuss the issues facing African-American males who are gifted. African-American males are underrepresented in this area of education because of racism and negative perceptions. The researchers cite a study that found that "Black males are most likely to (a) be labeled deviant and described negatively by teachers; (b) have their abilities judged inaccurately by teachers; (c) receive nonverbal criticism from teachers; and (d) be reprimanded, sent to the principal's office, and suspended" (p. 53). When Black males are prevented from academically achieving

because of teachers' and schools' negative perception of them, they do not grow. Instead, many African-American males underachieve, lose interest in learning and believe school is irrelevant to their lives. Ford examined gender differences in underachievement among gifted African American males and females in grades 5 and 6. She found that

> Black males were more likely than Black females to be underachievers, they exerted considerably less effort in school, and they demonstrated more negative attitudes than the females. Ford also discovered that Black males were more pessimistic about social factors than females. For example, several of the Black males spoke with anger and disappointment about the injustices with which Blacks must wrestle (p. 53).

If the gifted African-American males are experiencing discomfort and injustice in school, imagine how the African-American males labeled and sorted into the general, vocational or special education programs gift are feeling and being treated. What is also salient is that the study involved elementary students and the Black males were already beginning to disconnect from school. If Black males are being targeted in elementary schools, they will carry the academic, social, and psychological damage for the remainder of their schooling experiences, if they make it to high school graduation. And the current data indicate that at least 50 percent of African-American males in this country are not making it to graduation.

Labels make African-American males more visible, and then they become invisible. When a Black male student has been labeled a troublemaker, a thug, learning disabled, emotionally disturbed, un-teachable, or "at risk," he attracts the attention of the teacher, who "makes an example" of him in class by publicly assigning a consequence or sending him out the class, and he becomes visible to the administrator who doles out the consequences. In fact, the student gains a reputation through out the school; other teachers, the secretaries, cafeteria workers and even the custodians know a student's reputation and label, which is blinking on him like a bright neon sign. More troubling, as African-American males acquire unflattering labels, they begin to act out, lending credence to the labels placed on them by the dominant group. Once African-American males are tagged as inferior and incorrigible, removing this group of students from the

general education setting makes life easier for the general education teachers and the classes. Unfortunately, this practice of excluding certain students to the space on the social and educational hierarchy that the dominant group believes is appropriate has not changed through out the history of American education (Tyack, 1974). Hacker (2003) writes that "slower tracks also become repositories for pupils whose conduct teachers find bothersome or inappropriate" (p. 191). Kunjufu sums it up: "To reduce the number of Black boys placed in the lowest academic track, we need to abolish tracking entirely" (1989, p. 55). Tracking in any form subordinates one group over another and for African-American males, it reinforces the hegemonic society's perception of them as inferior, "an endangered species," "at-risk," and other injurious labels and does nothing to improve their schooling situation.

Tyack (1974) explores the history of urban education and discusses how students who were considered inferior and prone to dropping out of school were designated to special tracks that would provide vocational training for those students whose schools determined that they could not handle a high school curriculum (p. 210). Oakes (2005) states that recent studies of vocational programs being established in high schools on the surface appears to be a way of providing training to students for positions in an industrialized society. However, studies are also revealing the insidiousness of the vocational program trend. Oakes states:

> Many of those who study schools suggest that the introduction of vocational programs was more likely a fearful response to the influx of working-class, poor, and immigrant children into the high school and the threat they posed to its formerly elite status. Rather than change the character of the academic curriculum to meet the needs of a diverse student population (and thereby preserve the common school), the inclusion of vocational programs permitted schools to differentiate their curricula and to sort students. As a result, vocational programs provided a means of encouraging working-class children not to drop out of school while keeping them from receiving an academic education (pp. 152-153).

For African-American students, particularly males who are being suspended and/or expelled and dropping out in record numbers, vocational programs segregates poor and Students of Color from the middle- and upper- class students and their curricula.

Furthermore, this specially designed curriculum prepares marginalized groups with skills to do the work that meets the needs of the dominant group (Kharem, 2006).

To further differentiate students for the purpose of sorting, many school districts used IQ testing, which is racially and culturally biased, to group students according to their ability. However, the scores based on mental aptitude tests also "influenced the behavior of professionals and the self-concept of the children who lived in classrooms" (Tyack, 1974, p. 216). Currently, other forms of testing are used to determine if students are achieving at a certain level. However, the data can also assist schools in placing students in classrooms based on data-driven ability. With empirical evidence in hand coupled with the teacher's anecdotal evidence of Black males' behavior and ability in class, some students are bound for the lower track general education classes, vocational track, and even special education (Ferguson, 2000). Once placed in the lower tracks, students rarely move up and researchers have found that the academic gap between the higher and lower tracks widens over a period of time (Hopkins, 1997; Kharem, 2006; Kunjufu, 1989).

African-American Males' Over-representation in Special Education

Perhaps the most pervasive labeling and sorting practices occur in the area of special education. Research indicates that a disproportionate number of African-American males are labeled as students with disabilities and therefore require an *Individualized Education Plan*, widely known as an IEP (Artiles, Harry, Reschly & Chinn, 2002; Harry & Anderson, 1995, 1999; Kunjufu, 1989). The National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities defines an IEP as a "written statement of the educational program designed to meet a child's individual needs" and the document as well as the IEP process is designed to "set reasonable learning goals for the child, and to state the services that the school district will provide for the child" (p. 1). When there is a disproportionate number of a particular group placed in a certain educational setting, Harry and Anderson (1999) states that the term *disproportionate placement* is often used and "means that those students are represented in the program in a significantly greater percentage than their percentage in the school population" (in Polite & Davis, p. 35).

Harry and Anderson (1999) place the current issue of the pervasive practice of labeling and sorting Black males for special education in a historical context, stating that "African-American males have been disproportionately represented in special education since its inception" (p. 603). According to Kunjufu, federal laws [the Civil Rights act of 1964 and the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965] established special education but the law "was never designed to be exploited" (p. 43). In order to maintain segregated school settings and circumvent the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, many schools devised ways to maintain the status quo--races staying in their "proper place." Bell (2004) notes that the "fear of losing federal funds became a motivating factor inducing school authorities to effectuate some small measure of desegregation" (p. 97). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 created billions of federal funds for schools. The nation was in a state of transition: the Supreme Court ordered schools to integrate, so predominantly White schools grudgingly accepted African-Americans, having no knowledge of Black culture and White teachers had never taught Black students while schools were coming into millions of dollars to educate all the students.

There is a component of the Critical Race Theory movement called *interest convergence* or *material determinism*. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) posits that "because racism advances the interests of both white elitists (materially) and working-class people (psychically), large segments have little incentive to eradicate it" (p. 7). Further, legal scholar and racial realist Derrick Bell asserts that "civil rights advances for blacks always coincided with changing economic conditions and the self-interests of elite whites" (in Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 18). The elite in this matter of using special education to segregate African-American students, particularly boys, is the dominant group who controlled school funding and made decisions supposedly in the best interest of children. White-operated and -controlled school districts allowed Black students into their schools while the government provided funding. However, with the establishment of special education, this particular program provided an opportunity to integrate the school but exclude African-American students. Harry and Anderson (1995) state:

By 1965 in San Francisco, California, resistance to the court-ordered segregation initiated by the Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954) led to the charge that districts were using special education classes as a cover for segregation. In 1974, *Johnson v. San Francisco Unified School District* brought this charge to the courts. In that same year, the plaintiffs in the now-famous case of *Larry P. et al v. Wilson Riles et al* (1979) first filed suit, accusing a San Francisco school district of discriminating against five African American children who had been placed in EMR [Educable Mental Retardation].

In the district from which the *Larry P.* case emerged, approximately 29% of the student population was African American, while 66% of students in the EMR classrooms were African American. Similarly, in the state as a whole, approximately 10% of students African American, while 25% of students in the state's EMR classrooms were African American (ibid).

After many legal maneuvers, the judge ruled that in the *Larry P.* case, the district's misuse of IQ testing was done to intentionally segregate students based on race. The judge also issued a ban on the use of IQ tests for African-American students for special education placement and ordered the state to monitor disproportionate placement of Black students in EMR classes and eliminate this unjust practice. Oakes (2005) writes, "Placement strategies that result in the disproportionate assignment of minority children to special education programs are considered a denial of the equal protection and due process guaranteed under the Constitution" (p. 12). Unfortunately, history continues to repeat itself because African-American males are still overrepresented in the nation's special education classes.

Despite monitoring of data from school districts by the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), there is still a larger overrepresentation of African-American males in special education programs. According to Artiles et al (2002), overrepresentation "affects the so-called high incidence (emotional disturbances, MMR [Mild Mental Retardation], and learning disabilities) or "judgmental" disabilities and the students [who] are consistently affected at the national level are African Americans, particularly males in mental retardation (MR) and emotional disturbance (ED) programs" (p. 4). In a 1992 survey by the OCR, results revealed that African American males comprised 8.23 percent of the national school enrollment but were represented more than twice that percentage in cognitive disabled and emotional disturbance categories and Black males were suspended in disproportionate numbers (Harry & Anderson, 1994). Most of the students referred and subsequently placed in

special education programs are poor, male, and are an ethnic minority, and it is rare for them to leave the special education category once they are placed. Teachers usually refer students to the school psychologist because she suspects a disability, even though some parents believe their child has a disability and requests testing. While referring and determining if a student has a disability is a process, there are still too many African-American males making it through the process. Granted, some students have some learning challenges; however, given the data that the teachers are majority middle class, female, and White, and the research supports that cultural, racial, and gender biases leads to labeling and sorting, these issues play a role in the referring of Black males for special education services (Artiles et al, 2002; Ferguson, 2000; Harry & Anderson, 1999).

Identifying students for placement in special education can be debilitating for students. Placement in special education is a serious matter because it can negatively impact a student indefinitely. Depending on what the IEP requires for the learning environment, many students may never have the opportunity to be included in a general education class (mainstreamed) and be challenged academically. In many cases, students identified as Emotionally Disturbed(ED) are self-contained because of their behavior but may not have a learning disability. Research indicates that a significant percentage of Black males are declared ED and placed in a self-contained class when they could in fact handle the general education classes with improved teaching strategies, cultural proficiency and additional support in the classroom for the student. When a student is found to qualify for special education services, he is considered disabled. The stigma connected to the special education label suggests the child is different and not considered "normal." IEPs call for students to be in the least restrictive learning environment in an effort to create a sense of normalcy as well as to include students as much as possible. However, the opposite may occur. Over-identification and disproportionate placement of African American males in special education programs perpetuates the negative perceptions that the dominant group has about them, diminishes opportunities to advance social and academically, and promotes exclusion.

Resistance

"It is a struggle; for though the black man fights passively, he nevertheless fights; and his passive resistance is more effective at present than active resistance could possibly be. He bears the fury of the storm as does the willow tree."

-James Weldon Johnson

The research concerning the over-representation of African-American males in special education is abundant, and the majority of them have been labeled as having significant behavioral issues in the classroom, which can and usually does lead to the Emotionally Disturbed (ED) label (Artiles, Harry, Reschly & Chinn, 2002; Harry & Anderson, 1995; Noguera, 2003). The research has also been clear regarding how teachers' perceptions can hinder a Black male's schooling experiences until he graduates, if he makes it to that point. In summary, the research has been consistent in regard to the composition of the nation's teaching force as being White and female, White teachers' perceptions of African-American males are less than stellar, and these negative views of and attitudes toward this group of students can lead to labeling and sorting. As a result of this racist hate speech (Vaught, 2011), Black males have been unjustly ruled incompetent, unwilling to learn, troublemakers, criminal, and lazy, just to name a few pejorative tags placed on them. If the teachers, administrators, and school psychologists believe that Black males are very angry and refuse to take advantage of the educational opportunities within the schoolhouses, the answer is not to test them for special education, suspend or expel on a regular basis, prevent access from advanced courses, push Black males toward vocational programs or computer-based instruction, or push them out the doors without a high school diploma and post-secondary options. The answer is in the question: why are African-American males resisting school and from where comes the rage?

Despite the billions of dollars schools receive each year through grants and federal funding to motivate students to learn, improve reading and math skills, and engage students while attempting to make the curricula rigorous and relevant, African-American males are not making significant gains academically and many are not graduating from high school. For the ones who are being challenged academically, have

a positive self-image of themselves, and are comfortable with who they are, they are being schooled in safe, positive academic setting or have strong cultural supports within or outside the school setting that celebrates and embraces them as young Black men. However, this type of academic setting specially designed for the academic, social, and cultural needs of Black males are not in most of our nation's schools. If the African-American male from the time he enters school as an elementary student is perceived negatively, disproportionately suspended or placed in special education, or given labels that degrade him, he becomes complicit in his own journey down the path of failure. Noguera (2003) states:

> Black males often adopt behaviors that make them complicit in their own failure. It is not that they are more likely to be punished or placed in remedial classes, it is also that they are more likely to act out in the classroom and to avoid challenging themselves academically. Recognizing that Black males are not merely passive victims but may also be active agents in their own failure means that interventions designed to help them must take this into account (p. 437).

For many African-American males, failure becomes the choice because their mind is bombarded with so many negative perceptions and inequitable experiences that their psyche ingests the dominant groups' message about them. Noguera believes that changing policies, creating programs, and other initiatives will not be productive in improving Black males' school experiences unless there are strategies in place to "actively engage Black males and their families in taking responsibility to improve their circumstances" (p. 437). For them to take responsibility, they must feel like they belong in the school and not like as Dubois describes Black men, a "stranger" or "problem."

In a major study about the academic disengagement of middle class African-American students in an affluent suburban district, John Ogbu (2003) uses the term *collective identity*. Collective identity "is a sense of who [African-Americans] are, the "we" feeling or feeling of belonging. Collective identity is a product of the group's history and experiences"(pp. 173-174). Ogbu posits that for Black students, their collective identity is in opposition because it was created under oppression (i.e. White supremacy) since Black people were brought to the United States involuntarily, as *involuntary* or *nonimmigrant minorities*:

In education, oppositional collective identity is associated with affective dissonance in the domains of curriculum (culture), language (standard English), and relationships with teachers and the school system. Involuntary or nonimmigrant minorities perceive and experience the school culture or curriculum and language as an imposition by the dominant groups and its schools. The minorities feel that they have to endure the imposition because they have no choice. In addition, involuntary minorities often experience the school curriculum and language negatively, because the dominant group uses both the curriculum and language to communicate to the minorities the message that they are inferior (p. 174).

Even though African-American students cannot clearly articulate if they feel inferior in school, they can articulate if a teacher is really teaching and putting effort into it, motivating them to learn, or if a teacher cares about them. They can also communicate if they are being degraded or treated disrespectfully. The subtle messages are prevalent in schools as well (Ogbu, 1994). For example, African-American students will go through their elementary and high school years interacting with few teachers who look like them and for Black males, they may have one Black male teacher from the time they enter kindergarten and graduate from high school. The curricula, textbooks and instructional materials lack cultural richness and relevance, giving the impression that Whites invented, wrote, created formulas for mathematics, etc. and no other race contributed to society. Black history is often focused on in the month of February and that depends if celebrating is a part of the school's culture, yet there are opportunities to incorporate African-American and African history in every subject every month. For many school districts with a predominantly African-American population, Black history and literature classes are not requirements or are not offered at all. When schools do not recognize and respect the needs of African-American students, then resistance in some form whether unconsciously or consciously will take place (Thompson, 2004).

Sabina Vaught (2011) in her research illuminated the issue of racist hate speech that occurs against African-American children in schools across the nation. Non-verbal and verbal messages are sent to African-American children and other Students of Color that they are not valued or worthy of respect. These racist beliefs play on students' psyche and are particularly detrimental to Black males because of the significance of the number being placed in special education, suspended, routed to other, less rigorous

academic programs, and other disingenuous ways. Along these lines of racist hate speech, which again is not limited to verbal messages, is the concept that scholar bell hooks refers to as *shaming* (hooks, 2003). Rossum and Mason (in hooks, 2003) defines shaming as "an inner sense of being completely diminished or insufficient as a person. It is the self judging of the self. A moment of shame may be humiliation so painful or an indignity so profound that one feels one has been robbed of her or his dignity or exposed as basically inadequate, bad, or worthy of rejection" (p. 94). This shaming causes trauma that not only devalues a person, but deems them "not fully valid as a human being (ibid, p. 94). hooks assert that "[o]ne of the ways racism colonizes the minds and imagination of black people is through systematic shaming. The primary vehicle for this shaming is the mass media" (p. 94).

Indeed, young people have access to mass media unlike any other generation that can draw them into the overt and covert messages being sent through television and the content shown on television, music, and movies. Every day television shares with millions of viewers across the United States negative images of African-American people.   African-American males are shown in handcuffs or standing on a corner in a white t-shirt and sagging jeans doing nothing, women of various races are sexualized on commercials selling items such as lipstick and bras and panties, in the hip-hop culture misogyny toward African-American women is prevalent and the music video show women "breaking it down" in front of men, performing sexualized acts in a group of men. Of course, African-Americans are not the only ones engaging in sexualized and criminal activities, but this is the message being sent by the White-controlled media. If one carefully observes commercials on television that include Black people, women and children particularly have a lighter complexion and their hair is straight or has a soft, wavy texture to it. Everyday, African-American youth see these images that are racist-based and they fall victim to these messages and this is prior to setting foot in schools. White individuals are portrayed more positively than Black individuals. Then schools reify these racist messages when the textbooks do not feature African-American children in a positive manner or exclude them from the books, most of the teachers with whom Black males will interact are White females, African-American males are disciplined more than other groups, a disproportionate number of Black males are placed in special

education based on the White female teacher's referral, and many of the perceptions that most of the White teachers have of Black males start with exposure to mass media.

Many African-American males have experienced trauma, injustice, degradation by words and deeds, and racism before entering school, so their time in school should be an experience of caring from teachers and administrators and other school personnel, encouragement, expectations that they will excel and reach their highest potential and afforded opportunities to make it happen, and equity. Black males are entering the school setting marginalized and oppressed and schools reify the marginalization and oppression. hooks (2003) writes:

> Many black students with excellent academic skill and talent are performing poorly in academic settings because they are shame-based and in settings where shaming is a common practice. In many cases simply the experience of being "judged" activates deep-seated feelings of shame. Messing up, performing poorly eases the anxiety. If the fear is that they will be found wanting, then as soon as they can inappropriately act out so that they are indeed wanting, they can feel better (100).

To mask shame, many Black males have rage inside of them. Kaufman and Rafael (in hooks, 2003) state:

> When the intensity of shame reaches the highest levels, rage is triggered. Rage serves a vital self-protective function: it shields the exposed self. At certain times, rage actively keeps everyone away, covering the self. We refuse further contact because has shut us in and others out. But at other times rage in response to shame may make us invite or seek direct with whoever has humiliated us—if for no other reason than to strike back…That is why if we feel worthless or inadequate…we often mask our deeper shame with surface rage (101).

hooks continues, "Often individual students of color, and other marginalized students are consumed by feelings of rage. Their anger blinds them, preventing them from taking needed steps to restore their integrity of being and personal agency" (ibid). Many African-American males' experiences in school creates a rage within that pours out of them in a manner that further marginalizes them: they are excluded from school due to multiple suspensions, labeled emotionally disturbed (ED) and reduced to special

education status, and pushed into specialized programs such as vocational or computer-based instruction.

For too many Black males, they are simply walking away from school without graduating because in their mind, no one understands them and they do not believe they have a future, so they are just living for the moment. For some, they find a way to cope with the internal conflicts in school and external conflicts of society: they comply as a form of resistance—follow the rules, go to class on time, and turn in their assignments. This particular group is conflicted: Black males in this category want to do well academically but are concerned about the separation that may occur as a result of pursuing academic success (Fordham, 1996). Giroux (2001) posits that openly rebellious resistance is not the only behavior that defines resistance. He states that "some students go through the daily routines of schooling by minimizing their participation in school practices while simultaneously displaying outward conformity to the ideology of the school" (p. 246). African-American males at the other end of the continuum resist to the extreme, who researcher Vernon Polite calls *overt resistors*: they disobey rules, challenge authority, evoke responses from school personnel by saying and doing inappropriate and offensive things, and do whatever they can to upset the culture of the school (in Shujaa, 1994).

In both cases, Black males have feelings, frustrations, dreams and aspirations, and experiences that are not being given an opportunity to be voiced (see Boutte, 2002). Their voices are depressed, thoughts and feelings are repressed, and they are oppressed by a system that has subjugated them. Until African-American males are given the tools to find their self-identity and embrace who they are, able restore their dignity, provided a space to tell their story and not be judged, and are valued and encouraged to reach their highest potential, they will continue to be enraged and resist the schooling experiences and the teachers and administrators that provide them that experience.

Previously I shared the schooling experience that Huey P. Newton (1973) endured as a student in segregated Oakland, California in the 1940s and 1950s. He described being ashamed of being Black because he felt inferior to the White children. He equated "good" with being White and this message was conveyed in the reading books used in school such as *Little Sambo* and *Snow White*. From the time Newton entered school, he

had discipline issues and there was one particular unpleasant incident that remained with him. One day in class, the White teacher thought Newton was not paying attention and acting out because he was "stupid" and that she would demonstrate how stupid he was. The teacher forced Newton to the board to spell the word "business," but his mind froze and he couldn't spell the word so he walked out of class. Every time Newton was called on to read aloud or write on the board, his mind would freeze, so he walked out of class. His reaction to the shame was to walk out, a passive-aggressive stance of resistance to the racist teacher.   In another incident, a White teacher hit him on the head with a book because she felt he was delaying the class after recess when he was only emptying his shoes that were full of sand. In response, Newton threw a shoe at the teacher. He was disciplined of course, but the other students respected him for "resisting unjust authority" (p. 19).

As Newton went through his junior high and senior high school years, he continued to be devalued and degraded and he continued to resist and was suspended multiple times. He would purposely do things to get removed from the class or he would simply walk out—all acts of resistance. He and his friends were tracked to the "dumb class" which was all Black. There, the students stayed with the same teacher for three bells. Newton continued to defy authority and even though he graduated from high school to enter the lowest place on the socio-economic and racial hierarchy, he said his schooling experience taught him the "necessity of resistance and the dignity of defiance" (1973, p. 50). After high school, Newton used the power of resistance to challenge White supremacy in social, political, legal and economic spaces, which led to the formation of the Black Panther Party. It is disturbing because the conflicts Newton encountered almost sixty years ago is still prevalent in today's public schools. In today's educational jargon, the "dumb class" is either a self-contained classroom or a vocational class. Teachers continue to remove students from class because they lack the cultural competence to deal with African-American students and particularly Black males. Some teachers remove them because they have already prophesied their future of life in the penitentiary or they "won't make it." The "Huey P. Newtons" in today's schools walk out of classes without permission because they are not engaged in relevant lessons, they are not being intellectually stimulated, or have been given a verbal and nonverbal

message that their presence in class is not welcomed (Thompson, 2004). Perhaps the instructor offends and degrades the Black male in front of his peers, and the young man's response is resistant—he may simply walk out as he slams the door behind him, walk out after calling the teacher a series of derogatory names, push or throw a book or desk, or threaten the teacher with bodily harm. African-American male goes through life with a target on him—negative media images, racism from other entities such as the legal or law enforcement areas, encounters a criminal element because of where he lives, familial conflicts, and conflicts within the spaces of the school. Equally significant is the education system has predetermined Black males' position on the social hierarchy and how much schooling is needed to maintain the status quo of socio-economic and racial oppression.

