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From their perspective: Issues of schooling and family culture of four African-American first generation college students

Warner, Neari Francois, Ph.D.
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FROM THEIR PERSPECTIVE: ISSUES OF SCHOOLING AND FAMILY CULTURE OF FOUR AFRICAN AMERICAN FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Curriculum and Instruction

by

Nearl Francois Warner
B.S., Grambling State University, 1967
M.A., Atlanta University, 1968
May, 1992
Dedicated to
my mother and father
whose memories I shall cherish forever
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ABSTRACT

The diversity of students entering today's colleges and universities makes it increasingly important that educators, theorists and other scholars strive toward a fuller understanding of the life conditions of minority groups. This research is designed to provide insight into the processes, pressures and people that shape the lives of one particular minority group, the African American non-traditional, first generation college student.

In this research, I examine the school and family experiences of four of these students in an attempt (1) to provide data that contribute to the refutation of the stereotypical images and myths that are so pervasively used to explain the lack of persistence and motivation of African American youth in the American system of public education and (2) to offer recommendations of programs that will enhance the experiences of these students as they return to schooling in post-secondary settings.

I begin the research by providing a historical overview of schooling with attention being given to how schools have promoted racial inequality. With the
ideologies of the early curriculum theorists as the pivotal point, I move the research from the early 1900s to the contemporary urban educational system. I focus a literature review on the urban school and suggest that its crisis phenomenon is the result of the benign and systematic neglect of schools serving primarily African American youth.

Through the voices of the four students, I attempt to provide an insider's perspective into the urban schools. I use their voices to demonstrate that the experiences of African Americans have not always been pleasant and meaningful. I draw conclusions as to the contradictions and conflicts that exist between the school and family culture of African American youth that prompt their leaving the educational system and subsequently motivate their seeking empowerment through the same system years later.

Finally, I recommend curriculum-related programs which seem appropriate to facilitating the success of the many non-traditional, first generation students who continue to return to the nation's colleges and universities.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Each of us, because our biographies, our projects and our education differ, encounters the social reality of everyday from a somewhat distinctive perspective, a perspective of which we are far too often unaware (Greene, 1978, p. 14.).

The Problem

Given that no one factor is usually accepted as explaining a phenomenon, it is problematic to me that inequalities associated with the educational and life experiences of African American students are explained by reducing their plight to a single cause or issue. Mainstream and radical sociologists have attempted to do just that in regard to the persistence of racial inequality in schooling and in society (McCarthy; 1988b).

Mainstream sociologists of education reduce the complexities associated with racial inequality to the issue of the educability of minorities. The issue is articulated differently by the various groups of mainstream theorists (Clark, 1983; McCarthy; 1988b).

For instance, conservative mainstream theorists attribute racial inequalities to innate cognitive inferiority (Jensen, 1967, Shockley, 1969).1 African
American educators and theorists, however, argue that African American children demonstrate cognitive abilities and a very early readiness for learning, albeit for a different kind of learning than European American children. They suggest that this readiness is in direct relationship to their backgrounds. African American educators feel that African American children are prepared for tasks that are quite different from European American children. They maintain that African American children are prepared early for survival rather than for academics (Clark, 1983; Cummings, 1977; Glasgow, 1981; Hale-Benson, 1986; Miller, 1974; Robinson, 1973).


In brief, one perspective suggests that the experiences of African American students in impoverished environments cause permanent personality traits that inhibit their opportunity for success.
(Birch & Gussow, 1970; McCord, 1969; Scanzon, 1971). In similar manner, the other perspective focuses on the failure of the child to interact verbally within the home (Burling, 1973; Haskins & Butler, 1973; Horner, 1966; Leitcher, 1973). However, African American educators maintain that society fails to acknowledge that with African Americans, a variety of factors indigenous to their experiences affects their language development (Clark, 1983; Hale-Benson, 1986).

In sum, mainstream educational theorists fail to consider the conditions that limit and regulate the lives of African Americans by focusing on abstracting such as values, beliefs and tastes as dictated by European Americans.

On the other hand, radical sociologists, the neo-Marxists, declare that racial domination is grounded within the nature and structure of capitalism. Racial antagonism, they suggest, is the residue of the discontinuities between labor and capital. Neo-Marxist theorists relegate humanity and consciousness to a subordinate position in favor of an economic ideology (Apple, 1979; Bowles & Gintis, 1976).
Nonetheless, regardless of their differences, mainstream and neo-Marxist theorists share the common bond of not having examined the adversarial relationship that marginalized groups experience within society. I suggest that neither perspective gives attention to the interaction of the African American child with the oppressive, dominant society.

In the past two decades, proponents of multicultural education have tried to address issues of racial inequality in schooling. Multicultural education reformulates philosophies and curriculum such that it recognizes the omissions in education and advocates teaching ethnic histories—the problems, the issues, the contributions and the heritage—not as history for minorities alone but as history for all Americans. McCarthy (1988b) maintains that "multicultural education must be understood as part of a curricular truce, the fallout of a political project to deluge and neutralize Black rejection of the conformist and assimilationist curriculum models solidly in place in the 1960s" (p. 267). African American educators of today assert that "the changes, adding bits of black history and biography, amount to
Regardless of the posture, each of these groups of theorists neglected to examine African Americans in a more indepth context. It is, perhaps, this negligence that inspired Hicks (1981) and McCarthy, 1988a; 1988b) to suggest that it is important to understand the dynamics of race, class and gender in settings inside and outside of school when attempting to provide explanations for the experiences of African American students in educational institutions. Hence, he proffers a theory of non-synchrony through which he asserts:

The patterns of the social stratification by race, class, and gender emerge not as static variables but as efficacious structuring principles that shape minority/majority relations in everyday life. (1988b, p. 275)

This problem, the failure of society to acknowledge that the non-synchronous relationship that African Americans experience in the larger society affects their school experiences, is the basis of this research. It was with this premise in mind that I researched and subsequently sketched the life histories of four non-traditional African American first generation college students. My experiences as
an African American educator at an historically African American postsecondary institution were the catalyst for my interest to go beyond the phenomenological descriptions to explain and understand the actions of African American students from the point of view of those students who, themselves, left the public schools disenchanted and returned to school settings after extended periods of absence.

The purpose of this study is to provide insights into the processes, pressures and people that have shaped the lives of these students. The study examines the contradictions, paradoxes and ambivalences in the lives of marginalized groups that prompt their leaving the educational system, particularly the urban school setting, and subsequently motivate their seeking empowerment through the same system. This research also reveals the commonsense ways and understandings of African American students that move them to return to the educational system which they rejected years before. The study reviews the historical, political and ideological backgrounds of the urban school setting in which African American students have attempted to
improve the quality of their lives. However, most important and unique about this study is that it draws on the background of first-hand experiences. Thus, it gives a perspective of history and ideology in schooling, family and racial inequality not readily found in much of the published literature. The lucid, candid commentary of the research participants demonstrate their perceptions of their real world problems, challenges and satisfactions. Their vivid and realistic reflections provide a more balanced, albeit personal, account of what African American youth experience in settings inside and outside of school.

Need for the Study

Glasgow (1981) contends that the study of the poor working-class or low-income African American experience has been dominated by two major approaches: (1) comparative analysis of African Americans and European Americans and (2) examination of the lifestyles of lower-class people, considered as a unique (usually especially exotic or deviant) subculture. He posits that research in an African American community usually places the burden on them to become worthy. This research denies or ignores the
powerful impact of institutional barriers and racism by placing stress on altering or improving behavior that is considered dysfunctional.

For example, the oppressiveness of racism is rarely considered when theorists profess to understand why many African American children seem unaffected by school instruction. Theorists fail to acknowledge that the life structures and values molded by poverty and racism are in direct conflict with those of the European American controlled schools. Many minority youth, particularly African American youth, conclude that the school system was not designed to teach them. Somehow many of these students decide early that they are in an oppressive educational system. While some develop a variety of defenses to protect themselves, other become discouraged and drop out (Clark, 1983; Miller, 1974; Rashid, 1981; Robinson, 1973).

The large percentages of African American youth dropping out of educational institutions underscore a need for sensitizing and assisting theorists in understanding that by necessity African American youth relate mainly to their daily environment and much of their socialization is geared to survive in that setting. This study is intended to assist theorists
in acknowledging that African American youth must maintain a dual existence--as part of a larger society yet separate from it.

W. E. B. DuBois (1903) described this phenomenon as African American people having two warring souls. Hale-Benson (1986) explains: "On the one hand, Black people are the products of their African American heritage and culture. On the other hand, they are shaped by the demands of Euro-American" (p. 178). Rashid (1981) adds that "the cultural and biological history of African Americans has resulted in an essentially African group of people who must function in 'essentially' European schools" (p. 58).

A survey of pertinent literature suggests that schools maintain the status quo--that schools are, in fact, designed to instill the values and attitudes of the dominant society and to promote the cultural orientation of the European American power structure. In very traditionally designed schools, learning experiences are teacher-oriented rather than student-oriented. Methods of teaching are restrictive; the teachers tend to lecture and demonstrate rather than permit the students to engage in discovery, inquiry and laboratory experiences. The organizational
structure is rigid; there are strict grade lines, stigmatic grouping and orthodox lines of authority and supervision. The curriculum is limited to subject matter that is familiar to the masses; it does not lend to curriculum experimentation and innovation that would foster creativity and independent thinking for correlating ideas, experiences and expressions.

Elliot Eisner (1985) characterized the curricular mode of these schools as being normative, essentially one that is technical which relates means to ends. According to Eisner,

This means-end model of curriculum planning has the virtue of systematic educational planning; it reminds educators to formulate purposes and to use those purposes as criteria for evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of the plans that were made. It is argued that schools should be purposive; they should have meaningful goals, and it should be possible to determine--indeed measure--the extent to which they have been achieved. (p. 80)

From this same basic orientation, Schubert (1986) characterizes this curriculum mode as the perennial or empirical-analytic paradigm. This paradigm is the dominant mode of curriculum development and planning. This theory manifests the guidelines for curriculum development in four key categories: purpose, learning experiences or content, organization and evaluation. This paradigm is associated with Ralph Tyler.
Although Tyler's ideas for curriculum development began progressively, they came to function more mechanistically and positivistically as technical dimensions were superimposed by behavioristic psychologists and the concept analysis. Use of this method of curriculum development is widespread; thus, the proponents are many (Schubert, 1986; Eisner, 1985). Their basic justification of the paradigm is "there is nothing more practical than a good theory, an empirically verified one" (Eisner, p. 184).

Alexander Astin (1984), depicting a related authoritarian approach to education, explains that such theories mean that student learning and development depend primarily on exposure to the right subject matter—an assortment of worthwhile courses. Students are assigned a passive role in the learning process. The "knowledgeable" professor lectures to the "ignorant" student so that the student can acquire the same knowledge. Astin admits that attempts to expand educational opportunities for underprepared students have been hindered by most teachers' adherence to the subject-matter theory of learning.

This means that school personnel are conduits for what needs to be transmitted, albeit reinforcement of
inequality. Teachers, counselors and principals play a significant role in setting the tone for what is to be expected from particular students. Ray Rist (1970) provides a classic example in his study that illustrated that after only eight days in a kindergarten class, certain students were labeled (probably for the duration of their schooling) based on the personal, subjective criteria of a teacher. Rist's observations led him to conclude that the public school system not only mirrors the configurations of the larger society, but also significantly contributes to maintaining them. Thus, the system of public education in reality perpetuates what it is ideologically committed to eradicate--class barriers which result in inequality in the social and economic life of the citizenry.

Throughout the educational system, the methods of Mrs. Caplow, the kindergarten teacher in Rist's study, are practiced to such an extent that they have been categorically accepted by most--even parents and students themselves. Hence, labeling has become another device to which marginalized groups have fallen prey.
Michael Apple (1979) observes:

It is often the case that institutional labels, especially those that imply some sort of deviance, 'slow learner,' 'discipline problem,' 'poor reader,' etc, may again serve as types found in educational settings—confer an inferior status on those so labeled. This is shot through with moral meanings and significance. Usually the 'deviant' label has an essentializing quality in that a person's (here, a student's) entire relationship to an institution is conditioned by the category applied to him. . . . There is evidence that these labels are massively applied to the children of the poor and ethnic minorities much more so than the children of the more economically advantaged and politically powerful. (pp. 135-136)

In similar manner, Jean Anyon (1988) asserts:

Students of families of low social status are consistently more likely than middle-income and upper-income students to be placed in non-college curriculum and low 'ability' groups. This fact suggests that school grouping procedures may teach students to believe, not only that those in lower groups are there because they are less capable, but that those in society who are less capable are systematically those who are black or poor. (p. 183)

Macdonald (1988) suggests that as the schools replicate the social structure, employing the discourse of meritocracy, they are convincing the so-called "winners" and "losers" that they deserve the status they achieve.

Accordingly, the curricula of the schools are designed to support and reinforce inequality such that schools with predominantly African American students
emphasize vocational and general course programs whereas schools with predominantly European American students emphasize a college preparatory curricula. In racially mixed schools, the African Americans are disproportionately assigned to the general and vocational programs. After a while the African American students "learn and accept their place in life" (Cumming, 1977, p. 38.).

In the American educational system where the slogan "education is the key" (Weis, 1985) resonates throughout the country, African American youth have been treated unequally. Whereas the school experiences of youth are expected to be meaningful, enjoyable and productive, marginalized youth, particularly African Americans, have experienced alienation, hostility and a general feeling of disengagement from a system that purports to educate all of its citizenry equally.

When theorists and educators appear perplexed as to the reasons for these reactions, I maintain that the conditions of their lives as well as the urban school systems to which these youths have been subjected are plausible areas in which to seek answers. I further maintain that some answers may be
found in the wisdom of the students themselves, particularly the non-traditional student; for more than ever before, these disillusioned, marginalized students are returning as adults to the educational system which they abandoned as youths. Thus, the American educators and theorists must change their perception of the typical American college student as being no older than twenty-one. In fact, statistics reveal:

that two out of every five college students are over the age of twenty-five; that fewer than three in five are attending college full-time and that one out of every six is a member of a minority group (Hruby, 1985).

As these students return to the educational system, it is imperative that theorists and educators recognize the significance and importance that their life histories play in their present station in life, that is, to understand the "landscapes" (Greene, 1978) from which they have grown and in which they have attempted to prosper. Even for the most discerning scholars, it is not an easy task to understand another's life structures. Illustrative of this is the fact that the findings of two major ethnographical texts, Between Two Worlds (1985) and The Next Generation (1974) result in contrasting, even
oppositional theories, to explain the school activities and experiences of African American youth.

On the one hand, Weis' *Between Two Worlds* (1985) explores the educational culture at a predominantly African American two-year community college which she names Urban College. African American student culture is not allowed to exist on its merits; it is not accepted as having its own historical and developmental foundation. Instead, Weis chose to subordinate African American student cultural forms by studying them with preconceived theories defined by European American working-class male culture as found in Paul Willis' *Learning to Labour* (1977). European American working-class male culture is made the criterion by which African American student culture is delineated and understood (more appropriately—misunderstood). Weis does not consider the nuances of being African American in America. She does not consider the dynamics of race, class and gender and their relationship to the economic, political and cultural facets of the school.

Weis' one academic year exploration of the elements of African American student culture lacked the perspective of a participant in the total...
experience of the students of Urban College. She neglected to examine the students in relating to the social, cultural and political underpinning that structure their daily existence. For example, Weis strongly criticizes the collective culture of the African American students. Ogbu and Matute-Bianchi (1986), however, explain that African Americans form this sense of collective social identity in opposition to the collective identity of the European American culture. Due to superficial treatment of the African American students at Urban College, Weis was unable to conclude that African Americans' formation of a sense of peoplehood may be positive as opposed to completely negative. DeVos (1967) identified this collective identity or sense of peoplehood as "ethnic consolidation." Weis never acknowledged that the dynamic of race is a significant factor in the culture produced by the students (Solomon, 1986). Weis never attempted to explore the production of differences—the nonsynchronous (Hicks, 1981; McCarthy, 1983a; 1988b) relations present in society. She provides no insightful clues into their lifestyles or never even considers that for Urban College students, mainstream culture is not necessarily the center of their
orientation. In effect, Weis' study reflected a micro level of the social worlds of the African American students at Urban College. Thus, it led her to conclude that students collude in their own oppression and encourage their own continued super exploitation. Weis ignores or denies the racial antagonism created by the institution's agents and practices.

In contrast, Ogbu's *The Next Generation* (1974) portrays a relatively complete picture of the families, school life and community groups associated with the education of hundreds of fifth through twelfth grade students in the Burgherside school system. Ogbu's "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) included interviews with those who taught the youth and any significant others who had direct or indirect impact on education in the community. He utilized spatial maps, demographic graphs and charts to situate the community in terms of its cultural, political and economic reality.

Ogbu obtains generational information about education in Burgherside not only from the children but also from and about the education of their parents and their parents' parents. Analysis of these data of three generations revealed that for the oldest
generation education was not as important as it was for the second generation. For the third generation, education was viewed as indispensable. However, as parents emphasized the importance of a good education on the one hand, they neutralized that value with verbal statements and personal experiences that were translated to mean that education does not really pay if one is African American. The message is tacit, but the impact is insidious. The Burgherside youth, therefore, think that there is no use trying to make it in school since they cannot succeed when they leave school regardless of their achievement. Ogbu concludes that Burgherside youth fail in school not because they cannot do the work or do not have the ability but because they are not serious about their work and make no serious effort to try to succeed. Ogbu accepts this view of children's failure as being more valid than the three explanations (cultural deprivation, inferiority of schools, and genetic inferiority) that are so pervasively used to explain the failure of African American and poor students.

As an added dimension, because Ogbu created the text out of the real life experiences of these students, he was able to unveil some positive elements
of the Burgherside community. Through his immersion in the culture, Ogbu revealed that, despite their environmental limitations and the societal obstacles, the Burgherside families are still as normal in many aspects. He showed that the families spent time together, that there were patterns to their lives and that they enjoyed each other's company. In Burgherside, friends visited; children played and people helped one another. Ogbu implies that the families of Burgherside are optimistic about their children's future as they continue struggling and surviving against the backdrop of racial inequalities.

Ogbu's text is a strong contribution toward understanding how the experiences of African American students are shaped and molded. Research of this depth must be continued and expanded. Unless and until more such research is conducted and its findings deployed, theorists will continue to de-value and ignore the cultures of marginalized groups. This study is intended to provide an indepth view into how the life experiences of African American students affect all aspects of their lives. Because this study is created out of the real life experiences of African American students, theorists will be provided with
practical and empirical evidence that show these African American students, in fact, do aspire to improve the quality of their lives despite the voluminous body of literature suggesting otherwise and that their school experiences are impacted in a myriad of ways by the structural constraints imposed on their culture.

Organization of the Study

In this introductory chapter, I have attempted to provide the theoretical framework which underlines the need for this study. I have also attempted to establish the twofold purpose of this research:

(1) to examine the school and family experiences of the research participants in order to provide data that contribute to the refutation of the stereotypical images and myths that are so pervasively used to explain the lack of persistence and motivation of African American students in the American educational system and (2) to offer recommendations of programs, proposals and strategies that will enhance the educational experiences of non-traditional African American college students.

Chapter 2 provides an historical background of schooling with special attention being given to how
schools have promoted racial inequality. I focus a literature review on the contemporary urban school, emphasizing that this phenomenon is the by-product of the historical and systematic neglect of schools that serve minority youth, particularly African Americans. I also discuss the necessity of reform of these schools and delineate recommendations toward that end as advocated through the literature.

In Chapter 3, I explain the philosophical and theoretical basis for selecting life history research. In addition to providing my personal assessment of life history research, I develop argument for quantitative research through a cadre of proponents. Chapter 3 is also used to describe the methodology and to detail all of the activities of the research project. I conclude this chapter with a methodological postscript describing my personal reaction to a tragedy associated with this research project.

Chapter 4 presents the data. In this chapter, I examine the school and family experiences of the research participants. Excerpts from their life sketches are employed throughout this chapter to bring into focus various issues associated with schooling
and family culture of African American youth as raised through the literature.

Chapter 5 provides implications for curriculum. I use this final chapter to discuss the surge of campaigns advocating national educational reform. I conclude the chapter, hence this research project, by proposing programs and strategies that seem appropriate to facilitate and to enhance the educational experiences of the large numbers of non-traditional students who are returning to schooling in postsecondary settings with the potential of being the first in their family to receive a college degree.
FOOTNOTES

1For decades, the heredity/environment argument in regard to intelligence has held center stage. Jensen (1969) and Shockley (1969) addressed this question and stirred controversy when their studies asserted that genetic factors were strong contributors to I.Q. As a result of such discussions, Bowles and Gintis (1976) articulated an interpretation: The poor are poor because they are intellectually incompetent; their incompetence is irreversible because it is inherited from their poor, intellectually deficient parents.

Ogbu (1978) takes issue with this theory when he asserts that the differences in cognitive skills are not genetically based. He suggests that they are probably adaptive responses to the different roles ascribed to African Americans and European Americans in the American system of racial caste.

2The theory of Cultural Deprivation posits that a large majority of African American students who come from low-income families are reared without basic socialization necessary for achievement. It further explains that these students are exposed to many negative influences resulting from family
disorganization and the general quality of lower-class family life. The theory purports that these negative home experiences influence language development, perception, learning and general intellectual functioning.

Ogbu (1978) suggests that while on the surface the Cultural Deprivation Theory purports to explain why lower-class children do not perform as well in school as middle-class children, a closer examination shows that the theory is more deeply concerned with differences in school performance between African Americans and European Americans. It assumes that failure occurs before the African American child enters schools. The concept assumes that school success and failure are reflections of the individual's own abilities and achievement aspirations as acquired from his family, either genetically or through socialization. The Theory of Cultural Deprivation is criticized as being a self-fulfilling prophecy. Failure becomes the fault of the individual, his family, his environment or his culture.

