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"I pray it happens in my lifetime": the life history of Clara Byrd Glasper, a black woman educator fighting for educational equality

Carol Marie Miller
Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

"I PRAY IT HAPPENS IN MY LIFETIME":
THE LIFE HISTORY OF CLARA BYRD GLASPER, A BLACK WOMAN EDUCATOR FIGHTING FOR EDUCATIONAL EQUALITY

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Carol Marie Miller
B.A., University of Texas at San Antonio, 1991
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Mrs. Clara Byrd Glasper

PREFACE

This is a chronology of the life history of Clara Byrd Glasser:

1896		Plessey v. Ferguson opinion
1906		NAACP founded
1934	(Jan. 15)	Clara Byrd born
1940		Louisiana Maneuver in Grand Cane
		Teacher would have her read for visitors
1943		Lived with aunt in New Orleans - Thomy Lafon Elementary School - "The Negro Mother"competition
1946		Mother rented a house in Mansfield - lived with her mother - Middle School - grandparents on weekends
1948	(Fall)	Attended DeSoto Parish Training School
1949		Mother adopted niece - washing & ironing
1951	(May)	Graduated from DeSoto Parish Training School
	(Aug.)	Attended Southern University - worked in the biology dept. & fixing hair
1954		Brown v. Board of Education I opinion
1955		Brown v. Board of Education II
	(May)	Graduated from Southern University - secondary education, major-biology, minor-math
	(Fall)	Began teaching biology at DeSoto Parish Training School
		Went to Shreveport at night for cosmetology school
1956	(Feb. 26)	Davis, et al. v. East Baton Rouge Parish School Board, et al. filed
	(Summer)	Moved to Shreveport for cosmetology classes
1957	(Summer)	Graduated from Pearleen's Beauty School
		Worked in a beauty shop weekends
		Started master's degree
1958		Summer Institute at LSU
1959		Summer Science Institute - Met William Glasper who worked at Northwestern High in Zachary (Math & Science)
1960		Jimmie Davis became Governor of Louisiana
		Segregation vote taken at DeSoto Parish Training School
	(Dec.)	Married William Glasper
1961		Maternity leave from DeSoto Parish Training School
	(Sept. 24)	William Jr. was born
1962	(Jan.)	Began teaching for East Baton Rouge Parish School District - McKinley High School
	(Aug.13)	Sherri was born
1963		Maternity leave
		Begin teaching at McKinley Middle School (math & science, mostly science)
1964		Institute of Science at LSU

1965		Received her master's degree in administration & supervision
1967		Maternity leave
	(Sept.15)	Sharon was born
1970		Maternity leave
	(Aug. 5)	Mark born
	(Fall)	Cross-over began in East Baton Rouge Parish school system
1971	(Jan.)	Cross-over teacher at Glasgow Middle Academic magnet (one semester)
	(Fall)	Cross-over teacher at Westdale Middle School
1974	(Fall)	API at Southeast Middle School - - Principal Mr.Walker; APA - Richard Day
1980		Court ordered its own desegregation plan
		LEA & LTA merged into LAE - joined J.K. Haynes Foundation
		Joined NAACP
1981		Moved to Deseg Center housed at Westdale Middle School
1983		API at Glasgow Academic Middle Magnet
		NAACP - executive board
1984	(Oct.)	Parish Middle School Supervisor of Math & Science - moved to Central Office
1985	(Summer)	Math & Science Task Forces develop scope & sequence
1989		Member of the Multicultural Committee
1991		Scope & Sequence Parish wide
	(June)	Doctor ordered month off for stress
	(July 1)	Informed by Mr. Epperson that teachers did not have to answer to her
1992		Chairperson of Multicultural Committee
1994		Member of NAACP Education Committee
		Retired from school system after 37 years as an educator
1995		Chairperson of NAACP Education Committee
		Dr. Gary Mathews hired as Superintendent of Schools
1996		Rallied support for the Consent Decree
	(July 29)	Consent Decree in Davis case signed
1997		Joined Diversity Design Team
1997/2002		Remained Chairperson of NAACP Education Committee
		Monitored the goals of the Consent Decree
		Member of the magnet schools committee
		Worked with extended year program
2003	(Aug.7)	Filed: Opposition to Final Settlement Agreement
		Davis, et al. v. East Baton Rouge Parish School Board, et. al.
2004		Remains Chairperson of NAACP Education Committee

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to write the life history of a black woman educator is order to enhance our understandings of educational activism and social change in the Deep South. African American educators have been marginalized and under represented in their communities despite the roles they have played in ameliorating educational inequalities. The life history of seventy-year-old Clara Byrd Glasper's activism as a black woman educator is one example.

Life history, as a method of research, reveals an individual's life experiences from their perspective and provides the appropriate methodology to explore the following research questions: In the context of activism, what do we learn from Clara's story about the process of social change?; what does it mean to be a black woman educator activist fighting for educational equality?; what are the motivating factors that sparked Clara Glasper's fight for educational equality?; what strategies did Clara Glasper use to meet the challenges she encountered in a segregated society? These questions are answered through a combination of life history interviews and an examination of historical documents connected with the longest running desegregation lawsuit in the history of the United States, forty-seven-year-old Clifford Eugene Davis, et al. v. East Baton Rouge Parish School Board, et al. (Mathews & Jarvis, 1997).

The fifteen recorded interviews approximately two hours in length were conducted from July 2000 to December 2002. The interviews were edited into a first person narrative spanning Clara Glasper's entire life. An introduction providing a context begins each chapter. Next, Clara's first person narrative becomes the body of each chapter. Reflections follow the narrative at the end of each chapter where my voice is heard.

This research concludes that unlike other black women educator activists, Clara Glasper's activism for social change went through three stages: awareness, advocacy, and full-time activism. Embedded in her life story, three themes emerge that necessitate a rethinking of their implications for the field of education: activism, educational equality, and racism. Lastly, this life history is important to the field of education because it raises serious questions about how African Americans continue to be marginalized.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On February 28, 1956, just two years after the Brown v. Board of Education desegregation case ruled that "separate but equal" was unconstitutional, the attorneys of record representing the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), among them Thurgood Marshall and A. P. Tureau, filed a desegregation lawsuit on behalf of the plaintiffs against the East Baton Rouge Parish School Board. This 47-year-old case, Clifford Eugene Davis, et al. v. East Baton Rouge Parish School Board, et al., hereafter referred to as Davis, was the longest running desegregation suit in the history of the United States (Mathews & Jarvis, 1997; WAFB News, August 31, 2000).

Since, the school system was still functioning under the 1981 desegregation court order, a new superintendent was hired in 1995, Dr. Gary Mathews, because of his vision for ending this lawsuit. According to Mathews and Jarvis (1997), "Years of desegregation failure, history of broken promises, and what was perceived as 'bad faith' implementation of the 1981 court order had produced a high level of mistrust on the part of the plaintiffs (p. 78). In 1996, after forty years of failure to desegregate the school system, the school board with the help of Dr. Mathews developed a Desegregation/Education plan that not only addressed racial balance, but also educational issues. This plan became the foundation for negotiations between the original plaintiffs, the NAACP, the Department of Justice, and the defendants to come to a mutual agreement that the court would recognize and remove the 1981 court order under which the school system had been operating. However, the ultimate goal was eventually ending the court case and providing a better education for the students of the school district.

Much is known as public record about the legal details, the court's actions, and the school board's involvement. However, we know little about the lived experiences of the individuals who participated in this process. One such person is Clara Byrd Glasper, who serves as the Education Committee chairperson of the NAACP, a plaintiff. A veteran educator of thirty-seven years, Clara was a teacher, administrator, and supervisor in the East Baton Rouge public school system for thirty-one of the years the Davis desegregation case was in litigation. Most importantly, she is credited with rallying the support of the black community behind the consent decree (Mathews & Jarvis, 1997).

Clara Glasper was born in 1934 and grew up in segregated Northwestern Louisiana under Jim Crow laws. For Clara, the overarching theme in her childhood, college years, and professional life has been segregation. She attended all-black Southern University in Baton Rouge, and taught for six years at the all-black school she attended as a teenager before her employment with the East Baton Rouge public school system under court-ordered desegregation oversight. Since her retirement in 1994, she has fought in various ways virtually full-time to bring about a resolution to segregation in this system and improvement in the quality of education for all students.

In 1996, Clara was hopeful that a final agreement could be reached about the newly proposed plan. Unlike desegregation plans in general, which are created only to achieve racial balance, this agreement had an excellent educational component to it. She prepared a document that listed twenty-six positive educational points (See Appendix A) in the Desegregation/ Education Plan, which was presented to the executive board of the NAACP, the membership, and their lawyers. She knew that the black community did not trust the school board. She also

knew that the black parents had to be informed and needed to understand the proposal before they would support a plan that would affect their children's education. The biggest change was going to be redistricting, which meant black children could be going to different schools. Clara worked with a group of local pastors, who had the power of the pulpit to educate the black community about the issues that affected them. Her efforts were successful.

The plan, now known as the Davis Consent Decree (a court decree that all parties agree to), was signed by the defendants and all the plaintiffs involved through their lawyers and accepted by the court on July 29, 1996. The school system would now be working toward clearly defined goals (See Appendix B) under this new desegregation plan (Mathews & Jarvis, 1997). The focus of this dissertation is to examine the lived experiences of Clara Byrd Glasper and her actions as a social change agent in relation to this historical desegregation case.

Background to the Study

The first I ever heard of Clara Glasper was a reference about her in a local newspaper article:

> Clara Glasper, a retired teacher and former chair of the Multiculturalism Committee, said she has made several presentations before the Diversity Design Team about issues that were before her committee when it was disbanded. Now, Glasper said, she plans to keep close tabs on the new group, including pushing the idea that any diversity or multicultural group must deal with (address) differences like gender and religion, not just culture and race. ("Team," 1997)

I thought that the opportunity to experience this process at work would be invaluable to me because of my educational interest in multiculturalism. I received the proper approval from the East Baton Rouge School District's Central Office and immediately began attending the group's meetings as a non-participant observer from February 1997 until the Diversity Design

Team finished the 5-day Cultural Diversity Awareness Workshop - Training The Trainers on May 7, 1998.

At the first meeting, I found myself sitting next to Clara Glasper, a very soft-spoken, articulate, and professional African American woman. She had files, notes, and charts in front of her at the table. Her copy of the Consent Decree was tabbed, noted, highlighted, and well-worn. It was obvious from the interaction in the meetings that she was the expert when an issue came up for discussion. She had the decree memorized and could easily find items referred to in the legal document.

My original research intent was to connect my interest in multiculturalism with my experience observing the Diversity Design Team at work. But, overtime the object of my observations and my interest shifted to Clara Glasper. I found myself consciously making an effort to be seated next to her. I loved to listen to her mumblings under her breath during the meetings and to engage her in conversations during breaks. Eventually, we began to seek each other out. On my part, I was drawn to her knowledge on the subject of multiculturalism. On her part, I think she found in me the welcome relief of intellectual companionship when the agenda of the meetings began to wander aimlessly.

The last day of the Cultural Diversity Awareness Workshop, we all stood holding hands in a circle of unity as the facilitators wished the diversity trainers success in their mission. It was an extremely emotional experience, and Clara turned to me with the look of hope in her eyes and softly said, “I pray it happens in my lifetime.” I knew what she meant without her having to say the words. I knew that for Clara, desegregation and educational equality were not synonymous.

She was fighting for desegregation because it was a means to an end, educational equality. Before educational equality could be attained, desegregation had to be achieved.

Her look and words haunted me continually. She reminded me of the teachers in Gloria Ladson-Billing's book (1994), The Dreamkeepers who believe that:

> No challenge has been more daunting than that of improving academic achievement of African American students. Burdened with a history that includes the denial of education, separate and unequal education, and relegation to unsafe, substandard inner-city schools, the quest for equal education remains an elusive dream for the African American community. However, it does remain a dream--perhaps the most powerful for the people of African descent in this nation.
>
> The power and persistence of the metaphor of the dream has defined the sojourn of African Americans in the United States. From the words of the Bible to the poetry of Langston Hughes to the oratory of Martin Luther King, Jr., African Americans' struggle against all odds has been spurred on by the pursuit of a dream. (ix)

Some time passed and a picture of Clara appeared in the newspaper giving a presentation at the weekly school board meeting and telling them, "It sounds good when you read it (the proposal), but anyone aware of your action last summer when you tried to take the medical magnet away from Glen Oaks . . . would have to be drunk or crazy or both to agree to that part of the proposal" ("EBR," 1999). Clara was objecting to a proposal presented by the school board because, in her judgment, the board had already tried to change the desegregation plan (Consent Decree) too much. The proposal said the board will modify magnet programs and adjust attendance zones "as needed" to ensure the success of the overall desegregation efforts and relieve overcrowding. Reminiscent of past school board tactics, she was afraid the proposal would give the board even more leeway to make changes.

After reading the newspaper, I called Clara that night and said humorously, "It looks like you're becoming famous." She replied in a frustrated tone, "You know I like to talk, but I talk and talk and they don't listen." The remark she made to me on the telephone reminded me of a

statement made by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1997), “In everyday and professional life, as well as in the classroom, women often feel unheard even when they believe that they have something important to say” (p. 5). I immediately responded that “I” wanted to “listen” and that writing her life history would be a way for “her voice to be heard.” She agreed with me and was eager to undertake the challenge of telling her story.

Purpose and Significance of this Study

The purpose of this study is to write the life history of a black woman educator in order to enhance our understandings of activism in the Deep South. The narratives of black women educator activists have been marginalized or under represented in their communities and the field of education needs to pay attention to those stories (Crocco, Munro, & Weiler, 1999). Clara Glasper’s story of her activism is inspiring, powerful, and provides an avenue for examining the meanings one black woman educator activist gave to her life. Her life story provides a unique window to understanding activism in a deeply, deeply racist and segregated society. Although black women’s life histories have been collected, the majority have been northern or urban teachers. In addition most life histories have not necessarily covered the entire life span. This life history will further our knowledge and understanding about the process of social change in education.

The lives of black women cannot be generalized. They offer an abundant variety of life experiences and ways these women interpret their lives in the context of their respective cultures. This research resists the common assumption of the marginalization of women of color by placing Clara Byrd Glasper at the center of her story rather than at the periphery, giving her life

history voice (Etter-Lewis & Foster, 1996). Clara Glasper's authority as the chairperson of the Education Committee of the local chapter of the NAACP, gave her a major position to articulate her ideas and to work toward a resolution of the educational inequalities in the East Baton Rouge school system.

Action in the Davis case was continually reported by the school board (the defendants), played out in the media (both newspaper and television), and dramatized in open public hearings, but there is another side to this story. The silenced story is that of Clara Glasper who fought the power of the white school board officials and their white lawyers to abide by the Consent Decree, an agreement they had signed. According the Patricia Hill Collins (1991), "The shadow obscuring the black women's intellectual tradition is neither accidental nor benign . . . Maintaining the invisibility of Black women and our ideas is critical in structuring patterned relations of race, gender, and class inequality that pervade the entire social structure" (p. 5). As a voice for the plaintiffs, Clara Byrd Glasper's story is significant to curriculum theory and to the field of education. Her life history is a human journey involving issues of race, gender, class, and social action. The meaning she gives to her thirty-seven years of experience in teaching and administration and her social activism for educational equality will inform our understanding of segregation, desegregation, multiculturalism, and the black woman educator's role as an agent for change.

The scholarly literature on the activism of black women educators is meager, and there are few scholars who are engaged in research on their experiences. The literature shows that despite countless examples of first person narratives, many of which were written by socially conscious teacher activists during the 1960s, the experiences of African American educators are

not well represented. Consequently, there are many questions concerning the black woman educator's activist experiences important to this study that remain unaddressed. First, women's stories have been silenced. For example, although there is considerable evidence reported in personal narratives collected by Michele Foster (1990, 1993a, 1993b, 1997) that African American teachers were discriminated against both prior to and following the Brown v. Board of Education decision, we know little about their stories. Second, we know that the number of African American teachers is minuscule. The current demographic figures on teaching reported by the National Education Association indicate that "African American teachers constitute less than 5 percent of public school teachers. Therefore, it is more important than ever to capture this practice in order to build a knowledge base of effective pedagogical practice for African American students" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p.154).

Lastly, these women face obstacles to advancement in the profession. According to Hull, Scott, and Smith (1992):

> Even in those areas where their numbers are large, Black women rarely receive the same promotional advancements as Black men. In public school systems few are principals and even fewer are promoted to upper administrative posts . . . This is not the case for Black men, who are usually given positions in which they can be highly visible . . . For some uncanny reason, a Black woman at a board meeting is not thought to have the same "visibility" as a Black male. It would be easy to say that white men who control these . . . institutions can identify more easily with Black men and thereby practice an "unconscious" sexism within their affirmative action programs. (p.118)

Therefore, very little is known about what factors enable African American women to succeed, despite the odds, in what is often an inhospitable environment for women, generally. Clara's story provides a connection to all three questions.

Patricia Collins (1986) describes the outsider-within stance as a peculiar marginality that applies to many African American women educators in a white dominated profession. "Because

of an ever-present sense of marginality, African American women in education do, indeed, share . . . those experiences and ideas . . . that provide a unique angle of vision on self, community, and society" (p. 22). African American women's consciousness is shaped by the experience of simultaneously being a part and not a part of the group.

Life history, as a method of research, reveals an individual's life experiences from his or her perspective. The study of the experiences of Clara Byrd Glasper during different phases of her life and the way in which she conceptualizes these experiences in order to give meaning to her life, confirm life history as the appropriate methodology to explore the following research questions:

1. In the context of activism, what do we learn from Clara's story about the process of social change?
2. What does it mean for Clara Glasper to be a black woman educator activist fighting for educational equality?
3. What are the motivating factors that sparked Clara Glasper's fight for educational equality?
4. What strategies did Clara Glasper use to meet the challenges she encountered in a segregated society?

It is my intent that this study will help to lessen the void that presently exists in the scholarly literature on black women educators and their lived experiences as activists for educational equality. Secondly, it is my purpose to contribute a black woman educator's representation to the male-dominated desegregation literature of courts, judges, and lawyers.

Lastly, this research examines the implications of Clara Glasper's story for the field of education.

Review of the Literature

The focus of this study is the life history of a black woman educator fighting for educational equality in the context of segregation, particularly the Davis desegregation case. The literature that I reviewed included black women educator's activism and personal narratives relating to experiences with segregation. I also reviewed historical accounts on the desegregation of East Baton Rouge Parish.

Black Women Educators Activists

Clara Byrd Glasper is part of a long history of black women educator activists beginning in American colonial society. In the African American's struggle for survival, education was always a foremost goal, both as a tool for advancement in the general society and a means of uplifting and improving life in the black community. Famous educator activists, Maria W. Stewart, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell, Mary McLeod Bethune, Septima Clark, and Marion Thomas Wright exposed racism against blacks with their spirited campaigns against unequal education and segregation. Collins (1991) writes that, "These women saw the activist potential of education and skillfully use this Black female sphere of influence to foster a definition of education as a cornerstone of Black community development" (p. 147).

The first American-born woman of any race to lecture in public on political themes, Maria W. Stewart (1803-1879) left surviving copies of her texts. Stewart, who lived in Boston in the 1830s, was arguing for black rights, North, and South. Stewart saw the potential for black women's activism as educators. She advised them to, "turn your attention to knowledge and

improvement; for knowledge is power" (Richardson, 1987, p. 41). She believed there was a connection between knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment. She thought that women should rely only on themselves to change things in society. Unfortunately, a black woman writing at that time was scorned, and she was forced to leave the city entirely due to the violent reaction against her, which even came from black men. Stewart also thought that African-Americans should actively lead the fight against racism, rather than leave it to the whites in power. Stewart was probably the first black woman journalist, and wrote at a time when the public didn't want to hear what women or blacks had to say (Collins, 1991).

A teacher, scholar, social activist, college president, and writer, Anna Julia Cooper (1858-1964) was an emblem of black women of America. She advanced the view that black women's struggles are for human dignity and empowerment. Cooper began her teaching career in 1887 in the only black high school in Washington, D.C. Her commitment was to the education of black youth. She became principal and was dismissed because of the racial prejudices of the school board members. Cooper helped found the "colored" YWCA in Washington, D.C. due to segregationist policies. Cooper wrote a book in 1892, A Voice from the South by a Black Woman from the South, that championed the cause of black women's education (Collins, 1991; Washington, 1988).

In 1888, Ida B. Wells (1862-1931) became a teacher in Memphis, Tennessee after completing her studies at Rust College. She began her activist work as a teacher and after writing a critical article about the conditions of black schools and the plight of Blacks, she was fired from her teaching job. She settled in Chicago and formed the Women's Era Club, the first civic organization for African-American women. The name was later changed to the Ida B. Wells

Club in honor of its founder. She worked for the integration of schools, the women's club movement and the NAACP. In 1909, Wells was asked to be a member of the "Committee of 40." This committee established the groundwork for the organization now known as the NAACP, the oldest civil rights organization in the country. Wells continued her crusade for equal rights for African-Americans until her death (Collins, 1991; Crocco, Munro, & Weiler, 1999).

A high school teacher and principal, Mary Church Terrell (1863-1954) was appointed to the District of Columbia Board of Education in 1895, Terrell was the first black woman in the United States to hold such a position. In 1896 she became the first president of the National Association of Colored Women and by the early 1900s was deeply immersed in a host of efforts to improve the lot of African Americans and to combat racial discrimination. Terrell became nationally known both for her support of women's suffrage and for her opposition to racial segregation. She was also one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. She focused her time on education, discrimination, and segregation in Washington. Terrell's greatest single moment in the fight for black civil rights, however, came in her late eighties, when she led and won the struggle to desegregate Washington, D.C.'s lunch counters. She died in 1954, shortly after the Supreme Court decision Brown v. Board of Education. Terrell had been a leader in the fight to end Jim Crow segregation throughout her life (Karenga, 1993).

Devoting her life to advancing equal social, economic and political rights for blacks, Mary McLeod Bethune (1875-1955) distinguished herself by creating lasting educational institutions that trained black women for visible leadership roles. Believing that education provided the key to racial advancement, she founded a college which became Bethune-Cookman

College. She mobilized thousands of black women as the leader and founder of the National Association of Colored Women and National Council of Negro Women. Bethune adjusted her tactics, but not her essential agenda for black empowerment. She would take what the existing system offered, and then ask for more. For example, regarding segregation, she knew that abolishing it was a long-range goal, so for her, as she started her school in 1904, the question was: How can I get these southern and northern white people to support black education? It would not have been useful for her to advocate integration when the whole notion of spending money for black education was in question (Hanson, 2003).

Playing an essential, but little recognized role in the Civil Rights Movement, Septima Clark (1898-1987) was born in Charleston, South Carolina. She was a public school teacher until 1956, when she was fired from her teaching job because it was against the law to teach in the public school and belong to the NAACP. She later worked for the Highlander Folk School, helping to set up Citizenship Schools throughout the South where Black adults could learn to read and prepare to vote. She was one of the first teachers in the Citizenship School program. During the 1960s she was a close associate of Martin Luther King, Jr. and she worked with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. From 1978 to 1983 she served as the first black woman on the Charleston School Board (Wigginton, 1991; Brown, 1996).

The first black woman to receive a Ph.D. in history from Teachers College, Marion Thomas Wright's (1902-1962) dissertation (1941) was a study of segregation in New Jersey between 1919 and 1930. Her research indirectly influenced the Brown v. Board of Education decision. She made significant progress in challenging school segregation. This led to several reforms within the state. Wright used the Journal of Negro Education to further develop her

theories concerning segregation. Wright had to conceal her marriage and children to accept a scholarship to Howard University, where she eventually became a member of the faculty. However, the sacrifices she had to make for her education led to an unhappy life. She struggled for recognition in the academic world and she became increasingly critical of the lack of recognition educated black women received for their work of racial uplifting from the community. Wright believed the problem of racism in this country could be solved by education. And, it has been claimed that multicultural education was an outcome of Wright's research. She belonged to many organizations, among them the Urban League, the NAACP, and the National Education Association (Crocco & Davis, 1999; Crocco, Munro, & Weiler, 1999).

One contemporary educator activist, Patricia Hill Collins (1991) believes that, "Like the work of Maria W. Stewart, Black women's intellectual work has fostered Black women's resistance and activism" (p. 5). Likewise, bell hooks (1989) stresses that, "Oppressed people resist by identifying themselves as subjects, by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, telling their story" (p. 43). However, there are countless other stories that have gone untold by women who have consistently struggled to make themselves heard and have used their voices to raise essential issues affecting black women educators and have fostered black women's resistance and activism. Collins (1991) states that:

> African-American women have been victimized by race, gender, and class oppression. But portraying Black women solely as passive, unfortunate recipients of racial and sexual abuse stifles notions that Black women can actively work to change our circumstances and bring about changes in our lives. Similarly, presenting African-American women solely as heroic figures who easily engage in resisting oppression on all fronts minimizes the very real costs of oppression and can foster the perception that Black women need no help because we can "take it."(p. 237)

The search for the narrated lives of black women educators who experienced desegregation indicated that studies in this area had been done primarily by one researcher, Michele Foster. Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis' work with women in the professions complements Foster's contributions to this neglected field of research by the addition of nine first person narratives of African American women. Therefore, I rely heavily on their findings. Foster (1993) writes that:

> There is surprisingly little that chronicles the experiences of Black teachers. There are some biographies of famous Black educators who have made significant contributions to education, but these accounts do not encompass the experiences of thousands of Black teachers who, though not historically significant, nonetheless played an important role in education of Black children. The voices of Black teachers are not adequately represented among first-person narrative accounts. (p. 273)

Interviews of twelve female and four male teachers in Foster's (1990) "The Politics of Race: Through the Eyes of African-American Teachers," revealed that teachers growing up in the segregated South were firmly anchored in their African American communities and their schooling experiences reinforced their community life. Teaching was one of the few occupations open to black college students.

Desegregation significantly weakened the voices of these teachers in the education of African American students. Many were dismissed. Negative and unfair evaluations resulted in firings. The most competent teachers, especially those with master's degrees were siphoned off and reassigned to white schools. It was hard to find jobs. Many teachers caught in the racism of the school systems fought back in their own ways, by covertly avoiding participation in union strikes. They remained in their jobs under conditions of individual racism on the part of white colleagues who resented and challenged them. They did not allow institutional racism to

overwhelm them. Their support of one another enabled them to act as social agents to change the status quo.

Directly related to the above study, Foster's (1993a) "Resisting Racism: Personal Testimonies of African-American Teachers," found that African American teachers have been exploited, victimized, and marginalized by the larger society as well as by the educational institutions in which they work. She focuses on the various individual means by which nineteen black teachers resisted racism and challenged their adverse circumstances. Black teachers were paid less than white teachers, received inadequate resources, hired to instruct black students, discriminated against by white unions, dismissed in large numbers following the Brown decision, harassed, and denied teaching positions by various means. Resistance took many forms. By joining the NAACP, teachers were helped to fight for salary equalization. Despite severe under funding and lacking supplies and equipment, interviews disclosed that black teachers were able to intellectually challenge and effectively teach their black students.

Another article by Foster (1993b), presents research similar to the above studies. Foster collected the narratives of black teachers, who have been marginalized, silenced, and denied access in schools and in society and the ways they attached meaning, resisted inequities, and asserted change. Foster (1993b) argues that there are two important reasons for collecting the narratives of untold black educators' stories:

> One is that they demonstrate that a community's heroes can be found among ordinary people. By collecting stories . . . , we recognize the perseverance and the often unacknowledged victories of the ordinary people who come before us. All the same, the process of reclaiming our stories is multilayered. Collecting narrative is but one step. The next and most critical step is to use these narratives to initiate social change. Not only can these stories help us better understand our oppression, but they can be used to demonstrate that no matter how oppressive the circumstances, ordinary people have the power to act. Reclaiming our stories is necessary not only to pass them on to future

> generations, or to understand the resilience and strength of Black communities, but to incorporate what was *best* about the past into our communities and schools. (p. 172)

Michele Foster's (1997) major work, Black Teachers on Teaching, presents twenty life history interviews of black teachers told in their own voice. She included three groups of teachers, elders, veterans, and novices. Only five male stories were included. The purpose of the book is to understand how teaching has been experienced and understood by black teachers. Utilizing the life history approach, she explores their professional lives and how their experiences changed over their careers and over the years and the meaning associated with those changes. Foster's findings indicate that black teachers do not agree whether desegregation benefits black education. Some teachers argue that segregated schools gave students a sense of racial pride and community that they do not have now. Their accomplishments were not overshadowed by white students. They were not subjected to the racism of a white teacher and their achievement levels were higher. Desegregation caused black school closings, loss of jobs, and a general feeling of insecurity and diminished moral for black teachers. Other teachers argue that desegregation offers the economic benefits and resources that black education was lacking. Teachers complained of dilapidated black schools, limited supplies, and discarded textbooks. However, most of the teachers in her study do not agree that desegregation has had a positive effect on black education.

In their book titled Unrelated Kin: Race and Gender in Women's Personal Narratives, Etter-Lewis and Foster (1996) contest the common assumption of the marginalization of women of color by placing these women at the center of their communities rather than at the periphery. These women are the authorities and the voice of their own lives. The authors have collected the life histories of women of color, who by definition experience the double oppression of racism

and sexism. Coupled with those issues is the public's tendency to ignore unequal treatment of different races of people and women. Consequently, Etter-Lewis and Foster find them under represented both in research and in literature. This book does not directly relate to the experiences of black women educators, but it is valuable for its contribution to women's life narratives. Their goal is to show that the lives of black women cannot be generalized, but offer an abundant variety of life experiences and that these women interpret their lives in the context of their respective cultures. These stories represent only a part of the whole of black women's experience.

My Soul is My Own: Oral Narratives of African American Women in the Professions by Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis (1993) presents oral narratives of nine African American Women. An important section in her book analyzes the "Myth of the Invisible Women" (p. xvi). She argues that African American women are absent from scholarly literature or subsumed under women's issues to conceal their power and importance. However, black women have unique experiences apart from other women by the double oppression of race and gender and will continue to play a major role in American culture by resisting the many barriers they encounter. She presents narrative data about teaching: a woman's place, the college experience and the success stories of black women who became exceptions in professions that are not the norm. In addition, the book is an excellent reference on issues associated with "doing" oral narration.

African American women and their community work are essential to the process of social change, according to Cheryl Gilkes (1994) in "'If It Wasn't for the Women . . . ': African American Women, Community Work, and Social Change." Racial oppression places the entire African American community in a colonial relationship of powerlessness and dependency.

African American educators contribute to the process of empowerment. Gilkes (1994) highlights the importance of the teachers' struggles for the creation of a just and more equitable society. The most important motivation for involvement is the effect of racial oppression on the children, and their combating that damage constructs the core of group survival and advancement.

Black women seeking higher education were steered into work that served the African American community, such as primary and secondary schooling, nursing, social work, and library sciences, Elizabeth Higgenbotham (1994) suggests in "Black Professional Women: Job Ceilings and Employment Sectors." Her research revealed that the explanation for the job ceiling experienced by black professional women revealed two major factors. First, educated black women continue to cluster in traditionally female occupations that serve the community, especially teaching. The second factor is racism. Rigid racial barriers limit black women's occupational options. Jobs in the public sector are easier to obtain because less hiring discrimination is experienced.

Examining the value of education for black women educators and its meaning to their lives, self, and society, in the words of Crocco, Munro, and Weiler (1999):

> What is of interest in looking at the history of education from a gendered perspective is the degree to which gaining an education and building a career in education served as leverage for some women to live their lives as agents of change–change for themselves as workers and citizens, for students and professionals in schools and universities, and for society at large. Education functioned as a transformative force that provided a site for these women's emergent sense of selfhood and authority within the culture. Through the empowerment of education, they created subjectivity–a fluid, often conflicted, and continually renegotiated sense of personal identity and agency. (p. 1)

Kathleen Casey (1993) in her book, I Answer With My Life, recounts the life history experiences of contemporary women teachers working for social change. Casey argues that, "Women teachers' own understanding and interpretation of their experiences have been, until

recently, not only unrecorded, but actually silenced" (p. xiv). It is her objective to enable us to see "women teachers as authors of their own life history narratives, as 'authors of their own lives,' and, just as importantly, as authors of social change" (p. xiv). Casey documents the life histories of four black teachers. She concludes that:

> Besides documenting the discrimination which they have suffered, these women's accounts disclose deep discrepancies in prevailing educational arrangements. That they do succeed (they graduate from college, they are eventually hired as teachers) must be understood, at least in part, by the inability of educational institutions to deal with anomalies . . . as experienced teachers, these teachers prove themselves well able to exploit the ambiguities and weaknesses of the white-dominated system. (p.141)

Casey's chapter on "A Signifying Discourse of Black Women Teachers Working for Social Change" sums up the educational agenda of being a black teacher as "raising the race; accepting responsibility for the well-being of one's people, and especially, for the education of all black children" (p. 152).

The review of the literature on black women educator activists indicates that education was a major focus for uplifting the black community. The lives of these women, such as Clara Byrd Glasper's, reveal how they consistently wield power within education and how the challenges they face can inspire future generations who seek to build further upon their work toward educational equality for all students. For many communities, desegregation of the schools was a necessary process for black students to access equality in education. For Clara Glasper the fight for desegregation was central to her activism and life story.

The Desegregation of the East Baton Rouge Parish School System

Clara Byrd Glasper worked as an educator in a school system that was under court-ordered desegregation. Each individual school desegregation case is necessarily shaped by the

facts and circumstances peculiar to that system. The seminal work on the history of school desegregation by Richard Kluger (1977), Simple Justice, explains:

> But the school-desegregation cases were not like most other cases that came to the Court. To start with, the Justices had reviewed earlier Court rulings on the question and pronounced them no longer applicable. Times and the nation had changed. The Court, then, had no ready example of its own devising to lean upon in determining how the mechanics of desegregation ought to be arranged. (p. 716)

Simple Justice is an account of race relations in America. Secondly, it is a detailed study of the complex process-- the litigation strategy--by which the five consolidated cases that we now know as Brown arose and worked their way up to the Supreme Court. The third is a painstakingly researched account of the process within the Supreme Court by which the Brown decision was reached.

There is no major research on the Clifford Eugene Davis, et al. v. East Baton Rouge Parish School Board, et al. desegregation case, which was a significant influence on the life history of Clara Byrd Glasper, particularly the Consent Decree. Several minor works have been written about various aspects of the case that are important to the conceptual framework of my endeavor to understand the background of the case and write a historical context of the Clifford Eugene Davis, et al. v. East Baton Rouge Parish School Board, et al.

Mathews and Jarvis (1997) give a historical overview of the East Baton Rouge desegregation from 1956 until 1997 describing the efforts to comply with the court and the court order of 1981, which forced the court to institute its own plan and called for mandatory busing. The entire community (both Blacks and Whites) was becoming increasingly disenchanted, and since 1981 the school system has lost 18,749 white students and gained 9,083 black students. Over the forty years, this shift in population transformed a once majority white system to a

predominately African American system, which significantly affected the dynamics of the case. This historical overview is a good source of information on the background of the Davis Consent Decree approved by the court in 1996 and the first year of its implementation.

Crossing Over: An Oral History of the Desegregation Experience of Public School Person in East Baton Rouge Parish Louisiana, a doctoral dissertation by Douglas Davis (1999), explores school desegregation in East Baton Rouge Parish from 1956 to 1970. His study is an oral history of two teachers and four administrators' experiences in the 1970 cross-over. His historical research on the Davis cases is valuable to the background of my study. His subject for the oral history of the black educator is male. This teacher experienced white students acting out, questioning his use of language, and interrogating his knowledge. He felt they were testing his intelligence. This insight into this teacher's account of the cross-over experience is a valuable resource for comparison with Clara Glasper's cross-over experience. Davis (1999) suggests that Baton Rouge had a profound and unique experience with desegregation that remains an unfinished project.

A doctoral dissertation by Alonzo Luce (1999) studied court approved magnet programs in East Baton Rouge Parish. At the present time, one of the problems facing the school board is the magnet program which does not meet the criteria of the Davis Consent Decree. Magnet programs have a twofold purpose: to desegregate schools, and to improve racially isolated schools. A magnet school is located in a black community with a particular program that is intended to draw white students to that neighborhood. Luce (1999) did a case-study of the magnet programs at three high schools in East Baton Rouge Parish. He concluded that further

research should continue in the parish. This work is a valuable source for the historical background of the earlier years of the Davis case.

Bankston and Caldas' (2002), A Troubled Dream: The Promise and Failure of School Desegregation in Louisiana, examines the limited success of desegregating schools in three Louisiana cities, one of which is Baton Rouge. They argue that:

> Our close study of racial composition in the schools of Louisiana has led us to conclude that desegregation has often been self-defeating precisely because activists, the courts, and others seeking laudable social change have seen the racial makeup of schools almost exclusively from the perspective of social injustice and have failed to consider the sometimes differing interests and perspectives of black and white families. Moreover, even the social justice theories driving school desegregation have often been flawed and have delivered results that are just the opposite of what these theories promised–educational quality and equality. (p. 5)

Forced desegregation in 1981 caused a tremendous flow of white students from the public schools to nonpublic schools or adjacent parishes. The extent of the white flight is indicated by the following statistics. The percentage of white students in nonpublic schools increased from 20 percent to 25 percent in the next year. By 1998, the number of white students jumped to 48 percent. The white student population of the two adjacent parishes jumped from 26 percent in 1965 to 56 percent in 1996. The major decrease in the number of white taxpayers, the primary source of local funding for schools, resulted in the decline in the schools and the system. Instead of stimulating desegregation, the opposite resulted. The racial makeup of the parish shifted from a majority-white to a majority-black student population. The authors calculate that by the year 2020, East Baton Rouge Parish will be an all-black system. They contend the system is crumbling and so financially strapped that some compromises must be made to salvage the school system (Bankston & Caldos, 2002).

Desegregation and the accompanying literature on the subject primarily deal with the legal issues, the courts, and the lawyers, the voices of men. A thorough search of the index of Simple Justice, revealed approximately thirty female names in an 864-page book, most of them children that were denied admission to a white school. Women's voices are silent in the literature. Clara Byrd Glasper's life history will contribute a black woman educator's voice to a subject dominated by those of men.

Research Methodology

Qualitative researchers in anthropology, psychology, sociology, and other disciplines have developed various ways to study human behavior. Qualitative research is a broad term that encompasses a variety of approaches to interpretive research. Each approach can be distinguished from the others by its unique focus, strategies for data collection and analysis, as well as specific ways of communicating results. Some approaches are particularly suited to the investigation of people's inner experience, and some to the investigation of social and cultural phenomena. According to Ertmer (1997), "when scant information exists on a topic, when variables are unknown, when a relevant theory base is inadequate, incomplete, or missing, a qualitative study can help define what is important----that is, *what needs to be studied*" (p.156, original emphasis). In this research what needs to be studied is the lived experiences of Clara Byrd Glasper and the meaning she derives from that experience.

Qualitative inquiry was the method of choice for this study because it assumes that human behavior is context-bound, that human experience takes its meaning from and therefore is inseparable from, social, historical, political, and cultural influences. In addition, qualitative

inquiry places no prior constraints on what is to be studied. For example, it studies human experience holistically, taking into account all factors and influences in a given situation.

Life History

Life history is the study of the experiences of individuals during different phases of their lives and the way in which they conceptualize these experiences in order to give meaning to their lives. Researchers gather, analyze, and interpret the stories people tell about their lives. They assume that people live "storied lives" and that telling and retelling one's story helps one understand and create a sense of self. The researcher, working closely with the participant, records that story. Life histories used across the social science disciplines are particularly useful in giving the reader an insider's view of a culture or era in history (Edgerton & Langness, 1974). Clara Byrd Glasper's life experiences with segregation gives us a firsthand perspective of its enduring effects on the black community and our country's educational history.

Life histories seek to "examine and analyze the subjective experience of individuals and their constructions of the social world" (Jones, 1983, p.147). They assume a complex interaction between the individual's understanding of his or her world and that world itself. They are, therefore, uniquely suited to depicting the socialization of a person into a cultural environment and to make theoretical sense of it (Dollard, 1935). Thus, one understands a culture through the history of one person's development or life within it, told in ways that capture the person's own feelings, views, and perspectives. The life history is often an account of how an individual enters a group and becomes socialized into that group and therefore capable of meeting the normative expectations of that society rather than how society copes with the stream of individuals (Mandelbaum, 1973).

Life histories are helpful in understanding socialization and in studying aspects of certain professions. Their value goes beyond providing specific information about events and customs of the past–as a historian might–by showing how the individual creates meaning within the culture. Life histories are valuable in studying cultural changes that have occurred overtime, in learning about cultural norms and transgressions of those norms and in gaining an inside view of a culture. They also help capture the evolution of cultural patterns and how the patterns are linked to the life of an individual. Often, this point of view is missing from standard ethnographies (Edgerton & Langness, 1974).

Researchers recognize that the person may reconstruct or add present interpretations to the past; the person may "rewrite" his or her story. The main purpose is to get at how the respondent sees/remembers the past, not just some kind of objective truth. The interview often is supplemented with documentary data (e.g., old photographs).

One strength of life history methodology is that, because it pictures a substantial portion of a person's life, the reader enters into those same experiences. Second, the method provides a fertile source of insights that might be tested by further study. Third, it depicts actions and perspectives across a social group that may be analyzed for comparative study. Life history methodology emphasizes the value of a person's own story and provides pieces in a mosaic that depicts a certain era or social group. Life histories are often used in feminist research as a way of understanding how women's lives and careers evolve (Lawless, 1991).

Jones (1983) offers five criteria for life histories. First, the life history of an individual "describe[s] and interpret[s] the actor's account of his or her development in the common-sense world" (p.153). Second, the method should capture the significant role that others play in

“transmitting socially defined stocks of knowledge” (p.153). Third, the taken-for-granted assumptions of the specific cultural world under study should be described and analyzed. These assumptions are revealed in rules and codes for conduct as well as in myths and rituals. Fourth, life histories should focus on the experience of an individual over a long period of time to capture the “processual development of the person” (p.154). And fifth, the cultural world under study should be continuously related to the individual’s unfolding life story.

The major criticisms of the life history are the difficulties of generalizing, limiting principles for selecting participants, and few accepted concepts to guide analysis. Once the researcher is aware of the possible weaknesses in the method, they can be minimized. Official records may provide corroborating information or may illuminate aspects of the culture absent from the individual’s account. The researcher can substantiate the meanings presented in the history by interviewing others in the participant’s life to assess possible bias and to ensure that their interpretations resonated with the understandings of one another and those who came in contact with them (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

As with any qualitative genre, the abundance of data collected in a life history should be managed and reduced in some preliminary way before any analytic headway can be made. Alternatives to the classical chronological order for presenting the interpretation include (a) critical dimensions or aspects of the person’s life, (b) principal turning-points and the life conditions between them, and (c) the person’s characteristic means of adaptation (Mandelbaum, 1973).

Presentation of interpretation of meaningful life experience can occur in turning-point episodes in which human character is revealed, and human lives are shaped, sometimes

irrevocably. It is necessary to discuss the structures of these moments and the experiences that flow from them. Denzin (1989) finds in doing life history, particular value in identifying what he calls "epiphanies."

> It is possible to identify four major structures, or types of existentially problematic moments, or epiphanies, in the lives of individuals. First, there are those moments that are major and touch every fabric of a person's life. Their effects are immediate and long term. Second, there are those epiphanies that represent eruptions, or reactions, to events that have been going on for a long period of time. Third are those events that are minor yet symbolically representative of major problematic moments in a relationship. Fourth, and finally, are those episodes whose effects are immediate, but their meanings are only given later in retrospection, and in the reliving the event. I give the following names to these four structures of problematic experience: (1) the major epiphany, (2) the cumulative epiphany, (3) the illuminative, minor epiphany, and (4) the relived epiphany. (Of course, any epiphany can be relived and given new retrospective meaning.) These four types may, of course, build upon one another. A given event may, at different phases in a person's or relationship's life, be first, major, then minor, and then later relived. A cumulative epiphany will, of course, erupt into a major event in a person's life. (p.129)

The purpose of the life history is to provide an account of a person's life as it has meaning to her (or him) and to establish "collaborative and nonexploitative research relationships" (Munro, 1993, p.164). In this context, the culture is revealed through the experience of the subject. Chanfrault-Duchet (1991) views the life story as "a meaning system complete into itself" (p. 77); in other words, as a text. She defines the life story on the basis of two features: (1) the narrative and "literary" character of the object produced in a dialogue; and (2) the social character of the self dramatized in the narrative. Eagleton (1996) recognizes that:

> Meaning is not simply something "expressed" or "reflected" in language: it is actually produced by it. It is not as though we have meanings or experiences, which we then proceed to cloak with words; we can only have the meanings and experiences in the first place because we have a language to have them in. What this suggests, moreover, is that our experience as individuals is social to its roots; for there can be no such thing as a private language, and to imagine a language is to imagine a whole form of social life. (p. 52-53)

Chanfrault-Duchet (1991) is skeptical of life stories derived from such instruments as structured or semi-structured questionnaires and obtained by interviewers commissioned by institutions. Instead, the author emphasizes the importance of using textual and narrative approaches designed to generate an authentic portrayal of the social self. Only when the narrative has freed itself from the constraints of traditional methodological approaches, does it take on the character of a genre: the life story.

The resurgence in interest in life history may be attributed to the current focus on acknowledging the subjectivity, diversity, and partial nature of human experience (Munro, 1993). Researchers recognize that individuals both act upon and are acted upon by social structures. Understanding the interaction between person and culture from the viewpoints of diverse individuals not only provides greater insight into the culture and institutions but provides us with the tools to change oppressive or outmoded institutions.

Establishing a collaborative relationship with the subject requires that the researcher learn active listening skills. Too often, the process of interpretation takes place simultaneously with the listening process. When this happens, it is likely that the subject's narrative is filtered through the interviewer's perceptions. Ideally, the interpretive or analytical process should be suspended while listening, or at least subordinated to the process of active listening (Anderson & Jack, 1991).

Anderson and Jack (1991) observe that the shift from data gathering to the interactive process requires a certain type of spontaneity. The authors propose that as a general guideline, qualitative research requires an awareness that: 1) actions, things, and events are accompanied by subjective, emotional experience from which they derive meaning; 2) some of the feelings

disclosed may exceed the boundaries of accepted or anticipated behavior; and (3) individuals can and must explain what they mean on their own terms.

In terms of listening itself, there are three ways of listening during the interview that heighten the researcher's perceptions of the feelings and thoughts underlying what might appear to be a conventional story (Anderson & Jack, 1991). The first is listening to the person's *moral language*. This refers to statements that are self-judgmental and which allow the researcher to examine a relationship between the person's self-concept and cultural norms. For example, a woman suffering from depression stated, "I feel like a failure." In fact, negative self-judgments often precipitate depression. Listening to the way in which language is used to convey cultural norms which have been internalized and which have been used to evaluate the self provides important insight into the social self. The second guideline for listening is attending to the meta-statements. These are places in the interview where people stop, reflect, and comment on their thoughts or statements. They can provide valuable cues to the person's awareness of a discrepancy within the self or to the way thoughts or statements are being self-monitored. The third guideline is *observing the logic* of the narrative; that is, observing the internal consistency or inconsistency about recurring themes and the way the themes relate to one another.

It would be difficult to find a person who is so self-sufficient that he or she does not engage in some form of self-judgment or self-monitoring. In fact, a lack of meta-statements, for example, would alert the researcher to the idea that the person is saying only what is expected rather than offering genuine narratives. The critical rules for researchers include listening both to the narrator and the self (Anderson & Jack, 1991). Listening to the self is no less essential; perhaps the major difficulty in qualitative research is not in understanding the subject's thoughts

and feelings, but in trying to guide the discourse and impose the researcher's own concerns on the subject.

The difficulties in listening to the subject and the self are conceptualized by Munro (1993) as dilemmas of life history research. Describing her experience chronicling the life of female teachers, the author states, "I questioned if it was truly the life historian's understanding of her experience that I was seeking, or if I was structuring the interview so that the subject would tell the story that conformed to my orientation" (p. 171). Munro (1993) observes that the questions of representation, self-reflexivity, and subjectivity are ongoing dilemmas in the collaborative process. There are no easy answers, but it may be fair to say that the fact that researchers admit to such dilemmas and reflect on them is a necessary step. The reflection and collaboration are integral to life history as strengths, which can be used to solve the dilemmas developing in any form of research.

Gluck and Patai (1991) suggest that these tenets for life story narratives are assumed to be inherently feminist because they were "making available in accessible forms the words of women who had previously been silenced or ignored . . . [that] the telling of the story can be empowering, validating the importance of the speaker's life experience . . . [and] by documenting women's representations of their own reality, we are engaging in advocacy" (p.2-3).

Data Collection, Analysis, & Interpretation

In order to answer the questions raised by this study, the primary source of data came from fifteen semi-structured interviews and regular telephone conversations with Clara Glasper. The interviews were conducted at the Goodwood Library in Baton Rouge, Louisiana at Clara

Glasper's request. She explained that the library would be a perfect place for us to meet because she did not want the distractions at home to interfere with our work. Because of her involvement with the desegregation case, the phone was always ringing or people were stopping by with problems. In addition, her grandchildren stayed with her on many occasions and that too could be distracting. When Clara suggested that we meet at the Goodwood Library, the red flag immediately went up that I was being denied access to her private world. As it turned out, that was not the case. The atmosphere of the library allowed her to leave the public world of her home and to let me enter her private world where she could give me her full uninterrupted attention.

The fifteen recorded interviews were each approximately two hours in length. The interviews occurring from July 2000 to December 2002 and were scheduled around Clara's busy schedule. During the interviews, Clara was asked open-ended questions to capture how she understands her own past. These recordings document Clara's life story including her perceptions, attitudes, and experiences. I had to constantly probe deep for perceptions and feelings and underlying motivations. I found that each interview had its own mood and tone; it was necessary to be flexible and sensitive to these circumstances. I had to know my background information to be an informed and effective interviewer. I had to also be informed about the specific terminology and topics discussed for me to be able to be engaged in the interview in a meaningful way. In addition, traveling to Clara's birthplace and where she grew up gave me a better understanding of the earlier context of her story and allowed me to be a more informed listener.

Since the Davis case was active, this research was truly an emerging study as pertinent events were unfolding continually and Clara's role in the process was also evolving. Informal conversations on the telephone yielded very valuable information about how she felt about events that would happen between scheduled interviews. One example of such an event was the resignation of Judge Parker from the bench and therefore the case. Being a non-participant observer in school board meetings, the Diversity Design Team meetings, and the National NAACP Conference in New Orleans, in which Clara participated, allowed me to actually see her in action. This allowed me to see a side of her that the interviews did not allow, but it did also validate what she said in those interviews.