Henry Giroux (2001) points out that students may defy the rules and display behavior that opposes the school culture and the logical argument is that this oppositional behavior is a response to "ideological hegemony such as racism and sexism" (p. 245). He states, "[T]he source of such hegemony generally originates outside of school, particularly in the family, the peer group or in the industrialized culture. Under such circumstances, schools become social sites where oppositional behavior simply gets played out" (ibid). Also, Giroux believes that resistance must have a sociopolitical significance to be viewed as resistance (in Solomon, 1992). Given that criterion, many African-American males resist the school and society norms, and it can be in the form of refusing to comply with rules that the school finds as a basic rule that is simple to follow, but is a problem for them. For example, Black males may refuse to comply with a uniform rule because in their culture outside of school, their peer groups do not tuck in shirts and wear belts or they will wear white tee shirts because that is what they do in their community. More serious oppositional behavior occurs in academics where for many African-American males earning good grades is "acting white" (Fordham, 1996; Noguera, 2008; Ogbu, 2003).   In her ethnographic study at Capital High, a predominantly Black school, where she studied cultural identity, Fordham (1996) explains:

Within the African-American community, "acting white" is generally used as an epithet to convey the response of African-Americans to the institutionalization of norms that are generated and maintained by the larger, dominant community. As Capital students defined it, "acting white" entailed representing the "Other" in the presence of Black people. They labeled this response as acceptance of dominance, a political statement about whose views and ideas are to be promulgated. Most Capital students are consciously or unconsciously engaging in an effort to avoid dominating the Black Other and evading domination by the Black Other (p. 22).

This notion of dominating the Black Other is particularly salient. This suggests that African-American students believe that in excelling in school leads to a transformation into someone other type of Black person, one who "acts white" and perhaps "sells out" his Blackness (Chesley, 2007). Solomon (1992) states that student subcultures "use oppositional behaviors to dismantle the social and institutional structures of schools and replace them with ones that are more compatible with their own needs and desires" (p. 12). African-American males in many cases establish a subculture that permits and expects resistance to the structures of school.

Michael Apple (1995) examines what happens in schools, what are the actual experiences of the students, and the school's role in economic and cultural reproduction. Schools serve as agents of White supremacy because they have the power to control which group of students has access to the resources and how much they will get. Research on schooling—academic performance and achievement, gifted and special education identification, suspensions, and other topic—shows the inequities that Students of Color and in particular African-American males are experiencing. Apple writes:

Students become quite adept at "working the system". Large numbers of them in inner-city and working-class schools, to say nothing of other areas, creatively adapt to their environments so that they can smoke, get out of class, inject humor into the routines, informally control the pacing of classroom life, and generally try to make it through the day. In these same schools, many students go even further. They simply reject the overt and hidden curricula of the school. The teacher who is teaching about mathematics, science, history, careers, etc. is ignored as much as possible. Also the covert teaching of punctuality, neatness, compliance, and other more economically rooted norms and values is simply dismissed as far as possible. The real task of the students is to last until the bell rings (p. 87-88).

Yet, Apple says that in considering the school's role in economic and cultural reproduction, the idea that students would reject the norms of school life and the hidden and overt curricula must be included in the discourse. Pedro Noguera (2003) in examining the role of environmental and cultural factors in the academic achievement of Black males asserts that "[s]tructural and cultural forces combine in complex ways to influence the formation of individual and collective identities, even as individuals may resist, actively and passively, the various processes involved in the molding of the 'self'"(p. 442).

Consciously or unconsciously, many African-American males resist and react to how school defines them and rejects what is being taught to them and who is instructing them. Their resistance to the school's curricula, norms, and culture is also a rejection of Black males' marginalization and exclusion they experience within these spaces and outside of the spaces of school. Hopkins (1997) states, "Black male motives for resistance to authoritative domination must be considered, understood, and reckoned with if Black males are to receive a positive and quality education and succeed in the school environment" (p. 71).

Alienation

"Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house?"
-Dr. W.E. B. Dubois

The inequalities and inequities that African-American males must endure in their schooling experiences results in their disenfranchisement from a quality, culturally relevant education and ultimately results in their alienation from school and education. Black males are pushed to the margins of education then pushed out. From the dominant group's negative perception of them in and outside the school, the school's labeling and sorting of Black males to the depths of failure, and their resistance to the internal and external hegemony directs African-American males into exclusion and invisibility in schools. Research suggests that African-American males are alienated from schooling and this alienation to the point of invisibility is reifed by the school personnel, school

districts, and governmental agencies overseeing educational policies and mandates (Vaught, 2011).

So far, this paper has elucidated the research supporting how most African-American males have been placed on a path to failure. Ingrained practices that on the surface appear specious to them are in fact very destructive to the psyche, identity, and academic achievement of Black males. These invidious practices include tracking, disproportionate placement in special education, teachers' negative perceptions influencing what is being taught, how the curricula is presented, and these perceptions lead subjective and often inaccurate assessments of Black males' aptitude and ability to handle challenging curricula and instructional programs. In addition, the negative perceptions the predominantly White teaching force has of Black males derive from the stereotypes portrayed in media and socio-historical narratives written White supremacy. Chesley (2007) examines how White hegemonic schooling impacts African-American males:

> Many teachers don't understand that the Black males sitting before them are an endangered (not dangerous) population, and that on any given day, at any hour outside of the school day, by virtue of racial profiling (which is rampant), this Black male student can be approached by a law officer and accused of a crime—"just because!" For those Black males who are less school-engaged and less culturally connected, this means that they must fight to survive. And so they develop that tough exterior to protect themselves, a kind of resilience (though not a constructive form), and in so doing, are labeled belligerent, which seems to give permission to some people in authority to ostracize, criticize, and even demonize these students. A correct response on the part of the Black males enduring this discrimination is to increase their resistance….All of this now serves only to heighten the level of fear experienced by their teachers, especially many middle-class white teachers. It also engenders alienation by the teacher. The widespread "infection" caused by this single sociocultural dilemma is phenomenal. The effects are realized across the entire school population and climate, causing almost total alienation of these students and others who happen to look like them (p. 182).

Many African-American males are alienated from school culturally (except for the subculture they create), psychologically, and academically—labeled special education and placed in special education classes, consistent removals from classrooms and suspensions from school, placed in vocational classes, or sent to alternative programs.

Dunbar (1999) examines how "alternative schools" exclude African-American males from fully participating in the academic culture of schools. His article focuses on alternative schools which house students who have demonstrated inappropriate behavior or perceived inappropriate behavior. The Black males sent to these alternative settings have been labeled "incorrigibles, violent, disengaged, social misfits, and super-predators" (p. 242). Schools disingenuously cite the need for a "safe and orderly environment" as an excuse to exclude these particular students. Other programs are presented as an educational option that will address Black males' aptitude level. These students have been labeled at some point as lower functioning so college is not an option but obtaining job skills *is* an option are removed from the general curricula and placed in an alternative program. Dunbar states the students are "forced into educational dead ends" (ibid). Because the African-American males have perceived learning disabilities or have been subjectively assessed as not "college material," these students receive the minimum curriculum that prepares them for low-level jobs. Black males in this situation are denied full participation in the school setting and are isolated. For example, they are denied access to advanced courses and other educational opportunities that would encourage them and push them to the next level (Noguera, 2003). Dunbar (1999) cites studies by Edelman (1975) and George (1993) that suggest minority students have been disproportionately placed in alternative school settings and the exclusionary, racist policy of alternative schools "in effect separates a disproportionate number of African American male students from the traditional student population" (Dunbar, pp. 243-44). When the researcher spoke with the students who were attending an alternative school, the overall impression the students had was it was less a second chance and more of a "place of banishment while also being limited in terms of the learning and tools provided that would let them participate in the larger society in an effective way" (p. 244). The students recognized that the alternative school "was not a real school" or asked "What kind of school is this?" They realized that this setting was for the "bad kids" and this was not a court-ordered placed but their own school district in essence sentenced the African-American males to time at a warehouse for a "dead-end educational experience" (Dunbar, 1999, p.244). This is a stop on the school-to-prison pipeline for African-American male students.

Pedro Noguera (2008) examines why schools are so obsessed by law and order that the students who are most disadvantaged or most academically struggling are being the ones punished and excluded. Schools want to socially control certain groups of students so stringently that they will determine if the student is capable of learning, using subjective measures that lead to labeling and sorting and then control where the student will receive instruction and what kind of setting in which this instruction is to take place. The insatiable need for schools to control students is particularly prevalent when it comes to discipline. Noguera suggests that the disciplinary tools being used in schools are very similar to the strategies used to punish adults in society, i.e. jails and prisons. If students propose a threat to the order of the school, the "bad" students need to be placed elsewhere so order can be restored and the perceived "good" students are not negatively influenced. Noguera, using Singer as a reference, states that "those most frequently targeted for punishment in school often look—in terms of race, gender, and socioeconomic status—a lot like smaller versions of the adults who are most likely to be targeted for incarceration in society" (p. 114). As Dunbar posits, Noguera (2008) also indicates that African-American males at a young age endure negative experiences in school and the label attached to them early continues to follow them because many of the predominantly White teachers they interact with daily have conveyed a message that he is too much to handle in class—too much energy and won't stay in the desk or has a perceived discipline issue and that he doesn't want to learn. As a student continues on the education pipeline and these negative experiences are reified, Black male students begin to internalize that school is not for him and a trajectory to college and a career is not an option. Therefore, many Black males resist the school's cultural norms and expectations and violate the rules consistently, resulting in exclusion from the regular school setting. Further, if the behavior becomes serious, students will not only have punitive consequences from the school but will also become involved with the police and subsequently the court system.

When African-American male students have been labeled and sorted, "children learn whether they are in the educational pipeline and develop expectations regarding where they will end up on the social hierarchy. Some paths lead to success and prosperity or, at the minimum economic security. Other paths lead to dead-end jobs, low wages, and subordination" (Noguera, 2008, p. 118). The students who are on the path to low

wages have accepted their future and are usually the ones who cause problems for the school environment. School officials know who is on the path to a dead-end and to maintain order, these particular students will have to be moved to a more secure and isolated situation. Therefore, school officials offer alternative education options to these students who are majority African-American males—unsuccessful in school and engaged in oppositional behavior. Noguera identifies the alternative schools options: schools specifically for behavioral issues, vocational schools, and even inner city schools [the one or two designated as the "dumping ground" for unruly, unmotivated, and failing students].   African-American males who find themselves in this position are alienated from the general school setting and deprived of the opportunities that come with being a part of the school experience. Instead they report to locations that serve as "warehouses" for Black males. In reference to these alternative schooling sites, Noguera states:

> Such schools often operate more like prisons than schools. They are more likely to rely on guards, metal detectors, and surveillance cameras to monitor and control students, restrict access to bathrooms, and attempt to regiment behavior by adopting an assortment of rules and restrictions. Although such measures are more likely to be imposed in high schools I have observed a number of elementary schools that have adopted similar measures. In any educational setting where children are regarded as academically deficient and where the adults view large numbers of them as potentially bad or even dangerous, this fixation on control tends to override all other educational objectives and concerns (2008, p. 119)

When African-American males are tucked away like they are invisible, the message communicated to them is that they will not contribute positively to society and will more than likely end up in prison. It is true that many students, Black male students included, break school rules and play a part in their academic failures. However, the history of African-American males from slavery until present (see Noguera, 2008, pp. 127-28) finds their cultural identity juxtaposed with White supremacist ideology, and this cultural dissonance is magnified by the socio-historical based negative perceptions of Black males. When Black males initially enter the educational system and move through the schooling pipeline, the school's norms and structures are in diametric opposition to Black

males' racial and gender identity, culture, socio-economic status, and struggles. Subsequently, they become behavioral and academic problems and are methodically alienated and excluded from school under some pretense of needing specialized help that the regular setting can not provide or an environment away from other students that will allow the Black males to be more focused and have fewer behavioral issues.

Drawing on Chaos Theory, Vernon Polite (1994) examines the social context of schooling for a cohort of African-American male high school students and how seeming insignificant actions, policies, and procedures resulted in African-American males not being prepared academically, led to avoidance schooling, and created a chaotic school environment, which had negative implications for them. Some of the results from Polite's research indicates that the Black males did not believe that the teachers cared (predominantly White teachers at this school) and the message sent to the students was "if they do the work that is fine but if they don't, they did not care" and one African-American teacher commented that "[t]he feeling of disinterest seems to increase with each passing year" (p. 596). The students in this study felt excluded and devalued because the teachers in their observations did not care if they succeeded or not. The teachers even noticed that there was disinterest emanating from their colleagues. The students felt the teachers' disinterest in their academic achievement, and the lack of interest alienated many of the African-American male students in this study. Polite notes:

> Not all, but far too many teachers demonstrated little or no care for the African American males at MHS. A few teachers, particularly some teachers in the school's business department informed me that they experienced very different, positive relationships with their African American male students. However, increased social distancing between the teachers and students at MHS was an identifiable factor associated with the patterns of avoidance schooling and the poor overall educational outcomes for the school's African American males (p. 597).

Consequently, many of the students also stopped caring about school and the school personnel, becoming disruptive and they did the student version of an academic work-stoppage. The school environment became chaotic: fights, classroom disturbances, and over a thousand suspensions were assigned, majority to African-American males. Also

teachers were threatened and assaulted. Disenfranchisement and marginalization can erupt unfortunately into passive and overt to the extreme acts of resistance to oppression.

Garrett Albert Duncan (2002) conducted an ethnographic project to examine the academic and social lives of African-American males at a magnet high school that is known for its caring for students and its academic excellence. However, many of the African-American male students are being marginalized and excluded. In the article, Duncan discusses how the absence of caring in schools alienates certain groups of students. He cites Delgado who states that members of oppressed groups are considered "strange" and "we cannot identify with or love anyone who is too different from us" (in Duncan, p. 133). When the Other (African-American males) is too different from the mainstream (in this case, the majority of White female teachers teaching Black males), they have little concern for the "strange" group, "even when the group is vulnerable and endangered" (p. 133). Duncan goes on to state:

> The dominant storyline suggests that black males are too different from other students, and oppositionally so. Moreover, it comes as no surprise that they have difficulties in schools, especially in those with high-powered academic programs and codes of conduct that rely on student consent and compliance for their enforcement. It is in this way that the problem-solving orientation in research on black male students contributes to a cycle where the perception of strangeness contributes to the further marginalization of the group in school (2002, p. 133).

It is worth noting that Duncan posits that research on the plight of Black males in school perpetuates this notion of them being strange.   It is not that the Black male students are strange. Perhaps what is strange is that few school systems and educators have considered how their racist, oppressive schooling practices have marginalized thousands of Black males from school and addressed this pervasive problem with anti-racist scholarship. Marginalization according to philosopher Iris Marion Young is the most dangerous form of oppression (in Duncan, 2002) because it has the potency to exclude and deprive a person of "useful participation in social life , then potentially subject to severe material deprivation and extermination" (p. 133).

The far-reaching effect of marginalization is that it can permanently exclude African-American males from education, economic, social, legal, and political

institutions and rights attached to these institutions. When schools marginalize and expel Black males to the "schools of no opportunity," it is a crime against humanity, for they are at the end—they were deprived of opportunities to learn and be academically challenged, a chance to pursue education after high school, their dignity, and of an opportunity to enter and participate fully in society. For many African-American students, particularly those in poverty and especially males, school is a safe place for them to be. However, when Black males are systemically and systematically disappearing from our nation's schools, school for them is about as dangerous for them as is "the streets" and prison.

Summary of Literature Review

The literature review outlines several significant issues that are contributing to the failure of African-American males in America's education system. The negative perceptions and attitudes of teachers and school officials toward Black males were internalized, and unjust and subjective labeling and sorting forced a disproportionate number into special education, low academic tracks, vocational and alternative schools; moreover, Black male rage and resistance to the oppressive and racist practices they experienced became evident. The end result of these pervasive, injurious practices for this group of students is a push to the margins of school and exclusion from full participation in the schooling experience. Consequently, African-American male students are alienated and as data show, many are dropping out of school. As such, they will barely have skills to obtain low-entry jobs and will be unprepared for education past high school if they manage to get a high school diploma. Thus, Black males will remain on the low end of the social hierarchy that was established by White supremacy. With options being extremely limited for those Black males who are alienated from school, they either drop out or are banished to alternative programs that are not preparing them for opportunities past high school Black male students are susceptible to criminal life on the streets, prison, or even an early death. They are traveling the school-to-prison pipeline.

Court rulings and federal educational acts were established to allegedly level the playing field for all students and provide them a quality education and full participation in the schooling experience. However, for Students of Color and particularly African-

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American male students, the playing field is full of holes. The schools and the personnel influence their lives because the kind of schooling a child is provided can make or break him, and overall schools have failed Black males and now a crisis of tremendous magnitude exists. Critical race theorists recognize that racism is normal and permanent, but that does not mean that educators can not embrace anti-racist scholarship, pedagogy and practices that will level this uneven playing field. No reform efforts will be effective until those involved in America's education system commit themselves to dismantling policies and practices that disenfranchise, discriminate, and oppress students.

African-American male students have been oppressed and alienated; they have been silenced. School districts and their leaders and teachers talk about, theorize, and even participate in professional development about how to close the achievement gap, improve test scores, discipline and classroom management, and then lament the plight of African-American male students. However, talking around them and excluding them from the dialogue about them is counterintuitive. Schools must listen to the stories, experiences, and challenges of African-American male students and how they view schooling and education. It is their story to tell; it is school's obligation to act with care, without fear, and in a courageous and anti-racist manner, take action to bring African-American males from the precipices of failure.

CHAPTER 3

"Critical theories seek to displace dominant ideologies that oppress people."

-Gloria Swindler Boutte (2002, p. 6)

Methodology

To explore the schooling experiences of African-American males, the researcher used qualitative methodology. Seven African –American males who met specific criteria were selected for this project because they could offer a perspective and some insight on the schooling experiences of Black males that is personal yet represents the experiences of other African-American males who have had similar circumstances. Data was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews, which allowed the participants to relate stories about their schooling experiences, explore their understanding of how race impacted their schooling, and identify barriers that they have encountered in school that they believe have impeded their success.

Design of Study

Critical Race Theory

The theoretical framework that structured my work is Critical Race Theory (CRT). As an African-American female educator and scholar, I am, in fact, a racialized subject. Pillow (2003), asserts that race-based methodology "shifts the locus of power in the research process by situating subjects as knowers" and "describes and provides a way for the 'raced' academic to think about our unique roles as researchers and theorists" (p. 186). This position provided me "insider/outsider status": I related to the experiences shared by the subjects because I have been racialized and I have interacted with African-American males in my career as a teacher and administrator, and I have seen their struggles, trauma, and pain. However, these experiences are not mine but those of African-American males. Therefore, I am not the "voice of the powerless" (Hanchard, 2003, p. 172), but through my research, I was able to provide a space for the voices of the oppressed to be heard, which I hope empowered them. In addition, I am a *womanist*, defined by Alice Walker as a woman who is "[c]omitted to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* [author's emphasis] female" (1983, p. xi).

According to Pillow, race-based methodologies are necessary because "existing theoretical models and methodological discussions are insufficient to explain the complexity of racialized histories, lives, and communities" (p. 186). Race and racism become the center of the research (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) and "contributes to a decentralization of Eurocentric thought" (Pillow, 2003, p. 189). Epistemologies and discourses that are race-based counter the hegemonic structures, epistemologies, and traditions that have influenced the dominated groups and led to the internalization of the dominant worldview (Ladson-Billings, 2000).

Delgado and Stefancic (2001) define the *critical race theory (CRT) movement* as "a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power" (p. 2). While the critical race theory movement is similar to the traditional civil rights movement in terms of promoting equal opportunities for African-Americans and other ethnic groups, CRT takes it a step further by placing the civil rights movement and ethnic studies discourses on a more comprehensive scale by including "economics, history, context, group- and self-interest, and even feelings and the unconscious" (p. 3). While the conventional civil rights movement desires step-by-step progress, critical race theory "questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law" (p. 3). Critical Race Theory is rooted in the law; however, other disciplines have embraced the theory. For example, educators utilize critical race theory's concepts to comprehend and critiques educational issues such as discipline, tracking, curriculum, and intelligence and achievement testing. Moreover, Critical Race Theory includes an activist component that is not usually found in other scholarly pursuits because this movement not only desires to comprehend the social aspect of race but endeavors to transform society and eradicate the racial hierarchies.

Critical Race Theory developed in the mid-1970s when numerous lawyers, activists, and legal scholars concluded that racial reform in the United States was not progressing, and in some cases was regressing, and determined that new theories and strategies were needed to challenge and defeat more subtle yet equally subversive forms of racism that were emerging (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Parker, Deyhle & Villenas,

1999). According to Ladson-Billings (in Parker, Deyhle & Villenas, 1999), critical race theory emerged from the critical legal studies (CLS) movement, which she describes as a "leftist legal movement that challenged the traditional legal scholarship that focused on doctrinal and policy analysis in favor of a form of law that spoke to the specificity of individuals and groups in social and cultural contexts" (p. 11). Critical legal studies was instrumental in translating legal doctrine in order to expose how the law has legitimized and supported the country's class structure due to inconsistencies in legal doctrine. Critical race theory goes further than critical legal studies in that it includes racism in its critique of American society because CRT believes that race is embedded in America's social order and is, therefore, a permanent—and natural-- part of American society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Since racism has permeated society, CRT is concerned with unveiling the subtle and overt forms of racism in order to transform society. There are five (5) tenets of CRT:

- Normalcy of racism (racial realism): race is embedded in society—its language, laws, structures.
- Race is a social construction: there is no biological basis for race
- Differential racialization: dominant society racializes different minority groups at different times—usually a response to economics
- Interest convergence/structural determinism: No incentive for Whites to end racism. Racialized groups receive some benefits as long as the dominant group's interests are met
- Voice of Color thesis: People of color through their experiences of oppression, have unique perspectives and voice to tell their stories of racism.

Additionally, intersectionality is another theme presented in Critical Race Theory. Intersectionality explores how race, gender, class, national origin, and sexual orientation intersect and plays out in various settings.   This study explored what it means to an African-American and male in White America and the "double consciousness" experienced every day (Dubois, 1903; Ladson-Billings, 2000).

As this study is concerned with how schooling and education structured in racism has contributed to the alienation of Black males, CRT is an appropriate theoretical

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foundation to examine this phenomenon, as "critical race theory advances a strategy to foreground and account for the role of race and racism in education and works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of opposing or eliminating other forms of subordination based on gender, class, sexual orientation, language, and national origin" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p.25).