The Theory of Verbal Deprivation asserts that African American children, particularly those who are
poor, receive little verbal stimulation, hear little well-formed language and as a result are severely inadequate in communicative skills. Haskins and Butler (1973) suggest that African Americans form a subculture in order to survive; they develop alternative ways of living and interacting as well as different ways of speaking. These patterns evolved only because African Americans were relegated to a subculture position. It is from the roots of the subculture of a slavery that a non-standard American English, as such, evolved. Slaves were never taught language; they experienced it only by hearing it spoken by the master. They imitated what they heard, thus coding in mispronunciations, distortions and sounds that they learned to understand.

*Neo-Marxists maintain that schools fulfill capitalism's need for a large labor force. For them, schools legitimize racial differences in order to provide subordinate individuals for the secondary job market. Bowles and Gintis (1976) declare that since its inception in the United States, the public school system has been seen as a method of disciplining children in the interest of producing a properly
subordinate population. Sometimes the efforts are conscious, explicit or overt; other times the efforts are implicitly, unconsciously or covertly, filtered through the curriculum.

"The proponents of multicultural education address the problem of inequality in education. Multiculturalism proposes that a common mission of African Americans and European Americans is necessary to further human quality of life in this racially, pluralistic society. Multicultural proponents attempt to join forces for the achievement of equality and dignity of all men. However, the multicultural curriculum, designed to promote higher educational achievement and to facilitate better job opportunities for African Americans and other minority youth, is stifled by the racial practices existing in the job market. Collins (1971) maintains that "social origins have a direct effect on occupational success, even after the completion of education." He acknowledges also that "case studies show that the operation of ethnic and class standards in employment based not merely on skin color but on name, accent, style of dress, manners and conversational abilities" (p. 124).
CHAPTER 2

EQUAL EDUCATION FOR ALL?

In Chapter 1, I suggested that the American educational system, being grounded in the European American tradition, is problematic for African American youth. I drew attention to several theoretical perspectives and various aspects of the school structure that unfairly predefine the intellectual capacities for academic success of African American students. In this chapter, I will examine the historical background of schooling. Reviewing the ideologies of the early curriculum theorists as a beginning, I move this chapter from the early 1990s to the contemporary urban educational system. I attempt to document how the early vestiges of class racial stereotyping have manifested into a school system where minorities, particularly African Americans, have experienced feelings of disillusionment and distrust. This chapter is driven ultimately by the question: Is the premise of equality in education a chimera?
Historical Overview

Historically and systematically, African Americans have been denied equal access to quality education. Weinberg (1977) reports:

during the days of slavery, those in power acknowledged that laws prohibiting the education of blacks were intended to perpetuate "compulsory ignorance." Even five years after the Civil War, 90% of school-age blacks were not in school. As recently as 1940, public schools in the south operated on an average school year of 175 days for whites and 156 days for blacks. (pp. 1,3,5)

Ogbu (1978) believed that from emancipation from slavery in 1863 to the present almost all changes in education for African Americans have been responses to changes or anticipated changes in the social and political climate of the nation. Interestingly, President Abraham Lincoln, author of the Emancipation Proclamation, anticipates Ogbu's premise: "I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me" (Foster, 1954, p. 255).

The inequities noted and documented in educational opportunities for African Americans are grounded in the perceptions of many of the early educators and the early curriculum movements. For example, Edward L. Thorndike, a founding theorist of American behaviorism, has been noted by historians of
education as one of the most influential persons in determining the form that American education took in the early nineteenth century (Franklin, 1986; Kliebard, 1986; Schubert, 1986). A salient feature of Thorndike's thinking was his acceptance of an hereditarian view of individual differences. He advocated a one-to-one relationship between an individual's social traits and behavior (Franklin, 1986; Kliebard, 1986). His major emphasis, however, was on heredity as it relates to intelligence. Generally, he believed African Americans were not as intelligent as European Americans. This assumed inferiority, he felt, was problematic to the point that he maintained that the presence of African Americans in a community diminished the quality of life within that community.

In similar vein, Samuel Chapman Armstrong, founder of a manual training school for African Americans and American Indians, in 1867 in Hampton, Virginia, exalted labor for African Americans, particularly menial labor by both men and women. He contended that training of the hand is at the same
time a discipline of the mind and will. Armstrong saw manual labor as African Americans' salvation from poverty and degradation (Kliebard, 1986).

Other educators held different views of African Americans' intellectual ability and the American educational system. One of the pioneers in curriculum development was Werrett W. Charters who migrated from Canada and earned the Ph.D. at the University of Chicago in 1904. For Charters, human behavior was grounded in both heredity and environment. Consequently, he rejected the hereditarian thinking of many of the sociologists and educators of his day. Instead, he argued that other qualities such as character, personality and efforts were greater determinants of success than intelligence. He questioned:

What right has any person to predict a failure because an intelligence quotient is somewhat low? To be sure, three percent of the pupils in the school may be so defective as to be hopeless, but the other ninety-seven percent may possibly be able to develop compensating traits of personality which far outweigh mediocrity in mental ability. We of the classroom are inclined to feel sorry for the industrious child with a comparatively low mental score, who by dint of hard work keeps abreast of his class. . . . In making an inventory of the assets of a man industry, forcefulness, leadership, sympathy and ambition are major headings, which combined yield nothing in importance to brains and mental brightness. (Quoted in Franklin, 1986, p. 101)
In 1945, while addressing the graduates of Fisk University, a historically African American higher education institution in Nashville, Tennessee, Charters said to those graduates that America was entering a period in which the social, educational and economic promise of democracy would be realized by all, irrespective of racial distinctions (Franklin, 1986).

George S. Counts, a curriculum theorist also from the University of Chicago, was one of the first among European Americans in the 1920s and 1930s to actually suggest that society was perpetuating an injustice on certain groups of people through its schools.

His earliest major work (1922) sounded the theme that American education, despite its claims, had been serving 'the selected few, whether by birth or by talent.' Essentially, he argued that, although the tax structure required schools to be supported by all, the American school system was serving a rather narrow and privileged segment of the population. . . . The rhetoric of democracy notwithstanding, access to secondary education, he found, was contingent on social and economic standing. (Kliebard, p. 133)

Counts chose four cities to test his hypothesis: Seattle, Washington; St. Louis, Missouri; Bridgeport, Connecticut; and Mt. Vernon, New York. In his analysis of the data of the social classes represented in the elementary and secondary schools in these
cities, he concluded that secondary education differed from elementary education not simply by virtue of the age of their student populations but by the social class selection evident at the secondary level. Counts found that one's access to secondary education was contingent also upon one's social and economic standing not only one's ability limited to race (Kliebard, 1986).

The major African American educators of the early 1900s held conflicting views on the most appropriate educational focus as well as the educational prospects for them. Booker T. Washington, the well-respected founder of Tuskegee Normal Institute in Alabama and a disciple of Samuel Armstrong, founder of the normal school in Virginia, championed the practical value of menial labor. He contended that "through manual training, the 'downtrodden child of ignorance, shiftlessness and moral weakness' would be converted into a 'thoroughly rounded man of prudence, foresight, responsibility and financial independence" (Quoted in Kliebard, p. 133).

W. E. B. DuBois, a noted intellectual, historian and first African American to be awarded a Ph.D. from Harvard University, strongly maintained that the
manual labor being promoted at Tuskegee was outdated and counterproductive. Washington's philosophy, DuBois contended, denied African Americans the intellectual training and professional skills that the changing industrial society demanded at that time (Kliebard, 1986). Inappropriate education was a barrier to African Americans' opportunity for equal status in American society.

In addition, the historical exclusion of African Americans from equal education is evident in the textbooks of the nineteenth century. They systematically promoted inequality. Through suggestive, negative depictions and illustrations, racial difference and inequities were portrayed. Using a passage from The Picturesque Geographic Reader (1892), Steven Seldon (1988) provides a powerful vignette typical of racist stereotyping. A character named Nellie explaining a racially mixed picture to a younger child says:

There are many Negroes in this country. . . . They are found in almost every part of the country but they prefer the South, because it is warm there. . . . They work at all kinds of business. . . . In the North they are especially employed indoors: they work in hotels and restaurants as waiters, for which they seem well adapted. In the South they work in the rice, cotton, and sugar fields, under the burning sun without serious consequence from the
heat. . . . Let me add that the Negro is remarkable for his faithfulness. . . . He is lively, and kind hearted, and since he will shortly be compared to Anglo-Americans he is not very ambitious. (p. 53)

The widespread acceptance of such literature carrying the tacit messages of racism was an indication that twentieth century America supported a racially stratified society. During that era several major publications, read both in the North and in the South, intimated that Blacks were undesirable, inferior and socially unequal (e.g., *The Passing of the Great Race* (1921) by Madison Grant, *The Picturesque Geographical Readers* (1892) by Charles King and *The Leopard's Spots* (1902) by Thomas Dixon, Jr.).

Now, late in this twentieth century, it is a reality that African Americans, who Ogbu (1978) characterizes as caste minorities, those who the dominant group regards as inherently inferior in all respects, are still searching for new directions—politically, culturally and educationally. Given the historical facts and development of African American people, this is not a startling revelation. African Americans were victims of a four hundred year period of bondage and servitude. They were not brought to
this country to be given an education, citizenship or democracy; they were brought to this country to serve, labor and obey. Nevertheless, due to various social, economic and political pressures throughout history, African Americans have been given semblances of freedom. Their freedom came in various stages—not so much out of genuine concern for their liberation but more out of what Freire (1986) refers to as "false generosity." Freire declares:

In order to have continued opportunity to express their 'generosity' the oppressors must perpetuate injustice as well. An unjust social order is the permanent fount of this generosity which is nourished by death, despair and poverty. (p. 29)

African Americans have been the recipients of many false, generous gestures. The Emancipation Proclamation proclaimed their freedom; the Thirteenth Amendment of the Constitution secured that freedom; the Fourteenth Amendment made them American citizens, and the Fifteenth Amendment provided penalties for any state that denied their rights of citizenship because of race, color or previous conditions or servitude. All of these stages of freedom, including the more recent congressional acts targeted toward improving the quality of life of African Americans did not guarantee real freedom. The freedom is a facade, and
the schools are one of the social institutions by which society attempts to perpetuate and maintain the facade. Thus, the educational system has not been effective for all segments of the nation's citizenry.

Apple's (1979) vignette, reported below, produces a cynical yet realistic assessment of the idealism of equal educational opportunities for all.

Imagine yourself as living in one of the largest ghettos of an American city. Another community member comes up to you and says, 'You know, schools work.' You look at him somewhat incredulously. After all, your children are doing relatively poor on intelligence and achievements tests. Most of the community's young go on to lower paying jobs than their white counterparts. Many are rather disheartened about their futures. The school has increasing violence and vandalism. The curriculum seems out of touch with the reality and the history of your people. The community, rightly, feels it has little to say in what goes on in the institution that is supposed to educate its young . . .

What if schools and the curriculum within them evolved in such a way that the interests of my community were to be subsumed under the interests of more powerful people. 'Yes, schools work . . . for them.' (p. 62)

In the area of education in the American school system, the social class inequalities are too evident to be denied (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). For large segments of European Americans, the educational system has been an effective vehicle to achieve middle-class status. However, for far too many poor minorities, it has been an abysmal failure (Bowles & Gintis, 1976;

The institutionalization of deprivation and disenfranchisement among schools has permitted race and socioeconomic status to function as the chief determinants of access to quality treatment for children. The public schools often represent an integration of society's most crippling diseases--indifference, injustice and inequality. (p. 37).

Society's failure to seek solutions and to adequately educate African American students has produced monumental disdain and distrust of the public educational system, particularly schools serving primarily African American youths in large city schools. That there is a crisis in urban school settings has finally (underlined for emphasis) been acknowledged. The 1984 Report of the National Alliance of Black School Educators corroborates: "The notion that this nation once had good schools for the masses of African American students but has since let them deteriorate is inaccurate" (p. 37). The following section builds on this hypothesis. In this
next section, I examine the literature relative to urban schools. I do this to provide a universal perspective of the kind of school backgrounds to which the participants of this research project were subjected. As shall be illuminated in this next section, urban schools evolved as a result of the benign neglect of schools that serve poor and minority youths.

The Urban School Crisis

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's *An Imperiled Generation: Saving Urban Schools* (1988) called national attention to the plight of urban schools. That report, along with other noted educators, (Dabney & Davis, 1982; Edelin, 1989; Fordham, 1985; Hess, 1988; Semons, 1989) maintains that society must first affirm that every student can achieve and succeed.

Parish, Eubanks, Aquila, and Walker (1989) point out that urban schools are producing such poor results because that is what society expects. "The children served," they note, "are not supposed to do well" (p. 389). Far too many teachers—not limited only to European Americans—in urban schools do not believe that the impoverished children they teach can learn as
much as the middle-class children in suburban schools.

This attitude has produced a disinterested, unconcerned and generally apathetic population of urban school youths. (Barber & McClellan, 1987; Calabrese, 1989; Conant, 1961, Firestone & Rosenblum, 1988; Laffey, 1980; Ogbu, 1983; Perry, 1988; Ralph, 1989) Although these youth enter school settings with brains that function, they lack the experiential and cultural norms that are reflected in the schools. As I shall point out later in this research, these youth soon begin to believe that what they are learning and what they are doing will not help to improve their lives or their communities. In other words, there seem to be no apparent reasons for doing well in school. Hence, they are not motivated to achieve. This lack of motivation is manifested through the low-achievement levels of African-American students. Maeroff (1988) suggests that "no white suburb in American would long tolerate the low academic achievement taken for granted in urban high schools attended largely by blacks and Hispanics" (p. 633).

The records show that African American youths have very low scores in reading, mathematics, writing
skills and science. This fact is applicable on all levels--local, state and national. (Cole, 1983; Commission on Minority Participation, 1988) The records also show that African Americans have very high incidents of dropping out of school. Sherraden (1986), however, suggests:

In many respects it is inaccurate to view these young people as "dropouts." They never really dropped in. They have attended school often erratically because school is compulsory and because there are tremendous social pressures to attend. But they have been marginalized for many years. They have gone through the motions but they have not been engaged in the educational process. Dropping out is only a visible sign of this underlying pattern of disengagement. (p. 23)

The records also show that African American students seem to be receiving a very low percentage of quality high school diplomas; instead of their diplomas reflecting academic competencies, they more accurately reflect attendance and age accumulation. These students in the urban school settings have, more often than not, been exposed to a system that was not established for their success--a system operated by an oppressive society--a system which Freire (1986) labels a "banking" concept of education:

(a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught;
(b) the teacher knows everything and students know nothing;

(c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;

(d) the teacher talks and the students listen--meekly;

(e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;

(f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;

(g) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;

(h) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his own professional authority, which he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students; and

(i) the teacher is the subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects. (p. 9)

In keeping with this, Robinson (1973) posits that African American students adopt the strategy of conformity and docility, which is not only encouraged but often demanded. The African American students then begin suppressing their feelings and emotions and subordinating their own interests and desires as their mechanism for surviving each school day. This has made it very easy for African American students to become the group with whom the educational system experiments. African American youths have been
subjected to more alternative educational programs than any other minority groups—ranging from the metaphorically verb acronymmed programs (SKIP, LEAP, RAP) to the early dismissal programs characterized by an insanely low number and quality of requisite courses for graduation. Most of these programs were short-lived which made their success rate inconclusive.

Relative to this, Gilbert II and Gay (1985) maintain that "the key to improving success in school for poor black students is modifying the means used to achieve learning outcomes, not changing the intended outcomes themselves" (p. 133). Thus, it becomes apparent to me that educators, theorists and other significant school entities must begin to identify and implement strategies that will alleviate the feelings of alienation and disengagement that African American youth seem to experience in urban educational settings. Therefore, in this next section, I provide a discussion of the role and responsibilities that various elements within the schools must undertake in order to change the attitudes and learning outcomes of students attending these schools.
Requisites for Urban School Reform

Today, more than ever before, educators and scholars (Clearinghouse, 1981; Cuban, 1989; Kozol, 1988; Penning, 1989b; Stickney & Marcus, 1985; Tye, 1987; Watson, 1989) suggest that school personnel must refrain from using the students' home environment or social status as an excuse for poor achievement and must "get on with the business of creating classroom environments and school learning climates that promote high achievement" (Brookover, 1982, p. 45).

Teachers in the urban schools are major players in creating the atmospheres that facilitate success. However, they will find that "when school culture comes up against the urban black culture, conflict can result" (Gilbert II & Gay, 1985, p. 133). As shall be disclosed in a later chapter, this research lends credibility to that statement as well as to the position of Montero-Sieburth (1989):

while urban schools do not necessarily require of their teachers a different set of skills or competencies than suburban or rural schools, they certainly demand that teachers be cognizant of the particular contextual variables that pertain to the urban setting. (p. 332-333)

Ruffin (1989) suggests that teachers and other personnel must have high expectations and not be allowed to use excuses, cliches and cover-up phrases
such as: "(1) The school has changed; (2) Well, we have a lot of inner city kids; (3) Over half of our kids are on the free lunch program; or (4) Most of our students come from one-parent families" (p. 62-63).

Because teachers are crucial determinants of effort, motivation and achievement, it is imperative that they achieve an understanding of their own and their African-American students' cultural attitudes, values and behaviors. It is only then that they will be able to structure teaching and learning activities that enhance their students' success. Nonetheless, teachers alone should not be held solely accountable. Administrators, too, must do their part. Ruffin (1989) posits that "urban administrators must insist that the teaching/learning climates in their building do not suggest a romanticizing of mediocrity" (p. 66).

This brings into focus the school principal. By definition, principals are instructional leaders focusing on the academic performance of students. The role of the urban school principal, however, is multifaceted and complex. Urban principals soon learn that they must become the amalgamation of
administration, teacher, moral leader, role model, community worker, social service provider and fundraiser (Russell, 1986; Washington, 1980). The remarks of one of eleven principals participating in a Carnegie Corporation Conference illustrate this view:

The job description says you're an instructional leader, but there are a thousand and one things that interfere. . . . I'm not in control of my agenda . . . and the kids come to school without breakfast and there's a problem with the bus, and the plaster's falling from the ceiling, and there's a dispute between two community organizations or some of my children on the way home, or there's been a crime. (Russell, 1986, p. 5-6)

Principals who attempt the formidable task of managing urban schools accept the mission of resolving the school's crises and creating the conditions under which students could safely attend school and learn. Tewel (1987) maintains:

principals who take over schools beset with violence, high absenteeism, and high dropout rates find that initially, an authoritarian style is conducive--indeed, essential--to pushing through the reforms needed to overcome the schools' immediate problem. (p. 105)

During their chaotic and uncertain stages of problem-solving and decision-making, principals need but rarely receive support--psychologically, financially and professionally. The psychological support sought is the mere understanding from others
and an acknowledgement from their colleagues of the pressure under which they must operate. Initially, some financial resources are provided. When peace and order seem to prevail, the resources from central and district offices diminish. As urban school principals give full concentration to improving the school, they unknowingly neglect their teachers' needs, thus creating alienation and receiving little or no support within the faculty. (Russell, 1986; Temel, 1987).

This means that the principals can not do it alone. There are still, yet, other entities necessary to the success of the school children who populate the urban schools throughout this country. Improving urban schools is not only the obligation of the individual school systems but also the responsibility of the parents and the community at large. (Boyer 1986; Cooper, 1989; Penning, 1989b) It is incumbent upon parents, community groups and the urban leaders to demand that all levels of the school system become responsive to the needs of the children and assist in whatever way possible to enhance the success of their children. Ruffin (1989) presents that challenge in this manner:

Urban citizens must come to grips with the fact that there are no re-runs in life. If they want
better lives for themselves and their children, they must get busy making the changes now. Crime, filth, drugs, collapsed buildings and teenage pregnancies do not have to be a way of life. (p. 69)

Parental involvement in the school in varied forms--meeting with teachers, monitoring the progress of their children--solidifies parents as partners in the programs of school renewal and improvement. (Hodgkinson, 1979) Strong PTAs with fund-raising activities can help alleviate some of the financial woes of the schools. In addition, parents and community leaders must lend support to changing the physical conditions of the school by leading the fight and demanding from their legislators a real commitment to their schools. Urban leaders must address and embrace education with the same fervor that is demonstrated on special holidays, elections and other celebrated times. Campaigns that promote education must become a standard part of their agendas.

Piccigallo (1989) suggests that rehabilitating dilapidated school buildings is a realistic place to begin, "Rehabilitation," he remarks, "is one area that offers reasonable promise of straight-forward results." (p. 404) The literature is saturated with
bleak commentary that describes the deteriorating conditions of the school building:

- crowded and dirty . . . shattered windows . . .
- leaky roofs . . . broken desks . . . corroded plumbing . . . heating failures . . . no air condition . . . peeling paint . . . deplorable conditions (Penning, 1989a; Piccigallo, 1989).

There is also commentary that describes the conditions under which teachers and other personnel must work:

- operating ditto machines in the women's rest rooms . . . classes conducted in the staff lounge . . . begging for pencils, paper and other supplies . . . using closets, hallways and lavatories for classes and conferences (Cororan, Walker, and White, 1988; Penning, 1989a; Piccigallo, 1989).