Collaboration and flexibility were very important. Achieving true collaboration and trustworthiness was imperative in making the study meaningful. Also, it allowed Clara to share private papers and tapes that were important data that complemented the interviews. However, she was very concerned about protecting others who might suffer repercussions, so some information was off limits particularly toward the end of my time in the field. School personnel were being fired and the free flow of information from the Central Office had been stopped. It was at that time that the Judge had issued a gag order in the case, so the whole situation was a little tense.

Managing the large volume of data that is generated from interviews, observations, and the collection of documents was an organizational nightmare. A fieldwork journal recording accounts of thoughts, feelings, assumptions, motives, and observations of activities was kept. Upon completion of the interviews, all tapes were transcribed. Formal analysis of the texts began once the tapes were transcribed. After several readings of the transcriptions, themes were

identified and color-coded. Major themes that emerged were childhood, college, teaching in DeSoto Parish, teaching in Baton Rouge, and retirement. Within each of those themes emerged major turning points. Next, each of the themes was cut and pasted into a "raw" or unedited narrative. The theme narratives were edited for grammar and readability and arranged into chapters; however, the completed work remains a first person narrative. Given Clara's age, she found it was easier to narrate her life story in chronological order and then she could go back and identify turning points, which she felt in many cases were Divine Intervention.

The sources of information for the contextual history include primary and secondary sources, field notes from observations, court papers filed in the Davis case, East Baton Rouge Parish School Board documents, letters to the editors, newspaper articles from The Advocate, newscaster reports, and court decisions, and any documents, reports, or personal notes.

Ethical Considerations

Since I had already developed a relationship with the narrator before this study was suggested, Clara was eager to give consent to have her life story written after we discussed its purpose and the implications. She gave permission to use her given name in the text of this research and the proper approval for Human Subjects of Research was obtained.

The interviews were conducted considering the findings of Ann Oakley's study (1981). She argues that textbook methods of interviewing assume a predominately masculine model that creates problems when interviewing women because the personal involvement and interaction differ. The traditional imbalance of the researcher-researched relationship is much contested, notably by Oakley (1981), who says that:

> in most cases, the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is nonhierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship. (p. 41)

She suggests that a more appropriate orientation for researchers and the researched is what she terms *inter-viewing*, in which both the researcher and the researched are conscious of one another's agendas and attempt to mold the research to address both.

I situate myself as researcher in a collaborative role, which I believe is based on reciprocity, trust, mutual respect, and learning. As a researcher, I recognize the role of power distribution in my interactions. In the traditional research mode, those who are studied grant the researcher access and may benefit from the research process and product in a number of ways. The researcher, however retains control over the project's purpose, methods, analysis, and use.

Collaborative modes of research attempt to distribute power more equitably among the various aspects of the research process. The researcher assists and facilitates rather than develops and executes. The contribution of rapport remains essential. It is not separate from other aspects of doing good research, but an integral part of collecting data. Research could not succeed without the trust that rapport builds.

Rapport helps the field researcher understand the life historian, but understanding is a precondition for greater depth, not an end in itself. It slowly develops in the field as the researcher overcomes the initial bewilderment with a new or unusual language and system of social meaning. Once, he or she attains an understanding of the life historian's point of view, the next step is to learn how to think and act within the narrator's perspective. This is *empathy*, or adopting another's perspective. Empathy does not necessarily mean sympathy, agreement, or

approval; it means feeling things as another does. Rapport helps create understanding and ultimately empathy, and development of empathy facilitates greater rapport.

In many ways, I feel a novice-expert relationship exists in this research. I identify myself as novice and the "other." Comparing experts with novices makes it possible to specify how experts and novices differ in understanding, storing, recalling, and manipulating knowledge. Expert-novice differences are a step toward an understanding of learning. Knowledge is constructed by learners. Learning is active, not passive. In short, learning is the process by which novices become experts. From this relationship, "I" the novice, through the learning process of this research, have moved closer to the expert. However, I must qualify that statement by saying I am not there yet.

In situating myself as the researcher of a life history, I realize that I face several dilemmas. As a scholar with an academic agenda, writing a dissertation could be exploitative in nature, therefore colonializing or "othering" my life historian, Clara Byrd Glasper. To counter such a dilemma in this study, I am taking a stand to create a space for nondominant voices to speak as subjects in history–subjects of an unequal world, subjects defined by boundaries, and subjects of oppression.

Sociologist Jack Douglas (1985) speaks of the need for researchers to be subordinate to their interviewees because interviewees hold the knowledge and power. Indeed, your respondents have the power to reject your request for an interview, to terminate interviews once begun, to refuse to answer some questions fully or at all, and to hold back generally in their consideration of your questions. Such power is substantial. Its extent indicates how dependent you are on the respondent's willingness to be available and forthcoming.

One cannot dictate the particulars of the interviewer-interviewee relationship: if you will meet, where, when, and how often you will meet; what you will discuss, for how long and how often. However, for as long as the interview remains the means to ends you have fashioned and are pursuing, you will remain dominant– nonetheless you are submissive, dependent, and sit relatively quietly alongside a respondent while the words flow.

Nonetheless, three major ethical considerations must be addressed: age, race, and region. As a researcher, I am white, younger, and from Texas. Michele Foster (1997) addresses these issues when she describes her research experiences where she was younger, of a different gender, interviewing Northerners. She concluded, "even interviewers and narrators who share social and cultural characteristics are likely to be separated by other characteristics, . . . that despite these differences, my interactions with my narrators were generally positive, marked by empathy and trust" (xxi).

In working with Clara Byrd Glasper, I valued the courage and persistence in her struggles and the passionate commitment to her past and ongoing work. I find her a source of inspiration and I honor her impressive list of accomplishments, while at the same time tempering the potential of my research to romanticize her by my reflections at the end of the chapters. I also acknowledge the risk of bias as problematic for qualitative researchers. To counter the problem, I conducted an interview from an individual who met Clara Glasper at the school board meetings and had contact with her for more than a year. Her perceptions have been included where appropriate in my reflections. In addition, I had two peer reviewers, one female and one male, read this work to check specifically for bias.

First Person Narrative

This dissertation is written as a first person narrative of Clara Byrd Glasper's life history in the context of southern segregation. First person narrative allows the narrator to become directly involved in the story being told. A strength of first person narrative is that the character may also express feelings, thoughts, and experiences, and may reveal himself or herself; therefore, the reader gains keener insight into the life of the narrator. The intensity of such confessional intimacy can be striking. Collins (1991) contends that, "the primary responsibility for defining one's own reality lies with the people who live that reality, who actually have those experiences" (p.34). She further states that only, "Black women know what it means to be Black women" (p. 98). First person narrative is used in all of the following books as the method of choice in presenting the life histories of black women.

The decision to present my research in this format was influenced by three individual life histories, which are organized in this manner. Ready From Within (A First Person Narrative): Septima Clark and The Civil Rights Movement was edited by Cynthia Stokes Brown (1996), who explains that "oral biographies and histories are usually written in the first person voice. The person tells the story in his or her own voice, which constitutes much of the charm and interest of oral biography; the words on the page actually sound like the real person telling the story" (Brown, 1988, p. 17). Listen to Me Good: The Life Story of an Alabama Midwife by Margaret Charles Smith and Linda Janet Holmes and My Soul is My Own: Oral Narratives of African American Women in the Professions by Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis (1993) are also first person narratives. In addition, Michele Foster's (1997) Black Teachers on Teaching presents life stories "in their own voices–the perspectives, values, and pedagogical insights of a group of

excellent African-American teachers from diverse communities across the nation" (p. xi). Therefore, Clara will tell her story in her own voice.

An introduction providing a contextual and conceptual texture begins each chapter. Next, Clara's first person narrative of her story becomes the body of each chapter. Reflections follow the narrative at the end of each chapter where my voice is heard.

Summary of the Chapters

Chapter 2 is Clara's account of her childhood in Northwestern Louisiana, including her early education. In Chapter 3 Clara describes what her college years were like at Southern University. Chapter 4 recounts Clara teaching back in her hometown and her first experience with activism. Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 portray Clara's thirty-one years as a teacher and administrator for the East Baton Rouge Parish School District. The Davis desegregation court case becomes an important influence on this part of her life. Her awareness and advocacy for desegregation have their beginnings. Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 present Clara's retirement years as her activism comes to full force working with the NAACP to fight for desegregation.

CHAPTER 2

GROWING UP BLACK AND POOR IN NORTHWESTERN LOUISIANA

Introduction

In 1934 when Clara Byrd was born in Grand Cane, Louisiana, the demographic, economic, and cultural remnants of slavery were still present in DeSoto Parish. The importance of family, church, and community as institutions of survival were all vestiges of slave society that remained an integral part of everyday life. Although Clara's grandfather talked about the slavery experience of his father, he did not speak much about it with her. She came from a poor family and lived most of the time on her grandfather's 60-acre farm[1] while her mother worked primarily as a domestic servant in the nearby town of Mansfield, Louisiana.

Clara "hated" the loneliness of being an only child, the prolonged separations from her mother, moving around living with different members of the extended family, and working in the cotton fields in Grand Cane. She believed she was "smart," and the need for acceptance by her grandfather, her mother, and her school teachers motivated her to excel on the farm and in school. "I think that my earlier environment where on the farm you had responsibility that had an impact, it programmed me for higher expectations of myself and that idea was fostered by my grandfather."

Class disadvantage and its psychological effects shaped Clara Byrd's adolescent years. She realized the unfairness of her class-based handicap, but Clara blamed her own black community, particularly her teachers.

> I had the feeling that the expectations of me were not that much from some of the teachers and I felt that for several reasons. Mainly, I didn't have that much and it wasn't hard for them to realize that my mother for much of that time was a one parent and that

> wasn't that popular back then. And I really think when you hear me say that people had fewer expectations than I would like for them to have had of me it wasn't because I wasn't smart, or I wasn't doing well in school, but I think the general population there, teachers included, knew that I wasn't going to college. There was no way that I could go. My mother was washing and ironing clothes. So, you just don't make that much.

Clara was very much aware of the limitations that were placed on her life and the powerlessness and anger of her situation manifested itself early on in her life. She was conscious that the social class into which she was born could have a profound influence on her entire life. She was faced with the knowledge that she had limited opportunities to move ahead in life and achieve goals, such as a college education, the chance to live a long and healthy life, and the chance to enter a profession. Clara began to believe that she was not going to live to adulthood. She could not envision herself out of the country, away from the farm, and away from the cotton fields. She could not see a way out of her situation.

Clara said as she became older, "I decided that I was going to be a cosmetologist. That was my great ambition. I knew that it was impossible for my mother to send me to college. So that was just a solution to my problem. It was doable!"

Margaret Anderson (1966) writes in her book, The Children of the South, that:

> When a person is given a certain role in life, or a social position, especially during his formative years, he comes to accept this as his true place. He comes to believe that he is just what the people around him think he is. Only the very strong in mind and spirit are able to overcome this environmental handicap without help. The brilliant Negro students, who are capable of accomplishment, tell me how they struggle against this feeling of being less than they are. (p. 36)

Clara struggled against this feeling of being less than she was. Clara pushed herself to be an honor student at graduation because "that was the one time that I was going to let Mansfield know that I was somebody and that had enabled me to be tolerant of some of the things that were

happening to me coming through [school].” When she was not awarded that distinction, the pain of the experience remained with her for years.

However, in the case of Clara's life story, the actions of one teacher set in motion events that in the years to follow would produce opportunities for Clara to become an instrument of social change.

> I've thought about it a lot, and I tell people all the time that I believe in Divine intervention. Miss Audrey Henderson, God bless her soul, she died, but that lady gave me the first lifeline. She threw it to me, when she insisted that they allow me to take the test [for a scholarship to Southern University]. Even though they didn't consider me, didn't let me be recognized as an honor student. She knew that I had the qualities. She knew that I had the grades and I understand that she just insisted, “Well, just let her take the test. You don't have to honor her at graduation; you don't have to call her name. But just let her take the test.” That was my lifeline.

Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, offered Clara Byrd a scholarship, which she accepted and to this day, she firmly believes that:

> Teachers need to realize that all children are worthwhile, that each has potential. Unfortunately, there is a tendency I feel for teachers and administrators to believe erroneously that apples don't fall far from the tree. I have always resented that stereotype of students because I don't feel it accurately described me and neither did one special English teacher, Miss Henderson. She recognized something in me that I didn't feel the other teachers did, and she fought for me to have the opportunity to test for the Southern University scholarship, which changed my whole life.

The “powerlessness and anger” that Clara felt about her life growing up in the farming country surrounding the towns of Grand Cane and Mansfield, Louisiana in DeSoto Parish makes her “lifeline” all the more significant because it enabled her escape.

Historical Background of DeSoto Parish

DeSoto Parish is located in northwestern Louisiana on the mouth of the Sabine River and at the beginning of the Toledo Bend Lake. Following the depression of 1837, and prior to the Mexican War of 1846, the Parish of DeSoto was created in 1843 and named in honor of the

Spanish explorer, Hernando de Soto, who discovered the Mississippi River (Brown & Richardson, 1994). Mansfield was founded in 1842 between Shreveport and Leesville along Highway 171 near Toledo Bend Reservoir and the Texas state line. It became the parish seat because it was centrally located. Mansfield Battle Park is the sight of the Battle of Mansfield (1864), the last major campaign of the Civil War in Louisiana.

DeSoto Parish was classified by type-of-farming as the North Louisiana Upland Cotton Area (Rojas, 1953). The agricultural system was distinguished by the small, family farms where cotton was a common cash crop (Smith, 1992). Northwestern Louisiana was populated primarily by English-speaking British Americans and Blacks. The term "British American" refers to various English-speaking peoples from the British Isles who arrived at various times in Louisiana history. The term is intended to replace Anglo American, Anglo-Scotch-Irish, and Anglo-Celtic (Roach-Lankford, 1985). This region was primarily populated by settlers who migrated from Georgia, Alabama, the Carolinas, Mississippi, and Tennessee. The majority of these immigrants were Baptist or Methodist small farmers with a strong Protestant work ethic. Few owned slaves in large numbers.

In 1930, DeSoto Parish contained a black population of 50-64 percent and farm populations in which greater than 46 percent of the owners were black. It is noteworthy that the parishes with greater percentages of black farm owners were cotton dominated agricultural areas. The production of this crop was more applicable to the small farm than other major crops in Louisiana, such as sugar and rice, because the cotton plant required fewer exact physical conditions for its growth and less investment in mechanical labor (Smith, 1992).

The town of Grand Cane, Clara's birthplace, is located seven miles to the northwest of Mansfield on Highway 171.[2] The town site was once the location of an enormous cane break (thicket of cane), through which early explorers had to cut their way. As a result, the surrounding settlements were known as the Grand Cane District long before the founding of the town. These settlements centered around five churches that formed the Grand Cane Association in 1849. The countryside consisted of fertile farming land, though it formed the summit of a plateau, which sloped into Grand Cane Creek and to the Red River. In 1881, Amanda Hobgood, widow of Wright Hobgood and "Mother of Grand Cane," had the Village of Grand Cane laid out in lots and streets.

Railroads were fast replacing water and land transportation. People began moving closer to the railroad, merchants opened businesses, and Grand Cane was born. By 1899, the Village of Grand Cane was incorporated. The population soon grew to almost 500. As the Village developed, spurred by the nearby railway and the two crossroads (Highways 171 and 3015), a vigorous white business community developed, including seven stores, a dentist, bank, post office, blacksmith shop, livery stable, two hotels, four doctors, three drug stores, telephone office, newspaper, restaurant, two cotton gins, and various distinguished residential homes. The community also had the first accredited white public high school in the State of Louisiana, and a Presbyterian, Methodist, and two Baptist churches.

It should be noted that although small farm ownership was the norm, some plantations and instances of large slave ownership did exist. Dr. Murphy Rogers referred to some of the families living on what is now Highway 3015 into Grand Cane from the Rogers' farm during the period 1905-1910, as highly respected black landowners and farmers.

In 1921, Grand Cane had a population of 378 people. Automobiles appeared on the scene in 1923. A lighting system appeared in 1928, and plans were made for a paved road. The village continued to thrive until the Great Depression of 1929, despite several major fires that destroyed various downtown businesses.

During both World War I and World War II, the railroad was a valuable means of transportation. A downward trend continued with the demise of the Texas & Pacific Railway in the late 1950s. The steady decline of the agricultural industry, the lack of new businesses, the loss of the public school, and a general movement away from the rural area saw the end of the village as a center for trade. Today, Historic Grand Cane, Louisiana, has a population of approximately 233 residents consisting of 127 families. It has been revitalized with antique shops, a fine-dining restaurant, and a ladies boutique, all housed in turn-of-the-century buildings that are listed on the National Register (DeSoto Parish Chamber of Commerce, 2003).

Black Education in DeSoto Parish

The 1890s witnessed a rising tide of antiblack feeling in the South. Though historical evidence is strong that blacks were at no time treated equally in the decades after the Civil War, it was not until the l890s that southern whites began in earnest to erect the legal barriers known as the Jim Crow laws. Constitutional sanction for these laws came with the landmark Plessy v. Ferguson United States Supreme Court decision of 1896, which affirmed racial segregation as national policy, by declaring that “separate but equal” facilities for Blacks and Whites were constitutional (Harlan, 1969). The case arose from a Louisiana law providing for separate railway cars for whites and blacks. Many such Jim Crow laws were passed in southern states, at least in part to stop poor whites from making political and economic alliances with Blacks that

could threaten the established order of the South. Southern whites intent at further curtailing black opportunity were encouraged by the new ruling.

Efforts to educate black children became the northern philanthropic response to "Jim Crow" and disenfranchisement. Southern schools had always been separate, but never equal. After 1900, efforts shifted from simply training educators to actually improving many aspects of black schooling (Werner, 1939). The direction of this effort was lead by the Julius Rosenwald Fund, created in 1917. Julius Rosenwald, an early partner in the Sears, Roebuck Co. and later president of the company, became interested in philanthropy that addressed fundamental issues of equity, access and opportunity. Rosenwald wished to promote self-reliance among Blacks by requiring them to match his contributions with their own (Embree & Waxman, 1949).

Rosenwald's chief concern was black education in the South. His interest was sparked by fellow philanthropists and especially Booker T. Washington's autobiography, Up from Slavery (Werner, 1939). Washington (1856-1915) was a proponent of vocational education. Washington believed that blacks should be educated for industrial and agricultural work. Rosenwald met the great black educator in 1911, and it was Washington who suggested that Rosenwald's help was needed with elementary schools throughout the South (Embree & Waxman, 1949).

Julius Rosenwald directed the fund to attack first the most visible problem, poor elementary school buildings. In 1917, a fund official wrote later that the typical black school in the South was a one or two-room hand-me-down, an old white school, a rotting log cabin, or even a corn crib. For its initial decade, rural school construction was the Rosenwald Fund's major focus, accounting for all but $600 thousand of the $4 million spent. Julius Rosenwald could simply have addressed the school house problem by giving money. But instead he sought

to use his gifts to break down the barriers between whites and blacks which had led to the inequality:

Fund officials noted:

> The lethargy and suspicion of Negroes had to be overcome. It was difficult to change old ways. Some felt that if no schooling or classes in old church buildings had been good enough for them, it was good enough for their children. Others did not trust the white philanthropists from the North. Why should they give something for nothing, and especially to colored folks? If they did raise their share of their money, would the white men keep their promise? And Negroes were so poor -- how was it possible to get so much money? One hundred dollars, two hundred dollars were fantastic sums to little communities of impoverished Negroes. (Embree & Waxman, 1949, p. 45)

Henry Allen Bullock (1967) acknowledged in his study, A History of Negro Education in the South that the Julius Rosenwald Fund was “the most influential philanthropic force that came to the aid of Negroes at that time” (p. 139). More of the state's black children now went to school, and they benefitted from longer school years, and from better trained teachers. However, his study also concluded that it was a failed experiment.

Bullock (1967) found, in retrospect, with eight-grade educations and "industrial" classes in farming and home economics, students were educated to be good farmers, rather than given the ability to leave rural life. Rosenwald and his fellow philanthropists succeeded magnificently in raising the level of black education in the South. But they failed in their larger goal of promoting equality. Despite the marked improvements in conditions in 1930, black students were even farther behind Whites by almost every important measure than they had been in 1915. Though black schools had improved, white school boards were improving white facilities much faster. The Rosenwald building program was a well-conceived and well-executed effort, of massive scope by private standards. But ultimately it showed the inability of private enterprise to overturn racist attitudes toward black education that was deeply imbedded in the southern social

system. Rosenwald and his fellow philanthropists believed they could work within the social system to change southern white attitudes toward blacks. However, segregation was preserved.

Although blacks comprised 38.9 percent of Louisiana's population in 1920 and 36.9 percent in 1930, the physical and educational facilities available to Louisiana's black population at that time were poor. For example, churches, old cabins, or country stores frequently served as schoolhouses (Porter, 1938). Kindergarten education was not adopted in Louisiana until after 1945 (Sutton, Foxworth, & Hearn, 1971).

Clara Byrd's early education was in several schoolhouses built on the church property in the rural countryside of Grand Cane. Friendship Baptist Church, which was established in 1860, still stands today; however, no evidence of the little schoolhouse remains. The church sits high upon the hill overlooking the old cemetery where many of Clara's relatives are buried, including her grandfather, grandmother, and an aunt's entire family.

Clara received her secondary (high school) education at DeSoto Parish Training School in Mansfield, which was a Rosenwald school. Originally, the two-room white frame building was constructed in the pinewood area of East Mansfield in 1913.[3] Each of the two rooms measured 29' x 17'. The building was called the Mansfield Colored School. Four acres of land and a two-room school, with an attendance of less than fifty pupils, was the story of public education for blacks in Mansfield prior to1915.

In 1915, DeWitt Johnson, a native of Conroe, Texas and a graduate of Leland College, New Orleans, received his teaching assignment in Mansfield and accepted the position of principal of the Mansfield Colored School. His wife, Elizabeth Johnson, a native of Pearlington,

Mississippi and also a graduate of Leland College resigned from a small rural school in DeSoto Parish to join her husband as an instructor at Mansfield Colored School.

During the summer before the Johnsons could begin work, they had to improve the physical condition of the school, which proved to be a difficult task for the two of them. Upon requesting help from the community, the work was accomplished.

Children from all over the parish were attracted to the school, and as a result the enrollment increased. However, it was apparent that the space was inadequate, and additions to the staff would be necessary. The Johnsons realized that it would be a difficult task to provide for so many without funds from the local school board and the state, which was controlled by whites. Therefore, they began to organize The Mothers' Club, Parent Teachers Association, and a Board of Trustees in an effort to raise money and provide labor where needed.

As early as 1915, DeWitt Johnson wrote the following letter.

To the DeSoto Parish School Board (white):

> We desire (1) that the school be organized through the first eight grades (2) a good Domestic Science Department where the girls can be taught economic, cooking, and sewing (3) Gardening Department where the boys can learn to till the soil in a systematic way. To do this, we are greatly in need of (1) an enlarged building, at least two recitation rooms and a Domestic Science Classroom. We are trying to accomplish these improvements with the aid of patrons and friends.
> These we beg of you to provide. (DPTSAA, 2002, p.15)

In 1920, the DeSoto Parish School Board was able to secure funds from the Rosenwald Foundation. The buildings already constructed at the Mansfield Colored School provided the matching contribution, a necessary requirement to receive financial assistance from the Rosenwald building fund.

DeSoto Parish Training School replaced the Mansfield Colored School in 1925. It was organized to train black boys and girls from over the entire parish and dictated instruction that prepared blacks for manual labor. Men learned such crafts as plastering, joinery, and painting, in addition to agricultural science. Women were taught domestic sciences, such as ironing, dressmaking, and food preparation. DeWitt Johnson applied for the provision and the school was approved by the state to train teachers. The DeSoto Parish Training School graduated its first class in 1928.

Clara Byrd began attending the training school in the Fall of 1948. She recalls spending a lot of time in the home economics classes, and she became an excellent seamstress.

DeSoto Parish Training School was replaced by DeSoto High School in 1962 and finally closed in 1979 after sixty-four years of providing education to the black community in DeSoto Parish. Mansfield was left with one desegregated high school.

My Childhood

I was born January 15, 1934, in a small town called Grand Cane, Louisiana– that's between Logansport and Shreveport from a low socioeconomic status. I was born out of wedlock and I really did not know my father until I was a teenager. I think I was about twenty before I spent a night in his house, so I didn't know him that well.

I don't know whether or not my parents were class conscious. I don't know about my father, but my mother didn't appear to let it bother her. I didn't pick up on it. She worked very,

very hard and the thing that I remember most about her were what few things she purchased. She always wanted the best of whatever that was. It wasn't much, but she would save until she was able to get something with quality. So, I'm sure she knew her socioeconomic status, but I know I became increasingly conscious of it as I got older.

I grew up not wanting to ask for a lot. My mama tried to give me the things that I would ask for, and sometimes people would say I would make a statement like, "whatever I ask my mother for, she gets." That was true because I didn't ask her for it unless I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that she could get it, and the reason was I didn't want to hurt her feelings by asking her for something that she couldn't get. I was sensitive to our–I didn't know it was called socioeconomic status, but I was aware of the fact that we didn't have a lot.

"Home" on the Farm

Family was always exceptionally important to me, and I think it was because I was an only child. When I was growing up, all of my friends had brothers and sisters. Some came from large families, and some families were smaller. When I was back home growing up in the rural black community--okay, there was "home," my grandmother and my grandfather. I called them "ma" and "pa." My grandparents were farmers and the farm was the family gathering place where everybody would get together.

Well, what happened–my mother did not raise me alone and I had to move around a lot. There was a very extended family and we had relatives who lived kind of close. I spent most of the time with my grandparents, and then I had an aunt. I spent some [time] with her, her husband, and her daughter. Some of the other grandchildren would come to the farm, but they didn't have to stay. They would come for the summer. When we stayed there, they worked. My

cousins and other relatives would visit. Sometimes, they would come over and spend time–the whole family like that. Cousin Anna Mae, her husband, and her children may stay a night or a couple of nights with us. And I guess that was because we lived a good distance apart. It was very seldom that I was without anybody else for long periods of time staying with my grandparents. I don't remember the reason, but in the fifth grade I went to New Orleans and I lived with my aunt and her three children. We were just like sisters and brothers and to this day, her children and mine are all very close. When I started staying with my mother almost exclusively, I was alone then. However, the loneliness could have been much worse if I hadn't had my grandparents.

My mama never married my dad, but she got married twice. The first time, I guess, I don't know how old I was, maybe seven or eight–somewhere in there–but my mama and her husband separated; he moved to California and she stayed here. I remember him. I was very fond of him but also kind of scared of him because he was abusive, and I was so happy when he moved to California. [laugh] He was no longer there, but even when they were together, I didn't stay with my mama all of the time. I stayed with her sometimes, and then I would go back to the farm. So, I spent a lot of time with them (grandparents) when I was young.

We were living with my grandparents; then, my mother moved to Mansfield to work and so I stayed with them. Then, when I got to seventh or eighth grade I moved to Mansfield, too. When I got there, I had to go to school at a little church school there. It was a little public school, but they had a building by the church; so, I started staying with her for the school time.

I would go where I called "home" on the weekends and during the summer. Now, when I was there, I helped with all of the chores: picking cotton, the hoeing, the barn, the milking. I

learned how to do everything on the farm, to do whatever. I worked in the fields, whatever needed to be done. I thought it was great that I had to stay home one afternoon in the week from the field because I could iron. I learned how to milk; so, I would be the one to get up early. I knew how to do everything, and I thought it was being really smart. And I would tell my cousins, you all were really smarter than I was because you didn't have to do all of these things. But really I prided in the fact that I could do just about anything out there that needed to be done. I helped with the washing, ironing, farm work, but not the cooking.

My grandmother believed in doing her own cooking. She was an excellent cook, but we would do things like pitching in and preparing it to be cooked. She would have me clean the beans, shell the peas; we would put up a lot of fruit, peel the pears, yes, things like that. But the actual cooking of the meal, she did the cooking.

When I lived out there (country) we had a wagon. We came to town in the wagon with horses and we had seats–front seats and it was just something made that went across the wagon and you sat on the seat. So, we didn't have a car. My grandfather never had a car, ever. We had a wagon. And then after he got old, we took him riding in the car. Now, my mother's husband owned a car way back when because I can remember the car had this one seat and there was a little seat. They used to call it the mother-in-law seat in the back and you sat back there.

So when he (my grandfather) took me into town, we went in the wagon. And they had the hitching places where you would go. We wouldn't be alone. You'd be trudging along; there would be other wagons you would meet on the road or they would pass you on horses. Now, a lot of times when he wasn't taking the family, or didn't have a lot to get, he would go to town on his horse. Even to church, we would go in the wagon–my grandfather, grandmother, and the

children when he (my grandfather) had a son–his young son I can remember he was still there, but he would ride this horse to church. You could count the people who had cars back then. We just had hitching places for the horse, or for the wagons.

My daddy's father lived in Grand Cane, too, but a real distance from us, what we called "across the creek." I was not very close to him. I think I stayed with them once–I went to school at this place, I think it was called Old Zion--the schools at that time were named by the church that they were close too. I went to school one year with them and I'm trying to think, I don't know maybe third grade. They kept me one year. But I didn't really spend a lot of time with them. I didn't really like it over there with these grandparents.

I hated moving around and not having one place I could stay. I hated it! And that is why–and I always said, "If I ever have children I will never let this happen to them," and I didn't. My mama laughs about it now, but I never let her keep my children. I never let anybody keep my kids. I was very adamant about that because I didn't like it. Some of the relatives I lived with were really precious; I liked living with them. Some of them, I didn't. And I said I would never subject–and I think maybe I went overboard with it because I didn't let them go to spend a week, a weekend, never. I said I would never do it.

I felt lonely or cried at times. I wanted to be with my mother. And yes, I cried. Whenever she would leave or whenever I left her and so much so, I couldn't think about it. I remember staying with my dad's father and his stepmother–his mother was dead–and them saying to me, "If we take you to Friendship (that was my mama's church), are you going to cry to stay?" And I said, "No ma'am; I'm not going to cry." And I knew that there wasn't any way I wouldn't. Boy, I couldn't sleep! I was waiting to go and we went that Sunday. Miss Willie, my step-

grandmother, was driving the wagon and her friend was sitting on the second seat holding me, while I was screaming when we were leaving the church. I had promised I wasn't going to cry, but I was screaming for dear life for my mama. And I had an aunt, who was standing there as we passed by, and she just chucked me out of this lady's arms. Miss Willie just kept going. They didn't try to come back and get me or anything. And we laugh about that now. My aunt said, "Your mama is standing over there crying." So, I went home that day. But I said I would never. And I don't think my mama–I think she was doing what she had to do to make a living. But I hated it.

I talked to my mama about it, but she would say–there would be promises about getting a house and she was going to take me. But I was big before I really started staying with her full-time. But I hated it. She would do nice things, bring me nice little clothes, but I hated living with other people. She was trying to show me that she loved me. She was trying to show me, but I hated that! A lot of people say you do what you see other people do. But, I learned a lot of things not to do! And I never did them. For instance, I can't stand slap. I always said I will never slap my children, and I will never let my children go and stay with other people. I never even let them stay overnight. Never. I don't know that I was angry or hurt that the other children were living with their parents, but it just happened that it fell my lot that it happened to me and I hated it!

So what would happen, my mother would leave the country area in Grand Cane where we lived and she would go to–she went to Mansfield and worked, then she went to New Orleans and worked. I was with my grandparents at that time. I remember her working at a place called Mother's Bakery in New Orleans, and I remember in Mansfield she really did more or less housework, just domestic work. When she finally took me to Mansfield to live with her, that's

when I got to be seventh or eighth grade, she did washing and ironing for people. She would go to their homes, but she also took in ironing at her house, which enabled her to make more money because she would work at night, iron at night, and she would go from house to house to do the washing and ironing.

I had no brothers or sisters; however, my mother adopted a child when I was fifteen and I remember it as if it were yesterday because I cried so when she brought this baby home. I cried because I didn't feel like we could afford her, and I told my mama so. To me we were having kind of a hard time and couldn't understand for the life of me. Well, my mama just said it was one of her nieces. She said her sister was young and didn't know what to do with the baby and so my mama took this baby in.

My mother was married to her second husband then, but she also separated from him at the time that she fed this child. She was going to people's houses to wash and iron, and she would walk to what we call the eastside to Jenkins Street [in Mansfield]. It was–I don't know my perception of distance is awful–but it was a long way for me. I just didn't think it made sense to have to carry this child and let this child sit on a blanket while she ironed for these white people. I just couldn't understand–I don't believe I was jealous that I was not an only child anymore. Sometimes, my mama would say "you're just jealous" and sometimes other people, but I really don't feel that I was at all because I knew that she cared for me. I just felt so sorry for her because she worked so hard. I just could never understand why she would do this when we were barely making it. I knew the child's mother. Her mother was good. I just didn't see the sense in it.

Next to my mama, my grandfather was very special to me. He was my hero. The first thing about him that I really thought–when I was a small girl seeing him write checks and I didn't know the essence behind it–in this book where there are lots of pages–and just really thought he was rich because he could write checks and I had no idea. Now, he was not what you call a highly educated man, but I thought he was a very intelligent person.

Second, I thought he was smart because he thought I was smart. He made me feel that he believed in me. He just thought I knew everything. He thought I was capable of learning everything because he would–he taught me all kinds of things like how to hoe, to plow, to pick cotton–all of the things on the farm and I knew how to wash and to iron. I learned these things really early, and I can remember the reason I kind of felt I was special was because on certain days like on a Friday afternoon, I didn't have to work in the field because I knew how to iron. So, I would be brought out of the fields to do the ironing, or there were little things I could do: like how to milk, how to make butter, how to churn. All the chores on the farm I learned how to do.

I didn't resent having to do chores, not at all that was just part–it was a part of life–but there were some who tried to learn to do things and some who didn't and we laugh about it now because I thought I was really, really smart but I really wasn't. [laugh] Other children that lived on farms resented chores or they didn't do chores. They tried to get out of it! They didn't learn to do those things so they didn't have to do many; they didn't have to get up early in the morning to milk because they didn't know how. I don't remember the hour I had to get out of bed, but I know it was at the crack of dawn. You need to get up very early and milk. When I think about it,

I really wasn't as smart as I thought I was just because they didn't learn how to do a lot of the things that I did. I thought I was so smart because I knew how to do everything.

My grandfather told me that he really didn't go to school that much because he would have to leave to take care of the farm. But he said that he really didn't get passed he said the third grade, but that was hard for me to believe because he wrote well, as far as signing his name and writing notes and things of that sort. He had even at that time–we were living on what was a 60-acre plot–that was his. He had his own wagon and horses and mules and all of the animals out there–cows. And that was considered being–you were kind of looked up to for being pretty well off if you had some cows and horses. So those things made me–and he would sit even way back then and talk to me all of the time and especially if something went wrong at school.

I recall my grandfather buying me candy because there used to be traveling salesmen who would come by selling things. Then, they had these stands down from the church. The children would be given money for spending when we would go to things like that and then when we would come to "town," as we called it, we would get money to spend. Now, I can remember earning money, like if we were through, they called it "laying by the crop." If we were through with our crop, there is a period after you hoed it all; and then, they would turn the dirt and they called it "laying by." Once you did that, you just waited until the cotton matured or until the corn was ready to pick. So, you would have a rest period in there. If there were farmers who needed workers to help them, sometimes we were allowed to go and maybe help them to hoe their corn, and you earned some money that way.

Old-Time Religion and Socializing

Church was always a very important part of our lives. My (maternal) grandfather read the Bible to me and then when I got up in size, I read it to him. They–that was both my maternal and paternal grandfathers–because I used to spend some time with both of them. And more so my paternal grandfather, I read it more, much more to him than I did my mother's father because I don't think my daddy's father could read, but my mother's father could.

"Friendship Baptist" was the name of our little country church. Even now Friendship Baptist Church is still thriving, but nobody lives out there. People come because they have transportation to come in their cars. People still come back for Sunday services in August. So, that's still a tradition there. People still come from far and near.

Actually back in those times, each church had a Sunday service only once a month because this was way out in the country. So, we would go to Friendship on one Sunday and then to another church the next Sunday. So, the pastor had to travel to two and three churches; they didn't have just one. On Sundays it would just be the family: my grandmother, grandfather, and whichever grandchildren were there. Now, they actually raised one grandchild. One grandchild was given to them, Hazel. Hazel was always there; I mean she lived there all of the time. The rest of us would come on weekends after we moved and had to go to town to go to school. I had one aunt and her family who lived close to my grandparents; now, they would come with us on Sundays. The ones that lived in what we call "in town" and then some children moved to Shreveport, they didn't come down on Sundays. Houston and New Orleans, that's where the three girls lived, they came maybe twice a year.

The biggest community event that I can think of was during the summer when different churches had what they called their "baptizing." See, they didn't do like the churches do now, baptize when we wanted too. There was a time that they called "Meeting Closing," and they would have revivals once a year and that was in the summer.

The time I remember most would be in August when everyone would come home. The first Sunday in August was called "Homecoming" in our church, and all of the children came for that weekend because that would be the baptizement at our country church. Now, even though I lived there most of the time, I would go there on the weekends even when I got in middle school and high school. When I got above elementary I would come home every weekend. During the summer, my aunt who lived in New Orleans and her children would come home. Another aunt, who lived in Mansfield, and her children would come, also. They would have a large group of grandchildren during the summer.

Friendship's baptizement and "Homecoming" were the first Sunday in August, Cedar Hills was the second Sunday in August, and Evergreen's was the third Sunday in August. So, through July and August, that was a big event. Every Sunday you had a church to go to where they were having what they called "Meeting Closing." Everyone in our family even those who lived elsewhere–I think Houston is probably the most distant, Shreveport, Mansfield–they all came home that weekend for the first Sunday in August. So when everyone came home–my grandparents' home was the gathering place. And way back in those early times, you would be out in the country and you would have the Meeting Closing, the baptizing, and people had little stands where they would be selling hamburgers and cold drinks. They couldn't come on the church grounds, but down from there it was just wonderful where you could buy ice cream. And

it seems so funny, but at that time we didn't have stores out there so this was a big thing. It was just food that you could buy–candy and ice cream and cold drinks. Some people enjoyed the food during church time, but we knew better. We were in church. I always enjoyed church and the services. People would come from miles around and the church was full. Many came for the social life, meeting people, and going to the little stands and buying things. It was almost like a carnival. The family would get together on Sunday after church. I enjoyed this time in August the most. Everybody would come. Sunday dinner was always special after church because my grandmother was the best cook in the world, and we always had such good food and all of the family together.

So, socializing would mainly be talking to people at church on Sunday and after. The 19th of June was also a big time when we would have neighbors and cousins who would come by and visit with us. When I was a little girl, we didn't celebrate the fourth of July. We celebrated the 19th of June. They don't call it June 19th; they call it Juneteenth.[4] That was the day that Negroes found out that they were free from slavery. So, people would get together just like people get together for the 4th of July and have picnics. We got together and barbecued things that day. We had a big–I guess you would call it a yard that was fenced in and around the house, and that's where we would barbecue out there and get cold drinks. I mean, we just had a big time like we do now for the 4th of July, when the children come home and we eat and cook a lot of good food. Juneteenth was our day of celebration. And if you look in the papers, it's coming back to some, like Houston, now. Even in Baton Rouge for the last few years, they have had Juneteenth celebrations. It wasn't until I was maybe in college that we celebrated the 4th of July. Before then, we didn't.

There were other special times that we reached out to people who weren't related or who came by. Now, a social activity that my grandfather had, I guess you would call it, a syrup meal where people would come to his house to put their syrup out because he had this big thing where you could grind the sugar cane and the sorghum and make the syrup. So, sometimes they would bring the children while they were doing this; so, sometimes we had a lot of people coming to our house.

A World of Whites

Grand Cane was a little place that had stores rowed up along the highway going to Shreveport or Mansfield. At the time that I was growing up, there was just, on that highway, maybe three or four stores, maybe a little merchandise store and a grocery store and maybe something else. But that was it on one side of the street. And it was run by Whites. I did not see Whites until we went to the town of Grand Cane and they were the shopkeepers. I don't know anything about any black businesses in Grand Cane. But actually, when we went to what we called the town, or to the store, we went to Mansfield because we were about as far from Grand Cane as we were from Mansfield. When I was not in Grand Cane, there were more Whites. Now when I moved to Mansfield to live with my mother, I was very conscious of what they looked like, a world of them and not that many of us. That's the way it looked. I must have been somewhere like twelve and older. Until then, I would visit sometimes, but most of my time was spent in Grand Cane out in what we call the country now.

Where I was living and growing up, everything was run (community leaders) by white people who had power. There were some leaders in the black community. I can remember one or two people that you could go to, who could help you to get things somehow. There was this guy

whose last name was Clark. There were one or two people that you would go to, like if they needed assistance if they had a crippled child or if they needed to find out services. But, most things were just really run by White people.

I can remember one or two people, and this is later in life, who may have had a little store–black people on a corner or something, but that was much later in life. Things were just run by Whites, as far as I know. At the time when I was there (Grand Cane and Mansfield), the only black businessmen I knew, and there may have been others, but the only ones I knew were farmers and barbers. There was one, Isaac Reed, who had a dry-cleaning business. And, there was a person, who had an eating center, a barbecue place where you could go, but that was in what you call South Mansfield.

I never played with white children. In the first place there weren't any living nearby, as far as I knew. I knew where some were living kind of close to our church, but I didn't play with them. When I went to high school, there were no Whites. It was a totally black school. So, my experience with Whites would be working for them, but they weren't around when I would bring them the ironing. I didn't play with–I worked. When I was in high school, I would babysit for white children. I remember very well Mrs. Ross and there was another lady, Miss Louise, I don't remember her last name, but I worked for them. I had done that, but not a whole lot. So, my exposure to the white community was very, very limited. When I was in high school there weren't any white students. I don't know of any that were at Southern [University] at the time I was there.

I don't ever remember my grandfather talking about any activity by the Ku Klux Klan in our area. I didn't even know about them until I learned about them in school. But, I never heard

of any problems like that or anything with the Klan. I really didn't. Now later on, I did after talking to, hearing people talk about it. But my grandfather–I don't know whether it was the region, the area, I don't know what it was, but I never heard them talking about them having any major difficulties.

However, we did have experience with Jim Crow laws. What I remember was when I was working for white people and going in the back door because you didn't go to the front door when you went to their houses. I remember when we would go to Mansfield, there was a little fish market where you could buy your dinner while you were in town, but the Blacks went in a little section in the back of the fish market. You didn't go in where you could sit down. You went to the back and they would bring your sandwich to the window and sell it to you and you sat in the wagon. When you went in stores, you were waited on when they got through waiting on the white people. I remember Jim Crow laws very well. I mean even in these people's houses who you worked for, if you were working all day you ate when they finished eating. They would call you while you were washing or cleaning up; you went and ate after they finished eating. So, I remember those laws very, very well!

I can remember, even here in Baton Rouge, and I moved here in 1961, sitting in a different waiting room than the Whites at the doctor. I remember signs that said, "For Coloreds Only." I really don't remember at what point it happened that it really sank in what was going on, but I remember being disgusted about it. I can remember even when I was working being disgusted about it. But, at that time, I didn't feel that there was anything I could do about it. I still had my pride.

I can remember people telling me–I remember my mother used to–my mother worked for the Guy family, and I worked when I would go home for a break (college) and I didn't go to summer school. Mrs. Guy used to tell mother how dressed up I would come to work. I wasn't dressed up, but I was just neat. I believed in that, and she would make some kind of statement that I came to work looking better than she was looking or some comment like that. But, I had that sense of pride.

I really didn't like it (Jim Crow laws), but I don't remember feeling that there was anything I could do about it. I really don't. I don't remember questioning why it was the way it was. I can remember all of these things coming to my mind as I got older and things like that, but when I was little, when I was growing up I don't remember questioning why it was separate.

I remember very well–I think I was in college–when these things started breaking down and I felt better. But then in other places, it was a little better than in Mansfield because when I was in New Orleans, you didn't have to say "yes, ma'am and no, ma'am" to white people, but in Mansfield you did. My grandfather said, "yes, ma'am and no, ma'am," to the youngsters. You had to do it. But in New Orleans, you didn't have to, and I don't know what made the difference because I know when I lived with my aunt at that time, whites were much friendlier. They worked together. I remember my aunt worked at Mack and Tobias. There were Whites right back there with her. Sometimes, some of those women would come by the house. It was like a different world!

I understand my family got along fine during the depression because my grandfather was a farmer, and there was food or you could barter things. They didn't have money, others did. But

they didn't suffer in terms of food because they had the horses, the cows, the chickens, the eggs, and the farm.

Now when World War II was coming, I was about six years old and staying out on the farm, and I saw that in fields there were tents.[5] What do they call that? Bivouac or something where the soldiers go out, they go out into wooded area and they lived. I didn't know what they were doing. But they were out in the woods on our place–on my grandfather's place. They would just be out there in their tents. That's where they would camp out. I don't know how long they stayed. It wasn't something that they just stayed there forever, but it must have been a kind of training thing where they would go out in the countryside and stay and I guess practice survival.

I didn't really talk to the soldiers. In our culture, when adults came, they had this expression "Children stay in children's place." When I was growing up with my grandmother, children just didn't–I guess they called it "interfere." I was afraid of the soldiers, but my grandmother and they all were saying it was nothing to be afraid of. We were all concerned when we first saw them. I can recall the soldiers themselves being a little apprehensive, but they came, and they were nice as far as I can remember.

My grandmother would cook for them. They came to the house to hire my grandmother to cook them biscuits. She was an excellent cook. And they would pay her to cook things for them. They wanted these meals, this home-cooked stuff. They were just out there, and then they would come to get the food that my grandmother had cooked. She made money on them; I don't know how much. And they would come to the well and get water because we had a well with the bucket. They would come there, but then they would disappear back into the woods.

Fort Polk and another military installation is relatively close to Bossier City and Shreveport. I forgot what they call it–Barksdale. That's not too far from us. I guess about forty-some miles. I mean it's closer, I believe, than Fort Polk. I don't know where they came from. We just saw them; you'd see those trucks and at first you were afraid. I can remember the adults laughing about seeing them and how one of the women–she ran. And then one, I think it was one of my aunts, said something about one of the soldiers putting his hands on her shoulders and said, "We're not going to hurt you." They didn't, but I'm going to tell you the truth, we didn't see a lot of white people out there when I was little. There were some families, but they were, well you wouldn't call it quite a distance now, but at that time you called it a distance because of the mode of transportation. We didn't have cars. There were white people who lived along the road from Grand Cane to the church. But there were none who were really close to us. There were some a little closer, a place they call Well Springs, maybe about halfway between where the church is and where we lived. But as far as being really close and where you could see them every day or even every week, we didn't see them much.

The soldiers settled on the farmland that didn't have crops. So, it must have been during the time that the crops were already gathered. I know we must have been through picking the cotton because I don't remember going out to the fields while they were there, so it must have been in the winter time, or near winter when they were out there.

Lots of Education

Most of my early education I went to schools in Grand Cane and Mansfield and then to training school (high school) in Mansfield. They were totally black schools, but I'll tell you something, that the earliest thing I remember about school was in this little school next to the

church. I went to elementary school in Grand Cane. It was a little public school that was started right next our church (Friendship Baptist). And some people talk about the one room schoolhouse; this was a two-room schoolhouse. I don't really recall, but I think this school went to the eighth grade. I know it wasn't high school, but I stayed there for about two years. One of my first teachers was a gentleman member of our church and he convinced me beyond a shadow of a doubt that I was so smart. [loud laugh] Anyone who came he would call me to read to them. I can think back in the second grade, just anyone who would come by the school, he would say, "Come and let Clara read to you." So, before I left that little country school, I was aware, or I thought I was aware, that I was very–we called it smart, then. We talk about intelligence and all this, but this is what I had and that idea was fostered by my grandfather.

I spent a lot of time by myself. So, I did a lot of reading. I did a lot of working, doing little math things and entertaining myself. So, I enjoyed this. When I was growing up, I had access to some books, not a whole lot of them. And I'm going to tell you, I used to get magazines because my grandfather would go to town and there used to be a place where you would go, they called it the Feed and Seed Store that he would go to. The owner of this store must have liked him because he would give him stacks of old newspapers and magazines. And I loved every bit of it. I would just plow through all of that. I didn't have a lot of books that I bought, no. But somehow we always had books, and this man used to give us old newspapers. He would save them for my grandfather. I remember when we got our first radio. I was, I don't know, older. I was old enough to remember, I know that. Actually, we didn't get it. I had an aunt who got married to a person from New Orleans, he was out there teaching, and they had one. It was so exciting for me!

We walked to school when we were going to school out in the country. That was a long walk. There were other children, too. I don't know how long it took us to get to school, but it was what I considered a long way. I'll tell you, it was funny. Believe it or not, we used to maybe take a bag of peanuts or something, and we would hide them by a tree so that when we got out of school we could have these things to eat. I'm serious; we lived a long way from there, but we didn't want to miss school. I can remember it raining and the water getting up high, but we didn't want to miss school. I think it was fun because you would go up the road a little piece and then there would be those (kids) that–if they would get there first, they would kind of wait for you. So, it was a fun thing walking to school and back, but it was a long walk.

In the fifth grade I went to New Orleans. The school I went to was Thomy Lafon Elementary, which has long since closed, and that was for one year. I can't say that experience was different from my other experiences in terms of say the courses in the school and the students and my relationship with them. The thing I think of the most about Thomy Lafon was that I used to wear–see it got cold in North Louisiana–and I wore knee-socks. I remember some of the children laughing and making fun of me because I wore knee-socks in New Orleans in the wintertime. I didn't wear them in the summertime, but in the wintertime it's really cold in Shreveport, even colder than here in Baton Rouge. So, they didn't wear knee-socks and they thought that was the funniest thing. But, I remember that school fondly because there was a teacher who recognized me. She had me to compete in a speech contest and we had to memorize "The Negro Mother," which was the name of the poem:

> Children, I come back today
> To tell you a story of the long dark way
> That I had to climb, that I had to know
> In order that the race might live and grow.

Look at my face–dark as the night–
Yet shining like the sun with love's true light.
I am the child they stole from the sand
Three hundred years ago in Africa's land.
I am the dark girl who crossed the wide sea
Carrying in my body the seed of the free.
I am the woman who worked in the field
Bringing the cotton and the corn to yield.
I am the one who labored as a slave,
Beaten and mistreated for the work that I gave–
Children sold away from me, husband sold, too.
No safety, no love, no respect was I due.
Three hundred years in the deepest South:
But God put a song and a prayer in my mouth.
God put a dream like steel in my soul.
Now, through my children, I'm reaching the goal.
Now, through my children, young and free,
I realize the blessings denied to me.
I couldn't read then. I couldn't write.
I had nothing, back there in the night.
Sometimes, the valley was filled with tears,
But I kept trudging on through the lonely years.
Sometimes, the road was hot with sun,
But I had to keep on till my work was done:
I had to keep on! No stopping for me–
I was the seed of the coming Free.
I nourished the dream that nothing could smother
Deep in my breast–the Negro mother.
I had only hope then, but now through you,
Dark ones of today, my dreams must come true:
All you dark children in the world out there,
Remember my sweat, my pain, my despair.
Remember my years, heavy with sorrow–
And make of those years a torch for tomorrow.
Make of my past a road to the light
Out of the darkness, the ignorance, the night.
Lift high my banner out of the dust.
Stand like free men supporting my trust.
Believe in the right, let none push you back.
Remember the whip and the slaver's track.
Remember how the strong in struggle and strife
Still bar you the way, and deny you life–
But march ever forward, breaking down bars.
Look ever upward at the sun and the stars.