For the purpose of this study, I worked primarily with the following tenets of CRT: the Voice-of-Color Thesis and Racial Realism. Racial Realism is the idea that racism in society is normal and permanent. Equally important, Racial Realism contends that "racism is a means by which society allocates privilege and status" and the hierarchies that form from racism "determine who gets tangible benefits, including the best jobs, the best schools, and invitations to parties in people's homes" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 17). Racial Realism posits that African-Americans will see a little progress but will never experience equality and inclusion in American society. Derrick Bell (1992) summarizes Racial Realism:

> Black people will never gain full equality in this country. Even those Herculean efforts we hail as successful will produce no more than temporary "peaks of progress," short-lived victories that slide into irrelevance s racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance. This is a hard-to-accept fact that all history verifies. We must acknowledge it and move on to adopt policies based on what I call: "Racial Realism." This mind-set or philosophy requires us to acknowledge the permanence of our subordinate status. That acknowledgement enables us to avoid despair, and frees us to imagine and implement racial strategies that can bring fulfillment and even triumph (p. 374)

Voice of Color Thesis was important in this study because I was concerned with examining how race and racism have impacted African-American males in America's educational system. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) write that "the voice-of-color thesis holds that because of their different histories and experiences with oppression, black, Indian, Asian, and Latino/a writers and thinkers may be able to communicate to their white counterparts matters that the whites are unlikely to know" (p. 9).Their counter-stories, which contrasted the master narratives that drive the dominant groups' ideologies and practices, illuminated how racism has alienated them from education and society. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) argue that "social science theoretical models explaining

educational inequality support majoritarian stories" (p. 30). Because racism is normal, the stories created by the dominant group are accepted by the dominant group and marginalized groups. These stories are born of racial privilege and dominance, and counter-story is a "method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e. those on the margins of society). The counter-story is also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p.32).

Counter-storytelling

The design for this research project utilized the qualitative method of counter-storytelling which is theoretically positioned and framed by Critical Race Theory (CRT). Counter-storytelling was selected and was appropriate for this study because the stories that the African-American males revealed were a sharp contrast to the stories the dominant group presented about them. Also, this method gave a marginalized and oppressed group a voice to relate their own story about their schooling experiences as they saw and experienced it. Boutte (2002) defines *voice* as "the articulation and sharing of one's world, one's experiences, and one's vision" (2002, p. 6). Counter-storytelling methodology offered a space for the young men to be heard so their silence could be broken so that they could make some sense of their schooling, how race factored into their schooling experiences and how their school experiences influenced their current circumstances. The semi-structured interview format allowed participants to engage in an informal yet powerful dialogue about their schooling experiences.

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) state that storytelling is a technique that has been used widely in humanities, law, and social sciences and in Critical Race Theory, it is a method used to "examine how race and racism shape the experiences" of people of color (p. 156). Delgado (in Delgado & Stefancic, 2000) states that the dominant group "creates its own stories" and these stories "told by the in-group remind it of its identity in relation to the out-groups, and provide it with a form of shared reality in which its own superior position is seen as natural" (p. 60). Counterstories "shatter complacency and challenge the status quo" (p. 61). Solórzano and Yosso posit that critical race counterstories can serve in several capacities, including community building by those who are at the margins of society, challenge the perceptions, reality, and "perceived wisdom" created by

"those at society's center," and "provide a context to understand and transform established belief systems" (p. 156).

Data Collection

I collected the data for this study through use of semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with African-American males who were between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four and had not completed high school. I found participants for this study through informal contacts with several agencies in the area that provided services for individuals who had not completed high school. I provided a brief overview of my study and the criteria required for participants needed to conduct the study. After informal contacts, I contacted two agencies that had programs geared towards assisting individuals who had dropped out of school and worked with a significant number of African-American males in the age range for which I was searching. I interfaced with both agencies to discuss my project, and one agency in particular provided strong leads that assisted me in finding participants to contact.

Through leads from this agency that worked with individuals who had dropped out of school, I took flyers to the agency for the purpose of seeking potential participants. The coordinator contacted me when he had potential leads for a participant who met the criteria. After work and when the program had ended for the day, I went to the agency and met with a potential participant in a private office. To maintain confidentiality, I preferred to meet after the program concluded for the day.   If the participant met the criteria, I explained the purpose of the project and asked if he would be interested in participating in a study. If the potential participant agreed to volunteer, I gave him a copy of the formal letter for his records and a consent form for the participant to read. I also read the formal letter and consent form to the participant. I informed the participant of their rights as they pertain to the study and explained that if they did not feel comfortable answering a particular question they did not have to do so nor would they be penalized in any way.   I also explained that pseudonyms would be used in the study and that their identities would not be disclosed. After each participant signed the consent form for the interview and consent to be recorded. I had the participant sign two copies of the consent forms because I did not have access to a copier. The participant was given a copy for his

records, and I kept copies until data collection concluded. I also provided each subject with a list of resources in case they needed assistance.

Initially, I had planned to do one screening interview and then a more in-depth interview; however, I decided to do both in one sitting. I made this decision because I learned from the program coordinator at this agency that the young men in the program had some challenges. Their challenges may have prevented a follow-up interview at a later time. Some were just entering the program, some had been away from the program, and it was uncertain if the young men had telephones where they lived or owned mobile devices. Therefore, I took advantage of any opportunity presented to gather data.

Each interview took place at the agency where the participants were preparing for the General Education Development Test (GED), learning a trade skill for transition into employment or additional schooling, and other skills. Throughout the data collecting process, I learned that this program was a comfortable space for them and provided support that the participants felt they did not have in the past. Therefore, conducting the interviews in their "space" proved to be a positive decision.

The first part of the interview consisted of some background questions about growing up, their family background, and current situation and served as a transition into the participants' schooling experiences and the circumstances surrounding dropping out and the consequences of that decision. The questions served as a guide for the interview and allowed for transition to conversations that offered insights to the participants' personal challenges and their school experiences. I was also able to pose additional, more probing questions as a result of this type of interviewing. The way in which the general questions moved to more detailed questions created a story as the participants wove a quilt of their young lives and laid it out for examination and reflection.

The interviews ranged from thirty to approximately ninety minutes and were tape-recorded on a digital voice recorder (DVR) with a microphone attached. The first interview session conducted was a group interview of three participants; I conducted three interviews in one sitting. I did this because I had the opportunity to do the interviews and didn't want to miss it, and I felt that the participants would be more comfortable being interviewed if they were together. The remaining interviews were one-on-one interviews. Interviews were recorded to ensure accuracy and facilitated the

retrieval of data. In addition, I took informal notes during each interview to assist in the analysis process. The data was transcribed and destroyed when the study was completed.

Data Analysis

After the data were transcribed, I analyzed the data to identify examples from the interviews of teacher perception, labeling and sorting, resistance to the schooling process on the part of the participants, and alienation, which are the themes that were identified in the literature. I also studied the data for any themes that were not identified in the literature.

Analyzing interviews involved multiple readings of the transcripts and a review of them during the analyses. It was very important for me to maintain organized notes so that I could record observations and the thoughts of the subjects accurately and maintain organization. To assist in this, I created a document that had sections for each theme so I could record participants' comments or thoughts as they related to the themes of perception, labeling and sorting, resistance, and alienation. I also included a section on this document so that I could record participant's comments, allusions to, or thoughts on race as it pertained to their experiences in school and advice they would give African-American males in school based on their life experiences and current circumstances. Another document that I created was a coding system to assist me in identifying the major themes I was examining. I used these codes to note in the transcripts instances when the participant mentioned and discussed a theme. When the participants related their stories, they used the actual names of schools, individuals, neighborhoods, etc., so I had to use pseudonyms to prevent issues with confidentiality. I made a list of pseudonyms to maintain consistency.

The first reading involved becoming familiar with the participant's style of communicating and revisiting his story. I needed a snapshot of each participant's perception. I also took this time to make notes on the transcription of ideas that were salient in relation to the main themes and sub-themes. I read the transcripts a second time for clarity—their backgrounds, experiences in and out of school, family life, and took additional notes, making observations. I read the transcripts a third time and coded the major themes and recorded them on the document designated for this purpose. During

this phase of the analyses, I observed and recorded notes on other emergent themes, including traumatic experiences, substance abuse and mental health issues in the home, the economics of education, lack of culturally relevant instruction, absence of caring in schools, and the "school-to-prison pipeline." The participants did not use this exact verbiage, but their experiences articulated these issues. For the fourth reading, I recorded specific examples and details related to the themes and did a fifth reading to synthesize the intricacies into each participant's story of their schooling experiences. Finally, I conducted a sixth reading to examine each interview and inserted pseudonyms where necessary to protect the identity of participants. I took final notes that summarized what the subjects said and descriptions of incidents that occurred in school in relation to the themes of the perception of teachers and administrators had towards them, labeling and sorting experiences, resistance-how they demonstrated resistance toward schooling, and alienation. I also recorded instances when race was alluded to or discussed and what evidence was presented that they viewed as racist or inequitable.

I reviewed notes, observations, and transcriptions (I took notes and coded them as well) throughout this particular process to ensure that I captured the stories of the African-American males as accurate as possible. Their stories counter the hegemony's stories about them so it was my goal to re-present them as these Black men really are.

CHAPTER 4

"We don't get no story…our story's sad…Black people's story is sad."

-William

Findings

Speaking his Mind: Seven African American Males Reflect on their Schooling Experiences

The purpose of this study was to examine African-American males' experiences of alienation and how schooling has played a part in this process. Furthermore, purpose of this study was to rely on the voices of African-American males to explore their experiences of alienation and the role schooling has played in their alienation. There was a significant body of research and critique on the failure of Black males in schools and how to reverse the failure; however, little of it considered how alienated African-American males understand their own experiences in school. Therefore, my goal was to record the unheard stories of Black males in order to counter the stories that the dominant culture has created and re-created constantly to sustain racism in schooling.

Critical Race Theory was the theoretical framework utilized in this study to expose the racism operating rampantly through the institution of education and its effect on African-American males. The five tenets of CRT are (1) the normalcy of racism (racial realism)--Race is embedded in society—its language, laws, structures; (2) race is a social construction--there is no biological basis for race; (3) differential racialization--the dominant society racializes different minority groups at different times, usually a response to economics; (4) interest convergence/structural determinism—racialized groups receive some benefits as long as the dominant group's interests are met; and (5) voice-of-color thesis—people of color through their experiences of oppression have unique perspectives and voice to tell their stories of racism (Delgado and Stefancic,2001). Furthermore, intersectionality is another theme examined in CRT. Intersectionality

explores how race, gender, class, national origin, and sexual orientation intersect and plays out in various settings. In this study, intersectionality was evident because the participants were African American and male who experienced consistent racist acts in the school setting. Solórzano and Yosso (2009) states, "Critical race theory recognizes that the experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial insubordination"(in Taylor, Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, p. 133). Therefore, the voices of the African American males who shared in different voices their common experiences in schools thus provided qualitative data that countered the stories presented by the dominant group about them.

One of the key components of this study was the voice-of-color thesis. *Voice-of-color thesis* is "the assertion and acknowledgement of the importance of the personal and community experiences of people of color as sources of knowledge" (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). Voice is important in Critical Race Theory because the stories and experiences shared by those who have been oppressed by racist practices and institutional racism "provides a 'counterstory' to counteract or challenge the dominant [White supremacist] story" (p. 35). Solórzano and Yosso (2009) explains that *majoritarian stories* or *master narratives* are stories generated from White racial privilege that "distorts and silences the experiences of color" and "purport to be neutral and objective, yet implicitly make assumptions according to the negative stereotypes about people of color" (in Taylor, Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, p. 136). Boutte (2002) warns that silencing voices of the oppressed "as has been done traditionally, results in sentencing their lived meanings and their representations of their lives, conditions, and struggles to exile at the margins; at the same time these voices are measured against criteria and demands of the dominant culture" (p. 6). Therefore, the individual counterstories recorded in this study have challenged and countered the White-standardized belief and that African-American males do not care about obtaining an education, do not want their teachers to care about them, do not want to learn, and do not have goals in life due to their socio-economic and family conditions.

Participants

The research project I designed and conducted was comprised of seven African-American males who encountered negative teacher perception, labeling and sorting, and alienation. Additionally, these males consciously or unconsciously resisted the notion of school and the experiences connected to their schooling. Moreover, I examined the race stories of four African-American men who wrote in the twentieth century, and their race stories expressed their feelings of being perceived negatively, labeled, and alienated. They were enraged and for some of these Black men, their anger provoked a resistance against the hegemony. The African-American males studied for this project exemplified the current realities of the schooling experiences of many Black males.

Through leads and interaction with an agency that had a program focused on assisting individuals who have dropped out of school, I was able to identify seven males who fit the criteria of the study. They were at least eighteen years of age but not older than twenty-four, had not completed high school, and their race and gender were African-American and male. The Black males selected voluntarily shared their schooling experiences with me and offered their insight into what their challenges were in school and in life. Their stories are those of making the best of their situations and searching for independence, knowledge, truth, and identity despite the difficulties of being a Black man in a society that has condemned them from the beginning.

The seven participants studied were connected to a non-profit agency that has been in operation for at least forty years and is situated in a Midwestern city. This organization provides a broad range of resources to moderate to low income individuals and families. Their mission is to improve the quality of life of individuals, families, and the community as a whole. The seven participants were associated with a program called Builder of Dreams Program. This program provides General Educational Development (GED) classes to prepare individuals for the test, trains them for positions in the construction field, develops life skills, offers peer support groups and personal mentoring, and provides childcare if needed. The program also refers individuals to other services. To be eligible for this program, individuals, males and females, must be unemployed, sixteen to twenty-four years of age, a resident of the county, and they must be high school drop outs.

This program, in essence, gives second chances to those individuals who have through some circumstance been pushed to the margins of society and were trying to find their way back. Every individual involved in this program has walked away from their schooling, but for African-American males, school experiences leading to dropping out are not only of crisis proportions but in many cases are leading them to a point of no return.

Each participant was asked to share their schooling experiences from their perspective as African-American males. The interviews with each participant centered around four major questions: *could you explain the circumstance surrounding the decision to drop out of school? How did dropping out of school impact the quality of your life? What specific challenges are facing African-American males in school? What role do you think race played in your schooling experiences?*

Speaking his Mind

Pushed Out **by William**

William is a 24-year old African-American man who was born in a city in the mid-west called Riverton and has lived in that area his entire life. He described where he currently lives as "busy" due to a lot of traffic and said that he lived by himself   He described his family as "divided" because he lived with his mother until he was six years old then went to live with his father. William said that he did not interact much with his family until he was older, around the age of twenty-one. He completed three years of high school before dropping out. He began high school in a traditional high school but left there and enrolled in a charter school before dropping out. William was expelled from a Riverton district school and was told not to come back, so he enrolled in a charter school. He said that the charter school, Garvey Community School, helped students who were over age and were not being successful in traditional high school. William said that there were students at Garvey who were in their early 20s and the person overseeing the school attempted to transition it to a prep school but the scrutiny of the operations and fiscal controversies led to the school's closure. William said, "But you know it was a white guy that opened that school up. You know he gave a lot of black kids a chance in being switched over. It seemed like the whole school turned around." However, he

acknowledged that "the streets was in the school, too." William stated this because when he was in a traditional high school, in his opinion, the things that were going on in the streets were going on in the schools as well.

William said that Black people are being misled by White people. He stated, "[M]ost of the teachers is White telling their story about the White people. About the Pilgrims, the Natives. They telling their story about…the only story we know is we was on a boat." William asserted, "We don't get no story...our story's sad...black people's story is sad." He stated that teachers "gotta like kids to be around kids. You ain't got patience, how you gonna have patience with kids in your classroom? And that goes back to saying like they don't care." William felt that the teachers at Garvey cared about him but the teachers at his previous schools did not.

William served four years in prison, which he cited as the primary reason for dropping out of school. William was unemployed. Since his release from prison he has been able to obtain a job, but the company used a point system and if an employee earned too many points, an employee was terminated. In William's case, he lost the position due to missing work twice because of car trouble and coming to work tardy another time. He is preparing for the GED Test at Riverton Action for Change's Builder of Dreams Program, which is helping him learn construction skills that will hopefully lead to employment.

His career goal is to become an auto broker because he likes cars and he can make a profit. William stated, "I look at it like, I don't like to lose, so if I see something I can win in, I feel like I can't lose with it. Buying, selling automobiles."

William's descent into the drop-out ranks began when he was getting suspended from school due to his conduct. He says he completed the eleventh grade and after he was told not to return to a high school in the Riverton district, he enrolled in a charter school. William did not continue with his high school experience because he was sentenced to four years in prison.

> **PI:** **Why did you walk away from school?**
>
> W: I got incarcerated.
>
> **PI:** **Ok and you would consider that the major reason why you didn't finish school?**

W: Yes ma'am.

PI: Were there any other reasons why maybe? Or it was mainly the incarceration?

W: Yeah.

PI: How long were you incarcerated?

W: Four years.

When William left school, he enrolled in a charter school that he felt would give him a chance to graduate. However, he went to prison and did not have a diploma. William said this about the charter school:

> I think when I went it was more like a tool where a kid that could….I got…I got expelled from the Riverton Public Schools when I went Houston High School and when I went to Garvey it just seemed like…you know you had people like twenty-five, twenty-six [years old] going there. Playing for the football team. And it was on the news and everything. But you know it was a white guy that opened that school up. You know he gave a lot of black kids a chance in being switched over. It seemed like the whole school turned around. But it was…you know…like I said, the streets was in the school too.

Unfortunately, it was the streets that finally pushed William into the school-to-prison pipeline. William attended high school for three years and during that time, he was expelled from a traditional high school and told not to return, and he enrolled in a charter school but did not earn a high school diploma. However, William did serve four years in the penitentiary and now has a felony record.   When asked about his circumstances after dropping out, William related:

PI: And what have you been doing since leaving prison?

W: Since I've been released I've had a job but I lost it and then I enrolled in a pre-apprenticeship program to get my GED and a couple certificates.

PI: **Why were you…you said you were let go, or you were fired? How did losing the job occur?**

W: Oh I was fired.

PI: **Can you explain why, how did that happen or why?**

W: The job I had it was working off point systems and you had three points. And I had car trouble twice and the other time I was late.

PI: **Ok. It sounds like you were getting back on track. What kind of support services…what kind of things have been put in place to help you get back on track or get on your feet?**

W: GED tutoring.

PI: **Do you have your GED at this point or working towards it?**

W: Working towards it.

PI: **When do you feel you'll be ready to take it?**

W: Actually I'm just one test away from getting my diploma on the twenty-ninth of this month.

PI: **How do you think your choice to leave school, which it sounds like it was more of a…something happened or a decision you made that got you incarcerated, how has it affected your quality of life, or your life style, or how you're living, and where you are today?**

W: Because it seems like now I got to go backwards to try to get something that I should have had a while ago.

William realized now that his decision to drop out of school and engage in criminal activity that led to four years in prison has forced him to re-trace steps to prepare for earning a GED so he will have can move forward. Additionally, William had employment and given his felony record that was fortuitous; however, he lost the job because he was either late to work or had car trouble twice and did not report to work.

William believed that more familial and parental support is needed to help African-American males make it through school. He said

Like you know…usually if you've got that right support you know you should be able to get through anything. You know with the type of background, you know the environment you living in. You know the mental support of your family. I feel you know as long as you got that type of support you should be ok out here.

The lack of support at home he believed was one of several factors that led to him dropping out of school, which put him on the path to prison.

William also touched on the notion that teachers perceive African-American males negatively and attempt to look pass them when they are struggling with school. He says teachers would "see somebody struggling and like in a specific subject or what not and I mean…and they would just look right pass it, overlook it instead of sitting down with the person and helping them." William shared, "There was certain situations I needed somebody to be there and there wasn't nobody there. I could see in the teachers that they really didn't care. They were just there for they check. I mean cuz if they really cared they would have been tutoring us and talking to us."

Subject to Get Stepped On by Medger

Medger is a 23-year old African-American man who was born in a city in the mid-west and has lived in that area his entire life. He grew up in a neighborhood that has a moderate level of criminal activity, including gang activity, shootings, some homicides, and drug activity. At the time of the interview, he had just obtained employment three weeks prior at a local steel company. Medger was working on his GED.

He lived in an area of the city that he describes as in "shambles." He explained that there was a shopping strip mall that was for the most part vacant with a parking lot that was full of pot holes. Several fast food restaurants had closed, and the only grocery store in the neighborhood had closed, so residents had to go elsewhere to shop for groceries. Medger said, "They took our [grocery store], we got a big ass parking lot called River Crossing with nothing in it…there ain't nothing here for nobody to do. There's nothing to do in this area."

The neighborhood in which he lived was not in the inner city. The residents for the most part are low-, moderate-, and middle- income earners, so it is diverse from that standpoint. Recently, new houses were built with an attractive tax abatement to draw middle-income earners to the neighborhood. A new high school was also erected several years ago.

Medger grew up in housing project called River Terrace that was adjacent to a global corporation's manufacturing operation. Medger called it the "home of [Preston and Stevens]…pollution, trash, thievery." When asked how this happened, Medger stated, "I didn't have nothin' to do with it." Medger explained:

PI: Who did?

M: I was raised in it. I didn't put no drugs in my hood. I didn't put no guns, you hear me? I didn't cuff up nobody and tell them to remain silent. I didn't do none of that. I was just in the midst.

PI: What does that mean? You said you was just in the midst, like what does that mean to you?

M: Yes, ma'am...like a roach among roaches. Subject to get stepped on.

PI: By whom?

M: Anybody.

PI: I didn't hear you, by whom?

M: White man.

PI: Why do you say that?

M: I mean because…I say that because, I just look at it like this. If you look at our neighborhoods now which is majority all black, even out to the suburbs, they don't want no black people out there, period. I mean, they get the A schools…they getting the better teachers, I mean they getting everything that we not getting….

Cause there ain't no niggas going on out there...all the niggas going on in the inner city. So we'll won't give you niggas no money…

Medger alluded that the global corporation's economic wealth was responsible for the pollution and trash in his community. Referring to the corporation being engaged in thievery, he seemed to suggest that the corporation, operated by the dominant group has disregarded the African-American community's desire for basic needs such as a clean environment and has robbed the Black community of these resources because it is a Black, low-income housing project. He further posited that there are racial and economic disparities in neighborhoods and the schools because the suburbs do not want African-Americans in their communities and the majority Whites in the suburban areas have better facilities, teachers, and other resources that the Black community are not receiving. Medger believed that the suburbs "get the A schools…getting the better teachers. I mean they getting everything that we not getting." While he acknowledged that the schools are being rebuilt and may be giving children a better chance, but he felt his school experience was a situation where "we was the experiments."

It is also important to note that Medger considered himself "in the midst" of whatever is taking place in his community and compared it to being "like a roach among roaches…subject to get stepped on by the "White man." He dehumanized himself by comparing himself to an insect and being stepped on, killed, by Whites.

Medger said he had no support at home and that the individuals in his household were drunk or high. According to him, he told the teacher, "Homework? I ain't doin' no homework teacher, 'cause I'm not going home. I don't even want to go home…I ain't never doin homework."