Data within *A Nation At Risk* (1983), a report that addressed the shortcomings of education, point out that no solution for improvement can be successful unless the work environment is altered. Over a two and a half decades ago Hanson (1965) maintained:

> The need for healthful school surroundings is not just a physical need; it is absolutely and unequivocally an educational need as well. Academic excellence, a prime goal of the school, is best achieved when the physical conditions for learning are also excellent. (p. 98)

Many educators (Ginsberg, Schwartz, Olsen & Bennett, 1987; Piccigallo, 1989; Penning, 1989b; Ruffin, 1989; Stevenson, 1987) believe that improvement in the conditions that impact the teaching
and learning process is prerequisite to any kind of school reform. Educators, theorists and parents agree that there is no quick fix for the urban school situation. They acknowledge that the process of reform is an arduous task which takes commitment from all segments in and outside of the urban setting itself.

This view was never so evident or espoused so forcefully until the nation's attention was called to the plight of the urban school because mainstream America was being so adversely affected. The statistics below suggest that undertaking urban school reform presents a formidable challenge.

- Thirty percent of all poor children in the nation are enrolled in 50 urban school system;

- Twenty percent of federal elementary/secondary funds and 17.5 percent of state funds are allocated for urban schools;

- Teacher shortage in urban schools is 2 1/2 times greater than the national average;

- Urban children are half as likely as their suburban peers to have access to preschool;

- One-third of all urban school buildings are more than 50 years old;

- Seventy percent of the enrollment in the typical urban district is African American,

- Hispanic, Asian, American Indian, or Alaskan native, but 70 percent of the teachers are white. (Hunter, 1990, p. 10)
Much of the literature on schooling in urban cities propose that reforming the urban educational system will enhance the achievement of its students and improve the school culture/climate of its schools (Brookover, 1982; Dumaresq & Blust, 1981; Edmonds, 1979). I submit that this will solve only part of the problem. I wish to suggest that the problems of educating African American children is brought to national attention partially as a cover for the larger problem which has long been (underlined for emphasis) the fate of low-income and minority groups. Maeroff (1988) adds a relatively similar position: "Impoverished minority students in big cities, who suffer the worst educationally, are doubly afflicted by the ills peculiar to urban life, as well as possible racism" (p. 637).

Thus, I submit that the insights gleaned from the life history research of the school youths of the 60s and 70s will attest to the fact that some of the same situations discussed in the aforementioned literature were prevalent during their school years and that even then, two and three decades before the literature, domesticating, oppressive conditions surrounded their school experiences. Given this, I have used this
chapter to attempt to explain the background of these oppressive conditions. In sum, this chapter contained three sections wherein I discussed the historical and systematical inequities of schooling for African American youth. First, I looked at several forerunners of curriculum development. I delineated their perspectives and looked at selected issues of the early 1900s to conclude that the political and social climate perpetuated inequality through the educational system. Secondly, I examined the phenomenon created by the benign neglect of schools that serve students who are poor and minority. I pointed out that the urban schools have produced a population of students who are unmotivated, unachieving and generally unconcerned. Thirdly, I argued that reform of these schools is necessary. I suggested that attitudes and activities of urban school personnel must change and that the climate and conditions of these schools must be altered. Thus, at this point, I conclude that this study is important because this research will provide what much of the literature is missing—an insider's perspective. Although the research participants are no longer in urban school settings, I submit that the
retrospections of their school and family experiences will reveal some issues that contradict the voluminous body of negative literature relative to their schooling and family life.

As such, in the next two chapters, I attempt to make the voices in this research clearly serve as a bridge between the theoretical assumptions about African American youth and their real world concerns, problems and existence. In the following chapter, I outline the manner in which I undertook this research. I use the chapter to explain the series of activities that culminated in the life history sketches of four first-generation college students. Then, in Chapter 4, I will present these data. Using the voices of the participants, I attempt to provide linkage to the issues discussed in Chapter 1 and in earlier parts of this chapter by putting forth a logical, persuasive demonstration of the discrepancies, discontinuities and unresolved dualisms that exist inside and outside of the school settings of African American youth. What follows next in Chapter 3 are the procedures and activities to achieve this end.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

I begin this chapter with a personal statement describing how my interest in qualitative research developed. What I thought was a mild interest in seeking background information in order to help the students whom I taught and counseled became a mission of wanting others to know about the trials and travails that so many African American youths encounter as they try to live from day to day, particularly those youths who are not thought of so favorably by their own.

For twenty-three years, I have worked in a collegial setting where the majority of the students are from low-income communities. Those years provided me with opportunities to work closely with three different groups of students: the young college students, the non-traditional college students and the high school students. I interacted with these groups as a teacher, as an administrator of a federally-funded program designed to motivate high school students in a large urban school district to seek postsecondary education and now as an administrator.
charged with facilitating the entry of college freshmen.

As I worked professionally and became personally involved, sensitive to and aware of their individual needs, I found myself imbued with a deep sense of respect, appreciation and admiration for these students attempting to better themselves despite the material realities that shaped and molded their worlds. However, it was not until I began considering this research project and began a period of reflection that I realized how important the backgrounds of these students were in contributing to the inadequacies usually associated with them: the academic weaknesses; the uncertain, apathetic attitudes; and the lack of or short-sightedness of goals.

As I reflected on my work, past and present, with the young college students, freshman students exclusively, Sizer's (1985) accuracy in describing the typical American high school graduate always come to mind:

They come in all sizes and shapes. There are good ones and bad ones, saints and liars, bores and inspirers, quick ones and brutes. Besides their age, they have in common the vulnerability that comes from inexperience and a social status bordering on limbo. They are children, but they are adults, too. (pp. 32-33)
I remember that with this group, I was confronted with the daily challenge of dealing with situations that caused some type of irregularity from the traditional classroom milieu (excessive tardiness and absenteeism, offsprings in class, lack of textbooks, special athletic and veteran concessions). Indeed, my daily experiences called for wit, creativity, humor, indomitable mental stamina and an abundance of understanding and compassion. More important, though, my thoughts made me realize that for many of these young minds, I, as most of their teachers, was their role model, mentor, facilitator, or even, perhaps, their debilitating.

After teaching freshman students for seven years, I became a director of a pre-college federally-funded program. This job provided me with opportunities to interact in the urban school settings and in the homes and communities of the students who attended these schools. The program is a result of society’s attempt to rectify some of the inequities historically perpetrated on minority groups. "Congress appropriated over a billion dollars for the Head Start program to improve educational opportunity for culturally disadvantaged children in 1965. This was
followed by projects Follow Through, Upward Bound and other that continued the effort" (Schubert, 1986, p. 98). Although my work in an Upward Bound Program accounts for the longest and most intense period of my experiences, it was my experiences with the non-traditional students that were the major catalysts for this project.

My experiences as a teacher in the Evening/Weekend College of the University where the research was undertaken have allowed me to interact with hundreds of non-traditional students. From these students, I learned through autobiographical class assignments that their withdrawal from high school or their resistance to continue their schooling was precipitated more by their life events than anything else. Their autobiographies related the struggles they endured to survive in their communities and in their school settings. Their stories also told of the timing, the revelations and the circumstances that prompted their decision to return to school.

The poignant testimonies that I read semester after semester were the catalyst for my interest in this project. These students' narratives shaped my understanding and heightened my consciousness toward
life structures that prevented many youths from doing what I thought was the natural educational progression--elementary, secondary and college without forced interruption.

There was something compelling about the nature of these stories and the manner in which they could bring out new understandings and different perspectives on situations that seemed so forthrightly simple. I realized that the strength of these personal narratives lay in the fact that they were the voices of those who had been unheard for so long. Although themes varied and focused on areas that best defined each student's life, there were two major themes that connected their experience: the trepidation upon re-entering the school setting and the desire to improve the quality of their lives. The passages briefly excerpted below are taken from the volumes of narrative I have accumulated through the years.

... The most important thing about me in my life is the challenge that came to me in August of this year. I am convinced that this was and still is a message from God. At the age of 40 years old, I became a freshman at this University . . . (Williams, 1979, p. 1)

... I grew up in the Magnolia Housing Project. Some people assume that projects are filled with criminals. I can say this in not accurate. I
had some enjoyable and positive experiences in the projects. Living in the project helped me gain a realistic view of all types of people. . . . I was disinterested in school and did not attend after graduating from high school. But I know now that the only way that my wife and children will have a better life is for me to get a better education . . . (Summers, 1980, p. 1)

. . . Making the decision to come to school was very hard for me. After all, I have been out for eighteen years. The reason I am here is to upgrade myself and my standard of living. This is a giant step for me and a challenge. I intend to stick with this until the end but I am nervous and scared . . . (Harris, 1984, p. 2)

. . . I am the mother of four beautiful children and grandmother of eight children. I am 45 years of age and a true believer in Jesus Christ. I started out kind of late in life to get my college education. But I know it will be worth it. I was unable to obtain this education in my earlier life, but I do believe that it is never too late to gain your goal in life. . . . (Batiste, 1987, p. 2)

. . . My reason for attending college is pure and simple. I want to teach or become a counselor, or even a social worker. I graduated from high school nineteen years ago, and at that time had no interest in college. But then lately I wanted something out of life so I decided to go or come to college. My husband doesn't understand why but this is something I have to do for myself. . . . (Richardson, 1988, p. 1)

Truly, the absorbing stories of my students is how my enchantment with qualitative research began. As I began preliminary research toward this project, my fascination and intellectual curiosity were intensified by such comments as those of sociologist Gouldner (1973): "There are aspects of social reality
which tend to be relatively unknown and hence publicly neglected because they are dissonant with the conception of reality held by the powerful and the respectable" (p. 35).

My interest to do research in this area was strengthened by studying ethnography. Proponents of school-related ethnographies believe that ethnographic research allows for a more concrete understanding of the problems of urban students and urban schools. (Blase, 1985; Dabney & Davis, 1982; Filling, 1980; Fordham, 1987; Hess, 1988; Rist, 1981; Semons, 1989; Sleeter & Grant, 1985) These proponents acknowledge that while ethnographies do not offer specific remedies to the problems of inequality in urban education, they do, in fact, provide understanding in such areas as:

(1) the futility of dealing with issues improving or equalizing urban education in terms of only academic achievement; (2) establishing important relationships among societal factors, classroom behaviors and output variables such as academic achievement; (3) investigating the interaction between cultural characteristics and classroom behaviors as powerful or salient variables. (Filling, 1989, p. 273)

There are debates within ethnography regarding the nature of this research. For example, Roman (1988) contends that "naturalistic ethnography affirms
a social world that is meant to be gazed upon but not challenged or transformed" (p. 55). It is, perhaps, this "unnatural" detachment of the researcher attempting to maintain a "natural" environment that was the impetus for researchers to consider the need for a different kind of ethnography—a critical ethnography where emphasis is on raising and disclosing issues where the research methodology is empowering for the group being studied, one that is emancipatory for the group under study. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), for example, challenge the ethnographer's responsibility of merely describing the social world by suggesting that the researcher has a transformational responsibility to the group which she/he is studying.

In naturalistic ethnography, the primary goal is the description of cultures. On the contrary, the task of the critical ethnographer is that of going beyond phenomenological descriptions. "In order to get beyond the phenomenal level of analysis," says Roman, "ethnographers need to explain the underlying social relations that set objective limits on the 'appearances' of peoples' practices and their accounts of the social world" (p. 56). Thus, the
characteristic nature of critical ethnography makes it
ideal for this research.

(1) It is a dialectical method, allowing the research to gather data in a way that recognizes the problematic nature involved; (2) It responds to semiotic analysis; (3) It generates a sensitivity to ethnocentrism in forming questions and interpreting observations; (4) It offers a means for examining the relationship between ideology, social behavior, and social structure; and (5) It provides a means for analyzing social structure by examining the fabric in which behaviors are embedded. (Thomas, 1983, p. 485-487)

Warren (1982) endorses the life history/autobiography as an appropriate tool for this research:

One could argue that adult education in American, with its roots in such a community studies tradition, has had a long pragmatic tradition. One direct consequence of this pragmatism in adult education has been the recognition that the experiences of individuals are the starting point for determining the nature and design of any educational endeavor. Autobiographical methods are but one way in which researchers in adult education may obtain insights not readily assessable by quantitative methods... Indeed, this seems important if an aim of adult education is to extend educational programs and opportunities to new consumer groups as well as to develop programs to reach those who view the present array of programs as irrelevant to their lives. (pp. 215-218)

Thus, rather than hear these stories told by me, this research is designed to have students tell their own stories. It is only then that they become "the
best of all stories" for they provide data that experimental data can not (Birren, p. 91).

In order to have their stories told, I approach this research as a critical ethnographer because I know, from first-hand experience, the necessity of and the benefits of going beyond the surface when attempting to assist or understand those persons or situations that are different from another's span of experiences and frame of reference. As a critical ethnographer, I will attempt to bring the experiences of these research participants into the span of experiences and scope of reference of all who read this study. Indeed, from my perspective, this can be done only through qualitative methods. As I have used the section above to acknowledge my personal proclivity for qualitative research, I use the next section to survey the literature and build theoretical support for qualitative research.

Theoretical Framework

Husband and Foster (1987) affirm that "the desire to understand human activity from the actor's own frame of reference has had the most profound influence on shaping the methodology of qualitative research in education and psychology" (p. 53). Grumet (1987)
concurs in this manner: "For many years now curriculum theorists and educational researchers have been working to devise forms of research in education that honor the spontaneity, specificity and ambiguity of knowledge" (p. 310). Pinar (1988) posits:

Qualitative research is politically progressive, as it is epistemologically sophisticated, because it understands that a basic meaning of human life is movement, conflict, resolution, conflict resolution, each thesis and anti-thesis opposing each other in ways which give birth to a new order of understanding and life. (p. 151)

In direct relationship to marginalized and disenfranchised groups, Dr. Carter G. Woodson (1933), founder of Negro History Month, espoused the need for qualitative study when he states that "no one can be thoroughly educated until he learns as much about the Negro as he knows about other people" (p. 136). Pinar (1988) suggests a relation between knowing and self-knowledge:

We are not mere smudges on the mirror. Our life-histories are not liabilities to be exorcised but are the very precondition for knowing. It is our individual and collective stories in which present projects are situated, and it is awareness of these stories which is the lamp illuminating the dark spots, the rough edges. (p. 148)

It is difficult to imagine how this might be achieved and conveyed in quantitative or mathematical terms. The nature of people's lives and the meaning
of their experiences, particularly African Americans, can more easily be understood through the narrative method of biography or life history. Runyun (1982) suggests that "part of the appeal and promise of the biography is that, at its best, it can combine historical, scientific and literary approaches to human experience" (p. 66). He extols the power of the narrative "for conveying the subtleties of a relationship, the discrepancies between public appearance and inner reality and in short, the meaning of an experience" (p. 66).

Faraday and Plummer (1979) maintain that the life history technique grapples with areas neglected by quantitative research:

(1) the subjective reality of the individual--most notably it comes to lay bare the "world-taken-for-granted" of people; (2) the focus on process and ambiguity--It discovers the confusions, contradictions and ambiguities that are displayed in everyday experience; and (3) the focus on totality--It strives towards locating the individual in his/her overall life experiences and within the broader socio-historical framework that he/she lives. (p. 776-777)

Similarly, Fischer (1983) suggests that life history has special utility in four characteristic ways:

(1) the data are concrete and (therefore) closer to raw social data; (2) there is a wealth of
detailed information, allowing analysis of idiosyncratic life events; (3) the data are 'processual,' in that narratives can trace connections between life events; and (4) the understandings and interpretations of the actors can be included as part of the analysis. (p. 32)

Bertaux and Kohli (1984) believe that life history permits researchers: "(1) to pay attention to the various levels of social life, (2) to become sensitive to the weight of history, and (3) to conceive of the present as history in the making" (p. 233). Langness and Frank (1981) mention that autobiography has transformative power. They suggest that "through this medium, people who exist somehow on the margins of mainstream America and its values have shaped self-images of their own design" (p. 93).

Reporting his findings after studying schooling through the context of a teacher's life history, Goodson (1981) argues that studies in schooling have neglected personal biographies and that life histories are an important element in expanding studies in schooling. Thus, it seems reasonable to conclude that, when schooling is studied in a broader manner, be it the life history of the teacher or that of the student--

the focus changes from an obsession with specific events and occasions to an altogether broader historical sweep. Life history investigations
set against the background of evolutionary patterns of schooling and teaching should provide an antidote to the depersonalized, a historical accounts of schooling to which we have become accustomed. Through the life history, we gain insights into individuals' coming to terms with imperatives in the social structure. (p. 74)

On the importance of life history, Thomas and Znaniecki, credited with early advocacy of life history research, argue:

If we are forced to use mass phenomena as material, or any kind of happenings taken without regard to the life histories of the individuals who participated, it is a defect not an advantage, of our present sociological method. (Quoted in Faraday and Plummer, 1979, p. 773; Goodson, 1981, p. 62)

Finally, Goodson (1981) declares that the greatest strength of the life history lies in its penetration of the subjective reality of the individual: It allows the subject to speak for himself or herself" (p. 66). The sections that follow describe the research settings and the methodological procedures I used in my attempt to make previously unheard voices speak with clarity and power.

Research Setting

The research was conducted in a four-year postsecondary institution where the enrollment is ninety-eight percent African American. Geographically, this University is situated in the
heart of a beautiful, serene African American middle-class residential development. The neighborhood residents, however, are not the clientele of the University. The University is predominantly attended by students from low-income families and communities throughout the large metropolitan city in which it is located. Many of the students grew up in and still inhabit the low-rent housing projects that are within close proximity to the University. Because this University offers comparatively low tuition, has an open admissions policy, and espouses a mission of uplifting the disenfranchised, most of the students perceive it as their first step toward improving the quality of their lives. The passage reported below, taken from the University's catalogue, demonstrates this perspective:

The institution was established primarily, but not exclusively, for the education of African American citizens of the Greater New Orleans area and the state of Louisiana in general. While the University admits and actively recruits qualified students without regard to race, color, origin, religion, age, sex, or physical handicap, it maintains its strong commitment to serving the higher education needs of the socio-economically disadvantaged of the Greater New Orleans Metropolitan area. (Southern University, 1989, p. 25)

Using demographic data of the entering freshman class for the past two academic years, I have provided
a profile typical of the University's student population in Table 1.

Table 1
Profile of Entering Freshmen

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>1989-90</th>
<th>1990-91</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>709</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 25</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 - 35</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 - 45</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>109</td>
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<tr>
<td>46 - over</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High School Type</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>623</td>
<td>780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
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<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GED</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000 - 4,999</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,000 - 9,999</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000 - 14,999</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15,000 - 19,999</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20,000 - Over</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A unique feature of this University is that it has an Evening/Weekend College which enrolls the non-traditional student. Statistics on these students indicate that they are returning to this university in record numbers. Data also show that these students comprise forty percent of the total enrollment at the university but at least fifty percent of each year's graduating class. The university also serves as the major institution to which students from the city's two-year community college transfer. The community college student is, more often than not, a non-traditional student. Upon entry into the community college, the student is over the age of twenty-five and has had a break in his or her education of 5 years or more. (Prager, 1983)

University data indicate that at least twenty percent of each semester's new enrollees are from the area community college. Consistent with that is the graduation rate for students who transferred into the University from the area community college. University records document that at least twenty percent of the graduating class for the past three years were non-traditional transfer students as shown in Table 2.
Table 2
Graduation Rate of Non-Traditional Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total No. of Graduates</th>
<th>No. of Non-Traditional Graduates</th>
<th>No. of Non-Traditional Community College Transfers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Identifying and Selecting Participants

Having worked in this setting for twenty-three years, I had a large pool of students from which to select. Very early in my career, through their own autobiographical voices, I learned that for most of these students the decision to return to school was a long, difficult, painful decision. In their own words, they admitted to approaching the educational setting with timidity, lacking self-confidence, harboring feelings of hopelessness, but clinging to the hope that their move back into the educational system will guarantee that the quality of their lives will improve because of it. Despite the many academic weaknesses most of them brought to the classroom, I concluded as Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) did as
they studied the families and lives of achieving
African American first graders.

Their optimism about the future and their ability
to imagine what life would be like if conditions
were better seemed to keep them going, struggling
and surviving, albeit precariously, against the
odds and without the support of the society to
which they belong. (p. 192)

My selection of the participants was not random.
Fischer (1983) explains: "the amount of data needed
from each subject requires high commitment from
potential respondents, a factor which almost
inevitably means using non-random sampling" (p. 31).
She also suggests that "because the cost of data
collection tends to be extremely high per student, the
number of subjects is likely to be small in order to
offset the per capita expense" (p. 30). For example,
Willie (1990) researched the life histories of five
outstanding African American scholars to provide
insights into how significant events in their lives
interconnected to facilitate their success. Semon
(1989) selected five multi-ethnic urban high school
students to compare his findings with the findings
from the ethnographic studies of students from court
order desegregated schools a decade ago. Goodson
(1981) investigated one teacher's professional life
history to explore the evaluation of a school subject
in the changing educational system. Scheinfield and Messerschmidt (1979) investigated the lives of two teachers (young/old) to examine the differences in teaching styles as related to different life stages. Sarris (1978) studied five participants when researching the process of maturation of youngsters who grew up in housing projects and achieved some degree of success. For this study, I used four subjects. I selected four as the number of participants based on a simple, intuitive formula I created. I used the average of the total number of subjects used in the aforementioned life history studies. For me, this average of 3.6 translated into 4. Thus, I chose to research the life structures of four African American students who met the following criteria: (1) attended the university where the research is set, (2) considered non-traditional as defined by Prager (1983), (3) attended an urban public school for a large part of their schooling, and (4) potentially the first of the family to graduate from college.

Because of my position in the University, I was able to meet potential participants on a daily basis. As I would sit and chat with students, I listened
closely for a signal that provided me with the opportunity to invite their participation in the project. Certain comments prompted me to solicit their participation, such as: "If people only knew what my life has been like;" or "I wish that I could tell these young students a thing or two;" or "If I knew then what I know now, I would never have stopped school;" or "Nobody would believe what has happened to me;" or "I'm so glad to be here after all I've been through."