Oh, my dark children, may my dreams and my prayers
Impel you forever up the great stairs–
For I will be with you till no white brother
Dares keep down the children of the Negro mother.
by Langston Hughes (1931)

I didn't win, but I had never been asked to be in a competition like that. To this day I can still remember most of the words to the poem. At the time the words didn't really have any meaning for me, but as I went on in school I used the poem in many projects. As I became older, the poem began to have more and more meaning for me.

When I started staying more with my mother–I won't say moved because I would still go back to my [grand]parents on the weekend. That was when I was in something like seventh or eighth grade. I started living with my mother in Mansfield and that's a very short distance maybe ten miles from Grand Cane.

It wasn't that I moved there because economically she could afford to have me live with her. I moved there because of school–to go. It was better there, and see when we were going to school in the country I had to walk a long, long way to school and when I moved with her in middle school–it wasn't called that then–but it was just a short distance. And so I went there to an all-black school. I would still come back to my [grand]parents on the weekend and then go back on Sunday and live with her to go to school. When I was going to Northwestern, we lived on the east side and I walked to school. So, we were close to the schools other than when I was in the country.

DeSoto Parish Training School

I went to high school in Mansfield. It was called DeSoto Parish Training School at that time. I started there in the Fall of 1948 and graduated from that school in May of 1951. The

school campus had four buildings. When you went into the main building, the office and the auditorium were in the middle. There was a wing on each side. Math and social studies classes were in one wing and science and English classes were in the other wing. The main building was built on a slope, so we had a library down in a basement under the science classroom because I can remember climbing the stairs to get to my classes. We had an agriculture building that we called the "shop," and I spent a lot of time in the home economics building. There was also an elementary school building with the cafeteria behind the end of it. But, it's really hard to explain how small all of those buildings and classrooms were back then.

The only course that I really, really was interested in was biology, but I did well in all of them. I didn't have a chance to explore any interests because really the only electives we had there were home economics and shop and agriculture. I took home economics for four years. That was my elective. They didn't have all of the different math courses, all of the typing and the things we have now.

When I was in high school, I had the feeling that the expectations of me were not that much from some of the teachers and I felt that for several reasons. Mainly, I didn't have that much and it wasn't hard for them to realize that my mother for much of that time was a one parent and that wasn't that popular back then. My mother said she stopped [school] at the seventh grade because they had to leave the country to go to town to go to school. They didn't have it past the seventh grade at this little school. She said they would go to town and stay with a cousin, but she didn't stay that long and then I came along. So, she did get what we would call elementary [education]. That's as far she got.

Even in growing up, I had a step dad who used to tell my mom, “Oh, she is not going to amount to anything, you’re just crazy about her. And it wasn’t that she didn’t let me have my way, but she somehow wanted better for me, and I considered her as acting like she loved me. She wanted me to visit my cousin, my uncle in Houston to stay with them. I could go to the zoo and I could do things that they didn’t even have in Mansfield. And she always would buy books. That was a part of my thing. And my step dad’s sisters were a little bit different. And so I just had to push my way through things. And even in high school, I was not called the teacher’s pet. I was not the choice all the time. If I thought it was something that should be done, I did it. And if I didn’t think it was something that should be done, most times I didn’t. But the teachers, they learned me. I can remember distinctly one time they had hired people on the campus. And we had one teacher named Mrs. Blubber. If you didn’t do your homework, sometimes she would make you go out there and rake and pick up straws (pine needles). And that was exceptionally embarrassing. But some kids took it as a joke. You know they had fun getting out of the class. But I will never forget, one day someone stole my homework. And really, when I got in that class and didn’t have my homework and I started crying, you know she didn’t send me out there. That teacher knew I would never come without my homework. What I’m saying is, they knew me. There was some things I was not going to do. And one of them was coming to school without my homework.

DeSoto Parish Training School was a totally black school. There was Mansfield High–that was the white school, the counterpart. There was no coming together of the two schools or any connection between the students from the one school to the other, absolutely not. Even on the street there was no type of interaction. The only interaction I had with white people, period,

was babysitting, cleaning their homes, or giving them their clothes. When we came to iron them (the clothes), they (the Whites) weren't there. When I ironed–because as I got older we were really able to do reasonably well–my mother would say either she would iron until 12 o'clock and then she would wake me up to iron or vice versa. So, we were able to work at night and to make good money, what we called good at that time. And that's why I said we didn't have that much, but she believed in trying to do as much as possible.

My mother didn't have a house at that time. We were renting a house. She really did not get a house until I left [home]. My grandmother passed, and I was in college then. They later moved the house that was out in the country. It was a nice house. That was one thing about my grandfather. It was nice in quality standards at that time. And those were the things that made him stand out. He was just a cut above for people out in the country. He had more than he needed. So, they moved that house to town.

Really from an economic standpoint, there were people that I saw who were really suffering. I saw people worse off than we were, as far as my [grand]parents' life. Now, my mother wasn't doing that well until–as I got older and we were able to take in more clothes to iron by our sharing. So, that's what I was doing during my high school years.

When I was coming through high school, I never thought I was going to college. I had decided that I was going to be a cosmetologist. That was my great ambition. And I really think when you hear me say that people had fewer expectations than I would like for them to have had of me it wasn't because I wasn't smart, or I wasn't doing well in school, but I think the general population there, teachers included, knew that I wasn't going to college. There was no way that I could go.

My mother was washing and ironing clothes. So you just don't make that much. So, it was finances! My ambition was to be a cosmetologist, and the reason it was that was because I felt that was reachable. I had brainwashed myself with that–the very thing that I would tell children not to visualize; however, I felt at the time, you have to set your sights on things you can do. College, at that time, I saw as an impossibility. I didn't see any way. I didn't know about the scholarships and all of that kind of stuff. I knew that it was impossible for my mother to send me to college. So, that was just a solution to my problem. It was doable!

My grandfather knew that I wanted to be a cosmetologist. He encouraged me as far as getting education, but I don't remember him telling me a lot about going to college. I think he accepted that [I wasn't going], but I'm not sure; I just don't remember that. And I thought that was why in school some of the teachers didn't give me a part in the senior play and little things like that. I was not considered an honor student, even though I had all A's and Bs. At that time, the school chose "honor students," and they would speak at graduation, those six students, that's all! I don't know how they chose the top six, and those were the ones that were honored at graduation. Well, coming through high school it was my ambition to show them. I said, "I'm not noticed, but you just wait until I graduate. I'll show them," because I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that I was going to be one of those six. I remember I was not a part of the senior play so I said, "hmm," I know why. You didn't have to try out. They just chose the people who would be in the play. And so I was not in it. I was what you would call a "monitor." I had to hold the book and let the children read, and keep them in place, but I knew in my heart that they were saving me because I had to learn that speech for graduation.

The day that they came in the auditorium and announced the six honor students, and my name was not called. I was torn up, but pride would not let it show. So, as I went across the campus there were students saying, “Oh, Clara, I’m so surprised!” I smiled and replied, “It’s okay,” but I remember when I got to my house my grandfather was there. I opened the door and went into hysterics, and I remember him saying to me that they can’t take it out of your head. He talked with me and I was okay, but hurt because that was the one time that I was going to let Mansfield know that I was somebody and that had enabled me to be tolerant of some of the things that were happening to me coming through [school].

What happened I think–there were the educated people (parents) who had students that they thought would be able to go to college. I can remember right now some of my friends who all had their fathers, and one father was a barber and that was a big thing in that place. And so, there were certain students whose economic status was such that they assumed they were going to school, but a long time in my senior year my mother wasn’t even “working.” And I used to have to leave school every day at noon to go home and take care of her because she was ill. They knew I wasn’t going. They thought they knew, and I thought I knew, too.

When Southern [University] came giving a test to students, Miss Henderson asked to just let me take the test anyway–even though, I wasn’t supposed too because I was not an honor student, at least not according to their definition of it. If you made a really good score on this test, you could get a scholarship. Now, I’m saying that only these six students were targeted to go on to college, only these six. We did not have two tracks. We did not have college prep. We just had math and science. There were no honors [classes]. So, she just said that they didn’t want me to take it–for what? And she just asked them for it, “I’m just interested–just let her take it,

anyway." So, I did. Now, I didn't know all of this at that time. I was told later. I took the test, and I was the only student who got a scholarship to Southern [University] that year.

They did not give me that scholarship at graduation. I got the letter from Southern the last day of school. I was walking across the campus and the principal said, "Byrd, come by my office. I have something for you." And he gave me that letter and that's when I knew I was going to college. I don't think it was a conspiracy. think that was the norm. I don't know what it was. I just think they felt that they would have been wasting the college's time to give me this test because I wasn't going to school. How could I go with my mother not working, and evidently some people there other than Miss Henderson didn't think I would get a scholarship. But even after I got it–I could understand why they didn't give it to me at graduation. I can understand now. Can you imagine how badly it would have made them look– I mean? [laugh] I can look back now and laugh at it, but I had a chip on my shoulder for about six years. After I went to Southern [University], I really think it helped me because I was determined to show them that they were wrong by not allowing me to be an honor student. And so I went to Southern [University] and I did exceptionally well.

Looking back, when I think about those days now, picking cotton–to be perfectly frank, I hated it then. When the cotton season was in, I went out and picked and hoed the cotton when it was first planted, and I was really good at it. Now, my husband talks about when he was really young, he said, "I always thought that I would have some money. I always thought about that when I grow up." Do you know I can remember being on that farm and pulling this cotton sack going down the road? And I honestly couldn't see any way out. I didn't like it then. But I could not visualize getting out of this. I'm going to tell you something that I've told my husband.

When I was a teenager–well, a young beginning of teen–I don't know why, but I used to think that maybe I wasn't going to live to get grown because I could not visualize myself out of the situation I was in. I think I only started getting that glimpse and getting that vision when I started in high school and I was able to run into people and see things. You live out in the country and you live far from people. There were–a whole week could pass and you saw nobody other than the people in your household because it wasn't like we were on a major road or highway, or anything like that. And I just couldn't see any way out of there because I was living with my grandparents at that time. And my mama, well she went to New Orleans for a while, and then she stayed in Mansfield and worked. And I couldn't, I really couldn't see–I couldn't see my way out of that situation. But as I said, after I got in high school–and I don't know what it was in high school, I guess the teachers and all, and then I started visualizing. But my visions then weren't that great.

I think there are some black children today who feel the same way, not that many probably because right now there are just so many ways you can get to college. And then people have better, many of them. There are some whose plight is much better than mine. And I think they're wiser. They know more. They have television. They know about scholarships and financial aid–they know so much more than I did about the world beyond where they are. I didn't know all of that. I had been to New Orleans and to Shreveport–I had not been very far. Children today–even these children just like at Glen Oaks and all these racially identifiable black schools–even in a pocket of poverty where these schools are, there is still hope there.

Today there are people like the man in New Orleans who comes into the schools and says, "You make these grades, and I'll see that you go to college." There are so many ways that

you can do it now, but those ways weren't available when I was growing up. And then, I didn't even know about the scholarship at Southern [University]. When I took the test, I didn't know I was taking it to possibly get a scholarship. I don't even think anybody told me that. I took the test, but I guess I just did it because Miss Henderson had tried so hard to convince them to let me take it, and I didn't want to let her down.

Reflections

I traveled to Grand Cane and Mansfield, shortly after our interviews began. I wanted a better understanding of the places Clara was talking about and to get a sense of the place from where she came. In Grand Cane, I stood on top of the hill in front of Friendship Church that looks down over the cemetery between the church and the road. It was rolling farmland with no crops. The heat was intense, but the quietness of the countryside was somehow comforting. I walked among the gravestones of Clara's relatives–her beloved grandfather and grandmother, aunts, uncles, and cousins. They were all there. Grand Cane was just as Clara had described it. There was a single row of shops, mostly selling antiques, along one side of the road.

Mansfield, on the other hand, was a busy little town. I found the property where the DeSoto Parish Training School once stood. The original white wooded building funded by Julius Rosenwald had been moved to the back of the property. It is in a very dilapidated state; however, it remains a historic site. You could make out the outline of the foundations of the other buildings long gone from the school yard. While there, I was fortunate to visit with Lloyd Jackson, a former colleague of Clara's, who showed me pictures of Ms. Henderson, the black students (all nicely dressed) walking down the dirt road to the school, and the cafeteria. He said he remembered Clara as being a person who could have been anything she wanted to be. I took

pictures of the places I went, and I gave her copies of them. She was so excited, and we had a grand time going through them. I felt closer to her through being able to visualize the places about which she talked; however, I would never be able to understand the society into which she was born.

Clara Byrd was born into the segregated society of the Deep South. Although Blacks and Whites coexisted, her only contact with them was babysitting their children and helping her mother with their washing and ironing. When they went to town, she saw them. However, Jim Crow laws prevented much interaction.

And yet, it was not race that so much bothered Clara as a child, it was the unfairness of class distinctions within her own race. What seemed to be so painful was the fact that it was the black community, her own people, who made her struggle against this feeling of being less than she was (Anderson, 1966). When I was interviewing Clara, the hurt was still in the tone of her voice.

A central problem of Clara's was that of status. She underwent an intense struggle for position, recognition, and a sense of belonging. One of the strongest threats to her emotionally was the family setting. For Clara, frequent moving was a threat to her security. Though, even so, I found that from the way she talked about her grandfather, he provided the stability she desperately needed.

Class structure is seen as relevant insofar as it constitutes one of the factors which shape an individual's own achievements and motivations. Personality can be conceived as the organization of the individual's habits and behavior patterns in adjustment to the environment

and the effort not merely to survive but to achieve. Clara had achievement motivation to strive for success and to avoid failure (Gurin, 1975).

From Clara Byrd's story, there are indications of concern for status, for prestige, and for security within her culture. But, most importantly, she was able to maintain a certain integrity and adjustment to the community in which she found herself. Clara had motivation to achieve and she had choices before her. Cosmetology was a viable career choice that would bring her to the city; however, the dedication to her education gave her another choice that afforded her a chance for upward mobility. Her scholarship to Southern University could fulfill her vision of a better life and with her, on her journey to college, she carried the seeds of her future activism.

End Notes

1. The historian in me wants to know how Clara's grandfather acquired his land, the ownership of which still remains in the family. Clara has made inquiries of various family members; however, no one has the answer. Since the subject is outside the scope of this study, I have not pursued it any further.

2. Historical information on Grand Cane, Louisiana is draw from unpublished manuscripts written by Brown & Richardson, A History of Grand Cane, Vol 1 & 2.

3. Information about the historical development of DeSoto Parish Training School was obtained from D.T.P.S Alumni Association Reunion Brochures.

4. An important social event sponsored by the black church is the date that the last slaves in America were freed. Although the rumors of freedom were widespread prior to this, actual emancipation did not come until General Gordon Granger rode into Galveston, Texas and issued General Order No.3, on June 19, almost two and a half years after President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. Juneteenth celebrates the end of slavery and has come to symbolize for many blacks what the fourth of July symbolizes for all Americans freedom. The celebration grew with more participation from descendants and continues today to be a time for reassuring each other, for praying, and for gathering remaining family members. Religion has always been at the root of the observance of this holiday. Therefore, it is not surprising the black church has always played a pivotal role in keeping alive the meaning of Juneteenth (Taylor, 2002).

5. Soldiers camped on Clara's grandfather's farmland while she was staying there. Fort Polk, near Leesville, became one of the nation's largest Army training bases. In 1940-1941, the Army conducted a massive war games exercise throughout western and northern Louisiana to ready the troops for effective war combat, known as the Louisiana Maneuver. Dwight Eisenhower and George Patton distinguished themselves as commanders in the exercise (Wall, 1997). George Patton was quartered in Grand Cane on maneuvers prior to deployment to Europe in World War II. A resident of the town recounts the story of General Patton coming into the Cook & Douglas Store and being taken in back by her grandfather to the fitting area. General Patton was eaten up by red-bugs or chiggers and her grandfather stripped him down and treated him with Tichenor's Antiseptic (Brown & Richardson, 1994).

CHAPTER 3

COLLEGE YEARS AT SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

Introduction

In the Fall of 1951, Clara arrived at Southern University and A & M College located five miles north of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, with her scholarship in hand and a deep sense of responsibility for her mother back in Mansfield. She quickly moved into her room in one of the four women's dormitories.

According to James Anderson (1988), 29,269 black students were attending private and public colleges in the southern states and the District of Columbia in 1935 (p. 275). Of that total, the majority, 16,670, were women. Charles Vincent (1981) states that the growth of Southern University's enrollment increased from 1,564 in 1946 to 4,315 in 1956 (p. 163). However, he does not break the enrollment down by gender.

Although the opportunity to receive teacher training was available at DeSoto Parish Training School under the auspices of the Julius Rosenwald Fund, Clara was convinced that she was going to become a cosmetologist; therefore, she never entertained the idea of teaching. When Clara received her scholarship and arrived at Southern, she did not have much choice in her decision to become a science teacher. Once she began her studies in biology, she secretly wanted to continue on to become a doctor and she knew she could do the work that it would take to become one. The reality of being black and female in the 1950s, however, provided only barriers to pursuing such an occupation.

It did not take Clara long upon starting her classes at Southern to realize that "I had a lot of catching up to do" because of the lack of upper level courses offered at her training school.

DeSoto Parish Training School was modeled after the Washington-Rosenwald theory that Blacks should be educated in the vocational arts, rather than the liberal arts.

Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois

Clara did not know that her situation was a result of the problem of Negro leadership during the twenty years between 1895 and 1915 and the issues raised by the celebrated debate between Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois. The heated controversy concerned their racial policies, which among other things included the method of education best suited to the advancement of their race.

The problem facing Negro leadership was clear: how to obtain first-class citizenship for the Negro American. The path to reaching this goal caused considerable debate among Negro leaders. The majority suggested that Negroes use peaceful, democratic means to change undesirable conditions. Some black leaders encouraged Negroes to become skilled workers, hoping that if they became indispensable to the prosperity of the South, political and social rights would be granted to them. Others advocated a struggle for civil rights, specifically the right to vote, on the theory that economic and social rights would follow.

Negro leadership near the turn of the century was divided between these two tactics for racial equality, which may be termed the economic strategy and the political strategy. The most heated controversy in Negro leadership at this time raged between two remarkable black men–Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois. The major spokesman for the gradualist economic strategy was Washington. DuBois was the primary advocate of the gradualist political strategy.

DuBois grew to find Washington's program intolerable, and he became more outspoken about racial injustice and his differences with Washington over the importance of liberal arts

education when the latter's emphasis on industrial education drew resources away from black liberal arts colleges. DuBois noted that Washington's accommodating program produced little real gain for the race.

DuBois (1903) launched a well-reasoned, thoughtful, and unequivocal attack on Washington's program in his classic collection of essays, The Souls of Black Folk. In an essay entitled, "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others," DuBois stated that Washington's accommodationist program asked Blacks to give up political power, insistence on civil rights, and higher education for Negro youth. In short, Washington was criticized for emphasizing vocational education at the expense of academic development and civil rights.

DuBois firmly believed that full citizenship rights for black Americans could be achieved through persistent agitation, political action, and academic education. His educational philosophy directly influenced his political approach. He stressed the necessity for liberal arts training because he believed that black leadership should come from college-trained backgrounds.

In 1909, after an outbreak of rioting and murders of Negroes in Springfield, Illinois, a protest meeting was held in New York that led to the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. DuBois was one of the founding members of the organization. The NAACP was a coalition of black and white radicals which sought to remove legal barriers to full citizenship for Negroes. The association began an intensive campaign to bring about the enforcement of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. The NAACP fought against segregation and discrimination mainly in the courts. Washington felt threatened by the

rise of the association, and the ideological battle between Washington and DuBois continued until the former's death in 1915.

Both Washington and DuBois wanted the same thing for Blacks, but their methods for obtaining it differed. Because of the interest in immediate goals contained in Washington's economic approach, Whites did not realize that he anticipated the complete acceptance and integration of Negroes into American life. He believed Blacks, starting with so little, would have to begin at the bottom and work up gradually to achieve positions of power and responsibility before they could demand equal citizenship–even if it meant temporarily assuming a position of inferiority. DuBois understood Washington's program, but believed that it was not the solution to the "race problem." Blacks should study the liberal arts, and have the same rights as white citizens. Blacks, DuBois believed, should not have to sacrifice their constitutional rights in order to achieve a status that was already guaranteed.

Black Female Occupational Choices

In May of 1955, Clara graduated with a bachelor's degree in secondary education with a major in biology and minor in mathematics. "In Mansfield, a very small town, I didn't see Blacks in anything that was–that I could do as a professional other than teaching–the field of education."

Foremost in the minds of girls was simply the desire to escape from the drudgery of farm or domestic work, which has kept and still keeps them and their families in a perpetual state of poverty. The occupational outlook was limited and their choices in the professional field were made, for the most part, on the basis of precedence in the community. Thus, among the professions, the majority of girls selected teaching because the teacher was usually the best

educated Negro in the neighborhood, and the one with the highest status and most regular salary. The social prestige offered by teaching, the escape it offers with its possible attainability made it very attractive.

According to Elizabeth Higginbotham's (1994) article on "Black Professional Women: Job Ceilings and Employment Sectors,"

> Gender restrictions shaped the professions for which Black women could prepare and practice. Black women seeking higher education were steered into primary and secondary school teaching, nursing, social work, and library sciences–jobs that are primarily dependent upon the public sector for employment . . . and were expected to practice their gender-specific professions within a racially segregated society. College-educated Black women were discouraged from pursuing traditionally male occupations.
>
> Black females were dependent on salaries and wages. Thus, employment prospects for educated Black women were contingent upon city and county hiring policies to staff public institutions. Both gender and racial discrimination play a role in the occupational distribution of Black women. (p. 117)

Using Robertson's (1952) statistics available for the teaching profession in Louisiana at the time Clara entered college, 10,802 white teachers were employed for an enrollment of 299,766 students. While at the same time, 4, 885 black teachers were employed for an enrollment of 183,597 students (pp.155-156, & 181). Calculating the pupil-teacher ratio, each white teacher had 27.75 students, while each black teacher had 37.58 students. This indicates that black teachers had approximately ten more students, implying the existence of a shortage of teachers. Of the 15, 687 teachers in Louisiana, 68.9 percent were White and 31.1 percent were Black.

Southern University and A & M College

The beginnings of Southern University can also be identified with the Washington-DuBois debate. According to Raphael Cassimere, Jr. (1999):

> LSU and Southern developed differently under the concept of "separate but equal" sanctioned by the United States Supreme Court in 1896. The one became a basically liberal arts school for the sons and daughters of white planters and businessmen, the latter was initially nothing more than a vocational school modeled after the more famous Tuskegee Institute.
>
> LSU remained the preserve of the white middle class until Huey Long expanded it into his "million dollar" university in the 1930s. Graduate and professional programs proliferated and almost overnight LSU went from a "C" to "A" rating, attracting more working class students as well as students from practically every state and many foreign countries. In the meantime, Southern, which had been joined by Grambling College in 1901, continued to provide "Negro" education. Grambling was operated by the local parish school board until 1928 when it became a junior college for the training of Negro elementary teachers. It did not become a four-year college until 1940, and as late as 1955 neither Southern nor Grambling offered a single program on the graduate level. (p. 545-546)

According to Charles Vincent's (1981) extensive research in A Centennial History of Southern University and A & M College, 1880-1980:

> Religious and spiritual activities were always a vital part of the University . . . From its inception in New Orleans, Southern was and continued to be a non-denominational institution, but opportunities were available to students "to develop along the religious line of their choice." In addition to a daily chapel service near the noon hour, general Sunday School services were held every Sunday at 11:00 a.m. and vesper services were held at 7:00 p.m., at which time the President or some special speaker would address the assembly of students, teachers, and visitors. Wednesday night prayer meetings were also held. (p. 129)

During the four years (1951-1955) that Clara Byrd attended Southern University and A & M College, Dr. Felton Grandison Clark served as president. Under his thirty-year leadership from 1936 to 1958, the curriculum was broadened and an extensive building program completed, including the Laboratory School linked with the College of Education.

College for Clara was not a particularly enjoyable experience for her because she was too hard on herself. She felt she did not have time to waste, and she was constantly afraid of failure and the disgrace of having to face the people back in Mansfield. She worked all of her free hours during the day in the biology department and styled hair at night to cover her expenses. In

addition, she still harbored the anger over the way she was treated at the training school. It was always on her mind.

> I would have done well in college, but I don't think I would have done as well as I did had I not been set on showing the people at DeSoto Parish Training School that they had made a mistake the way they did (treated) me. When they didn't recognize me, when they didn't think I was going to go to college. When they didn't think I was going to be anybody. So, I worked very hard to make sure that they realized that they had made a mistake when they didn't want to give me a chance to get a scholarship and all that.

Also as a result of their treatment of her, Clara said that:

> I became determined not to ever look down on people who were less fortunate. So my record in the community has always been looking out for the underdog. And that is what I have always done, and I think I will always do it because I look for those people that the upper echelon has said that "you can't be anybody." I am always looking out for that.

University life and extra-curriculum activities under Dr. Clark's administration were strict by today's standards. Although not specifically stated in the catalog, it was a general policy for compulsory attendance of students to vesper services and lyceums.

Most student organizations were designed to encourage leadership with the guidance of faculty members. Among these were religious, educational and fraternal organizations and clubs. By the 1950s, all major sororities and fraternities were added.

The student organizations and the welfare of the students were of great concern to Southern's President Clark. He was expressly concerned over the fraternities, building morale, academic performance, and the decorum of the student body. Class cutting and tardiness were severely criticized. He always spoke of the "Southern family" and referred to the University as "Soul Mother." The codes of conduct as listed in the handbooks and catalog were closely observed and followed by the administration. On campus, students were instructed against loitering during class hours and boisterous talking. Open campus was only enjoyed on Sundays

from noon until 4:30 p.m. only in a particular area of the campus. Another area of the university was the women's campus. The male students could not be on the women's campus except during specific times. Within the dormitories, room inspections were held daily. Quiet hours (7:30-10:30 p.m.) were stipulated except for Saturdays and Sundays, and lights were out for freshmen at 10:30 p.m. and for upperclassmen at 11:00 p.m. A hair dressing room, sewing rooms, and other similar amenities were provided. Visitation to rooms housing members of the opposite sex was strictly forbidden. Radios, dress robes, and hot plates came under the watchful eyes of the counsel. Signing in and out was a part of the dormitory routine, except to attend class. Smoking, except in restricted areas, was prohibited. For those who flagrantly abused these regulations, demerits were given, and in severe cases suspensions were the punishment. Marriage was not a matter students could decide for themselves during the school year. A conference with the president, at least three months before the vows were exchanged, was expected. Gambling, stealing, keeping firearms, and drinking were strictly forbidden. These regulations, with slight exceptions, applied to both men and women students. The demerit system was the principal method of discipline. Thirty-three and one-third demerits constituted a warning, and after three warnings (or 100 demerits), a student was automatically suspended from the institution.

The female students had more rules and regulations men governing their conduct than their male counterparts. Senior and junior students had the most privileges. Commercial hair dressing, a forbidden endeavor, reached almost epidemic proportions in 1952, causing the state authorities to approach the president of the university. All female students were permitted to go on dates on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday nights from 7:00 to 10:00 p.m. The senior women had additional hours from 7:00 to 9:00 on Thursdays. A late date off campus privilege was also

provided for senior women of one date night per week, either Thursday or Friday from 6:00 to 10:30 p.m. to attend movies, and to eat at an approved eating place. Travel had to be either by taxi or bus, and permission to ride in a private car had to be obtained from the Office of Dean of Women through the residence director before 5:00 p.m. on the day that the student desired to go. This permission was usually granted if written parental approval was on file in the Dean of Women's office. Shopping off campus was permitted after arrangement with the residence director, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Saturday, for senior women. Girls could accept telephone calls from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m. and could make social calls until 12:00 p.m. (other students until 11:00 p.m.). On Sunday afternoons between 1:30 and 5:30 p.m., they could visit the local refreshment counter in Scotlandville and the lights-out time was 12 o’clock midnight.

Coed rights were generally based on their classification. Junior women had fewer privileges than their senior counterparts. Shopping in Baton Rouge was extended only to Thursday and Saturday in groups of two. No telephone calling was permitted and lights-out was at 11:30 p.m. Sophomore women could shop in groups of threes on Thursday and Saturday with special permission. Sunday strolling was confined to the campus, and visitation to the refreshment center was permitted on Saturday between 1:30 and 4:00 p.m. Lights-out was expected at 11:00 p.m. Freshmen had the fewest privileges. The female students were allowed special telephone hours each Sunday after dinner until 5:00 p.m., and they were permitted to go shopping on the regular shopping bus on Thursday and Saturday. Similar to Sophomore women, lights-out was at 11:00 p.m.

Time-off and vacation periods were limited during the regular school semester. The Christmas vacation consisted of approximately one week, a few days was allotted for the Thanksgiving period, with a half day granted for the Mardi Gras celebration.

Closely allied with the rules governing student conduct were efforts to provide cultural enrichment to campus life. The Lyceum Committee was responsible for recommending attractions, speakers, and dramatic productions. Each year the committee along with the university administrators would bring to the campus these groups or individuals. Such events greatly developed the cultural appreciation and experiences of the student body. Among the persons to speak on the campus during President Felton Clark's tenure were Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, W. E. B. DuBois, John Hope Franklin, Langston Hughes, Arnold M. Rose, Carter G. Woodson, and Rayford Logan. Among performances and Lyceum series were Jubilee Singers, Joseph Knitzer (Violinist), the New Orleans Symphony Orchestra, the Westminster Choir, Marian Anderson, the National Ballet of Canada, Rhoda Jordan Carmichael, Leontyne Price, Ralph Ellison, Sidney Poitier, W. C. Handy, Nat "King" Cole, Arna Bomtemps, Charles Werley, Mattiwilda Dobbs, William Grant Still, Lawrence Jones, Robert McFerrin, Phillipa Schuyler, Natalie Hinderas, Raymond McGuire, John O. Killen, Margaret Just Butcher, Ken Davis, Benjamin Mays, the De Paur Infantry Chorus, and Mary McLeod Bethune.

Mary McLeod Bethune

As an honor student, Clara was allowed to personally socialize with visiting speakers at President Clark’s home. She was exposed to the thoughts of many distinguished black leaders. At the time Mary Mcleod Bethune came to speak at Southern University in 1955. She was in her late seventies and close to her death. Mary traveled all over the country giving talks about her

life and teaching. Her message was to go out into the world and serve others. Clara's meeting with Mary Bethune had more than a lasting impact on her. Much of Clara's developing philosophy about life and teaching and the struggle for educational equality can be seen to parallel that of Bethune's.

Mary McLeod Bethune, an educator, presidential advisor, and civil rights advocate became one of the most significant African American women in American political history. She came to occupy a prominent place among a select group designated as "race leaders," devoting her life to advancing equal social, economic, and political rights for Blacks. She distinguished herself by creating lasting institutions that trained black women for visible and expanding public leadership roles. Few have been as effective in the development of women's leadership for group advancement as she.

Bethune, who lived from 1875 to1955, struggled to reconcile her nineteenth-century notions of women's moral superiority with the changing political realities of the twentieth century. She used two conceptually distinct levels of activism–one quietly non-confrontational and another designed to engage in formal political action that challenged the most overt discrimination–in her efforts to achieve equality. She gauged her activism to fit the particular circumstances. Empowerment is an important part of women's politicization and begins when women change their ideas about the causes of their powerlessness, recognizing the systematic forces that oppress them and acting to change the conditions of their lives.

The historical evolution of African American women's activism in the critical period between 1920 and 1950 is important for understanding the centrality of black women to the political fight for social, economic, and racial justice.

The results of Joyce A. Hanson's (2003) work, Mary McLeod Bethune & Black Women's Political Activism, indicates that:

> Bethune's life story demonstrates that race, class, and gender shape woman's political actions and the resistance strategies they employ. In Bethune's case, the ethic of socially responsible individualism and her understanding of the duties and responsibilities of educated black women informed her actions. She believed that highly educated black women must work to attain leadership positions not for individual gain, but to help the race achieve autonomy, self-determination, and self-development. Bethune consistently struggled to make black women's voices heard. She used her insight, determination, and persuasive power to move African American women from the sidelines to the center of American life. The institutions she founded and the work she engaged in nurtured black women's resistance to oppression and their political activism. (p.10)

Bethune founded a school for African-American girls in Daytona, Florida, which in 1923 became the coeducational Bethune-Cookman College. As college president until 1942, her efforts gained tremendous recognition. Bethune became a national leader and united all major black women's organizations across the nation into one powerful group, the National Council of Negro Women. As its president for 14 years, Bethune led campaigns against segregation and discrimination.

Presidents Coolidge, Hoover, Roosevelt and Truman sought her advice on issues concerning black Americans, and Franklin Roosevelt appointed her director of the Division of Negro Affairs of the National Youth Administration. She was the first black woman to ever head a federal agency.

College Life

When I went from Grand Cane or Mansfield to Southern [University], someone would take me to Shreveport, which was about a 40-mile drive to catch a train. And I would catch the

train and come to Baton Rouge. The train actually came to Baton Rouge and then I would have to get a cab out to Southern.

At DeSoto [Parish Training School], I wouldn't say that those students were getting a quality education. I felt that they got a good education, but I also knew that they did not get all that they needed. For example, when I came to Southern I specifically remember geometry and some of the other courses that I had to work hard at because we didn't have those electives. Like I said before, we didn't have any academic electives at that time. You just had a straight flat curriculum.

When I was attending Southern, there were no white students there, not a single one. I knew that there was a difference when I got to Southern and saw kids from Southern Lab and from all of these other places around the state who when they talked about congruence they knew exactly what they were talking about and all this and I didn't, and I was a smart student. So, I knew that there were some things missing, but I also felt that the courses that I took at the training school were taught by some excellent teachers. I can remember my English teacher and my biology teachers, which is why I went into biology–math teachers, good teachers but you didn't have a comprehensive education.

So, I had some catching up to do when you went to Southern. I don't think that they didn't have those electives because there were no teachers–that there was no way for them to get an education in those areas. I don't think that was it. You must remember the name of our school, DeSoto Training School. So I don't think it was perceived as an intellectual kind of school, and I think that they could have found teachers. I saw kids come from New Iberia, my

roommates and others who had all of these courses; so, there were teachers out there capable of teaching them, but it just wasn't offered.

There were things that were lacking in my education at the all-black school before I went to college that I had to make up for, definitely so. I didn't have an equal educational opportunity there, and that was a resource that was not available. I can remember in my school, the only electives that I was exposed to were agriculture and shop, industrial arts; we called it shop, and home economics. Those were the three electives.

So, I took home economics for four years as an elective. When I graduated, I was well versed in the subject. I sewed very well. I cooked very well, but when I got to college I had not had a formal course in geometry; no, I had not because that was not an elective in my school. And so, I had to work extremely hard when I took geometry. I can remember very well the first two weeks in class when Dr. Turner was talking about congruence–this triangle is congruent to that one–and I didn't have the foggiest idea. I just sat there. I was honest to goodness lost for two weeks. I felt like everyone else seemed so knowledgeable. I didn't ask any questions because I didn't know what to ask.

But there was a student who worked with me in the basement fixing hair, she was a math major, and I will never forget this. I told her one evening, "I am lost. We are in geometry and they keep talking about congruent. Some of the things he is talking about I understand, but some I don't." And I talked about the concept of congruence. And she said, "Well, I tell you what, when we get through and go upstairs, I'll show you." And I remember her cutting out two triangles. She cut them out at the same time. And she said, "You see these two triangles are the same size? You know they are the same size. I cut them out at the same time." I said, "Yes." She

said, “Well, when you are trying to prove congruent, all you are trying to do is prove that this triangle is the same size as this one without taking it and superimposing it.” And so she went on to show me what they meant by side-angle-side, and all that stuff. From then on, I made nothing but A’s.

I went to a vocational training school. That was the only school we had. There were black schools that were offering more than what I had. The other students understood those concepts and had more exposure than I did. I think that in other places they had geometry. I distinctly remember students from Opelousas and I remember students from Southern Lab, who were answering all these questions. And I was just appalled at how smart they were. And how much they knew. But in talking with them, they had formal courses in geometry in high school, which I did not have the opportunity to take. And these were all black schools that they had come from. So there were quality schools.

There were some that offered more than was offered at DeSoto Parish Training School. However, I still feel that even with their schools, they did not always have courses and resources equitable to the white schools in their area.

I went to Southern and I really wanted to be a doctor, but I knew that was not possible; I needed to work. Well, I really didn’t know anything else. We didn’t have guidance counselors in our high school that could introduce you to all of these different fields. And in Mansfield, a very small town, I didn’t see Blacks in anything that I could do as a professional other than teaching–the field of education.

We looked up to our ministers, you know. I didn’t have any desire to be a minister. [laughter] So really I learned about all these different professions, but somehow I liked the

medical profession, I guess that is why I like biology so much. And I wanted to be a biology teacher, if I had to be a teacher. But I really didn't know a lot else, if you want me to tell you the truth. The information really wasn't available and Southern was known for their teaching department.

And at that time, particularly, because I didn't know many things that even my friends did, you know about medicine. So, being a nurse, a doctor, a teacher, and a preacher, those were the things that I knew about. I think many Blacks felt at that time, those [professions] were one way to lift yourself up, you know, out of circumstances and conditions and financially. And if, of course, you really love people and you enjoy doing things for people, this was a chance.

It wasn't that nursing didn't really appeal to me. I liked it, but what I liked being–I wanted to be a doctor. I thought that would be the real thing. But, I knew really early that I didn't have anything like the means–money or assistance–for that.

But I really think with–well in college, Dr. Lee, [1] who was over the biology department at that time, I had assistance to go on to–well I didn't to med. school but to go to grad school. But I needed to work. I needed to get out to do some things for my mom too because we didn't even have a house. I mean we were renting and things like that. So I needed to work. Even though I had assistance in getting my master's [degree], the need to work was too strong for me to stay in. Teaching was doable and right then. My intention was to go back and get my masters degree as soon as possible.

The scholarship didn't pay for all of my expenses, but I worked. So, I worked on the side and then my tuition and things would be paid for. I worked in the biology department and I did hair in the basement. I did that in the basement of the buildings. They had a little place for us and

that's how I made a lot of my money for going to school–doing that. I can remember homecoming times when I stood in that basement all night, walked up took a shower, and went to class because you were making fifty cents and a dollar was the maximum you could make per head. So you had to make quite a few to buy your meal ticket and things of that sort. I had learned on my co-workers at Southern. [laugh] Then from the second year on, I would get AKA's. I got the top student award. AKA stands for the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority, which I joined. I would get honors and money through scholarships from the sorority.

I lived in the dormitory, but my scholarship did not pay all of that. I can remember I used to have to make sure I had enough money to cover the rest. We had to pay several times. It was like twenty some dollars a month, and so I had to make up the difference. When I started working, I was making thirty-five cents an hour and when it went up to fifty cents an hour I really thought I was making good change.

So, I was majoring in biology and worked in the Biology Department my whole time I was at Southern. I went into math and science education. And we all know that those are areas that first of all females are very low in percentage, and in my case what motivated me to pick that field, well actually my principal's wife was a biology teacher. And I really, really enjoyed biology with her. So, I made up my mind when I was in high school that I was going to be a biology teacher.

When I went to Southern, I kept that in mind and I did very well. I had not decided on a major or a minor then. But when I got there, at that time you were not allowed to choose your major/minor until your second year of school. But, during the first year of school I did very well

in math and I just developed a real affinity for mathematics. So, I decided that I was going to minor in mathematics.

Now, I must tell you that on the first day of school my second year, I went to what was called the Annex Science Department at Southern where everybody went to get the signatures of the dean of the school. And when I got in there I was the only female in that building. I actually sat there awhile and I got up and went outside. But I couldn't think of anything else to go into. So I went back in and signed up. Now a little later on, there was one lady who was in math and was minoring in science. So, she later took some classes. There was another one, who the next semester came into biology. But there just weren't many girls at that time.

I had education classes as part of my teacher training, which I hated. [laughter] I didn't like them! I didn't find too many of them applicable to the classroom. I really didn't. I learned the things that they had us to learn because I had to, and I wanted to graduate. But as I look at the things in the education department, educational psychology, and educational philosophy–those things were the ones that I enjoyed most. But all of that other stuff, I learned it long enough to pass the test. And even methods in science, and methods in math, they weren't that meaningful to me.

I did student teaching at Southern Lab School, so that didn't prepare me for teaching at DeSoto High School. It was not realistic. You know, it was not what I was going to meet when I got out there.

When I think about why I gravitated to biology–having a teacher is one thing, but you have to have the ability. I think there was something in my upbringing on the farm that attracted me. But if you are going to do well, you need to acquire the ability to think critically and to

analyze. You also have to have an affinity for nature. I enjoyed that. And I think that is what made me really, really like biology. Because I had been in the country, we had chickens, we had horses, we had pigs, we had all of those animals. We would dig the earth worms and go fishing and all of that and then when I got in biology in high school, we would take these same earth worms and dissect them and take the crayfish and dissect them.

These were things that were just a part of my habitat–part of my surroundings when I was out in the country. So, this was just easy. It was relevant. It was easy to me. When we had to name the flowers and look for mullein, I knew what it was. I didn't have to read and use the dichotomy key. I don't really know other than my excellent teacher that made me understand it, but I think it was easy to me.

I didn't really notice myself being that good in math. I made A's and B's in everything in high school. But in college my professor–I specifically remember Mr. Crawford, who taught me my first two courses, would just stop sometime in class and say, "Where did you go to school?" You know, he thought I was really smart. So, to me these were easy courses. They were courses that I enjoyed. And they were a challenge. I spent a lot of time by myself when I was growing up so I did a lot of reading. I did a lot of working little math things and entertaining myself. So, I enjoyed this.

Today for students, particularly females, are they lacking that connection with nature? Or, why is it that we have such a shortage? I don't know, it may be motivation or background, or whatever, because–and the reason I say that–I think your family has a lot to do with what you do when you are growing up. I have two daughters; they are both engineers. I have two sons; one is in industry, the other one is also an engineer. To do poorly in math or science was just not

acceptable in our house. Well, we didn't allow for bad grades in anything for one time. If you got a bad grade, you certainly wouldn't get it the next grading period. But math and science, I guess they probably understood that better than anything else because I was able to explain it to them. I always worked closely with them, and they just all went into science-related fields, and I think that is why because they didn't go out in the country. As a matter of fact, my daughters didn't fool around outside much to tell the truth. But for whatever reason they decided they wanted to be engineers. They did well in math. They did well in science.

So, I think it is exposure and your environment at home and the encouragement to explore those things at home or somewhere. I still think that Mrs. Jacobs had a lot to do with my going into biology. Even though I liked nature, I liked being outside. I liked doing these things. It was Mrs. Jacobs who helped me to see where I could come up with some life work that would be related to that. And I admired her so in the way she taught us, the things she would make us do. And she didn't pamper us. And I wanted to be a teacher; I wanted to be like her. And that had a lot to do with it.

I think good teachers in that field must make it interesting for the students so they really connect with it. I think that helps a whole lot. I don't think that is all because I know that when I looked at my children being in math/science-related fields sometimes they had good teachers, sometimes they didn't. But they had parents–because my husband has a math/science major/minor and I have a science/math major/minor–so whenever, wherever the teacher was short, we were able to fill in the gap. I don't know that they would have gone had they not felt so secure in these areas when they went off to college. They knew that they did well in math, they

knew what science was like. They had to study hard, but at least they knew what it was like. So, I think that helped them.

I was also in a sorority. I did join Alpha Kappa Alpha[2] while I was there. It was not an education sorority or an honor sorority. It was just a social sorority. We still have these sororities there. I'm not active in the graduate chapter, but they're all over the nation in the black colleges. We call them the AKAs–the Deltas that was another one. But at that time, these sororities would compete for grade point averages. So, I guess the thing that I felt really good about was the fact that they sought me out because they were looking for students who would help their grade point averages and who had the other qualities.

I can remember when we were pledging, there were things that you kind of had to police each other because they would punish all pledges for something that one pledge did. You know, the whole group would get punished. And I can remember we were pledging and we were marching, and I just got so tired and they were begging me, "Please come on," and I said, "I am tired and I am going to sleep." And I got in the bed and went to sleep. And of course, everybody was in trouble, but I couldn't go anymore. I mean they would do–not all this hazing, beating and none of that, but they used to keep us up. I can remember going–when we were pledging–in class trying to take notes and I would start off a word and I would wave it on the paper until I went to sleep.

This week of pledging–they called it that when we were trying to get into the sorority–so we had to–march in line and you did this and you did all kind of things. I had to do what they said to do and I finally had enough of this. I just was tired and sleepy and we were supposed to do something that afternoon and I said I'm not going. But I still got in. Oh yeah, and I think that

was part of the problem. I knew they wanted me in. I didn't seek them out. They had given me a scholarship during the sophomore year– I had gotten the AKA award for highest grade point average, so they were seeking me out, and I knew I wasn't mature enough not to take advantage at that time.

Now, Phi Delta Kappa [3] is an education fraternity that I'm still very active in now. Now, this is a fraternity. At one time, it was only men. But, well I think this last year they were in the process of changing the name. It has been a fraternity down through the years. They have a chapter there at LSU. As a matter of fact, we had a leadership conference here Saturday before last and we had some representative from LSU's chapter who teaches science at the Lab School. Usually there is some kind of community connection or something that distinguishes each of the different fraternities or sororities. The Phi Delta Kappa is an education fraternity and so we keep abreast of the issues in education. We have speakers to come and talk with us and we had some excellent training for teachers, like the Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement (TESA)[4] training.

I was very hard on people who did not do their work. I distinctly remember being in college and I couldn't understand how someone could get sleepy if they had not done their homework. And I am serious because I couldn't. I couldn't. I could no more go to bed without doing my homework than I could climb a tree backwards. But you know, after I became an adult and I thought about that thing; my motivation was different from theirs. You see there were kids there who, if they flunked out one semester, their parents would send them back after they sat out a semester. But I knew in my heart that if anything caused me to lose my scholarship that was it.

At the time when I was in college, you couldn't leave the campus at Southern. There were buses that could take you to church, or could take you downtown and you got on the bus and you came back because we didn't have cars on the campus. But there were kids, who would walk a certain distance, get in cars and then slip off. And I could boast, in the four years I never once slipped off the campus. Now, it wasn't because I was so goody-two-shoes, but I knew, and at that time if you got caught, they could send you home. And I knew that if I got sent back to Mansfield that was it for me. And I could see those people saying, "Told you." So, I never broke the rules.

When I was at Southern there were various community activities and university activities There were vesper meetings. That was a required thing that was on Sunday. I guess it was kind of like religion; it usually had a religious tone but that is when they would bring in great speakers to talk to us. I remember that's when I saw Mary McLeod Bethune. She came to talk to us. Benjamin Mays, Dr. Proctor, we saw these great black people. Some of them were university presidents, but they would be speakers. We had a speaker every Sunday night.

What I remember about Mary McLeod Bethune that was outstanding was that I just thought she was so great, to have the courage to start a school with–and she did tell us how much money she had–about seventy-five cents. You know it was such a tiny amount of money. Most people would have been waiting until they could get a certain sum. And I just marveled at her, just being able to get close to her and talk to someone like that. I was actually able to talk to her.

Well, I'll tell you what happened, later on I became an honor student at Southern. And so, sometimes we would have a chance to go to the president's house because of my scholarship and because I was a good student. And a lot of times those people (speakers) would be there an

extra day and little groups of students could go to the president's house where they would have a reception, and so you would sometimes get to really talk with them.

We had a chance to just hear great speeches and those were the things that I valued a lot. Now, I didn't like vespers at first, but you had to go. You didn't have a choice. You went. And I remember one thing about Dr. Clark (the president of Southern) was timeliness. Vespers started on time. And he would talk to us about things like that. He helped us in developing values–to value certain things. He was in my book, the kind of president that every college would want. The others coming behind him, they were okay, but nobody was like Dr. Clark. He was, to me, a good-looking man. He was articulate. He had such a purpose, and he wanted us to not live up to the black stereotypes. He would just talk to us and you would sit there and just listen. And these other people would come in and talk to us, he would have these speakers. And they always had these, you know, these great titles. But that was vespers. That was a Sunday night occasion.

College was a strange thing. It was not an exceptional enjoyment for me because I was so hard on myself. I didn't sit on Sunday afternoon out on the campus. I always felt that I didn't have time. And I really did. And in a sense I didn't because I worked all of my spare hours during the day in the biology department. And I fixed hair at night because there were always things that I wanted. And I didn't want them to be able to look at me and know how hard it really was. So I worked. I worked very hard. I learned how to do hair before going to college. That was something I just picked up from a cousin who was a cosmetologist. So I was able to use that to help myself, to help to pay my tuition, or buy a book whatever the scholarship didn't furnish, to buy clothes, and reasonably nice things. And so, I just didn't feel that I had time. And what I would feel is if I were not working, I felt that I should have been resting because I had worked so

hard during the week. So Sunday afternoon I spent resting. I didn't sit on the campus with the other students, and I didn't have a boyfriend, needless to say. So that was my life in college.

I think my life has been a challenge because in many instances, I think that I could have not gone to college, and I think nobody would have thought the worst of me. Nobody would have said, "Oh what a shame." Because of the socioeconomic status that I was in, none of my people were educators. I had a step-dad that the children used to look out and tease me about. And of course my mother was a hard-working person, but she just did common labor washing and ironing for people. My friends and most knew that. So, I don't really think that the people in the school from which I graduated expected a lot of me. They knew that I was what they called "smart." But they didn't think I was going anywhere. So that's why I say, it was a challenge. And my goal once I got to college, was to show them how wrong they were. And I think that is why I did as well as I did. I think that is part of the reason.

When I think about God's purpose for my life, you know, I don't know whether it is His purpose or whether it is something that kind of fell into my lap. I think when I was growing up, when I was in high school, now that was the time when I felt the real need to be noticed. I knew then I felt like I was somebody to myself, but I didn't think anybody else did because of the way that I was treated by some people. Some students were better off than I was, and the way I was treated by some of the school personnel in choosing students to do things and choosing students to honor, things like that.