Medger left school in his fourth year of high school after being expelled from a Riverton district high school. Then he attended Garvey, the charter school. He said he had a car and would show up at school at lunch or after school. He then made the decision to drop out and two years later, he was remanded to the penitentiary for two years. Medger decided he no longer wanted to be in school and admitted that he "never really cared about school." He said he was kicked out of school and told not to come back as well. Medger related:

> M: I mean that was me. I really never cared about school honestly. Never did. Can't blame nobody but me.
>
> **PI: Really?**

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M:	Mmm-hmm.
PI:	**Why didn't you care? Was there something that you felt…was it early on or something that happened over the years?**
M:	It's something that happened early on. Cuz I always knew that school was being fabricated through the social studies and all that.
PI:	**Explain.**
M:	You know Columbus, Christopher Columbus wasn't the first…nobody to touch this land. If anything you know. But I ain't nobody to say nothing. I just…I just never really got into the school thing for real. I never did. I went to school.
PI:	**So when did you decide that you had had enough?**
M:	It was late. It was late. I was in the twelfth grade. It was late. But Bethune High School was so "bougie" [Black colloquialism from the word "bourgeois," meaning that some individuals thought they were better than others] I mean…I don't even know how I was getting to the grades that I was getting through.
PI:	**You don't? What do you think it was? You don't know?**
M:	It was Bethune just wanted to get you out of there, to pass you.

Medger stated that he was not attending school regularly but was getting passing grades regardless and he felt the school was trying to get him through high school, even if he had done little academically.

Medger's last school stop was Bethune High School, where Medger dropped out of school and landed in the streets selling drugs. Medger explained:

PI:	**How close were you to finishing, were you like two quarters?**
M:	It was probably like first quarter I called it quits...I had my own little car. It was old. I was going to school it was just at lunch time, after school so…I would go…
PI:	**I understand ...you said you went to Bethune?**
M:	Yes, ma'am.
PI:	**You started off where?**

M: Garvey.

PI: You were at Garvey the whole time?

M: I was at Houston where I got put out.

PI: You were put out of Houston?

M: Yeah, I got put out my frickin' first week of school. I was shooting dice. But like I said...I had no family support. I had nothing…

PI: They didn't let you come back just because ...

M: I ended up going to jail for it and they put me out.

PI: You went to jail for shooting dice?

M: At school yeah...on their grounds. We were shooting in…I think everybody, I think just about everybody from my neighborhood got put out for that. I also, I was on my way to the twelfth grade. I remember I would end up going to jail [juvenile detention, not penitentiary] for the summer and if I had went to school, the next year I would have been starting the twelfth grade. I was seventeen, too.

PI: So Medger, I'm going back to the twelfth grade, seventeen, went one quarter, got out, had a car, said "I'm out" and you saying you decided that you were going to sell dope. Is that what I'm hearing?

M: Yeah.

PI: So what happened next?

M: Hey, I was on the way in...ten toes down. No turning back. Two years later, you know took that boat trip.

PI: Penitentiary?

M: Yes, ma'am.

PI: How long?

M: Two year bit and ever since then…it wasn't too late, but it was like you know better. You feel like …I made it to the state? First. They say jail is the second step away from being dead.

Medger served two years in prison. When asked about his employment status, Medger responded

> M: Oh, I'm working at Riverton Steel Treating.
>
> **PI: How long you been there?**
>
> M: About three weeks.
>
> **PI: Oh, so you just got it....you like it?**
>
> M: Yeah, it beats a blank. Matter of fact, it beats a restaurant. They say a black man in a restaurant job is like a brother with no job. Quote that.
>
> **PI: Why would they say that?**
>
> M: (inaudible) Jack and Jill went up the hill... (inaudible) I don't know. That's what they say.

When asked if there are challenges confronting African-American males in school and if so what they are, Medger felt that lack of parental support and not "cracking down" on their children and establishing structure for them was problematic. Medger believed that children need support at home and that teachers need to understand that males have a different attention span in class. He also posited that the information being taught was "fabricated" because "[y]ou know Columbus, Christopher Columbus wasn't the first…nobody to touch this land. If anything you know. But I ain't nobody to say nothing. I just…I just never really got into the school thing for real. I never did. I never went to school." He felt that parents need to take their children's education more seriously.

He remarked:

> M: Yes, I feel like there is some challenges, as far as African-American males, the people that they are associated with, not everybody but most of them, are associated with drop outs or people that don't want to go to school or they hang out with older crowed that's out of school, whether they got a job or graduated, they want to be in that same predicament and they just so in to

street life. Parents ain't cracking down on them for real, like giving them that structure, like the street life always be here, school won't. It only comes around once, so you need to make the best of it. I feel like parents fail to acknowledge that to their kids and far as the environment, the society, the excitement coming from the street life....growing up, this is what young African-Americans like...that excitement coming from the street life. I gotta say, when I was out of school, I was in the street. When I was in school, I was thinking about being out there. I didn't want to be in school. I wanted to be outside, like them, or just sit there and just daydream, thinking about outside of school. That's what I was thinking about more than school work. I was thinking about being out.

Medger also asserted:

Parents not like being as strict as they should for as schooling. So for them not to be as strict, I don't believe they was taking a child's education very seriously. Cause a child's only going to do what they see someone else do so for their part, as far as the parents handling they business and putting through the child, like a pet peeve. One of mine is, when I wake up, before I go to sleep, I have to put my phone on the charger, like that's just...that should be something processed in a child's brain at a young age, but and, they also go off on what they see so if they see a positive role model, they will also in the same footsteps, but also have to surround your child with positive things, positive people, that when that child gets old enough to understand that, he or she will also only associate with those that will increase their dreams, not decrease them. But I feel like that, what plays a part of that in school is also, some family issues, like participation, and the excitement from the street life. In my eyes, that's what I think.

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Medger acknowledged as he ended his story, "I was a screw up" but he "doesn't blame anybody" for his decision to leave school. When reflecting on his personal and schooling experiences he states, "God bless us. What happened, happened."

***I Needed Somebody and There Wasn't Nobody There* by Carter**

Carter is a 24-year old African-American man with two little girls. He earned his GED but is unemployed. Carter stated that he would be attending a local community college to major in construction management and will be participating in an apprenticeship for four years. He served two years in prison. He currently lives with his parents whom he says are older.

Carter was born in Riverton, a city in the Midwest. He grew up in an area infested with "gangs, drugs, murder, and guns." Carter said he lived across the street from an elementary school "so just imagine what I had to go through every day to come [in the house] and go in [school]." He says he was exposed to a lot and says that "[k]ids are exposed to a lot around where I grew up at." Carter stated that what he saw in school was the same as the action going on in the streets and said that school was distracting. He said when he left school, he went into the streets. He smoked weed and made money. He says the penitentiary led to his change.

While Carter had two parents in his home, his mother was working hard and his father was, too, but he said it took him "years to find out [his] daddy was a crackhead." He says his father was there but he was not "being fatherly," so he sought attention elsewhere and according to Carter, "the closest father was the streets."

Carter left high school after two years at the age of sixteen. He said he felt that the teachers did not care and were only there to get a check. He states, "They wouldn't care or nothing what the next child would get out of it. They was just doin' they job. If you got it or not they wouldn't even cared." He continued, "So it was like if they didn't care and you barely got the support you really needed from home and you wasn't getting no support from your school…I mean…nothing else left to do but leave school for me. Cuz I got more attention in the streets…" Carter noted that the first thing schools want

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to do is call the police on Black males instead of trying to find out what the student is "going through" and even just asking how a student's day was "would make a big impact on somebody." Carter also felt that schools just pass certain students along "to keep [them] going."

Carter dropped out of school at sixteen, between the tenth and eleventh grades. Carter commented on how high school was very social, mirrored the streets, and was distracting. He was attending Bell High School and says he was kicked out. He described school as being "too much":

PI: **What happened…when did you walk away? What age and why?**

C: I walked away at sixteen.

PI: **What grade was that? What grade were you in then?**

C: Tenth, eleventh.

PI: **Why?**

C: Because I mean I got kicked out of Bell High School. I mean honestly I was not getting nothin' and even if I went every day I wasn't getting anything. I mean it was always so much stuff going on around in the school.

PI: **Like what? You can be free. Be free.**

C: I mean whatever was being done on the streets was being done in school in the school hallway.

PI: **And you said Carter…you said you walked away because it was just too much.**

C: Too much. You go to school from home coming away from the environment where I'm seeing gangs, drugs, guns... I'm going to school and seeing the same things, why am I even coming here? This ain't no safe place. This ain't no place for real where I can sit down and learn 'cause I always got a distraction. Even if you try to do your work you got a distraction, something going on.

PI: **So you're saying you didn't want to be in school anymore because basically what you saw in the school mirrored what you saw in the street.**

C: Right…I mean it was just the whole environment. They had teachers where if the administrative system even cared they would have made a change...somewhat, somehow.

PI: **So what happened when you left school? When you walked away at sixteen, what did you do?**

C: When I left at sixteen I mean, it was to the streets. What I see from school back to my house. I got attention. I was able to do a lot. I don't mean to flatter myself. I didn't have to wait for nobody to…that's what I turned to.

Most people have heard the saying that individuals come from the "School of Hard Knocks," but for Carter, he thought the streets was a better educational alternative than school, so he transferred to the "School of Street Life" and graduated to the penitentiary.

Concerning some of the challenges facing Black males in school, Carter said that education needs to be more interesting and teachers should not just read to the students. Carter offered

> Nowadays, I believe I can't say because I'm not in that classroom setting, you know, so I can't say what the challenges that they go through, but from what I see they got it good. I mean, they got some like, my nieces, I got a chance to meet a lot of their teachers at Washington High School...they got, their generation got some good teachers that really cared and want to see them do something. So I mean, that's a plus, but at the same time, it's still that apparently they coming from. What are they coming from? Not even the neighborhood…the environment…the household, know what I'm saying? Cause now, you know like I know, we all know that it's the outfit? They don't care about nothing, they don't care

if their kids get to school, you know what I mean? That type, they (inaudible)...they've got going to somebody's house...they smoking, drinking… kids trying to do their homework, get up and play cards. Know what I mean, it's like what type of household is they coming from? To go to school, when… Riverton Public came a long way. They came a long way, and I mean they got a good healthy school, but what type of environment they coming from at home?

He also thought that schools have "a phobia" and related an incident when his aunt went to an open house at a school. Carter said that the teacher told her that he was a "smart child" but "I ain't never been to his class but two times, so he don't know nothing about me, basically, giving me the grade, for what?...you want to get me out of the way." Carter has his GED and when asked about support and future plans, he answered

> **PI:** **What kind of help or support have you gotten since you have walked away from school? What has happened?**
>
> C: Since I walked away, which was two years ago, so I had enough time to do some growing up and realizin' the fact I needed some type of education, piece of paper rather....that don't make you no smarter, it's just a piece of paper that they want you to have. But I got my GED…and I mean I been trying to do right...take care of my kids, stay out of the way....I'm going to do what I need to survive and maintain and make it... to make sure I make it. Ain't nobody else gonna make sure I make it, I have to make sure I make it…so it's just since I been out of school, Riverton Public I should say, I just been trying to get my life back together.
>
> **PI:** **Are you working now, since you have your GED?**
>
> C: No, I'm not. I'm currently at Riverton State.
>
> **PI:** **What are you going to major in?**
>
> C: I'm majoring in construction management.

PI: **So when you left school…how did that impact you? When you walked away how did that affect your quality of life? What was it like?**

C: I mean, when I left, it weren't like I left...I felt something like aw, I'm gonna be missing something. I mean, I was a child...I thought as a child. So you know I cared nothing about it. It was....I'm gonna make me a little money, go smoke my weed…go get high…go kick it, I mean that's all there was….it was nothing to me because I still kept a job, you know.

PI: **So what changed? What made you change from doing what you were doing?**

C: The penitentiary. I mean cause I got kids. I mean the penitentiary ain't what they made it out to be, like it's not...it ain't where you want to be, I'm gonna say that...maybe where you want to be but I'm saying it ain't like what everybody make it out to be. At the same time, I'm at a point where I have two kids. Little girls at that...I took two years of their life away from them that I can't get back, so it's like...why would I try to put myself back in that predicament all over again when I can prevent it?

While Carter said that he will do what he needs to do to survive, at the same time he did not want to place himself in the same situation that led him to the penitentiary. He has two little girls, and Carter missed two years of their life and actually he said, "I took two years of their life from them that I can't get back."

Carter said that people think he is older than his twenty-three years, and he relates, "I had a horrible life, I'm still having a horrible life, but I ain't goin' to cry to nobody. You just get up and put the shoes on…I can remember going home to no electricity…I wish I had a better life, but I wouldn't take back what I went through."

We Take Penitentiary Chances **by Malcolm**

Malcolm is a 21-year old African-American male who lives in the medium-size mid-western city of Riverton. He lives with his mother and step-father and several siblings. Malcolm has a fraternal twin with whom he is close. During his childhood, his family moved several times, interrupting his schooling as a result of the mobility. Malcolm and his family lived in Amberdale, a neighborhood that has a moderate level of crime such as gang and drug activity, shootings, assaults, and some homicides. During his formative years, he lived with his mother and five siblings, three brothers and two sisters.

Currently, Malcolm lives with his mother, her husband, his twin brother, and two younger sisters. There was a time when Child Protective Services removed Malcolm and his siblings from the home because it was deemed unsanitary for children, and he finally landed at his grandmother's home until his mother could get her children returned to her. When Malcolm related the events of the agency getting involved with his family, he explained how upsetting it was for him and how other family members would not take them in temporarily. His two aunts said no, his uncle could not help because he was serving eighteen years in prison, so the last option was his grandmother, who was glad to help the family. Malcolm's father lives in another city further north of Riverton. He said his mother refers to his father as a "deadbeat" and his father says that his mother prevented him from seeing Malcolm. Malcolm describes himself as a musician and poet with "a gift for words."

When the family re-united, Malcolm's step-father came into their lives, married his mother, and helped stabilize the situation. His mother obtained a house in a suburban area, Marshall, which was very clean but his siblings "messed it up." Malcolm began his schooling in traditional public school setting, but his anger and ADHD caused him to be removed from school a lot and finally he was placed with schools that address significant emotional issues. Malcolm was placed on an IEP when he came to the Riverton School District, and he thinks his label was ED, Emotional Disturbance. He said his grandmother believed something was wrong with him.

Malcolm has been associated with the legal system since he was twelve years-old. He currently has a pending court case because when he turned eighteen after being in and

out of Hillendale, a youth detention and transition program that has a live-in facility and a school, Malcolm was determined to stay clean. However, he said "the devil lurked around the corner" and he began thinking of ways to get money. One day, Malcolm decided to steal a car to take to a "chop shop" to get money and when the police caught him, he was charged with receiving stolen property. He had the keys to the car but according to Malcolm, the victim did not want to press charges but "she wanted [him] to go to church and get the Lord in [his] life."

He said "that kinda hit me 'cause no one ever said that, so maybe that was an opening reminder for me." Before turning eighteen, Malcolm was convicted as a juvenile of breaking and entering (B & E) and spent approximately eight months in Hillendale. He never spent time at the "kiddie prison" operated by the state's department of corrections. That facility is for youth who commit more serious offenses or multiple offenses and a Hillendale-type facility is no longer a viable option.

While Malcolm was having issues with the court system, his mother was having issues sustaining the home in the suburb because the landlord she was renting from did not want to repair the plumbing or the walls. The family was evicted and at one point, they were living in a motel. They were homeless. Malcolm's mother decided to stay with an aunt who had six individuals in her home already and with Malcolm's family, the number of people in the home rose to fourteen. Malcolm said there were conflicts regarding who paid rent, how much food was being consumed, and other squabbles. Finally, his aunt called the police in an attempt to get her sister and children out the home, even though Malcolm's mother had just paid the rent. Malcolm stated, "I don't really understand the women in my family."

When asked about his early years in school, Malcolm said that when he was with his mother, he attended an elementary school in the Canyon Hills area of the suburb of Marshall. While at Freedom Elementary, Malcolm was in regular classes initially but was placed in what he calls "special classes" because "they all figured I had a problem 'cause I had anger issues." When he was in the special classes a teacher took a Transformer action figure from him and said it would not be returned to Malcolm until the end of the year. It was a treasured item to him because it was the only thing his father had given him. When the teacher did not give the toy back to him, Malcolm threatened him and

was subsequently expelled from that school. Since that moment, since the age of eight, Malcolm has been in settings for students that have behavioral challenges that a traditional school can not handle. He has been enrolled in Give Hope Academy, Second Chance Home, and St. Paul's Academy, just to name a few.

When Malcolm was in the custody of his grandmother, he attended a Riverton city district school, Franklin Elementary. He was placed in "special classes" and then determined that he had a disability. Malcolm said his label was "learning disabled and my behavior."   He stated that he had difficulty focusing in larger classes and he was more focused on the students rather than the work. His attention was elsewhere all the time. When asked if he was tested for ADHD, Malcolm said that he was diagnosed as having ADHD.   Malcolm commented, "To this day, I don't believe I was ever ADHD or anything was wrong with me." When questioned about his belief, he stated, "I feel as if at the time, Moms saying she didn't nave enough money income comin' in so she want me to act a certain way for the paycheck to come in which the purpose of the check was to care of any things or any financed that I need as a child…" He went on to say that he believed most kids "don't have nothing wrong with them, especially black." Malcolm further said, "I believe, that the parent don't have enough money, so they assume something is wrong with their child, you get more money from the government. That's what I believe."   The young man added that he began to believe that he had problems because everyone else said he did. Malcolm said, "I usually get a very bad anger problem to the point my eyes would be bloodshot red. I would have headaches, I have migraines to the point my hair hurt and my veins be poppin' out and I would be mad for days at a time…I wouldn't just calm down." He stated that he would explode over minuscule things and "just destroy things."

Malcolm said that his teachers and his grandmother thought he had a problem and that his grandmother "was scared" of him. He said that he was hospitalized for a month at Children's Hospital's adolescent psychological unit. When he entered ninth grade, Malcolm attended a traditional high school in the area where his mother resided but within two weeks, he was expelled for a drug possession infraction, having marijuana in his pocket. He was placed on home instruction for several months. The following year, Malcolm transferred to Verity High School, a computer-based instructional school, and

while there, he was locked up for thirty days for receiving stolen property, the second offense. Upon release, he attempted school again but he committed another crime, breaking and entering and was sentenced to six months Center City Correction Center. Malcolm is over the age of eighteen and is currently on probation.

Malcolm is a young man who encountered difficulties in school at an early age and by the age of twelve he says he was in and out of jail. He was also in and out of alternative schools for students who have difficulty in the regular school setting. According to Malcolm, he had ADHD and an "anger problem", so he was placed in "special classes" then assigned to "special schools." He meandered in and out of regular or traditional school settings, to specialized settings, and spent time at the youth detention facility, Hillendale. Malcolm was unsure which grade in high school he completed; he said he thought he made it to tenth grade. The institutional mobility Malcolm experienced almost certainly contributed to uncertainty about which classes he completed and credits earned. In addition, he had discipline problems and the traditional high school he attended expelled him for drug possession and placed him on home instruction for the rest of the year. Malcolm enrolled at Verity High School, a computer-based instructional program for sixteen to twenty-two year olds who are credit deficit, overage, and desired to earn a high school diploma. However, during his time there, he had another interaction with the courts and was placed in jail. When he went to court, the judge stated that earning a GED was more appropriate than returning to Verity. Malcolm offered this explanation regarding dropping out of school:

PI: **So basically, you dropped out of school or walked away from school because you got caught up in...you got incarcerated?**

M: At the time I wasn't dropped out, when I was nineteen, the judge wanted me to drop out and get a GED. I said, why would I do that when I still have an opportunity to get my high school diploma. And she said, well I think this is better for you and she locked me up and she blew all my chances of ever getting a high school diploma, and she said, I wasn't coming to school every day and I knew I was, and I proved that fact to her. After proving the fact to her, she still said, I believe this is better for you and when I got out

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of Center City, I was still enrolled...at first they wanted me to come, but I felt like it would be a waste of my time trying to catch up two years.

PI: **So you were nineteen at this point?**

M: Eighteen, going on nineteen and I figured like know what, I'm just gonna drop out, not because I want to, but I'm just going to get my GED because it would be quicker and better for me so I could move on with other things. I had a chance to get my high school diploma and I blew it, so it's no reason to do two years when I could just....

PI: Right, so you had two years of school left, but you got caught up in the system, and ended up getting incarcerated, so when you got out you wanted to go back to Verity but it would have taken too long? So you thought it was best that you get a GED?

M: Yup.

Malcolm not only moved with his family several times and at one point his family was homeless, he transferred to various school settings including specialized schools that provide intensive services and instruction for students with significant emotional and behavioral concerns. Furthermore, Malcolm was entangled with the court system through out his high school years. He made it clear that he did not do penitentiary time but when he turned eighteen, he was incarcerated in the county detention center for a period of time then placed on probation. Consequently, Malcolm dropped out of school.

The entering and exiting of the school setting because of juvenile detention caused Malcolm to fall behind in school. Malcolm reflected

Well, elementary, I was more focused than ever but when high school came, it was like everything fell off the track, it was work and I wasn't for real, I wasn't paying attention. I was but I wasn't trying to hear it cause they was teaching a lot of stuff that wasn't, that I figured I wouldn't be using in my life for as fractions...the basic mathematics and a few other stuff is all I need to know and

as long as I know how to make some money, legally or illegally at the time. At the time, school work when it comes to homework, I would like to do all my work at school so when I get home, I wouldn't have to do none...I could just go on about my day, but that ended up...and also, incarceration, if I was never incarcerated, I believe I would have had my high school diploma. I would have took school in more, but I was constantly in jail for real, so I never had time to actually adapt to any school. So the hardest part for high school was basically, I was in jail most of it, so I never experienced it when I was there. I was just focused on the students, big classroom, lunch breaks, just going to school period.

PI: **So how has all these choices impacted your life? How has it affected you?**

M: It affected me, made me feel like I always told my self, I was never gonna be anything...I felt like I had no chances in this life at all from me having the 2 felonies and no educational history and no job and still headed down the same road. I felt like I'm not a success...I'm more of a failure. That's how I basically felt, but it was always people that tells me that I was going to become more successful. I didn't believe it...I still don't ...

PI: **You still don't believe what?**

M: That I will be a success, well now my confidence is more higher than ever, but back then, I didn't have confidence. I didn't have self control. I always took what everybody else said about me and focused in that direction and I never actually took the time out to actually think about myself and how I felt about myself.

Malcolm said that incarceration interfered with his education and the lack of success in school affected his confidence and self-esteem-he felt like a failure. Malcolm stated

I believe if I wouldn't have ever been engaged in criminal activity, I would have had a better experience than I have now and I would

have been anxious to go to college, but this was just so much. I couldn't bear it so anything involved with school or school work, I don't like.

Malcolm knew that he needed to obtain his GED but the idea of going beyond that to college is not an option he wished to entertain because of the negative experiences he had in K-12. In essence, when Malcolm dropped out of school due to multiple encounters with the legal system, he became disengaged and detached from the concept of schooling altogether.