Somewhere later within the conversation, I would cautiously and casually indicate to potential participants that I was working on a project where they would be able to tell other people their stories. My instincts, at the time, were accurate in that of the ten persons whom I solicited for the project, all were very excited and agreed to participate. Knowing that I needed to prepare for and should expect that some students would withdraw from the project, I began preliminary field work relative to the project in early Spring of 1990. All of the participants were very excited early in the project, but as time moved on, I lost most of them. I lost them at various points which I describe in a later section of this
chapter. Hence, after the preliminary stages of the project were completed (the withdrawal of participants), I was left with four students who willingly and diligently completed the project--two males and two females.

I gave each of them a pseudonym although each expressed the desire to use his/her own name. According to Langness and Frank (1981), this is not unusual:

Many life-history informants want to use their actual names. Sometimes these are marginalized individuals who by setting their own stamp on the life-history written about them make a statement to the world, offering testimony, or bearing witness, about events that shaped their lives. (p. 126)

Nonetheless, realizing the importance of anonymity, I was able to convince them to accept the pseudonyms I had selected when they realized that the names represented an inversion of their initials. As such, the four students described below provide the data for this research as presented in Chapter 4.

When I began interviewing participant Patricia Dawson, she was forty-one years old. She is the third of nine children. She grew up in a two-parent family, where the father is an excessive drinker. Pat, as she is affectionately known by her family, has separated
from her husband and has moved back into her parents' household. She is the mother of two children, ages fourteen and twelve. Pat obtained a GED after having been out of school for seventeen years. Patricia is pursuing a baccalaureate degree along with three of her sisters who also delayed college enrollment. Patricia Dawson aspires to become an independent woman who can offer her children and herself a better life. Patricia Dawson's life history is narrated in Appendix A.

Participant Daniel Kelley was twenty-six years old when I began his interviews. He is the last of eight children. Daniel is from a single parent home, his father having died when he was ten years old. After the death of his father, Daniel attempted to assume much of the male responsibilities of the household. At age fifteen, he perceived himself head of the household when his mother left for extended periods of time. Although others of his siblings have attended college, none persevered. Daniel has pledged to improve his position in life and has decided that he will be the first among his siblings to graduate from college. Daniel Kelley's life history is narrated in Appendix B.
Participant Shirley Franklin is the first of four children; she is the offspring of a sickle cell anemia carrier and is one of two of the four children who contacted the disease. Although Shirley was reared by her mother and stepfather, she always had close contact with and enjoyed a pleasant relationship with her father. Shirley was twenty-nine years old at the onset of this project and was determined to live her life as fully as possible, despite the odds that predict that she will not live through full adulthood. Shirley Franklin's life history is narrated in Appendix C.

Participant Richard Allen comes from a two-parent home and is the second of four children. He felt anonymous and alienated by being the middle child. His parents sacrificed to send him to the parochial school system, feeling that it was the perfect "fit" for him. Richard was twenty-eight years old when these interviews began and had enrolled in college. Richard Allen's life history is narrated in Appendix D.

The next section describes the activities and other aspects pertinent to the interviewing procedures I employed.
Conducting Interviews

I began my work by being forthright and self-disclosing as situations and participants dictated. I fully explained the theoretical, personal and descriptive aspects of the research project. I explained how I became interested in the project, and I explained that I, too, was a student and that this was a major project, similar to my writing a book. Initially, the students were amused at the thought of their "Dean" being a student. However, after I had confessed to them how I have always wanted to tell stories about the real worlds of African American students, they understood what I needed of them. They all wanted to be in my "book."

In attempting to establish some procedures for interviewing, I was mindful of Gordon’s (1980) admonition:

A danger to guard against in the long interview is simple fatigue or loss of interest by both the interviewer and respondent. In making strategy plans involving the possible use of extremely long interviews, pilot interviews should be done to explore any negative effects of fatigue. (p. 133)

I also considered the words of Gates (1987) reflecting on her work with life histories of Chinese working adults.
Initially I wanted their version of their lives rather than a set of answers to questions I had framed. I did not want to press them unduly on matters that might embarrass or discomfort them, and I trusted most of them to speak frankly, if not with complete openness. Naturally, had I been more directive and pressed harder for certain details, I might have learned other interesting things. But at the same time, I might have gone too far, deflecting someone from the line of remembrance she thought most meaningful and rupturing the friendly confidence that made the interview possible. (p. 13)

My first interview was generally short, and no data were solicited from participants. During that time I simply attempted to minimize their anxieties, fears and defenses. I entertained their ideas about placement and positioning of the tape recorder, and we experimented with the control mechanisms. This little activity seemed to alleviate their fear and actually increased their desire to talk on the recorder, quite surprised at the sound of their own voices. Sitton (1981) declares that "the informant's initial reluctance, shyness, or suspicion can be overcome by the interview process itself" (p. 122). He suggests that "the life history interviewing is profoundly flattering to its subjects and they are almost certain to warm to the task" (p. 122).

During subsequent interviews, I encouraged the students to tell their stories freely, asking them to
begin with their earliest recollection of their childhood experiences. Unless I misunderstood some point or wanted to ask a question, I allowed the interviews to flow without interruption. I tried to be the perfect listener. I tried to say the least and to get the most in return, that is "to ask the 'perfect question' that released the wellsprings of memory" (Sitton, p. 122). When the students hesitated or seemed to experience a lapse in memory on issues that I felt important, I managed to facilitate the memory process by using one or several of the strategies characteristic of a good interviewer: "persistent and (in a special sense) 'tough'; politely and tactfully assertive and 'wait him out'" (Sitton, p. 122).

At the end of each interview session, I always reminded the students that they should feel free to jot down and make outlines of the things that they would like to talk about during the next session. At the beginning of each session, I always reminded the students that they should feel free to add anything to the previous narration that they wanted to include but had remembered after the session concluded. Sitton (1981) says that "this filling of gaps is a natural
part of the life interview process. . . . The informant must feel free to 'circle back' to earlier periods or topics as additional material about them is recalled" (p. 124). Each of the participants "circled back" quite frequently--sometimes during a session and sometimes in subsequent sessions.

The setting of the interview sessions changed with some of the subjects. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) note that "the question of where and when interviews are held is not simply a matter of the comfort or discomfort of the interviewer and interviewee. Different settings are likely to induce and constrain talk of particular kinds" (p. 125). Most of the interview sessions were conducted in my office after regular school hours. Some were conducted during the lunch hour at a nearby fast-food restaurant. I met with each participant individually. The number of sessions and the amount of recorded data varied depending on the participant's memory exhaustion. The least amount of recorded data provided by a participant was four hours, and the greatest amount was seven hours.

Concomitant to taping the sessions, I made field notes, consisting of analysis, descriptions and my
thoughts. My notes contained mainly the verbal and nonverbal information that I thought would assist me in construction of the final document. I attempted to employ absolute keenness of my senses. I noted the speech patterns—situated speech—knowing full well that how it is said is many times more significant than what is said. I noted social relations, documenting whether or not certain people appeared in several aspects of their lives and what made certain rituals meaningful to the participant. I noted the gestures, movement and body language that occurred at various points in the participants' recitations. By using these field notes and analyzing the recorded material as described in the next section, I started the task of compiling the data.

Analyzing Tapes

After each interview session, I analyzed each tape later that evening/night to ascertain if anything had gone wrong with the technical aspects (tape-recorder) or the interactional aspects (my role as interviewer). Each time that I listened, I compiled a list of notes on what to do and what to explore in subsequent interviews. As I listened and analyzed the tapes, I realized that, in many instances, I had lost
opportunities for certain valuable information. From this process, I was able to pinpoint and in follow-up interviews correct or recapture memories lost through (1) my inexperience and experimentation as an interviewer; (2) occasions were my assertiveness caused me to intervene and cut off the participant too soon; (3) my posing some closed rather than open-ended questions that shut down the flow of thought; (4) my posing complex or ambiguous questions that confused the participant; (5) my failing to follow-up on certain key ideas during the interview; and (6) my failure to close many chronological and thematic gaps in their life histories.

As I listened to each tape, I realized that the participants had much more to tell than they thought they could and there was also much that they could not tell. Sitton (1981) compares the interview process to that of a "hunt in the labyrinthine thickets of the long-term memory" (p. 124). He warns an interviewer to be prepared for the unpredictable. Aaron (1966) describes it: "the interviewer resembles a hunter stalking his unpredictable quarry in a jungle . . . what starts out looking like a rabbit may turn into a porcupine" (p. 7-26).
Indeed, the following examples from my research attest to the accuracy of these figurative descriptions. After one participant's session proved to be very "therapeutic and cathartic," interspersed with tears, I decided to keep a supply of facial tissues in my desk drawer and a pocket packet in my briefcase. The tissue was replenished at least twice and needed for several other participants. The catharsis to which this participant referred came about the time that she began to talk about the death of her grandfather and the shock of learning that he really wasn't her grandfather. In her very next session, this participant reported to me that she learned something from her mother that she had never known about the family situation. She confessed that after all of these years, she finally felt better about the incident with her grandfather's death (as described in detail in Appendix A). In fact, all of the participants who completed the project changed their perspective on some aspect of their lives— an aspect that was negative or nebulous.

Quite the opposite was true for those students who withdrew from the project. When students began withdrawing from the project, I realized that their
leaving was indicative of something deeper. Therefore, I decided to examine very closely their interview sessions. I began to analyze the tapes and discovered that at the point at which they left, there were obviously things in their past that they were not ready to deal with or, perhaps, simply not willing to share with an outsider. For example, one student who withdrew was a sister to one of the participants who completed the project. In addition to doing separate interviews with each, I also did some joint interviewing. I thought that doing joint interviewing with the two would provide interesting material for analysis. In these joint interviews, I tried to focus on some generalized family issues that I thought would be common to both. After several of the joint sessions, one sister, apparently feeling overshadowed by the other's readiness and fluency in recalling incidents, accused the other of taking over and being bossy just like at home. The session ended shortly thereafter, and the potential participant came to me and withdrew from the project.

The withdrawing of another participant occurred quite differently. After one interview session which was especially strained and choppy (most of them were
with this participant), this student approached me in another area of the campus and confronted me with this question: "Do I have to tell you about how my uncle used to mess with me?" Before I could attempt to answer (after being momentarily stunned and speechless), he ran toward the rear of the campus. He returned to my office about three weeks later. Noting his bewilderment, I let him "off the hook" by saying, "Well, if it's not the mystery man. You've been gone so long that somebody else took your spot in my "book." (This was the reference that they all adopted after I made the initial comparison to help them to understand the depth of commitment that I needed from them.) The student smiled, seemingly relieved, and said, "Okay, but I'm going to be checking on you." He did check. About every two weeks, he stopped in to see how things were progressing.

Another volunteer who had returned to school after educating three foster children left the project when she reflected on her flight from her own family. Specifically, her last interview related how she left home to marry a young man whom her family forbade her to see. She recalled how the marriage was disastrous and ended in divorce after much physical and mental
abuse. She recounted how her husband was constantly talking about her being "high-yellow" (a term for a very fair-skinned African American) and thinking that she was better than he. Her departure from the project was without any word to me, even to date.

Despite the withdrawals, I was optimistic that I would retain the four subjects as projected. Fortunately, four students did persevere and complete the project. In the next section, I will describe how I constructed the life history sketches of these four students.

Constructing the Narrative

All of the literature relative to the study of lives (e.g., life history, biography and autobiography) agree that it is a creative art that is highly challenging and a monumental undertaking (Bertaux, 1981a, 1981b; Braxton, 1989; Catani, 1981; DeVries, Birren & Deutchman, 1990; Ferrarotti, 1981; Hankiss, 1981; Olney, 1980; Pachter, 1979; Stone, 1981; Watson & Watson-Franke, 1985; Young & Tardif, 1988). Sarris (1978) suggests that:

the single most intractable methodological problem of intensive life history research is that it generates an overwhelming amount of data, far more than group designed research. Further, since emphasis is on the individual, not the aggregate, there are presently no convenient
methods of reducing the data and presenting it compactly as in statistical and tabular presentation. (p. 271)

Before I transcribed the tapes, I listened to the complete set of each participants' interview session. I did this in an attempt to get a sense of chronology and a feel for thematic patterns that were present in each participants narration. I began the process of transcribing the raw data into two major themes: school experiences and family experiences. I, then, arranged each theme in chronological order. I had to re-examine the data many times. During these examinations, I omitted material that was repetitious and redundant. I organized the topics and ideas that appeared constantly into a detailed account of that particular topic.

The entire construction procedure was one of moving, shifting and re-arranging ideas, checking and re-checking tapes against field notes and testing for continuity, sensibility and grammatical and structural correctness. During the entire process of compiling the data from interview to interpretation to construction of the products as they appear in the appendices, I was keenly aware of making sure that the narratives would be the best possible representation
of each participant's own perspective of his/her life.
No portions of the narratives are intended to deceive
or mislead a reader or to distort or denigrate the
participants' lived experiences.

Nonetheless, I am not so naive as to think that
the final products are devoid of my own focus,
philosophy or sense of rhetorical style. Langness and
Frank (1981) validate:

the life historian consciously attempts to
accurately portray the subject of the biography.
At the same time, because a document that
expresses the ethnographer's experience in the
field is involved, he or she will be shaping a
self-portrait composed of attitudes taken with
regard to that work. (p. 100)

This premise is best highlighted in the final
stage. I titled each life history. The titles
evolved from the contents and are intended to reflect,
in a creative way, the character, personality or life
summary of each participant.

Postscript to Method

I call this section a postscript because it
occurred and was subsequently inserted after the
culmination of all of the interviews and the
construction of the life history sketches. In general
terms, the research project had been completed.
Nonetheless, I felt it very important to include
because the situation affected me in such a personally, emotional way. This section should also give an indication of my level of engagement and attitude about the project.

Nothing in the literature had prepared me for what I experienced at the culmination of this project. Neither the warnings of the transformative effects (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Hankiss, 1981; Langness & Frank, 1991; Runyan, 1982) that this type of research has on a researcher nor the profound declarations of the depth of personal entrenchment such researchers feel (Liebow, 1967; Slack, 1974; Whyte, 1970) prepared me for this occurrence.

On October 11, 1991, participant Richard Allen died. If at all there is any irony in death in this situation, it is that there is one participant in this study whose imminent demise is projected because of the disease which she carries. When I informed several of my advisors of a participant's death, they immediately assumed it was that of this participant. They were a bit taken by surprise upon learning that this was not the participant; I, too, was surprised that this participant died. I had no idea of how to react. What coping skills were I expected to use to
deal with it? Was I obligated to maintain the confidentiality of the information I had gained? What was my role to be in the aftermath of the death? Should I disclose my feelings and to whom? Did I owe this participant more than an acknowledgement? My need for answers to these questions was the impetus for this commentary.

Upon learning of the death of this participant, the unexpected, undocumented effects of qualitative research encompassed my entire existence. My subjective research nature was overpowered by a subjective emotional nature which I equate to that of a mother for a son. In many ways I felt like a mother. Based on both our ages, this participant could have been my son for I could have given birth to him as a young sixteen year old. I shared his childhood memories. I knew what he liked and what he disliked. I knew what angered him and what made him happy. I also knew that he was different from the other children in the household and that he was searching for some answers to some issues that were problematic for him. I knew also that through this research, he had found a beginning—a place where he
was comfortable and was able to release tensions and re-live and reflect in a cathartic way.

The death of this participant angered me, particularly after I learned that he had asked for me. I was angry with myself because I was not there during his final moments. I was attending a conference in Baton Rouge, and my plan was to visit with him on the Sunday evening of my return. I remember how I fortuitously learned of his death through a casual conversation. While attending a meeting on Saturday, October 12, an attendee, having come from New Orleans that morning, questioned me as to whether or not the flag at the university was at half mast for the student who had died. I remember my denial as I asked her if she knew the student's identity. She confirmed my worst fear by saying the first name of my participant. Still not believing, as soon as I arrived home, I called my colleague and this participant's death was confirmed, a second time.

At this point, I experienced what I have termed an "intellectual paralysis." I could think of nothing but the death. Along with this, I experienced a period of paranoia. I began to wonder if this were a dress rehearsal for something that would unexpectedly
take my own son away from me. (I worry continuously about his traveling the highways so often from school to home, even the moderate distance from Baton Rouge.) Not being able to move beyond emotions, I also began to wonder if this were a sign that my doctoral dissertation would be in limbo forever. I could hardly think logically and clearly enough to put the refining touches on the text in order to provide my committee with copies in a timely manner prior to the defense date. However, I was finally able to pull myself from the emotional stupor when I was able to acknowledge the source of my discontent--my not being there when he asked for me. Constantly regretting not having had the opportunity to say good-bye, I chronicled the events leading to his death in my mind for two weeks trying to determine if I had negligently missed the opportunity to visit and ultimately say good-bye.

His death happened so quickly--within seven days of my last encounter with him. I remember having last seen him in the hallway. As we walked the short distance, we chatted casually about campus activities. As he opened the door for me he said, "Dean, I feel so bad. Look at all of this medicine that the doctor
wants me to take." He held a brown bag and began to shake it so vigorously that the bottles began to rattle and click against one another. I remember my saying, "You'll be all right. You probably have a touch of the flu." I never mentioned how much weight he seemed to have lost. I remember also that the next evening, my colleague, our mutual friend, called and said that my participant had been hospitalized and was not doing well. I remember telling my colleague that I was leaving town later the same evening and would visit with the participant when I returned if he were still hospitalized. Of course, my words meant that he could possibly be recuperating at home by the time I returned at the end of the weekend. The visit never happened. My participant had passed away, and I never had said good-bye.

Then, came the funeral. I remember sitting at the funeral looking at the family who were grieving for a young man who, according to his own account, felt rejected, invisible, misunderstood and unwanted by most of them. As I looked at the family members, I remember the many talks "off the records" when the participant said on numerous occasions, "Dean, I don't want this on the tape, but I want to tell you this
about . . ." I thought about many of the things that he shared with me. Some of them brought tears to my eyes. Several of my colleagues comforted me. Many of them glanced at me surreptitiously perhaps, wondering why I was so overcome with emotion when I am usually so calm. Several persons on the campus knew that the participant and I had a very close relationship, but only a few actually knew the depth or the reason for it.

Shortly after the funeral, the university held a memorial service. I opted not to participate because I felt that I would become too upset. However, I did attend. As I listened to the tributes and accolades paid to him, I decided that the most appropriate tribute that I could make was to let him continue to live through this research via the data he contributed to this project.

Thus, in the next chapter I have used the life history data provided by this participant and three others to provide evidence demonstrating the relationship African American youth experience inside and outside of school and that African American youth have not been privileged to an educational system that
recognizes and incorporates their strengths, their abilities and their culture in the learning process.
A single life history, taken alone, gives only a
limited picture of anything beyond the individual
who creates it; several overlapping lives show us
something both of the individual represented and
of the shared experiences that make up a people's
history and culture. (Gates, 1988, p. 17)

In this chapter, I will present the data through
the voices of four college students. These students,
whose success in attaining a baccalaureate degree will
mean that they are the first in their families to
graduate from college, are also the high school
students of the 60s and 70s who attended schools in a
large urban school district. Throughout this chapter,
I use the voices of these students to provide an
insider's perspective into their urban schools,
typical of most in the country, and into the culture
from which students who attend these schools come. I
examine the school and family experiences of these
students in anticipation that their memories will
provide linkage to the literature reviewed in previous
chapters while also providing a realistic perspective
of how African American youth think and feel about
their lives, how they see their world and how they
have interacted with their environment.
I begin my examination with school experiences. As you shall see, the diversity of the ages of these participants gives insight into the social, political and economic context which surrounded public education in this urban district where they each attended a different school within the district. Accordingly, participant Patricia Dawson attended school during the time that segregated school systems were the norm throughout much of the country. In contrast, participant Daniel Kelley attended school during the period when integration had been "accepted." However, European American flight had become the phenomenon, and previously all-European American schools began to take on a different look. No change was visible in the student population of the previously all-African American schools. Daniel's elementary school, formerly all European American, had a Euro/Afro ratio of 70/30. The population ratio of the magnet middle school which he attended was approximately 60/40, Euro/Afro. For senior high school, Daniel attended the college prep school whose population was 100% African American although it was open to all and had an excellent academic reputation. In the case of participant Shirley Franklin, she attended elementary
school in the rural setting of her hometown. Incidents that affected her personality as well as her schooling prompted the family to move to the city. There she attended the integrated schools of this urban district. Participant Richard Allen's educational experiences alternated between parochial and public schools. In each of these settings, the schools were integrated, with this public urban setting being more fully integrated.

The comments and memories, hence the data, provided by these participants suggest that regardless of the time and space perspective of education, there have been some basic unmet needs of the youths attending schools in this district. In the following section, I provide an overview that subtly hints of the attitude toward the district and specifically notes various characteristics and features of the district.

Characteristics of the District

Writing about the urban students in this research district, Columnist De Parle states, "not only do [this district's] students come from poor families, they also come from less educated ones. In some . . . neighborhoods, the average adult has an 8.5 years of
school" (p. A-1) Within the same article, the superintendent of the district adds:

You have to consider the environment, the lack of education that exists in parents of many of these kids and the poor self-image that's been created over the years. All of these things place impediments in the way of learning that more fortunate youngsters don't face. (De Parle, 1985, p. A-1)

The same theme resonates throughout the article as a guidance counselor at a school near the large housing project where one of the participants attended comments: "I think the students can't see the relationship between an education and a decent job. Many times they get the diploma, but they're marginal students and they still can't get the job" (pp. B-16-17).