I didn't feel like they knew, but you know I was sitting in Sunday school yesterday and we were talking about how sometimes when bad things happen they open up new opportunities and that flashed before my face. Because I don't think–I did exceptionally well in college. And I

would have done well in college, but I don't think I would have done as well as I did had I not been set on showing the people at DeSoto Parish Training School that they had made a mistake the way they did (treated) me–when they didn't recognize me, when they didn't think I was going to go to college, when they didn't think I was going to be anybody. So, I worked very hard to make sure that they realized that they had made a mistake when they didn't want to give me a chance to get a scholarship and all that.

So what I'm saying is, I think I would have done well, but I wouldn't have done as well because that was always before my mind. As a result of that, I became determined not to ever look down on people who were less fortunate. So my record in the community has always been looking out for the underdog. And that is what I have always done, and I think I will always do it because I look for those people that the upper echelon has said that "you can't be anybody." I know that and that's why when I hear talk that low socioeconomic status children don't do well, I can't buy all that junk. Because they can, they just need the motivation and the wear-with-all to do better. And so I am always looking out for that

I did very well in school and received many honors. All the time through school I had honors, Who's Who (in American Colleges and Universities) and Top Student in my second year, and there were times when I made all A's. They would send these write-ups to the paper back home and people would tell me that they had seen my picture or a write-up about me on the bulletin board at the training school. But, it didn't make me feel happy or proud. I resented it because of the way I was treated as a student.

I graduated magna cum laude in May of 1955 with a bachelor's degree in secondary education with a major in biology and a minor in mathematics. When I finished college, I had to

go back home. I had to buy my mama the first television. I had to get running– we call running water facilities in the house. I had all this to do. I needed to work.

Reflections

It was apparent that for Clara, most of her college experience was not particularly notable. The fact that she arrived at Southern academically behind other students in mathematics was very unsettling for someone who prided herself on being "smart." She had to overcome her vocational arts education, espoused by Washington and Rosenwald. Furthermore, she endured the self-imposed pressure to succeed. From her perspective, nothing could be worse than going home to Mansfield as a failure. In addition to the strict lifestyle Clara imposed upon herself, the university also had strict rules governing the conduct of its female students. Financially, her scholarship did not pay for all her expenses, so her interest in cosmetology became a survival strategy. She was able to make up the difference by building a clientele among her fellow students.

Hidden under this heavy cloak of responsibility, Clara encountered intellectuals that opened her mind to a new and stimulating world. Her ability to listen to visiting speakers and socialize with them was a consciousness raising experience. When Clara talked about Mary McLeod Bethune and how she was able to speak to her personally, she had such admiration in her voice. She had immense respect for this woman and her achievements. It was apparent from the way Clara talked about Bethune that she had been become one of her role models, along with her grandfather.

It was during this period in Clara Byrd's life that she began making many decisions for herself about what her values and beliefs were, what was important to her, and in what she

believed. She also began making lifestyle choices in accordance with her values and beliefs. Clara had to compromise on her choice of a career. If she had been given the opportunity, she would have pursued the profession of a medical doctor; however, the immediacy of getting a job and helping her mother weighed heavily in her decision to become a teacher. It was at this time that she commenced to identify with the "the underdog" because of her own experience growing up, and it became a social commitment for her.

End Notes

1. Dr. J. Warren Lee was head of the Biology Department. His professional leadership and influence on the biological sciences was extremely significant. So much so that not only is one of the current building named in his honor, but the most notable area of the university was the quality of the Natural Sciences (Vincent, 1981).

2. Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, the first Greek-letter organization for black college women was founded in1908 on the campus of Howard University in Washington, D.C. The sorority became an instrument for enriching the social and intellectual aspects of college life by providing mental stimulation through interaction with friends and associates. Candidacy for membership into Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority is open to women of high ethical and scholastic standards who are pursuing or have completed courses leading to a degree in an accredited college or university.

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. was created to cultivate and encourage high scholastic and ethical standards, promote unity and friendship among college women, to study and help alleviate problems concerning girls and women in order to improve the social stature, to maintain a progressive interest in college life, and to be a service to all mankind.

Through the years, however, Alpha Kappa Alpha's function has become more complex. From the initial group of eight women, Alpha Kappa Alpha has evolved into an international service organization. In 1977, the organization gave $69,000 to the United Negro College Fund, a project commemorating Alpha Kappa Alpha's 69th birthday. This type of donation is still made by the sorority annually. Today, Alpha Kappa Alpha continues its traditions of sisterhood, service, and academic achievement.

3. Phi Delta Kappa was founded in 1906 on the principle that "Education is, and forever will be, the guiding star to civilization and the rite of passage to equity, honor, respect, dignity, and hope." The promotion of quality education, with a particular emphasis on publicly-supported education, is essential to the development and maintenance of a democratic way of life. The vision of the organization is dedication to, responding to, and acting on education issues and ideas. It is to be valued for its

educational leadership, research, and service. It is to be the leading proponent of and advocate for free public education in democratic societies. And finally, it is to be the lead designer of a seamless web of lifelong learning, contributing to social, economic, and political well-being. Basically, the mission of the organization is to make a “difference” in education by dealing with the problems that face education and society.

4. The Teacher Expectations and Student Achievement (TESA) organization provides a research-based professional staff development program of behavioral change for all educators, grade levels, and subject areas. The program promotes high expectations for achievement by providing each child with an equal opportunity to learn and to be successful. Educators are trained in an interaction model which results in their practicing the supportive and motivating techniques with both “high” and “low” achievers in a nondiscriminatory manner. This is accomplished through workshops and seminars.

In TESA workshops, teachers learn the fifteen interactions of the model designed to encourage equitable interaction with all students: Equitable Distribution of Response Opportunities; Affirmation or Correction; Proximity; Individual Helping: Praise for the Learning Performance; Courtesy; Latency; Reasons for Praise; Personal Interest Statements and Compliments; Delving, Rephrasing, Giving Clues; Listening; Touching; Higher-Level Questioning; Accepting Feelings; and Desisting.

TESA is designed to modify the way teachers interact with students through heightened awareness of how perceptions affect their expectations. Results of classroom research shows that use of TESA interactions improves academic performance, gender and diversity awareness, attendance, classroom climate and reduces student discipline problems.

CHAPTER 4

TEACHING AT DESOTO PARISH TRAINING SCHOOL

Introduction

Clara Byrd began her teaching career back at her old training school from the Fall of 1955 until May 1961. She did not apply there. The word came through her mother that she was offered a position. Her motivation for taking the job was out of concern for her mother, so she moved back in with her. Once she started the job, Clara was assigned office duty the last period of the school day. This gave her access to the old school records. This access allowed her to prove to herself that she was truly an "honor student." She needed this validation so she would know for sure that she had been right about the actions of her former teachers. She could then let it go and get on with her life. In her mind, her suspicions were confirmed.

While teaching full-time, Clara completed cosmetology school in Shreveport because:

> I still needed to be a beautician, too, because that's what I wanted to be for so many years in my mind and I just didn't feel satisfied. And let me tell you one other thing that I knew, too, that I have to admit. At the time when I went to beauty school, I did not know that I was going to come back to Southern for graduate work, meet a husband, and move away from DeSoto. I wasn't sure that I was going to make it as a teacher there because I was a nonconformist. And so I wanted to feel secure, too.
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> As a nonconformist, I felt that if I were going to be a real person I had to do the things that I thought were good and best and right and not the things that would make me get a smooth ride. I wasn't going to be a yes-woman. No, I was not, definitely not. And I wasn't sure that I would make it because there were so many people who would just float with the tide and I had not learned to do that and I didn't feel that I was going to learn.

As Clara began to develop her teaching philosophy, Marva Collins and her book, Marva Collins Way (1982) inspired her. Ms. Collins, after teaching for fourteen years in Chicago's troubled public school system, decided to open her own school on the second floor of her home. The outstanding results of her teaching method have been recognized on CBS's "60 Minutes,"

and in a made-for-television movie entitled "The Marva Collins Story." Central to her teaching is convincing her students, "You can do it," self-reliance, and self-respect. "First, she had to convince the children she cared about them, convince them to trust her, and make them believe they could do anything they wanted to do" (Collins & Tamarkin, p. 28).

During the period of time that Clara's college days were ending and her first teaching position was beginning, the United States Supreme Court handed down its historic decisions in Brown v. the Board of Education I, II (1954, 1955) that made the doctrine of "separate but equal" unconstitutional.

Earl Warren was appointed chief justice of the Supreme Court in 1953 by President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Warren went on to become one of the most influential chief justices in the nation's history, providing over many of the landmark decisions on social and civil rights issues. Perhaps the most important of these rulings was the first: the 1954 unanimous decision in Brown v. Board of Education I declaring that racially segregated public schools were unconstitutional.

The ruling reversed the "separate but equal" doctrine affirmed by the 1896 Supreme Court decision in Plessy v. Ferguson. Warren wrote the opinion of the court in Brown I, making significant use of the arguments advanced by attorney Thurgood Marshall of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the organization that represented the black plaintiffs challenging racial segregation.

The court made no direct statement how this ruling was to be implemented; one year later in Brown II (1955) the court issued an "Enforcement Decree" calling for states to desegregate their schools "with all deliberate speed." Despite these pronouncements, many southern states

actively resisted school desegregation. Louisiana was one of those states that used the unpopularity of the Supreme Court's decision to its own political advantage.

While waiting for the court's decision, many school officials produced a flurry of activity. The idea was to upgrade black public schools to make them appear to be equal. The general consensus in Louisiana was that nothing would be changed. After the court ruled, Louisiana did not accept the decision that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional.

The political climate in Louisiana was heating up for a battle. Efforts by the State of Louisiana and its political subdivisions to avoid compliance with the United States Supreme Court's decisions on school desegregation were researched by McCall (1973). From 1954 to 1960, the white hierarchy was adamant about maintaining the status quo and used an array of laws that were designed to prevent any challenges to the system of segregation. For example, the legislature provided for the dismissal of teachers and other state employees who belonged to or cooperated with any organization advocating integration of the races in the public schools. Only white teachers could teach white children and only Negro teachers could teach Negro children in separate schools. Throughout this time, as least 135 statutes and resolutions aimed at maintaining segregation were passed by the Legislature of Louisiana.

Three days after the court's decision, a resolution was introduced in the Louisiana House of Representatives censuring the Supreme Court for "a usurpation of power." The legislature also created the Joint Legislative Committee to Maintain Segregation, which went to work considering a new approach to the matter, but no details were given, saying, "We don't want the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to get set" (McCall, 1973, p. 28).

On March 12,1956, 101 senators and congressional representatives from eleven southern states signed a declaration of opposition to Brown, entitled the "Southern Manifesto." Louisiana was, of course, one of the eleven and the entire delegation signed. The declaration argues that the Supreme Court went beyond its proper authority in its ruling. The signing members of the "Southern Manifesto" support all efforts to resist forced integration by any lawful means.

One of the main issues involved in desegregation is the fact that policy is made by the judicial branch of the United States. Not much leadership or enforcement came forth from the executive branch of government in Louisiana or Washington.

If you were African American in the state of Louisiana and most other places in this country in 1956, you were assigned to a school based on your race, even if you lived right next door to a white school, which a lot of African American people did at that time. Earl K. Long, governor of Louisiana from 1956-1960 vowed to keep black people out of white public schools. The Louisiana Legislature passed legislation that made it illegal for black and white students to go to school together. Its reasoning was to promote and protect public health, morals, better education, and the peace. The state legislature passed a resolution criticizing Chief Justice Warren and established the Joint Legislative Committee on Segregation, which devised numerous means of circumventing the letter and spirit of the judicial mandate called for in Brown.

The 1959-60 Louisiana gubernatorial election was the first state election since 1924, in which race was the major issue. With its obvious implications, candidate Jimmie Davis announced that he would not accept the support of the NAACP or of Teamster boss Jimmy

Hoffa, and would not tolerate Northern groups coming into the state “with a designed plan to divide our people and disrupt our Southern way of life” (Dugas, 1989, p. 93).

During the campaign, Davis had committed his administration to a course of defiance, and he now proceeded to steer segregationist forces in the direction of resistance to federal attempts to eliminate state segregation laws. In his May 10, 1960, inaugural address, Governor Davis pledged to preserve segregation and to “maintain our way of life without compromise, without prejudice and–without violence,” and declared his intentions to “cooperate with the federal government.” However, he would “not permit interference with those rights that the constitution specifically reserves to Louisiana” (Times Picayune, May 11, 1960). The policy of “legislate and litigate” was pursued with a vengeance. Governor Jimmy Davis’s two-term administration was considered “the most segregationist in Louisiana history” (Middleton, 1984, p. 90). Prior to 1960, the vast majority of blacks were unable to vote, serve on juries, buy homes in decent neighborhoods, use publicly-owned facilities or frequent hotels, restaurants, and other public accommodations. In addition to these humiliations, they were required to utilize inadequate “separate but equal” public parks, playgrounds, swimming pools, waiting areas, and correctional facilities, and especially schools, until the mid-1960s.

In 1960, Clara and her fellow black teachers and administrators in the parish were gathered together by the white superintendent to let them know his stand for continued segregation of the schools in the parish. He left a petition for the school personnel to sign indicating support for segregated schools. Clara was initially one of three who challenged the administrative power structure by not signing the petition. “I was smart enough to believe then that the only way we were going to get some of those things that we wanted in the school was to

be in a school that contained some whites." She never signed the petition, while the other two teachers eventually did. Clara believes it was fear of losing their jobs among the Blacks working in the parish that pressured the outcome of the vote.

> Those black people who signed that petition for segregation didn't believe that. Many of them were afraid not to sign it. Because I can remember one of my best friends who came to my class the next day and stood there and cried like a baby, during the lunch break because she said "I've just bought my house…" Well, they were afraid that if they didn't sign it, they may get fired. So it wasn't in many instances, now I'm not saying in all, they signed that but it wasn't that they really believe that. They believed that they needed to do that to keep their livelihood. So you didn't have enough people who had the courage to say, "Well if I lose this job, I'll get another one."

Another significant event in Clara's life took place in 1960. Clara had met William Glasper while taking summer graduate classes at Southern, and they married in December. She still continued to work at DeSoto to finish out the school year. Clara applied for a maternity leave from her job, effective May of 1961. However, it was at that time that she had to face the consequences of her vote in favor of desegregation. The application for leave was delayed and in the process of obtaining it, she was verbally harassed by the superintendent (white) for her beliefs. She was told, "you are not for our way of life. So I don't see why you don't just go where they have the kind of life that you want." Clara was granted the leave at the end of the school year, but never returned to DeSoto Parish Training School.

The matter of school desegregation appeared remote from the daily lives of the people of Louisiana and was largely confined to the courts and to acts passed by the legislature. Few Louisianians, if any, appeared to believe that school integration would ever come to the state. The federal government did finally begin enforcing the Brown ruling in Louisiana, but it took years.

My First Teaching Job

After I graduated from Southern University, I did not apply to the DeSoto Parish Training School for a job. My former high school principal sent word to my mother that he had a teaching position for me and gave me a job on the spot, even though I did not apply there. I guess they were just really nice to me after they had heard how I had done so well and from getting the articles about my achievements in the local newspaper. I took the job because my mother was still living there; so, I went back home and worked for six years at DeSoto Parish Training School. I taught there from September 1955 until May of 1961.

When I started teaching, I was making about $2,900 a year or something like that. After a while, I then had enough money to get my own car and television. It took awhile, but I did. Actually, I lived very close to the school about two and one half blocks and I did walk back and forth for a while and then I got a car. My mother was living there in a rented house. My grandfather was still living out in Grand Cane. He didn't move to Mansfield until maybe a couple of years after I came back. When my grandmother had passed, he stayed out in the country by himself for a while and then we moved the farmhouse to South Mansfield and him and my mother shared the house.

I was teaching 10th grade biology in the high school. I never taught math there. And the last period of the day, they asked me to work in the office. So, I had access to past grades of students. I was delighted, considering I wanted to get to those books because I wondered if they had put one grade on my report card and another in the book. When they asked me to work in the

office, I was determined to look in those books and I did. I got a chance to look at my file. My grades were not changed, but there were changes made in other (students) grades so that it would come up a few points. I specifically remember Bertha Brown where they crossed out maybe a D and put an A or B. That was honestly done back then to get the students they wanted for those honor students. I saw that and I was bitter for a long time.

I started teaching at 21, and I was a very hard working and a very good teacher. The superintendent said to me when I got ready to leave DeSoto Parish, "I understand that you are a good teacher in the classroom, but you're one of those that no one can tell you anything." And he was probably pretty telling. At that time I was very bitter with my principal and some of the teachers who were still there because I felt they had done this to me and I couldn't believe they could do such a thing. It took me a while to give it up. So, I think that's how I kind of got back at them with my patience. If they would tell me to do something that I didn't think was right, I didn't try to be diplomatic about it. I just would tell them how I felt and wouldn't do it. And so that's how I got by, but I was an excellent teacher. You know I always felt that I had to cover my tracks. I wasn't going to give them an excuse if I could help it.

I never had problems with the administration as far as my teaching; no, not my teaching. But in terms of getting along with other teachers at DeSoto, at first it was a very strange relationship with all of the old teachers there with the exception of Miss Henderson. I feel that my schooling at Southern–I mean, Southern being "the" black university was prestigious to have graduated from there at that time–they felt intimidated by me. I think that they saw that I could do good work that I was smart. And then when I came back there, we had what was called LIALO, which was a kind a thing where kids would go in the spring. They would get tested in

different areas and compete. It was a type of competition. And after the first year I didn't have any winnings, but after the first year some of my children won in the district, and then they started winning in the state. I can remember about the third year, we won over St. Augustine, which was the school in New Orleans that nobody could beat, and my children came out first. Some parts of it were like a science fair type competition, but this was just a test. They had a part where you did projects, but mine were winning with the testing, and so I was getting accolades for that. And I was able to right away control my children. I didn't have any problem with discipline and the parents. And I think I didn't have it because it was a little town where everybody knew everybody. I graduated from there so if I called a parent on a student that was the end of that problem. And then I knew the children. I was teaching some of my own cousins, and they behaved. So I was a good teacher there, but not one who went along with everything.

When I started teaching, I think I used more of the things that I had gotten from teachers, who had taught me, and some of them were the wrong things. So, I had to really learn those things myself. And I'll tell you one thing–what really had an impact on me with teaching was my own children. They made me a much more compassionate teacher. I always loved children. I was always very good to children, but I was exceptionally demanding. And I didn't–how can I say this? I didn't allow for any excuses that really I think I should have looked at. And that is another thing that you have to think about–perspectives. Those are kinds of things that taught me later on. You know you do have to look at things from other people's perspective.

Having children of my own literally gave me some of the other things that teachers ought to have, like compassion, and that is important to me. And I don't think I had as much of it as I should have before I started seeing it through the eyes of others. I just really feel that a school

can educate children. I don't think there is any cookbook way of doing that. I think we have to take into account the difference in the children and work to that end and try to meet the needs of the children, whatever they are. They all aren't coming with the same needs, and I think we have to look at that. And that is one of the things I think about when I talk about teaching children to use standard English and saying that means different things for different groups because for some groups it may mean just reminding them to say what we have been hearing. For another group it means learning grammatical rules because they cannot pick it up just from association.

If I were to identify the major influences on my teaching, I would have to say some of the teachers that I had influenced me. Now sometimes they influenced me by my saying, "I want to make sure I don't do that." Now some influenced me by the way that they taught. I didn't like memorization and because of that I think that influenced my teaching by helping kids to understand critical and creative thinking and putting a little bit of logic in. And I think it was because of the way I was, and still am, I like to understand things, I don't want to just memorize. And I had a lot of that in school and I didn't really like it. For instance, I can remember distinctly the sixty-four parishes. I can name them and I still can name most of them in alphabetical order, but I can't tell you where twenty of them are and to me that was wasteful. So, I learned not to teach that way. There were some things you just had to learn. But I tried to make my teaching as meaningful as possible. I would lead them in science projects because that was a way for me to teach the scientific method in a meaningful way. And I did a lot of that kind of work.

I specifically remember Marva Collins and her book inspiring me. What was most meaningful about Marva Collins, more than her method, was her belief in the children. She believed that they could do certain things and she had high expectations for them and she just

didn’t stop until they did it. And that’s what I believe in. I believe that children can learn certain things. If they don’t learn it one way, than you back up and you try another method of teaching them. Believing that they were capable of doing things and then not just sticking to the lower level of things was important. She wanted them to be the best that they could be. Now the memorization, she did stress memorization of a lot of things, and there are some things that you have to memorize. I’m not that fond of that, but I realize that it is important to develop the memory. And now, I wasn’t that good in that phase of teaching, but I admire her for some of the things, but it was more the person that she was. She believed in her children, and she just didn’t stop. She just said, “You can do, and you are going to do. I know you can do it, that’s why I expect you to do it and that is why I’m going to hold you accountable for doing it.” And I believe that’s the way it ought to be. I think that if we did that more, more children would be successful. We expect too little of them.

I’ve always been good at brainwashing myself. I had convinced myself that I was going to be a cosmetologist and when I finished college I was still not satisfied. I started cosmetology the fall of the same year that I started teaching at DeSoto Parish. I went to Shreveport at night to take classes. I moved to Shreveport the next summer and stayed there during that summer taking cosmetology. I went the next fall and the following summer, and I graduated from Pearleen’s Beauty School. I had to become a cosmetologist because I liked it so much and I had learned a lot just on my own. I just felt that I could be very good at it. That was the best thing I felt that I could do to make a really good living outside of going to college. And at that time, going to college I didn’t perceive that as doable because I didn’t have the money. I think some of it was the creativity, but I felt that was doable. It didn’t take a lot of money to become a cosmetologist.

All coming up in my high school years when I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that my mother couldn't send me to college I felt that I could work and go to beauty school. We called it beauty school at that time and so that was what I had satisfied myself with. I'm going to be the best cosmetologist there is.

So, I went to Southern because I had the scholarship that enabled me, graduated, started teaching and then I turned around and still went to cosmetology school after work at night and during the two summers. I had to-I just I didn't feel whole until I had completed beauty school because I wasn't complete until I finished it. I worked in a shop after I finished, but after I started my family I didn't do cosmetology that much anymore. This was all done during the time I was teaching.

I loved teaching. I was a good teacher, but I still needed to be a beautician, too, because that's what I wanted to be for so many years in my mind, and I just didn't feel satisfied. And let me tell you one other thing that I knew, too, that I have to admit. At the time when I went to beauty school, I did not know that I was going to come back to Southern for graduate work, meet a husband, and move away from DeSoto. I wasn't sure that I was going to make it as a teacher there because I was a nonconformist. And so I wanted to feel secure, too.

As a nonconformist, I felt that if I were going to be a real person I had to do the things that I thought were good and best and right and not the things that would make me get a smooth ride. I wasn't going to be a yes-woman. No, I was not, definitely not. And I wasn't sure that I would make it because there were so many people who would just float with the tide and I had not learned to do that, and I didn't feel that I was going to learn.

In many ways I attribute that to my grandfather because he was the kind of person who taught us to do, my mother, too. I remember my mother always saying there's only one way to do a thing and that's the right way, and I brought it on up with my children. So, I wasn't sure I was going to make it and I felt that if I didn't have another way of making a living I was afraid I might fold. I had to have something else for security. I remember first of all I really enjoyed doing hair. Secondly, after I started to teach, I remembered feeling that I'm not really sure that they're going to keep me. I'm not going to make it because there were some things that I just would not do. This was a profession that was not housekeeping and it was not ironing and it was something. It was a profession. I felt it was a sense of security. And I'm going to tell you that even after coming to Baton Rouge I've always felt that I was an excellent teacher here, but I felt that if I didn't make it here, I had something else I could support myself with. So I didn't have to submit to every little thing–being afraid. I could be my own woman. I felt that I had another outlet if this didn't work and if I had to bow to the whims of a principal or even a superintendent, it wasn't going to work for me. It did work out, but I wasn't too sure that it would early on and so that was a sense of security.

I started going to graduate school after I became a cosmetologist. I think it was in 1957, I started working on my master's degree, but I had to finish beauty school first. I really wanted to continue when I left Southern and was given a chance to go on and work on my master's. I had permission from the university to go on and work on my master's, but I needed to get out and work awhile. I needed to help my mother who at that time was ill, and I just couldn't go. I couldn't continue. And as soon as I got some of the things that I needed to do for my mom, I started back to school. I thought about what the master's degree was going to achieve for me.

Well, first of all, I really wanted deeper knowledge. I felt that I could learn more. I felt that it would enhance my pay, which was very little at that time, and I had great ambitions for getting a Ph.D. at that time. So, my goal was to continue my education. I really thought, in the beginning, of going into medicine, but after I found that I couldn't because I wasn't able financially, or to stay in school that long then I did what I thought was the next best thing. I said, "I can't get an M.D.; I can take my time and get a Ph.D." This didn't happen, but that was my goal at that time. But after getting in and really realizing the financial situation in my family, I knew that was, or at least I considered it an impossibility at that time. So as I got closer to graduation and I realized that in fact it was an impossibility because I needed to get out and get a job, and that's what I did. I went into teaching.

So in the course of teaching at DeSoto, I started my master's in 1957 and I was funding myself by saving what I could during the year and I worked in a beauty shop on the weekends after I finished beauty school. I enrolled at Southern University in biology. I was going to get my degree in science at that time. At that time it was called education with emphasis in biology. I later changed to administration and supervision.

In the summer of 1959, I had a grant for the Summer Institute and I met my soon-to-be husband. We were both a part of this Summer Institute at Southern University. I was just out on a social, along with some ladies, and William [Glasper] came over and started talking with us. From then on we started just seeing each other and he remembered me from undergraduate school. I didn't remember him. This was the first I had seen him as far as I knew, but he said that we were in a couple of education classes together. Of course he said that I probably didn't see him because I sat on the front seat and he sat on the back seat. I accept his word for it. When I

met him, he was working at Northwestern High School in Zachary. He was teaching science and mathematics at that school. So, we both had the same interests. I think he is in math with a minor in science. I'm in science with a minor in mathematics. So, we could supplement each other's knowledge.

When we got married in December of 1960, I was still teaching at DeSoto and he had a job in Baton Rouge. This was home for him, so that's why I took a maternity leave and left there in May of 1961 at the end of the school year. I stayed in Mansfield and Glasper was in Baton Rouge for that one semester to finish that year out. That was kind of hard for me, being newly married, but it's just a short trip and he came up there often. However, the roads weren't good then. It was a little more than four hours, but he came rather often. I was staying with my mother.

My first encounter there with anything dealing with integration or desegregation was in 1960. I remember it well. Now, I taught there until May of 1961. Well, my last year there was during this whole time when the early Civil Rights Movement was heating up. As far as any exposure to any of this, the first thing that I even paid very much attention to was–we were called from all over the parish. They had people from Logansport–Mansfield was what they called the parish seat, but Logansport, Frierson, Pelican, all of those people were part of DeSoto Parish. It was on a Thursday night. Thursday during the day we were all told that Superintendent Plummer and some other person wanted to meet with all of the teachers. We all met in the cafeteria that afternoon after school. And the purpose of this meeting was that there was a letter that had been written by–I don't know whether it was the governor or the person in charge of education for the state, but there was a letter that they wanted all of us to sign that we were not for integration that we wanted to remain segregated. And I remember them keeping us there until

9:00 that night pressuring us to sign. So, this was after Brown (v. Board of Education) and Jimmy Davis was the Governor, then.

So, I along with two other people out of all the black teachers and administrators from all over the parish refused to sign. I remember it so well because the next day was Friday. The principal happened to see me at some point during the day and he questioned my attendance at the meeting the previous day. He asked me if I had left early because he didn't see my name on the forms. I told him that I had attended the meeting. I did not leave early, and that I didn't sign the forms. He reminded me that the forms were still in the office, a hint to me that I still could change my mind. As I was going to get in my car, one of the teachers who had not signed stopped me and she said, "Clara, I want to tell you before you leave that I did go in the office and sign today." And I said, "Well, I thank you for telling me, but I'm still not going to sign." So, the thing is it just made really a better teacher out of me because I knew that if they got anything on me they were going to handle me. Superintendent Plummer came to my room–evidently the principal brought him by to visit me–but I was on my toes as I always was doing a good job. But, I got married in December and I got pregnant in January. So, I had to write for a maternity leave and there were about three or four of us on the campus who were pregnant at the same time because you had the elementary and the middle school there on the same campus.

I wrote for a maternity leave as did everybody else and everybody got their response, but I didn't get mine. I really knew I was in trouble. So, I was really working hard. I expected that I would get it. Oh, I just kind of laughed because I said this was nonnegotiable. I knew that they had to give it to me. But I never got my letter and near just before the end of the school year, I

got a letter from Mr. Plummer to come into his office. Well, I knew something was up, so I went in praying really hard that I would be proper and not go off the deep end. And when I got in there, he said, “You know you are applying for a maternity leave.” I said, “Yes, I am.” And he said, “I don’t know why you would want it.” He then said, “Because you have shown us beyond a shadow of a doubt that you are not for our way of life. So I don’t see why you don’t just go where they have the kind of life that you want.”

I knew this was a contradiction to what the Civil Rights Movement was all about and what Brown was all about. Black people wanted civil rights–they wanted equal schooling. They wanted that, but look. Here’s what happened. I had, the next Monday after the signing, a friend who came to my room during the noon hour and stood there and cried like a baby. She said, “You know, I’m proud that you didn’t sign,” she said, “but you know I just bought my house.” They were afraid that they would be fired, if they didn’t sign this paper that they were for segregation, but I did not sign it. They just signed it [emphasis] because they were told to sign it by the superintendent.

Now, if Martin Luther King–if all of this Civil Rights Movement–was to get rid of “separate but equal” and Brown had basically overturned that– it meant that there would be equal facilities. All of this fighting for rights, they were rejecting them. Well, this was my personal feeling. You see what happened, they caught us all by surprise that day as to what it was going to be. Well, there were people just as Jewel, who came to my room the next day and cried saying, “I didn’t know what to do, I signed because I don’t want to lose my job. I just bought a house.” They thought they were going to get fired if they didn’t sign this, I guess. They were pressured.

I don’t think they did want to be separate, many of them. I really don’t. I mean just like Jewel, who came and told me she felt just like I did, but she was afraid not to sign. It’s just like people who would never go out and march or people who will not go to meetings and stand up and say some of the things they’re against. They’re just intimidated. They think things can happen to them, but I don’t think they were all wanting segregation. I know some didn’t because they told me so, but they didn’t have the courage to stand up against it.

So, there was the Civil Rights Movement going on, and there were no teachers openly involved in the movement. I didn’t know anyone marching or doing anything at that time. There was Lloyd Jackson, whose a firm believer and Thomas White, but I don’t think it was that they didn’t want desegregation. The information was available about what was happening say in Mississippi or other states. There was some access to the news of rioting and demonstrations. I don’t think it was that they didn’t know that was going on. That wasn’t it. They knew that this was going on because it was in Louisiana. Yes, they knew it was going on, but I think it was that they felt that the persons asking for these signatures had the power–that there was power there of being fired.

I think they (the administration) thought that if enough people signed these petitions that they may not have to change. You see there were no white people coming in. It was just us [emphasis]. He (the white superintendent) wanted his nice little world not to change. And he wanted to show the governor that all of these black educators here in DeSoto Parish don’t want desegregation. They don’t want it. I think he thought that would make a difference, and so all but three signed.

Now how he explained all of the black people who were fighting and giving up their lives in riots for these rights to be recognized in American society and have equal rights, he didn't. As far as the superintendent at that time, I don't think it really mattered that much to him because when I was called in that day he went on to tell me that blacks have made some strides, but he also reminded me that they're not responsible for the things that you have gotten. This has been given by the government. You've gotten a better school, but it's not through your making it. I mean he really did tear us down to me that day, and I didn't open my mouth. And at the end he said, "So, do you still want that leave." And I said, "Yes, I do." And he said, "Well okay, you're entitled to it," but he said, "even that right [to a maternity leave] that's not of the Black's making."

So, what I could make out of that was–well, he was trying to intimidate me and he was very angry that he had me, and I was very calm. I just sat there and looked at him through it all. I guess he didn't know whether I was going to change. And when he finished all of his down-beating and brow-beating he said, "Do you still want it?" and I said, "Yes, I do."

I didn't go back to teach at the training school. I got a job here in Baton Rouge, but I didn't give it up because I was afraid that I wasn't going to get a job here. I thought that by my not signing their paper my reputation would probably follow me–that I'm a trouble maker. I really was afraid that I wouldn't get a job in Baton Rouge. Now, I had married and my husband was here. But when I was interviewed, the gentleman said to me you have a–what did he tell me that I had–an excellent recommendation. [loud laughter] Well, that comment reassured me that I wouldn't have to go back there, but I didn't think of it being that way. I thought Plummer (superintendent) was going to really do me in on my recommendation. But I got a job right away.

So, at the time when I made that vote I was for desegregation and I was for a lot of the things that I was missing by being in a segregated society. I wasn't totally aware of some of those things, but I was smart enough to believe then that the only way we were going to get some of those things that we wanted in the school was to be in a school that contained some Whites. And I think that's the ideal now. What happens now is many parents really all they want for their children is an excellent education, but they don't believe that they're going to get all the things that they need in a school that is racially identifiably black, and they're not too far wrong.

When I had asked for my maternity leave from DeSoto Parish, I was told, "Well, I don't think that we have the life here that you're looking for." In essence, I think he was basically kind of saying that I was trying to act White, that is a possibility. And I think that he was saying that more than talking White, acting White, you are not acting Black, because you are supposed to accept things. You don't fight certain things. And when you are told to do something by your superiors, you do it. You don't question things. And to be perfectly frank, I had that problem. I had a few problems with that with my principal, who was black. They knew that the white superintendent was the person who was in charge and that he backed this black principal. And sometimes even the black principal went a little bit beyond his realm because he knew that he could be backed. But there were things that if I didn't think they were right, I would say so. And sometimes I just didn't do what they told me to do, if I didn't think it was right. And so that was a no-no. I felt that because I was a black woman I was not to question. Oh, I definitely felt that I was not to question. I didn't know about white women at that time because we didn't have any Whites in the school. Even in East Baton Rouge Parish, I didn't feel that being a black woman that you could question. We talk about this notion of privilege–that a white woman could

question these things and get by with more than I could. But to be perfectly frank, the longer I stayed here in Baton Rouge to me I just got the feeling that women just weren't quite equal. Race didn't matter.

Reflections

As a new teacher, Clara was having to again make lifestyle choices. She came back home to be with her mother. In the process, she resolved the question of her "honor student" status. She completed cosmetology school nights and in the summer, while still teaching. She did this because it gave her the security she needed in the event that she was fired from her teaching position. Black teachers never felt their jobs were secure. For Blacks, the habit of surviving was a way of life–always a concern.

Life has no certainties and particularly for someone who has decided to put her values and beliefs into practice through concrete action. When Clara told me about the way they were herded into the cafeteria and made to stay there until the segregation vote was completed, she was very emotional about the event. In fact over the course of our interviews together, the occasion came up many times. I sensed that night was a major turning point in Clara's life. She experienced a multitude of feelings and emotions: courage, conviction, fear, and anger. But, she had crossed the line. She had challenged the white bureaucracy.

Clara had a vision of a better world for teaching black children. She was deciding what exactly her responsibilities were to others and the world around her. Much like her grandfather, and Mary McLeod Bethune, Marva Collins became an important a role model. Her method of successful teaching made a lasting impression on this beginning teacher.

Clara married William Glasper Jr. and her subsequent pregnancy brought her in direct confrontation with the superintendent of schools. She had decided to pick her battles and this was not one of them. She was determined to meet with him in a civilized manner and knowing Clara Byrd Glasper, I am sure it was especially hard to compose herself when he attributed everything that the Blacks had achieved to the benevolence of the Whites.

CHAPTER 5

WORKING AS A TEACHER AND AN ADMINISTRATOR FOR THE EAST BATON ROUGE PARISH SCHOOL DISTRICT 1961-1981

Introduction

Clara Byrd Glasper was already on a collision course with segregationists when she left DeSoto Parish because of her belief in desegregation. Shortly after the birth of her first child, William Jr., Clara Glasper began teaching in January of 1962 for the East Baton Rouge School District. When she accepted the job, she does not recall having any knowledge that a desegregation lawsuit filed against the school district five years earlier was still active. Her first teaching position was as a science teacher at McKinley High School, formerly known as the McKinley Colored High School.

> McKinley, opened in 1924 and was one of the first African American High Schools in the South. The school had earned a reputation by 1965 for being a high quality school. The reputation of McKinley High School was such that it not only served students from East Baton Rouge Parish, but also from all across the state of Louisiana. (Davis, 1999, p. 96)

At the time, Clara had only a rudimentary knowledge of what desegregation meant. This led to her belief that the only way black children would have access to quality schools and resources was to attend schools with white children.

While Clara was attending the training school, going to college, and teaching at her first job, a segregation battle was already brewing in Baton Rouge since before she arrived. Of particular concern to black parents was Rosenwald Elementary No. 11, a school constructed by black parents with the help of the Julius Rosenwald Fund and originally designated for black

students. In 1942, the East Baton Rouge Parish School Board redesignated the school for white students to make room for a growing white population in the area.[1]

In September of 1954, thirty-seven black children and their parents marched to the school, now renamed Gilmer Wright, and tried to enroll there. They were told they could not enter the school. Many of the fathers on that march would put their own and their children's names on the desegregation lawsuit that was eventually filed Feb. 29, 1956, on behalf of those thirty-seven North Baton Rouge African American students. When the historic Brown v. The Board of Education suit led the U.S. Supreme Court to declare that segregation was unconstitutional, attorney Johnny Jones filed suit on behalf of the children of Baton Rouge. “We thought we had the answer,” Jones said. “We thought we had the answer in 1954.” This case became known as Clifford Eugene Davis, et al. v. East Baton Rouge Parish School Board, et al (also referred to as Davis). Two well-known lawyers for the NAACP, A. J. Turead and Thurgood Marshall argued the case.

Several of the original plaintiffs recalled that their parents were upset because their children had to be bused to distant schools for black children only, and could not attend nearby white schools. Segregation meant having to take the bus north to Zion City Elementary, a black school that was overcrowded. Schools were around their area, but not being allowed to attend to those, they were bused to Zion City Elementary. They were a block from a school, but were bused every day to an area they were unfamiliar with.

In 1960, U.S. District Judge J. Skelly Wright issued an order prohibiting the School board from continuing to operate a racially segregated school system and required a desegregation plan to be submitted. The state legislature passed a law in 1961 increasing the

number of East Baton Rouge Parish school board members in an attempt to pack the board with ardent segregationists (Davis 1999). In 1963, U.S. District Judge E. Gordon West approved a "freedom of choice" plan, which allowed pupils of all races to attend the school of their choice, and later in September, twenty-eight black students enrolled in previously all-white schools without any problems. The plaintiffs in the litigation appealed the approval of the plan to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. The "freedom of choice" plan implemented by the school system had very limited success in 1964 and was reversed on appeal. The school board asked the United States Supreme Court to hear the case, but it refused to do so.

The first major court order was handed down in 1969 ordering the closing of several schools and the desegregation of other schools mainly in the Mid-City, North Baton Rouge, Baker, and Zachary. It also ordered the integration of the faculties and staffs at all schools.

The case appeared in the courts again in 1970 when the school board submitted a "neighborhood zoning plan" as another attempt to desegregate the school system by creating more racial diversity in the teaching staff. That plan was approved by the District Court without an appeal by the plaintiffs. In the Fall of 1970, Baker, Lee, Baton Rouge High, Istrouma, Glen Oaks and Zachary High Schools were all opened up to black students who lived in those school districts and there were some assignment of white students to predominantly black schools. However, all of the traditionally black schools and most of the traditionally white schools were not affected by the plans except for the fact that the faculties at every school were integrated.

This was the first year of the massive district-wide teacher cross-over. This policy was developed by the bi-racial committee and approved by the courts (Davis 1999; Jarvis & Mathews 1998). Prior to the beginning of the school year in 1970, the East Baton Rouge School System

held a three-day seminar at LSU with over six hundred teachers and administrators in attendance. It allowed black and white teachers in Baton Rouge to meet together for the first time in a large professional gathering. This seminar was an event organized to begin forced integration of teachers and students in the school system on the first day of the 1970 school year . However, experienced black teachers were selected to teach in white schools and the newly hired and low seniority white teachers were sent to the black schools. School officials were afraid to try and send any of their better, more experienced, tenured teachers to black schools because the teachers would either fight the move, or just quit.

During Clara's years in teaching, her survival technique depended on a good support mechanism, especially from the administration, both Black and White. Because of her own childhood experiences, she identified with what we call today the "underdog." She took a special interest in those students. She realized that along with looking out for the "underdog," she also had to look out for herself.

Until 1970, she had always taught black students in all-black schools. The cross-over of the best black teachers to white schools became Clara's initial experience with efforts to desegregate the school system. Clara soon found that she was working in a hostile environment.

Working in all-white schools, she found that she was always having to look over her shoulder. She believed that she had to be careful with everything she did. The messages of power and control on the part of white administrators were evident. It was then that she began keeping a diary to protect herself whenever a situation arose in which she had to defend herself and her actions. While teaching in a white school, she found her diary valuable when a parent wanted to have a white student removed from her class. She also encountered other problems.

Perhaps the most annoying behavior was the tone of voice that white students used to belittle black teachers. The white students were constantly testing black teachers' knowledge. They would ask for more than the normal explanations. It seemed that they had the idea that black teachers were not as intelligent as white ones. Acting out was used to show that black teachers could not control their classes.

As she continued to teach, she began to feel that she would be able to do more for education in supervision, So, she completed her master's degree in administration and supervision from Southern University.

In 1974, the plaintiffs filed a motion saying the 1970 cross-over plan did not desegregate the system. However, Judge E. Gordon West ruled against the motion saying the school board operated a "unitary" school system. Judge West declared the school system fully desegregated and dismissed the lawsuit on August 21, 1975. The NAACP appealed the decision to the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. In 1978, the Fifth Circuit vacated Judge West's order and remanded the case back to the Middle District of Louisiana for more hearings. In 1979, the United States, through the Justice Department, intervened as a plaintiff in the litigation, arguing that as a matter of law it had clearly been established that the school board was not operating a unitary school system. The Justice Department based its decision primarily on statistical data, including the number of one-race schools in the system and the number of minority students assigned to those schools. On September 27, 1979, John V. Parker was sworn in as U.S. district judge and inherited the school desegregation case for the next twenty-two years.

During this time, Clara was an assistant principal of instruction at Southeast Middle, a position which she began in 1974. Her diary and instincts became invaluable tools against white

teacher revenge resulting from her evaluations of their performance, as well as, resentment by older teachers that she regularly observed in their classrooms. Once, when she believed she was setup by the white teachers on a vote for a radio station, she protected herself by keeping the ballots. Although these teachers were nice to her face, it seemed that a lot of the retaliation was conducted under the table. Clara was firm in her resolve that she was doing the job that she was hired to do and so just dug in and continued defending herself. As a result, this only added to the distance between her and many of her white colleagues.

My First Twenty Years

I was working at DeSoto Parish Training School, got married, and went on maternity leave. I came to the East Baton Rouge Parish School District in 1961 with a glowing recommendation, despite my unpleasant meeting with the Superintendent at DeSoto Parish when I left there. Now, I don't think that being black was the reason I was hired immediately because of the desegregation lawsuit; nor do I think that because I was black that was a plus on my side. It may have been, but I didn't want to believe that. I didn't believe it then, I don't believe it now. I know I was a very good teacher. I had a command of the English language. I had an excellent background as far as content knowledge was concerned. I was a very good disciplinarian even though I was very young. And I think that the persons writing the recommendations evidently gave me credit for that. Another thing that helped me to hit the ground running–three of my four years at Southern I worked in the science, the biology department. That exposed me to so much

more than I would have been exposed to had I just been a student there. I was able to read so much more, have so much more in terms of books, talk with the professors who assisted me on almost a first name basis. They would ask me to come into classes and help them with the lab, to set up labs for incoming classes, even in courses that I did not take. I was able to see tests that they constructed. So I really kind of had a leg up on people who were just taking the classes. By working in the department I was exposed to so much more.

I believe that I was hired on the basis of my merits. I really do. And the reason I believe that is because there were people who talked with me after I got in who said, "Well, I've been trying to get in this parish for three or four years, and you just came here in June and just applied in January." Well, I applied not in January; I applied in October shortly after my baby. And they said, "And you have a job already." But even when I talked with the person in personnel, I was told that I had an excellent record that contained many of the things that I had done, like my children had won LIALO competitions in the state and things of that sort. He said if anything came open, I would get a job second semester. And I did. And quite a few people, some of the persons I had finished school with or had known were surprised that I got a job so soon. Some of them were working in outlying parishes and had been trying to get a job here and didn't. They were black teachers. So, that ruled out color. I didn't feel that in terms of discrimination, that was not an issue.

When I applied for a job at the East Baton Rouge Parish School District, I wasn't conscious at that time that it was under court-ordered desegregation. I'm sure it was in the papers, but I hadn't really paid any attention to it. At that time, the only confrontation with desegregation I had was in DeSoto Parish in 1960 when they came with those long forms for us

to sign that we were for segregation. And of course I refused to sign, and that's how I really got involved with the desegregation activities. Before then I had read about it, but it really wasn't that big a deal to me at that time. I was not going to sign that I was against it because I was not against desegregation. I just had not had an opportunity to work for it. I was for it, maybe not for the reason that some people thought or were for it.

But I was for it because I thought that was the only way the schools in which the black children attended would be enhanced to the extent that they would get an equal opportunity–was to be mixed with the whites. I didn't have the faith in the system that they would make the black schools equal in resources and in quality to the white schools. And I felt that the only way that the black kids would get that equal educational opportunity would be to be in the same schools as the white kids.

Now, when I say equal opportunity, I'm talking in terms of resources, facilities, teachers, being with white students–what I perceived as the success mechanism was bringing the two together. Well, I felt that if they had all of those things, they would have access to a better education. And I say that because I remember when we didn't have new books. I recall having books with so many signatures in them, my students didn't have room to sign their names. And they weren't names of people who were in our school. Let's take science books. I know that when you use a science book that's four or five years old there will be things in that book that are not true. And I'm sure that the same thing was happening in other books. I wasn't conscious of it. I didn't realize that meant more than just being valued less to get older books. And I guess the thing that really brought that to my mind was I was teaching biology, and my textbook had that there were twenty-four pairs of chromosomes. And at that time, I was getting a little science

newsletter and it came out in the newsletter that they had miscounted, and that there were really twenty-three pairs. And I said, “Oh my gosh, how happy I am that I am getting this newsletter.” I was thinking about my children next year, or the next year when they went somewhere else. They would have said, “Gee whiz, Ms. Glasper sure was dumb,” because I had taught them what was in the book and I would have been giving them misinformation. That started me to think, how much of what I learned with those old books was outdated? And these things made it apparent to me that when you get old books, you are getting more than disrespect or devaluing, you are probably getting some misinformation.

My decision to come here (Baton Rouge) was because my husband was here. This was his home. He was teaching at Northwestern High School at that time. He taught about seven years prior to my coming to Baton Rouge. So, he would have been teaching math and science around the time that the desegregation lawsuit was filed. Much later on he was moved out of the classroom. He first went to the planetarium and he acted as a liaison teacher between the planetarium and the school system. From there he worked in Title I and for a short time when Mr. Jones, director of Title I, became incapacitated, he served in his place kind of directing. Title I is the Federal program that assists in trying to equalize educational opportunities for children. That program will give money toward making up for poverty and for the things that children have not had equal access too. This has nothing to do with desegregation. Not really, it just happens to assist more black children than white children because there are more poor Blacks than Whites in the system.

So, we were both working for the school system, and I don’t feel there were any repercussions in terms of the fact that the two of us were working in the same system. First of all

when it comes to math and science teachers, there has been a kind of shortage for years and years. As long as I can remember it was very easy for a person certified in math and/or science to get a job. Mine was enhanced because I was certified in both math and science. So that made it relatively easy.

Teaching and Raising a Family

When I was teaching and trying to raise a family, first of all, I tell you, I had two children born in August and two in September and heaven knows they weren't planned that way, but that's the way it happened. So, I was out the first semester of school four different times and it gave me a chance to be with them for a good little while before I had to leave them. We were blessed enough to be able to hire Glasper's aunt, who had partially helped with raising him because she didn't have any children. He would pick her up in the morning and take her home in the afternoon when we would get home. She not only kept the children, but she cooked. She just worked for us really until my baby was in junior high school. And so, it gave me peace of mind. Sometimes, I would tell them I felt guilty that I wouldn't think about my own children all day long when I was working. And it was because I felt so comfortable with her. If they got sick, if they needed a doctor's appointment, it was already made when I got home. All she'd say is, "Well, I made an appointment with Doctor Bett tomorrow at 4:00," and we would go. But it was the kind of thing where I knew she loved those children, so I didn't worry about them. I really didn't. If she had not been available, I don't know what we would have done. I guess I would have done what the rest of them do, but I would have worked. I'll tell you that. I don't know if I would have gotten somebody or if I would have taken them to some nursery. I just never had that to worry about. When I first started working in East Baton Rouge Parish, I remember telling

Glasper to ask her if she would work for us. And I remember getting very angry with him because he went to his mother and his mother said, “Oh no, she’s not going to want to do that.” I insisted that we ask her because my maternity leave was up. And I said, “Well, I’m going to ask his sister.” So, when I talked with her and she agreed to do it, we kept her. As a matter of fact, she stayed until the first ones were out of school.

Now with the two incomes from teaching, Glasper’s and mine, we were not financially comfortable, not really at first. Later on we learned to live with it. But, when we started–first of all you were making very little and then you got paid for nine months. I had to learn how to stretch that money over the summer. Boy, we had a hard time even with the two of us working and teaching. My first, William Jr., we had to leave him in the hospital he had what they call AB incompatibility, and they had to do a blood exchange. I remember having to pay something like $600.00 and that was a lot of money to come up with at that time because salaries were just not much. And see when we got married, I was in Northern Louisiana and I had a car that wasn’t paid for. Glasper had one that wasn’t paid for and here I come up expecting a baby. At that time you couldn’t teach up to the time of the delivery and that meant you had to be off at least a semester

You had to take a semester’s leave. You had to. I remember asking to come back, but I couldn’t. But see now you can work, and doctors want you to work. They just don’t want you to sit–you can work up until almost time for the baby. You can come back after six or nine weeks or whatever you really need to do. However, you could not do that then. At that time you had to stay out at least a semester when I first moved to Baton Rouge.

Teaching in East Baton Rouge Parish

I went to work here in East Baton Rouge at McKinley High School. I stayed there for a year, went on maternity leave, and then moved to McKinley Middle School. There I stayed teaching math and science, mostly science, until I think it was 1970.