One day, Malcolm was looking for a job and encountered a friend from the neighborhood who told him about the Builders of Dreams Program. The friend referred him and Malcolm thought "he would give it a shot" because it was an opportunity to get his GED and learn a trade that could lead to employment. At the time of the interview with Malcolm, he had been in the program for two weeks. He was on house arrest also. When asked how he felt about the ability to gain employment, he said he will have some difficulties because "with me having two felonies, no high school diploma or GED, and no experience…the only experience I have is I know how to clean up real good."

Malcolm said bad choices, being around negative people, and "engaging in criminal activity" led to his current situation because he was not thinking of the consequences at the time and his motto at that time was, "Do it how you live." Malcolm has two years "on the shelf" if he violates his probation and he will more than likely do those two years in the penitentiary.

Malcolm said that if he would have had a better experience in school, he would have desired to attend college "but this was just so much." He is not interested in anything involving school or school work. When asked why he felt he could not go to college, Malcolm replied that he could but did not think he wanted to go any longer.

Keep Movin' Forward by Martin

Martin is a 20-year old African-American young man who lives in a mid-sized city in the Midwest. He grew up in a predominantly Black neighborhood that has some criminality—drug dealing and using, gang activity, and sometimes homicides. Martin's primary care giver growing up was his sister because his mother was terminally ill. His family nucleus included his mother, two brothers, and two sisters. His mother passed in 2008. Martin grew up around older people in the neighborhood and even though they were not doing right, they wanted to make sure he "was still good and had [his] head on straight." Currently, he lives in an area that is predominantly White but has experienced more people of Color, African-Americans and Hispanics moving into the area. He describes it as having "a bunch of hicks right now…and more Mexicans." Martin resides with a girlfriend and says that the girlfriend is the "worst thing in the world to be living with." He said he could live with a sister or another female but "staying with a female period…it's hell to go through." Martin states that he is not stable enough to get his own place because he does not have a job. He wanted to say he did not have a job because he is a Black man but he says that no one is being hired due to the economy. However, Martin added that being a Black man, not having an education, a lack of job history "all plays its own part." Martin did not have much of a relationship with his father. He said that he respects him as an adult but does not "too much care for him."

When asked about his career choices, Martin said that he likes working with his hands but when he was younger, he wanted to be a scientist and was also interested in technology and flying airplanes. When asked about pursuing that goal now, he stated that he felt discouraged. When he was in California living with his brother, he inquired about entering the Armed Forces, but he didn't pass the test due to vision issues. Therefore, Martin "lost the effort for it."

Martin's school history became challenging upon entering the ninth grade. He entered a high school in the Riverton School District. While at Bethune High School, a predominantly Black high school, he was placed in the AA program, the "track" for academically advanced students. However, he said it was not a pleasant experience for him because the teachers in his opinion did not care and all the teachers were White.

Martin was removed from AA classes after the first semester because the team leader removed him due to his tardiness to class and when he came in, he was intoxicated from smoking marijuana. He stated that the teacher would make comments about his condition when he came to class and he would retort with comments alluding to also smoking marijuana because she looked high like him. This contentiousness received laughs from the class, so he felt she removed him for being a problem. Consequently, he was moved to another "level" as Martin referred to the different tracks that the ninth grade team had. He said the levels were AA, average, below average, and "retarded". He said the retarded class was for students who did not come to school, who were disciplinary issues and "couldn't remain quiet and that type stuff." When asked if there were to his knowledge students on this level with IEPs, Martin said there were a few but "that doesn't mean they're special ed, but it's a lot of them in the class." When the academic team decided to move Martin from AA level, they did not seek input from his sister or him. However, someone from the team had contacted his sister about a disciplinary incident, and he and his sister "got into it" because during the parent-teacher conference, Martin felt like his sister "didn't have [his] back." Martin said that it seemed like "every time [they] got around the White people…things changed, but any time [his sister] is talking to [him] she's telling [him] she got [his] back no matter what…" He did say that his sister was trying to keep him out the streets but she did not know how.

Before Martin's ninth grade year ended, he said that the assistant principal, a White man, told him not to come back to the school. According to Martin, the administrator confronted him in the hallway and said not to return to school the following year. Martin had been absent for a few days prior to being told not to return. The following year, he attended a school in another district that was significantly smaller than the district he was in. prior. His sister had moved to this area, so he had to attend the school in the area. Martin said that he felt the school had more resources than his previous school and he performed better academically. Martin stated that he was not in AA at this school because the school would not release his records, so he had to repeat ninth grade. The school, however, allowed him to enter a program that allowed him to take ninth and tenth grade classes in order to get on pace. Martin felt this demonstrated

that the teachers cared "a little more" than the teachers did at the other school. He said that the next year, his junior year, he would have been in advanced classes.

However, Martin relocated to California with his brother. He went to visit him over the summer and decided to stay and his sister felt that being around a male would be good for him and he could get his "head together." So Martin enrolled in a high school that had a predominant number of Mexican American students. He said he began the school year in the eleventh grade until his former school sent his records. The classes and curricula of the new school and former school were not aligned so all the credits did not transfer. Martin was steered towards a GED program but did not complete the school year because his brother became incarcerated, so he had to return to Marshall, the suburb where his sister resided. By the time he returned, he had just turned eighteen and Marshall High School would not re-enroll him because he was eighteen. Had he began school prior to turn eighteen, the school would have enrolled him. In essence, Martin "aged out" of high school.

Not having a lot of options, Martin enrolled in a program at Riverton Community College that allowed students who had aged out of high school to prepare and take the GED Test and transition into college classes upon passing. Martin had a temporary job but with the family needing money and having to take care of his sister's children, he said he became stressed out and turned to "hustling" for "fast money." He said the instructor of the Achieve Success Program called him, even after he missed three months and was supposed to be ejected from the program, but he had "rather go after this money than chase after that [a GED]."

Martin is not working currently but is preparing for the GED and for NCCER (National Center for Construction Education and Research) certifications so he can enter the construction field. He said that he will not have any issues with the GED Test because it is a state test because "[he] feels it's a gathering of information that they want you to know…the government or even higher up, whatever's past that, that we don't know about." Martin believed that state tests are a way to control information and that they set up people for failure.

Martin's decision to drop out of school was in part due to mobility of a different kind and having to repeat classes. In the ninth grade, he was assigned to the advanced

academic (AA) classes but after a semester, he was removed from that program. During his freshman year, Martin had conflicts with teachers, he was coming to school "high" on marijuana, and he was coming to school late. Following ninth grade, his sister moved to another district, the Marshall School District, but the previous school in the Riverton School District held his records, so he was enrolled in the new school as a freshman. Martin was allowed to be in a program that allowed him to get on track, so he took ninth and tenth grade classes. The summer after completing his tenth grade year, he went to visit his brother in California and stayed. Martin's stay was short-lived because his brother was a wanted fugitive and was caught and Martin had to return to Marshall.

Martin explained his time in California:

> **PI:** **What part of California?**
>
> M: San Diego.
>
> **PI:** **So you get to San Diego and get to Grade Eleven...did you go to school?**
>
> M: Yeah...Chula Vista High School.
>
> **PI:** **How'd you like it?**
>
> M: Fun…it's fun if you with all the Mexicans.
>
> **PI:** **So mainly Mexicans?**
>
> M: Yeah, because I was in Chula Vista where you stay is the school you gotta go to.
>
> **PI:** **Very expensive to live there. Did you finish your eleventh grade year there?**
>
> M: Mhmm...they started me in the 11th until Marshall sent my credits and it was only eight, that counted as sixteen in their credits down there, but the thing about that was everything that I was taking up here is like what they take in the sixth and seventh grade down there, so we taking biology in the tenth grade, they takin' that in the seventh, so I had to start from scratch down there. Like Algebra I & II is seventh and eighth grade so when they start ninth grade, is geometry and pre-calculus then calculus then what ever is after that. The first day that I took the classes I didn't have a

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problem with none of the classes but because my status of credit for course I had, they couldn't allow me to be in those classes.

PI: **So what grade did they start you in again?**

M: They had me placed down to the eleventh Grade but they had like something like a GED/ABLE program that was on campus, so I was back t   here with them.

PI: **How did that work?**

M: That was a little easier, but even though I was completin' all them credits, I had to come back here and them credits was cut in half, so it's double our credits, down there, but half up here.

PI: **So how long...did you finish the eleventh grade year in California?**

M: I finished most of it.

PI: **And why did you move back here?**

M: My brother was incarcerated.

PI: **Ok, get out there, get this fresh start and your brother gets incarcerated.   Ok, so you come back to Riverton and Marshall...what happens next?**

M: I tried to go back to Marshall. They told me that I couldn't come back because I was over eighteen. They said if I would have started the school year before I turned eighteen I could have went there, but because I was over eighteen they couldn't allow me to register in any program.

PI: **So you came like in the middle of the school year?**

M: I came back after November 28th, matter of fact after Thanksgiving, went up there after Thanksgiving break. They said it was not happening and they recommended me for the Achieve Success Program through them.

When Martin would change schools, his credits would not follow and if they did follow, not all of them were accepted at the new school. When the situation happened with his

brother and by the time Martin returned home, he had turned eighteen and the high school would not re-enroll him. Martin aged out of traditional high school, and he was lacking credits.

Marshall High School suggested he enroll in the Achieve Success Program at Riverton Community College, where he could attend and work on his GED. Martin explains how this optioned turned out:

PI: **And did you like that...did you want to pursue that?**

M: It was fine 'til I had to make sure I got up there every day [at Riverton State]. Make sure I got there every day, plus pay for gas money, plus for this, this, clothes.

PI: **So nothing is paid...do they supply books or…?**

M: It was on the computer...it was all on the computer, but just the whole financial part of it...like my financial status was hindering me from being able to be as successful as I could in the program, so that I could graduate with my class, 'cause they were going to still let me walk, but I had to try to do that, but it was having to drive there, plus have to sit with my sister's kids, 'cause she's the reason that I'm back. She paying' for my trip and all that, so any time she need me, I was gladly ready to help and being my other sister taking care of my mother...any time she need me I got to jump for that. So it was like a little bit stressful, plus trying to have to work a temp job...it just seemed like too much. Even having to worry about with all this fast money out here.

PI: **Did you do that?**

M: Yeah, that's what it boiled down to.

PI: **So, you had all this family stuff going on...one sister taking care of your mother, brother incarcerated, other sister had children, you were trying to help them out, you had a temporary job, you trying to go to Achieve, you had a financial situation, and you hustle on the side with no car....wow. And so, when did it end? Is that what kind of turned the school**

thing…kind of shut that down? So, how long did you last at Achieve before you stopped doing that?

M: I didn't stop going to Achieve until, even the teacher at Achieve, he was on me. I guess he seen the potential, 'cause he stayed on me even though I didn't show maybe once in a while, if that. He made sure he called me…he kept sending letters out, kept calling me, kept sending letters out to make sure that I came to the program...let me know that I was still in the program, even though after three months, they supposed to take you off the list. Sometimes I wouldn't show for two or three months and he still would call me, so, the last time I went was May of '09 and when I really got some money, it was just like, I'd rather go after this money than chase after that.

PI: **So really, you only did up to the eleventh grade, basically…**

M: Technically.

PI: **Even though their eleventh grade was not like the eleventh grade at this other school?**

M: Right.

PI: **And you decided when you came back here from California, you wanted to go to school, you go to Marshall and they say no, you too old, but we have this program called Achieve Success and you have all this other stuff going on…the stuff that's stressed you out, with the family and money, so that would pretty much...all that is what made you say, "I can't do this any more?"**

M: Pretty much.

PI: **Which particular event played a role in the decision to drop out of school? Was it the family, the finances, or all of it mixed together?**

M: I think it might have been more financial and my stuff than anything, 'cause I was worried that if I...the people around me

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...perception about me, then I was worried about my knowledge, gaining the knowledge that I already knew. I felt like that anything that was taught to me on that computer, was nothing but stuff that had already been taught to me. That's why I was placed on the computer. I felt everything that the computer was showing me, as far as me clicking on the answer, was repetitive, so, it felt like if I could put this much effort in to this computer, just imagine if I put the effort I'm putting in this class into the negative, maybe it would turn out positive. Kind of a backwards way of thinking.

Martin's thinking was that putting effort into making "fast money" which he acknowledged was a negative act could become positive. In retrospect, he realized that his thinking was counterintuitive.

Martin's dropping out of school was not only an academic issue brought on my moving to California then coming back and being too old with deficit credits to re-enroll in a traditional school but a financial decision he made as well. When he could not return to Marshall High School because he was eighteen and tried the GED program at Riverton State, he dropped out of that program as well. According to him, the expenses associated with attending the program were too much in his opinion. He worked temporary jobs and still hustled for fast money. Martin explained how dropping out of school affected him

Well, honestly… I used to...I never talk about it before my friend here shot himself in the head. It's somebody I grew up with, he was five or six years younger than me and I took him under my wing, like my family 'cause his family is a little distraught, so I took him under my wing as his family. Before he had passed, it didn't really affect me...I felt like I could go back to school any time. It's always going to be there for me, knowledge is always there. But since he's been gone, I felt like maybe if I did continue I would have been further...woulda been able to do more....maybe even able to give back to him, or not even just him, but my community period, just be able to bring up the people around me.

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Martin reflected that if he would have continued with his education and graduated, he would be further along in his life and would have been able to provide more resources and support for his friend who committed suicide. He also feels that finishing high school would have allowed him to give back to the community and "bring up the people around me."

When asked to speak on the challenges facing Black males in school based on his experiences, Martin explained

> M: Hmm....I think every black is looked at as a thug from childhood. No matter what you have, no matter what you look like, whether you be light skinned, mixed, if you got some black in your blood, you a thug. It's almost like you can't be saved until they actually see what's inside your brain. And even then, they still leave you behind. You can't keep up, they leave you behind in a second.

> **PI: Is that what you think is challenging…perception? How you're looked at?**

> M: Yeah, like I was in sixth grade and two years before that and up until this when I went to International Elementary, up until sixth grade, all my teachers loved me and all this everybody had something good to say about me. Security, so forth, but as soon as I grew these braids and started getting a little bit more mature, starting to go through puberty and such, I mean, they felt like I was a thug, a gangster. I was just a proper perfect student just last year and the year before...

> **PI: How did you know that was the perception?**

> M: I got blamed for almost everything that happened. If it was something happening, I was involved in it...no matter what the situation, no matter happened, I could have been the last one that walked to the scene....I could have been walking up when the principal walked up and I was still the ringleader as far as they was concerned because at International Elementary, there wasn't too much of anybody that was my shade or darker, unless you was an

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African ESL student or something like that, so for them it was like, it can't be any of these other students, he has to be the source of our problem.

PI: **So one of the biggest challenges you think is the perception of the people in the school toward Black males?**

M: Yeah, it was the people in the school because one of the principals, she became assistant principal over at King High School and she told me in October that she was going to get me out of the school and she did before the year was over, she got me expelled...Greta Ross...yes she did.. she told me like in October, like on the second or the sixth, but she told me like walking up the steps that she was going to make sure that she got rid of me before the end of the school year....out of nowhere and me and a couple of other students looked at each other like, she really don't like you! I'm like, I don't know where that came from and it was all because one time, somebody, one of the students that got held back, he had a lot of resentment from being held back from our class and he had a lot of resentment about that and he just lashed out at me and I let him know that if you keep talking to me like that it will be problems...and she suspended me for that. She took the suspension back because my sister was on it like, that's bull crap pretty much for you to suspend him, and he ain't never did nothing and he didn't say nothing to the student...he told the security about it and it should have been handled as such, but never mind, it was me causing an uproar in the lunch room.

His observations suggested that from childhood, a Black male regardless of skin pigmentation will be perceived as a thug and this perception from the dominant group will certainly be a challenge. Next, he observed that the school staff at his elementary school thought he was a nice young man but that perception changed when his body began to mature and he grew braids. Martin's physicality and presence created a

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negative perception of him, and he believed that his looks led to school officials placing blame and a target on him and he may have not be involved in any negative situation but Martin was placed in it because he looked like he would participate in negative activity. Martin also suggested that because of his darker skin, he was targeted as a thug and troublemaker. He believed that these issues are very real for Black males in school and are challenges that they will encounter.

Fortunately for Martin, he has not gone to the penitentiary and does not have a felony record, which is not always the case for many African-American males who drop out of school. Martin advised African-American males to stay in school and keep their head straight and keep going forward. He recognized that many Black males may not want to remain in school but it is a necessity.

Don't Give Up on Us by Derrick

Derrick is a 22 year-old African-American young man who is in the Builders of Dreams Program to help him get his GED and learn the construction trade. Derrick grew up in a housing project on the west side of the city that was plagued by drug activity, gang activity, shootings, and poverty. He is the "baby" of five siblings. His father was in the home with his mother, but his father was on drugs and according to Derrick, "he was there but he wasn't there." He says that he did not come from an abusive home and learned how to be responsible at a young age, such as cleaning the house, cooking, and making up his bed. Because his father was not contributing to the household, his mother had to work more.

Derrick was labeled as having a disability and placed on an IEP in the fifth grade. He is not sure what his label is, but he stated that he had problems with reading skills and ADHD, Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder. Derrick said that by seventh grade, school was boring to him and he stopped doing work. When asked how he passed, Derrick said, "That's a good question. I don't know how they did that…they just passed me on…I guess I really did not like that, 'cause I felt dumb…" He started selling weed in this grade also, stating "[I] didn't know what I was doing, but did it." He said he did not necessarily need the money but he saw what others had and wanted the same things and more.

Derrick was seventeen when he dropped out of high school. He thinks he completed the ninth grade. A traumatic event that occurred prior to his dropping out was the death of his brother and two months later his grandmother passed. Derrick said that he was still going to school but then the trauma hit him and he abused and dropped out of school. Derrick said he could not talk to anyone and when he tried to talk to individuals at school, "they used big words [he] couldn't even understand…[I] just wasn't feeling it." Derrick acknowledged that he took it upon himself not to graduate and he was hard-headed, not listening to people who were trying to help him.

When asked about his schooling history, he said he liked school until he was in the seventh grade. Derrick recounted his time in elementary

PI: **Until high school, how was school for you?**

D: You mean elementary? It was good, I mean.

PI: **Did you like school?**

D: Yeah, I liked it. I mean, that was the beginning of school career so, I really liked it. I'd come home from school and I might watch Barney or something, you know what I'm saying? I loved school. That's when I was really into school, you know what I'm saying? I was really into it, I mean you couldn't stop me from not going to school even if I was sick. But it's like as I got older, I just got lazy...know what I'm saying, it got real boring.

PI: **About what time was that...were you in sixth grade, seventh grade or was it ...**

D: When it started getting boring? Seventh grade.

PI: **Why was it boring for you?**

D: It was a boring thing because I guess I felt like I knew everything, you know what I'm saying, even like with a 7th grade level education, I felt like I knew everything. I felt like man, I don't need school no more, know what I'm saying? School ain't making me get no money, like school ain't paying me right now for me to sit here and do all this type of social studies and all this. It ain't paying me but that's about it.

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Derrick made it to high school, but the deaths of his loved ones and the subsequent trauma pushed Derrick's disengagement to the brink. When asked about the last grade he completed, Derrick described this period of his life

> **PI:** **So what was the last grade you completed before dropping out?**
>
> D: I would say nine. Ninth grade.
>
> **PI:** **So what happened to you to keep you from graduating from high school?**
>
> D: It was more...I was sixteen when my brother died and at that time, I was attending high school and it really hit me like...that's when I started doing drugs and marijuana and it just started hitting me, like...that's what made me drop out. Like, he died and then my grandma died like two months apart, like you know what I'm saying, back to back like one month he died and the next month she died really and it just hit me like I can't believe. I couldn't talk to nobody...even if I talked to somebody at the school they used big words I couldn't even understand, so you know I'm just...I just wasn't feelin' it, I just you know, I don't know.
>
> **PI:** **So, you would say the death of loved ones, your brother and your grandmother, led to you just, "I can't deal with school...I don't want to be here any more…"**
>
> C: Yeah, but I didn't want to like give up on life, know what I'm sayin', just give up on education like that. I knew there was peers out there who wanted to help me and you know, wanted to keep me on the right direction because if I had some problems, I could talk to some people, but I took it upon myself not to graduate, you know. I could go to my principal and she or he can talk to me and I wouldn't listen. I was too hard headed. I had too much pride, basically. But they was there for me, I just was hard headed...I wish I would have listened. Really.

When Derrick dropped out of school at sixteen, he turned to the streets and committed crimes because he felt this was the way to survive, and he continued to use drugs to ease his pain.

He described himself as being in the streets committing robberies, selling drugs, kidnapping and stated that "I just had to do me, like I had to get grimy…I had to rob, I had to kidnap, I had to go outside just to eat." Derrick said he was stressing his mother and she was worried about him because he was coming home late at night/early morning and would be drunk. Derrick admitted that he did not get caught for all of his criminal acts and was on probation for a couple of offenses; however, he was convicted of robbery and sent to prison for two years. Upon being released, he went home to his mother, but their relationship was on "shaky ground" because of his behavior and consequences of it, and she did not want him in the house. Derrick became homeless and had no job, job skills, or high school diploma. He wanted a job but he felt the felony on his record would prevent him for obtaining employment.

Derrick was motivated when he was released from prison and came to the Riverton Agency for Change and the Builders of Dreams Program in an effort to turn around his life. He says he was going to give up on the program because he "wasn't feelin' it…[he] was ready to get back to the streets, get back to packin' that gun and robbing people…" When asked about support and services to help him, Derrick explained:

> **PI:** **So they've [Builder of Dreams Program] been helpful to you...they've been supportive?**
>
> D: Yeah, they been supportive to me and that's what I need, you know what I'm sayin, and how I got in to this program was from another student that graduated from here. And when he told me about the program, I was like man, they got some counseling up there? That people can talk about their problems? He's like, yeah ...and I'm up there now. I talk to them every day like just the other day I was talking to them about my living situation...and they like you living in a house, and I say yeah, I live in a house but right now my checks is being held because I pissed clouds...I failed the drug test.

I was telling him like man, it ain't no point in me being in a house that ya'll got me in and you hold my check, like that don't make no sense. That's like basically, I'm freeloading, like even though there's 2,3 other people that's in that house with us, they gotta pay more money cause I can't pay my end of the bargain, you know what I'm saying?

PI: **So you didn't pass the drug test, why? Are you addicted? Was it marijuana?**

D: That's the only way I can cope with my problems. I try to talk to these people, but...

PI: **What about maybe going to a mental health agency and talking to someone instead of self medicating, maybe get some medication that can help you?**

D: It ain't nothing like that, it's just....

PI: **Why do you feel like marijuana helps you with your problems, help you cope?**

D:: It helps me cope cause I'm a gorilla...I look at myself as a gorilla, like for real, I mean, if I don't got marijuana in me and I ain't got nothin' good for myself, like now I got something good for myself, so I can calm down, know what I'm sayin'? And just....yeah it just help me calm down like but if I ain't got it, it's ...I'm bout to go...can't...I can't handle things. It's over, like I'm gonna go off, like I'm a gorilla, like I'm gonna do whatever I gotta do to eat. That's what it is.

Derrick regretted dropping out of school because of the negative impact it has had on his life, not grabbing the opportunity to get his education. Derrick stated simply, "I'm a victim to myself.