One of the schools which the participants attended caught the attention of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. This school, located in the city's 6th Ward opened as an elementary school. In 1947 it became a high school, but the building was not renovated to accommodate larger classrooms and space for science labs and other programs for high school students. ("Too Close, 1988, pp. B-1,2) A Carnegie representative reports this description:
Housed in a decrepit stucco structure erected in the 1920s, this school was so dated that the steps in the narrow wooden stairwells were worn concave by generations of feet. In some classes, dog-earned books were distributed, then collected after each session so they could be used by separate classes throughout the day. The scarcity of books made them unavailable to be taken home. Classes of more than 30 students were typical at this school. Physical education classes were conducted only with dim sunlight that flowed through the windows of the gymnasium because there was no money to buy high intensity bulbs. (p. B-2)

Forty-four years later, this school is still unsuitable for high school programs. Even more remarkable is the fact that sixty-five years prior to the Carnegie visit, the city's African-American newspaper, The Louisiana Weekly, posed this question: "Why is it that every time a [Negro] school is built, we are forced to economize--conserve, et cetera-- and build a make-shift structure inadequate for present needs and impossible for future necessities?" (Quoted in De Vore & Logson, 1991, p. 183) Such a revelation suggests that this phenomenon of the urban school was incubating years before contemporary literature brought it to national attention. It is my intent to have the voices of the participants illustrate this by linking their school experiences to issues raised in previous chapters.
Linkages of School Experiences

Segregated Settings

I shall first examine school experiences which were set against the backdrop of segregation. In 1900 the school board in this research district voted to limit all public education to grades first through five. (De Vore & Logsdon, 1991). For many years thereafter, the European American operated school board refused to listen to the demands of the African American leaders as they petitioned for high schools for their communities and their children. It was not until 1917 that:

the white leaders realized that if they were going to maintain a fully segregated society, the separate black community needed its own physicians, teachers, lawyers and clergy; and to train such professions, a black high school would be necessary. The school board decided to open a black high school that fall. (De Vore & Logsdon, p. 191)

The school experiences of one participant are set within the context of this segregated school era. Her experiences suggest that even though the schools were attended and completely staffed by African Americans, the values and culture of the dominant society were expected while the needs of the children seemed to go unheeded. This premise, perhaps, explains Patricia Dawson's distaste for school; she comments:
When I think about school, I think about how much I hated school, how hard it was and how long we had to stay in school. Whatever my memories of school are they always go back to remembering how much I hated school. I can not fully explain what I disliked most about school or even why I had such a great dislike for school. I thought that I would like school a little better when I got to junior high school, but I didn't. Actually, I hated school even more (if that were possible). I was happier in senior high school than in any other school (although I still didn't like school.)

Some theorists believe that teachers transmit messages through their actions (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Hale-Benson, 1986; Rist, 1970). They submit that teachers' actions suggest to children that they prefer to work with those whose conduct and appearance are in line with their perception of what is appropriate and that they reward children who conform to acceptable societal norms. Participant Patricia Dawson must have received such messages; she bears out this claim as she recalls:

In elementary school, I always felt like I was the poorest child in the class. My mother always sent us to school clean and neatly dressed. It just seemed as though everyone could get new clothes during the school year except me. I went to school day after day only because my mother made me. I wasn't an A or B student, but I did enough not to get kept back in elementary school. I didn't have any favorite teachers. They all didn't seem to like me, and I didn't like them. They seemed to pick on me and treat me differently from some of the other children. I made up my mind that the teachers didn't like me because I couldn't wear pretty, new clothes.
When I told my mother these things, she said that I should not worry and that the most important thing was that I was clean.

The fact that youths such as Patricia matriculated in segregated schools does not diminish the impact that mainstream society had on these schools. For example, the city erected a monument to honor John McDonogh, a man who had provided an enormous sum of money to build schools for all of the city's youth. The entire school system honored this man with a school holiday, which began in 1891 and was observed the first Friday in May of each year (De Vore & Logsdon, 1991). The pride that the school board felt in sponsoring this tribute was not shared by all, particularly African American youths. Patricia Dawson provides a perspective that was very likely shared by other African American school children:

I could always tell when it was near the end of school. Every year before school closed, the entire school would come dressed in their best clothes to go to the statue. This was the day that the school children went to honor a man who had given the city many schools. We would go to his statue and place flowers around it. This stands out so clearly in my mind because we would also have to stand "tall and erect" (as the teacher would say) in the hot sun until all of the little white children had marched around the statue singing. As a child, it seemed like we stood there for hours and hours watching groups of white children honor the statue and leave. The white children who were waiting their turns were permitted to stand in the shade of the
trees. These were horrible days for me. Shortly after the event, however, school always closed, and I was the happiest child in the world.

Other incidents throughout the schooling of Patricia Dawson suggest that fair and equitable treatment for all was not guaranteed in segregated systems. It was the values inculcated by the dominant society that, perhaps, caused African American teachers to treat their own with little regard to their individual backgrounds or without the concern and sensitivity necessary to motivate African American youth or to apprise them of the potential value that education can play in improving their lives.

Other scenarios that existed in the segregated schools of this school system imply that, even then, teachers needed to attain an awareness of the specific backgrounds that surrounded the lives of many of their students. This knowledge would have assisted them in planning and formulating activities that were meaningful to the students' lives. For example, Patricia Dawson's school experiences may have been enhanced had a teacher understood the situation she recounts:

Many times I tried to stay home from school by pretending to be ill, but my mother could always see through that. Remembering elementary school makes me remember that we had to walk through the
housing project to get there, and I was very scared. Then, all during the school day, I was thinking about and dreading the long walk home through the projects. I would be scared the entire school day--week after week, month after month.

Patricia became labeled as slow. The practice of categorizing students, usually attributed to racially-mixed school, occurred in single-race schools as well. It not only had a devastating effect but also seemed to follow a student throughout his/her schooling.

Patricia Dawson's early perceptions of not being liked or not holding a favorable position in the eyesight of her teachers followed her through high school and was truly validated for her as she describes:

In high school I developed a special circle of friends--about ten. I actually began to enjoy going to school. Then it happened--the incident that caused me to drop out of school. It was two weeks before graduation. I had purchased a class ring, and I bought a beautiful white graduation dress. One day the seniors were called to the auditorium to practice. The counselors called the names for line-up. All of the names were called but mine. Everybody started giggling; it was very funny to my friends, but it was embarrassing to me. I stood there alone thinking that there must have been an oversight. Finally, I had the courage to ask the counselor if she had overlooked my name. I still remember the pang of her words as she said, "Oh, no, Patricia, you won't be graduating. I'll talk to you in my office after practice." The counselor explained that I was lacking two units. She suggested that I that I should come back and graduate with next year's class or go to summer school and get my diploma upon satisfactory completion. She explained that when I went to summer school, I
had made up only two of the four units I had failed. All that I could do was cry and think that I was the only of my ten friends who didn't graduate.

Indeed, Patricia Dawson is only one of the many youths from the segregated school era who were disenchanted by the American public educational system. The treatment that Patricia Dawson received in this system parallels the treatment of benign neglect which schools serving African American youths received from the European American power structure in this school district during the era of segregation.

Did this benign neglect continue after the schools were desegregated? That question is answered in the following section which is set within the historical context of the school district's desegregation efforts.

**Desegregated Settings**

Unlike the urban schools which Patricia Dawson attended, contemporary urban schools had their beginnings within the context of school desegregation in general. In particular, the school district in this research began desegregation activities during the 1960-61 school year. After much conflict, court battles and despite last minute maneuvers by the European American power structure, four little African
American girls entered two previously all-European American elementary schools (De Vore & Logsdon, 1991). They entered accompanied by their parents and escorted by armed federal marshals. Local police also stood guard. Even so mobs of white adults and children gathered and shouted obscenities and racial slurs as the girls passed. Many white parents hurried to the schools to remove their children, much to the delight of the onlookers who now applauded. (De Vore & Logsdon, p. 245)

For the first few years after initial desegregation, European Americans seemed to tolerate the limited mixing, along with a grade-a-year desegregation plan. This plan, however, was later discarded in favor of one that rapidly moved desegregation activities such that by the 1969-70 school year, this research district's public school system was totally desegregated. Mixed faculties existed at all schools by the mid 70s (De Vore & Logsdon, 1991). At each of these stages European Americans began to leave the public schools little by little. However—

the long-feared white flight finally occurred during the second decade of desegregation, 1970-79. . . . within ten years, the system had lost over twenty thousand white students . . . Twenty years after desegregation, the majority of Black public school students were attending predominantly black schools. (De Vore & Logsdon, p. 266)
The other three participants in this research are products of the early, mid and final stages of desegregation of the public school district in this research project. Data within their life histories are consistent with the literature that posits that urban teachers and the school curriculum are key elements in determining the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of a student's school experiences, as well as contributing to the phenomenon of the urban school (Gilbert II & Gay, 1985; Grant, 1989; Montero-Sieburth, 1989; Ruffin; 1989). Related literature maintains that as African American youths began to enter the integrated school settings, the responsibilities of teachers became different and more demanding, particularly those who worked in the urban schools (Cuban, 1989; Grant; 1989; Kozol, 1988; Tye, 1987). Teachers went into the integrated schools having some theoretical knowledge and understanding about urban students but their practical backgrounds were limited and superficial. Grant (1981) explains:

While in college, they probably heard a few lectures on the "minority child," the "at-risk student," and the "second-language student." But they probably didn't take those lectures seriously. They may have found it interesting to hear some (but not too much) information about "those people," and they probably retained enough to regurgitate it on subsequent exams. (p. 97)
Nonetheless, teachers moved into urban schools. It is highly probable that most of the teachers approached these settings with an appropriate and positive attitude; however, it is important to remember that "their attitudes will have been shaped by a society that is biased along the lines of race, gender and class" (Grant, 1989, p. 765).

In the school district where the participants attended, faculty desegregation started in the 1966-67 school year with the assignment of three African American teachers to a formerly all-European American senior high school and eleven European American teachers to four formerly all-African American senior high schools (De Vore & Logsdon, 1991). The process of desegregating faculties in this district was slow-paced and problematic for many groups. Therefore, in 1972, "the board voted to use administrative transfers to achieve a ratio of sixty to forty black to white teachers in elementary schools and a fifty-five to forty-five in secondary schools" (De Vore & Logsdon, 1991, p. 268). Thus, the schools of this school district became as fully integrated in teaching personnel as it was in student population.
Teachers in this research district moved into their new assignment and were expected to teach and deal with the obstacles inherent with integrated settings. As expected, teachers were faced with accusations of prejudice (whether real or perceived). Participant Daniel Kelley, who attended one of the first junior high schools to be integrated, remembers:

During my eighth grade year, I was suspended for reading a Playboy magazine in class. The teacher (white/male) called on me and wanted to know what was more interesting than the lesson. He took the magazine and escorted three of us to the office. The teacher talked to the assistant principal (white/male) about ten minutes and then told us that we were being suspended. Our parents were called to take us home. This school had a majority of white students, a few black teachers and one black counselor out of three. The students were always cordial to one another during school hours. After school there were always fights with blacks against white.

Daniel, attending the city's first public high school for African American youths sixty years later after its establishment, provides another example:

I had a teacher (white/female) who assigned a term paper without giving what I thought was adequate directions or guidance. As I began to turn in various stages of the paper, I would get unnecessary, constant criticism and a paper filled with red marks. I swore that the teacher was prejudice because I knew that I was right. Finally, I did get my outline approved, and I made the usual B on the paper. Later in this teacher's class, I wrote an essay for competition. I wrote on the nature of prejudice. When I didn't win, I was angry, and I blamed my
not winning on the judges' inability to accept the subject matter.

Participant Richard Allen, whose school experiences alternated between parochial and public schooling, provides this account:

I remember that most of the teachers seemed to treat black and white students differently. In most classrooms, there was always a definite seating arrangement with the white students in the best areas for seeing the blackboard or getting the breeze from the hallway or the windows. The black students were punished more often than white students for some very minor incidents. When there were arguments and fights between the blacks and whites, the white students always seemed to get the benefits of explaining their side. I clearly remember one incident when the teacher was upset, and he pinpointed a group of us boys (black) as being responsible for creating the problem. He said that we would all get zeros for the day. We (the group) were very angry because we felt wrongly accused. That afternoon, just before school dismissed, we sneaked into the teacher's class and stole his roll book. We threw the book out of the window into the bushes where we picked it up on our way home.

Parkay (1983) suggests that "many teachers entering the integrated urban settings experienced 'culture shock'" (p. 111). His research pointed out that new urban teachers were anxious and frightened, experienced nightmares about their school, and felt threatened by the attitudes and behaviors of the students. In this research setting, participants provided evidence that affirmed that these teacher not
only had to teach and prepare classroom activities but also had to endure the tests, pranks and antics of the students. In many instances the European American teachers were targets. One participant describes:

I remember how we did terrible things to a white art teacher (female)--from tacks in the chairs, removing chalk from the board, not doing homework to the entire class pretending to become sick from the lunch. Nevertheless, whatever we did, that teacher did not give up, did not report us to the principal and kept coming to class fully prepared. We finally realized that some white teachers did care about black children.

He also provides this:

At my school, I found myself in trouble with teachers. I became the class clown or I created academic controversy. For example, I wrote an essay that my teacher (white/female) said was inappropriate for a school assignment. The essay described a telephone coming to life relating, with philosophical comments, the conversation between a male and a female teenager who were reminiscing about the pleasure they derived from their latest sexual encounter.

Still another participant provides an example:

Once a teacher gave a test and asked that we exchange papers to check them. He said that we should check them in red pen. Since I didn't have the red pen that we were always expected to have, I asked the girl next to me to check the paper. She agreed, but the teacher became angry. We had an exchange of words in the class which included my remark, "We shouldn't be doing your job anyway." The teacher immediately sent me to the office, and the principal put me out of school. I was not allowed to return until my parent came.
Although European American teachers were the primary objects of the taunts, African American teachers were not exempted as one participant discloses:

I can also remember an incident with one of the black teachers. This was really a nice teacher. She, too, never fussed, never sent us to the office and was always prepared and pleasant, but she gave us lots of homework, much more than any of the other teachers. Some teachers didn't even give us homework. We decided (rather I announced to the class at recess) that we would stop doing Mrs. Jones' homework. After a few missed assignments, Mrs. Jones confronted the class asking, but not really expecting an answer, why we didn't do her homework anymore. She answered her own question by saying that it was because she was black. She went on to say many things that none of us could appreciate until later in our lives. I do remember that she talked about struggle, helping to prepare us to get good jobs, and about helping us learn to write and speak properly. (She was our English teacher.)

Grants (1989) believes that many teachers spent months or years learning how to deal with the shock of this setting and learning how to effectively teach their students. In many instances, the classroom of these teachers became a place where learning and academic activities were secondary to maintaining discipline, to placating and befriending the students and to simply metering time. These research participants remember.
Daniel Kelley submits this testimony:

However, I remember one white teacher (male) who really seemed to relate to us. We thought that he should have been black. He didn't conduct himself like he was playing a role on TV as so many of the other white teachers did. He was really down to earth, made jokes and tried to help us learn by using little anecdotes. I remember an incident when the history lesson was focused on the slavery period. We were all feeling hostile and upset about the treatment of slaves. This teacher said, "I'm okay! Don't get angry with me. I understand though because I know that all of us honkies look alike to you." The class did not join him in laughing at his attempt to make us feel better. This same teacher would also let us push the chairs against the wall and perform concerts for him. He would pick a group of fellows and ask us to sing some hits from the Temptations, his favorite group. As I think about that teacher now, I realize that he was more a hindrance than a help to us. I really was glad to leave that school because I really couldn't tell who was genuine and who was not.

Shirley Franklin adds:

There was one thing that seemed really different in the city school. When I was put out or sent to the office, no one seemed to care. The principal would simply tell me to sit in the office until my next class. Another thing that was different was the teachers. They seemed to be more willing to talk about interesting things than my other teachers. I remember one teacher (white/male) talked to us about birth control. He explained to us about one "sure fire" way of not getting pregnant. He told us to go to any drugstore and buy an aspirin. (Naturally, we were all sitting attentively waiting to hear this great message.) He told us to place that little white pill between our legs and hold them together as tightly as possible. The entire class roared with laughter.
Daniel Kelley, whose experiences were from mid-integration period, provides a summation: "For the most part, the teachers were okay. Most of them didn't go out of their way to help us."

Much of the literature on urban schools has suggested that in order for teachers to be effective and successful in urban schools serving African American youths, they must accept and demonstrate acceptance of the youths while establishing an environment conducive to achievement (Brookover, 1982; Calabrese, 1989; Dabney & Davis, 1982; Dumaresq & Blust, 1981; Edmond, 1979; Grant, 1989). The life histories of these non-traditional, first generation African American college students import data that suggest that this has not been the case. The school curriculum was not sensitive to African American realities. Woock (1970) reports:

In the 1960s and 1970s, there was a parade of ideas about the kind of curriculum and teaching methods that urban students need. ... Teachers were often provided with a so-called "teacher-proof curriculum" in order to make up for their lack of knowledge about teaching urban students and for their lack of skills in teaching content. (p. 237)

Reminiscences from the research participants hint that the curricula at their urban schools were not academically challenging and were simply a set of
mandatory subjects that seemed to have no relevance to their lives or to their personal needs.

One participant holds in his memory the following:

I began getting discouraged with school because there seemed to have been too much emphasis on making As and Bs. I felt that the teachers didn't care or teach us about how to survive once we left the school each day. It was getting harder for us, my brothers and sisters, to survive because my mother had been leaving us periodically to go to Virginia to care for her mother. This left us children in charge of all of the household responsibilities. . . . My depression was getting deeper, and the school work was getting boring. I decided that I would not pressure myself with school work. I thought about dropping out. Instead, I decided that I would take and in-school vacation and do just enough to maintain my B average.

Another participant thinks back to offer:

Actually, school was a turn off for me whether I was in the Catholic school or the public school. Even though I didn't like either school, I preferred going to public school because I had more fun, and I didn't have to do much homework. . . . I had a very uneventful time at school. I liked being with my people, but I found that I didn't have to put out much academic effort. Much of the lessons we were having were easy to me because I had already had them in the Catholic school, especially in English, math and science. Therefore, I made really good grades.

Yet, another calls up this memory:

I remember also how my gym teacher (black/male) let me get away with a lot. He didn't make me dress out as much as the other students did, and he didn't make me do some of the activities that the other did.
Many theorists assert that curricula in urban schools must be relevant to the lives of their students. These curricula should also provide a range of possibilities for the future and should encourage and instill in students the desire to pursue positive goals and dreams. The absence of such characteristics in the school curricula usually results in misinformed, misguided, disenchanted youths, who seek to do anything rather than continue their schooling. So was the case for each of these participants. As demonstrated below in the following passages, each participant rationalizes and finds comfort in his/her decision not to continue schooling.

Participant Patricia Dawson reviews her reasons:

I was the only of my ten friends who didn't graduate. My mother was disappointed, but she did her best to comfort me. She said I should get a job this summer and go back and graduate next year. . . . That summer, I got a job at a large supermarket (as a matter of fact, it was one of the chain stores of the supermarket where the candy bar incident happened). I had planned to work only that summer and return to school in September. Somehow, things didn't work out that way. I continued to work. I began helping my mother with bills, buying special treats for the younger children and for her. There was never any mention of going back to school.

Participant Daniel Kelley contributes this perspective:
I thought about going to college, but I decided that I was smart enough and didn't need college to succeed. After all, throughout school everyone had always told me how very smart I was. I got a variety of jobs . . .

Participant Shirley Franklin submits this testimony:

I worked throughout my senior year filing papers and running errands. I enjoyed working, and I especially enjoyed having so much money for myself. After graduation, I continued to work for the program. I thought about going to college, but I was terrified to go to another school for fear of being teased and misunderstood.

Participant Richard Allen retraces his situation:

Because my grades were good, my mother allowed me to get a job. I enjoyed working and handling money. After I graduated from high school, I continued to work, despite my mother's insistence that I go to college.

Consequently, all of these participants opted to leave the educational setting; they halted their schooling after high school. I submit that their rejection of continued schooling was a direct result of their experiences in their school settings. Their stories demonstrated that they were intelligent and capable of learning as any other child. They suspected that about themselves; they hoped that it was true; and they needed only to receive the confirmation from within the schools. However, these
data suggest that this did not happen for them, as is the case for far too many African American youths.

Before formulating conclusions about African American youth and their school experiences, it should prove interesting to explore Gilbert II and Gay's (1985) hypothesis that "too many teachers and principals are still unaware of the areas of conflict between the culture of the school and that of children raised in urban black communities" (p. 134). Toward the end, I provide another dimension to this research that is more colorful and intimate by looking at the culture in which African American youth have been raised.

Elements of Culture

In this section, the participants recall their family experiences and provide information about the activities and customs that comprise their culture. Franklin explains the concept of culture:

Culture does not 'cause' an individual to act or react in a given manner; it shapes and guides his or her behavior and also serves as a yardstick or measurement for judging the correctness or appropriateness of a given action. The process of learning cultural values, beliefs and practices is 'acculturation' and it generally takes place in the family and community. The process of learning societal rules, regulations and social practices is referred to as 'socialization' and it generally takes place in
the schools and workplace (and in society at large). (Quoted in Hale-Benson, 1986, p. 194)

This definition is consistent with Hannerz's (1974) belief that African American culture is influenced by three kinds of forces: (1) the weight of the African American community, (2) the pressure to conform to mainstream American culture, and (3) the particular structural conditions derived from consistently being placed at the bottom of the American society.

Acknowledging that culture is one of the greatest environmental variables, Hale-Benson (1986) recommends "that understanding the African American child is dependent upon a view of that child in the context within which the child lives and moves" (p. xxii). The participants in this research provide this view through a variety of memories.