I really enjoyed teaching. I really did. After about six weeks at any school I was ready to go. But it took me about that amount of time to get my students in shape to know what I was going to take and what I was not going to take and to kind of get with the parents. Now, sometimes the parents would come, but I was always able to explain whatever I was doing. I said the same thing to my administration. I can justify what I'm doing every day in my classroom. If you ever come in my classroom and you're concerned about something that I'm doing, I would appreciate if you would ask me why I'm doing it because I have a reason. I think when you explain to people and let people know that you're very sure of yourself and that you can justify what you're doing and why, I have always been able to get the respect of the principals with whom I worked.

When I think about my career as a teacher for so many years, while many others leave after the first year, I think, first of all, I was always a very compassionate person. I think that I identified with what we call today the "underdog"–kids who are having trouble, kids whom other teachers didn't like. I always took a real special interest in those kids and I looked out for those. The others could most times look out for themselves. Another thing that I think really helped me to gain confidence was that my first job was in my hometown. I was well respected and when I was in college they would put my picture in the paper when I got some kind of award or

something. When I went back there to teach, this is such a small town I knew the children's parents and if I called a parent and said Johnny was not respectful to me, that was the end of it. I guess this helped build my confidence and so I was able to have good discipline. I knew all along that I was very knowledgeable in my subject matter. I was ambitious. I would write the companies and get different copies of books. I subscribed to science magazines and would read them, and when I found something different like the teaching about chromosomes, I would explain this to my children and tell them that science changes, and what's true or considered true today may not be such tomorrow.

I looked for things like that. I think confidence was a lot of it. My grandfather always made me think that I was just special. I thought I was. I was very confident, and I worked very hard because I wanted to be a good teacher. I had some good teachers, and I had good role models. Then another thing that helped me when I went back to DeSoto, I had some teachers there who had taught me, and they pointed out pitfalls to me. I had so much help. You see had I been thrown into a school where I didn't know anybody, no one gave me any hints, or the principal may not have backed me, I don't know that I would have done as well. But I am grateful I had people, my math teacher, and my science, my biology teacher who was so excited that I had gone into biology. Those people were there to help me. And they pointed out things to me, and they wanted me to succeed. It would have been very hard not to with those people there. So I think that was a lot of it–a source of my becoming a good teacher.

I had a good support mechanism. And so, I would say that would be one of the keys that younger teachers today just don't have. They are pretty much out on their own. In many instances, they are. I know now that they have mentors. They say, "You're new, so I am going to

appoint a mentor to you." But, I don't think they go back as much as they should to see what these mentors are doing. I have had new teachers to tell me, "My mentor hasn't said anything to me in so many months." So they just assign, but I don't think they do enough follow-up to make sure that the mentors are doing all that they need to do. And then to be perfectly frank with you, I have requested a list of mentors every year, well not every year but most years, to see who they were. And some of the persons, I questioned the choices of some of the mentors. So, I don't think they have worked hard enough with that phase of assistance to new teachers. And you know I remember when they had this program when Governor Roemer was in office and they phased it out because people complained. I think that was the biggest mistake that Louisiana ever could have made because that was a program that really would have helped teachers a lot. I remember what the evaluators would do–you went in and you sat there and a teacher could not ignore certain persons. You watched to see that they called on everybody. If there were students who were misbehaving and they were ignored by the teacher, you got marked down for that. It was a very rigid evaluation. But, it would have enhanced teachers. It was teacher accountability, and it didn't last long because I guess too many teachers were kind of getting rough marks; however, it was something that they really should have kept.

I realized in my classes that the curriculum needed some improving. And I implemented something in my classroom. I always had to know what I was going to do between September and May. So, even though I didn't have a curriculum prescribed by the Central Office, I always designed one for myself because I needed that. I had to know where I was going. I couldn't just take a book and say I'll just teach as much as I can and when the year is up, this is it. I couldn't

do that. I felt the need to take that book and see what was most important, and I always had my own certain sequence.

What is Most Important about Teaching

What I considered most important about teaching is the fact that I think that you have a chance to help so many children and not just academically. I think that I helped a lot of children in ways other than academically. Academics are very important, yes, but I found out by going back last year to my old school for a reunion that it's more. It's also the little things that you do for your students. That was the first time I had taken my husband back, and he was impressed when people were coming up to me and recalling things that I had said to them or I had done. I felt I was appreciated and it just tickled him the things that they remembered I had said or done. And of course it came out, "There is only one way to do a thing, that's the right way," and just helping children. I have a young lady here, well I have two, one in Mansfield, and the one here, who every Mother's Day calls me. They maybe send a card, a gift, or call me. The things that I did for children I really thought nothing of it, but they remembered. This little girl Liz, when I taught at McKinley, had lost her mother and father; she was living with her aunt and had little means. I used to bring her home with me sometimes on the weekend and do her hair. They had a little 8th grade prom, and I made her a dress, bought the fabric and made the dress. It was just little things like that because I learned to sew very well in high school because of home economics. [laughter] I would do things for children. I still do that. I enjoy it, doing hair, and by that time I was a licensed beautician, not practicing because I didn't have time. But, I would do little things for children. And, there was a young lady who lived across the street from me who had an exceptionally heavy bust. Now, her mother died, and she lived with her grandmother. I

would sew for her because her grandmother didn't know how to buy for her. And really having this heavy bust, I don't know if I could have done much better because her clothes needed to be made to really fit. I used to do those kinds of things. After she left and went out to California, she used to send me things. I did these little things that were nothing to me, but kids come back and tell you how much it meant to them. So, I believe that teaching is very important because I think that for everybody, but for people with lesser means especially, the door out of poverty, in many instances, is the door to a schoolhouse. I saw that for Blacks. And I still tell children, if you want to get above your circumstances, stay until graduation and you can move up. Even now more so than when I was growing up, there's very little that you can do without some learning or without some training. So, I push that. But teaching to me is more than just academics. It is modeling for the children– it's being a mentor for them. It grieved me when teachers started not fixing themselves up nice and looking nice. I really have not learned to accept that. I feel that the teacher just needs to be someone that the children can look up to and respect. That is a part of teaching to me, more than just subject matter. We need to be role models and mentors. How they perceive you makes an impact on how they perceive themselves and what they want to aspire to. I believe that. I really do. Marva Collins talks about that, about appearance–that self esteem and how you look makes a big difference in how you feel. I still think it is very important.

I believe the educational system has gone too far in lowering achievement expectations, but I do think it is possible to raise our expectations of students. You are not going to get everybody to do it. But I think it would catch on. I think we still have a few teachers who hold high expectations of children. We don't have a lot of them, but, there are a few who do. I still think it is possible. The reason I think it is possible is because of just the few kids that interact

with me at my church, and we have a small church. They'll come to me and say, "You know Mrs. Glasper I have a conflict. I want you to tell me if I ought to take this co-op, or better, I ought to take physics because they are both the same hour?" And I just look at them. A little girl did that last year and I said, "I think you know what I'm going to tell you." [laughter] It's things like that I know they can do it and I tell them that. I have bought them books on the ACT. When they come to me with their report card, I'm sweet to them and all that, but I don't hesitate to tell them when I know they can do better. I guide them into courses that they should take, and I push. I'm structured with them, but they know I love them. They know that I am not happy at all when they are taking these little foolish dead end courses instead of taking meaningful courses. I can't make them all stop because the parents are letting them do it, but many of them I do guide into meaningful courses. And I have seen too many of these kids do well. Children who could have been nothing, and people would have not raised their eyebrows have come up to really be good citizens, educated citizens. I know it's possible. And I'll tell you when I taught in Mansfield that is about all I had were expectations. I had one microscope for that classroom, and a few other things. Let me tell you, I was the only biology teacher so they had to come by me, and I mean I pushed them. I had children who went into the medical field and I think it was because when they got to college they did very well in biological sciences. They were ready to do it. So, it is possible. I think that what happens now I tell people with the LEAP (Louisiana Educational Assessment Program) test, it makes absolutely no sense for all of these children to fail. You can't wait until three weeks before the test. Start with word problems, start with little logic activities, start with non-routine projects and do it the whole year. We can do it!

Another issue is teaching to the test. Oh, I don't like that. Teach creative and critical thinking all the time because children need to be able to think critically. I mean that is a need I believed in way before I got out of the classroom. Mine may have been because of an "I'm from Missouri" kind of attitude that I had. I always wanted to understand things and I felt that the children needed to understand things. I felt that if they really understood, remembering for the test would be easy. You know, last year I spent more than $100 getting materials. The reason I bought that material was because I didn't have a chance to see the test. So, I knew if they had study material, it was going to be similar to the test. I thought it was beautiful. A lot of it was just reasoning, and using a little logic and a little critical thinking. That to me is what teaching ought to be. It frustrated me when I was tutoring in my church, and the kids would come and they had to do problems 1-14. And I would say, "Okay, what about 15-20?" "Oh, we don't have to do those." But that was the application, those were the word problems; those were the things that they should have been doing. Right now the reason these children don't do well on the test is because all of that critical thinking, all of that reasoning, all of that logic needed in preparation for the test is missing.

But it is possible if you can get people with the courage to do it. You do have to have courage because I remember one year I decided I was going to make all my tests, the whole year of biology. And you know what, all of the older teachers who were there said, "You are crazy. You're not going to have a job because you are going to fail too many children and you are going to be gone." I was no better at listening then than I am now, and I did it. By the end of the first semester, I had the same percentage of A's because children will do what you expect them

to do. I said, “This is how you are going to learn.” And they learned to do it. It’s not that they can’t do it. They are just conditioned not to think.

Look, even gifted classes have shown you that. All those children in gifted classes aren’t gifted. But I tell you what, they learn to think critically because they’ve got to play the part. And the teachers teach them as if they are gifted. So, they learn. I’ll tell you what happened to me one year when I was hiring teachers to teach summer school. I hired a gifted teacher to teach summer school math. Boy, was I talked about, but that was the best experience those children ever had because she used methods that she had used on gifted kids. When you look at those methods and when you look at a lot of the activities that they do, they are good for anybody. So, it is not that these children can’t do these things.

My own children weren’t gifted, but they all did well. Three of them graduated from LSU in engineering. And I think you know they didn’t give them the grades. The other one went to Southern in math education. He did not finish. He got married. He was going to school, and when DOW Chemical called him, he went. And you know, I was almost happy because I didn’t believe that he was tough enough to be a teacher in this day and time. I really saw him as having a hard time. I didn’t tell him, and I encouraged him and I talked with him about the issue, but he wanted to be a math teacher.

With my own children, I had a little book. I looked at it the other day, Logic Anymore. It starts out so simple to them, my youngest granddaughter could almost, maybe, she is eighteen months, could probably do some of them. But you start out so simply, and I would do these kinds of things with them. They weren’t any more different from anyone else’s children. None of them were in gifted classes. Mark, my youngest, maybe could have made it. And I think that was just

because he had all of us to help him. But I would just do little things, order little books, Dr. Seuss books. I would do the little summer things, the newspapers that you could get, Weekly Reader and Highlights. So, it was just because of what we did and what I expected from them. "My" children couldn't be slow and so I worked with them. If you feel that way about all children I think that–but what happens now is that somehow they have these ideas. You know at one time they didn't even want you to teach children anything about reading in kindergarten. So, now we are seeing kids can learn so much more at an earlier age than what we thought.

The point is, if we expect more, we will get more. They would say I was hard. I didn't feel that I was, but that is the way the children thought. They passed, most of them. They got my message. But it was because I had expectations of them. And they knew that they were not going to get by with those little flimsy answers that they would give. They just knew they had to produce.

Most of the time I had the support from the administration. I can tell you the biggest problem I had was with the athletes. When I was at McKinley, I recall a principal distinctly telling me he wanted me to change grades. And I said to him, "You have my grade sheet, you have the roll book, and you are the principal, now you change that notebook, but I'm not going to change it." I knew that if I change these grades there is no telling. I had my reputation, they knew what they had to do in my class. I would go into a room and see children reclining on things. I would not allow a child to tune out like that. Marva Collins says, "Sit up straight, no heads down." Yes ma'am, I did the same thing. I would not allow a child to be found sleeping. And I would tell the students, "You are going to have such a hard time failing, you just might decide to pass because you are not going to sit in here and do nothing." I would not allow it. And

I've heard people say the child has the right to fail, maybe they do. But I have a right to do everything I can do to get the work that I am trying to get because I knew that it wasn't unreasonable. And you have a few teachers whose homework the children will do. They don't tolerate that foolishness. They expect a lot, and they get a lot.

Finishing My Master's Degree

After I worked awhile, I decided that I wanted to be in administration. I thought about working with student teachers. I really felt that I had something to offer others. And even getting a master's degree in biology would have given me more courses there, but I still would not have been certified to become an administrator. Another thing that really pushed me into administration was fact that I had taken most of the courses by the time it got close to time for me to finish. I had taken most of the biology courses that I needed. Many of them, if not most of them, were more than six years old at that time, and I couldn't use them. I said to myself, "I'm not going to take these courses over. It doesn't make sense. I know what I've done. So, I'll get my master's in something else." I could just use the biology, the science, the physics, the courses that I had taken at Southern and LSU, and ,of course, a course of math at Loyola for my +30 and get my master's degree in administration and supervision. So, I finished my master's in either 1965 or 1966. Along with working on my master's I was attending Summer Institute. I think the last one I attended was the summer of 1963 or 1964. I'm not sure, but one of those summers I attended an Institute of Science at LSU. After that, I spent summers that I went to school working strictly on my new field. Glasper, my husband, continued on with his masters. He completed his before I did. He was working full time, but each summer he would go off to school and he also took some courses at night, which I did very little of. I think I went to school

in the evening one time and I couldn't handle that with the children. But he went to school consistently each summer so he finished his ahead of me.

The Cross-Over

Really, the first effect the desegregation court case had on me was the cross-over that began with the beginning of the school year in 1970. I had read things about it and of course I kept up with things about the children who went to Baton Rouge High, and things of that sort. But this was the first thing that really made me just stop in my tracks and pay more attention to it. I didn't particularly want to participate in the cross-over. I had no apprehensions as such because there were some persons who were very concerned about teaching in a white school. That didn't bother me because I felt very secure in what I was doing. I did not like the fact that I was being taken away from the children at McKinley Middle because I enjoyed working there. At first when I was moved from McKinley, I felt that I was making a difference and I felt that it was unfair. As far as being leery of working in different schools, that didn't bother me either, but it troubled me that I had to leave the children that I had grown fond of and understood.

When they started doing this, they were kind of screening teachers. They weren't just coming in and saying, "Give me three of your black teachers to go over here." What happened, they made you believe that they were choosing what they considered the best teachers. They had your record, and so when they said that they were choosing some of the best teachers, I just felt that I would be chosen. I had a good record with my supervisor, so I almost knew it was just a matter of time. I had no say so in the decision, none whatsoever.

Not all teachers were part of the program. Some were never asked or told. Now, I don't know if it would have mattered if I had rebelled or not. But, I mean, my principal, the people

around me knew that I wasn't anxious to go. I think it was just a matter of saying, "Well you know you will be moved to school X or school Y. No one called me in and said, "Would you like to go?"

I guess I was resisting change, but as far as the assignment, that really didn't bother me a lot because I was very confident in terms of my knowledge of the subject matter. I was very confident because I believed in my teaching ability. Having competed with the likes of St. Augustine and my students won out, I was very confident. I also felt that I could handle the English language, which some people feared. I knew that I was a good disciplinarian, and I hadn't heard anything that made me believe that the white children were so greatly different from the black children, so I didn't have the fears that some people had. And I felt that I could talk with anybody.

I understand there was a big seminar at LSU attended by several hundred teachers, and it was explained how the cross-over was going to work. However at the time, I didn't know when I was really supposed to do the cross-over when the meetings were held, since I was very much expecting a baby. So I did not attend those meetings. My assigned cross-over school was Westdale Middle School in September of 1970, but I had a baby in August. When I came back to the system in January of '71 instead of sending me to Westdale, the person in human resources said that someone was leaving at Glasgow Middle. So he said, "You'll just go to Glasgow for a semester and then in the fall you will go to Westdale." Glasgow and Westdale were both white schools at that time. I taught at Westdale Middle School until 1974.

They caught me up or gave me the information that I needed through letters from Central Office and of course communicating with my principal. So, it was basically up to me to catch up

and be knowledgeable. All they did was to tell me where I would be going, and what I would be teaching. And that was about it. This was the very first time that I had taught white students. From then on, I was teaching both white students and black students combined. I guess, I didn't have sleepless nights about it. I thought about it, and then I had a chance to talk to people. Now I think the thing that helped me, I was and still am a very confident person about what I am doing. I just always believed in whatever I did, doing it well. I had no fears of them listening to me and finding me giving out wrong information or finding me using faulty grammar. I didn't have those fears. Now, there were a lot of people who did, but I didn't have those fears.

However, I felt white teachers really needed more understanding of black culture because I didn't feel that I had enough understanding of white culture. For instance, lets say if you are disciplining black children, I talked with many white teachers who told me that they had no idea that the black students hated the word "boy." So, many of them were using, "Boy, sit down,"and meant absolutely nothing negative. But black kids resent that because for years and years and even now it is a reminder of the subservient status of slaves. Their grandfathers were called "boy;" their dads were called "boy." Many of them got in trouble with black students by calling them "boy." Because that was an extremely negative thing. If you call a black girl, a "gal," you are in trouble. The same thing with the word "punk." In the black culture, the word "punk" meant a homosexual when I was growing up. Yes, ma'am. And when I heard a white teacher after the cross-over come in and say, "Oh, he's a little punk," you were in big trouble. Also, you learn never to say anything about a black kid's mother. Oh well, gee whiz, that is completely out of the question. You were ready for a fight then.

This is why I feel that there should be multicultural teaching, and there should be some diversity training before they bring these teachers in here. It is important to do something. You don't have to have a whole month long thing. But let them know those pet peeves. There is some words that mean one thing to a group for instance like I said "punk." Now a teacher comes in and says, "You're just acting like a punk," and wow! You have just messed up. But if you knew that was a very sensitive thing, you wouldn't do that. And so many times, white teachers came in with the heart to do their very best, but they were not accustomed to the culture and they didn't know what to do.

I wasn't worried about my teaching. I just didn't know how I was going to be able to interact with them. I went there on hearsay. I don't know if I had been told or somehow led to believe that white kids were supposedly much, much smarter than our children and just lots of myths that you pick up. And when I got there, I really found that there were more of them that were out front. Some of them were exceptionally bright, some were lazy, didn't get their work, just like some of the ones that I had left.

At McKinley there were some students who were out front too, and some who were not. However, the proportions were quite different. When I crossed over, I found more of those children able to do–I could give research projects and things that I would find more of them would be able to do. When I would give science projects for science fairs, some of them were able to go out to LSU and get assistance. Many of them had parents who taught at LSU or taught somewhere else. So, I found that more of those students were able to go, let me put it like this, on a higher level than the students at McKinley. I found it true because of either the access to people on a higher level, or their parents in many instances. I had no problem giving assignments

that could involve a lot of research. I had to understand also that there were some that I would have to assist along the way, but not as many as I would have to assist in a racially identifiable black school.

I didn't find teaching white students different. I didn't do anything differently because I was doing okay in the black schools. But something came out when I went to my first assignment. I noticed sometimes I would say something and the children would come behind me, and for instance, I would say "down" and they would come behind me and say "damn"–not grammar or anything like that but tone. I was trying to give them some leeway for a little while. I thought that they would stop, but they didn't. So, finally one day I just said to them "Listen, I don't sound like you, I never have and I never will. But I am not making any mistakes as far as grammar is concerned. I am not splitting my verbs and don't you come behind me another time." I think they knew that I meant it. That was the end of that.

So, it wasn't making fun of my dialect. It was being disrespectful. I think it was. That's why I became angry and told them never to do it again. I'll tell you something else that they would do to try and irritate me. They would ask questions. I got the impression that they thought that maybe I wasn't so smart and that didn't bother me because I was sharp and I knew it. I had no aversion for saying "I don't know," because I wasn't intimidated by not knowing. But I knew I was very well versed in content knowledge, more than most teachers, because I had so much more experience. And then once I finished college, I didn't stop. I was a prolific reader. I went to workshops. I went to the Educational Association meetings. I went back to college taking courses and then we went to the Institute courses, and they were tough. So, I felt I was ready. I had no fears as far as my content knowledge. But they would ask a lot of questions, and

sometimes the questions were legitimate, and I would answer them. And sometimes you could see them kind of looking at one another, and I guess they were surprised that I could answer some of these questions. I think that they spent time at night writing down questions. I'm not sure that they were trying to break me down. I think that they had probably underestimated the intelligence of black teachers because other teachers told me that they experienced some of the same things. Some black teachers were extremely frustrated. But I didn't really let it annoy me. I was kind of glad to let them know how smart I was.

During this cross-over experience, I worked with other black teachers and they talked to me about problems they were having. Some continued to have problems with students. There were instances where we taught some of the same students and they were appalled that I was no longer having trouble with them. This is what I said to those students. I even made a joke and said, "If I went home saying what you just said, my husband would think I had gone completely nuts." But the questions and the repeating, it was a kind of correcting mode like a child.

My granddaughter may come in and misuse a verb, and I would come behind her and restate it using the verb correctly. But I was not misusing verbs because I was very confident in the English language. So, this was only an attempt to make me say something with the same tone that they were saying it. I was very conscious of my pronunciation, and I knew that it was just either lower expectations or disrespect or whatever, but I corrected that.

I'm not sure whether it was their home environment–that their attitude toward me was a learned response because they were used to white teachers or whether it was a rebellion. I got the impression, and I may have been wrong, that they just probably had been told that we were not as smart or as intelligent as the white teachers.

I can remember little things I will never forget when I got to Westdale Middle. It didn't take me long to get my discipline going because I would always go and talk with the principal–with whomever was in charge of discipline and say to them, "If you just support me for a couple of weeks, you won't be bothered with my students. Just support me because they've got to know that I mean what I say and they've got to know there are consequences." The principle supported me and one day Mr. Chambers, who at that time was the science supervisor, came to visit me during class. When the supervisor was sitting down observing me teach, two of the students came up and threw their notebooks and they fell behind a big cabinet. I was devastated. I just stopped and said, "Who are you showing off for? I've never seen you do this." It really embarrassed them because I guess they thought they were going to show Mr. Chambers that I didn't have control. So, I just stopped teaching, talked with them, then told them to go and sit down. After Mr. Chambers left and they went on to their next class, they came back later and wanted to know if they could get the custodians to move this big cabinet so they could get their notebooks. I looked at them and said, "That's a notebook you've lost forever." That was probably really mean, but I had to send a message. I think that has helped me a lot because even though I love children to the nth degree, I've never had a problem being exceptionally firm and making them know that there are consequences for their actions. I think that kids know early on that I care about them. I explain what I am doing. I'm doing this not to hurt you, but you've got to take time to think about what you are doing, and I'm not going to take it–these kinds of things. They fumed about it and then they went to the white principal. I don't know what they told him, but when he called me in I told him exactly what happened. I said, "I told them that they had lost those notebooks forever, and I hope you'll support me." He did. That was the end of that. I didn't

have any more showing off because they realized I did as I tell my own children, whenever you embarrass me that's when I'm going to correct you–not wait until I get home. I treat my own children the same way I treated my students. Now, if you start showing off, I'm not going to say "wait" until the supervisor leaves, I'm going to correct you right then and there.

I remember when I became a supervisor there were times children would do little things to a teacher or against a teacher when I was in the class. I have even had them say she's just acting like that because you're in here. It's a childish prank that may not have anything to do with race. At the time I thought it was racial, but when I got out and became a supervisor, I realized that they all did these little things to see if they could "get you." It wasn't a matter of whether you were black or white. That's what I perceived later on. At that time, I felt that they were trying to show me up in front of my supervisor and make it look like they cut up all the time when they didn't because I had good control.

It was just little things. I didn't have many real major problems. Now I don't know if my colleagues were supported in the same way that I was. Knowing Mr. McKay, I believe that if they had gone to him and explained what they were doing and why, he was the kind of person I believed would. I had a lot of respect for him. If he was not happy to have me there, he never let it show.

White parents would come to him and insist that their children be taken out of certain teacher's rooms. I don't know whether it was only blacks. I only heard about the black ones because we talked about those things. But I can't say that they didn't do the same thing for white teachers. However, one little white girl's father, who was a psychologist or a psychiatrist, came to school to ask that she be taken out of my class. Mr. McKay sent for me. The thing that I would

try to do would be to go to the principal and get him to understand the situation so that he could support me. I knew that out there on that limb by myself I didn't have a chance of a snowball in July. First of all, there were the negative thoughts about black teachers not being as well versed or as smart, and I knew that perception was out there. But I wanted to prove to them that they were wrong. There were a lot of stumbling blocks in getting there because the children probably were feeling that way too.

I had a conference with the parent, and what I did with Molly was to take all these notes and things that she had talked with me about, and sat there and shared them with her dad. When the conference was over, the father said, "Molly is lucky to have a teacher like you, and I am not going to ask that she be taken out of your class." I think what had happened, Molly had gone home and told some untruths. Molly fantasied, and he may not have noticed it. Anyway, Molly had told me some things that had happened at home. Her mom and dad had separated and I didn't know, but I believed that Molly was fantasizing. He came to talk with me about something Molly had said–that she felt I didn't like her. Well, I went on to tell him that I couldn't imagine her saying that because Molly comes by or hangs around to talk with me often. I really thought that she felt very comfortable with me and that she liked being in my classroom. I said she even told me about a waterbed that she has, and I went on and named some of the things that I really didn't believe Molly when she told me. I think that helped him to realize that Molly didn't always tell the truth. I think that was a lot of it. But he went back to my principal and was very positive, and he left her there. I really am not sure why Molly did that. I don't remember if her grades were going down. So, I never had any children taken out of my classes because of anything I had done. While at Westdale, my students did very well in science fair competition

and so what I felt was that if they gave me just a few months, the parents would realize that I was a good teacher and I still feel that way.

The experience wasn't as traumatic as I had thought it would be. It really wasn't. At first I really found myself having to show the children that I was an intelligent person. They would ask me all kinds of questions. Sometimes the questions didn't have any connection to the work we were doing– "Can a dog have diabetes?" you know, just to see. After that initial trial period, then it was just school as usual. But it took awhile.

So, this was a new experience for some of them also, getting used to a black teacher because I didn't go the first semester. But I suppose it was just as much a trial period for them because they had not been exposed to that in all of the years of their schooling. Since then, there have been whites in black schools, and blacks in white schools. The cross-over just kind of broke the ice and got it started.

My Move to Administration

After I left the cross-over experience at Westdale, that was in '74, I became an assistant principal of instruction (API) at Southeast Middle School until '81. I was assigned just to that one school. Richard Day and I both went there in 1974. We were all new in our AP positions. He was in charge of discipline, assistant principal of administration, and I was in charge of instruction and I was called API, assistant principal for instruction. Mr. Walker was the principal. Both men were white.

I can remember my first year as API evaluating teachers. At that time they had all these criteria. You could be excellent. Today, you are either okay, or you are not okay. But at that time you had all these different grades. My first evaluation of all of my teachers, two white English

teachers, went to Dr. Brown at Central Office. And I know why they went to her. She was noted for being rough. She was the supervisor of English (white) at that time and O.C. Brown's sister. He was supposed to be a big powerful lawyer in town.

They went to her because they had always gotten "excellent," and I didn't give them an excellent evaluation in some areas. I can remember her coming out there (Southeast), telling me in so many words what the teachers were upset about, and on and on, and I respected that. I was asked to change the evaluations by Dr. Brown. But I didn't. She didn't get me to change anything that day. I must admit that my principal stood behind me because he knew that I knew what I was talking about. I don't know whether the teachers took it to the Central Office or whether Dr. Brown took it to a person higher than she was in instruction at the school board. Well, I was called into the Central Office over these same teachers. When he called me in, I took my notebook with me. I sat down and I started from my notebook giving times that things had happened. I remember saying, "On such-and-such a day was the first day that Mrs. 'X' ever put up a bulletin board. On this particular day, Mrs. 'X' talked to her class and she told several children that they were going to be on welfare," just things like that I had recorded. After I did about four instances and gave the date, and sometimes the period, he said "Ms. Glasper, I don't have a doubt in my mind that you know what you are talking about. So this is it, this is the end of this." And, it was the end of it. I never had any more problems of that nature.

So, that really gave me courage–more courage to say what needed to be said and to do what needed to be done. I also remember a teacher once calling Mr. Walker, a friend of his. She complained to him because she said that I was sitting up in her room observing, and I should have been observing the new teachers' rooms. Well, Mr. Walker wanted me to observe

everybody because this was a new school. And he didn't know these teachers. So, he wanted everybody observed. Anyway, when Graydon Walker from the Central Office came in that day, I was standing in the cafeteria on duty, and he walked up to me and started telling me about teachers saying that I was in their room instead of observing the new teachers. And I remember Mr. Walker (principal) walking up saying, "I am very pleased with Mrs. Glasper's work. I have no problem with her work." Well, you can imagine how word traveled throughout the school.

I think that they knew that I would be candid about what I believed. They knew that I worked hard because I spent my time in classrooms. When someone came and wanted to know what was going on in English or math or whatever, I was able to tell them. I never had a fascination with sitting behind a desk in an office. I spent my time in the classrooms. I knew what was going on. And so Mr. Walker trusted me for that.

There was another incident when some teachers tried to set me up, too. We had to choose a radio program that we wanted to carry our news for the school. They were boosting the schools and all the radio stations were providing this service. We had a little form that we had to fill out to choose our radio station. And I will never forget that day. They choose a black radio station. I think it was WXOK. Now just about all of the students and the majority of the teachers were white, but a black radio station was chosen. And I really think they may have done it because they thought that's what I–maybe they thought that–honestly I don't know what they were thinking. But anyway, I sat there and counted the votes. As I was tallying the thing, I was throwing the ballots in the trash. But when I realized that WXOK had won, by instinct I got up and took all of the ballots out of the trash. I put them together and put them in the book room high up on the shelf because something said to me, "You are going to need this proof."

Sure enough, Mr. Walker called me one day and this was the first time that he was kind of aggravated. And he went on to tell me that, you know, Janet Boudreaux had told him that she felt that I had changed these votes that the people had cast. And she went on to say that, "Furthermore, this radio station is always saying…" something, I don't remember the expression but it was something that said "the black voice" or that really designated it as being Black. I told him, "You know, Mr. Walker, something told me I was going to have to answer to this. So, I have every one of those ballots." I left his office and went to the book room. I got those ballots that were put high up on the shelf and came back to my office to look at them because my main objective was to see what station Janet Boudreaux had voted for because their names were on them. When I picked hers up, she had voted for WXOK. I immediately took them, putting hers on top, and I said, "I want you to look at this."

The vote wasn't anonymous. It was just a simple thing, who you want to kind of boost the school, and we all had to choose stations. You would have thought that they would have known that they would get caught with their names on the ballots. No, she just had gone in there with this. And I think she probably thought that I had done as I did do. At first I was just counting them and throwing them in the trash. Who was going to keep that little piece of paper? But when I saw that WXOK had won, it scared me and I got up and picked them out of the trash because I felt that they were going to believe that I had cheated–that I had misrepresented the vote. They didn't believe me–now it could have been a set up. But the very person who went to him had voted for WXOK. And then I put hers on top of the pile. So, that was the end of that.

I think all of these things added to my integrity because he saw that I was being fair and I worked hard. However, I felt I was working in the kind of an environment where I always had to

look over my shoulder. What I did was I kept what amounted to a diary and I felt that I could always justify what I was doing. Let me tell you, that's why whenever they brought up something that had happened, I had a record that I could refer to. I had a big notebook that I kept updated. I didn't bring it in, but I kept it in the trunk of my car. I didn't bring it in because I was afraid I may forget and leave it at school. I would put down if something happened that I thought was significant. I'd scribble it on a little note and put it in my purse. I would put the date, the time, who did it, and I taught my own children to do the same thing when you are in a hostile environment. I always felt if you can give dates and times, and specify what happened, somebody was going to believe you. That's what happened with Mr. Walker, I think. When I said to him, "On such and such an hour, Ms. Peels said this, and on such and such a date was the first time she ever put up a bulletin board." I think it commands attention. And so I guess I had this intuition that I was in hostile environment.

To my face, they were sweet and nice. They didn't really treat me hostilely, though. The teachers didn't. It was under the table. When Mr. Walker said that Janet had told him that (outcome of the radio station vote), I was shocked because she was very sweet to me. And also when Mr. Walker came out to kind of dress me down about sitting in her room when I had all these new teachers, I was shocked because she was very nice to me. So, that was the way it was. I think the others were just angry–now it put a little bit of a gap between the persons who reported me for not giving them excellent (evaluations) when they had allegedly always gotten all excellent evaluations. They were aggravated and they went to the people that they thought could really make me change an evaluation. So, there was a distance. A distance came between those who wanted me to change, and I wouldn't change the evaluations because they were

accurate. Those were things that I had observed, and I didn't feel that they should have gotten an all excellent evaluation, and I didn't give them one.

What kept me going mentally and physically, knowing that every day I was going into this kind of environment, was the fact that Mr. Walker respected me. He supported me and there were a lot of teachers who did. But, all of them weren't that way. All of the Whites were not that way. Some of them were as nice as they could be. There were maybe about four or five who were older than I was and had been teaching a long time, who just felt that I should have given them excellent evaluations and that I shouldn't observe in their classrooms. All of them were not like that. There was a lady, Irene Smith, who was just as old as they were. But she was the sweetest white lady I've ever known, and I stayed in her room because I liked her room. She was an excellent teacher and I enjoyed watching her, the way she worked with children. She was always nice to me. But there were a few–one was the wife of the assistant superintendent–she didn't really like me because she didn't do all that she was supposed to do. And I called it the way I saw it, even though he was assistant superintendent. I did what I had to do.

By now I had worked for the East Baton Rouge Parish School District for twenty years. So I guess they thought it was time for me to move. It was 1981, and I was sent to the Deseg Center. Again, I was not asked if I wanted to go, and it wouldn't have mattered anyway if I didn't.

Reflections

Clara believes that she was hired by the East Baton Rouge school system on her merits. She attributed her success and confidence in her teaching ability to her grandfather's influence, a good support system, and good role models. I found Clara's ability to seek and get the support of

white administrators noteworthy because had that not been the case, she may have experienced more difficulty teaching. Teaching was more than academics, it was important to provide a role model and a mentor for her students. Clara takes a special interest in the “underdog” and instills in her students the idea that the door out of poverty is the door to the schoolhouse. She had high expectations of her students, integrated creative and critical thinking into the curriculum, and guided them into meaningful courses.

When Clara became a cross-over teacher and began to teach white students for the very first time in her career, many things came into play. She had confidence in her knowledge of content matter. She felt she would have no problem communicating with white students. However, she had to prove that black teachers were just as intelligent and capable as white teachers and that she could control discipline. I was struck by her advise about understanding different cultures before you are put in the classroom, particularly definitions of words that vary from culture and region. Also, I wonder if Clara thought about who was teaching the black children, if they were transferring the best black teachers to the white schools.

After completing her master’s degree, she became an administrator in a white school. As an API , she was constantly having to “watch her back.” Her diary became her protection. The white teachers complained to the administrators over evaluations, observations, and a vote for a radio station. Even though Clara had to be careful of every movement she made, still she felt that she had earned the respect of the principal, and that gave her the courage to do her job.

End Notes

1. Unless otherwise indicated, the historical references for the Davis case came from the LPB documentary film, American Apartheid, produced by John Camp & Bob Courtney (2001).

CHAPTER 6
WORKING AS A SUPERVISOR FOR THE EAST BATON ROUGE PARISH SCHOOL DISTRICT 1981-1994

Introduction

In a 1980 decision, the court ordered the school district to submit a new desegregation plan. In the ruling, the court relied on the fact that sixty-seven of the 113 schools in the system had a more than 90 percent one-race student population. As a result of this order, the school board went back to the drawing board to create a new desegregation plan. The plaintiffs and the Justice Department also prepared a plan. The court ordered the parties to negotiate in an attempt to develop a plan they could all endorse; however, in April of 1981, the parties reported to the court that agreement was impossible (Jarvis & Mathews 1998). Shortly thereafter, the court issued its own desegregation plan on May 1, 1981. The school board appealed that order to the Fifth Circuit.

The plan called for the closing of many schools and the elimination of the use of temporary buildings (T-buildings) at many others. Judge Parker ordered a desegregation plan involving clusters and pairs [1] at the elementary level, single grade centers at the middle school level and revised high school districts. Mandatory busing was to begin. The school board submitted a new middle school plan that was accepted by the courts allowing students to attend one school for all three grades. The court order also provided that the plan would be implemented beginning with the 1981-82 school year, but later modified its decision to require implementation to begin at the elementary level only for the 1981-82 school year. In 1982-83, the secondary schools part of the plan was implemented.

It was at this point that Clara was moved from her API position at Southeast Middle School to the Deseg Center. Facilities had been set up at one of the schools for personnel to work on the courts demands. Previously, Clara had no idea that this facility existed or really what her role was in the process. She spent a year at the Deseg Center and it was this experience that allowed her to immerse herself in the whole subject of desegregation. She traveled and observed magnet schools. She read all of the available research on desegregation. She conferred with others on the subject. Unfortunately, she was never able to gauge the center's accomplishments because of the unstructured nature of the endeavor; however, Clara left the Deseg Center a very aware and changed person.

It was around this time that the two state teachers organizations, the black (LEA) and the white (LTA), were forced to desegregate by the National Teachers Association (NEA). The result was a merger of the two into one organization with a new name, the Louisiana Association of Educators (LAE). Clara and her husband belonged to the LEA. Its president, Dr. J.K. Haynes opposed the merge. They, along with a small group of black educators that followed Dr. Haynes, formed a splinter group called the J.K. Haynes Foundation. It was their belief that the larger organization would not meet the needs of the black teachers.

The LEA and the NAACP worked together in many instances that involved education. So, Clara and Glasper became members of the NAACP. This was a major turning point in Clara's life. She worked for the school system that was involved in the long standing desegregation lawsuit. She had just spent a year thoroughly studying the subject. In addition, she was a member of a black teachers' organization and a member of the NAACP, the plaintiffs in the lawsuit.

While that appeal was pending, there was a change in administration in Washington and the Justice Department was contacted about the possibility of reaching a consent decree on an alternative desegregation plan which would be acceptable to all parties. The Fifth Circuit affirmed the orders of the District Court and the school system continued to implement the May 1, 1981, court ordered plan of desegregation. Through the years, dozens of orders were approved by the court to modify aspects of the May 1, 1981 plan, but the basic plan remained unchanged.

In 1989, Superintendent Bernard Weiss pushed through a voluntary program called Redesign that gave more authority to the local schools and set up special programs to voluntarily attract students interested in health careers, computers, extended day classes and Montessori programs. These programs were never sufficiently funded and Redesign never provided enough voluntary desegregation to continue its operation.

In 1990, the school system began experiencing overcrowding problems. The staff prepared a capital outlay plan (tax plan) designed to address the overcrowding issue, and a series of public hearings was conducted. The school board president appointed a Desegregation Task Force consisting of interested parents, teachers, administrators, and community leaders to make recommendations to the Board as to what should be included in the new capital outlay/ desegregation plan. The opposing parties objected to the plan unless the school board could demonstrate that it had the financial resources to implement the plan. The District Court agreed and indicated that it would not review the plan until the funding had been arranged. Consequently, voters did not approve the funding (bond).

During this period of legal battling, Clara became a middle school supervisor for math and science and moved to the Central Office in 1984. Ten years later, she decided to retire.

My Last Years Working for the School System

. In 1980, a big court decision was handed down in the desegregation case. Until now desegregation efforts were voluntary, then the court took over and started implementing its own desegregation plan. Actually at that time, I don't really remember feeling terribly upset, or happy, or whatever. I was working at Southeast Middle as an assistant principal of instruction, and I think the most impact on me was when they suddenly pulled me out of the school to work in the Deseg Center, and I really didn't want to. I don't know who made the decision, but I wasn't happy with it. I enjoyed being API, and I didn't want to leave, but I didn't have a say in the matter. They just said, "The superintendent wants you to work in the Deseg Center." And that's what I did. I was moved to the Deseg Center in the spring of '81 for a year. It was housed at Westdale Middle School.

I didn't want to go because I enjoyed what I was doing. Administration of Instruction was very important to me because I felt that I was a good teacher. I felt that I had something to offer to those teachers there. I enjoyed the work. I was working with people I enjoyed. Mr. Walker said to me that he valued my work as an Assistant Principal for Instruction. He had in our meetings told me that I was a value to him with the instruction because he said he just didn't like to deal with it. To go and sit in the classroom and observe teachers, that just was not his cup

of tea. There were things that I wanted to learn to do like scheduling. So, he actually turned all of the responsibility for instruction over to me. And I enjoyed it.

He found my work with the teachers invaluable because he said to me, “I have a hard time talking with people or telling people on a one-to-one basis something they are doing wrong or saying you need to do this better.” And he said, “but you do a good job with that. Now I can get in a meeting and address a whole group.” And because I did that well and did it in a way that didn’t produce a lot of friction he said I was important to him. And I appreciated that and I wanted to stay there and work with that because I really did like Southeast.

The Deseg Center

I was sent to the Deseg Center in the spring of ’81, and this is when I really learned a lot about desegregation. So at the time I felt that the Deseg Center was supposed to handle the judge’s court order. This was the main place where implementation or any compliance was supposed to come out of. This was the idea that I got because actually when I went there I didn’t know what I was going for. In any case, while I was at the Deseg Center that is when the court really came down on the school system. And I, in one-way or another, whether it was before or after the court order was handed down, became apart of it; however, I really didn’t know what my part was in this. Well what happened, I knew that they were getting people down there to work on curriculum and to make some plans for how we were going to desegregate the schools, and things of that sort.

Now, the school system was supposed to come up with a desegregation plan or the court said, “We’re going to implement a plan for you.” I think this had to be after the court took over. Well, I’m not positive, but I would think it was because we kept really busy. I mean they just

called in all of these people, principals, teachers, assistant principals, so a group would come in and say, “let’s plan some things, let’s see what we are going to do with the curriculum, and let’s plan some magnets, and let’s do this…” you know. I can’t believe that we just jumped up all of a sudden and started doing all this. Something really must have happened.

To tell you the truth that Deseg Center, being in there, and sitting in there, I don’t think it was as structured as it should have been. The head of the Deseg Center was Mr. Helms. He was white. I know Molly Lucomb was one of the people. She was white.

I think working in the Deseg Center that year really made me aware of so many inequities by bringing teachers in to work with me and talk with me about what they had in their schools. You see I was an API and before that I was in my own classroom, so I didn’t know what was going on in other schools. When I went to Southeast, I was an Assistant Principal for Instruction, but we had everything. When I say everything, I mean compared to what they had in that day. We opened up this new school. So we had all current things. And really I was naive enough at that time to think that they were putting these good things in many of these other schools, too. And working that year there, I found out so much because I called in people that I knew would talk to me. I was given permission to call in some math people and some science people of my choosing to come in and work with me. We would talk about what we thought would be an ideal in a math/science magnet and what ought to go on in a good math and/or science program.

I think that really motivated me to–I guess that was a way of psyching myself up–to feel that I would have something to contribute. Because before then I had not done extensive study on it, and that’s where I really started accumulating my knowledge and really looking at the

issue, really working. I was so busy wrapped up in my own little thing of being an API; I didn't do a lot of study on it.

That's when I started really studying everything I could find to look at court cases. I mean, I actually immersed myself in this issue. I was about the best read person you have ever seen because I read sometimes all day long. I remember getting stacks of articles that maybe I had glanced through before, but now I was reading them from cover to cover. And I read lots of articles that dealt with the different kinds of desegregation and related issues.

Now the materials that I was reading was really just about desegregation in general. To be perfectly frank, it started sometimes out of boredom because there were times when we were in there, and we didn't have specific things to do. So, I just started reading journals and things that I had not had a chance to read that had just piled up. There were articles I wanted to read. What I remember was getting a stack of different magazines, and one in particular was the Kappan, the Phi Delta Kappa magazine. That magazine had lots of articles on desegregation and related issues. I started reading and really catching up because I had known about it before then, but at that time I was having children. The more I got into desegregation, my understanding and awareness increased about the issue.

Well, I did actually get up to speed in terms of the court case itself because I was in there, and I was trying to find out really what my role was. I had not really kept up with the desegregation issue, and I was trying to find out more about it. Let me put it like this. I knew about the children going into these schools. I kept up with the big flashy things, but the details of what was going on and some studies of how things had gone in this place or that place I had not

kept up. So, that was a chance for me to really look at the details and to really find out what some of the people were thinking and doing in reference to it.

We did some traveling not by bus but a van. We went to look at other schools. And especially I remember we went to Houston, a group of us to look at magnet schools. We must have spent almost a week over there visiting different magnet schools, talking with the superintendent, and trying to see how they were doing. At that time, Houston had a rather extensive magnet school program. And we went and sat and observed to see what the schools were like. And then we brought that information back, talked about it, planned for things that we could do in our schools, and wrote up plans for some magnets here.

It was not a real new thing because I was aware of some of the problems even from DeSoto Parish. We didn't have the serious court problems there, and I knew that here it was a big deal. And I also watched the children, read the newspaper and things about the children going into different schools–the Arkansas case. I knew about all of that. I was reading articles about James Farmer who was a black leader at that time–what were his feelings, what did he think, and what other people were thinking. All the while, I just immersed myself in the details. I started looking at the real details and the real "whys" of it and just having the time to read what other people were thinking. I had a chance to do that. My eyes were opened to what was going on in the East Baton Rouge system. Actually, I saw things in a different way.

Molly evidently was my direct supervisor. The reason I say that is because I remember when someone reported to her that I was having trouble going along with things that I didn't think were educationally sound. She was the one who called me in to talk to me about it.

So, at that point, 1981 was very rough for the school system. It was a significant turning point in this case, and that is when massive busing started. I don't think it was chaos, but even before I got that involved I remember some of my neighbors, who were going to Glen Oaks, would come almost every night to our house for us to help them because they wanted to make sure they kept up their studies. And I can specifically recall a little girl, Delores, who would tell us that she would sit in this science classroom and hold up her hand and would never get called on by this particular white cross-over teacher. And, ironically, I ended up this gentleman's supervisor later on. But they had some real problems. And the children would come for us to help them so they could make sure they could keep up. They didn't feel that they were getting the assistance that they were supposed to be getting in the classroom.

The parents of these girls choose Glen Oaks because I can remember my husband asking Delores and her sister and there was another little girl who lived up the street, Belinda. He asked, "Well Belinda, why are you going to Glen Oaks?" And I remember her saying that she could get a better education and there were better teachers. They had been lead to believe that white teachers were just better than the black teachers. And I remember my husband and I chuckled after they left saying, "They are over there because there are better teachers, but they come here and work our socks off every night to teach them." They had led the children to believe that was the case.

In terms of busing, there wasn't that much turmoil; there wasn't marching in the streets. I remember the children going, but I didn't give as much thought about it as maybe I should have until my children were involved. And actually, when my oldest son went to Lanier at that time, which was a white school, there I noticed it. But we took him to school. I don't know whether

we had to or not, but we took him to school. It may have been this within a mile radius rule, but I remember our taking him and picking him up from school. So that was never a big problem.

They did not experience busing until middle school–the two younger ones. The two older ones didn't experience it period because we put them in the Southern Lab School after they got out of elementary. But the two younger children stayed in the public schools the whole time and it was the kind of choice busing that they had for most of the time–well, Sharon went to Park Forest for one year. And then she got into the Magnet School, and then Mark went to the Magnet School, too. They were bused, but it was a choice kind of thing.

So, I didn't have neighbors, or I didn't have phone calls or teachers weren't talking about it in the lounge or whatever about any of this. I did not talk with them a lot. But, you have to remember that I was a transplant in Baton Rouge, so I didn't have a real widespread base of friends at that time, only people I met at work and at church. And then when I went to a different assignment as an administrator, I'm sure there was a lot of talk, but I didn't get the complaints that much at that time.

Busing was the big issue, but you know when it comes to the black kids, they've always, in our neighborhood and in others, been bused, so they don't do a lot of fussing. For instance, I talked with a lady last week–she came over to express a concern to me–and I know that she had told me earlier in the year that her son was catching the bus at 5:30 in the morning. But later on, they waited and it was almost 6:00 when he would catch the bus, and he was going to Southeast. But, the first time she came over she was concerned because he was catching it that early in the morning, then would go to Independence Park and sit for 30 minutes waiting on the transfer bus. And then a lot of the children on the street, there are not many children on my street now, but as

they were growing up they would walk to the end of the street to catch a bus to go to Belaire High School, which is quite a distance from our street. But, I didn't hear a lot of fuss or complaining.

I left the Deseg Center at the end of the year of 81/82. I was sent back to Glasgow Middle. Glasgow was basically white even when I worked there as a cross-over. Glasgow was an academic middle school magnet–6th, 7th, and 8thgrade. So you really had more white than black students. I went there as assistant principal for instruction (API).

When they moved the magnet to McKinley they told me I needed to stay at Glasgow because they were bringing in an elementary principal (white) who knew nothing about middle school. So they needed a strong middle school person at Glasgow. I did a lot. I think I helped the school out a lot because I was a good API. So, I stayed there and I can remember the teachers telling me on the first day of school that was the first time they had real organization in registering the students. They said that, "Usually we have students in the library unregistered for two or three days." But I got everybody in class on the first day because I had practice, and I knew what I was doing.

My Move to Supervision

In 1984, I applied for an opening for Supervisor of Math and Science. I was given that position and subsequently moved to the school board office. I enjoyed being an API much better than being a supervisor because with supervision I had so much. I had all of the middle schools. I had the math and the science and that was really just criminal. It was really too much to ask anybody to do–anybody who really wanted to do something. Now if you wanted to kick your feet under the desk and sit in the Central Office–which is what many people did–but I wanted to

know what was going on in the classrooms. I wanted to know who the good teachers were and who the not so good teachers were. And then I wanted to learn. Because even though I felt that I was a real good teacher, after being a supervisor, if they had put me back in the classroom, I would have been a much better teacher. Because I saw so many good things that I could have done that I had never even thought about. So I really enjoyed that part, the learning part. But I had to interact with so many different personalities. And then at the school board I was the only black supervisor. And I had a kind of hard time at the school board. And as no surprise to me, I was told that I was not a team player. That is the way they perceived it, and from their definition they were right. Because some of the things that the team did I didn't think were right, and I didn't go along with them. I did what I had to do to make it, but I had a difficult time part of the time. The first maybe four or five years, I didn't. I mean it was beautiful as a supervisor because my immediate supervisor was my former principal at McKinley, Mr. Essex. And Mr. Essex knew me, he knew the kind of person I was so I didn't have to try and show him. So, I had a good time then. But when he retired it, my problems started up.

I really wanted to help. I really wanted all of us to be good teachers. And I saw good things and took time to tell them. And I would actually go and sit in their classroom. And that was something that was almost unheard of and there is still not a whole lot of it that goes around. But I went. I visited every single teacher, at least once during the year. And it was almost unheard of because I had so many. I had all of the math and all of the science teachers in the middle school. But what I would do is go and spend the day at the school. I stayed in schools; I didn't like the Central Office. It was easy for me to spend my time in schools. They really knew me and I knew them.