It affected it, I mean, it affected me bad, 'cause when I was say…when I left school, I ain't got no job, had no job since school, in and out of jail, selling weed and all types of drugs, and robbing

people, it really impacted me in a negative way and as I got older I realized that a mind is a terrible thing to waste, like and I got that from the Negro College thing and when I (inaudible), it just hit me like, but it impacted me in a negative way though cause I could've got my education and I didn't take that opportunity. I didn't grab the opportunity to take it, so....

The impact of his dropping out of school was not only criminal activity and prison, but Derrick's relationship with his mother was fractured. Dropping out for Derrick meant prison, and drug use that delays a check he receives monthly if he tests positive.

Derrick felt that one of the challenges facing African-American males in school is the teachers giving up on them. He believed that when the teachers give up on them, the males give up on themselves. When asked what advice he would give school officials, teachers, and administrators regarding African-American males, Derrick responded

My advice would be don't give up on us please. Don't give up on us because man, if you give up on us then we gonna give up on ourselves, you know what I'm saying? We're not going to give up on ourselves first until somebody give up on us. And when you do give up on us, you just basically telling us to go eat with the rats on the streets, and what I mean by that is, you telling us to go do what we got to do to eat and as high as our ranking is in Ohio for murders, that would be the worst aim to kick a young youth out of your school. He got something going good for him, hisself and he know he won't some good for hisself if you kick him out. He ain't goin to do nothin but kill, so you know what I'm sayin? Black on black crime, to date, is out of control and needs to stop. It's ridiculous. So that's my advice for teachers...just don't give up on us cause we need ya'll.

Derrick's quality of life after dropping out has not been pleasant. His connection with Builder of Dreams is the one constant in his life and is perhaps the one thing that will save his life.

Make us Feel Wanted by Frederick

Frederick is a 22 year-old young man who was born in a mid-western city. He currently lives in a neighborhood on the west side of the city; however, he grew up in an area that is close to the downtown area. This part of the city has its share of criminality: drug activity, shootings, gang activity, and other acts that can make the area unsafe. Growing up, Frederick lived with two parents, brother, and a sister. At some point, his sister left home to live with the grandmother and his father left them. This left Frederick, his mother, and his brother. He said he felt "horrible because [his] mom couldn't really do it on her own…it was too much for her." He stated that he has a limited relationship with his father and that his father is trying to re-enter his life but at fifty years old, his father had a baby and Frederick stated that "he waited a long time to have a baby."

Frederick described his current neighborhood Woodland Acres as "ok" because the part he resides in is fairly quiet. He says that there are "old people outside" and while it is a decent area, "it costs a lot just to live" in this area and that he has found it difficult to "keep up with the bills and stuff." Frederick was just laid off after working for almost five years as a cook at a hospital. He is receiving unemployment but said that there is an attempt to rescind it because the agency says he quit and was not terminated.

Frederick made a decision to leave a traditional public high school because he needed to work to have money and to help his mother with bills. He had attended this school in the Riverton School District for two years. He chose a charter school that had flexible schedules so that students could still work and earn credits towards graduation. However, when Frederick attended this school, he found it chaotic and "too many kids were there." He said the teachers could not control the class and they would not help the students because they were too busy trying to "calm the kids." He claimed that when he enrolled in the charter school Height Skills Development Center, he had earned ten credits while at the other school. Frederick then earned six more but said Height took several credits away. According to him, the environment, the credit issue, and the

financial situation at home led to him leaving the charter school. The school was not what he expected. Frederick explained

PI: **What was the last grade you pursued...ninth grade? Tenth grade...**

F: Well I went to Height Skills Development School, and we didn't really go by grades, we went by credits.

PI: **How did you end up at Height? What is Height Skills Development Center?**

F: Height is a school ...like you can go work and go to school at the same time. I didn't really like it because it was too many kids there...they was talking too much, acting up, couldn't really get your work done, and the teacher wouldn't help you...they was too busy just trying to calm the kids…

PI: **Did you finish Height?**

F: No.

PI: **So it was a chaotic type of environment when you went to Height Were you in another high school before going to Height?**

F: Yes, I was in Evers.

PI: **How long did you go there?**

F: For two years.

PI: **So after two years, you left Evers. Was there a period of time between Evers and Height where you didn't go to school at all?**

F: No.

PI: **So, what happened?**

F: Evers? I just wanted to go to Height so I could go work and have some money in my pocket and everything. I thought it was going to go good, but it turned up the opposite way.

PI: **So you left a public high school to go to Height because you wanted to get your credits and go work at the same time.**

F:	I didn't get to take it. They kept messing up my credits, taking away, adding them, so…
PI:	**So how many credits did you earn?**
F:	I had, when I was at Evers, I had ten credits. When I was at Height, I was up to sixteen, then they took four away, so it dropped my back down.
PI:	**So you were on track in terms of credits.**
F:	Mhm, because I only had fourteen more credits to go and I was going to graduate.
PI:	**But you wanted to work, so you decided to go to Height and that didn't work out for you because of the environment, or was there something happening in your life?**
F:	It was the environment for real.
PI:	**So, when did you leave high school?**
F:	I don't remember, probably 19.
PI:	**Did you end up working?**
F:	Yes.

Frederick obtained employment at a fast food restaurant but did not graduate from any high school nor did he earn a GED.

Frederick is currently working on earning his GED and mentioned that the agency and the construction program employees were very supportive but if he could do it again, he would have stayed at Evers High School, the traditional high school where he began his high school career. He described himself feeling like "scum" for dropping out of school because he could not complete anything.

Frederick cited two challenges facing African-American males in school: teachers' perception of them coupled with lack of encouragement and Black males' concentration on getting money in order to impress others. He believed that this need for acceptance and validation from others using money and materialism as means to achieve status extinguished the importance of acquiring knowledge. He stated that Black males

need encouragement from teachers and "not just put them down because they a black male like [him]." He stated

> Just that teachers need to encourage the students more and not just put them down because they a black male like me, (inaudible) , like lift our spirits up, make want to come to school, make us want to ask you questions about our work, like just make us feel needed.

As for challenges facing African-American males in school, Frederick cited their need to impress others as a challenge. The need, in his opinion, of his peers to get money in order to "flash" it and impress others overwhelms the need for obtaining knowledge. This suggests that Black males are in part responsible for their situation. Frederick suggested

> The challenges, for real for black males, just trying to get money just to impress people. If they don't think about that money...all they need is really to get enough money to go back instead of trying to get a lot of money, just to flash. If they just can get the essentials right and just that, they be alright. It's very like trying to be greedy. Everybody need to help everybody. They trying to put money in front of knowledge. You gonna need that knowledge in the long run   All that drug money and stuff, that ain't going to help you in the long run with your own.

Frederick has not been in the penitentiary and his only brush with the law he says was four hours at the county's adult detention center for driving with a suspending license. He cited his mother and brother for setting boundaries, keeping him out the streets, and providing his necessities which kept him from the penitentiary.

After earning his GED, Frederick plans to attend a school that trains individuals to be automobile technicians and his second choice is to attend Riverton State, a community college in the city, to study for an automobile technician career and study computer technology.

The After-Word

The African-American males interviewed for this research study shared their personal accounts of their schooling experiences and the circumstances that led to them dropping out of school and the effects of that decision. The stories expressed in their own voices offered significant insight into the personal and educational challenges Black males confront on a daily basis in an effort to successfully maneuver the K-12 trajectory. Their personal challenges and unstable home environment often collided with their school life, exacerbating Black males' attempts to obtain an education and in most cases, thwarting their chances of completing high school and earning a high school diploma.

The participants' stories countered the narratives put forth by the hegemony, which do not address the racism on which the educational system is situated and how schools serve as an agent to uphold White supremacy and oppress African-American males. The participants expounded upon the circumstances surrounding their decision to drop out of high school, how the decision impacted their quality of life, circumstances, the challenges facing them as a result of dropping out, and how they situate race in their schooling experiences. Their stories are data that support the premise of this project.

The next chapter will serve to review the literature and to share the emerging themes that resulted from the participants' counterstories. Their voices will expose the appalling and tragic schooling experiences of African-American males.

CHAPTER 5

"The paradox of education is precisely this; that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated."

-James Baldwin

Emergent Themes

The review of the related literature illuminated that there is an on-going crisis in the public education systems nationwide concerning the academic achievement and graduation rate of African-American males (Hopkins, 1997, Duncan, 2002, Noguera, 2008; Smith, 2004, Smith 2002).   Current data support this disturbing crisis: In 2000-2001, Black males were 8.6 percent of America's public school enrollment but were 20 percent of students labeled as mentally retarded, 21 percent of students categorized as emotionally disturbed, and 12 percent of those were diagnosed with a specific learning disability. Black males are 8.6 percent of the nation's public school demographic, yet 15 percent of them are placed in special education and in some cities the percentage is 30 percent (Smith, 2004). Additionally, Black males make up 23 percent of suspensions and 22 percent of expulsions (Hopkins, 1997; Smith, 2004), and African-American students are three times more likely than White students to be placed in special education but are half as likely to be in gifted programs (Teachers College, 2005). The drop out rate for African-American males in many of America's cities is 50 percent while 60 percent of incarcerated youth under the age of eighteen are African-American males; more Black males receive the GED in prison than graduate from high school in many US cities (Schott Foundation, 2006, 2004; Smith, 2004, 2002). For African-American males ages 15-34, homicide remains the leading cause of death, with a lifetime risk of violent death of one in 27 for Black males compared to one in 205 for White males (Mitchell, Bush & Bush, 2002; Teacher College, 2005). According to the Justice Policy Institute's report on education and incarceration (Western, Schiraldi & Ziedenberg, 2003), in 1999, 52 percent of African-American males who had dropped out of high school had prison records by

their early thirties. Indeed, the data and research support the fact that Black boys are indeed "in trouble" (Noguera, 2008).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework that examines how race, racism, and power connect to influence and promote White supremacy in institutions such economic, legal, political, and is particularly insidious in the institution of education. This particular theoretical framework posits that racism is embedded in society and its institutions, making it normal and a fixed part of America's landscape. CRT contends that racism is permanent and normal, referred to as "racial realism." Racism in ensconced in the language, laws, structures, and polices of American society. To counter White supremacist stories communicated about African-American people to the media and through other means, CRT promotes a storytelling methodology to provide marginalized, oppressed Black people an arena to challenge racial oppression in their own voices that articulate their experiences, which are affected by racism. These stories counter the stories, assumptions, stereotypes, and myths created and upheld by the dominant group.

The counterstories that the African-American males shared in this research is shocking data and potent proof that the permanence of racism has played a significant role in the schooling experiences of African-American males. Their stories are the data that not only confirmed the problem but correlated with the literature that is available that four factors contribute to African-American males' negative schooling experiences. The four factors reviewed and supported by the literature are the following: negative teacher perception of Black males (Artiles, Harry, Reschly, & Chinn, 2002; Ferguson, 2000; Harry & Anderson, 1995, Noguera, 2003, Steele, 1997), labeling and sorting through the use of special education and academic tracking (Davis & Jordan, 1995; Ferguson 2000; Ford, Grantham & Bailey, 1999; Hacker, 2003; Harry & Anderson, 1999; Kunjufu, 1989; Oakes, 2005; Vaught, 2011), Black males' resistance to schooling due to the insidious practices taking place in schools (Apple, 1995; Artiles, Harry, Reschly & Chinn, 2002; Fordham, 1996; Giroux, 2001; hooks, 2003; Noguera, 2003; Ogbu, 2003; Vaught, 2011), and alienation from schooling because of these practices (Chesley, 2007; Dunbar, 1999; Duncan, 2002; Noguera, 2003, 2008; Polite, 1994; Polite, 1994; Porter, 1997).

The findings from this research project have firmly established that African-American male students' schooling experiences have not been meaningful, positive, and relevant to their lives. From their voices, they shared how the perception that the teachers and administrators had of them were negative and uncaring, and for several of the males, they were labeled and sorted because of being perceived as a troublemaker and a problem. The participants rebelled against the lack of caring and support from the school and the teachers by resisting the rules, curriculum, and culture of the school. These three factors led to the final step, alienation. The Black males in this study were deemed "invisible children"(Midgette & Glenn, 1993). The African-American males offered their insight concerning the schooling experiences of Black males in public education. The African-American males studied provided data to support that teacher perception, labeling and sorting, resistance, and alienation are significant factors adversely impacting their schooling experiences.

Teacher Perception of African-American Males

The majority of the African-American young men who participated in this study stated in one way or another that the teachers they encountered did not care about them and were concerned with getting their pay check. If teachers did not care for them, then the teachers' perception suggested that African-American males are not worth being cared for nor did they deserve a quality education.

One participant alluded to teachers perceiving African-American males as criminals. He believed that teachers' first line of defense was the call the police. Carter stated, "You know I believe in the first step when you see a young guy messin' up is not always to call the police on them. Teachers, that's what they did. They felt like "as long as he's in jail he can't…" you know what I'm saying?" He suggested that calling the police and having African-American males taken out the building is a way of keeping them out the teachers' classes. He also believed that this negative perception of Black males prevented teachers and other school personnel from approaching a young man to offer help. Carter even suggested that asking a young man how their day was could "make a big impact on somebody." This participant also observed that he though White teachers had "a phobia" towards African-American males, which he explained in his

interview as he related the incident of a teacher giving him a passing grade and telling his aunt how smart he was, but Carter had barely attended class, so she did not really know anything about his academic aptitude. Carter's insight was that teachers attempt to keep African-American males away from them by passing them to the next grade or not saying anything at all to encourage, guide, or teach them. Martin summed up the negative perception White teachers had about African-American males: "because the majority of the school was blacks. To me, that's what I think. White...all the teachers was white. The only people that was black was the security and they wasn't even real security."

Today's teaching force is predominantly White, and they make up 83 percent of the nation's elementary teachers (Harry & Anderson, 1995; Kunjufu, 2002; National Center for Education Statistics, 2003-2004). However, the majority of White and White female teachers are teaching majority non-White students. For African-American males, the perceptions many White teachers have of them are further supported by the distorted images that are displayed in the media and literature, which characterize Black males as dangerous, criminal, incapable of learning, and sexually and physically aggressive (Feagin, 2000; Hopkins, 1997; Noguera, 2008).

Kuykendall asserts, "Blacks and Hispanics are still being seen as passive, docile, dependent, non-enterprising, inferior, and less attractive than Whites (2004, p. 13). When teachers have these attitudes and perceptions, their actions demonstrate their beliefs. Many do not provide rigorous, challenging, and relevant lessons and activities nor encourage students to do their best, and some teachers even humiliate students in the classroom or make comments that students lack academic ability and/or will not do well in life. When students hear this constantly, they begin to internalize these perceptions and perceive themselves as the dominant group perceives them (Fordham, 1996). Girabaldi's research on African-American males in New Orleans, found that 95 percent of the Black males surveyed expected to graduate but 40 percent responded that their teachers did not set high enough goals for them to reach and 60 percent felt that their teachers should have push them more (1992). Girabaldi notes, "Teachers who hold negative perceptions can inadvertently "turn off" Black male students who have high abilities, positive self-concepts, and outstanding personal expectations, and who set achievable aspirations" (1992, p. 8).

Claude Steele's research (1997) examined the effects of racial stereotypes on academic performance, looking specifically at student attitudes towards testing. He refers to a *social-psychological threat* as one "that arises when one is in a situation or doing something for which a negative stereotype about one's group applies. This predicament threatens one with being negatively stereotyped, with being judged or treated stereotypically, or with the prospect of conforming to the stereotype" (p. 614). A *stereotype threat* is "a situational threat—a threat in the air—that, in general form, can affect the members of any group about who, a negative stereotype exists…Where bad stereotypes about these groups apply, members of these groups can fear being reduced to that stereotype" (ibid). Steele's study found that students are vulnerable to prevailing stereotypes and perceptions already in place in relation to their intellectual ability (in Noguera, 2008; Steele, 1997).

Labeling and Sorting of African-American Males

The data revealed several incidents of labeling and sorting. The labels ranged from classification as a student with a disability (SWD) to being a troublemaker. Two students were labeled as students having a disability or and were given an Individualized Education Plan or IEP. Several other students were told not to return to their school because of their behavior.

Malcolm's behavioral issues prevented him from being included in a regular school setting for most of his schooling. He was placed in self-contained classes which are smaller and more structured for students who may have significant cognitive delays or severe emotional disturbances. Malcolm was labeled as having Severe Emotional Disturbance (SED) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). His acts of aggression led to placements that included partial-hospitalization and specialized schools that have ample supports that traditional schools do not have. In addition to having the label of SED and sorted into specialized settings, Malcolm was also involved in the legal system beginning at the age of twelve. He was sent by the courts to a juvenile facility for offenses such as breaking and entering and receiving stolen property. Malcolm has spent time at an adult detention center. Malcolm has two felonies on his record and no high school diploma. Derrick is the other participant who had a special education designation.

Although he could not say exactly what his label was, he stated that his reading skills were low and that he had Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Derrick said he remembers receiving an IEP in the fifth grade.

At the other end of the academic continuum was Martin, who was labeled as an Advanced Academic (AA) student and placed in AA classes in the ninth grade. However, he only remained in this specialized program for a semester because his teachers removed him from the program and placed him in a lower "level," a term used by the participant. Martin explains Bethune's tracking program:

> The way they did it was, they felt like they had different ninth grade teams, so for my ninth grade team, they split it up in to four classes and put all the other students into, we called it the "retarded class," 'cause they was all the students who didn't want to act right, wanted to town on people, wanted to act like they didn't have any sense and stuff. So they put all them in the same classes and sorted them by levels, like who's the next level towards AA and B and so forth and so forth down, and they placed me in like the third level down from AA.

When asked about students referring to one class as the "retarded class" and if that meant students in there had IEPs, Martin said, " No, but I mean there was a few people in there with IEPs but that doesn't mean they're special ed, but it's a lot of them in the class. A lot of people who couldn't remain quiet and that type stuff." In essence, students were not only sorted by ability but also according to behavior.

Two participants, William and Medger, were perceived and labeled as troublemakers and were expelled from traditional high schools and according to them "told not to come back." They landed in charter schools but did not graduate. Instead of graduating, they were convicted on felony charges and sent to prison.

White supremacy and privilege allows the predominantly White teaching force to control which educational spaces students will occupy. Attaching a label to a child serves this purpose and establishes "gateways to the predictable early termination of

school or the school-to-prison pipeline, among multiple caste-based trajectories (Vaught, 2011, p. 148).

Tracking is one form of labeling and sorting students and is still a common practice in many schools. Jeannie Oakes (2005) defines *tracking* as "the process whereby students are divided into categories so that they can be assigned in groups to various kinds of classes" (p. 3). Oakes states that tracking is the same as *sorting*, which is a practice of "sorting of students that have certain predictable characteristics" (ibid). Many teachers will place certain groups of students on certain tracks based on prior achievement, prior behavior, prior placement, socioeconomic status, language ability, physical attributes, gender, and race/ethnicity (Kuykendall, 2004, p. 16).

Based on the data compiled and analyzed, there was a "label and sort" practice taking place in schools where the participants attended. The labels could have been academic such as special education or academically advanced and/or based on disciplinary issues as was the case of two participants. Unfortunately, five participants received the label of convicted felon because they left school for the streets, with a final destination of the penitentiary. And all seven participants had the label of high school drop-out.

African-American Males' Resistance to Schooling

In one form or another, the participants studied resisted school. This resistance may have been rejection of the school norms and rules that led to suspensions or expulsions, dislike of school for various reasons, refusal to attend school regularly, and acting out in class. The ultimate resistance to school was the act of dropping out of the schooling process altogether.

William and Medger admitted to breaking the rules while enrolled in a traditional high school, but their behavior led to expulsion from school and both stated that they were told not to return. Medger admitted, "I really never cared about school honestly. Never did." He stated that his dislike for school was something that "happened early on" because he felt the information being taught was not true but "fabricated" By the time Medger was in high school, his home life was unstable, and Medger was in the streets. He stated that he would not go home at times, and instead hung out at a friend's house.

When the teacher assigned him homework, Medger would tell the teacher, "I ain't doin' no homework teacher, cause I'm not goin' home. I ain't never doin' homework." In his interview, he believed that schools "are trying to see how many people they can make the same, that's what they trying to do." Medger decided that resistance would prevent him from conforming to the set standards for all students regardless of their differences.

For William, he pointed out several times in his interview that school was a fashion show and that the focus was on material items and money and not education. He was one of several participants who stated that the schools mirrored the streets. William resisted schooling in favor of engaging in the social aspect of school that extended from the streets. After leaving the Riverton School District, William attended a charter school where according to him, "the streets were in the school too." He was going into his fourth year of high school when he was convicted of some type of crime and sentenced to four years in prison. William resisted school for the streets.

Carter left school at the age of sixteen, between the tenth and eleventh grades. He said school and his personal life was "just too much," so he stopped going to school. While he had two parents in the home, Carter's parents were self-absorbed with drug and alcohol use and he would leave for school in the morning and return home to a neighborhood of "gangs, drugs, and guns." Carter said that if he even attempted to do homework, there was always "something going on" and the "distraction" was overwhelming for him. This participant turned away from school and turned to the streets to make money and "smoke his weed." Carter stated that no one cared at school or at home, so he received attention in the streets.

Derrick started getting bored with school in seventh grade. He resisted school by not attending regularly and not completing any assignments. However, the participant was passed through middle school and upon reaching high school he encountered personal tragedy and totally resisted school and turned to the streets and to using drugs. Eventually, Derrick was convicted of robbery after being given several chances to change; however, he was sent to prison for two years. Derrick stated that when he was in high school, he could have gone to some of the school personnel for assistance but he resisted help from some of the people who were concerned about him. The participant reflected, "We made the bad choices and when they saw our body language giving up, a

sign of saying we givin' up...then they just gave up on us. Even though we ain't trying to talk to 'em to let 'em know what our problems is, we just gave up on it before even letting people know what's going on in the deep side of us, like inside…"   Derrick believed that when the youth gave up or resisted help from the teachers, the teachers and other school personnel resisted helping them.

Malcolm was the participant who was in and out of specialized programs due to this anger and defiance. He also spent time in detention centers starting at the age of twelve. Malcolm shared that he did not believe he was "special ed" and was performing so his mother would receive more benefit. Rather or not he was genuinely emotionally disturbed or acting, the participant was still engaging in overt resistant behavior. He avoided doing assignments, defied authority, acted unruly in class to seek attention and resisted doing assignments, and he would become so angry that he had trouble de-escalating.   Malcolm was expelled from school for resisting school rules and simultaneously defied laws and spent time in jail. The participant commented, "I didn't care [about] the consequences or who would get hurt, or if I would get hurt, I just know if I wanted it, I was going to get it."

Martin was in advanced classes his freshman year but was removed from the program because he had a conflict with the teacher. Also, he came to class high on marijuana, disrupted the class, and put forth little effort towards completing assignments. When his sister moved the family to another district, Martin did not want to attend the school despite his observation that the new school offered more resources and opportunities. The participant was expelled from this school for having drugs in his possession. He resisted the rules and resisted the opportunity to be schooled. When the participant dropped out of school and entered a GED program at the local community college, he resisted the opportunity to complete the program and instead chose to make money on the streets. The teacher for the program called and sent letters to Martin in an attempt to persuade him back to the program and even held his spot past the deadline, but the participant resisted the assistance and the opportunities available to him.