**Neighborhoods**

An appropriate beginning in examining the culture in which urban African American youth are raised is their responses to their physical environment, their neighborhoods. Pertinent literature suggests that many urban African American youths are raised and attend school in poor areas of a city (Evans, 1980; Gurin & Epps, 1978; Willie; 1979). As shown in Table 3, the demographics of the neighborhoods in which the
participants live(d) and attended school indicate low socioeconomic status.

Table 3

Participants' Neighborhoods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighborhood</th>
<th>Average Household Population</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Households Below Poverty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lower 9th Ward</td>
<td>19,726</td>
<td>$13,903</td>
<td>39.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th Ward, Treme, Lafitte</td>
<td>12,458</td>
<td>12,697</td>
<td>48.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Bernard Area Project</td>
<td>8,984</td>
<td>10,968</td>
<td>63.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida Project</td>
<td>2,716</td>
<td>7,665</td>
<td>80.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire Project</td>
<td>7,876</td>
<td>7,252</td>
<td>83.56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The statistical images of urban neighborhoods and the negative images suggested through the literature (Conyers, Farmar & Levin, 1970; Mueller & Ladd, 1970) are quite different from the images portrayed by the participants. Although these areas are usually undesirable by mainstream America, these are the homes of urban youths and they feel good about them, regardless of the obvious shortcomings.
Patricia Dawson describes her environment:

We lived in a neighborhood that I considered nice and clean with mostly elderly people. There were just a few children actually living on our street, but there were always a lot of them playing up and down our block. At first our house was perfect for five people; we had two bedrooms, a kitchen and a bath. When my mother started having other babies, the house got a bit crowded. . . . It was only with her ninth child that I knew or rather understood that she was pregnant and going to have a baby. . . . Shortly after her birth, we moved to the housing project.

Daniel Kelley responds:

I grew up in what I would describe as an upper-lower class area. . . . We were basically good children and didn't get into bad trouble. Our leisure time was spent playing in our yard when we were younger and playing football in the streets as we got older. . . . We had a modest house but it was large enough to accommodate us--eight children and both my parents. None of us had our own rooms. At first I shared a bed with my older brother who had a bladder problem. I can vividly remember many nights when I was awakened by a warm, wet sensation moving over my legs and back. After a while my father knocked out the wall of the double house and enlarged our house. Now, I had my own bed, but I shared the room with my sister who played the radio so loudly that I could never have peace and quiet.

Kinships

Additional discussion of this culture continues with the family. Much of the literature on African American families suggests that these families tend to be matriarchal (Nobles, 1972; Staples, 1970; Willie, 1990). Historically, research on African American
women defines them as domineering and pathological (Hale-Benson, 1982). However, others (Braxton, 1989; Ladner, 1971; Washington, 1987) prefer to describe the African American woman as strong and persevering. Bell (1971) believes that there is an especially strong bond between mother and child and that for African American women, motherhood is possibly more significant to them than their roles as wife. This research provides descriptions and definitions influenced by the real-life experiences of the participants. They described their mothers in a variety of ways:

With resolution:

... Even now I remember how very strict and rigid my mother was then. She never let us play near the street curb like the other children; she never let us do the things that our cousins did; she made us go to church every Sunday, and she never let us spend the night away from home.

With admiration:

... After my sister's death, my mother began treating me differently. Things changed drastically; she became very protective of me. She used to try and do things with us even though she worked quite a bit. She worked at a nursing home during the day and did private duty sitting at night. She saved so that we could move to another house.

With enlightenment:

... My mother seemed never to understand me; there always seemed to be a gap between us.
(Later, however, I found that she understood me better than I understood myself).

With amusement:

. . . My mother was always preaching to us about the importance of going to school. Her speech was so regular and routine that we would sometimes recite it along with her, or fill in the blanks, or make body gestures to illustrate her message.

Middleton and Putney (1970) contend that "the locus of power within the family is an important variable in family structure. These research participants clearly establish the line of power within their families. However, when viewed within the total context of their live structures, that power, perhaps is not power at all, but should perhaps more adequately be thought of as a management or coping strategy for family survival. Two participants delineate the locus of power in their homes:

Patricia Dawson:

When I was a little girl, I decided then that my mother was the head of our household, although she was always telling us that our father was. I knew that was not true because all that my father did was bring home the money; anything else that happened in the house or the family was controlled by her. . . .

Daniel Kelley:

My childhood seemed to end with the death of my father. My mother became head of the household, but she did not work.
As other roles of the mother are delineated, the role and treatment of the father surface, almost incidental to events and activities. The passages below validate Hale-Benson's (1982) claim that African American males are a subculture within the African American community.

Patricia Dawson:

I would tell them how my mother would send one of us to pick up my daddy's check from his work so he would not spend it and drink it up before he got home. When he would get his share of the money, he would go on a drinking binge, come home drunk and start picking fights with one or all of us. . . .

Richard Allen:

I remember also that my mother always took us on vacations. My father never went with us; he said that he needed to stay home to work to pay for the trip. . . . This was the only time that my father came rather than my mother.

Consistent with research in this area (Herzog, 1970; Staples, 1982; Wideman, 1984), data from this research suggest that many fathers in African American homes occupy a precarious position in the family structure.

One participant, Patricia Dawson, provides the following account:

That man, my father, is quite a character. My daddy used to drink so much that we all hated him. I was always so embarrassed and hurt by his actions when he was drunk. I always thought that
we were the only family who had these kinds of problems. I especially thought that none of my friends had a father who was an alcoholic like my daddy. When I got older, I took a chance and talked about it with one of my girlfriends. Surprisingly enough, as she talked, I realized that we were experiencing some of the same things and that her father's drinking behavior was just as bad or even worse than my father's. After that, I was able to talk to more people, and I found that many of my friends had drinking fathers. Many times we would just sit and share stories. . . . We tried to convince mother to divorce him. She refused and constantly defended him, telling us that despite his drinking, he was a good man. Each time that we could start to believe it, he would go on a drinking binge, come home, break furniture, throw objects and pester everybody in the house. We were always very afraid and ashamed to have our friends at the house. . . . As time went on and we got older, such incidents became funny to us. Whenever he would get drunk, we would just push him aside and ignore him just like he was a child. In fact, I always felt that we had only one real parent and that was my mother.

Another participant, Daniel Kelley, provides this account of his father:

. . . As a young boy, I felt like I was my father's right hand man. I would travel everywhere with him. Whenever you saw "Ike," you saw me. I didn't call him "Ike" but everyone else did or "Brother Kelley" or "Bygazzi." I traveled all over the neighborhood delivering packages with my father; he delivered cases of things to bars, things to churches and packages to neighbors. My father also worked in the church as financial secretary. My father did other things around the church, for he and the pastor were good friends. . . .

The same participant also provides an account from an observer's perspective:
The neighborhood was relatively quiet except when the father across the street would come home drunk. There would always be a big family brawl with lots of fighting, screaming, and cursing. This would last until late into the night. At first, the neighbors would get alarmed and try to stop the fighting, but after a while nobody seemed to even notice what was happening because it became a weekly occurrence, sometimes on Friday night and sometimes of Saturday night.

Still, other images are recorded by Shirley Franklin:

My parents divorced when I was two and a half years old. . . . The summers I remember most and the ones I enjoyed most were the ones that I spent with my father. . . . My father continued to live in Texas after we left. I visited him regularly, sometimes on holidays (except Christmas) but mainly in the summertime. My father always did take care of me. He didn't pay child support, but he always sent me clothes and was responsible for my health insurance.

In the African American culture, the kinship system is said to be more binding than in many other ethnic cultures (Braxton, 1969; Hill, 1972; Staples, 1974; Willie, 1990). Nobles (1974) proposes that African Americans display a deep sense of family characterized by two main principles: survival and oneness of being. The elderly are highly regarded and respected. Grandparents, particularly, seem to occupy a certain presence in the African American culture as evidenced by:
Patricia Dawson:

... I always think about my grandfather. He was a very important part of my life and the lives of my brothers and sisters and the other children throughout the neighborhood. I remember so well how my grandfather used to stand on the porch and throw pennies to all of the children in the block. ... My grandfather made us feel like we were special people. When we were with him, we felt like we were queens of the world. ... My grandfather was really a wonderful man. We to used visit him all of the time, and that was the only place my mother would let us sleep overnight sometimes. Grandfather would send a cab for us, or he would tell us to get on the bus and he would be waiting at the bus stop to pay the bus driver. Grandfather used to buy us dresses and shorts. He used to wash our hair and send us down the street with it sticking straight up and out to the hairdresser to get it pressed or hot combed. He never raised his voice or got loud. If, by change, we made him angry, he would turn the hose on us but that would turn into a cooling summertime treat.

Daniel Kelley:

Sometimes, I would spend the summer in the country on my grandfather's farm in Mississippi or in Virginia with my grandmother. I preferred going to Mississippi because there were so many interesting things to do on the farm. I rode horses, tended animals and plucked corn. There I was the center of attention. On the contrary, staying in Virginia was boring and just like being at home. Everybody there left for work early, leaving me at home alone, and came home late. When they came home, I was like a waiter for all of the grown-ups. I was constantly serving them. There I was giving them all of the attention, and I got none. I didn't like going to Virginia, and my mother stopped sending me to Mississippi after my father died.
Shirley Franklin:

... She sent me to my grandmother's where I finished the sixth grade. My grandmother lived on a plantation where she worked cleaning house. She was raising my little cousin so I had a playmate. Each day we had chores—picking berries, feeding the chickens and sweeping the yard.

In similar manner, interpersonal relationships and the camaraderie that exist among brothers and sisters are also strong. All of the participants provide commentary suggestive of the cultural norms and oneness of the family.

Daniel Kelley's comments are personalized:

Since I was the baby of the family, I experienced a variety of treatments from my siblings. My oldest brother and I had a close relationship. Everyone credits our closeness to the fact that he named me. My oldest sister always took me places and treated me like I was her little boy. Everyone says that is why she became pregnant as a young teenager—to have her own child to play with. My second brother, Arthur, taught me the value of money. I worked for Arthur—cleaning his room. He was a "wheeler and dealer." He made me do much more than he was paying me for. My brother, Marvin, was the rough one. He was always saying that he was going to make me a man. He used me as a constant punching bag. Most of my childhood cuts and bruises came from him. Mona, Marvin's twin, used to take me wherever I wanted to go if I paid her. Then, there was my brother Rodney. We were really buddies. He was more responsible for taking care of me than any of the others. Having that many brothers and sisters meant that I was in a continuous maze trying to please, obey or outsmart one or the other.
Patricia Dawson confines her remarks to include female siblings only:

I was very surprised at myself when I got my first check. I didn't spend it on clothes as I had dreamed of; instead, I took my little sisters to lunch. At this point in my life, clothes were no longer a problem. With so many girls in the house, we were able to swap clothes. That worked out quite well for all of us, and it kept us from begging mother for clothes.

Richard Allen's remarks are therapeutic:

I always felt that I didn't fit anywhere in the family. I had no identity. I can still hear my mother say, time after time, "This is my oldest son, John. That's my youngest son, Kevin. This is my baby and only daughter Carolyn, and that's Richard." I didn't have a title. I always felt like an added burden. As a result, I didn't get along well with my brothers or my sister. My oldest brother always bossed us around; my youngest brother always had his way, and my sister was pampered and got too much attention. I was just there. I always felt like that even though my mother made sure that we did things together. I remember three of us always participating in a summer camp at the university. This was the one time that I felt like a part of their family. This was the time that I could really see that "blood is thicker than water." This happened whenever we had to come to one another's aid during an argument, fight or problem with another child at the camp.

Shirley Franklin's words were foreboding:

. . . . The family visited her everyday. I would always stay with her until dinner so that I might feed her. My sister didn't seem to get better within two or three days as she normally did. She developed pneumonia. She was connected to lots of bags, tubes and machines. I remember leaving the hospital one night feeling very sad because I could not get her to eat her jello and because she would not talk to me.
Kinships are never void of unhappiness. The theme of death and the ritual thereof are present in the histories of three of the participants. Thus, it seems safe to conclude that death has a strong impact on children in the African American communities.

Patricia Dawson describes incidents of death that typify acceptable behavior for African American females at such events.

My grandfather was the kindest, most loving person I have ever known. When he died (my sister's sixteenth birthday), I thought that I would not be able to go on without him. The funeral had a devastating effect on all of us--first, because he was gone and secondly because we learned something at the funeral that really hurt us. We "carried on something terribly" at the funeral. All of the children were crying, stomping and yelling. My mother was stomping and shouting. She leapt from her seat and flung herself out, making every stitch of clothing she had on identifiable--outer and under garments as well.

. . . . One night we were watching the news, and we heard the reporter speak about a tragic murder of a woman with the same name and address of Mother Ruth (her grandmother). My father jumped from the chair and some of us went with him to her house. When we got there, we saw the yellow police tape so we knew that it was true. . . .

When I think of tragedies, I think about another death that occurred in my family--my oldest brother. . . . About three o'clock that morning, we received a call notifying us that my brother had been shot. According to his wife, he was in the window of their housing project apartment showing her how people play Russian roulette. He was supposed to have emptied all of the bullets from the gun. His wife said that he
kept spinning the barrel and pulling the trigger, 
and on one pull, the gun went off.

At the funeral, we "cut-up" again. 
Everybody wanted to know why we acted so badly. 
People in the church tried to calm us and quiet 
us by taking us out of the church, bringing 
smelling salts, cups of water, and anything else 
they thought would satisfy us. My brother's 
death haunted us months after.

Shirley Franklin discloses one incident of death:

Later that night, my mother and stepdaddy 
came home. My mother was shaking and crying; my 
stepdaddy was trying to console her. They told 
us that my little sister had died. The primary 
cause of death was sickle cell; the secondary 
cause was cardiac arrest. I had a very hard time 
accepting her death. For at least a year, I 
pretended that my sister had gone to California 
to be a model. Whenever, I went into a store, I 
would look at the magazines, hoping to see her on 
the cover of one of them. I refused to let 
anyone tell me that she was never coming back. 
No one could convince me that she wasn't a model. 
We had talked about her being a model because she 
was so pretty.

Daniel Kelley provides one other incident; it is 
symbolic of the African American community's ethos on 
the conduct of men in certain situations.

I was ten years old when my father died. I 
cried only when I was told about it. At the 
funeral, I didn't cry because I knew that he was 
a good man and that he was going to heaven. I 
also knew that he would not want me to be sad and 
that he would want me to go on with my life and 
be strong like his "little man." My childhood 
seemed to end with the death of my father.
Situations

Moving beyond the intimacy of family and community, the experiences that urban African American youths encounter outside of their homes and communities are significant to how their culture is shaped. Two participants relate their stories. Such type incidents are, perhaps, the early beginnings of the adversarial relationship African Americans experience with the dominant culture. These incidents are indicative of the endemic tensions and conflicts experienced by African Americans as they attempt to determine their position in society.

Patricia Dawson:

... Our grandfather had us with such a carefree attitude about sweets and treats that we got into trouble once in a large downtown supermarket. I remember it as though it happened yesterday: My brother and sisters and I went to this grocery in the downtown area. My sister picked up a candy bar and began eating it. When we were about to leave the store a security guard stopped us and said that we had stolen a candy bar. We were taken to juvenile hall. In tears, we explained to the guard that we always got candy, that our grandfather always said for us to get a sweet treat in the grocery and that we never ever paid for candy. The guard explained that we could not do that and then he called our mother. She came, and she whipped us all the way home. From that day to this, my sister doesn't like the candy bar, Three Musketeers. It was not until years later that we realized that grandfather had a credit book at the corner grocery, and at the end of the month, he paid for all of the charges we had made.
Daniel Kelley:

... I vowed to myself and promised my father through a secret prayer that I would not be a burden on her and that I would help her all that I could. However, my mother seemed to be making me into a mama's boy. She would not let me play with the older boys, and she kept me close to her. I was always getting beat up and other children were always taking things from me. The day that I decided to take control of my life was the day that I named myself a double agent. It happened after a boy from another neighborhood beat me up and took ten dollars from me. I was really angry because I had saved that money after working endlessly for my brother and doing odd jobs in the neighborhood. I knew that if I went to my mother, she would say not to worry about it and that the Lord would take care of that person. I knew also that if I went to the police, they would not believe that I had ten dollars or, perhaps, would not even listen to my story. I decided, then, that I would get my money back so I started stealing. I didn't perceive it as stealing. I felt like I was getting back what so many people had been taking from me. ... I got to be really good at stealing. Other children used to get me to steal things for them. My brothers and sisters knew what I was doing, but my mother didn't. I gained the respect and admiration of all of the children in the neighborhood. This was, of course, among the children. ...

For such and similar actions, these youth were usually subjected to punishment. Herskovits (1958) suggests that the most common form of disciplining in African American communities is whippings. According to him, the most common instrument for discipline is the 'switch,' a long, thin twig from a tree that is stripped of its leaves. Nearly all African American
youths experience and accept, even expect, discipline from their parents. African American parents were harsh disciplinarians, but they were not sadists. Three participants relate incidents.

Daniel Kelley’s detailed account provides much information: the typical disciplinarian in African American communities, the role of the siblings, the two-fold approach of the parent, and the likelihood of recurrence.

My mother did the chastising in the family. When she called us in a certain tone, we knew that we were about to get a beating. We always tried to counteract the beating by beginning to cry as soon as we thought we had done something wrong. Sometimes we tried to escape by running. She never ran after us; instead, she would send the brothers and sisters after the guilty one. There was no escaping seven brothers/sisters who gained pleasure at each other's performance during the beating. Some of the performances were so spectacular that they produced various nicknames for us. . . . After my mother knew that I was all right, she whipped me for disobeying her. My mother would also make us get our own whipping switch from a tree in the backyard. Many times my brothers and sisters volunteered to get the switch for my whippings. We would get whippings for such things as staying out too late, not taking baths, not doing what we were told to do and missing or sneaking out of church.

Shirley Franklin’s account is insightful in a female specific way:

My summers in my hometown were spent mainly at my cousin's house. We would play spin the bottle and sit around and talk about "girlie" stuff. This was our evening routine until I came
home really late one night. My mother was terrified, thinking that something had happened to me. She beat me that night and forbade me to go back to my cousin's anymore. She always thought that my cousins were too "womanish."

Patricia Dawson's memories are painfully long lasting:

One morning, for what I thought was no apparent reason, my mother said that she was going to school with me. When I asked her why, she said that the principal had called to find out why I had been absent for such a long period of time. (Needless to say, I was nearly scared to death.) We walked to school in silence. I wondered what my mother would do, but I had no idea that she would do what she did. When we got to the school's playground, my mother put me in the middle of the playground and beat me in front of all of the children. That was the most embarrassing thing that ever happened to me in my life, and I spent the entire time at that school trying to live that down.

Education

The above incident is suggestive of the importance that African American families place on education, particularly African American mothers. They want their children's future to be more lucrative than their present situations. Most parents feel that this will happen only through education. Hale-Benson (1986) contends that black parents know that "black children will not be able to survive if they are mediocre" (p. 158). Thus, the disobedient nature of the above incident coupled with the thought of a young
child jeopardizing her future by not going to school is almost criminal. Education is high priority in the community and is expressed primarily by the mother (Bell, 1965) as illustrated below.

Patricia Dawson:

. . . . I remember very vividly my mother constantly told us throughout our childhood that she wanted us to go to school and get an education so that we, as females, wouldn't have to go through and put up with the things that she had to.

Richard Allen:

. . . . The vacations were nothing elaborate, within driving distance. Whenever we went, my mother made sure that we took a day or two to do "something educational" (as she would say) like visiting a museum, the zoo, the area library or simply riding through a college campus. My mother did everything that she could to make us understand the need for a good education.

Despite the desire of African American parents to have their children attend and succeed in school, many of the youths leave the school settings as illustrated by the non-traditional college students in this research. These students represent hundreds of others who were turned off by and pushed out of the American educational system. Their return to school years later was mediated by their experiences as they attempted to live a quality life in the mainstream of
society. Their experiences differ but the end results are the same—a return to schooling.

Patricia Dawson explains her motivation:

When my husband and I separated, I moved back with my mother. I started working at various jobs. One day I took a really good look at my life, and I didn't like what I saw. I decided, then, that I wanted more out of life than what I had and where I was heading. I wanted more out of life for myself and for my children. I wanted to be a better role model for my children. I knew that the only way that all of those things could happen was for me to go to school. I was frightened; I felt dumb, and I felt silly, but I took a chance. Now, here I am, a college student; and for the first time in my life, I love school.

Daniel Kelley recalls:

I thought about going to college, but I decided that I was smart enough and didn't need college to succeed. After all, throughout school everyone had always told me how very smart I was. I got a variety of jobs—parking cars, grocery stock boy and cashier, fast food worker and a number of other menial positions. At first, the money was good, but most times the work was hard, unappreciated and mentally unstimulating. Some of the bosses were prejudiced; some were just plain mean; some were women; and some were just plain ignorant. Sometimes my white bosses would be just as young or younger than I. It really angered me to be bossed by somebody like that. Once when one of those young white bosses purposely smudged a window that I had just hand-washed and said that it wasn't clean enough, I knew that I wasn't so smart after all. I knew then that if I had been smart I would have gone directly to college. I realized on that day that if I wanted more out of life, I needed to have a degree hanging on my wall.
Shirley Franklin remembers:

After gaining what I thought was some worldly experiences, I was able to get several other clerical jobs. I moved from one job to the next, each time that there were a few dollars more in the salary I changed positions. . . . One day, a lady who I had developed a close friendship with sat me down and said, (I remember the words almost exactly) "You are too smart to be working in this kind of job all of your life. Don't be like me, baby. Go on to college and make something of yourself." My friend's words lingered with me for a long time. Then, I did it. Two years ago, at age 27, I enrolled in college.