When I became supervisor the first year I just went around and observed. I realized that there was no middle school curriculum in science or math, not parish-wide. And this really did trouble me. It troubled me because some teachers would do just as I had done, would design their own. But there were too many teachers who had the book and they just went by the book. I went to schools in April and they were still on whole numbers and long division. Well, that should have been completed the first month of school in order to get on with all of the other things–the fractions, the decimals, the probability and statistics. So that was one of the first things that I worked on when I became a supervisor.

The summer following my first year as a supervisor, I knew the teachers well enough to invite some to serve on what we call the Math Task Force and a Science Task Force. During that summer, those teachers worked on a scope and sequence for the parish in both–the math teachers did one; the science teachers did one. We completed it, but the Central Office said, "You can only try it in three schools." I think there was a little statement that went in the Back to School issue of the Advocate. I think it went in there somewhere like in '87.

So, there were three schools that we tried this curriculum in the first year. Then the next year they allowed me to spread it to three more. And then later on I was able to try this curriculum in the whole parish. We worked with it in the entire parish for two or three years. But anyway, the schools kept improving in both math and science. And then in the 89/90 school year, all three grade levels in both math and science made a score above national norms. That was the first time in the history of the parish since they had been keeping records on testing.

Now what I'm talking about was what we called strands and threads. We were talking about major topics. In mathematics there were some major topics, like we would do whole

numbers, then we would do fractions. We would do decimals. We should do a strand on probability and statistics, and I guess the nearest synonym would be something like major topics, but we call them strands in mathematics. What the essence of this was that teachers could no longer just do their own thing. You know you take a book and you can't teach the whole book, so you decide what you are going to teach. That to me was too important to be left to chance. And I felt that we needed a scope, which would give the coverage that each teacher would do in mathematics, and sequence would be the order in which these things were taught. And I felt that was important because there are some things that just work better if certain other things are taught before you get to that.

What would happen sometimes with teachers if they were not math certified, or if they were elementary certified and had not had much math and were in middle school, they would tend to teach whichever topics they were most familiar with. And sometime some of the major topics would get left out. And so I felt that it was imperative that we have a scope and sequence and we say to teachers, "you must teach this, and this, and this. And those that you are not comfortable with, let me know, and we will have in-service activities; we will have assistance. I will come out and do demonstration lessons, whatever it takes. But you must teach each one of these topics to your class in the span of a year." In addition to having just the scope and sequence, we had suggested pacing. And by that I mean, we had a suggested time limit for each topic. And I said suggested because some teachers, let's say if we are teaching probability and statistics, some teachers have may have a novel way of teaching this. And they may need only two weeks. Another teacher may need a month the way she was teaching it. So what I said to teachers, "This is your suggested pacing. If you find that you need additional time in teaching a

topic, you take that time. But it is your responsibility to decide from which strand you are stealing that time, and to make sure that you can teach that strand in the time that's left for you to teach it. In other words you've got to teach all these strands in the nine months, but you do have a little say so on the amount of time that you use.

The rationale behind this was that students were going from year to year and without this were lacking in some areas. Now it was definitely to their detriment because when teachers could teach what they wanted to and leave off what they wanted to, there were whole strands that were left off for some groups of children. Also, in some schools, the population's very mobile, especially in some of your inner city schools. So, if a teacher could teach what she wanted when she wanted, if fractions–suppose the teacher said, "Oh, I like fractions so I am going to teach fractions first." Okay, here is a kid who was in another school that intended to teach fractions last because she didn't like fractions. So this kid in December moves from the school where fractions would be taught last, so he hasn't had fractions, he comes over here to this school where fractions was taught first, so he doesn't get fractions at all. But he passes on to the next level. So you have children missing whole strands, and we have that now. That is what is happening to a lot of our children now.

In the inner city, a lot of people rent, and so they may move from one apartment to another or one house to another. Being mobile like that, they miss out on a lot. But, if you had a scope and sequence and a pacing chart, even though a child may move, that child isn't going to miss a real strand.

You see when I was in my own classroom, I knew that I had to design mine, but I was naive enough to think that everybody would make them out–you know, a scope and sequence.

And, then when I became an API, I insisted that my math teachers get together and came up with a scope and sequence. My social studies teachers, all of them had a scope and sequence. I thought every school was doing that and when I became a supervisor and I moved from school to school, I found some schools doing very well with a scope and sequence that the whole school worked with. However, most times it was an individual teacher thing. I found some where teachers would just flip flop and teach whatever they wanted to teach. I couldn't handle that. So, that was one of the first problems that I undertook.

Now this was separate from the curriculum guides that the Department of Education for the state has developed. They have curriculum guides, but there was no follow-up or monitoring to see that you used them. Most of them were not used. Most of them were too cumbersome, too big, and what we did, we took the state guide and made sure the parish guide was in compliance with the state guide but condensed to a manageable form. So ours was in compliance with the state guide, but no one had to take this big thing and try to go through it and decipher it. So that was organized for the teachers. Now this was the work of a combination of black and white teachers. We did a scope and sequence in each subject matter. The teachers had to do it for Southeast. But it was not until I became a parish supervisor that we implemented the math and science scope and sequence for the whole parish on 6th, 7th, and 8th grade levels.

Superintendent Dr. Averson left the system, and he was a supporter of this. When he left the system, I was told by my immediate middle school superior–I don't remember what he was called, supervisor or director–but I was told that he did not want the teachers to answer to me and their principal. He wanted them to answer only to their principals. So that ended my being able to hold teachers accountable for following this curriculum.

The Multicultural Committee

There was a Multicultural Committee, and at first I was just a member of the committee because I was interested. I had joined the committee and even went to a national convention in New Orleans somewhere around 1989-90 early on. But it was Superintendent Dr. Weiss who said to me one day, "I want you to chair the committee." I had been on the committee maybe two years before I became the chairperson. We had different chairpersons. But the thing that I think may have made Dr. Weiss ask me to chair was because I spoke of being frustrated because every year we would start over, so we never got anywhere. It was during the time I was chairing it, we did get seven goals (See Appendix C) approved by the then sitting school board. Before then we would start over every year, and that just frustrated me. It was such a waste of time.

I guess indirectly it was connected to the desegregation case. There were those of us who keep saying "Let's look at this from another perspective." They did things like saying, "We're no longer going to teach the rules of grammar, that's rules in isolation, and let's get it through the whole language approach, and let's do…" And I kept saying to people even when I was an API, you know this is good for some children. So, I thought that maybe working with multiculturalism would give me a chance to try to get the people who make decisions to look at education from somebody else's perspective because we were dealing with lots of black children. I'm not saying that they are distinctly different, but what I'm saying is that many of their experiences are different.

Let's just take one that I still feel strongly about, the rules of grammar. You see, if you notice, and I know you can't help but have noticed, many, if not most blacks have a real problem with grammatical usage. I think at one time, or at least when I came through school, I had

teachers who recognized this and said, “We are going to learn the rules. I’m going to teach you when to say… I’m going to teach you to use ‘can’ with a helper. I’m going to teach you the objective case. We are going to learn these rules. So when this doesn’t come to you naturally, you can fall back on your rules, and know what to use. Well, what some say is, “We learn it by association.” But if your association is with people who have not learned acceptable grammatical usage, then you are going to come out with that.

When I was a supervisor; I sat in classrooms and listened to children saying “Oh, she haven’t came in yet.” And the teacher saying nothing. Not correcting them, not re-stating it, even if you don’t want to correct them, and I believe in correcting them–there’s a way to do it. So, they don’t learn. They come out with these things, and they don’t know the rules. My point is that maybe on the overall sphere of things, you may say, “Well, we’re not going to take that item with the rules, that is grammar in isolation.” But you are supposed to meet the needs of children, as far as I am concerned in giving them education. So if children need the rules, well then give them the rules.

That was just one, and I said maybe if I could get in there and get them to look at this thing from a different perspective, maybe we can get some of those things done. And there were lots of other things. I was concerned about the novels, the books, the required reading list. I wanted some black authors on the reading list. I was concerned about some of the items in history and in science, some of the contributions of blacks that I wanted included. Not to take away things that they had, but to infuse some of these other things into the existing curriculum. And let’s teach the children these things because I felt that it would enhance pride in who you are. If it looks like your race contributed nothing when you look in the books, you don’t see

yourself, when you are talking about who made the contributions, who helped with medicine, who discovered this, you get the sense that we are just leeches. We haven't done anything. And I think that has something to do with a child's pride. Many of these things about blacks, I learned because I taught myself. Not because they were a part of the curriculum, or because anybody tried to teach me, and I think that's a tragedy. I think that it is a tragedy because I believe that you work yourself into a way of feeling good. But I also think that you need to have something to hang your pride on. You need to feel that you are not an inferior race. And when children feel that way, and we have adults that feel that way, it does something to their psyche, I believe.

So, I felt that by being a part of the multicultural committee that I could make a difference. I really did. I felt that I could keep bringing these things up, keep talking to them about, "Y'all, let's look at this from another perspective." For instance, in reading a book once, it was talking about after the Civil War people lived in constant fear that there would be an uprising of the Blacks. Well, you know, you look at that from a black person's perspective. They wouldn't stay in constant fear. They may be in constant hope that there would be an uprising so that those that didn't have freedom could gain it. So what I'm saying is not to change, but just look at it, let's talk about it. There is nothing wrong with you and I sitting down, looking at something and you're seeing it one way, and my seeing it another way, and I'll tell you why I see it this way and you tell me why you see it that way. I'm not trying to change you, but I'm trying to make you just understand this thing from my perspective. Not to take on my perspective. But I think we would respect each other, not just saying, "Oh, I can see how you would feel that way." But I think that is the way we can garner respect among all of the races, among all of the different people.

Now on that committee, I had some support, not total support, from other black teachers because there were many who didn't really understand what I was saying when I talked about multiculturalism. They didn't understand multiculturalism, period. There are many who still don't understand, or they pretend they don't understand. For instance; even the school system will tell us when they write their report cards for the courts, they continue to say that they have developed–that they have a curriculum of inclusion at Baton Rouge High. They don't teach inclusion. What they did was, they had different teachers to bring some things about Blacks that they had used in their class. That is not teaching inclusion. What I perceive as a curriculum of inclusion would be–and I'll say something about science because that is the area that I know most about–when you talk about the circulation of blood, the books just talk about William Harvey. There is nothing wrong with that. He was wonderful. He did a lot of things. But what is wrong with bringing in some of these other people who have worked with circulation of the blood. Let's talk about it regardless of what race or nationality. Let's bring in all these other people. Harvey, yes, he was considered the "father of circulation," but there are others, including Blacks and other races that have a lot to do with circulation. So, what I'm saying is let's talk about all of the people, rather than just the Europeans. And this is the kind of thing that we talked about.

And when we have a list of books that we must read, there is nothing wrong with putting some Richard Rice books or some of James' books, or some black authors on their must read list. And sometimes they are not even by Blacks; sometimes they are just about Blacks. For instance, what is the book, Sounder? It was not written by a black person, but it was a good depiction of how Blacks felt about the things that happened. And I seem to remember one year, my

granddaughter was attending Istrouma, and there were several books that were on the reading list, and they were told to read one. Of course I guided her into reading Sounder because I wanted her to know the story. She read it, and she was not living with me. Later on when she came back to see me, I asked her how did she do because they had to have a little test on it when school started back. She said, "Oh, I really didn't report on Sounder, I reported on…" And I can't remember the other book, and I said, "Why did you change?" "Well," she said, "You weren't getting but…" I don't know how many points, lets say, five points on this one, but you were getting eight points on the other books. Well, it is things like that are grossly unfair, even though they put a black book on there, what child would read that book if he or she knew that it would be fewer points. And I, until this day, I have the letter with the points that you would get for reading the book. I insisted that my granddaughter bring it to me because, really, I was almost doubtful. I thought maybe she didn't want to come up with that book in there, you know in a class with a majority of the white students. But it is things like this that I had hoped that I could make a difference.

I know the subject of using standard English and its "Rules in Grammar" is controversial. However, it is my belief that black students should know standard English, absolutely! Standard English opens and closes doors for Blacks, for everybody, but especially Blacks. Let me tell you, I was an assistant principal for instruction from '74 until '81 at Southeast Middle School. During that time, Mr. Walker and I would interview people. We would sit together and interview people because I was over instruction and he wanted me to assist in choosing teachers. But I remember exactly when black teachers would come through who spoke fluently, I especially recall Lydia Jones, and he said to me when Lydia was through, "She has command of the English language.

We ought to hire her." Now he said nothing about her science ability, nothing about her scientific knowledge, but he was exceptionally impressed with her command of the English language. There was another person, Ms. Boulder, he really was impressed with her. She was from some northern state and of course she didn't have the southern drawl that we have, but in addition to that she spoke the "king's language." And so he was very impressed with her. He was that way. And I'm not saying anything here because I really did like Mr. Walker. He respected me and my ability and I really enjoyed working with him. But I saw in working with him how important it was. And to be perfectly frank, I think it is important for more reasons than that. I just really believe in it.

I worked with my children in learning it from the time they were little. Glasper's aunt, who worked for us, watched our four children when they were little, until they were all in school. She would come every morning and go every afternoon. She said to me when we first hired her, "I know you want your children to speak right." This was her expression. And she said, "If you would give me a book, I will study it so that when they start learning to talk, I will be using correct English." That's his aunt and she's still living to this day. She makes very few mistakes. And I just treasure her for that because she knew–I mean I never told her that–I wouldn't have said that to her. I wouldn't have asked her to take this book and study it, but she did. And so, my children could have done without–could have gotten by–let me put it like that, without the grammar rules and all of this because they heard, for the most part, correct usage. But, I don't think that most black children were as fortunate as mine.

For those students who have not had that influence for the first five years and then come into school, they have been exposed to the black dialect the entire time. You teach them, you

don’t ridicule theirs, but you have them to know that in the classroom we are going to speak this way. In my classroom you were corrected, not in a demeaning way, and I can remember children groaning. In the essay’s, you were corrected. I always believed in children expressing themselves because that’s a problem that we have. And when I say “we”, I’m talking about black kids, Blacks in general. The kids, they have a real problem in expressing themselves, many of them. I’m not talking about all of them. Many of them have problems, especially in low socioeconomic status groups, where the parents weren’t educated. And so, I needed to help them. I corrected them, and then I taught them to tactfully correct each other. We even got to the point where if you, and even if I, made a mistake correct me, we were watchers for each other. And this was even when I was at Westdale, even when I was at Glasgow, we corrected each other. It was kind of like a game, but it was not demeaning.

I always told my children, you know, that it is very important–now, lets face it, when I sat and I interviewed for years at the school board, and when a Black came through there and made a grammatical error, that was one of the first things that was mentioned when they left. And, we were kind of talking about it and adding up our points. “Did you hear her mis-use this?” So, it is important in getting employed, I’m going to tell you that. And so since I know that, why would I sit down and let my child use a dialect– I could teach them that this is okay when you are playing with your friends. But to be perfectly frank, I didn’t allow mine to use it, period! And my favorite expression that they will remind me of now is, “Instead of you stooping down to your friends level, you pick them up to your level.” And I was not teaching them that they were better than anybody, but I was teaching them that in order to relate to your friends, you don’t

always have to go to their side of the road, bring them over to your side. And this is the just the way it is.

What I would say to those that argue that by using standard English these black students are losing their heritage, listen, the part of my heritage that will not help me to be successful, the part of my heritage that will give me the appearance of being uneducated–I'm not totally concerned about that. That the part of your heritage that makes you continue to be a peon and stay on the bottom of the pile–I'm not saying that you need to lose it, but you need to rise above it. As long as I know that if I go into an office to be interviewed making grammatical errors like, "Oh, I should have came yesterday," I'm not going to get hired. That part of my heritage I really can do without. I believe in people knowing their heritage. I have no problems with my kids–we laugh about sometimes–"What is this word? Why do they say it this way?" I try to interpret that to them. And when we used to go to Mansfield, people used to make the statement that my children talked proper. What they were really saying was that they used standard English. We laugh about that now because some of those children who said that are educated now and have their own children and insist that their children use English correctly. And what it is, it's verbs.

I proved that from '74 until '94 because I had a chance to interview people. I kept a log of mistakes that were made. When people came in, sometimes Whites did too, and I would log these. But, I found that Whites made more mistakes with pronouns and antecedents. Blacks made the mistakes with verbs, more. So, I logged them and I would in many instances come back and make the statement again correctly. As I've done with my first daughter-in-law. [laughter] She told a friend, "I get so tired of being corrected." Let me see, one of her favorite expressions was, "I seen her." And I would have to come around and say, "Oh, you saw her yesterday?" or

something like that. And she wasn't dumb. She knew I was correcting her. It was these kinds of things–but I tell you what, she and my son ended up divorcing, but she spoke very well before they split. [laughter]

I do believe in your heritage, but it's just like somebody saying, "Well, you know, I've been doing this all my life, it's okay." I just think that in this day and time you need to be able to use standard English. I don't care whether you're educated, or I don't care what you were doing. And, I stress this. And, we would talk about it. After a while, I didn't have a real problem with my students. I just said, "I'll tell you what, you are going to have to speak correctly here." In my grading, I didn't take a lot off, maybe a point or half a point. I had to do something because otherwise just talking wouldn't work. I had to defend it sometimes with the principal. But, I never had a principal to make me stop taking points. I had some parents who said, "Well, that's not right." In my mind, you've got to be able to express yourself and usage is a part of expression.

The J.K. Haynes Foundation

I really became concerned when the two teacher associations were forced to merge in the late 1970s. There was a white organization, the Louisiana Teachers Association (LTA), and a black organization called the Louisiana Education Association (LEA). When the associations merged, I think they changed the name to the Louisiana Association of Educators (LAE). When they merged I decided that I was not going with the group. I think that was the first real active thing that I did that kind of pushed me out there.

At that time J.K. Haynes was president of my organization, the LEA, and a member of the NAACP. Haynes was really devastated by the merger and as a result, a splinter group formed

that called itself the J.K. Haynes Foundation with him as president of the foundation. I went with the J.K. Haynes Foundation and that was black educators, rather than join the newly merged one–LAE. Not many of them went with us. This was a small group. Most of the blacks joined the consolidated organization. But some of the others, a lot of the rural parishes like Opelousas and down in there, Shreveport, a lot of those people continued to follow J.K. Haynes.

I followed him because he was my idol. He was an educator. He used to be a principal and he was just so strong. And I felt that he was going to do more for us and for black kids than the other organization. And I stayed with him, my husband and I, and quite a few other people. And we had our meetings every year at the same time the consolidated organization had theirs in November.

That didn't really lead to our joining the NAACP. There wasn't any precipitating issue or anything that made us go to a NAACP meeting. However, I think the two kind of worked together, but I just became more aware of what the differences were that were out there. It made me more aware of the inequities and my children had grown up where I could get out and go to things. So I just wanted to work for the cause. I believed in it, and I believed I had something to offer, and I just worked with both of them.

Haynes was our president. I admired him. He was a very smart, very intelligent, compassionate man. I loved him. And so I followed him because I knew that he was going to work for us and for the children. He did lots of things to help many people who were in trouble, even some of those who were not members. When they got in real trouble, something really happened, or they felt that there was unfairness, they came to him because he would fight for anybody.

The J.K. Haynes Foundation was the organization that really assisted black teachers who were having problems after the cross-over. Because there were a lot of times when they had problems that had nothing to do with their qualifications, it was just racial, racism, in a lot of instances. I found, personally, it appeared to me that a lot of the Blacks in the new organization (LAE) got real aggressive assistance if they were fighting another Black. If the principal was black that they were having problems with, they got aggressive assistance. If the principal was white, then nothing happened, if anything. And so the Haynes Foundation stayed together because it was needed to come in and assist these people and help with lawyers and things. There was a legal branch where we had attorneys who helped people who needed things.

However, this was strictly an education organization and it helped people who were in education–and they would bring in a number of people to train us in different things, bring in people to do speeches, maybe new educational activities were going on. They would do the same thing that the LAE does when they have their conventions. It would just be two educational conventions. One was small scale with a few Blacks; the other one was both black and white. I was dealing with the education part of it.

My Membership in the NAACP

I don't really know if it was through Haynes or maybe even before the merger–when we would have our meetings, there usually was a representative of the NAACP, so I got to know those people. The groups kind of worked together, sometimes. And I became a worker with both of them. I remember talking to George Eames, who was president at that time. I remember telling him that I felt that they needed to look into what was happening to some of the children who had been admitted into some white schools. I talked specifically to him about it. I had heard

from some parents about the children being re-segregated after getting into schools. What I was hearing was that they would be put in these schools, but when they get over there many of them would be re-classified as Special Ed or put in low level classes. And that troubled me and that was the thing that I felt that they needed to look into. What was happening to the children after they got into the desegregated schools. You know, not just say, “Oh well, they’ll desegregate,” but do some follow-up and see what is happening to these children. That’s the first contact directly with them.

Shortly after, my husband and I started attending the NAACP meetings. When Glasper and I first joined the NAACP, it was about injustices– period–not just education. I just admired them, and that was it. But as far as, I didn’t even know all of the details, I saw the organization as one that came to the rescue of a black person in trouble. If there were educational concerns, they were brought up at the meeting. But there were other concerns. We had hiring problems, may have been how employees were treated, or it may have been police problems. It was more community concerns and sometimes educational issues would come up. But to be perfectly frank, there have been two presidents since I have been in it and the first president–he was not as passionate about the educational issues as the one we have now and so, that was not as big an issue as the educational issues are now.

In 1984, somewhere around that time, I was elected to the executive board early in my tenure with the NAACP. The board would meet monthly, talk about issues, make decisions on what the organization would do. We would go to state meetings. Of course, there were national meetings, but I didn’t go out of town unless the national meeting was in New Orleans. The board really kind of governs the organization. Any major decision must be brought to the board, and I

was on the executive board. At first, I could bring issues that I noticed, but I was not on the educational committee, the ones who are really out there getting the information. But, we were involved in that whatever decisions were made, it had to be passed by the board and then brought to the body.

The NAACP has committees. There is a redress, health, legal, youth group, and education committee. My husband was active–as a matter of fact our children were members but not really active. Another thing I can remember working with the young people speaking to them. I can remember on Saturday morning going to talk with the young group or to work with them in some capacity. At that time we had a very active youth organization.

But, the education committee is the most active committee. We became knowledgeable about what their issues were and therefore also became closer to what was going on with the desegregation case. I just basically was acquainted with it, but not in any detail until I worked at the Deseg Center. But being in the NAACP, I got more interested in the background and what was going on. And then of course I learned more because they would talk about Brown and those kinds of issues, and then I started getting the Crisis Magazine that comes with your NAACP membership, and I would read it. So, I really became familiar with the issues. But this has not always been the case. So, throughout this whole thing, Glasper, my husband, has been very supportive, but he is much milder. He thinks deeply, but he doesn't speak out against issues as I do.

I did things like, I solicited membership and I was on television and on the radio. I was talking about the membership where you would have the membership drives. I was very active. I would bring issues, even educational issues, but under the old presidency they didn't grab at it

like they do now. It was a known fact that the NAACP was a plaintiff in the desegregation case and if something wasn't done, if they didn't do something, this was never going to be solved. I think the president and some of the members tolerated some of the things that were going on, more than some of us did, more than I had for sure. I can remember specifically making a call one day saying we need to check something out, because this and this is happening to the children who are going to school over at school X, and I can remember distinctly the president stating something like, well, you know, whenever you go to war there are going to be some casualties. In other words, this is to be expected and that was unacceptable to me.

After quite a bit of this I just decided that there was a better way for me to spend my time. I started a tutoring service at my church working with people in meetings and things helping the children and actually wrote a proposal with an educational committee in my church, and I started working in my church to help to solve things. I became inactive for two years in the NAACP.

Then there were some people who asked me to come back and work with them on the education committee. Actually, Patrice Niquille (Nicky) became chairperson of the education committee and there was a new president. Well, that made a big difference with me. They asked me to come back and work with them, and I did. In that capacity, we would bring our decisions or information in terms of desegregation to the board, and the board had to accept or reject. So I was helping to foster decisions.

I had first hand knowledge of what was going on in the schools as an administrator and later as a supervisor in the Central Office and in the organizations. By being a member of the NAACP, I would find out some things if an issue was brought to them. I worked under Nicky's

leadership and then, when her leadership was over, I was asked to serve as chairperson. She is now on the school board. I think I became chairperson in the early nineties. It was before I retired from the school system in ‘94. It has always been a very interesting organization with a lot of different things to do.

Advocacy

Actually, at first I was an advocate from the time my kids got in school, but only for my children. I would say that started–maybe ’66. But I would make sure to go to the school if I thought things weren’t fair. Really I was active, but for a long time it was only for my children. Basically, that instinct came out when it came to my own children. That is just a natural reaction that a mother wants the best for her children. But it extended past that for me. It didn’t matter to me whose child it was, I wanted a quality education for them all. I would always speak up for them. But it wasn’t until later that I started speaking out for any child that was having a problem.

So, my advocacy actually started prior to my retirement, but in a subtle way. I saw things going on while I was still employed. And we had an educational committee at our church, and I started tutoring those children. There were parents who would ask me what to do about situations they had. Sometimes problems would come to me from our children and we would write letters, but they would come from the education committee at our church.

So, we worked, but it was in a more subtle fashion there then after I retired. At that time the actions that I was taking were more through my church, and what I did mostly, I schooled the parents so they would know what to do. For instance, I can remember a parent bringing a child to tutoring at the church and saying, this was in October, they informed her that her child would probably be retained in that grade and that was unacceptable to me. In October you tell a child

that–what kind of expectations do you have for his learning all year long. And so, I worked with the parent, I gave her information. I talked with her about what to say to the principal and what to say to the teachers and so that's why I say it was a more subtle fashion. I kept up with the rules and regulations from the school system. I gave them to her so that she would know her rights. Parents, who when they would come and ask, "What do you think about me retaining this child?" I talked with them. I would counsel with them and tell them exactly what you say to the principal. What you do and, actually, these kinds of things we did. When I became a supervisor where my days weren't so structured I would often even go.

It's Time to Retire

Many people ask me how I stayed in the teaching profession for thirty-seven years. It really wasn't hard. I went in, well, at twenty-one. I stayed in it because I really enjoyed it most of the time, not all of the time, most of the time. And then when it got down to the hard part, I just kept trying to correct, or to change, or to work at things because I just felt that it could be better. And most of the time, I really felt that I was making a difference. It was not until the last three years that I just saw I was getting nowhere. My children had been trying to get me to head out, but I kept saying, "Wait, just let me get this, show them that these students can excel–that these children can achieve in all of these schools. And when I did get them to that point, to show them that, then my supervisor tied my hands and said I could no longer hold teachers accountable. He wanted them to be accountable only to the principal. When he said that I knew that my power was gone and I had done all I could do.

What happened, we really had the scope and sequence working parish wide. The scores went up tremendously. Then, there were three principals who went to the Central Office, and I

found out who those principals were, and that it was because of pressure from some of the math and science teachers. You see with that program, which was an excellent program that we had designed for the parish, you had to teach. You could no longer sit behind your desk and pass out purple passion sheets (ditto machine worksheets). But what would happen was that teachers would just like to give out worksheets. You could do that, and you could really have some peace. And you know like if you are teaching long division for six months, you had it really good because in long division they would be quiet, you didn't have to get up. They had been on it six months–you just pass out a long division sheet.

But now you had certain things that you had to teach in, let's say in six weeks, and then at the end of the six weeks you were going to get a test coming out from the Central Office that you had to administer to your children. Then, after you administered that test you had to do a tally sheet. So if you started out with 25, that's the number of problems on the test, so you had to do how many with 25, all the way down, and if most of your tallies were down here in this bottom, the three and four and five, you looked kind of bad. Something was wrong. So teachers hated that. They hated that. And so what I would say to them is that this let's me know that you need some more activities on these things. And I would send them some additional activities like re-teaching. But they didn't like that. That meant that you had to get up and work. Also, it meant that if you didn't understand probability and you had to teach it, you had to learn it. And what happened was, when you teach what you want to teach, if you don't understand it, probably you don't teach it. So the kids hurt, but you are fine. So there were teachers who kicked against that. They were black and white, both. It was a lot of work. If we needed a workshop on probability, they got it. They told me that they needed some help–I've had teachers that were black that said

to me, “Ms. Glasper, please spend a couple of days with me. I’m working on this, that, and the other.”And I’ve done that. Because I was so tickled for them to ask me. It was a rigorous curriculum. But let me tell you, it helped the children. And see, when I would give the test and they would say, “Well, you know my children just didn’t do good on the test.”And I said, “Wouldn’t you rather know now than in April? If he doesn’t do good than you give him some more work on it.”

It was really a good program, but it didn’t give you time to sit back and pass out, as I said purple passion sheets. It didn’t work like that. You had to teach because you were going to a new topic. You always had to get up and introduce that topic and teach the children this. So it made you work harder. But believe it or not, some of the teachers who really fought this thing at the first, came back and were my biggest supporters when they saw that the children had done so well. However, there were these three schools, they were able to get their principal to support them, and they were stronger than me. Now in a lot of the schools the teachers didn’t like it, but the principals supported me because they saw it helping their children. But, I was out on leave, just a stress leave. The doctors had made me go home for a month, and when I got back, the day I got back Mr. Epperson called me into his office, July 1, 1991. I will never forget that. And he said, “Now, the teachers have to answer to you, and their principal and I don’t want them to have to answer to both of you. I want them to answer only to their principal.”

That was the beginning of the end of my tenure as the supervisor because I knew there wasn’t any need for me to go and sit in the teacher’s classroom if I couldn’t help, talk to her, or hold her accountable for doing the right thing. And then he wrote the letter, I got a copy of–he didn’t give it to me but a principal did–saying “If anyone comes out there and try’s to tell you

what to do in the classroom call me immediately."He sent it to everybody. And it's just like now where some people will sneak you a note of something that goes on. So it was a sabotage and it was–but later I understood that some of the other supervisors fought this because, let's face it, many if not most, supervisors like to sit down in the Central Office with their feet under the desk. I didn't do it. I was in a school everyday because I enjoyed it and I say we were getting somewhere.

So, first of all, that gave me no need to be sitting in classes if I couldn't do anything about it. All that was going to do was raise my blood pressure seeing the teacher do the wrong thing and not be able to hold them accountable. So, I stopped worrying about staying out in the schools. That was in '91 when he did this to me. I stayed there until '94. I feel like those were the least effective years. I would get materials for them, but I didn't have the zeal. I was just there for three years, I was basically just there. Well, I would have workshops. Even though I couldn't make anybody come, they were always full. And they still tell me now, "We haven't had a decent workshop since you left." So, that is what I did for most of the time. I pushed for materials for the teachers and those who would ask me to come out, I would do that. But it was only if a principal said, "Well Ms. Glasper, we just need some help." So, I still had a lot of requests and things like that, but it wasn't what I wanted. I wanted the whole middle school system to do well. I wanted all of them to be successful. It was rewarding to some extent for certain schools, but I guess not for others.

And then also at that time, they wouldn't give me the book money. They would get the Superior Textbook money and they would divide it with the high school and elementary, and the middle school got none. They started punishing me that way. They wouldn't give the middle

school a thing. I had a math specialist that I was hiring out of Title II Funds. They took my specialist away from me one year. I had a little girl who, you know how the children from high school would come down to the Central Office and work office practice, and I think they paid them minimum wages. I had a little girl who was working with me in that capacity. I became ill and I went home. I was home, I think, about three or four days. When I got back, they had taken her from me. I didn't have that help. Just things that they would do. And that was their real gift to me.

And then I remember coming down the hall and I remember Ginny asking me one day, "Do you have your receipts from last year?" We had gotten some money in; high school and middle school had a grant. And I said, "Yes, I have mine."And she said, "Oh good, let me have them because we are trying to balance this budget."And I said, "Ginny I have them, but I can't just give them to you. I can't just hand over these receipts, which I need for my budget records." So that didn't help my situation at all because she was best friends with Epperson. I was criticized if I didn't spend money. It was just a lot of things. So I had to go out, and I just had to fight this battle. And then finally, Dr. J. K. Haynes came in with me and talked with Dr. Weiss, the Superintendent, and just said, "She is a smart girl, she is a Christian girl, she works hard, and why are you doing this to her? Why are you allowing this?"And Dr. Haynes went on and told him that he just thought that was ridiculous and told him that he had expected them to share the money right because they weren't really hurting me, as much as they were hurting the children. After that incident, the next three years I got money that I had to find creative ways to spend. When that was worked out I said, "Well, I'm going to go while I'm on top."

They were trying to put me in my place. They were trying. They would say, “You’re not a team player,” and according to their definition of a team player, they were right. Now to me, I didn’t see that as a team playing. They wanted me to be a conformist. They wanted me to go along, even though I didn’t think it was the right thing to do. And because I wouldn’t go along with what I in my heart felt was wrong, they accused me of all sorts of things. I remember trying, asking– I wanted to be the chairperson of the math department down there. Dr. Hooper was in at that time. “We’re not allowed,” the first time they told me that they wanted someone in high school, and I was in middle school at that time. And then when this person left, they reached down and got the elementary math supervisor and made her chairperson. I could show you a letter that I wrote Dr. Hooper concerning that, and I just compared items–they have an education, I have an education, and I went on and printed out the thing, and the things that I had done and the accomplishments that I had made. And I just told him that the only variable that I saw was race.

I fought, that’s how I dealt with them. I would fight back, very professionally, and I would write letters because I wanted the paper trail. And I remember they got to the point, I’d write letters even to my co-worker who would do ugly things. And I can remember my director, who, now he was black, but I guess he was trying to stay in with the team players. So, one Monday morning I got to work and on my desk there was a letter that was sent to all supervisors that we could not write a letter to any of our co-workers without his approval. [laughter] And everybody fell out laughing because they knew who it was referring to. But see, I would write these letters and they didn’t know where they were going to end up. I guess that was a kind of defense that I had. They didn’t like letters because they were always professional, but they hit

hard. And I always believed in having my notes, you know to say this happened, and this happened, and they were truthful. And so they used all kinds of games. I don't think there was but only one letter though that he didn't let me send out. I would take them to him, but one he didn't. I just fought. I wouldn't take it, and so it kept my pride intact.

During all of my years as an educator, I don't know of a time that I almost quit or thought about it. I remember a time that I thought that they may not keep me. That is one of the reasons that I went to cosmetology school because I was not–I just didn't conform to everything that they thought should be done. And I really didn't know how safe the grounds were that I was rebelling on. I don't call it a rebellion. But, I'm not that good in compromising. If I believe that something is right, I'm not that good in saying, "Oh well…" and so I knew myself. And I said you know I may end up fired. I thought about the fact that they may not keep me, but I didn't want to leave because I enjoyed teaching. Other than when I really got ready to go, I don't remember any other time because you know really the things that make some people give up, make me fight harder. If it is something I really believe in. And even the times when they were trying to make me sign things, I just felt that I was right and I pushed at it. So, I really don't remember a time that I said, "You know, I'm just going to quit."

I always used to say when I was working and I would get into it with my superiors, the mistake they made was letting me go home at the end of the day. Because when I would go home, I had the support and love of my children, my husband, my family members because they believed in me. And by the next morning I was fine ready to go out and fight some more. So I have had that support, I still have it. I just believe people ought to do the right thing, and I know that sounds naive. But I'm not going to help them to do the wrong thing, I'll put it like that. If I

had stayed for the forty years, I would have received full retirement, but I retired three years early, after thirty-seven years. I finally decided to get out and try working with the school system in another way.

Reflections

I am not sure Clara really realized the vulnerable position in which she was putting herself. She saw things in the school system that needed to be changed, but once she moved closer to the center of power, the Central Office, she was stepping in the domain of the white males, a place where a black women supervisor was not welcome. This was a school system that had avoided desegregating its schools and had evaded the courts for thirty-eight years. Her year at the Deseg Center gave her the knowledge about the issues that up until then she lacked. She was a visible member of the NAACP and a person who challenged the status quo.

Although her intentions were focused on making education better in the system, she was the only one playing on her team. Clara's work on implementing a change in the way math and science was taught was making a difference for students who moved a lot, so they would have continuity and the scores were going up. However, the teachers' complaints that it was too much work caused the program to die. In a way, a part of Clara died with it. It was only a matter of time before she had to be stopped. The writing was on the wall.

End Notes

1. Its main objective is to minimize the number of racially identifiable schools by reassigning students through the pairing of predominately white and predominately black schools. At the elementary level, this means that one school in the pair would house grades K-3, while the other school operated grades 4-6. Students living in the attendance zones would attend one school until they finish 3rd grade, and then would transfer to the other school for the remainder of their elementary school years. Schools would be clustered and students would be bused to schools in their "cluster" based on the need to create racial balance.

CHAPTER 7

RETIREMENT YEARS

Introduction

In June 1994, the school board voted to end Dr. Bernard Weiss' superintendent contract effective December of that year. Following this action, five of the twelve board members decided not to run for reelection in the upcoming school board election to be held in November. An organized effort through Community Action for Public Education (CAPE), a grassroots organization, heavily supported the opponents of the candidates up for reelection. Jenson Holliday, a leader of CAPE, had approached Clara on several occasions to convince her to run for incumbent Jackie Mims' seat on the board. However, Clara was not the least bit interested. From her perspective, there was no way that they were ever going to change the white power structure of the school board. Therefore, the frustration of voting in the minority on issues was futile. She felt her time could be served in better ways.

Four of the seven members running for reelection were defeated. CAPE had changed the governance of the East Baton Rouge School Board by electing nine new school board members. In January 1995, the nine new members and the three incumbents began a national search for a superintendent with a new vision for desegregating the school system.

Clara questioned each of the candidates invited to apply for the position. Dr. Gary Mathews impressed her with his innovative Desegregation/Education approach to the school system's problems and the Education Committee of the NAACP did what they could to influence the board decisions. The school board hired Dr. Gary Mathews as the new superintendent in the summer of 1995 . His assessment of the overall school system looked extremely bleak.

Immediately, he restructured the central office, assembled a team of advisors, and hired new legal counsel to handle the forty-year-old desegregation lawsuit.

A new Desegregation/Education Plan (See Appendices A & B) was released to the public and the plaintiffs on April 12, 1996. The proposal received mixed reactions. After two months of intensive work and revisions by all parties concerned, a Consent Decree was agreed to and became effective July 29, 1996. An Advocate article, "Black leaders back plan"claims:

> Support also came from members of the local NAACP's Education Committee. Clara Glasper, a member of this committee and a retired school system administrator, noted that the black community had rallied behind the school board's plan after the release of the U.S. Justice Department's modifications. In addition, she stated that several members of the local NAACP had sent a letter and petition to Franz Marshall, the Justice Department's attorney, asking him to support the school district's plan. (June 2, 1996)

The Consent Decree calls for the board to improve facilities and education opportunities for students attending neighborhood schools by implementing magnet programs. Magnet programs[1] are an essential part of this plan. They are considered the primary tools for desegregating the predominately black schools in the inner city.

They Can't Keep Me Down

When I retired some people said, "Get a life." I think there are people who really believe that, "Oh she is going and visiting in a school, if she really had a life she would just be at home." But to me, serving, helping these children to get an education, helping to make things better in the school, that is my life, that is. I don't need to sit there. Glasper has retired, we've been together almost forty-one years, I don't need to sit there and look upside of his head all day. So

it's fine for us to be apart during the day and I do my thing and he does his. So this is what they say. Also, someone had said to me, "I'm going to show you how to retire."

Well, some people believe that retirement means sitting home, not doing anything, just shutting out the world, just being at home. If that's what they showed me, they would probably show me the way to some insane asylum because I couldn't handle it. I couldn't sit there. My first year out I read so many books. Books that I had put aside for years that I was going to read. I even started back reading fiction, which is something I had decided along time ago that I didn't have time to read because I needed to read my books on education and all of that. I read even novels again, but I found that I could just read only so long, and I just had to do something. And so I got up, and I started doing things.

After my retirement in 1994, I continued my connection with the school system because I was still a member of the NAACP Education Committee. And so I turned my attention to that work. When I became a member of the education committee, I never in my wildest dreams realized what I was getting into, in terms of the desegregation case. I was on the education committee for I guess about a year, and then right after the election of officers around December, I was asked by the president to chair the committee. Nicky (Patrice Niquille) was chairperson, and she got very involved in something else, and she had to resign. It may have been when she started running for the school board. And so then, I stepped into her shoes.

But I remember a lot of things were kind of coming together at that time. I can't remember which was first, but there were things going on that we would go in and talk about. I knew some things the position would require because I was very familiar with the national agenda for education committees, but never did I think I would be as busy as I am with it.

There are distinct duties that are given us by the National NAACP. You are supposed to look for, to try to promote equity in whatever system you are in. You are to confront any prejudice or racism going on in the school. There are just some activities that we must carry on year after year, just to try to ensure quality of educational opportunities. And one of the things that we were working on most was the ability grouping that was rampant in this time.

Actually desegregation is one of those duties, but the National NAACP says that we must eliminate segregation or must work to eliminate that. But it also talks about stimulating school attendance. Actually, you are doing anything that can enhance the educational opportunities or chances for children to acquire a quality education. But they talk with us; they charge us with looking at any abuses or any things that are not going right in an educational setting. Whether these things have to do with desegregation or regardless of what it is. Actually, we have the charge of trying to do whatever it takes to improve the quality of life of these children and their parents. Sometimes it may be just helping a child, or helping a parent to change a school or helping them to change the courses that a high school child should take. And that would have nothing to do with desegregation. But anything that can help to improve the chances of getting a quality education we are charged with doing.

Just an example, I remember students wanted a particular course at Tara High School, and they called the president, and he just said, “Well, Clara I would like you to work with this.” And sometimes he’ll ask someone else to work with it. And what we will do is go in and talk with the people, see why this course is not offered, and try to find out the possibilities of getting the course offered if it warrants that. Usually, the specific duties are delegated to certain persons in the organization. If it’s an economic problem that someone has called in, then the president

will usually talk with someone who is working with economic development. So, that's how it's done.

Now individuals in the community who know me personally and know what my role is sometimes call me at home. And I also chair an education committee at my church and for several years I headed up a tutorial program. I worked with the J.K. Haynes Foundation, so a lot of people know me and they will call and ask for advise or call and ask for assistance without any attachment at all to the NAACP. They do know that I am an advocate for children, especially in terms of education, and so many times they will just call me maybe for suggestions or for help. Sometimes it is through the NAACP, sometimes it is just a personal thing.

Full-Time Activism

Certain teachers or parents had concerns and I would try, within the bounds of what I was able to do, to see what the information was and try to remedy it, if it was possible for me to do that. I don't really think I have access to information because I work with NAACP. I think I have access because I know about the Freedom of Information Act. And there are a lot of people who don't know that. There are a lot of people who request material or information, and they (the school district Central Office) don't give it to them, and they just feel that there is nothing they can do about it. So I think that's the reason they give it to me, and I think they know that I know, and so I am able to get it.

So, the Freedom of Information Act would allow anyone to go in and ask for 'X' number of public records. Now, you can't go in and tell me what Mary's grade is, and things like that. But, when it comes to schools, what have schools spent this money on, what their scores are, how many teachers they have, what is the race of their teachers, what is the experience level of

their teachers, all of these kinds of things are public record. And if you don't know, they can easily tell you, "Well, I'm not going to give you that," and you go on and say okay. The system has the information, but most people don't know that they have it. I have lately requested information, such as, by school, I want to know the number of certified teachers, the race of the teachers, and the schools they are teaching in. With the computers, they have this, so it is really not hard to do.

They are very good about doing this, and I have to tell you I don't really know whether they would do that part for everybody or not. At one time now I've had to really write and use the Freedom of Information Act to remind them that I should have this in so many hours. In other words, it was really just a way to let them know that I knew that they had to give it to me in so many hours, or had to respond to me and let me know that they were getting it together. So, I think once you let them know that you know that and they feel that you will push it, you don't have too much trouble. Now, one thing that they will do sometimes, they will take their time in doing it. But most of the information I get.

Even if part of the school board went off by themselves, they couldn't do it behind closed doors because of that act. That is why now when we have our [NAACP] meetings, they'll send maybe two members. But there is a certain number, I guess a quorum. If they came to any of our meetings, even secret meetings with the other attorney's, the information would have to be given to the public because it is public business. Sometimes when people are insecure about what they are doing, they don't want people looking over their shoulders.

I think that there is involvement from the black community, but there is a lot of, I don't know whether I want to say uninvolved or improperly informed, involvement. For instance, I can

remember when they were talking about the new district line and so there was a group of Blacks that came to the meeting, and they were trying to speak. And then I took the map and I showed them these kids aren't out of their community. So, my point is they are uninformed and they come to the table and make all these statements so there is involvement, but I think the informed involvement is not as great as it should be.

A lot of times I've talked with teachers who say, "These parents just don't care." And you may think that. But they do, they do care. But they don't know how to express that caring. And in many instances they say, "where can I pick…I don't take the newspaper." And so I can remember a few weeks ago, someone called me and said, "you know this lady's child missed passing 4th grade by one point and she has all A's and B's." And she was wondering if there is anything that she can do. I said, "Ma'am, she could have appealed that last year, but right now I really don't know anything that can be done." So what I'm saying is they don't know their rights, and of course, as the book goes, ignorance of the law is no excuse. But to me if it is going to hurt kids I'll go a little bit out on a limb. "This child, or look at a child that isn't all that he or she ought to be," and they will say that, and I'll tell them that this child deserves an education just as much as mine. So a lot of things happen. There are just problems and so much poverty. There is a greater number of Blacks living in poverty than other races here. And I don't believe that poverty has a thing to do with your brains, as such, but I think that the expectations of poor people, that teachers have of poor people are so much lower than they have for others. I know that to be a fact from my own background. And that was the reason I made that vow that I would never, ever judge a child by his socioeconomic status, and I have always been for the underdog. Now that's where I'll fight regardless of what it is. If that child is an underdog in any situation,

whether it is achievement, or whatever because I know what it does to people. I felt that I was blessed because I always felt that I could. My grandfather instilled that in me. And so instead of them being able to convince me that I couldn't, I wanted to show them that I could. And so that was a blessing because I have met a lot of children that don't work that way. When you tell them they are dumb, they believe it.

NAACP Education Committee Chairperson

Under this new NAACP president, Alvin, there became more awareness of the fact that we are plaintiffs in the Davis case and that they needed to take a more active role in solving this, and that it is their major concern for the organization right now. Let me tell you, the other president, George Eamons, was very well versed in terms of the legal ramifications. He knows the case, he can memorize it. He can tell you which year, everything like that, but his emphasis was different. The person we have now is more educated. He is an attorney. He has children, so he's especially interested in education. Also, Alvin respects me. I guess Alvin kind of looks at me like a mom. And I think I may have been more of an affront to George because we just didn't quite hit it off too well. When it comes down to it, you know different men can react differently to women, sometimes. See, I am no threat to Alvin. He sees me as a person who can help him to get things done that need to be done. Most of the things that come up, if there are things to be written, if there are things to be worked out, I am usually involved in some way. I was the one who attended every solitary one of those public meetings that they had. I was the one who attended all of the meetings when they brought these people aspiring to be superintendents. I was the one who attended all of those meetings and asked questions even of Dr. Mathews when they came to these meetings. I was the one reporting to the group.

Any big article evaluating the school system that comes out of our chapter of the NAACP, trust me, nine times out of ten, much of it has come straight from research and work that I have done. In the beginning, maybe I had to establish myself. But, when I would do this research, when I would bring this information forward, when I would write these evaluations up on something that they were doing, when I attended all these meetings, they found out that I knew what I was talking about. Trust me, the president of this organization is conferring with me. He has been in Shrevepor. His mother is ill. But he calls me from Shreveport when he needs something worked on. When someone calls him about an educational problem, he turns it over to me. It is definitely not a male-dominated organization anymore. Maybe at one time with the other president before the present one because he didn't do a lot of listening. I think we kind of had clashing personalities.

Looking for a New Superintendent

I was very concerned with the search for a new superintendent for the school system now that Dr. Weiss was gone. The first time Dr. Gary Mathews came to the system, I went to hear him talk. I asked him a couple of questions, listened to his spiel, I did this with everyone who came here because I was very interested in getting a good superintendent. And one of the things that I would ask each one was their feelings about diversity and inclusion and things of that sort. And of course they gave the right answers. [laughter]

I really wasn't a part of the search committee. They would invite these people here, and they would have open meetings in the Instructional Resource Center (IRC). I would just go and ask each candidate questions. There was a time when the audience was allowed to ask questions, and I did. My main concern in a candidate was with education in general because I would talk

with them about tracking. I didn't like ability grouping. I would ask questions about multiculturalism.

Dr. Mathews knew about the desegregation lawsuit because he talked about it. One of the things that impressed me most about him was, he talked about how he was going to use the effective school model, where you have effective leadership. What he would say is that regardless of how well certain children were doing, if all the children weren't doing well, then the school is not an effective school. You know, he talked about all of these things that he was going to do in the area of the under-served. And of course we call the kids who don't do well, the under-served. He talked about School Improvement Teams, and how he would get the parents involved. And so he was very impressive.

Now the NAACP obviously had a great stake in who was going to be the Superintendent of Schools, particularly, his outlook on what he intended to do in terms of this lawsuit and what he felt about solving it. And one of the things that was impressive about him was that he promised to set out to not only get a Desegregation Plan, but to get a Desegregation/Education Plan. That was his first title of the booklet that was put out–East Baton Rouge Parish Desegregation/ Education Plan. I was very impressed with the fact that he was not just trying to get one white student to sit next to a black one. His plan was to revamp or reform the education in the system. And I knew that it needed such, so that was impressive to me.

I reported that to the NAACP. Now, I was not the only member who would attend sessions. I was just the most vocal one, and I think I was the only member who attended all of the sessions. But at some sessions we may have three, four, or five members and then at another

there may be just one. I was just really interested, and then I had the time. A lot of other people were not retired like I was.

Actually, the school board makes the choice to hire a new superintendent. So, the public doesn't, except through their representative. So, somehow the NAACP had to make their choice known. There are some white board members that we were able to talk with. And of course we talked with all of the black board members. See you have a representative board member for each of the twelve areas in the district. And so you have to get your wishes to your board member.

Work Starts on a Consent Decree

Dr. Mathews was hired in June of '95 and so he comes into office and I think it was his idea for a consent decree, getting everybody together to agree on a plan. I got the impression that it was his, and he went right to work on this because I think that I have one little booklet dated in April of '96. I remember them by colors. I had a blue one, and then a pink one, then the white one, so I know there were several revisions of this.

I think it was his leadership. I know it was because there wasn't a plan for all of this. When he came in, he came in talking about reviving the educational system, reforming it. He talked about using the effective school model, and all of this. These were things which a person who had been reading were very impressive.