Giroux (2001) suggests that openly rebellious resistance is not the only behavior that defines resistance. He asserts that "some students go through the daily routines of schooling by minimizing their participation in school practices while simultaneously

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displaying outward conformity to the ideology of the school" (p. 246). Polite refers to *overt resistors* as oppressed students who disobey rules, challenge authority, evoke responses from school personnel by saying and doing inappropriate and offensive things to be suspended from school, and do whatever they can to upset the culture of the school (in Shujaa, 1994).

Many African-American males resist to how school defines them and rejects what is being taught to them and who is instructing them. Their resistance to the school's curricula, norms, and culture is a response to Black males' marginalization and exclusion they have been subjected to within the confines of school. Hopkins (1997) says, "Black male motives for resistance to authoritative domination must be considered, understood, and reckoned with if Black males are to receive a positive and quality education and succeed in the school environment" (p. 71).

Alienation of African-American Males

One of the purposes of this study was to examine how certain practices in schools could lead to the alienation of African-American males in schools, rendering them invisible. I maintain that teacher perception, the labeling and sorting of Black males, and their resistance to schooling because of these practices culminates the marginalization and alienation of many Black males until they drop out.

Most of the participants felt that the teachers did not care about them. This absence of caring connects with the themes of teacher perception and alienation. When a teacher perceives that a student is not worth caring for and communicates this verbally or non-verbally, this marginalizes a student and alienates them from the class, the school, and the overall schooling experience. African-American males' feeling of alienation is magnified because *they are* Black males. The participants in this study felt alienated because in their experiences, the teachers did not care if they came to class and for some of them, they were passed to the next grade without being in class. They were not physically present in the class, yet were given grades as if to keep them invisible.

One participant, Carter, discussed how he and his aunt went to a parent conference and the teacher extolled the intelligence of her nephew; however, he was rarely in class and knew nothing about him. The participant thought that White teacher

had a phobia toward a Black male, giving him passing grades to "get [him] out of the way." In other words, the teacher wanted him to disappear from her class, so she gave passing grades to move Carter along. Derrick discussed receiving passing grades in middle school, but he was not attending school enough to be promoted. There seemed to have been an "out of sight, out of mind" mentality on the part of the teachers. As long as the African-American males stayed invisible, they would be passed to the next grade as long as they remained out the way and on the margins.

Malcolm meandered in and out of traditional school settings and specialized schools for the majority of his schooling in an attempt to address his emotional challenges. He was alienated from the regular school setting to receive help for his emotional disturbance. By the age of twelve, the participant began committing crimes and referred to juvenile detention centers and was pushed beyond the margins of the school setting toward the court system. At the age of twenty-one, Martin was still involved with the court system and sitting on the precarious edge of earning his GED, finding employment, or returning to the criminal life he knows.

In response to the question about the challenges African-American males encounter in school, Martin believed that every Black man is viewed as a thug from childhood, regardless of the tone of his skin. He stated, "It's almost like you can't be saved until [Whites] actually see what's inside your brain. And even then, they still leave you behind. You can't keep up, they leave you behind in a second." Even if dominant group is able to get past the color of a Black man's skin they realize that they have intelligence and thoughts, he will still be alienated and left behind.

When African-American male students have been perceived negatively by schools, labeled and sorted, and the consequence of these harmful practices initiates resistance on their part, Noguera (2008) says that "children learn whether they are in the educational pipeline and develop expectations regarding where they will end up on the social hierarchy" (p. 118). For some students, their paths will lead to a low-wage job others may attend college, and some are spinning their wheels and making no progress towards graduation. The students who are on the path to low wages or are making no progress towards earning enough credits to graduate have accepted their fate and are usually the ones who cause problems for the school environment. The teachers and

administrators know who is on which path, so the school officials offer alternative educational options to these students who are majority African-American males. They are unsuccessful in school and engaged in rebellious behaviors. There are numerous alternative schools options, including schools specifically for behavioral issues, vocational schools, and even inner city schools that have been unofficially designated as the "dumping ground" for the less than desirable students. These particular schools usually have a high special education population, low attendance rates, high failure rates and poor graduation rates, and the suspensions are numerous. More charter schools are emerging that offer an alternative to traditional schools. They may accept students from the ages of sixteen to twenty-two and the academic work is usually computer-based.

African-American males who find themselves in this position are alienated from the general school setting and deprived of the opportunities that come with being a part of the total school experience. Instead they report to locations that serve more as "warehouses" for Black males, where they are monitored closely in a very controlled environment as if they are prisoners (Noguera, 2008).

Other Emergent Themes

From the participants' stories, additional themes emerged: (1) the need for parental support in their lives during their schooling experiences; (2) the need for teachers to care about them and support them; and (3) the curriculum should be culturally relevant and instructional methods should take into consideration the gender of the students because males learn differently than females. The data also indicates that six of the participants believed that race plays a factor in the following ways: how Black males are perceived which is negative, what they are taught, inequities in funding and resources for urban students, and too many African-Americans in special education placement. Finally, a very troubling theme emerged during the study: the realism of the school-to-prison pipeline.

Lack of Parental Support

The African-American males who were interviewed for this project overwhelmingly stated that they would have benefited from having more support from

home. They felt that this would have helped them deal with school better. When asked to describe their background, six of the seven Black males who participated in this research painted a picture of instability and lack of parental support. There were instances of drug and alcohol abuse, absent parents, economic hardships, homelessness, and trauma caused by deaths of parents, siblings, and friends. When students' external environment away from school is unstable, uncaring, or even unsafe, this places stress on children regardless of their age. The participants stated that they needed support from home but did not receive it, and they believe that this was a factor in their lack of success in school. The African-American males had no one from home advocating for them in the schoolhouses. Kunjufu states that regardless of the amount of money or the number of parents in the home, the home environment can still be a high-achieving environment (1989). However, he says that in some homes "the parents are downtrodden and they transmit a dismal attitude to their children" and will "pass the buck" of placing blame for their lack of interaction in their child's life (p. 91). Kunjufu puts forth five characteristics of high achieving homes: hope, consistency, complimentary towards their children, high expectations for their children, and the understanding that parents are the primary educators of their children, not the school. From the perspectives of the participants interviewed, the parents for the most part were not involved in their sons' lives and this created a void in their lives and made schooling even more difficult for them.

Polite (1994) published an article in which he examined the social context of schooling of African-American males in a high school setting. One of the indicators from his study is that "the parents of African American male students at MHS self-effaced and abandoned their role in the education of their sons" (p. 599). From Polite's examination, he learned that the parents knew there were problems at the school but elected to place their sons' failures on the school instead of becoming involved. The parents left the education to the schools and did not get involved. The lack of involvement and passivity of parents sends a message to children, particularly African-American males who are being targeted more than any other group in schools, that they are not important, that school is not important, and exacerbates the abandonment and isolation already being felt from being in school where they feel no one cares.

The participants in this research project believed that support of home was critical to helping Black males make it through school. They were being passed through school and not going to class, given too much freedom to do what they wanted because the home environment was unstable and the parents were caught up in their own lives, and the school environment according the participants did not care about them.

Lack of Caring from Teachers

The lack of caring from teachers was troubling for most of the African-American males who participated in this study. They believed that the teachers were simply at work to get a check and did not have their best interests in mind. The African-American males came to this conclusion because of certain situations, including being given grades so they would pass to the next grade even though they rarely passed the class because they just "wanted [them] out the way" as one participant stated, not being taught a culturally relevant curriculum that was based on fact, and being perceived negatively as a thug, troublemaker, or a problem. The lack of caring also extended to the teachers not being concerned if the Black males were in class at all. When teachers do not care about students, it is like the students are not visible to the teachers. Therefore, the Black males feel like they are invisible to teachers. They also could feel when teachers did not care for them; it does not always have to be stated "I don't care" but can be conveyed by teachers' actions. One participant stated, "Being in school you know I feel like you know you need counseling. Some people have it hard at home and you know you never know what that person going through. So instead of you know pull them to the side after school to talk to them you know they wanna get you up out of there. So a lot of times they really didn't care. And I'm pretty sure all you had to do was ask that person you know "how was your day?" You know that would make a big impact on somebody."

The lack of caring from teachers, mainly White middle-class teachers who comprise most of the teaching force, toward African-American males increases African-American males' resistance to schooling and subsequent alienation (Chesley, 2007; Midgette & Glenn, 1993; Mitchell, 1998; Polite, 1994; Wilson & Banks, 1994). Several of the participants believed that their teachers were only concerned about a check which suggests that the participants felt like a commodity, a means for teachers to earn money

but they did not really like educating African-American males. Carter stated, "Where I went…you know it was the teachers that was just there to get they check and go. They wouldn't care or nothing about what the next child would get out of it. They was just doin' they job. If you got it or not they wouldn't even cared. So it was like if they didn't care and you barely got the support you really needed from home and you wasn't getting no support from your school…I mean…nothing else left to do but leave school for me." Martin also expressed his view that teachers did not care about him. He explained

> Well, after Bethune…that was one of my worst experiences for me. When I first started Bethune, it was fun school-wise, but teacher-wise, the teachers wasn't really there for the students, they was just there collecting a check, it seemed. Didn't get homework, didn't get no books sent home, I mean, just the whole school period, like the teachers-wise, it was all like, it was pretty much they was just coming. It was like having a body in there but not the spirit, so it was like more the class running the class than the teacher running the class. So it was fun for the students but not fun for our brains.

Martin acknowledged that school was fun but at the same time the teachers were not concerned with their behavior or with teaching and the students learning. He also observed that the teachers seemed like they were there physically but spiritually and mentally, their hearts were not into teaching the students. What a sad commentary.

Duncan (2002) posits that Black males in schools "suffer a condition characteristic of a population that is *beyond love* [author's emphasis], a condition of those who are excluded from society's economy and networks of care and thus expelled from useful participation in social life" (p. 140). He also states that because African-American males have been constructed as being strange and different with values and attitudes that are in contrast to other groups of students, "their marginalization and oppression are understood as natural and primarily of their own doing" (ibid).

Absence of Culturally Relevant Curriculum and Teaching

Several participants pointed out that what they were being taught in school was from a White perspective, that the information was not factual, and excluded information about Black people. Even though only a few of the African-American males interviewed mentioned this, lack of culturally relevant teaching is a significant issue in schooling. Ladson-Billings (1995) defines *culturally relevant teaching* as "a pedagogy of opposition not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment' (p. 160). She cites three characteristics of cultural relevant pedagogy: "students must experience academic success," "develop and/or maintain cultural competency," and they must "develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order" (p. 160). Cultural relevant teaching is not only concerned with the academic content but also with teaching culturally competency and developing children's consciousness so they can critique acts of oppression, injustice, and inequity and respond appropriately. Teachers who practice culturally relevant pedagogy use "students' culture as a vehicle for learning" (p. 161) and not their culture as a framework for students' learning.

Delpit (1995) asserts that some of the issues impeding African-American children and other children of color from learning have to the do with the lack of multicultural curricula. She states, "In part, the problems we see exhibited in school by African-American children and children of other oppressed minorities can be traced to this lack of curriculum in which they can find represented the intellectual achievements of people who look like themselves" (p. 177). Delpit goes on to say that children would not equate doing well academically as "acting white" if the teachers included and celebrated the intellect and creativeness of African-Americans and other People of Color who made significant contributions to society.

The Existence of a School-to-Prison Pipeline

One of the most disturbing themes emerging from this study is the reality of the School-to-Prison Pipeline. Five of the seven participants in this study stated that they had spent time in prison and had felony convictions. This lends credence to the emerging data that schools are contributing to African-American males' journey down the pipeline from

school to prison. Too many Black males are not graduating from high school but instead are spending time in prison.

The National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) released a report on the over-funding of prisons and the under-funding of education in the United States. State spending on prisons is six times that of spending on education; 70 billion dollars is spent annually on prisons and 50 billion dollars of this amount is spent on the state level (NAACP, p. 12). There are approximately 2.3 million people serving time in prison and "while one-third of the nation's population is African-American or Latino, these ethnic and racial groups account for 58 percent of the nation's prisoners" (p. 10). Instead of each state initiating reform efforts to reduce incarceration, each state pours money into the prison system at the expense of education and other reform measures that can prevent youth from dropping out of school and dropping into prison.

Advancement Project (AP), a policy, communication, and legal action organization that focuses on racial justice and equal opportunity, examined how schools' "zero tolerance" policies for discipline became an insidious trap for youth to enter the School-to-Prison Pipeline or Schoolhouse-to-Jailhouse Track, as Advancement Project refers to this trap. Many schools currently rely on having a police presence in schools to maintain safety; however, this organization believes that school-level disciplinary infractions that have a "zero-tolerance" tag attached to them are contributing to more juveniles interacting with the juvenile justice system. Advancement Project is not opposed to having safe schools but it is concerned with the disproportionate number of African-American and Latino students getting suspended or expelled from school and getting arrested. This organization states, "Schools must take a thoughtful approach to discipline to ensure that young men and women are not robbed of opportunities to succeed" (p. 12). The Advancement Project is concerned that structural racism leads to the disparate treatment of students of color when applying schools' code of conduct and school-based arrests. This disparate treatment based on race begins in the classroom when the teacher writes a referral on a Black male and removes the student from class, moves to the principal's office when he gets a disciplinary referral, and can move to an arrest by the school resource officer (SRO), a police officer assigned to schools. If the Black male has already had interaction with the juvenile justice system outside of school,

the incident that occurs in school is added on to the record and can lead to the Black male being incarcerated in juvenile detention and missing instruction. If this cycle is not broken, dropping out of school and into the penitentiary is almost inevitable.

The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (2005) released a report stating that there were over three million suspensions in the United States in 2000 and almost 100,000 expulsions. Statistics have demonstrated that African-American males are being suspended and expelled from school is disproportionate numbers. When students are suspended or expelled, they may find themselves in the position of being arrested. The NAACP posits that suspensions and expulsion leads to grade retention, dropping out, criminality and eventually to adult incarceration.

The organization cites a failing education system as the "entry point" into the School-to-Prison Pipeline because schools are under-funded and under-resourced. Instead of school systems receiving funding to combat low academic achievement, negative behavior that can lead to suspension and possible arrest, and non-academic needs such as in-house mental health services and clothing, shoes, and school supplies on hand for students, state funding is being directed in monolithic amounts to prisons and "kiddie" jails while schools and under-served, oppressed, and disenfranchised groups such as African-American males are being neglected and marginalized.

At the beginning of this research project, I had the following questions: (1)How do African-American males who have not graduated from high school understand their experiences of schooling and how has these experiences contributed to their circumstances?; (2) What factors do African-American males identify as barriers to achieving success in school?, and (3) What do African-American males believe should happen to improve the schooling experiences of this select group? In addition, I was interested in hearing if the participants situated their schooling experiences and current circumstances in race.

The Circumstances Surrounding the Decision to Drop Out of School

The participants in the study dropped out of school once they reached the high school level, and they left school at various periods during their high school years. From

a young age until the point the participants dropped out of school, the Black males communicated a multitude of struggles in their personal life, including drug and alcohol use and addiction in the home, family financial hardships, living in unsafe environments, one-parent homes due to divorce/separation, drugs or other reasons, and trauma from losing family members.

When the participants did attend high school, they were not engaged in schooling and some of them view the school setting as social and the activities and interaction taking place mirrored, in their opinion, what was occurring in the streets. Even though the participants were not directly asked about the number of credits they had earned to be in the corresponding grade, it is very possible that due to the lack of success they were having in school in terms of fulfilling graduation requirements by passing classes and earning credits, some of the participants may have *aged out.* This is a term I use to describe a student who has reached the age of eighteen and has been in high school for several years but does not have the required number of credits to be on track to graduate. I mention this because two participants, William and Medger stated that they left school at the end of eleventh grade or in twelfth grade, respectively. They may have been in the school for three years, but that does not mean they were on track in terms of credits to be a junior or senior. William, when he left a traditional high school, enrolled in a charter school that allowed students to continue with their education past the age of eighteen and Malcolm wanted to enroll in a school that accepted sixteen to twenty-two year olds but a judge, according to him, steered him towards entering a GED program. Malcolm had moved through so many school settings and had been involved in the court system for a significant period of time that he was not exactly sure where he was in terms of grade level when he dropped out of school.

How the Decision to Drop Out Impacted the Participants' Quality of Life

For the participants who shared their stories, the decision to disengage and drop out of high school created more difficulties for them. According to the data collected, Frederick was the only one who did not turn to criminal activity once leaving school. He transferred to a school that offered flexible schedules so he could work and after dropping out this school, he continued to work until being laid off. Martin stated that he has not

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been to the penitentiary but did go after the "fast money" after dropping out of school; it seems he did not get caught doing these activities. For the remaining five participants, however, their decision to drop out placed them on a trajectory to jail and/or penitentiary time for felony offenses.

The participants when studied for this research were involved in a program at the Riverton Agency for Change (RAC) called Builder of Dreams Program. The program exists to assist youth who drop out of high school earn their GED, have no employment, and develops their skills in construction for potential employment in that field. In essence, the program is a second and even third chance for young people, particularly African-American males, to earn a GED that can lead them to college if it is their choice, learn a skill that can lead to viable employment, develop life skills, and have access to mentoring and support services.

It is important to examine the participants' awareness of how their decision to leave high school impacted their lives. Sharing their experiences provided them an opportunity to make sense of their current circumstances by reflecting on their past choices. Hopefully, reflecting upon their experiences through telling their own stories will guide their path going forward.

Frederick left a traditional high school setting after two years there to enroll in a school that would provide a flexible schedule so he could work while attending school. The school he chose was not what he expected and the environment proved too distracting to Frederick, so he decided to drop out and work to help his mother. His decision, while responsible and admirable, impacted his self-esteem. Frederick stated, "It made me feel like I was scum…I couldn't complete nothing." Frederick never did anything criminal to make money nor has been in prison; he spent four hours at the detention center for a driving while on suspension. He worked to help his mother, but it was at the price of his self-value.

In addition to the impact of Frederick's decision to drop out bruising his esteem, he did not have a high school diploma or GED that would give him more options. Many jobs require people to have at least a high school diploma or GED. However, the current reality is that people need to have post-secondary education and/or training to develop skills for gainful employment and even then, with unemployment, jobs are scarcer.

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Frederick did not have a high school diploma or GED, so he was limited in what he could do. He was a cook at Wendy's then a hospital four years before being laid off, and the agency that handles unemployment benefits is attempting to end his unemployment benefits. In retrospect, when asked if he could do things differently what he would do, Frederick stated, "I would stay at Evers High School."

The Challenges Facing African-American Males in their Schooling

The participants in the study were asked what they thought the challenges currently facing African-American males in school based on their experiences. The African-American males interviewed were not that far removed from high school, so their experiences during high school and the circumstances that followed dropping out of high school can provide insight about the challenges other Black males may face in school. Several participants noted that while the students currently have it better they did because of new buildings and some good teachers, there are still challenges for Black males and one challenge that was repeated is the lack of support they are receiving from home.

The participants believed that more structure and parental support in their home would have assisted them in being drawn into the environment around them. The absence of boundaries and structures in the home set by parents and designed to make sure the participants were going to school and doing their homework allowed them to be in the streets, making school unimportant. The parents were disengaged from their children and exposed them to a negative environment. The African-American males in this study took responsibility for their actions but at the same time they realized that they needed a support system from home to assist them through the schooling process and may have kept them from entering the streets.

Several participants suggested that the curricula and instruction need improving to engage African-American males and motivate them to learn. Carter stated that the instruction, the content and the delivery of it, needed to be interesting, use multiple strategies and suggested that teachers need to use various ways to make sure struggling students receive attention. He stated, "I would make it more interesting, because the time span for kids' experience, teenagers or whatnot period, are short and if it's something like

they need to hear....make it interesting, you know what I'm saying. Like don't make it like Christopher Columbus and just make it interesting. Let them [students] read and not just sit there cause you reading out of the book, not breaking them down."

One participant suggested that the gender of students is important to consider when teaching. Medger said, "It's attention span...you know, you gotta do research on men....we don't need to pay attention that long, so if it ain't infatuating or glamorous or whatever, they ain't goin to pay attention. If you ain't talking about sports or that girl, we don't even hear you." William stated that some teachers lack patience. He said, "[A] lot of teachers shouldn't be teachers ...like (inaudible) she a teacher, but what she don't understand is you gotta like kids to be around kids. You ain't got patience, how you gonna have patience with kids in your classroom? And that goes back to saying like they don't care."

Derrick's plea for teachers not to give up on them was in fact a sign of them caring enough about African-American males to stay in their corner when the Black males have thrown in the towel. The encouragement and caring from teachers could give Black males the strength to rise up and keep fighting another day. Conversely, when there is an absence of caring, Black male' throwing in the towel would be a certainty. It seemed as if Derrick views teachers as the beacon of light that can guide them through their struggles and if they give up on the Black males, then there is no hope for them, so they give up and walk away.

Martin believed that the negative perception that educators have of African-American males is a challenge because from childhood, a Black male is viewed as "a thug" regardless of their skin pigmentation. When educators have these perceptions, it blinds them to the ability and intelligence that African-American males have.

How African-American Males Situate Race into their Schooling Experiences

This study utilized Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the theoretical framework driving this research. Therefore, it is necessary to examine how race and racism impacts the institution of education and specifically, the schooling experiences of African-American males who have dropped out of school. One of the goals of this project was to explore whether the participants view race as one of the factors that influenced their

schooling experiences. If the African-American males did identify race as a factor that impacted their schooling experiences, how did they situate race into their experiences in school and in their life circumstances?

Carter did not want to place the blame on Whites totally and believes that Black people are misleading Black people. Apparently he used to believe that Whites were the cause of African-Americans' plight because "that's what White People do" but now considered Black people their own worst enemy. Carter believed that Black people are "not coming together" and things are happening to African-Americans because "we choosin' to let it happen at the same time." However, he also believes that education should be equal for Blacks and White. Carter stated, "Well you can't blame nobody but us because we ain't workin together as a race, but at the same time, in the school-wise I feel it should be equal. I mean Ferguson School District, [a suburban district] shouldn't be getting any more money than Riverton Public. I mean, why should they? Really, like when you talking about education."

While Carter was hesitant to blame Whites for the trials and tribulations of African-Americans, he thought that some Whites have a "phobia" toward African-Americans. He related an incident that happened when his aunt attended a parent conference at his school:

> I think it's a phobia...cause like open house, ok I'll give you an example. Open house, my aunt come, ok, my aunt goes up to the social studies teacher. My social studies teacher tells her, he's a very smart child......I ain't never been to this class but two times, so you don't know nothing about me, basically, giving me the grade for what? You just want to get me out of the way.

PI: **And she just wants to get you out of the way, because......?**

C: I'm not goin' to say she was racist or anything like that, but I'm just saying she wanted to do her eight and be gone.