Richard Allen reports his decision:

After working for a few years, I got married at age twenty-two. The marriage didn't work out, and we separated after three years. At age twenty-six, I decided to go back to school. I discussed my plans with no one. However, when I received my letter of acceptance from the university, I shared it with my mother. She was ecstatic, and so was I. She and I are both anxiously awaiting the day that I graduate, the first in the family.

In this particular instance, this student's mother will never see the day when her son, a participant in this research study, graduates from college; for as reported earlier, on October 11, 1991 at the age of thirty, his life history ended with his untimely demise.

Conclusions

In the preceding sections, I have used the voices of the participants to illustrate statistics and to
illuminate issues brought forth in the literature. In this section, I first summarize the commonalities that permeate the experiences of these participants. Secondly, I will discuss specific elements in the experiences of each participant in an attempt to point out the inconsistencies that existed in their home and school culture. I attempt to draw conclusions as to what appeared to have been problematic in the experiences of these first-generation students.

In general, the compilation of their experiences suggests that these participants attended schools where their actions, their teachers' action and the classroom activities were perfunctory. The participants were expected to play the appropriate role of eager, contented, submissive youth. They were expected to be self-motivated with a burning desire to learn. On occasions, the participants stepped out of their roles to send signs and signals of distress such as inattentiveness, misbehavior and apathetic attitudes. Their signs and signals were to no avail. They went unheeded or misinterpreted. The totality of their experiences provided a portrait of the urban school teacher. The picture they painted was of an individual who was distant and detached; the teachers
demonstrated no warmth, kindnesses or gestures of nurturing. The attitudes of their teachers were nonchalant and minimally tolerant. Their approaches to the lesson were less than stimulating, and creativity was never apparent in any meaningful way. Their portrait was completed by the revelation that some teachers were individuals whose lack of interest or understanding of the culture prompted them to be insensitive, exploitive or condescending toward it. All of the experiences of these participants seem to be undergirded by the reality that their teachers appeared only to understand middle-class values and behavior.

In regard to culture, the compilation of the family experiences of the participants revealed that there is a culture among African Americans that is distinct and different from middle-class America, that is, European Americans. Most important, their stories demonstrated that their culture is not dysfunctional. The lives of these participants revealed that the most salient characteristics of the culture are the extensive network of kinships and the flexibility of self-help and survival skills. The participants painted a picture of a culture where relationships
were nurtured, where day-to-day life was set within a maze of personal problems, where their homes and their mothers were the center of their orientation, and where educational empowerment was advocated but not necessarily anticipated. Most decidedly, it is safe to conclude that the manner in which the youth interacted with their parents, sibling and other relatives shaped their relationships, their perception of themselves and their ideas about life.

In view of these generalizations, I now look specifically at each participant in an attempt to make sense of their experiences and to offer explanations for their disdain of their school experiences.

Participant Patricia Dawson's early dislike of schooling seemed to stem from the inconsistency she detected between home and school. At home, Patricia felt loved, wanted and needed by all. At school, Patricia felt unloved and unwanted by all, especially her teachers. When the activities in these two situations were inconsistent, Patricia had the normal, natural reaction of a child—to dislike the one which caused her pain and unhappiness. Thus, the conflict between home and school is established when Patricia is unable to receive the same nurturing and gestures
of love and affection at school as she receives at home. Patricia had no reason to believe that everyone would not love her as her mother, her siblings and her grandfather did. Therefore, when she experienced feelings of alienation, she began developing a dislike for school very early in her experiences. Knowing that she had done nothing to warrant the teachers' dislike for her, Patricia created reasons and decided that teachers disliked her because she was "the poorest child in the class and couldn't wear pretty new clothes." Her mother's declaration that "the most important thing was that she was clean" had no impact on her attitude as she moved from year to year. In fact, at each juncture of her schooling, her early assessment was reaffirmed. At each juncture of her schooling, Patricia was subjected to situations that were of personal embarrassment.

When she entered junior high school, Patricia "hated school even more." The one incident that could have changed her attitude toward teachers and schooling actually solidified it. When Patricia was whipped "in the middle of the playground in front of all of the children for shooting hooky," she thought that the teachers should have actively attempted to
lessen the embarrassment she felt. Patricia attributed no blame to her mother for this incident. She knew that her mother loved her; therefore, she knew that this act was precipitated by that love. Her mother was completely exonerated because Patricia knew that her mother had the right to discipline her when she had been disobedient. Thus, Patricia shifted the blame to her teachers. She said, "They didn't seem to care or even try to make me feel better about the incident."

Finally, the ultimate confirmation of Patricia's early hypothesis and the most extreme embarrassment came at the point when she was beginning to have a more positive attitude about schooling. When Patricia was pulled from the graduation practice line for lacking two units, she lost all faith and trust in teachers, counselors and the school itself. She dropped out of school and relegated herself to working and to helping the family. For Patricia, her home and family were a refuge from the frustrations and embarrassments of school. With her family, she felt safe, received love and experienced personal worth and satisfaction. Thus, Patricia was one student for whom the educational system did not work because it was
unable to provide her with the nurturing and supportive environment she needed to feel as worthy and as wonderful at school as she felt at home.

The voice of Patricia Dawson becomes the voice of one of college campuses' fastest growing populations—the re-entry woman. Literature suggests that in addition to some commonalities the reasons for women's return are as varied and different as one woman is to other (Doty, 1965; Henry, 1985; Saslow, 1980). However, not much of this literature has focused on the African-American woman. Patricia Dawson is a highly suggestive example of the re-entry African-American perspective; it is extremely likely that many of the African-American women returning to the campuses will have shared in some experiences similar to Patricia Dawson's. As Patricia and others like her enter post-secondary settings, it is important to know that the curriculum can not be void of support services and efforts that will facilitate the success of these students. Examples of such programs and proposals will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Unlike Patricia, participant Daniel Kelley felt welcomed, wanted and well-liked in the school setting. Daniel was obviously a very bright student whose
academic potentials were recognized by his teachers, his family and persons within the community. By his own admission, that of "double agent," Daniel acknowledged the dualism that existed in his life. Daniel's need to be the man of the house after his father's death seemed to have been the catalyst for the contradictions that characterized his life. Daniel appeared to be a happy, well-adjusted youth when in reality he was a despondent youth who needed his school activities to provide his life with meaning and personal satisfaction. However, school activities, that is the curriculum, became problematic for Daniel when he was unable to find personal success and accomplishment or immediate solutions for the situations that plagued his family.

Despite his aptitude and capabilities, Daniel found no sense of achievement in classroom activities. He did just enough to pass, constantly worked below his potential and literally took "an in-school vacation" through most of his schooling. Daniel's early motivations and competitive drives were soon diminished by a curriculum that was homogenized, diluted and geared toward masses; for Daniel, "school work was boring," and he was unchallenged. He used
those unchallenged energies to effect pranks, "get rid of the teacher schemes" and ingenuous intellectual annoyances.

The curriculum presented other paradoxes for Daniel. For example, even though the school work was "boring" for him, "his brothers and sisters were doing poorly in school." He was not able to help them with their work because he was taking care of the critical situation they faced at home. Realizing that it "was getting harder and harder" for him and his sibling to survive as their mother left for extended periods, Daniel decided that his school activities were irrelevant to his real concerns. He was turned off by school because the activities "didn't teach how to survive once (he) left school each day." Daniel's disappointment in not having his needs met manifested in depression and thoughts of suicide. Thus, it seems safe to conclude that not only was the curriculum irrelevant to Daniel's real life concerns but also that Daniel was in need of sensitive, intuitive teachers who should have detected that the underachievement and apathy that he displayed were symptomatic of something deeper.
As Daniel's voice, his story is prototypical of many urban students, it is important to realize that their entry into the postsecondary setting must be complemented by programs and activities that will enhance their experiences. Such programs and proposal will be described in Chapter 5.

In manner similar to that of Daniel Kelley, participant Shirley Franklin needed sensitive, intuitive teachers. When her family moved to the city, Shirley found that the environment in the urban school was quite different from the school in her rural hometown. Shirley decided very early in her attendance at the urban school that "no one seemed to care." She reached this conclusion when the behavior she displayed did not provide her with the same kind of attention that it did in her rural hometown school. Shirley was fighting a deadly disease and as such felt the need to constantly defend herself against those who ridiculed her about it. When her behavior became unruly previously, she was handled with a sympathetic, yet, firm hand. However, in her new school, the city school as she called it, she was "sent to the office to sit until the next class." There were no counseling efforts, no attempts to investigate a
probable cause of the behavior, and no real attempt to modify her behavior.

Continuing to acknowledge that "city schools" were different, Shirley felt that her teachers were also different. Her idea of the teachers being "more willing to talk about interesting things (such as the aspirin between the knee birth control pill) equates to a teacher's insincerity to his/her students and to his/her job. Teachers in the urban school also allowed Shirley to misuse her illness and "she took full advantage of this situation to get away with a lot." This suggests that teachers were not fully aware of the physical and mental limitations of students with special health concerns. Given that "one in every 400 black newborns in the United States suffers from sickle cell anemia or a variant of the disease" (Sickle Cell Anemia, 1971), it is important that educators are knowledgeable of certain diseases, particularly since demographic projections indicate that the American public educational system will serve primarily African American and other minority youths. Thus, consciousness-raising programs and services are mandatory as more of these students enter post-
secondary settings. Chapter 5 will be used to discuss such proposals.

Contrary to other participants, Richard Allen's dilemma regarding school was fueled by his family. Richard's negative perception of public school was formed by his mother's insistence that public schools were not for him and by his brother's characterization of public school as being nothing but fun. When Richard's mother consented to his going to public school, he went with very low expectations.

Richard constantly compared his experiences in public school to those in Catholic school. Of the two, Richard preferred to go to public school because he "had more fun and didn't have to do much homework." He preferred public school because he felt "comfortable and among friends . . . like (he) belonged there." He preferred public school because he "didn't have to put out much academic effort. The lessons were easy because (he) had already had them in Catholic school." However, what seems to have been overlooked by Richard's mother and his teachers was his constant need to fight. Richard could never explain the reasons for the fights. According to him, "(he) had to fight and liked to fight." Neither his
mother nor his teachers were willing to admit that the fighting, perhaps, was symptomatic of something deeper. Neither was willing to acknowledge that changing schools was not the answer. Thus, here again, a student needed the benefit of sensitive, intuitive teachers. The absence of such made school problematic for Richard.

Apparently, Richard was a troubled youth, searching for answers. Seemingly, his only release was through fighting. Regardless of the school setting, Richard was always fighting. In the Catholic school, his fight was not only physical, but he also fought "the burden of acting white" (Fordham, 1985). He explains: "It was like I had to act white for the teachers . . . and it seemed as though I had to act white in order for my classmates to like and befriend me." Although Richard found some superficial peace in public school "among his own cultural community" (Perry, 1988), he was unable to resolve the issues that attributed to his constant fighting.

As Richard and others such as he return to post-secondary settings, many of them have not resolved their inner problems. Thus, it is imperative that the schools provide programs and services that will assist
non-traditional students in resolving personal issues and problems. Recommendations and proposals for such services are described in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS FOR CURRICULUM

Writing in *Black Issues in Higher Education*, Mercer (1991) says, "I don't think it's an accident that our African American communities are in the shape they're in. Education is the key to changing the consciousness of a people" (p. 16). In this research, I have attempted to confirm both of those premises.

In Chapter 1, I attempted to establish a rationale for this research by suggesting that African American youth have backgrounds that deserve attention and consideration within the larger context of the American social and political structure. I discussed several theoretical perspectives and aspects of the school structure that promoted class and racial stereotyping that predefined the intellectual capabilities for academic success of African American youth. Thus, I suggested that investigating the backgrounds of these students is fundamental to refuting the myths and stereotypical images attributed to them and to understanding their retention and
persistence or lack of in the American educational system.

In Chapter 2, I argued that throughout history, African Americans have been victims of a traditional, European American school system which has overtly and covertly perpetuated the inequalities manifest in the larger society. I implied that public education has been benignly and systematically neglected and that the crisis which currently exists in urban schools is the result of that neglect. I suggested that reform of these schools is mandatory and that insights for reform can be gleaned from the experiences of students, particularly those who had been a part of the system for years before.

Thus, in Chapter 3, I established the methodology by which I investigated the experiences of four students who were disenchanted by the urban school system. In Chapter 4, I presented these data. In this chapter, I inferred that the American educational system reneged on its responsibility to give all children the opportunity to engage in something meaningful that would prepare them for a better life. Using the voices of the students, I attempted to demonstrate that the experiences of African American
youth have not always been pleasant and have served primarily to alienate them from the system which purports to assist them in building productive, successful lives. The voices in Chapter 4 corroborated Glenn's (1989) proposition that two kinds of schools fail to serve poor and minority students well.

(1) . . . segregated schools in which drill is stressed and expectations are low, schools in which a dismal miasma of failure hangs over students and teachers alike; (2) . . . integrated schools in which they are an unwelcome foreign presence—schools that make no pedagogical adjustments to respond to their strengths or to meet their needs. (p. 777)

As I suggested within the conclusions which I drew in Chapter 4, there must be some additional and some specific kinds of programs incorporated in the educational system if it is going to serve realistically the students who reenter the educational setting. In this final chapter, I recommend and describe programs which I feel will serve non-traditional students in a very meaningful and practical manner. However, before discussing these program recommendations, I shall discuss other areas that support the voices of this research, that further establish the need for the program recommendations and, in fact, serve as advocacies for change.
Advocacy for Change

It seems safe to conclude that the lived experiences of the marginalized groups, particularly African Americans, coupled with current data infer that issues that have most affected and impacted the education of their youths--poverty, language barriers and physical and emotional handicaps--have been historically and systematically ignored in the normal system of American education. In the following section, I discuss a body of statistics which speaks to this issue and what seems to serve as statistical mandates for change.

Statistical Mandates

A 1989 study conducted by the National Academy of Science concluded that "Blacks in America trail Whites in all aspects of quality of life--from economics and health to education and housing--because of persistent discrimination and the lagging economy of the past two decades" (p. 1). The study found that the chasm between African Americans and European Americans is as wide as ever, despite the gains of the 60s and 70s.

Other findings of the study showed that economically, the median income (1986) for African American families was $17,604 and $30,809 for European
Americans making the poverty rate of African American families between two and three times that of European Americans. Educationally, African American high school youths dropped out at twice the rate of European American youths and are likely to attend college at less than half the rate of European American students. Healthwise, African American babies die at twice the rate of European Americans. The probability that African Americans will abuse alcohol and drugs is greater than that for European Americans. Socially, African Americans are twice as likely to be victims of crimes, while African American men particularly, have a six time greater chance of being victims of a homicide.

Added to this, Harold Hodgkinson's (1986) projections for the youth who will begin the decade of the 90s as ten year olders reveal that one third of them are nonwhite; twenty-four percent will live below the poverty line; eighteen percent were born out of wedlock; and twenty percent of the girls will experience pregnancy as teenagers.

Unfortunately, the numbers and the percentages maintain the same flavor at the state, local and school district levels throughout the country. In
Orleans parish, for instance, a study from the New Orleans Council for Young Children in Need reported the following: that forty-five percent of children under five live in poverty, failing to receive proper nutrition or education; that one out of five births is to a teenager; that the infant mortality rate is highest in the state; that fewer than half of poor children attend preschool; that one out of five first and seventh grade students are held back; and that fewer than half of the students graduate from high school (New Orleans Council, 1988). In fact, the entire graduation rate for the state from public high schools was "49th of the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The state's rate was 60.1 percent compared to 71.1 percent in 1987" (State Graduation, 1989, p. 8).

The level of minority underachievement in basic computational skills was revealed in a study, "Everyone Counts," (1989) conducted by U.S. mathematicians and scientists. For Louisiana, a dismal picture was painted: more than half of the state's college freshmen must take remedial courses, the average math ACT score is 15.2 as compared to the national average of 17.2. Finally, in an eight
southern state region, Louisiana ranked last in mathematics performance of eleventh grade students. In addition to the aforementioned facts, other data suggest that the educational system has gone awry because of various other reasons and influences. In the following section, I shall discuss what seems to me to be political mandates for change.

**Political Mandates**

According to Broder (1991), the Department of Education was created by President Carter as a result of a campaign promise to the National Education Association. Because Carter's term was short-lived, so was the term of Judge Hufstedler, the first secretary of education. Thus, there was little time for action and establishing of educational programs and policies.

Reagan's ascent to the presidency was marked by cuts in the educational budget even though his first education secretary Terrell Bell unveiled and published the shortcomings of education within *A Nation at Risk* (1983). His successor, William Bell, used his job "as a pulpit for his personal and highly controversial views on what schools should teach, what college should charge and even where college students
should vacation" (p. B-7). Lauro Cavazo, whose tenure spread across both presidents Reagan and Bush, brought no focus or agenda to the department. While Cavazo summarily commented that "the problems with U.S. education is not . . . an issue of dollars . . . Funding is truly no an issue" (Study, 1990), a Bush-era report, "Shortchanging Education," contradicts his statement:

We recognize that money does not guarantee excellence and we suspect that other changes—im curriculum, in the status of teachers, and in expectations about students, to name just a few—will also be fundamental to any improvement in education. . . . But to begin a process of education reform by denying the need to increase spending . . . places a severely limiting constraint on any plans for educational improvement. (p. A-3)

Giroux (1988; 1989) also offers insights into the problematics of the educational system as influenced by the last two presidential eras. On the Reagan era, he purports that education, particularly school curriculum, has been manipulated by corporations under the guise of investing in our children. "For students," he writes, "learning is often reduced to the exercise of lifeless paperwork, the 'mastery of knowledge that has little to do with their own experiences'" (1988, p. 8). His research of the Reagan era led him to conclude that education and
"learning were defined in ways that ignored the
diversity of experiences, traditions, voices,
histories and community traditions that students bring
to school" (1989, p. 729).

Educators, parents, theorists and business-people are now acknowledging the reality of what has happened in education with powerfully profound statements. A national education advisor comments, "the country's educational system has operated on the faulty premise that a certain number of students are destined to fail" (p. B-2). An education analyst adds, "The whole system is biased against kids who don't already know what teachers are trying to teach" (Pierre, April 6, p. B-4). A group of educators from an urban school district notes the importance of apprising the public of two fundamental lessons:

(1) the future of our country depends upon the strength of our city schools; the city schools are as essential to the national welfare as America's military bases are to the national security; and (2) our country can not afford to write off any child's future; all children can learn. (Green, et al, 1988, pp. 1-2)

Similar feelings and opinions have been noted at the local level. For example, at a New Orleans conference hosted by a parish school district and its business partner, David Hornbeak, education adviser
for the National Center on Education and the Business Roundtable said, "our schools are too much like they used to be . . . we have to challenge the basic assumption that learning can only take place from August to May, Monday through Friday, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. in 45-minute intervals" (Pierre, 1991, April 5, p. B-2).

Adding to that, William Spady, director of the High Success Program on Outcome-Based Education, said "educators should rethink some 'sacred cows' of education such as the grade structure and the nine-month calendar, both entrenched in this country's education system" (Pierre, 1991, April 6, p. B-4). The local superintendent, Thomas Tocca, commented, "restructuring entails a willingness to change, a fundamental change which strikes at the heart of our cherished assumptions and time-honored paradigms" (Pierre, p. B-2).

The most recognized imperative for change came from President Bush as he declared, "For the sake of the future of our children and our nation, we must transform America's schools. The days of the status quo are over" ("Bush Calls," 1991, p. 1). His declaration was without caution as he added, "To those
who want to see real improvement in American education, I say: "There will be no renaissance without revolution" ("Bush Calls," p. 1).

I submit that one facet of the renaissance has to be in the area of curriculum. There needs to be a change in curricula direction--one that prepares for the demographic predictions of a minority majority and one that must go far beyond the superficial gestures of including a few African American studies programs or courses in the curriculum. McCarthy (1990) observes:

Continued Anglocentric dominance in the content and organization of American school curricula underscores the fact that educators have merely paid lip service to minority demands for greater inclusion of knowledge about the history and culture of Hispanics, blacks and Native American. (p. 130)

This becomes the challenge for educators--to understand how the experiences of minority students have affected them, to learn from them and to work through those lessons to make the school activities meaningful. Will it happen? Will education for the twenty-first century become sensitive to the diverse needs of students or will it continue to be standardized by a curriculum designed to maintain the status quo? However, there have been warnings to the
consequences of maintaining the status quo. A perspective from corporate America is reflected in the words of Owen Bradford Butler, retired chairman of Proctor and Gamble: "As poverty, crime and related ills tear at the fabric of American life, taxpayers are faced with two choices: Raise a generation of children who will contribute to the country's growth or be prepared to watch them destroy it" (Woods, 1989, p. B-1). Hodgkinson (1986) echoes that position in these terms: "If they (minorities) succeed in life, non-minorities will benefit. If they fail, all of our lives will be diminished" (p. 274).

Theoretical perspectives within the literature suggest that whatever is decided relative to curriculum policies and classroom practices today will determine the direction of education and its students for the twenty-first century (Apple, 1983; Beckum, Zimmy & Fox, 1989; Ediger, 1989; Grant, 1989; Wells & Morrison, 1985). Apple (1983) comments:

> It is crucial that we debate now the questions of what we should teach, how it should be organized, who should make the decisions, and what educators should and can do about (and in) a society of large and growing disparities in wealth and power. (p. 325)

If there is such a debate, I suggest that the critical theorists have the most realistic perspective. Thus,
in the following section, I discuss aspects of critical theory which outline the real challenge for curriculum.

Challenge for Curriculum

Glenn (1989) feels that it is essential that curriculum and pedagogy be culturally sensitive and show respect for human diversity. He suggests that the society needs "an approach to education that takes seriously the lived culture of children and their families" (p. 779).