Actually, the plan was a good start. There are few things in the plan that I would have done differently, but basically that is a beautiful plan, if they would just comply with it. So I was encouraged. The mere fact that they tacked on education, because in many of the desegregation plans they just look for a way of desegregating. But this started out being called a

“Desegregation/Education Plan,” that is not the name on the latest book. But the first two or three were called a Desegregation/ Education Plan. I was not in on all of the negotiations, but as many as they would let me in on, I was there. I went to all of the meetings, except the ones that were strictly for the lawyers. But even one of the days I went in on that. But all of the open meetings that they had, I attended every single one.

Before the Consent Decree was passed in July 29th, 1996, my job at that time really was self-imposed because no one said to me, “you must attend every one of these meetings that they have. You must get to know these people, you must meet Dr. Carter and see what his idea is for diversity.” No one said you must do that. I wanted to do that because I was very, very interested, and I knew that was really a part of what the job of an Education Committee for the NAACP was like. So I did it–some parts with the NAACP in mind, but satisfying my urge to really know what this was all about myself. Because I didn’t want to have to take anybody’s word. I wanted to hear what the authorities were saying. The new superintendent was talking about what his feelings were and I wanted to hear what they were saying. So I attended every single day of meeting they had when they were going through the Desegregation/Education Plan before they got to the consent decree stage.

Okay, so we’ve got these lawyers, they don’t know anything about education so they had to get their information from somewhere. My committee and I were very instrumental in giving them information, and I still am. I mean basically I was doing their field work. The research and collecting of data, and validating things, and some things I just already knew because I taught for thirty-seven years. I mean not necessarily taught, but I had been in education for thirty-seven years. I had worked at the school board office for my last ten years. I had worked as an

administrator for ten years before that. That last twenty years I was in administration and supervision in one way or the other. I knew the ropes for a lot of this information. And so it made it much more meaningful to me when I would sit there and listen and take notes for all of those meetings. It wasn't hard for me to interpret what they were saying because I knew the language.

Our attorneys had not really sat through those meetings, and they didn't know this Consent Decree as well as I did at first. They didn't have time. These are people who have jobs. So they couldn't give up their livelihood to come and sit through meetings like this. So they didn't know the ins and outs of the Consent Decree. I wrote up an evaluation of the positive and the negative points. I pulled these out and then I put the pages so if they just saw one that they wanted to check, they could go and check. That was really written so that I could give it to them so that they wouldn't have to take my word when I said that, "They promised this, and they promised that." So I was kind of doing some work and compiling information and things that they just didn't have time to do. And see, I had retired and I would go to all of these meetings and sit through them and I would take time and read each one of these books, page by page.

I mean, I knew it by heart. So I had to do this for them because they didn't have time to do that. And I think they acquired respect for my reading this. So they would call me, and "What do you think about this" or "What do you think about that? "or "The school system said this, is this true?" Because they soon found that even though people say something beautiful, it may be the most distant from the truth. So they had to kind of depend on me for that kind of verification. So I was just a gatherer of information a lot of times for them because being practicing attorneys, they didn't have that time.

The school board had presented it, but they would have meetings daily where they would be negotiating and talking and they would say, “Look this is not enough money for this,” or, “We don’t like this program,” or, “We need to do this.” They were actually in those meetings all day long for quite some time. And as I said, I was allowed to come in one day and asked questions about certain things. But what would happen, many times they would call me, and there was a time when the attorney’s would be meeting downtown in Mike Gerrard’s office (school board attorney) and they would get on the phone and call me, maybe a three-way conversation or something like that. They would consult with me or someone on the education committee. So they were continuously asking questions, but something came up at the very end. I had to go out of town and so at the very end of this I was not here.

I would have pushed more because, for instance, when they talk about the pupil/teacher ratio in racially identifiable black schools in most instances it is higher than in racially identifiable white schools. My point would have been to make sure it is lower, because the weaker the kids are, the lower that pupil/teacher ratio needs to be. I would not have sought for “no higher.” There are several other things that I would have changed, but I still could live with what they had if they lived up to that. We still could make it because there was a way to lower the pupil/teacher ratio with the “Y” factor (additional teachers), if we used it right that would make it even a little lower. So, I looked into ways of doing that.

I was willing to convince others to adopt this plan because I was so impressed that they acknowledged that there were distinctly unequal opportunities. That hadn’t been done before. They actually acknowledged it in their plan by the fact that they laid out some ways of getting rid of the inequity, and some of those plans were excellent. For instance, every year they were

going to give each racially identifiable black school this certain amount of money for facilities, and that was in addition to the regular facilities money because they admitted that they had forsaken those schools. They had not fixed rooms, had not fixed windows, that was an admission and a plan for rectifying that. They pushed strictly educational endeavors then, which is not a part of all desegregation plans. They specifically talked about the fact that they were going to take over the textbook money from the Central Office standpoint, so that every child would have a book in every major subject. That was something that had not been done. In many instances, they were getting old books, and some schools had no books. They talked about having extended day programs to help those kids who needed more time. Maybe they could learn, but in the span of that day there were some things that they didn't get. They needed more time. They added and said we would have an extended year for those children who may have gotten almost enough to pass, but there were just a few things that they needed a little more time with. So we are going to provide for all those things. There were just so many things that I knew were needed. They talked about equalizing educational opportunities and they specified how they would do some of these, and I was so impressed with that.

I became the advisor of Pastors for Excellence in Achievement of Character and Education (PEACE). This group organized, I guess at the same time we were working on a consent decree. And what happened was they were working with the parents. And the reason it was so important is because you have a lot of people out there, especially in the poor communities who don't take the paper, and sometimes there is such a gap in terms of information. And so we felt that the churches would be the best organ of communication for them. And so this group of ministers came together and we would meet at different churches.

But they asked me to serve as the advisor for them and that was really just because I would read the Consent Decree, interpret it to them, and tell them things that they needed to do to assist. When things came up like zero tolerance, to go and sit with them and help them to understand what it was and just things like that. But it was that the ministers could in turn, from their pulpits or from some meetings at their church, advise the membership. But after things got pretty much on the way, then that organization kind of dissolved. But this was kind of something to help to ease in the work of the Consent Decree if it came in. I looked at some parts of the Consent Decree to be implemented, these kind of things that I was doing, giving them basic information that I gave to all of the members. Just breaking down the information and like "questions to ask you child's teacher." Trying to help the parents to better become involved in their children's education.

I think that the reason we had a hard time, or we had to work on the Justice Department to get them to go along with a consent decree, it was because Franz Marshall had worked with this system even from '81 on, probably before then, but specifically then. So, he knew the system. I didn't know it as well. I was a little naive about some of these things. I thought that all of these things were done on paper and in front of a judge and the lawyers and that these people were going to attempt to do this because they wanted unitary status.[2] But Franz would say, "They are not going to do this, I can tell you." Or, there were some things that they had a certain amount of money specified and for them to come in and say "This is not enough. This is not going to do it." He was much wiser than I was in terms of what the system was capable of doing and how they could back out of these things.

I still am a strong believer in multicultural or diversity education. At that time, when they brought Dr. Carter in, they said of Dr. Carter, “We have hired him, he is going to be here and he is going to take care of the diversity and all of that.” And as soon as they got this signed, they put him on skates. [laugh] So Franz knew, he knew these kind of tricks. Franz has been operating with the desegregation plans all over this U.S. of A. So, the man was much wiser than I gave him credit for. And I tell you we have to laugh sometimes when I see him now. People talk about him but I love Franz because if he had not been there–you think we got sold a bill of goods–we would have gotten sold a much bigger bill. But there were some things that he said, “No, no, no, you are going to have to do it this way for me to go along with this.” And so he helped us out a lot. But if he were a mean person, he could shake his finger and say, “I told you.” Because he knew that people would do these kinds of things when they had no intention of doing what they said. But I didn’t know that, I was a little naive.

The school system came up with the plan and they started having public meetings. And I remember the very first public meeting I went to. They had some plans you had to pay for a copy of. They would discuss things, and they would have handouts. But they had this little bound booklet, and I think you had to pay $10 for a booklet, whatever it was. I bought it because I got reimbursed by my group. [laughter] But I got the book. I read it from cover to cover several times. So when they would have the public hearings, I would always be there, and I had these little cards, and I took copious notes. I even would put down who said what, so that I could remind them. And we just went through things.

I was involved in working with our attorneys and NAACP members. For instances, I typed up information that I gathered and gave it out at the NAACP meetings telling them some

of the positive points in the Desegregation/Education Plan. All of these things ended up in the final draft. I also included my concerns. So, these are the things that I gave to the NAACP to encourage them. Final approval had to come from the attorneys for all of the groups. The attorneys for the Justice Department, the attorneys for the original plaintiffs, the NAACP, they all met with the school system attorneys, the educational expert, the school board and the superintendent. And whenever something came up, they would bring in people to question. For instances, if it were something dealing with English, they would bring in the English supervisor.

I remember I met with them only one afternoon, actually out of rebellion because what happened they were not open meetings, but I wanted to attend. And so they started, they had this meeting, this particular day in the IRC. So I told my husband, I said, "Now, what I'm going to do is. I'm going to dress and I'm going down there. And when they come back from lunch, I'm going to be standing there. And they are not going to know what I'm going to do. So, they're probably going to let me in." And sure enough, that is exactly what happened. They probably thought I was going to act crazy or something. I wasn't going to do anything. If they had said I couldn't come in, I was going to come on home. But, because I was as vocal as I was, I think they didn't really know how to handle it. But, I was allowed in and that particular day there were questions. They didn't let me just come out with them. What they would have to do, I can very clearly remember Dr. Mathews kind of stooping over by me, talking to me. Mr. Mercer from the Central Office coming over asking me, and then our attorneys coming over asking me, but I didn't have a voice because the meeting was for the attorneys. But, they were negotiating. They met, I don't know how many times. Everyday they would meet in the IRC and they kept–some

things they would go along with some things they would– “we’ve got to have more money than this, this is not enough.” And so that is how they arrived at the Consent Decree.

So, when I typed up the information about the plan, I took it to our meeting and gave it to members of the NAACP who were there to read it. Because I’m going to tell you, they didn’t trust them. I had to really push this thing. And I had to really, I guess other people just didn’t have time to do all this reading. So, I was able to work with the people, to talk with the people. I started getting more members of the NAACP to go to the meetings, telling them some of the things. And eventually, to be perfectly frank with you, we wrote a letter to the Justice Department and we shared this letter with someone who was in the Central Office. And I really believe, someone at the Central Office gave this letter to the press because we would never had done that. But, it was a letter that we had written to Franz Marshall, telling him about this educational plan and telling him about the good things in this plan and we wanted a chance to try this. It wasn’t called a Consent Decree then, it was just a plan. Anyway, someone leaked it to the paper, and they printed the whole thing in the paper. Even after we had many meetings involving the Justice Department, the original plaintiffs, and the NAACP. There were many meetings trying to get them to go along with it because they were apprehensive about it. And they had good reason. But I think my job was to convince our attorneys and they in turn would talk with Franz Marshall more. And he saw me as active in meetings and sessions, but I don’t consider myself as having personally swayed him by my going to him and talking to him. I think it was more of his looking at my actions in meetings, looking at some of the data that I had, some of the analysis that I had, some of the reports that I shared, or that our attorneys shared with him. I think these are things that were convincing, not just my going to him. I think our attorneys would

talk, and they would be speaking on things, on information which I had given them. But my directly swaying him, I don't think that was the case.

Well, the Justice Department had much more experience with the school board. They didn't believe they were going to do it. And they were much smarter than I thought they were because see, Franz Marshall (Justice Department) had been working with the system for a long time. And he just didn't believe that they were going to live up to it. Also, he had to work with us because in many instances the school board had an amount of money that they were going to spend and he would say, "Hey, this is not nearly enough." I'm really very grateful to him for having done that because I couldn't picture really the amounts of money that was going to be needed. So, he worked with us and kind of fine-tuned the demands, and later on when they got a little bit, we just pushed and begged and talked with all of them. We had many meetings. They would say, "This is too this, and we don't like that, and…" And so finally they got down to this last draft and they had more meetings. But at that time when they had meetings to try to finalize the Consent Decree (legal term), I had to go to Houston. They accepted it on July 29, 1996, and I remember Glasper when he came and picked me up, he brought it to me, and I read it the whole time driving back. And I would say, "Oh boy, if I had been there I wouldn't have agreed to this right here." But anyway I came back and it was already signed.

Now Dr. Chris Rossell, a desegregation expert, was hired to help come up with the Education/Desegregation Plan. That was the title of it. Then they hired Dr. Carter, who was this black gentleman who was working with the diversity part of it. But as soon as they got it signed, they kicked him out. That was one of things that were important to me because I asked about him, "Oh, he'll be here through the time to assist and the implementation of the plan." As soon

as they got it signed, they booted him out. I was beginning to see the writing on the wall, just like Franz Marshall had warned me.

Now, the reason I pushed it was because there was a good education plan in there. And to be perfectly frank, white kids are not the only ones in the numbers that are being bused in there. Because the whites did not come, many of them went to private schools, many of them, under whatever guise they got in, they weren't coming. There were a few, but not many. But for the most part it was black kids that were being bused all over town anyway. So it hadn't worked, it didn't really work for desegregation. There were very few white kids in these racially identifiable black schools, but there were lots of Blacks in those. So my point was, it was a one-way bus. So that wasn't the real essence of it anyway to me, I wanted a good educational plan, and so I pushed this idea of "let's try this."

I am for desegregation, but I felt that those who came voluntarily would be better than being forced because it was only the black people who were on the bus anyway, for the most part. So with the Consent Decree, forced busing stopped. And see, that was the thing that was really different.

I am most passionate about the educational part of the plan. It is a Desegregation/ Education plan. I believe in desegregation, but not for desegregation sake. I believe in desegregation, and still do because for whatever reason, it seems that unless a school has some white children in it, it is not supported the way it should be. And you can see that by looking at the differences in the course offerings, looking at the difference in teacher qualifications, certification, difference in resources, and differences in the upkeep of the buildings. So in order to get these things, we have to desegregate. They didn't fix up McKinley Middle School and take

out all these dark windows until they decided to make it a magnet so that white kids could come. And I mean it is just a fact of life. And what happens is the school board controls where the money goes, where the teachers go and all of this. And the school board has seven votes (out of twelve) without a single vote from a black member. So, regardless to how passionate one of the black vote members is about something, if he or she can't sway a few of the others, you're out there by yourself.

So, desegregation is a means to an end for a quality education in East Baton Rouge Parish, as far as I am concerned, not just desegregation for desegregation sake. I see nothing wrong with it, but what I'm saying is, it's not something that we just try to make sure that you're sitting by this white person or this black person. That's not the thing. It's a quality education that we want. And we are not getting it. If we were, then these three racially identifiable black high schools would have calculus, and advanced placement courses just like all the rest of them, but they don't. So, these are the kinds of things that if they get enough white children in these schools, they will put it there. And I think that one thing that happens is that, let's face it; most whites are more vocal about the education system. In the first place, they have more power. And I don't think it's because Blacks don't care about education. It's not that they don't care, they don't feel like they have the power. You watch when Blacks come down to the school board in numbers. They don't listen to them. But you let that school board get crowded with white parents, there is going to be a change made more than likely, or some kind of accommodations. And I've looked at them have whites up there, and they will just talk and talk and talk. But I can remember them talking about calling the security guard for a black lady who didn't want to sit

down when the bell sounded for her. So it's a difference, and we just have to admit that there is that difference.

Community Action for Public Education

There is a Community Action for Public Education (CAPE) group. Now that group was responsible for getting school board members. That group solicited me to run against Jackie Mims for the school board, but I refused. I met with them– Jensen Holliday–also there was a little minister. I remember him because he said if he couldn't get me, he said he wanted to talk to my husband. And I said, "You're welcome to talk to my husband, but he is not going to push me to do anything that I don't want to do." And I didn't. I am not good at compromising. And in a situation, a public office like that, you have to. You are not going to get anywhere unless you can. And why put myself through something like that. And I know I would make a lousy school board member. I would, because you see I would have a hard time voting against something that I didn't really believe in just to get them to support something else that I wanted. I'm not good at that. But yes, they did, I mean they really courted me, and wanted me. Many times I met with this minister, Reverend Charles Smith, and Jensen Holliday right at the church out here, Shiloh Baptist Church, but I didn't want it. I was not the person they wanted. I wouldn't make a good school board member. To be perfectly frank, I think I could have won because they were a little disenchanted with Jackie Mims, who is our school board member. And they really pushed it.

The Multiculturalism Committee

I was still chairing the Multicultural Committee, but I resigned shortly after I retired. I didn't want that responsibility because I really just wanted to be free for awhile. I wanted to still

be a part of it, but I didn't want to have to make sure the notices got out, and I didn't have access to a secretary to get all these things out. It was just too much for me.

So I resigned, but I still attended the meetings. They went on until after Arminta Bolden took over as chairperson. And they went on until Dr. Matthews came. And shortly after he got here, he asked her to stop, until I think they were going to do something different. He told her that they were going to work with them. He was very interested in it (multiculturalism) and he thought it was good, but to just kind of let it go for awhile. Well actually, I was already a member and working with things. But what happened with the Multicultural Committee, it just kind of phased out. I think about the next year it resurfaced as the Diversity Design Team. They changed the name of it after the Consent Decree.

I think that the desegregation case was never solved and my feelings, just from my own knowledge, why it has gone on for forty years prior to the Consent Decree, it could have been solved. I just don't think the people who were in power had the will to solve it. Just like it could be solved now. The Consent Decree is nothing but a recipe for getting unitary status. But they don't have the will. They want to get the unitary status by circumventing certain parts of it. It's not that the job is so hard, it's just a lack of will. That is my personal feeling. And, well, there are stereotypes about the kids. Some people don't want the racial mixing. Some are very opposed to that. Some are very opposed to trying to remove the remnants of segregation by establishing equity and by trying to make up for things they have not done, whether it is in facilities, or instruction or what. And even right now the offerings in all of the schools, they're not the same. The racially identifiable black schools, they don't have all these high level courses that are held in others. And I know some people are saying, "Well, if they're not doing that good, they don't

need them." Yes, they do need them, that's why they are not doing that good. They have all of these dead end courses and the children take them and many of them don't know any better. They think they have had a quality course in physics.

There are kids who leave out of school thinking they have had honors chemistry, when in fact, they have a had a course that was called honors chemistry. So, there are some people who just don't face up to the issue and they look at the gap between Blacks and Whites as the way it is supposed to be. They don't believe that some of the reason is because of inequity. I'm not saying all of the reason, but some of the reason is inequity.

Now you don't expect a kid coming out of Glen Oaks, unless he or she is an exceptional kid, to score on the same range as children who come out of Broadmoor where they have all these high level courses. They don't have all these dummied-down courses like financial math. Financial math is good if it is really that. But they are called these names and it is kind of a do nothing add, subtract, multiply, divide kind of math that is going to get them nowhere. Because if you don't know when to add, subtract, multiply and divide you are in big trouble. And so many times they don't have the kinds of questioning, or the kind of problem solving that really give children a reason to multiply, add, subtract, and divide.

So when you get kids that don't get this high level thinking in school and then you test them with high level thinking, you don't expect them to do any better. And like I keep saying, these racially identifiable black high schools, neither one has a single advanced placement course and then some of the courses are in name only, they're just not equitable. When you look at the number of non-certified teachers in those schools, it is horrible. There is not the equity there.

I really believe it could have been solved had they been willing to promote equity, had they been willing to put first rate teachers in all of the schools, had they been willing to repair all buildings rather than some. But this idea that some people have that the solution is to make sure that Blacks and Whites are sitting side-by-side, that's a part of it, yes. But the education part of it–the sitting side-by-side, or the going to the same school, is a means to the end of getting a quality education. So quality education is the end product that Blacks are looking for, not sitting side by side. Because we have been taught very well that if you want the best resources and the best teachers and the best whatever in education with the power structure being what it is, you are going to have to have some white kids in that school. Because they are going to take care of them. And you get taken care of in the process. And that is why it is desegregation to the end of getting a quality education.

What is stopping this whole process of getting unitary status is lack of compliance with the Consent Decree. The Consent Decree is a staunch plan for getting unitary status. If they would do everything that is in the Consent Decree at the end of eight years, I believe any judge in this U.S. of A. would declare this system unitary, but they will never do it. Now they probably will get unitary status someday without doing everything because what they will say is we have complied in "good faith." But, that is a recipe for it.

And every portion of the Consent Decree I believe once it is implemented, and I firmly believe in all aspects of it, the various things that they are supposed to do that once that is put in place the plaintiffs will be happy. They've agreed to it, they've all signed that this is the Consent Decree, that this is complied with, and it is an eight-year plan. They've agreed, but the point is, there still is not that will to really do what is in there. They want to circumvent it. Right now,

watch closely the cuts. Now the Consent Decree says in no uncertain terms that what's in here you can't give lack of funding as an excuse. This is your responsibility. You shouldn't have put anything in here that you can't fund, and if you do, it is your responsibility to get out there and find the funding or to cut something else, but not the things that are in here. But watch the cuts. The first thing they are fixing to do now is to up the pupil/teacher ratio. Now, you are reversing something already because really this is designed to lower the pupil/teacher ratio in those schools where you have children who are most at-risk. But here is something that is going to reverse that.

Community Involvement

Okay now, what you'll find is that some of these things I've let go, quite a few of them I've let go because the education committee, the NAACP, and monitoring the Consent Decree, is so time consuming that my church activities and educational activities have just taken the forefront in some of these cases.

I'm still a member of the Trustee Board of Elm Park Baptist Church. The Trustee Board looks at all of the finances, makes sure that the church has the proper insurance. When people request money, we have to make sure that it all has to come through us. So you really kind of look at the finances. You make sure that we are fiscally responsible when we spend the money for the church.

I was asked to serve on the Education Committee of the Chamber of Commerce, and I did for years. We would have presentations from the schools. They would tell us if they had a new program, talk with us about it. But after the Consent Decree, and I became Education Chair there with the NAACP, I still worked with them, but after awhile I stopped attending the

meetings. Sometimes we were kind of at odds with them, and I really didn't feel that comfortable. And I didn't have the time anyway.

Well, I guess maybe twenty years ago, maybe longer, I wrote up a proposal to the church to start an education committee and it was accepted. I wanted to push for scholarships for our children. I wanted to assist children who were in the church and needed help. One of the first things I did was to set up a tutorial program in our church. So I really started the Education Committee of the Elm Park Baptist Church, and we still have this committee, which I still chair. So I've been there I guess for the last ten years. Right now we do things, like every summer from the summer of '97 until now, we paid four students to work in the extended year programs as teacher aides. We also give a $1,000 scholarship to one student and $500 to two other students. And we assist students in buying books. Anytime they come to us with a need, if we can, if we agree that it is a legitimate need, we help them financially.

All of the groups that I am working with want to improve themselves, want to do whatever is best to help our kids to get an education. Because, if you notice, most of the groups that I'm working with deal with education because that's really what I know best. And we are not pushing or fostering segregation into black or white. We are not necessarily pushing desegregation for desegregation sake. We push for desegregation because really life has taught us that to get the things that we need in these schools, they are going to have to be desegregated because once you take these racially identifiable black schools all you've got to do is go and look at them and that will tell you that they are not going to do all of the things that need to be done for these schools if the clientele are all black. They are not going to do it; they have never done it.

The things that they have done have been done because the judge has said you've got to do this. And they're still not doing all of them because if they were, then Glen Oaks High School would have high level courses like calculus and advanced placements, so would Capitol High School, so would Istrouma High School, but they don't do it. But you see, I'll tell you what, McKinley has them because McKinley has the gifted group in there and they have quite a few black kids. So we know, now it is not a thing that we are trying to say that you must have ten Blacks to…no, but the desegregation is necessary. We have found it to be necessary. In order to get the power structure to do what it should do for kids, all of these desegregated schools have the high level courses. And I think there are a lot of reasons for that. And I know because in many instances the white parents are more vocal, and they have more power. So if they say, "Listen, my child is going to get calculus," they are going to put it there. But many of the Blacks are just learning their rights. Many times, for black parents what came home from the school was gospel. They somehow at one time felt that what the school did was best, but they don't always.

And so there are groups, like our group and like other groups, like Nicky is doing, trying to educate her parents in her district. By having these workshops and telling them about Special Education. Letting them know that many of your children are getting put in special education and they don't belong there. You know these parents didn't know that. They didn't know that, if the school sent home and said your child is supposed to be in Special Ed, they accepted that. But many people don't know. I can remember my oldest granddaughter coming home with a note saying that she was going to be put in Title I, you see. So had I not known better, that's where she would have been.

The system had meetings in different areas. I specifically remember at Istrouma they had meetings in each section of town, once they got to explain all of this stuff to the people. So there were many community meetings, well attended. I spoke out at these meetings because most of them were informational for the community. But at the end of these meetings they would have a time where you could get in line and you may have two or three minutes to ask some questions. At some of the meetings I would ask questions, some I said nothing but just furiously took notes and things of that sort and came back, analyzed, and reported it to our committee. I was not that vocal in them. I was mostly there learning and listening.

They all kind of agreed in those meetings in the IRC that they got it how they wanted it. Because some of the things changed. But, the school board has to comply with what they call "Green Factors"[3] in order to get unitary status. The attorneys came together, and then they had a conference with the judge, where they signed off on it. But I think the biggest part of it is was getting the parties to agree and if the parties agree as long as it is constitutional, I don't think there was a big problem with the judge.

Reflections

When Gary Mathews became superintendent, Clara had high hopes for the school system. In many ways, I think she saw him as the savior she had been looking for. The system was so broken, and she thought he had come to fix it. She was so excited about the unstable component of the plan, it was more than she could hope for if it really happened. The Consent Decree stated that a curriculum of inclusion would be developed at Baton Rouge High and then implemented in the remaining schools. This was one of her priorities–that black children would see Blacks as contributors to the history of our country. I think Clara hoped that when the school

board members signed the Consent Decree that they meant to do what they agreed to do. But with their past record, if they did not the court would hold them accountable to it. She prayed that one day she would see that educational equality for all students in the system would become a reality and she was committed to help it happen.

It was around this time that Debra, a colleague of mine, met Clara while attending the school board meetings. I interviewed Debra to counter the risk of bias in my research. This is part of the interview we had on Aug 9, 2001.

Miller: Debra, could tell me when you first became aware of Clara Glasper, or became acquainted with her, and under what circumstances?

> The first time I can remember seeing Miss Clara, and that's what I call her, Miss Clara, we sat by each other at a school board meeting. I think the two of us met in these meetings for about two years. I'm a member of a professional, independent teacher organization and became one of their officers. So I was blessed with the position of having to go to school board meetings and listen to all their rhetoric they have to say. But we just struck up a conversation and we had the same, it seemed like we had the same attitude about the school board at that time. You know like, they talk and talk and talk but nothing ever happens. And so I developed a kind of comradery with her at these meetings. She would always leave about half way through them. She would say, "I can't take any more of this." And she would leave, where I had to stay, wishing I was her**.**

Miller: Why do you call her Miss Clara?

> I call her Miss Clara, I guess it's a southern thing. I have a lot of respect for her. But I feel like it's more personal a relationship than Mrs. Glasper, or Clara, I don't think that is respectful enough. I think it is more of a respect thing for her, that she is Miss Clara.

Miller: How would you describe her in terms of characteristics?

> My first thought, how I felt about her when I first met her, I had to step back and think. You know, right away you understand she is a very passionate woman, she is aery intelligent woman, but she is very open minded too, which I have a lot of respect for. I know a lot of people who are intelligent and who are passionate, but they are not open-minded. But Miss Clara is.
>
> I would describe her as persistent. Some patience, not quite as patient maybe as she should be. However, when she speaks, she controls what she says though. She has the

passion but she controls her thoughts when she is speaking, which is a plus. A lot of people don't do that. When she presents herself, she does it in professional way. She has a lot of wisdom, she picks her battles, she knows what is worthy to fight for, and what isn't. Sometimes you pick your battles because there's too many of them out there.

Miller: At one point, you said she was very soft spoken, but yet you know she is there.

Her presence, she is one of those kinds of people when she walks in the room you have to, everybody turns to see who it is. Some people have that gift; she is one of those. She has a nice presence about her, but forceful. Let's see how can I put it? She is like the epitome of what a woman should be: soft spoken but strong, passionate but smart about it. I guess that is a good description. Very professional, dresses professional, when she walks in the room, when she conducts herself, this is my impression of her.

Debra's description of Clara confirmed my experience working with her. She picked up on the fact that maybe she did not have as much patience. However, as Debra pointed out, sitting and listening to the rhetoric of the school board was hard to do. And, Clara was very familiar with it.

End Notes

1. Magnet schools are innovative schools that differ in a formal way from regular public schools–in mode of instruction, curricular emphasis, or a program of career preparation. Students enroll on a voluntary basis and from beyond the borders of regular attendance areas, hence their magnetic character.

2. The Consent Decree provides on page 7 as follows:

The school district may unilaterally move for unitary status upon the conclusion of the eighth school year following the implementation of the plan. At any time after the conclusion of the fifth school year following the initial implementation of the plan, a joint motion for unitary status may be filed by all of the litigants with the Court. In Board of Educ. Of Oklahoma City Public Schools, Independent School Dist. No. 89, Oklahoma County, Okl. v. Dowell, 498 U.S. 237, 249 (1991) the U.S. Supreme Court stated as follows: The District Court should address itself to whether the Board had complied in good faith with the desegregation decree since it was entered, and whether the vestiges of past discrimination had been eliminated to the extent practicable.

3. The six “Green Factors” are: student assignment, faculty assignment, facilities and resources, transportation, staff assignment, and extracurricular activities.

CHAPTER 8

IMPLEMENTING THE CONSENT DEGREE

Introduction

The Consent Decree simply laid out a long list of commitments for the school board that, if met, would give the school system a good chance of obtaining unitary status, or a declaration by the court that it was desegregated. The Consent Decree, however, led to new disagreements.

In 1997, voters turned down a $2 billion tax plan to pay for new schools. The following year a $280 million tax plan was approved. But, Judge Parker delayed the collection of part of the funds after the U.S. Justice Department contended that it would not help desegregation. Judge Parker ruled that the Consent Decree limited enrollment at the schools, which school officials vehemently objected to, saying the numbers in the plan were always intended as estimates, not limits. Judge Parker later ordered the school system to change attendance zones to drop enrollments below the Consent Decree numbers. The T-buildings (temporary buildings) had been a source of contention among the desegregation case parties. Judge Parker told the school board in August of 2000 that it could not continue using those buildings, at least until it did a better job of justifying their contribution to desegregation. Clara was a member of one of the two teams that started circulating among the district's 101 schools. Each team included a court-appointed monitor, one or two school officials familiar with desegregation and capacity, and at least one member of the Education Committee of the NAACP.

Clara kept busy monitoring the progress or failure to progress in each of the areas prescribed in the Consent Degree. She worked with the magnet committee. Because the curriculum of inclusion was so important to her she invited herself to join the Diversity Design

Team. But, basically she worked through the NAACP as the Education Committee chairperson to observe and report back to the organization what was happening out in the parish.

Who Said I Retired

At this moment, I am involved with the NAACP, the Magnet Improvement Committee, and a member of the Math/Science Curriculum Committee, which really comes under the Magnet Committee. I am Vice President of Programs for Phi Delta Kappa, which is an educational fraternity that Southern University formed. I chair the Education Committee for Elm Park Baptist Church. I am also on the Trustee Board for Elm Park Baptist Church. Those are the things that I am really active in.

I'm such a very busy person. I mean I spend so much time on school issues and advocacy for other people. You know, I have calls to answer and meetings. I have people faxing me stuff that I have to look over. Well, right now, it is a little different from what it was. From '96 until I guess the beginning, probably mid-way 2000 it was almost like a job. I spent an enormous amount of time visiting schools, analyzing materials, and I must admit at that time I had someone who was coming in to help me clean.

I had to get a housekeeper. She was coming in just one day a week to do the heavy stuff and then she got a full time job so I've had to do this myself, so that cut it down. But I'm going to tell you, I doubt, there are very few days that I don't read something, write something, or do something as far as the school system is concerned. But I don't spend all day, you know. I don't

believe there are four days out of a month that I don't do something. If it's nothing more than taking clippings from the paper and putting them in the little clear binders and putting them in a notebook to keep them. But there is just something almost everyday. Even when I am on vacation, well vacation to me is going to spend a week with my children in Houston. Even when I'm there I get faxes or I fax. I don't do this all day, but I still like to keep up with what's going on. And then there are some days if the attorneys tell me "I need to have you analyze this or that," I may spend the greatest portion of the day. For instance when the budget first came out, I guess I spent almost a whole day looking at that budget, analyzing it, wondering about some of it. They had Y factor [1] people assigned to Shenandoah and you know just going through it and highlighting these things and putting question marks that were not in compliance with what was supposed to be going on. So some of the documents that they pass out–I have to look at them closely. Usually the day after school board meetings, I spend that Friday, a great portion, four maybe five hours, going through my folder. Reading whatever they have in there, highlighting, taking out and putting in a binder those things that I need to save. So that is usually my biggest day now. I don't visit the schools as much as I did. I've only been to two schools this year, and usually I've visited quite a few schools by September, by this time. So, I am pretty busy but it's kind of winding down a little bit now.

Diversity Design Team

The team meetings started somewhere in '97. They had changed the Multicultural Committee to the Diversity Design Team. They didn't ask me to come. No, not at all. What happened, I still have friends at the Central Office, and they were feeding me information. So what I asked a person at the Central Office I said, "When you see them planning on having a

meeting or you find out that they are having a meeting, give me a call, tell me what time and where." And so every time they would have a meeting, I would just come in and slide into a chair. And so finally they started sending me a notice too because I was sitting there every time anyway. No, they never asked me.

Now, the sensitivity training with the diversity team did not, in my mind, comply with what was required in the Consent Decree. The school board thinks that they have. They have to write up something to give to the judge on their compliance with it. In each one they talk about the fact that they have. They say that at Baton Rouge High they have a curriculum of inclusion, that they've done that. And the only problem I have there is that I don't want to believe that they are that dense, I think they are just feeling that if they say this long enough that we will believe it. [laugh] Because you know, like some of the things that they list I've asked for… "Okay, tell me the things that you've done." And they'll say "Oh, we have a class in black studies and…that's not inclusion, that's separatism if anything. That's not inclusion. And then they collect a whole stack of stuff that they have gotten from each teacher. The PE teacher may have something on Jackie Robinson and they say this is it. But that is not a curriculum of inclusion. I mean it's just a little add on thing–a curriculum would be something that is mandated, you know. To me a curriculum of inclusion would be just to include things about all groups in this curriculum. But when you go off and say okay there is this black history class that nobody is going to take but Blacks, that's not inclusion. So, it's not required. It's an elective and guess who elects it. I am not going to believe that all these Ph.D.'s and master's and master's plus 30 people don't know better than this. I think they are just pulling our leg. I know better. They know better. But they will say when they do their write up about how they are doing, they will say they have

done a good job. That intensive training involved one afternoon of people–tired and not wanting to be there–and told what the diversity training is, and that's the end of it. No curriculum, no staff-development training. They said they were going to train the people who had to teach the curriculum. Well they haven't done the curriculum, so you really haven't done the training of the people. No, I don't believe they think they have done that.

That sentence in the Consent Decree about multicultural sensitivity, and inclusion, that was one of my own personal issues that I have been working on for years; however, it seemed to me, there was really little, other than one sentence, and from my experience I didn't feel that it went far enough. It didn't really require enough. I'm disappointed because they didn't even push that little bit that's in there. For instance, in the Consent Decree, they talked about the fact that at Baton Rouge High they would develop a curriculum of inclusion which would include the contributions of all groups and particularly Blacks. Then some where else in there they talked about the fact that every single middle school would have a curriculum of inclusion just like Baton Rouge High. The reality of it is that they don't have one at Baton Rouge High, so naturally, to say that all middle schools would have one like Baton Rouge High hasn't materialized. So, actually they had very little in there, but they haven't even done that little. They talked about the fact that they would have sensitivity training on diversity, different perspectives. And they would refer you to the staff development plan for East Baton Rouge Parish, saying it would be in compliance with this plan. Well, when you get this plan, it has a little more detail about the multicultural education, or diversity, or whatever they wanted to call it. But they have not done that. They talked about intensive training of people in interpersonal relations. They talked about intensive training in diversity. One afternoon over about two to

three hours of introduction to diversity, that's the intensive training that they've had. So even though they've had little in there, they have not even done that little. And I'm very disappointed. I really had planned today to get the copies of the required reading list. I do that every summer to see if they have changed any and they basically read the same things I read fifty years ago. So there are a few of them, very few female, and even fewer black authors required.

But I know that we live in a world where there are all kinds of people and I really believe that we've got to learn to live together. Because I believe in multiculturalism, I believe that we are all here, and I believe that we can all live together, and if we don't learn to live together as Martin Luther King had said "We are all going to perish separately." Because I just haven't been able to understand why people feel that just because our skins are of a different color that we are really so different. Oh sure, our culture maybe has some different barriers sometimes or some different ideas. But I don't think it is necessary to be one or the other. I think we can all exist together, and I think that is the only way we are going to really get anywhere. And to be perfectly frank with you, the power structure is such that we are just interdependent. We may as well accept that and move on. I don't want my grandchildren to feel that, if they hear someone that they have to first make sure they see them to see what color they are to see whether they agree with them or not. And I wouldn't even want anyone to start this kind of teaching around my grandchildren because I don't want them to have that feeling. No, that is not necessary, I think there is some good in all of us, and I just don't see the need for the separatism.

These barriers are coming down some, but I think the schools could do so much more to help them come down faster. And we could all be happier and more successful and better off. This is one of the things that I was so excited about in the Consent Decree, where they said that

all of the middle schools would have a curriculum of inclusion where they would deal with the contributions of all people and work these things in. You see, the way it is now, when you sit in these classes, like history and science, it looks like we have done nothing. Why not talk about Drew, he is the one that is responsible for us being able to store blood–the separation of the plasma. Nobody talks about that. Why not when we talk about inventions and things–would it really be so bad to let them know that the first stop signal was done by a Black. You see, let them feel that we've done something. But we sit there and we don't talk about what Blacks have done at all. We are just sitting there getting the rewards of what all other people have done. And I think that is ridiculous. Every year I look at the reading list. Why don't they put more of the novels there as a choice? And then people would say – Blacks did this, and Blacks did that. And it wouldn't make blacks look inferior. So that's why I'm saying that I think in getting together you realize that you are more alike than different.

My Many Commitments

In the summer, I spend a lot of time with the extended year program that is in the Consent Decree. Now I did sit in classes then and observe. And then, well one school, I spent a lot of time there because I had to go. Our church paid for four students to work as teacher aides. I chair the education committee at my church. It was my job to supervise these students to see that they were doing what they were supposed to do, to talk with the teachers and the principal. And then I had, every Monday, to take the sign-in sheets, and on Thursdays to pick the sign-in sheets up, and also to pick up the evaluation sheets because the teachers had to evaluate them every week.

And then I get phone calls from various parents. I still do that. Now lately, since school started, I've had calls from parents discontent about the Y factor. So I've had quite a few calls.

Sometimes I can work the things out on the telephone, if they are not big problems. They are big problems to the person who called me, but they are things that, if it is at a school where I have rapport with the principal, I can just call them and work things out.

There have been several people who, in the course of my working with this desegregation lawsuit, I have met. And of course Judge Parker has been called many things, he has been on the case for about twenty-two years. I have not met him on a personal basis, but I've been in his Court when he has had us in for hearings and things, some were open, so I've been in to his court. I have taken a document that I did to him, but it was given to his secretary, or receptionist, I have not talked with him as an individual one-to-one. So, he's never asked me things. It has gone through his clerk, or through the lawyers. I don't know if he knows me but he has seen my name enough because some of the documents that they have turned in to verify things have been things I've given where my name may have been on there.

Also, I remember I did an evaluation, I think it was after the second year. I went step-by-step through the Consent Decree telling what had and had not been complied with and evaluating the school system's compliance and I took that to him and gave it to his receptionist to give to him. I actually went to the courthouse. It was addressed to him, "Letter to Your Honor."

It was from a member of the NAACP because even on the cover of the little thing it was a –I've forgotten the title I had on there–but it was looking at the school systems compliance with the Consent Decree, and it was by Clara Glasper, Chairperson of the NAACP Education Committee. Now I didn't get a response back, but I got an indication after that in his rulings, or things he said, or things I heard that what I had analyzed he had taken notice of. I believe whole-heartedly he did. Because many of the things he talked about. I did a thorough job of explaining

the magnets, and he got off on those magnets. I definitely believe that he looked at some of these things because some of the things that he would say to them when they would have the sessions would leave me to believe that either he had read mine, or he had read somebody's. And then there were times when, for instance the attorneys for the original plaintiffs, quite a few of them shared the notes because I didn't even know that my lawyer was sharing them with him. And I remember one day when I met him and he said, "Oh, I know you, I used lots of your material." I was not aware of it until such time as he told me. This Mr. Carter, who is the attorney for the original plaintiffs, somehow through the grapevine he got my work.

Now I felt that, I mean as an individual, I went to the courthouse and did this–what motivated me to do it outside the system, so to speak, I did that because I was afraid. I knew that I had done a good piece of work. I had documentation for every single thing that I said, and to be perfectly frank, I didn't think that the attorneys were going to take it to him. I felt like they were going to say, "Oh, no…" And I didn't think any one could tell him what I had seen, what I knew to be a fact better than I could because I'm the one who experienced it, whereas lawyers don't.

And then, sometimes they look at things and I think that these attorneys have strange minds. They think that women just jump up and down about things. And then sometimes I think they underestimate us because, I can remember at one time in talking with them, I would bring up something and one may say, "Well I see, you know, I'm a lawyer." In other words, I would be saying something and I remember my favorite expression was "I'm not a lawyer, but I'm not stupid either." [laughter] So, sometimes we would get in those little–I don't know whether it was chauvinism or attorney-ism. There are things that sometimes I have to do myself. I really do. Case in point lately, I looked at the budget. There were things in that budget that were as

untrue–if they were true they are in serious trouble. And when I talked with one of the attorneys he said, “Oh, I’ll tell you what, let’s don’t say anything about this. They are going to apply for unitary status and we’ll bring it out then.” So, I said okay. I had it written coming from the education committee. I didn’t argue with him. I went back, I erased, I got on the computer, I changed that and put it from Clara Glasper. Where I had c.c.’d to the attorneys, I erased all of that and I just sent it from Clara Glasper, not from the NAACP, not from the education committee because my point is I wish that they would look at this and straighten it up. That’s what I want them to do. You know it’s no fun for me to let them go and lie, and them come and catch me in a lie. I want them to do what they are supposed to do. I want these Y factor people put in these schools. I want these pupil/teacher ratios lowered. I want some staff development for these teachers so that they can help these children to pass the test. So, if I can tell them, “Look you put this in here, you shouldn’t have done it, you’ve given Y factor people to Shenandoah and to Wedgewood when they didn’t deserve them, and yet you’ve taken one or maybe two out of the racially identifiable black school that does deserve one.” If they looked at this and go and put some more there, I would be the happiest person in the world. That’s what I want them to do–lower these pupil/teacher ratios.

So what I’m saying is that in some instances the system is creating an obstacle, and it’s necessary to go outside the system that has been created by the desegregation case in order for you to get information to the judge–to get them to see and to understand because you’ve been there, you’ve seen it, you’ve experienced it. And this whole, you know, plaintiff/defendant thing and strategy, and well we’ll let them play their hand, and then we’ll play our hand, and all that. In some instances, it creates an obstacle. In some instances, I serve as chairperson with the

education committee. I'm loyal to that position. I do not represent that with things that are not created through them. But, there are some things that I act upon as a citizen, an interested citizen that has nothing to do with the education committee. Now I do respect our lawyers. I go through them when I do things, and if they say I can't do something–if they can convince me that I shouldn't do it, period, I won't. But, if it is something that I feel strongly about, I do it as a citizen, not connected to the NAACP, not connected to the education committee, but connected to me. Just something I want.

And it's good that I did that, because had I not been doing these things in my heart, I don't believe that we would have the revamping of the magnets right now. Because nobody else was going to take the time and go and sit in these classes to do a lot of these things that had to be done. I just refuse to believe that math/science magnets won't work. So, I had to go out and find out what it was that was keeping them from working. Like Glen Oaks, I remember going there two days straight, I know the principal was probably completely fed up with me. But I spent two days there. I wanted to visit these classes because I knew something was wrong. And I uncovered what was wrong. And then I came back and I wrote about it and these were the kinds of things that I turned in that let them know what was happening with the magnets. I would also communicate frequently with Dr. Bates who is the instructional monitor. I would go and I would write these things up and send him a copy, share these with him. And I really think that was the kind of thing that made him realize, "Hey, we've got to do something." And when the judge talked about it, he was happy to work with this. And of course I was one of the first persons Dr. Bates asked to be on the magnet committee because he knew that I knew the schools. I have written an assessment of every single one. And then they had an evaluation by the principals.

And I took those things the first year, and I kept them. And so, when he started talking about things, and later on they called–I think the principals were really intimidated, but I had their first evaluations and those things that they said were wrong. I'd tell him that a magnet that was supposed to be ready to go in August, did not get up and running until January. This is what the principals had written. And so I kept documents, and even though my memory is lousy, I would remember.

So, I just have to keep at them. And there are things like looking at the master schedule. And you look at a master schedule where they may have Algebra I, Part I, Algebra I, Part II, and Remedial Math, all at the same hour– the same teacher–and you question these things. If it's bad enough, you talk to the Central Office, and to shut you up they give them another teacher. So, a lot of things have been done by my uncovering things. Of course, that has made it a little more difficult for me to get material, sometimes I have to request it twice. But at one time they gave me whatever I would ask for on the spot. And I think, I don't know, they probably thought nobody is going to sit down and read all of this stuff. But I did.

Okay, Judge Parker resigned the end of July. In terms of the time, he was on the case for twenty-two years, I think he did a good job. I do think there were instances when he could have, and maybe should have, maybe not, but there were instances certainly that he could have been much harder on the school board than he was. He was tough with them sometimes, but he kept giving them chances and I think they took advantage of that. I don't really know what happened, but I really admired him because he had a lot of courage. To sit down in your hometown, and continuously fight and do things that they blast you for, and misrepresent on the television, and you still hold people accountable, he had a lot of courage. And when he retired, I just said Judge

Parker knows that he is real close to having to slap somebody in jail, and he probably just doesn't want to put them in jail. Because they just wouldn't do right, they would not do right. But, I admired the man. I thought he was courageous, and I really feel that he did a good job under the circumstances. But this is a difficult school board to deal with. And I think he–there was something where he talked about the whip–where he said that "Maybe they needed someone who used the whip." And I think he was not a whipping kind of person. And so he kept trying to reason with these people, but I think he eventually found that there was no reasoning them.

In the newspaper he was quoted as saying that, "The school board lawyers would rather litigate than desegregate," and I agree. And that "He hated to leave the case unfinished, but unlike Sisyphus, who was condemned for eternity to push the boulder to the top of the hill only to have it roll back every time, this senior judge is not required to continue pushing the stone." And he said, "I will no long preside over this action." He basically said he'd had enough. That, "I'm not willing to undertake even one more unsuccessful attempt at resolving this case." As much as he disliked leaving it unfinished, he was just tired. I think a lot of times he tried to get them to use moral judgment, to get them to be ethical, but none of that worked, none of it worked, and just look at them now. Now they have hired a firm that's going to cost maybe $60,000-$75,000 or more. And in the paper what they stated was that most of their effort would be looking at what they've done to see if they are ready for unitary status. I told them at the school board meeting last week, "You know, I'll do it for you free." And I meant every word of it. The audience started laughing, some people in the back started clapping, it made absolutely no sense.

I got up to the podium. Yes, I did. And I told them that I had visited a school the other day, and the principal told me that she was only going to have fifty kids in the extended day program. And I asked her why, how could she define the number when there were criteria, children who fit this. And she said, “Well, I only have money to hire two teachers.” And I told the school board, “That money that you are spending for lawyers, you could give some of this to the schools so they could hire enough teachers to give the children the attention that they need. And now you are employing some highfalutin lawyers that I guess you think can persuade someone to give you unitary status. But my point is that you say you are getting these people to tell you what you need to do to get unitary status, I can tell you for free what you need to do. And that is–follow the Consent Decree.” And that’s the truth. They don’t need any big lawyers to look at what they’ve done and decide, okay, have we followed it? And I really could, I have it all written out, I could tell them what they’ve followed and what they have not followed.

They said on the news the other day that since 1995, they’ve spent $2.7 million on lawyers, and they had hired this Washington firm for $70,000 to file this appeal. So, all of this money could have gone into education and into actual compliance. They’re spending money, but they are not spending money to get people to help them to do the right thing–what’s in the Consent Decree. They are trying to find lawyers to help them circumvent the Consent Decree. Because those people know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, the things that they have not done. And the reason I can tell you they know, I have a folder that I’ve requested information just this summer, information on this. I have a letter where I’ve written to Bill Robbins, the person who is there with desegregation, who is over equal opportunities. So even if they look at that, they know I’m telling the truth, things they have not done. I looked at the budget, now they had all of these

things, this is the General Fund Budget and they tell me that they have given an IEA person, this is personnel, to Baker Heights and Bellingrath. They know these are not racially identifiable black schools. They know that. Now maybe that first one, I thought "Oh, they made a mistake there." But now listen when you get these many in one document, these are not mistakes. These are not mistakes. You know what they are going to do, they are assigning these different people, and so they're going to add up how much this personnel costs and say "Hey, look how much money we've spent on desegregation." None of these people should have had IEA personnel, none of them. But what they'll do, they'll put all these lies in there and they will figure up the salary of all of these people and say, "Look how much money we've spent." They'll tack this on to what they really did, and they do it all the time. They did the same thing with the textbooks. They don't tell the truth. And so you have to look at this stuff. And each time I find and catch them in a lie, I tell them. You have to be a private investigator.

So we have Judge Parker resigning and I thought, "How could he do this at the beginning of the school year. It was such a critical year, what with it being that year that supposedly the school board thinks that they are going to apply for unitary status." I'll tell you, I was stunned. I had mixed emotions; I didn't know what to do. I guess I was really, to tell the truth, I was upset then. But after I got home and thought about it I said, "You know, in the last meeting, when we had the sessions with them, I understand because I was not there, but I understand that he had told the school board that they had better not come down there applying for unitary status. If they did, he was going to put sanctions on them." And at this time, I mean he had almost put them in position where he was going to do something tougher than he had ever done to them. And I said, I don't know, maybe he just didn't want to do that because of the public outcry. You can't fight

all these people. I can understand. So later on, I said I don't blame him; I would have left the thing too.