Carter did not explicitly attribute race to this situation. Yet, race seemed to have crossed his mind because he felt that Whites have a "phobia" about African-American males and this fear that the teacher led to the White female teacher telling Carter's aunt what she

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thought his aunt wanted to hear. Carter perceived this as the teacher's way of dismissing him or as he stated, "get me out of the way."

Two participants noted how the curriculum being taught in schools did not include African-Americans and the information that was being disseminated to children was not accurate. Medger stated that "most of the teachers is white telling their story about the white people. About the pilgrims, the natives. They telling their story about the…only story we know is we was on that boat." His comments revealed that he was totally aware that the narratives being taught in school were those of Whites and the only story told about African-Americans is the narrative of them being on slave ships. Medger and William believed that the information being taught in schools glorified Whites and misinformed students. The content of the curriculum also served a second purpose, according to William: the stories Whites convey about African-Americans were either sad or there is no story.

Malcolm was the participant who experienced special placements in non-traditional educational settings because of his emotional disturbance label. When he reflected on his schooling experiences and the behavioral issues he had, Malcolm believed that there was nothing wrong with him and suggested an economic advantage to placing students, particularly, Black children, on Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). He explained

> At the time, I look at it as, since I'm grown now, I know there ain't nothing wrong with me. I don't need no pill to control me. I feel as if at the time, Moms saying she didn't have enough money income comin' in so she want me to act a certain way for the paycheck to come in which the purpose of the check was to take care of any thing or any finances that I need as a child, not her expenses or anything she owes or any of her bills. So when it comes to IEP, I believe most kids don't have nothing wrong with them...especially black. I believe, that the parent don't have enough money, so they assume something is wrong with their child, you get more money from the government. That's what I believe.

Malcolm contended that many of the students being identified as needing special education services do not really need to have IEPs. He particularly pointed out that in particular most African-American students do not need IEPs. While Malcolm did not accuse schools of placing numerous students in special education because of the extra funding that districts receive, he did indicate that he believed his mother used his special education designation to receive financial assistance from federal programs.

Another participant discussed how he would not have a problem passing the GED Test. Martin was confident that he would do well because he performed well on state tests because the information is controlled on the tests. His contention was that state tests are tools of the government to control what "they" want people to know. In addition, this control of information he believed sets up certain groups in schools for failure. Martin discussed

> **PI:** **So how do you feel about taking the GED?**
>
> M: I'm pretty good at tests, especially state tests. So if the state made it, I probably could ace it.
>
> **PI:** **So how do you feel about state tests?**
>
> M: I feel it's a gather of information that they want you to know....the government or even higher up, whatever's past that, that we don't know about. The information that they want you to know... that they think is important. Not the math part and all that...like the writing and stuff...social studies.
>
> **PI:** **So, are you saying it's trying to control people to a certain extent? Is "they" or whoever creates these things, it's a way of....**
>
> M: Keeping you in that mentality, even when you think you out of it.
>
> **PI:** **So what do "they"...what do you think the plan is if they're trying to control information like that?**
>
> M: By giving you a test that has such control of information and nothing that is like pertaining to me or my environment or what I came from...feels like it's a system set up for you to fail, but you can make it out of there, I'm not saying that you can't make it out

of it, it's just like the system is waiting for you to fail, even when you are successful.

PI: **Who...people who look like you...African-American males or any person?**

M: I feel like it's anybody who's in public school is being set up like that, because the teachers that you get, for the most part, if they're not black or been through the struggle or have seen the struggle or can even relate to the struggle are not going to understand it, so they're not going to care, so it's more or less like, they take people from out there and place them in here and take people from in here and place them out there....if that made any sense.

PI: **And what struggle do you talk about? The struggle of....**

M: Adversity, of I don't know, oppression I guess.

PI: **As an African-American male, do you feel oppressed?**

M: I feel oppressed as soon as I step out of the house every day. When I wake up in the morning. If it ain't one thing, it's another. If it ain't the police, it's somebody else, so either way you go, every time you step out of the door, if you ain't worried about somebody that looks like you, you worried about somebody who don't look like you.

Martin connected the control of knowledge to testing, information being taught in preparation for the test, and to the teachers who are instructing them. He stated that if the teacher is not Black like he is or has experienced the struggles he has, the teacher did not care. When asked what kind of struggle, Martin referred to it as the "struggle of adversity" and being oppressed. He said that as soon as he walked out the door, he felt oppressed and had to constantly worry about Whites as well as African-Americans. Martin said, "If you ain't worried about somebody that looks like you, you worried about somebody who don't look like you." For Martin, he was concerned about White America because he is an African-American male and oppressed, but he also worried

about African-Americans, too, when he walked out the door. They were oppressed just as he was, and adversity and oppression, Martin suggested, were dangerous.

Frederick situated race in terms of the encouragement that African-American males need from the teachers. He stated that teachers should not put down students because "they a black male like me." He believed that teachers should lift the spirits of African-American males and make learning such that they want to come to school to learn. Frederick was sensitive to how the teachers perceived him as not just a male student but a Black male. At some point in his schooling, he encountered a teacher or more than one who devalued him and negatively affected his view of school. Frederick believed that African-American males need teachers to care and encourage them because they are students who want to learn.

The participants for the most part implied that race was an issue in their experiences. However, there was also intuitiveness in their voices that explicitly communicated that race and racism were intertwined in their schooling experiences and those of other African-American males.

CHAPTER 6

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

"When you are right you cannot be too radical; when you are wrong, you cannot be too conservative."

-Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Implications and Final Reflections

The results of this research project provide valuable implications for teachers, administrators, school districts, parents, teacher unions, and other organizations and groups involved in the field of education who are concerned with the present and future of African-American males in schooling and education. The results presented are also pertinent to other researchers who are examining the practices and policies of education to get to the root of what is crippling Black males in America's education system in order to present informed research that can generate anti-oppressive, anti-racist, and inclusive schooling experiences and educational opportunities for African-American males and other marginalized groups. Socially conscious and socially just educators and even those who think they are doing what is best for all children should be shocked, sickened, appalled, and ashamed that young African-American males from kindergarten to high school have been subjected to the atrocities exposed in this research.

I started with several questions, and I listened to the dejection and pain of African-American males who were oppressed and finally alienated from obtaining an education. Critical Race Theory is not only a theoretical framework but a movement, an activist scholarship that "not only tries to understand our social situation, but to change it; it sets out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies, but to transform it for the better" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 3). Thus, I have presented implications for school districts and state policy-makers, the very institutions that are intentionally upholding and consistently creating practices that are having invidious effects on Black children, particularly African-American males. These practices "suggest that policy-makers have decided (tacitly, if not explicitly) to place race

equity [author's emphasis] at the margins—thereby retaining race *injustice* [author's emphasis] at the centre" (Gillborn, 2009, p. 65).

Implications for school districts

First, school districts must acknowledge that the education system is infused with racist and oppressive practices and policies. Until schools districts acknowledge that White supremacy is entrenched in the education system and that the *Brown* decision did not cure the ills of public schooling, any efforts to reverse inequities in school districts will prove futile. Superintendents answer to school boards; therefore, the top level of district leadership has to take the lead in grappling with the sordid effects of slavery and current impact on education and initiate and mandate sweeping reform efforts. The kind of work involved in this transformation is long and hard, but it must happen in order to change mindsets of teachers, students, administrators, district officials, and other school-related personnel. Total transformation will not occur until the mindsets of those connected to the school system are transformed. Furthermore, it is not realistic to think that racism is temporary, but there can be socially just action to make educational opportunities equitable. However, the superintendent of a district with school board support can and should initiate a district goal of improving the achievement gap of African-American males as it compares to other groups. Lack of achievement is affected by other factors, including suspensions/expulsions, attendance, mobility, and curriculum/instruction. Districts will need to examine this data and discover ways to confront these issues head-on and develop solutions that will keep Black males in school and engaged so that they graduate from high school and into post-secondary education and/or training.

Second, school districts must recruit and retain African-American male teachers. The data demonstrates that in some cities over 50 percent of Black males are not graduating from high school and more Black males are incarcerated than in college. One way to improve the number of Black males entering the teaching profession is to partner with universities and develop a program for middle and high school African-American males to get them interested in the teaching profession and provide mentoring throughout high school and enrichment opportunities through out the school year and summer to

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ready them for college as education majors. The program can also provide students opportunities to participate in "student teaching" while in high school.

Currently, there is a push for STEM programs (science, technology, engineering, and math) to attract more students into the field. It takes teachers in these areas to prepare students for the various careers in these four areas. Districts and universities can identify Black male students interested in these areas and provide extra support for them to stay involved and prepared for college. Even if a student wants to be an engineer for example, universities can also design a dual-major program that will allow African-American males to earn a teacher's license while studying to be an engineer. Along this line of attracting African-American male teachers, districts should provide a salary incentive for them to enter teaching. If contractually their salaries can not be more than their counterparts, perhaps the universities and district can figure out how to provide a stipend for males becoming teachers. Equally important, more African-American males are needed as administrators. However for this to happen, there has to be an increase in the number of teachers before addressing the shortage Black male administrators.

Third, school districts must develop specialized programs or academies to support Black males students in *every* school beginning in third grade. The purpose of these school-based programs should be to provide academic, moral, cultural, and emotional support for African-American males. There should be components included in each program including academic support and learning to embrace intellect, cultural competence, leadership development, community service and volunteerism, critical thinking and dialogue, social, political, and economic consciousness development, mentorship, self-esteem development, confronting and circumventing racism, and parental engagement.

Fourth, school districts must provide professional development opportunities in the areas of culturally relevant teaching, differentiated learning styles based on gender, and parental engagement. This training must be mandatory. Collaborate with teacher unions (if applicable) on how teachers will held accountable for participating in professional development and demonstrating proficiency in these areas. Districts should allocate to each school professional development funds specifically for building and sustaining a culturally proficient learning community.

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Fifth, school districts must examine the data on the number of Black males being recommended for special education services, identify inequities in the process, and correct if necessary. Student services departments in school districts must assist schools in implementing interventions prior to testing Black male students for identification.

Sixth, school districts should make every effort to identify African-American male mental health counselors and contract with them to provide counseling to African-American males who need coping strategies for anger, trauma, or other emotional or mental health concerns. If the parents have trouble coming to the school, districts should have parent advocates to assist schools with outreach.

Implications for State Policy-makers

The research is clear that more Black males are in prisons than in colleges and this is a nation-wide issue. States are spending more to incarcerate people of color and poor whites than on education. Also, many states are using high-stakes testing as part of graduation requirements, and this is preventing students from graduating from high school. This is another trap that will lead to dropping out.

First, states must eliminate high-stakes testing policies that increase the drop-out rate. Test results should be used to assist in identifying the academic strengths and weaknesses of students to improve teaching and learning, not to keep students from dropping out. For the Black males who make it through but do not pass a part on a test, it pushes them out of school without a high school diploma. Instead, if states and school districts want to know if the students are proficient in the content areas and in arts, there needs to be project-based learning and capstone projects. There are a variety of ways to gauge if a child "gets it" and one-size-fits-all testing is detrimental to students and to teachers. In addition, there is emerging information that suggests state standardized testing is not assessing students' ability to apply skills to real life situations or other content areas nor is the testing assessing the critical thinking skills of students. Universities look for students who can read and write well, can work collaboratively in a group, and can critically think, synthesize, analyze, and evaluate. Determining students' future based on a test of banked information spells disaster for many students, including African-American males, who are suspended, placed in special education, negatively

perceived, and marginalized more than any other group in education so they are not receiving the information needed to pass the test.

Second, the justice system, which is unjust, needs to be overhauled. Non-violent offenders and those who are non-violent but have chemical addictions need intensive counseling, not jail. The money being used to house these particular offenders is money that can be used for K12s, junior colleges, and universities. Also, many states have removed college education from prisons. If states are going to house offenders, depending on the crime, they should be allowed to earn an education so when they are released, they can be ready for the workforce and be self-sufficient. Furthermore, to reduce recidivism, state correctional systems should work with agencies and companies to provide job placement for ex-felons as well as after-care. For juveniles, a vulnerable group, the policies must be examined to identify the frequency of interactions that Black males have with detention centers and placements. Youth receive education while incarcerated but it is not comparable to what they would receive if they were in a regular school setting. There are several issues here: the need for examining the overrepresentation of Black males in the youth justice system and if inequities play a part in arrests and sentencing, what kinds of supports, whether social, economic, mental health, and/or academic are in place to reduce recidivism after they are released, and how will the Black males caught up in the juvenile system receive an education so they can either earn a GED or high school diploma. To reverse the crisis of African-American males in education, failure can not be an option.

Third, mental health in the Black community is the "elephant in the little room." African-American males are emotionally and mentally stressed, yet they are not receiving the types of services they need and this area of education has been virtually ignored. Like teaching, the social work field is full of well-meaning white females. However, Black males need to dialogue with someone who likes them and can relate to them from the gender and race perspective if nothing else. States should re-allocate funds being spent on housing prisoners to agencies so that they can provide mental health services to Black males. In addition, there needs to be an active and aggressive campaign launched to identify Black male counselors to work with schools and to attract African-American

males to the field of psychology or counseling by providing college scholarships, paid internships, and job placement upon graduation.

Fourth, colleges and universities receiving state funding must be mandated to create and sustain a program for Black males to attend college and major in education. African-American males should receive scholarship assistance and grants to attend college and major in education with a stipulation that they must teach in the state for a certain number of years. Also, there needs to be academic and non-academic support in place for them and support after they graduate, including intensive tutoring in preparation for the Praxis, which seems to derail many African-Americans. Scholarships should also be available for college graduates in education to pursue their graduate degree as well as licensure in administration. This can assist in creating a larger pool of Black male candidates in teaching and administration. Another aspect of college preparedness for the field of education is the junior college path. Enrollment in two-year colleges has increased due to the job losses. States can work with four-year colleges and universities to develop a pre-education program at junior colleges to attract more people interested in teaching but may not have the money for a four-year college or may not have the grades at that time. Supports can be put in place to help the pre-education students improve their grades so they can be admitted to an educational program. A pre-education program at a "ju-co" (junior college) should include a mechanism to attract African-American males to college then onto the university level to complete their degree in education. Some school districts require instructional assistants to have at least a two-year degree. Therefore, if a Black male earns a two-year degree at a "ju-co," they can obtain a position with a school district while pursuing their bachelor's degree in education. With this concept, there will be an African-American male presence in the school before they become teachers.

Implications for Research

There are several implications for further research on the topic of African-American males' schooling experiences. First, a study can be conducted on Black males who have dropped out and gone to prison to examine if getting involved in a program such as the one the participants connected with in this study helped them earn a GED, employment, and led to further education or did they leave the program before

completing it and the causes of incompletion. Second and related to the previous point, research can be conducted on the various programs available to African-American males who have dropped out of school and been incarcerated and examine the effectiveness of such a program. Third, there needs to be more research conducted on African-American males in which researchers utilizes the methodology of counterstorytelling to not only give Black males a voice but to gain insight from them about what is going on in schools. In fact, the study can be expanded to include younger males who are still in school. Fourth, a study should be conducted to examine how the parents of Black males view the concept of schooling, examine how their past experiences impact their sons' current schooling experiences, and what the parents' see is their role in their sons' schooling. Finally, the School-to-Prison Pipeline must be researched and examined at length to identify this phenomenon and present findings that will inform educators, policy makers, and the victims who fall prey to this trap.

Final Reflections

Based upon the literature review presented, the data collected and analyzed from the interviews I conducted, and my insider/outsider status as an African-American female educator who has interacted with many African-American male students in public education, it is evident that African-American males' racist-based schooling experiences have silenced and alienated them. I have witnessed how unjust policies on the school level and in the juvenile justice system have rendered Black males helpless in their quest for an education.

Equally troubling is my position in this injustice: being mandated to follow policies that are harmful to Black males but simultaneously trying to instill in them the need to understand the perplexities of a racist society and their precarious place in it. I encourage them not to lose hope in them even when they have given up on themselves. It is painful to sit in my office and talk with young men who have the capabilities to be successful but have shut down academically, mentally, and emotionally. I give them an abbreviated history lesson, the "real talk" and I need for them to understand the conspiracy and to work around it. However, by the time a lot of the young men get to high school, some are already in the school-to-prison pipeline or have failed along the

line and have lost interest in school, if they ever had it. I have met with probation officers who have high school freshmen on their case load, meaning that during middle school, the young man broke the law. At some point in their lives, they became disengaged from school, home, and life. The hopelessness they communicate is sad as well as infuriating because none of this had to happen. I am enraged.

The stories I captured in this study are real and if they are multiplied, there will be a million unheard stories Black males being alienated and invisible. Then they become visible—in coffins, behind bars, in crack houses, or standing on corners selling "death" to their community, thinking that fast money and hustling is their only path. I have witnessed what these young brothas shared with me, but it is not my story to tell. I see daily the depression, poverty, how the impact of little to no family support due to significant dysfunction sets them up for failure, the labeling and sorting—mainly into special education, and the anger in the Black males that leads to behavioral issues. And it just follows them to high school—the same chaos, drama, trauma, and pain—just a different day, month, and year. The unmet non-academic needs are making it virtually impossible to get to the academics. I have met more Black males whose fathers and mothers are in prison. They have seen death at a young age and do not grieve—they do not know how. The trauma they are experiencing is stupefying. And the anger and resistance the Black males are demonstrating in school are understandable to me, but for other educators who say they care, they do not get it and that is because they do not want to get it.

For this research project, the participants shared their own stories of the schooling experiences that overall were not positive for them. If one were to ask what theme from the individual counterstories connected the experiences of these particular African-American males, the simple yet powerful and profound answer is the lack of caring. No one cared—home, school, the school district, the streets, and society. For most African-American males in this nation, their counterstories expose the absence of caring. When individuals such as teachers and administrators and institutions in which they work make certain groups of students invisible through alienation, there is no burden for them to care.

From the findings and emergent themes examined and presented in this study, it is more than apparent that some type of process is active in education systems throughout the nation, and it is destroying many African-American males' chances of being successful in school and graduating from high school. I refer to this practice as *constructed schooling alienation*. I define c*onstructed schooling alienation* as an active and imbedded practice that has been deliberately constructed—designed and built—for the purpose of maintaining unjust, racist, and marginalizing practices and policies in schools and denies certain groups of student access to equitable, caring, and quality schooling experiences . The absence of caring is a characteristic of constructed schooling alienation.

This practice is active and rarely ceases; in fact, African-American males are ensconced in this practice before their feet hit the steps of the school because the system is already set up to make the trajectory up the schooling pipeline challenging. Constructed schooling alienation moves with African-American males through the K-12 schooling pipeline, and is even active after African-American males are ejective from school. After they are alienated physically, intellectually, socially, and mentally from school, constructed schooling alienation plays a part in the circumstances the alienated Black males are experiencing. Some of these circumstances include lack of high school diploma or GED, incarceration, lack of employment and/or employability schools, and lack of stability. Constructed schooling alienation is a constant, active, and aggressive presence that produces overt and covert practices and acts of educational injustice.

I agree with those who say that the problems begin at home with the parents. When the parents are struggling with issues, their children struggle as well. However, the problems became our problems and there used to be a time when education provided students with options. However, I have to challenge this notion as well. If children are entering school with the odds stacked against them, particularly Black males, why would schools and districts victimize them further with oppressive, racist practices?

Let me give you an example of these oppressive practices that affecting mainly poor, African-American students. A district a month before the school year begins announces that a gifted academy is opening on the east side of town, an area that has more affluent Whites. This community has been vocal in its desire to have a public

school re-opened in their neighborhood but restrict it to their area. Also, there is high voter turnout and the school district plans on placing a levy on the ballot. In addition, the economy is making it more difficult for these families to afford private schools so their answer as taxpayers is to demand their own public school and exclude certain students whom they have deemed unfit for their ideal school. Prior to these demands, the school board stated that this school would not be re-opened and with an on-going budget problem, that was a prudent decision.

Needless to say, the gifted school opened and in 2012, it will be moved to the closed elementary school that will now be renovated and opened again. This is what angers me: there are hundreds if not thousands of Black children in this district, including Black males, who have tested as gifted but not one school geared toward giftedness was created until the White community demanded it. Of course, a few Black students will enroll because their parents are usually the informed ones who take a more active role in their children's education. But what about little De'Andre from Downtown who is gifted and no one advocated for him? Instead of going to the gifted school next year that serves K-6 grade and has small classes, De'Andre will go to his PreK-8 grade school that has no gifted program and because he is bored because he not challenged, he will act out. The next thing that happens will be his White female teachers pushing for an IEP because they do not know what to do with him. And De'Andre's mother, a single working parent who is in need of money because they are living in poverty, will go along with the teachers because she does not have the information to make an informed decision, is being pressured, and she could possibly get a social security check if her son is crazy enough.

Here is another example: a high school is rated Effective but only 60 percent of the students in this predominantly Black high school are graduating. Yet they are still effective. Why? Because the state only measures attendance, the number of highly-qualified teachers on staff, and the scores on the math and reading sections of the state test. It is five weeks into first quarter and one science class lacks a certified teacher so the students have seen various substitute teachers rotate in an out. In another class, there is a math-certified teacher who retired years ago subbing in a math class, but he lacks classroom management and various instructional approaches so little instruction is going

on. The principal has requested certified teachers but has been told repeatedly no. If this were a magnet school with vocal White parents, this would be totally unacceptable. And while the Black parents of this school holds some responsibility because they are not complaining and demanding the best for their children, the bottom line is that the school district should expect and provide the best for all children so that no parents have to demand that. Why is this happening? Because of institutional racism. These racist practices and other types of tactics are destroying our most at-risk groups of children, Black males and poor Black students overall.

I am in my sixteenth year of working in education, and I have come to the stark realization that for the majority of the Black males who are at a crisis point in their lives and are on a path to destruction, the best option for them is to be educated in a unique and progressive, non-public setting away from their environment. We only have six hours a day to make a positive impact on Black males. Once they leave one of the safest spaces for them, school, they are potentially exposed to things that collide with schooling and derails their academic success.

Only a few Black males are completing high school and many who leave traditional schools are not faring much better in "back-on-track" programs. They need to live away from their chaotic environment and be educated in a setting with educators who expect them to reach their highest potential, are nurtured, are exposed to rigorous and relevant curricula with consideration for their learning styles, offer a full spectrum of resources in response to academic and non-academic needs, and enrichment activities and experiences that develop the mind, body, soul, and culture of Black males. The males in this boarding school will learn leadership skills, engage in civic and community projects, learn multiple languages, learn and engage in sports besides basketball and football, and travel. Exposure and participation in college readiness programs will be mandatory. Every effort will be made to have African-American males on staff as teachers, mentors, counselors, assistants. The Black males will learn to be proud, intelligent, and conscious Black men who are destined for greatness.

I am just one person with this plan, but to reverse the catastrophe that is approaching African-American males because of racist schooling experiences, there will need to be others like me who are ready to lead the revolution. There is no tomorrow,

there is no government or institution who will step in and save our Black boys—it will take those who are willing to take a courageous stand against racism, work outside the system, sacrifice, rebel, and engage in what Huey P. Newton termed "revolutionary suicide."

Transformation or damnation. The choice is ours and the time is now.

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