Well, he was retired and he had still stayed with this. But the public criticism, the things that he was being called, King George and I mean when I was in the school board meetings and I would listen to what they were saying about him, I think the public outcry was getting out of hand too. And like I say, I think this whole thing was just getting really ready to explode I really think he was just trying. He was performing his Constitutional duty. Now I was very impressed that the 5th Circuit backed him and upheld him because somehow I think the school system thought that the 5th Circuit was going to be lenient on them. I think they thought, "Hey, I know we are going to get something there. And this thing is going to be a shoe-in." But, it wasn't quite that way. I think it was Dr. Carter who made a statement after Judge Parker resigned and he said that, "We've changed judges, we have not changed laws." You know, the laws still have to be upheld. But I think that you had some people on that school board who were naive enough to think that we will get an easier judge. Because I know that I heard people said, "Oh god, I hope we don't get …." you know. So I think that they may have thought that we would get a judge who would be more lenient, but it didn't quite work out the way that they wanted it to work out.

I think that they were some happy campers, but after last weeks session, I don't know that they are as happy as they were because they seem to have thought that they could get someone who would circumvent the law and the Constitution. That didn't seem to have happened.

Judge Brady seems to be a hardliner. He seems to be following in Parker's footsteps. And saying the Consent Decree is the Consent Decree, you all agreed to it. Well, I know I talked with

several of the attorneys after the first session that they had with the new judge and a couple of them told me that you could tell without a shadow of a doubt that he knew what had gone on. He had talked with Parker extensively. So we really don't know how long these things were in the plan.

Now according to the newspaper, the Justice Department is basically saying the same thing, that the board has failed to implement key provisions of the Consent Decree. Then Dr. Mathews left in March 2001, and the new superintendent who was promoted from within the system, Clayton Wilcox, is saying this has set back the school board in their attempts to achieve unitary status. That this is unfair.

I was naive when I sat through all of those meetings. I really thought that Dr. Mathews meant what he was saying. You know, I guess it was wishful thinking when they came up with all of these things about we are going to do the curriculum of inclusion at Baton Rouge High, and we are going to plan a curriculum where we put in all the contributions of all groups, and groups of color in particular. It was so beautiful, and you know, I believed those people.

You see what I thought was that the lawyers would just hold such a tight reign. And I knew that I was going to watch and tell them, but what I didn't know was that I wasn't going to be able to persuade our lawyers to file objections to everything that I thought they should have filed. And all of this. But I'm telling you, I just learned this. I didn't know they were as deceitful as they are.

The Work of the Monitors

Now the monitors that we have are the monitors for the court. They don't really work for the plaintiffs or the defendants. They are under the auspices of the court. So the court has got

these monitors. The plaintiffs, and all, had some input in choosing these monitors, but they were really apart of, sanctioned by the court. The monitors have to make sure that what is in here is being done. There is an instructional monitor, Dr. Bates, and a facility monitor, Dr. Gordon. They in essence are the eyes and the ears for the judge out in the school system. They don't actually live here. They come in from out of state. So, they basically answer to Judge Parker. Now, I don't know what Judge Brady is going to do.

They come in, they'll give recommendations. And, you see, like with Dr. Gordon whatever they use the facilities money on, he has to approve it. But now, for whatever reason, Dr. Bates does not have to approve, or he has not taken the initiative to make them answer to him with how they spend the Instructional Equity Account (IEA), how they spend other monies in instruction. But with facilities, Dr. Gordon will tell them, "No you can't buy that with this money." And so I guess that is why they have done so well because he has been very strong.

Dr. Gordon deals with facilities, trying to get some equity there. For instance, in the racially identifiable black high schools, three of them, they have put state of the art science labs. I mean really nice. We would never have gotten that any other way. If you ride around the schools now you see nice signs identifying the schools, we never had that. In the classes now you'll see nice chairs and tables. Before than, you may have a folding chair and a tin chair, just whatever they could find to stick around. Any kind, two, or three, five or six different kind of tables in a room, if you had any tables at all. There has been nice clean carpet put in areas that had water stains and dirty spots. Now the facilities monitor, I have to tell you, he has really pushed his agenda. He has done a lot, there is still some things to be done, but he has really worked. Let me tell you, I admire that man. He just calls it the way he sees it. It doesn't matter to

him, like he will say, “I don’t feel any obligation to balance the school board’s budget.” You know like they may start talking like, “Well, we don’t have the money to do this.” Something that is in the Consent Decree and they start talking about it. And he’ll just tell them, “You know, you see this page that says you can’t use money, and you knew that when you signed this Consent Decree. I feel no obligation to balance the school board’s budget.” He told them about those magnets. We had talked about magnets and about how sorry they were. And what happened when they first started. Whenever Dr. Gordon and his son would come into town, we would meet with him, that’s the education committee. Whenever Dr. Bates, the instructional monitor, would come into town we would meet with him. Dr. Gordon and his son spent much more time here than Dr. Bates. So they were getting the information from us, but they didn’t have to take our word. We would tell them and they could go out and see this for themselves.

I have to tell you that I am much, much more pleased with the work and the findings of the facilities monitor than I am the instructional monitor. Now that is not to say that I don’t respect Dr. Bates, and that I don’t like him, I do. But Dr. Bates seems to be trying to be amicable with everybody, and I think he allows that school board to cook up crises. And I told him a couple years ago, “Every time you come here, they have some crisis for you to work on. And that is because they don’t want you to have time, or they don’t want you to have much time to get out there in those schools because they know what you will uncover.” And that was the thing that I have had a little bit of a problem with him. He has allowed them to garner too much of his time. Dr. Gordon didn’t allow–they tried to tell him, “Oh, we’ll get our people to check the roofs of the buildings.” He went up there and checked his own roof. He took his brother’s son with him and they went up in these buildings and they checked things themselves. They didn’t

depend on the report from maintenance on this. Dr. Gordon was involved with the temporary buildings (T-buildings). So, I had worked with him on that. When they had to do an assessment of all the buildings, the facilities and things, they did a report that you would have to respect. And Dr. Bates I worked with him on the magnet schools. Well, actually I've worked with both of them on instructional things. Even Dr. Gordon has helped us because, when it came to talking about these magnets, I think this was in '98, it was supposed to be up and running. He came here and found that the computers were still in boxes, and all kinds of foolishness like that, after school started. And you may remember when the superintendent said he didn't want Dr. Gordon–they wanted to get rid of him. And he said that he's delving into instructional things. But there are some things facilities and instructions are tied together. And so Dr. Gordon would just bring out whatever. He verified the fact that the magnets just were a failure. That they just hadn't done what they were supposed to do. And see he would sit down and talk with us about things. And I don't think it really mattered to him how the system felt. I think he had a job to do, and he did it.

The instructional monitor has not done as well. I have said to Dr. Bates more times than one, "What they do when you come, I said, they always have a crisis when you are here. So they whoosh you off over here to work on this crisis so you can't see all this mess that they have over here." And really, that's what they've done. They're using diversion tactics. Yes sir, they've done it. Of course there are lots of things that I have actually worked out and sent to him to show him certain things. Like I've done a master schedule, color-coded it for the higher level courses and the low-level courses. So that he could just take it at a glimpse, and thumb through and see that you have lots of blue in the white schools and lots of orange, which is low level courses –

you know. I've done it so that– because I know he is not going to take time to go through all of this like I read. But I am not pleased at all with the monitor of the instructional phase of it. However, I am pleased with the monitoring part of the facilities.

Dr. Bates is supposed to be over evaluation of instruction. He hasn't done anything about inclusion. It's still–let me tell when I say that they have not done anything–I sent [school board] them a letter, "Request for information submitted by Mrs. Glasper: A copy of the middle school curriculum of inclusion." Their reply for the curriculum of inclusion, you know you almost want to cry. I don't think I would believe it if I didn't have this copy of their reply. This is their curriculum of inclusion for middle school. This is not a curriculum. These are the activities, they have listed here. There is nothing that assures me that they have been included. I don't know whether one teacher, all teachers, or no teachers did these. This is not a curriculum, this is what–now look they were supposed to do this. Now this is 2002, they were supposed to do that in 1996. And this is–I'm sorry, no, '97/98 for the middle school. But 96/97 for Baton Rouge High. Now let me tell you what I've gotten from Baton Rouge High. I've received a big stack of things where they've run out and copied some things with black folk pictures on them. And some statement of some things, and they said, "Oh, this is a curriculum of inclusion." I sat at a meeting last week and talked with the principal from Baton Rouge High. I thanked him for what he had sent to me. But I went on to tell him that what I really wanted was the curriculum because you see, these things, these are activities. I wanted to know how are they infusing the curriculum. He admitted that they had not designed a curriculum. But he said that he asked the teachers to put something on their planner, lesson plans. But, I was really nice. I told him that I appreciated what he had sent, but I wanted the curriculum. And I wrote this little thing, this was years ago,

maybe three years ago and I gave copies of this to him that told what a curriculum of inclusion was. I don't think they know, I really don't think they know. And I even gave simple examples when you talk about the cell. See all we talked about was who did anything with the cell when I came through school, Robert Wood. Okay, well we know now that E.E. Jess, a black person, did a lot of research on the cell. So instead of just talking about Robert Wood, add E.E. Jess' contribution. When you are talking about respiration like breathing add what Morgan did. In other words, we don't want you to just say, "Okay, this is the black people here." Just take your regular curriculum and whenever possible infuse the works of all people and not just some black few. This is all we're asking. When you assign readings, when you assign required readings, all we're asking is that instead of assigning readings by, as the expression goes "dead white men" assign some readings from women, assign some readings from blacks, assign some readings from Hispanics. You know, these novels, they have good novels from all of these different groups. So, lets not just assign just required reading from Shakespeare and all these other people. And even the recent ones, there are some very good novels. I can remember reading books by some of the black authors when I was growing up, and even since I've been an adult because I didn't know many when I was growing up. But there are some excellent ones. Some are by or about Blacks. You take Black White View Me, it was not written by a black person, it was written about a black person.

Don't do this add on kind of stuff because even the black kids resent it when you come in with some added on stuff for what they've done. They know what you're doing. You'll find many kids will choose some of the white authors, anyway. But give them those choices. And these are the kinds of things that are just not done. So, it's being resisted. They are just pulling in

some pictures of Venus and Serena Williams, the two black girls who just won in tennis, that's wonderful, I love those girls. But what I'm saying is, "make it natural." Make it a part of the curriculum. Dr. Carter was the one who supposedly helped them to write the diversity part. And like I've stated, as soon as they got it put it in the language that we would like, they kicked him out. And they said the reason was he was charging too much.

See the school system does a good job on television, and I'm going to tell you the news media will play up what the system says. What was so funny, when we got home the other night, my son had taped the school board meeting. And I had gotten up twice. And he looked at that and my son was laughing and said, "Mama, you didn't tell them where you live did you?" [laughter] They record what they want to record. And they put in the paper what they want to put in the paper. I'm really not that impressed with the new writer. I'm glad he doesn't quote me be cause he gets too many things wrong. I don't need to be made up to sound anymore evil than I sound. Sometime they can twist one little word and make you sound ridiculous.

After six years of effort on my part, the thing that frustrates me most is the lack of will to do what needs to be done to raise the level of achievement of all children. You know, we know what to do, but there is not the will to do it. That's what they are in the business for. You see there is research that abounds on what works. They don't do anything with it. We know that you need to lower the pupil/teacher ratio. We know we need to put some teachers in these racially identifiable black schools who are certified and qualified. We know that you need to stop transferring teachers out every time the white teachers come in and teach one year.

Now I'm telling you, as laudable as it may be with these Teach for Baton Rouge people that they are bringing in here, they have no experience in teaching. But guess where all of them

are? Nine times out of ten they are in a racially identifiable black school. Prescott, academically unacceptable, I counted about seven or eight on one sheet, you know where you have the personnel changes. Every time I look down, "Teach for Baton Rouge," "Teach for Baton Rouge." I looked at them putting at Winbourne a teacher who has been an accountant, nothing showing me that she has worked with small children, but they are putting her over at Winbourne, one of the most needy schools in the system. These people are probably very intelligent people, but to teach, it takes more than intelligence to be a good teacher. You've got to have patience, you've got to have foresight, you've got to have a whole lot of things. But, you see in these racially identifiable black schools there is no stability. We have schools like Capitol that had 45 percent non-certified teachers, Prescott with 42 percent, Delmont with 41 or 42 percent, so this is the thing that's frustrating to me. We know what to do. But we don't have the will to do it. And we won't do it. We know that teachers need in-servicing continuously, ongoing in-service education. We are not doing it. We know that there needs to be some diversity training, but they've abolished the Diversity Design Team. So, these are things that are frustrating to me, and another thing that is frustrating is that there are things that they know they haven't done, and yet when you talk to them about it, they pretend that they interpreted it differently. Now how many ways can you interpret, just like this curriculum of inclusion? We are supposed to design it, and then we are supposed to in-service the teachers who have to teach it. Just look on page 21 of the Consent Decree. It's written so there is no way that they could not understand what they are supposed to do, but yet they are not doing it. Look what the statement says, "The school district plans to engage in minority inclusion and revamping of the atmosphere and curriculum." But every time I've asked for this revamped curriculum where they have incorporated contributions

of all Americans and, in particular, the contributions of Americans of color, they send me these pages with Arthur Ashe's picture on them. It says a revamping of the atmosphere and curriculum of the school so that black schools are not just admitted but retained.

They are supposed to do, "On going staff development for teachers beginning in the fall to address cultural diversity." Have you heard of any ongoing staff development?. "Incorporate a curriculum of inclusion respecting the contributions of African American writers, artists, intellectual scientist, athletes, into the entire middle school curriculum." They haven't done that. So it's things that they just blatantly refuse to do, and when you try to talk to them about it, they pretend they don't understand. So don't hand me this stuff and pretend you think you are replying to information requested. This is no reply to what I asked for.

After six years, I'm hopeful that, I pray that this judge will be hard enough on them so that they will understand that they must live up to this commitment that they signed. And if they live up to this commitment it's going to improve education for all of the children, black and white alike. Now if we get a judge who will say to them, "Hey, you gonna have to do this." Then you may as well do it. That is the only hope I have. Because unless a judge dictates it, or puts some of them in jail, or puts some sanctions on them, or gets a headmaster, it will not be done. It is not going to be done. You know, as I look back at this, I think they had one thing in mind; they wanted to get these children back into their community zones. And I don't have anything against that. I think they said, "I will promise you the moon in order to get you to let me bring your children back to their community zone," and then they're going to do none of it. And I think that was their goal. And I can see why they thought they could get by with it because from '81 until '96 not one motion had been filed. They had done nothing, and you heard nothing. And

so I think they thought, “This is the way it’s going to be.” They were going to slide on through, and they didn’t know that there would be a few people who had retired and had time to read. And so I think that they thought that would put the things in the decree that would make us go along with it, but we don’t have to do it, and I think this is it.

I see that my efforts have made the most difference in instruction. We have calculus, of course it took long enough, in three of five schools. I have been asked to work with Capitol High School, which is the only one without it to see if I can work with the personnel there to get them to encourage children to request it. I have because of the things that we’ve uncovered. We’ve been able to get them to add teachers where they were doubling up on what the teacher was teaching at a certain period. I was able through working and going into schools, and visiting in the schools, and fighting and fussing and getting information to get them to drop their idea when they were phasing out magnets.

Also my efforts as an advocate for the community has made a difference, I think. I think so because they need a spokesman. The average person out there, where are they going to turn? My efforts as a community person has helped a lot because I’ve been able to guide people to schools. Parents will come to me and say, “You know my child in such and such a school, and I’m telling the truth, it’s getting too expensive.” And then I would say, “Tell me a little bit about your child. Well, what about this magnet.” If you don’t like the school that you would be going to, and sometimes I wouldn’t have recommended that school either, and I will say, “Well look, this is a good magnet. Let’s do this, and let’s do that.” I’ve gotten letters, or calls, or thank you notes because they weren’t aware of it. Raising the level of awareness in the community has really been a big thrust with me. Because see at first I worked with this group of ministers. And I

was able to raise their level of awareness and they in turn raised the level of awareness of their people, their members. So this is the thing, and then to get in and just uncover some things that–for instance going to Glen Oaks and sitting in these classes and finding out that the science teacher was English-certified; no, she wasn't certified in anything. But she had an English major. You see these are things that you are not going to uncover on paper. And so I think just raising the level of awareness of a lot of people, including the board on some things because there were things that they aren't aware of.

Drafted for Duty

There were some issues that I've been pulled into, and then there are those that are my passion, which I've worked for because they're issues that I'm extremely interested in. And I would like to see some progress made in those areas. Issues that I've been pulled into, I can think of two right off hand: the T-building situation and another one was the attendance zone situation. Now I know that those things are important, but I was really willing to let whomever take care of that because I was and still am very, very interested in instruction, directly with instruction. Now the T-buildings, they just didn't bother me a whole lot because I had not even thought that much about them. They used them, I know that in some instances in the past they were used for segregation, rather than desegregation, but I was willing to let someone else take that on. I went because I had time to go, and I realized that someone needed to go. But I wasn't sure that I was the one. However, I do feel that by going, I got a much better insight into which T-buildings were needed and which ones were not.

I was willing to let someone else take on the job of trying to worry about the attendance zones. I had some problems early on with the attendance zones because I thought that they kind

of over did it in their gerrymandering in the black areas and sending kids out to desegregate some of the previously white schools. To me it caused a greater transportation burden on the black children.

Magnet schools–I made it a passion. Simply because I have to tell you that I was a little prejudice when it came to the math and science magnets. And I was terribly dissatisfied with what the system was doing more, what the system was not doing to make these magnets work. And the magnet went for, I guess, two years before any teachers were even trained. This year, 2001/2002 will be the first year that the magnets have actually had a curriculum, a distinct curriculum. Each magnet was doing it's own thing. So I wanted to be a part of that because they were magnets in name only. Assessing what was called a science lab for the science magnet–not one faucet was running, there was no heat, they had those old burners, they weren't running. I asked about the computers and this was in January or February, and she said, "Oh, well they haven't been working since October."

Extended year was also my passion. In the Consent Decree they talk about at-risk children losing so much of what they learn during the year over the summer and the teachers have to go back and review. And so consequently they don't get very far. So, what was ordered in the Consent Decree was to have what is called extended year programs. And so the at-risk kids can come to summer school. And some of them, you get kind of like enrichment and review and whatever they need during the summer. So we, at our church Elm Park, with our education funds which we get through donations, volunteer, members pay, things of that sort, we hire four students each summer and they go into those classrooms, and they kind of act like a teachers

aide. They tutor children one-on-one, or do whatever they can do to assist the teacher so that children can get more individual attention. I really am the organizer and I monitor the program.

Pupil/Teacher Ratio

I sat in a 4th grade class yesterday in an elementary school. As many as a third of the children in there were repeaters because they had failed the 4th grade math test last school year. Yet this classroom had thirty children in the class. Her other class has thirty-two. Now, hey, you don't have to spend a day in a school in your life to know that isn't going to work. And that's why I go in the school because when you read the book they tell you, "What's the pupil/teacher ratio at Lanier?" "Oh the pupil/teacher ratio over there is 1:18." And I told them I said, "I don't see where they get the pupil/teacher ratio." They count the number of students and they divide that by the personnel. And I told them "Y'all even count the janitors when you are dividing the numbers." The cooks, the janitors, they have to, to get sixteen or eighteen. Now, they do all kinds of things, they just don't tell the truth. And if you don't go and look, you won't know. If you just ask them what's the pupil/teacher ratio, they wouldn't come close to telling you that there are classes over there with 31 and 32 children. And of all classes, the 4th grade, a high stakes class. 71 percent of the children at this school failed the 4th grade math test last year. And yet, they have classes with 31, 32, 30 children. Now you mean to tell me that you are really promoting an education for those kids. I know better.

Pre-GED

My most serious problem right is what they call the pre-GED group of kids, eighth graders who failed the 8th grade test twice. We had to go out and observe. We have a little sheet–when you get a concern, you write the concern down, try to write it objectively just like

the person says, and then at the bottom, you write what kind of prescription you gave. And of course the members of the NAACP are directed to bring the concerns to the group. Right now we're not at the point where we can just trust anyone to go out and solve these, but this is what we are working on now.

Earlier, a parent called me and was extremely concerned about the pre-GED Program because she had a grandchild in that program. And so we did a little research. I went out to visit this center out at Sharp Station. And I had another member to visit the site at Christa McAuliffe Center. The NAACP believes from research done in conjunction with Harvard University that, "test driven sanctions imposed by many states against low performing schools create a perverse incentive for school officials to get rid of struggling students." And let me tell you, that's exactly what's happening in the pre-GED program. They are taking 8th grade students who have failed the test, and they have gotten these parents to agree to sign to put these children in a pre-GED program. In this program, they sign off their rights to a diploma. They give up Carnegie units.

They have these children, a lot of them, housed out at Sharp Station over on the backside of the warehouse by the railroad tracks where there's not one window. You go up these little steps and go in that metal door, and they're in there. You walk into this place–now what they are doing to these children over there would really upset you. They say that these children in the pre-GED do a half-day of academics and a half-day of skills. And do you know what the skills are? They pack these used science kits with new materials to send back to the schools. See, the school takes a science kit, uses it, sends it back, and it has to be refurbished. These kids in the pre-GED program are refurbishing those kits. That's their skill. Well, regardless to how well they pack the

kits, what job are you going to go around Baton Rouge and get with that. Do you see what I'm saying?

Now I went out there, the first time I went out there, I think the poor lady was so nervous. The kids were just packing kits and I said to her, "What time do you have your academic part for these kids?" She said, "Oh well, we flip flop." There's two teachers, one teaches academics and the other teaches the skills. So, she said, "We flip flop." So, I said, "Oh, well what time are you going to teach your academics today?" because it was about 9:00 in the morning, or a little after. And she said, "Oh, well you see the academic teacher, she is going to be testing all day today." I said, "Oh, so that means that these children won't get any academics today." And she said, "No, ma'am." And that is probably many days. And listen, now they have one room that looks pretty decent. It's just junky, but it has a few computers and some desks.

But where these children were that day–it was a big room where they had lots and lots of big plastic tubs with batteries, and yarn, and all kinds of junk that you put into this kit. You refurbish this science kit. The school uses it for a month and, it comes back in with the batteries, probably no good, and the salt and soda have been used up. So the kids go and refurbish these kits, again.

Now, if the children couldn't get it in a whole day, how do you think they are going to get it in a half day? And see what's happening, and what they say is, "Oh well, these kids, 8th grade kids. . ." now they say they are sixteen years old. Okay, I don't care. I've been up there twice and the teacher told me that she had tested all of her children and she was kind of proud of the fact that most of them are on the 5th and 6th grade level, and that's really good she said, "because a lot of time children, people trying to get GED's are on the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grade

level." And she said, "Some of them are even on 8th grade level." And I said, "You have students on the 8th grade level?" And she said, "Oh, yes ma'am. Some of them tested out on the 8th grade level." Well listen, an 8th grade child, I don't care if he is twenty, an 8th grade child who tests out on the 8th grade level has no business in a pre-GED program. I don't think any of them have any business in a pre-GED program. They ought to be getting more instead of less instruction. Let me tell you something, kids who get a GED, and that's something they sited in the research, that there is a big disparity in job holding and welfare between people who get a GED and people who get a diploma. People don't want to hire many people with just a diploma, and a GED is just a joke for a lot of people. You know, employers, they'll say, "Oh, you're too dumb to get a diploma, so you went out there and somebody hiked you up for the test." So what I'm saying is, let me go back to this research that they may intend to push these kids out. What has happened, these kids will no longer count in their test scores because they've pushed them out into the pre-GED. So the pre-GED children, they don't have to take the test. Because, see they are no longer working toward a diploma. They are working toward a GED. And I think it is a disgrace before God in Heaven.

They have another group at the Christa McAuliffe Center. And those out there, they supposedly have a half-day of lesson, and the other half-day they will do skills. And what they call their skills is light office work. They duplicate the material. They're out there, you know they laid off all these people, so they're doing the duplication. The same thing happened with the lady who used to pack the science kits for the schools.

And I was talking with one person in a school about this, and she said, "Oh, no wonder these kits have been so messed up this year." So they are using these kids. To me I think it's

illegal child labor. But you know the problem is, I haven't been able to impress anybody with this. I've talked to people who had clout. I've talked to lawyers and they say, "Well, what do the parents say?" Well, you know, a lot of those parents didn't understand what they were signing. One mother said, "Yes, Ms. Glasper, we did sign for him to go." But she said, "The alternative was, what they told us was "Well where is he going, cause he sure not going to the high school. He has failed both parts of the test. He is going to still stay in middle school." Well, the child was sixteen years old and that was the only alternative for getting him out of a middle school. They weren't going to put him in the high school.

And you talk about the children not passing, but let me tell you something, I was able to count twenty-nine 4th grade teachers who are not certified. Now these are children that either they've got to pass the test, or they have to stay in 4th grade. Why would you put non-certified teachers in fourth grade? You put the best you've got to help these children. I wanted to know all of the teachers, the 8th grade teachers by school because remember that's where these Pre-GED kids are coming from. I wanted to know the 8th grade teachers by school and I wanted to know the certification status of each one of these teachers. They will not give me that. Do you know why? Because many of these people, many of them are not certified at all. Many of them, and I know they talk about how smart the Teach for America, and the Teach for Baton Rouge are, but to come in and try to prepare someone for a test that you have not even been in-serviced on, I don't care how bright you are. It doesn't mean that these people aren't intelligent, but you have to know how to teach. There are a lot of extremely intelligent people, but they can't get it over to children. Teaching is definitely a skill. It is not something that anybody can do. And see when this statement comes up about holding these students… "Creates a perverse incentive for

school officials to get rid of struggling students," that's what they're doing. The kids have tried to pass the test. They didn't pass it last year, and didn't pass it during the summer. Well, I can tell you why they didn't pass it.

My Little Yellow Picketing Hat

My husband and my granddaughter and myself, we went together to the Federal Courthouse in New Orleans. And then there were two others–Gloria Simmons and Rose Mars went together. We were going for the hearing on the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP). The schools had appealed to the Federal Courts there and there was going to be a hearing on that day, but there was a silent demonstration.

I was there just to give support and I was there because of my being on the education committee. I felt that this was an educational issue. And New Orleans, I really do feel for those children down there. I think they're, if there is such thing as being in worse condition, they are, because you see, it may be coming together some now. But when they talked about the–it's like the first year, two years with testing, they didn't get the curriculum in place. See you're supposed to line up your curriculum with this test. But, it was not lined up with the test at the time. And so what they're saying is not take away the test, but they wanted them to declare a moratorium on the test until such time as the teachers had been in-serviced so they could teach because they said if the teachers can't teach it, the children can't learn it. And they have not been in-serviced.

Now they have a curriculum in place, but there has not been the in-service to make sure that the teachers are able to carry it out. And we have the same thing here. If you think that every teacher in this system knows how to teach so as to help the children develop critical thinking

strategies, problem solving strategies. As they use the expression, “I have some ocean front property over on Astoria Drive I want to sell you.” because I can remember as a supervisor of science, I mean math and science, for math I used to have problem solving workshops to actually teach the teachers how to do non-routine problem solving. That is not the easiest thing in the world to do. And I don’t care how smart you are. You know, most of us when we first start teaching, we teach the way we were taught. And we were not taught through a problem solving mode. But I feel sorry for those people up here who think that all of the teachers out there in English, in social studies, in science and math know how to do this. The same thing with science. There were many, many science teachers who did not have a thorough understanding of the scientific method, of a scientific method.

And so when we went there, we found that they had these little yellow hats and things and so Gloria and the other lady just went across the street to wait, I guess until time for the hearing. But I decided I was going to walk, march with the group. And, I did. I put my little hat on and marched with them there, silently, in front of the courthouse, and it was so funny. I had never picketed before.

It was a new experience, it was fun, you know, mostly children. There were some adults and you had a chance to kind of walk fast and catch up with someone you wanted to talk with. And while I was walking, I would be able to talk with the people moving around, but it was just a short little thing right in front of the courthouse. And sometimes people would come by and blow their horn and wave. I didn’t stay out there that long, it was very hot.

I was standing on the steps, I stopped, and was standing talking with someone and the little security guard came out and said, “You have to get down on the street. You can’t stand on

the steps." And then when it was time for the hearing, well I pulled my little hat off and I went on in the courthouse. And after that there was a news conference and we stayed there for that, and I got a letter from Geraldine Prescott who's in Mansfield.

And Gerry wrote me a letter and said, "I saw you on the television with that little yellow hat on standing up there protesting" And I was so surprised because I said, "nobody will recognize me, you know, with this little hat."

I'm in for the Long Haul

No matter what happens with the school board's compliance or lack of and their petition for unitary status, I see myself keeping up with them. I'm in for the long haul. I will be reading every report that they give to the judge to see whether or not they are telling the truth in it. I see myself as asking for reports. For instance, right now I have requested information on the extended year program to find out how many children passed, how many failed, how many were the children who were in the extended year program. I'm trying to find out whether or not they followed the criteria listed in the Consent Decree.

So as far as I see it, I plan on continuing at the pace that I've been working as long as physically it's possible. And the thing that I want to do, whatever they leave undone, I don't plan for them to leave it undone because they didn't realize that it was undone. They will know that they didn't do X, Y, and Z. I don't intend for them to say, "Well, nobody mentioned that to me, "and that I thought that we had done everything." They will not be able to give that as an excuse, they will not. Those things that they do not do, it will be because they decided not to do it, and not because it was not brought to their attention that they had missed this. So I will still be

monitoring, as they refer to me as the self-appointed monitor, so I will still be functioning in that capacity. I want to see this through. I really do.

Reflections

Clara Byrd Glasper is a very busy woman. What is remarkable, she knows every little detail of the Consent Decree. She can explain the facts and figures of each budget, where there were discrepancies and what the money is funneled into. And she means every word about being a self-appointed monitor to see that there is compliance with the Consent Degree. She is the only one who knows the decree in all of its detail, knows the system, has the time to be able to analyze what she has learned, and has the organization with which to present her findings. Most of our interviews were very uplifting. But when she talked about the school system and the disturbing stories of what she had seen and experienced and what the parents and children were going through, I have to admit I can see why she keeps pressing on.

Debra was still involved with the school board meetings and continued to develop her relationship with Clara. I asked her more questions about Clara again to minimize the risk of bias.

Miller: Debra, when you were in the school board meetings, did Clara mumble under her breath?

> When we were in the meetings, she mumbled under her breath. We both did. And that is why we got along so well. You know we would say these little comments about the board members and raise our eyes up at each other and it was like we are mates about this.It was them against us. I guess we must have put ourselves about the same spot at these board meetings.
>
> She was one of the people that you did watch to see how–because I'm a watcher, you learn a lot by watching, especially when people don't think you are. So you learn a lot by watching. She would be one of them that I would watch to see her reactions to–even if she did not speak she was still speaking in her way. You could tell by her body language what was going on. So you could kind of read her that way. She is very open in that, and maybe not, maybe I just understood her, I'm not sure. I could understand kind of what she was–what she agreed with and what she didn't agree with.

Miller: Was there any point when you are in these meetings that she got up and spoke?

> Oh yes, There were several workshops and things, I believe that she spoke at some of those. However, it is very hard for me with her because she is an exceptional person. I watched her and listened to her talk about these issues, and I felt this admiration for her because I've heard so many people speak who are trying to represent what she represents and they just can't pull it off like she can.
>
> I think it has to do with the fact that she has been in this area for so long. But everybody knows her and she has built this respect. I think it is different, other people have loud mouths, but they just don't have the knowledge, the background knowledge that it takes to be able to put all these pieces together. They may have a passion for it but they don't have the intellect or the wisdom to pull it off like Miss Clara does.

Miller: You watched her and listened to her talk about these issues. Do you feel that your admiration is justified?

> She had to sacrifice a lot I think. I have met few people like her. There are not many. I mean she has this passion that was embedded in her–and I'm not sure if how she was raised or her experiences gave it to her, I don't know anything about her past. Something built this in her.
>
> If she wasn't such a visible force in the school system, I don't think it would be as structured as it is, I don't think it would be–I think it would be more scattered like it was in the past. It was very scattered; nobody kind of knew what anybody else was doing, or they were fighting their own little personal battles. We all owe a lot to her.

Debra identified with many of the experiences I had with Clara. A very intelligent and professional woman, Clara has a special aura about her that captivates your attention.

During this time, Clara's time was very limited. In most cases, after our interview, she would be off to another meeting. But I do recall so vividly one meeting we had that I will never forget. We were meeting at the library as usual at 9:00 in the morning: however, the day was September 11, 2001. It just so happened that we both arrived early and walked in together. A television was set up in the lobby area and all of the workers were crowded around. We inquired what was going on and no one really knew. So, Clara and I preceded to our corner for about 90 minutes. When we came back out to the lobby, we saw the pictures of the World Trade Center

Towers, and everyone was talking about the terrorists who had invaded our country. I stood there in shock and disbelief. When I finally composed myself, I turned to Clara and she said to me, "God help us, but our country has always had terrorists. Black people have always been terrorized. These people just don't realize it."

End Notes

1. In the Consent Decree there are two factors, the X and Y factors. They involve putting personnel into schools. The X factor you would call that "equality" where no racially identifiable black school will have a higher pupil/teacher ratio than the white schools. So this is where every school gets an equal number of teachers per student ratio. They have the same ratio. In other words when they say we have the same pupil/teacher ratio all over the parish that would be what is related to the X factor, everybody, equality. The Y factor is really an equity kind of thing where they say, "Okay, even though you all have equal numbers of teachers per student ratio, there are some schools that have more at-risk students. Their students are achieving at a lower level, so they are going to get some extra help so that they can cut the pupil/teacher ratio down. They call these extra people Y factor people. According to the Consent Decree, each racially identifiable black school is supposed to get four Y factor people and they would decide how they would use these people.

EPILOGUE

Clara and I finished our interviews in December of 2002. On June 18, 2003, the attorneys for all the parties, plaintiffs and defendants, signed a "memorandum of understanding" that served as the framework for a proposed final settlement in the Clifford Eugene Davis, et al. v. East Baton Rouge Parish School Board, et al desegregation case. All of the parties still had to vote on whether to sign the final agreement ("Plaintiffs," 2003).

The members of the local NAACP voted on July 10, 2003, to sign a settlement of the 47-year-old case. The newspaper reported:

> Clara Glasper, head of the NAACP education committee, questioned the vote. She said one member had suggested that the organization double check whether those who voted have paid their membership dues. "There were a lot of faces I'd never seen before," she said, but conceded that she would have to live with the results.
>
> Glasper said she and the rest of the NAACP's education committee are skeptical that the school system will live up to its commitments. In their opinion, she said, the school system did not completely comply with the 1996 consent decree it signed, and that the proposed settlement needs more safeguards. "What makes anyone trust that they are going to live up to a gentleman's agreement," she said. ("NAACP," 2003)

August 7, 2003, was set as the deadline to file written comments, which allowed those who filed to have their arguments considered by Judge Brady at a fairness hearing scheduled for August 14, 2003. Clara and the other four members of the NAACP Education Committee filed a seven-page "Opposition to Final Settlement Agreement."

According to the filing:

> We believe this settlement agreement is grossly unfair to people of African descent and is not in the best interests of the citizens of East Baton Rouge Parish. The agreement would waive the constitutional rights of African Americans with no semblance of a comparable concession on the part of the defendants. While the proposed settlement calls for many current desegregation tools to continue, it does so for "only four years."

The newspaper reported that the education committee members highlighted three problems with the settlement:

> How it defines a "highly qualified" teacher, restrictions on Advanced Placement courses being added at three predominantly black high schools, and the failure to require the school system to create a program to produce more parental involvement in schools.
>
> The teacher quality issue dominates, especially a passage in the settlement in which the school system commits to continue having 108 extra "highly qualified" teachers in predominately black schools.
>
> The five education committee members are particularly upset that the state of Louisiana considers Teach for America and Teach for Baton Rouge teachers "highly qualified." The committee members say highly qualified should mean fully certified, "culturally competent," and "capable of addressing different learning styles."
>
> They note that all but one of the 117 teachers in the two programs last year were placed in predominantly black schools. While it is felt that the alternative certification program is a laudable one, it is discriminatory to place most, and sometimes all, of these people in the schools that need the most experienced teachers.
>
> The committee members also reject the idea that theirs and the interests of other African Americans are represented by the local NAACP. The group has been named the representative for the class of citizens for whom the case was brought. The members urge Judge Brady to require every black citizen be contacted and to allow people to opt out of the settlement. Although the African American community is comprised wholly of people of African descent, it is far from being a homogenous community. No one individual or organization may presume to speak for the whole African American community without the informed consent of the community. ("Critiques," 2003)

Judge Brady rejected the arguments raised at the fairness hearing on August 14, 2003, and later that day signed the final order ending the Davis desegregation case; however, it compels the system to continue many desegregation tools for four more years. Clara was quoted in the newspaper after the fairness hearing and the signing that day as objecting to the large numbers of nontraditional teachers from programs such as Teach for America and Teach Baton Rouge working in inner-city schools. "Those teachers, whatever their other strengths, lack the experience and the training to teach well," she said. "I was an excellent teacher, but to tell you the truth, I don't know how they kept me my first year." Committee members denied being

“obstructionist,” saying they are not opposed to any settlement, just to certain aspects of the one being considered (“Settlement,” 2003).

I called Clara, and she said not to worry. She was still as busy as ever monitoring the school system’s actions. She told me that she had documented many breaches of the settlement already and that she would fax me a copy. Within minutes, I received a seven-page Baton Rouge Branch NAACP Education Committee legal report dated November 24, 2003, which states that “The following document is a comprehensive assessment of the obvious and blatant breaches that we have observed to date.” The case may be settled, but Clara’s activism will not end because her commitment to a greater good reaches deep inside, empowering her from within.

Reflections

As I think back over the years to the day in 1998 when Clara and I stood holding hands in the circle of unity, I can still vividly remember when she turned to me with that look of hope in her eyes and softly said, “I pray it happens in my lifetime.” I experienced an awareness that those words came from deep within. Since that day, much has happened. Some positive things have been accomplished in the school system, such as renovated facilities, but there is still much to be accomplished. What I find significant is how Clara has continued to fight for social justice despite continued setbacks and a racist system.

It is my perception that Clara’s life history has evolved into a multi-layered story that has been heavily influenced by the power of spirituality. Theorist and social critic bell hooks (2000), writes:

> Spiritual life is first and foremost about commitment to a way of thinking and behaving that honors principles of inter-being and interconnectedness. When I speak of the spiritual, I refer to the recognition within everyone that there is a place of mystery in our lives where forces that are beyond human desire or will alter circumstances and/or guide

> and direct us . . . A commitment to spiritual life necessarily means we embrace the eternal principle that love is all, everything, our true destiny. (p. 77)

Clara personifies a very strong spiritual grounding. She knows that God has a purpose for her life. In many instances, she attributes events that have happened in her life to Divine Intervention. She continually invokes prayer in situations where she needs help. The role models in her life have all played an important part in guiding her and giving her courage, wisdom, and knowledge: her grandfather, Ms. Henderson, Marva Collins, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Dr. J.K. Haynes. These heroic figures gave her life purpose, a message of hope, and a willingness to fight for what she believes.

As a result, Clara has much hope and belief that educational equality can be achieved in this troubled school system. In her heart, she has a propensity for justice and virtue, and is repulsed by injustice and abuse. She maintains a deep hope and faith that things will be better than they are. All of us need and have hopes in our lives. Beliefs and hopes go together. Your beliefs may be in yourself, in others, or in a spiritual force– a Greater Power– which Clara calls God. Spiritual beliefs in that Greater Power and in other people, who possess positive values and principles help Clara keep on hoping and believing. Spiritual beliefs deal with the knowledge of the past, the acceptance of the present, and hope for the future. Hope needs belief, and belief must be based on hope to be a positive power in her life. She believes Divine Interventions in her life came from a Greater Power and from that Power's spiritual presence in her life.

In an attempt to gain a greater understanding from Clara's life history and her activism, I was recently asked the following question, "Should you use the master's tools to dismantle the master's house (racism, educational inequality) or should you not use the master's tools to dismantle the master's house?" I replied, "You should not." Audre Lorde (1984) contends, "*For*

the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (p. 112). In the realm of possibilities, could not the hope, belief, and power Clara draws from her spirituality, *tools* from a different Master, enable her to work toward dismantling the master's house and bringing about social change?

Paublo Freire (1996) explains, "The attempt to do without hope, in the struggle to improve the world, as if that struggle could be reduced to calculated acts alone, or a purely scientific approach, is a frivolous illusion" (p. 8). Freire further contends that, "One of the tasks of the progressive educator . . . is to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be. After all, without hope there is little we can do. It will be hard to struggle on . . . " (p. 9). So Clara will continue to educate, advocate, and believe that she can make a difference. Why? Because so many people's lives depend on it!

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APPENDIX A

SOME POSITIVE POINTS IN THE DESEGREGATION/EDUCATION PLAN

Clara Glasper - June 1996
East Baton Rouge Parish School System
Desegregation/Education Plan Page 1

1. This plan is an education plan as well as a desegregation plan. (page 1)

2. This plan calls for interaction between magnet and non-magnet students as well as interaction between gifted and non-gifted students. (page 31)

3. The system hired Dr. Robert Carter, a nationally known (Black) expert on race, racial identity and racial attitudes to help with the plan. (page 2)

4. The system used the results of a survey done in July of 1993 to choose the most popular magnets for inner-city schools. (pages 7-8)

5. Even though the magnets are designed to attract white. students, if they fail to do so, resources will remain in the inner-city schools. (page 11)

6. A person will be appointed to be in charge of all magnets. (page 12)

7. Baton Rouge High's atmosphere and curriculum will be revamped. (page 27)

8. The school system will implement the Effective Schools Model systemically. (pages 42-43)

9. School Improvement Teams will be formed at each of the 102 school sites. (page 44)

10. All schools will be mandated to address (a) student achievement, (b) parent involvement, (c) positive student conduct and (d) issues of diversity. (pages 44-45)

11. There will be impact evaluation (follow-up accountability) for staff development. (page 48)

12. Pre-Kindergarten classes will be provided for “at-risk” children in low achieving inner-city schools. (page 50)

13. Extended academic day will be provided in at least 24 one-race elementary schools (inner-city). (page 52)

14. Extended year programs will be held in all elementary schools qualifying for Title I funding.(page 53)

15. An Instructional Equity Account (IEA) of $900,000 will be established in 1996-97 with additional funds to be added in succeeding years. (page 55)

16. There will be reform in special education to curb over-recommendation of Blacks to special education. (pages 58-60)

17. There will be equity in staffing in terms of qualification an experience. (pages 60-61)

18. Staff development to address cultural diversity will begin in summer of 1996. (page 61)

19. School reform will include curriculum inclusion reflecting contributions of African Americans (writers, performers, intellectuals, scientists and athletes.) (page 62)

20. The system recommends the establishment of a Monitoring and Accountability Panel (MAP). (page 63)

21. The resources for all magnets will be accessible to the total school population. (Dr. Mathews or one of the speakers on 4/28/96)

22. The proposed Monitoring and Accountability Panel will report the court on:

    a. Budgeting and spending in the proposed desegregation and education plan

    b. Implementation and management of the reforms proposed

    c. Any recommended changes in the budget, implementation, and/or management of this plan

23. The indicators for progress in desegregation will not only include balancing of numbers in terms of racially balanced schools, but improved educational outcomes with particular emphasis on at-risk Black children. (page 63)

24. Discretionary use of textbook funds will be discontinued and administrative regulations will be adopted. Consequently, each 6th - 12th grade student in the school system will be assigned printed texts for English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. (page 54)

25. Each K-S student enrolled in the school system will be assigned appropriate textbooks in English/Language Arts and Mathematics. Every K-S student will have access to adequate materials to master the areas of Science and Social Studies. (page 54)

26. The gifted program will be moved out of McKinley Middle and Istrouma Middle Magnets. This will prove beneficial because many times gifted students are resourced out of gifted classes in which they are failing and placed into regular magnet school classes. This decreases the pupil teacher ratio in the gifted classes and increases the pupil teacher ratio of the regular classes to which they are sent. This has never been fair to the regular students.

APPENDIX B

SUMMARY OF THE CONSENT DECREE

EBR School Board Handout Aug. 1996

Report a plan for achieving core curriculum subject grouping magnet and non-magnet students for upcoming year	By August 15 of each School Year
M to M Transfers	Students must apply within the first two weeks of each semester
When Proposed Enrollment is Exceeded	Need Court approval no later than 15 days subsequent to the beginning of each semester
Emergency Teaching Stations Discontinue Use	Beginning of second semester 1996-97 School Year
Facility Enhancements	
not less than $600,000 each year	1996-97, 97-98, 98-99 School Years
not Jess than $1,000,000 each year	life of agreement beginning 1999-2000
Faculty Enhancements (y factor) no less than $1,500,000 each year	1996-97.97-98,98-99 School Years
Monitors	
filing report with parties and the Court	within 150 days of appointment starting 1997-98 school year the report will be filed during December of each year.
School Systems Objections to findings or recommendations in report to the Court and parties	within 45 days of receipt of the report
Singleton Compliance within plus or minus 15 percentage points	within 3 years end of 1998-99 School Year
Temporary Buildings	
Moving	Need Court approval beginning 1997-98 School Year
Increasing number in system	Need Court approval
Eliminating the use of one third of current number (67)	by the fifth year 2000-2001 School Year
Eliminating the use of 75% of current number (150)	by the eighth year 2003-2004 School Year
Eliminate 14 racially identifiable schools schools not falling withing plus or minus 15 percentage points of system-wide ration at each level	By the end of the third year 1999-2000 School Year 1996-97 had 67, 1999-2000 can have only 53
Unitary Status	
Joint motion for unitary status	After the end of the fifth School Year 2000-2001 School Year
Unilaterally move for unitary status	After the end of the eighth School Year 2003-2004 School Year
Baton Rouge High School Goal of reaching 50% black	By 1999-2000 School Year
Elementary Gifted Sites Bernard terrace, Brookstown, Brownsfields, Buchanan, Glen Oaks Park, Greenville & Progress	Beginning 1996-97 School Year

SUMMARY OF THE CONSENT DECREE
Page 2

Middle & High Gifted Sites	
Crestworth, Prescott, & Scotlandville Middle	Beginning 1997-98 School Year
McKinley High	Gifted will continue at this site as it is now
Meetings with Gifted and Talented Association Parents	
School officials will conduct meetings with the G&T Association's leadership to promote the programs	Meetings will be scheduled starting with the 1996-97 School Year and throughout the life of this agreement
New Attendance Zones	
Elementary	1996-97 School Year
Middle	1997-98 School Year
High	1997.98 School Year
Pre-Kindergarten classes	Beginning 1996-97 School Year
Banks, Beechwood, Belfair, Buchanan, Harding, Lanier, Merrydale, Mohican, Nicholson, Brookstown, Claiborne. Crestworth, Dalton, North Highlands, Park, Polk, Progress, Ryan, Delmont, Dufrocq, Eden Park, Forest Heights, Glen Oaks Part, Greenville, Winbourne, B.R. Center for Visual/Performing Arts, South Boulevard, & Bernard Terrace.	
Extended Day	No later than October 1 of the 1996-97 School Year
Banks. Beechwood, Belfair, Bernard Terrace, Buchanan, Harding, Lanier, Merrydale, Mohican, Nicholson, Brookstown, Claibome, CrestwoIth, Dalton, North Highlands, Park, Polk, Progress, Ryan, Delmont, Dufrocq, Eden Park. Forest Heights, Glen Oaks Park, Greenville and Winboume.	
Magnet Programs	
B.R. Center for Visual/Performing Arts	1996-97
Belfair Montessori Program	1996-97
Dufrocq Montessori Program	1996-97
Nicholson Computer Science & Technology	1997-98
S. Boulevard Foreign Language & International Studies	1997-98
Eden Park Computer Science & Technology	1997-98
Delmont Composition Writing & Comm.	1997-98
Broadmoor Middle VPA	1997-98
Glen Oaks Middle Math/Environmental Science	1997-98
Istrouma High Technology	1997-98
Glen Oaks High Medical (Begin with Phase-in of 9th graders)	1997-98
Winbourne Foreign Language & International Studies	1998-99
Claiborne Computer Science & Technology	1998-99
Ryan Computer Science & Technology	1998-99
Harding Writing Composition	1998-99
Capitol Middle Foreign Language & Intemationat Studies	1998-99
Crestworth Middle Math/Science and Computer Science	1998-99
Glen Oaks High Environmental & Architectural Design	1998-99
Beechwood Math/Science	1999-2000
Forest Heights Math/Science	1999-2000
Merrydale Computer and Math/Science	1999-2000

APPENDIX C

GOALS FOR MULTICULTURALISM IN EAST BATON ROUGE PARISH

Handout 1993

The mission of the Multicultural Education Committee of East Baton Rouge Parish is to facilitate an understanding of and appreciation and respect for cultural differences in order to insure educational equity for all students.

To carry out that mission, we have set for ourselves the following goals:

1. To help educators and students become better informed about the nature and contributions of the various cultures and peoples that make up our society - local, state, and national.

2. To help individuals gain a greater understanding and appreciation of self by viewing themselves in relationship to people who are ethnically and culturally different.

3. To help educators and students become more aware of the harmful effects of stereotypes and biases based on race, class, gender, ethnicity, and physical conditions.

4. To help teachers and administrators develop culturally sensitive attitudes. expectations, instructional resources and practices, disciplinary policies, and classroom climates that promote educational equity in East Baton Rouge Parish Public schools.

5. To help teachers and administrators implement pedagogical practices which will help all students become proficient in reading, writing, and problem-solving strategies.

6. To help students acquire the knowledge, skills, understanding necessary to function withing their own and other cultures.

7. To provide instructional resources and staff development necessary for the accomplishment of the multicultural goals.

VITA

Carol Marie Miller, the daughter of William Richard and Florence Geneva Gill, was born on July 4, 1949, in Highland Park, Michigan. She received her high school diploma from Fenton High School in Fenton, Michigan, in 1967. She married and raised a beautiful and very special daughter, Rivkah, born in 1974.

Carol's family moved to San Antonio in 1984 where she became involved in volunteer work at the Hurley Medical Center and the Southwest Foundation for Biomedical Research, which provided the baboon heart for "Baby Faye." It was Rivkah's participation in the Texas Pre-Freshman Engineering Program at the University of Texas at San Antonio and her encouragement that influenced her mother to begin college in the Fall of 1987.

In May of 1991, Carol Miller graduated summa cum laude, receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree with a dual major in history and American studies from the University of Texas at San Antonio. She continued on with her studies in the master's program in history working on the Stewart Title Collection at the university. In the Fall of 1992, Carol transferred to Louisiana State University where she began a master's degree in history. During the thesis stage of her degree, the untimely death of her major professor, Dr. Sally Graham, changed the direction of her studies. Carol was admitted to the College of Education and in 1997 was awarded a Master of Education degree in the Holmes Program with a concentration in social studies. At present, Carol Miller is a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Louisiana State University to be awarded in May 2004.