Grant (1989) adds:

In order to help as many urban students as possible, the curriculum must be neither sterile nor remote from the lives of urban students. It must be relevant to their lives, but it must also provide a range of possibilities for the future, if it is to encourage students to pursue positive goals and dreams. (p. 769)

To achieve this end Giroux (1988) advocates:

A type of critical pedagogy fundamentally concerned with student experience: it takes the problems and needs of the students themselves as its starting point. This suggests both confirming and legitimating the knowledge and experience through which students give meaning to their lives. (p. 257)

If there is any chance of such a paradigm, one of critical praxis, coming to fruition, Macdonald (1988) prescribes the manner in which it must begin:

Our activities, efforts and expectations should be focused upon the ideas, values, attitudes, and
morality of persons in school in the context of their concrete lived experiences; and our efforts should be toward changing consciousness in these settings toward more liberating and fulfilling outcomes. (p. 161)

Proponents of critical praxis, of which I am one, emphasize the importance of personal experiences and maintain that reflection and revelation of the private life activities of students will ultimately lead to education. "Schooling, they believe, is not likely to provide intellectual experience that becomes internalized unless students participate in the formulation of their goals" (Eisner, 1985, p. 71).

Similarly, the personal relevance orientation to curriculum supports the theory--

that for experience to be educational, students must have some investment in it--must have some hand in its development--and that without actual participation or the availability of real choices within the curriculum schooling is likely to be little more than a series of meaningless routines, tasks undertaken to please someone else's conception of what is important. (Eisner, p. 69)

These curriculum concepts allow the student to become his or her own person. Dr. Asa Hilliard, a noted professor of urban education who recently supervised a major university's curriculum revision asserts that "everyone needs to see themselves (sic) as a participant, not just a spectator. It motivates
them to do more, to study, to read where they had not

Recent literature proclaims that teachers can not
help urban students learn to empower themselves and
take care of their lives if the curriculum focuses on
raising test scores and ignores or marginalizes the
history, culture, lifestyles and structural
constraints that surround urban students. (Adler;
Alter & Denworth; Fulghum; McCormick; Morganthauh;
Wyman; 1990) Nonetheless, to challenge the existing
historical system and attempt to move into a different
curriculum direction will be a monumental task, to say
the least. Doll (1988) describes it best:

Developing a curriculum based on instability and
uncertainty is frightening. It requires a major
attitudinal change. At the practical level this
means a willingness to open the curriculum, as
well as methods of instruction, to public
scrutiny and debate. It means the curriculum
must undergo change as it is being delivered;
that ends must be ends-in-view, not absolutes.
It means that a major change must occur in the
teacher-student relationship, particularly as
each gropes to understand the other. (pp. 128-
129)

This study and other studies have shown that
these critical perspectives are valid and must be
given consideration if there is any hope of students
experiencing success. For example, a study which
surveyed GED candidates reported that the factor cited
most often for their dropping out of school was a feeling of "disengagement" from school (American Council on Education, 1991). Directors of that study said, "The results of this study suggest that adult educators should examine previous schooling experiences in order to recommend appropriate educational strategies for adult learners" (American Council on Education, p. 3). In similar manner, I submit that the findings of this study have certain implications for curricula programs for non-traditional students. Therefore, in the following section, I discuss my recommendations of programs that will enhance the experiences and facilitate the success of non-traditional first generation college students.

Recommendations

A Census Bureau survey found that 3.3 million college students were thirty years older in 1989--double the figure fifteen years ago (Older students, 1991, p. G-11). Hence, college and universities must make some changes to meet the needs of these non-traditional students. These students, manipulating families, jobs and school assignments, face challenges that most of their younger classmates could never
imagine. Therefore, it is important that curriculum planner possess the vision to establish programs that are consistent with the life situations and personal experiences of these students.

For example, it is highly likely that as these students return to school, they are accompanied by the duties and responsibilities of parenting. Clearly, then, child care programs are needed as co-curricular to academics. An associate director of a university based Center for the Education of Women reports that "the way financial aid is calculated doesn't provide support for child care" (Older students, p. G-11). With this being a reality, I recommend that colleges and universities establish child care facilities which are campus-based or at least under their jurisdiction. Child-care facilities associated with the university would mean that parenting responsibilities would not necessarily interfere with school attendance. I recommend that such a program would have two specific components: one designed for care of pre-school children and one designed for school-age children. In the child care program, pre-schoolers would receive general physical, hygienic care while the school-age
child would receive tutoring and assistance in home assignments.

I submit that this recommendation is very practical and would be in tune with the needs of participant Patricia Dawson and the many others like her. According to an Associated Press survey, "one in every five women in college was 35 or older in 1989" (Older students, p. G-11). This is significant considering that fifteen years before, the figure was only one in eight. Many of these women who return to school with commitment and dedication could very easily become detracted by their need for babysitters and their desire to assist their children with home assignments. Thus, I propose that the experiences of non-traditional students will be greatly enhanced by child care programs associated with the college or university which these students attend.

"The non-traditional student wants convenience," said the dean of admission of a large university (Older students, p. G-11). In line with this, I recommend that colleges and universities expand their services to include not only formal courses offered during evening and week-end hours but also courses offered at community satellite sites and through a
non-formal program of telecourses. Satellite sites strategically placed within the community will give students more flexibility, ease the financial burden of transportation for some, attract the interest and perhaps subsequent enrollment of other non-traditional students and will more readily create a sense of collegial community for non-traditional students. In a related manner, a program of telecourses is a viable curriculum for non-traditional students. The telecourse is a university course that is presented through televised sessions on a local channel and can be viewed at home. To be truly effective, a campus-based instructor should be available to answer questions by telephone during a reasonably established set of hours.

This type of program, especially the non-formal courses, will serve the highly motivated, self-directed non-traditional student who is unable to juggle his responsibilities to attend formal classroom settings. Even more important, these non-formal courses will be very practical in assisting students like participant Shirley Franklin and others like her whose health problems render them unable to physically attend classes for extended periods of time. In this
era where students are involved in extensive rehabilitative services due to widespread misuse of drugs and alcohol, I recommend that colleges and universities expand their services to include non-formal courses for non-traditional students whose life structures are best accommodated in this manner.

Closely aligned to the students described above are the many non-traditional students who return to educational settings with many unresolved personal issues. As such, it becomes important that schools provide services that will help students to resolve or, at best, cope with their situations. Therefore, as non-traditional students return to school, I recommend that colleges and universities establish counseling programs focusing specifically on mental health services. A campus-based mental health counseling service will be a supportive service to those non-traditional students who enter with personal problems and those who may be experiencing stress in their current life situations as well. These students need professional assistance to effectively confront their life situations and personal environment. A campus-based counseling program would be readily accessible to students and could enhance their ability
to effect a balance in their lives and their ability to remain in school.

Such a program should begin as a free service and may be staffed by faculty and/or graduate assistants with the appropriate expertise. Also, the fear of and stigma that people usually attach to mental health services may mean that the program will have to be advertised creatively—not to deceive the students, but also not to discourage their patronage. The directors and advocates of the program will also need to sensitize the campus to the goals and objectives of the program as well as apprise them of the signs and symptoms of a student in distress, such as those which were displayed by participants Daniel Kelley and Richard Allen—behavior which regularly interfered with effective classroom management; high levels of irritability including unruly, violent and abrasive behavior; and poorly prepared work inconsistent with previous work.

I propose that if students avail themselves of services that assist them with stressful, problematic areas of their lives, they are more likely to experience academic success and more likely to persist in school. Thus, I strongly recommend that colleges
and universities establish mental health counseling programs to assist their students during their difficult times.

In addition to the aforementioned program, I propose that colleges and universities should establish mentoring programs specifically for non-traditional students. A dean of admissions suggests that most non-traditional students "demand a personal relationship with their professors, unlike their younger classmates who may sit in the back of the class to escape notice" (Older students, p. G-11). In contrast, these students are searching for teacher relationships. They need relationships that engender a strong sense of understanding and appreciation and that will continue to motivate them. Such a relationship can increase the effectiveness of the curriculum by helping students focus on the connection between their life, career and personal goals and their immediate and long-range academic goals. The university should carefully select mentors who will provide supportive and nurturing experiences for non-traditional students. The mentors should be persons who will serve as consistent and reliable sources of encouragement and inspiration. Within the structure
of this mentoring program, non-traditional students should be able to build self-confidence, should become creative problem solvers and should be able to minimize their weaknesses while building on their strengths. Because non-traditional students usually return to school consumed with fear and anxiety, a mentoring program will make their transition less frightening. Thus, the mentoring program is my last but most important recommendation, for it is this program that will make students feel comfortable as they return to educational settings.

To be sure, these are just a few programs that address the challenge issued by the critical theorists. I submit that the continuing challenge for educators and theorists is to make a difference in the lives of urban high school students and non-traditional, first-generation college students by assisting them to empower themselves and to improve the quality of their lives through education. I submit that learning for empowerment can happen only by providing students with a meaningful curriculum transmitted by a cadre of dedicated, sensitive educators. I maintain that if the messages deployed, both explicitly and implicitly, through this research
and that if these recommendations for curriculum-related programs are given serious consideration for implementation, there is a ray of hope for the fast approaching twenty-first century.
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APPENDIX A

PATRICIA DAWSON: "A MELL OF A HESS"

Family Experiences

I remember when there were only three in our family—my older brother who is now deceased and my oldest sister and I. Even now I remember how very strict and rigid my mother was then. She never let us play near the street curb like the other children; she never let us do the things that our cousins did; she made us go to church every Sunday, and she never let us spend the night away from home. When I was a little girl, I decided then that my mother was the head of our household, although she was always telling us that our father was. I knew that was not true because all that my father did was bring home the money; anything else that happened in the house or the family was controlled by her.

We lived in a neighborhood that I considered nice and clean with mostly elderly people. There were just a few children actually living on our street, but there were always a lot of them playing up and down our block. At first our house was perfect for five people; we had two bedrooms, a kitchen and a bath.
When my mother started having other babies, the house got a bit crowded. I don't really remember my mother being pregnant all of those times. I just remember that she would leave and come home the next day with a baby. It was only with her ninth child that I knew or rather understood that she was pregnant and going to have a baby. I cried and screamed and yelled at my mother for being pregnant because I felt that she didn't need another child. However, when the baby was born, my little sister Ann, I was so happy and I loved her so much. I used to hold her all of the time, hug and kiss her, sing to her and play with her all day. Shortly after her birth, we moved to the housing project.

When I think about the housing project and my early childhood days, I always think about my grandfather. He was a very important part of my life and the lives of my brothers and sisters and the other children throughout the neighborhood. I remember so well how my grandfather used to stand on the porch and throw pennies to all of the children in the block.

My grandfather made us feel like we were special people. When we were with him, we felt like we were queens of the world. When we were with him, we would
get anything that we wanted. He would take us to the store or send us to the neighborhood grocery store and tell us to get anything we wanted and sign for it. Our grandfather had us with such a carefree attitude about sweets and treats that we got into trouble once in a large downtown supermarket. I remember it as though it happened yesterday: My brother and sisters and I went to this grocery in the downtown area. My sister picked up a candy bar and began eating it. When we were about to leave the store a security guard stopped us and said that we had stolen a candy bar. We were taken to juvenile hall. In tears, we explained to the guard that we always got candy, that our grandfather always said for us to get a sweet treat in the grocery and that we never ever paid for candy. The guard explained that we could not do that and then he called our mother. She came, and she whipped us all the way home. From that day to this, my sister doesn't like the candy bar, Three Musketeers. It was not until years later that we realized that grandfather had a credit book at the corner grocery, and at the end of the month, he paid for all of the charges we had made.
My grandfather was really a wonderful man. We used to visit him all of the time, and that was the only place my mother would let us sleep overnight sometimes. Grandfather would send a cab for us, or he would tell us to get on the bus and he would be waiting at the bus stop to pay the bus driver. Grandfather used to buy us dresses and shorts. He used to wash our hair and send us down the street with it sticking straight up and out to the hairdresser to get it pressed or hot combed. He never raised his voice or got loud. If, by change, we made him angry, he would turn the hose on us but that would turn into a cooling summertime treat.

My grandfather was good to everyone. He did special things for everybody, especially his wife, my grandmother who was actually our great grandmother. He cooked for her, ironed her clothes, and cleaned the house. He kept his house in immaculate order. The house was decorated with a man's touch. All of the living room furniture was covered with plastic. We weren't allowed to go in there, although sometimes he would let us sit on the sofa as a special treat. The curtains and the bedspread were of matching color, and the tiny bathroom was spotless. There was a large
black/white TV in the living room. We didn't have a TV at our house so we thought our grandfather was rich. Also, he would have lots of money all of the time. He didn't believe in banks, and he kept his money in socks and bundles beneath the bed and the mattress. However, it didn't matter what my grandfather did, my grandmother never seemed to like him, or appreciate his kindness. She was so different from him. She was very selfish and mean. She would tell us all kinds of ugly and negative things about him. We got to a point that if we went there and our grandfather was not home, we would wait outside until he came home.

My grandfather was the kindest, most loving person I have ever known. When he died (my sister's sixteenth birthday), I thought that I would not be able to go on without him. The funeral had a devastating effect on all of us--first, because he was gone and secondly because we learned something at the funeral that really hurt us. We "carried on something terribly" at the funeral. All of the children were crying, stomping and yelling. My mother was stomping and shouting. She leapt from her seat and flung herself out, making every stitch of clothing she had
on identifiable—outer and under garments as well. While all of this commotion was going on, I heard my grandfather's sister (or so I thought at the time) ask the lady next to her, "Who are those children?" Why are they crying like that and acting such a fool?" The lady next to her answered, "Oh, those are his grandchildren," The first lady said, "Huh, can't be, Frank doesn't have any grandchildren." Matter of fact, he never had any children." When I overheard this conversation, I couldn't believe my ears. As soon as we got home, I asked my mother about it. She said that it was true and that the woman who said it was grandfather's cousin. She said that the man we knew as grandfather was actually our grandmother's second husband. She said that he was really no kin to us, that he had just married our father's grandmother. We were all shocked to learn that the man whom we had cherished above all was not our grandfather but was really our step great-grandfather.

Now, my other grandparent, my daddy's mother is a completely different story. She always had lots of money and lived in what we called a real rich-like house. She didn't seem to like us very much. She didn't seem to really want to be our grandmother
because she made us call her Mother Ruth. She had her "picks and chooses." She only liked real light-skinned people. The only one in the family whom she really liked was my brother; he was really fair like she was. My brother could get anything from her. We could get very little from her. No one was really close to her not even my father, her son. Daddy told us that his mother gave him away at one month to be raised by his grandmother (the one we called grandmother but who was actually or great grandmother). A good example that the family was not close was when my grandmother was tragically killed--raped and murdered. One night we were watching the news, and we heard the reporter speak about a tragic murder of a woman with the same name and address as Mother Ruth. My father jumped from the chair and some of us went with him to her house. When we got there, we saw the yellow police tape so we knew that it was true. To this day, all of us think that her husband was involved in the murder. Her husband was ten years younger than she and only four years older than my father. Of course, the murder was never solved.

When I think of tragedies, I think about another death that occurred in my family--my oldest brother.
He was twenty-three years old. My brother died on the day that the first family niece was born. (Each time that I think about it I think about what the old people used to say: "Take one out and bring one in.") My brother was really celebrating about his niece. He was so proud to be an uncle. He was drinking and clowning and wanted to stay at our house that night. He was acting foolishly with everyone and drinking more each minute. My mother said to him, "Man, you need to cool down and go to sleep. Go home with your wife." My brother pleaded to stay while my mother constantly refused. After a few hours, he reluctantly went home with his wife and six-month old daughter. About three o'clock that morning, we received a call notifying us that my brother had been shot. According to his wife, he was in the window of their housing project apartment showing her how people play Russian roulette. He was supposed to have emptied all of the bullets from the gun. His wife said that he kept spinning the barrel and pulling the trigger, and on one pull, the gun went off. Here again, the entire family was horrified and filled with questions. (We always wondered why we were notified at three in the morning when he was killed at midnight.) We had a lot
of questions then and most of them still have not been answered.

At the funeral, we "cut-up" again. Everybody wanted to know why we acted so badly. People in the church tried to calm us and quiet us by taking us out of the church, bringing smelling salts, cups of water, and anything else they thought would satisfy us. My brother's death haunted us months after. His wife didn't want to have anything to do with us and hasn't let us see his child to this date. (She's now sixteen.) Also, the insurance company refused to pay at first by suggesting the death was suicide, not accidental. I think that the worse that has come from my brother's death is that my mother blames herself. She often says that if she had only let him stay that night he would be alive today. Everyone has tried to convince her otherwise. Nevertheless, from time to time, she mentions it but I know that she thinks about it almost daily. On some days she seems especially tormented, nervous, and teary-eyed. Because of this incident, my mother is overly protective of my younger brother. He can do no wrong even though he does quite a bit of wrong like fighting his wife, drinking too much, and not working and being a responsible adult.
As I think about him I think about another thing that the old people used to say: "He didn't steal it." By that, I mean he got some of his bad habits from my father.

That man, my father, is quite a character. My daddy used to drink so much that we all hated him. I was always so embarrassed and hurt by his actions when he was drunk. I always thought that we were the only family who had these kinds of problems. I especially thought that none of my friends had a father who was an alcoholic like my daddy. When I got older, I took a chance and talked about it with one of my girlfriends. Surprisingly enough, as she talked, I realized that we were experiencing some of the same things and that her father's drinking behavior was just as bad or even worse than my father's. After that, I was able to talk to more people, and I found that many of my friends had drinking fathers. Many times we would just sit and share stories. I would tell them how my mother would send one of us to pick up my daddy's check from his work so that he would not spend it and drink it up before he got home. When he would get his share of the money, he would go on a drinking binge, come home drunk and start picking
fights with one or all of us. Once when my brother (deceased) was eighteen, my daddy sent him to the store to get some beer. (Beer was all that he drank.) When my brother returned with the beer and gave daddy his change, my daddy said his change was twenty-five cents short. He accused my brother of stealing it. He went to the kitchen and came back with a knife. He lunged at my brother and cut him on the arm. Then, we all jumped in the fight. It became a real family brawl where three of us were cut. Two of us had to go to the hospital for stitches. It was incidents like this that caused all of us to hate our daddy. We tried to convince mother to divorce him. She refused and constantly defended him, telling us that despite his drinking, he was a good man. Each time that we could start to believe it, he would go on a drinking binge, come home, break furniture, throw objects and pester everybody in the house. We were always very afraid and ashamed to have our friends at the house.

Once, when I began dating, a guy came to see me. My daddy said to him, "Say, bro', I'll let you go out with my daughter if you bring me three pounds of crayfish and a quart of beer." (I ended up marrying this guy, and he always teased me that he got me
cheap—for three pounds of crayfish and a quart of beer.) As time went on and we got older, such incidents became funny to us. Whenever he would get drunk, we would just push him aside and ignore him just like he was a child. In fact, I always felt that we had only one real parent and that was my mother. I remember very vividly how she constantly told us throughout our childhood that she wanted us to go to school and get an education so that we, as females, wouldn't have to go through and put up with the things that she had to.

School Experiences

When I think about school, I think about how much I hated school, how hard it was and how long we had to stay in school. Whatever my memories of school are they always go back to remembering how much I hated school. I can not fully explain what I disliked most about school or even why I had such a great dislike for school.

In elementary school, I always felt like I was the poorest child in the class. My mother always sent us to school clean and neatly dressed. It just seemed as though everyone could get new clothes during the school year except me. I went to school day after day
only because my mother made me. I wasn't an A or B student, but I did enough not to get kept back in elementary school. I didn't have any favorite teachers. They all didn't seem to like me, and I didn't like them. They seemed to pick on me and treat me differently from some of the other children. I made up my mind that the teachers didn't like me because I couldn't wear pretty, new clothes. When I told my mother these things, she said that I should not worry and that the most important thing was that I was clean. Many times I tried to stay home from school by pretending to be ill, but my mother could always see through that. Remembering elementary school makes me remember that we had to walk through the housing project to get there, and I was very scared. Then, all during the school day, I was thinking about and dreading the long walk home through the projects. I would be scared the entire school day--week after week, month after month. I just wanted to stay home and play and be with my mother. I could always tell when it was near the end of school. Every year before school closed, the entire school would come dressed in their best clothes to go to the statue. This was the day that the school children
went to honor a man who had given the city many schools. We would go to his statue and place flowers around it. This stands out so clearly in my mind because we would also have to stand "tall and erect" (as the teacher would say) in the hot sun until all of the little white children had marched around the statue singing. As a child, it seemed like we stood there for hours and hours watching groups of white children honor the statue and leave. The white children who were waiting their turns were permitted to stand in the shade of the trees. These were horrible days for me. Shortly after the event, however, school always closed, and I was the happiest child in the world. I would play all day during the summer. I think that I was trying to make up the many days that I couldn't go out to play because I had not finished my homework.

I thought that I would like school a little better when I got to junior high school, but I didn't. Actually, I hated school even more (if that were possible). My first year in junior high school, seventh grade, was a disaster. I was kept back because I had missed too many days. I used to "shoot hooky" by going to my aunt's house. My aunt was so
different from my mother. She didn't care very much about school, and she would let her children stay home anytime that they wanted; they hardly ever went to school. One day I went to her house, played with my cousins all day and went home when I saw the other children walking home from school. When I realized how easy that was, I went there every school day for about a month.

One morning, for what I thought was no apparent reason, my mother said that she was going to school with me. When I asked her why, she said that the principal had called to find out why I had been absent for such a long period of time. (Needless to say, I was nearly scared to death.) We walked to school in silence. I wondered what my mother would do, but I had no idea that she would do what she did. When we got to the school's playground, my mother put me in the middle of the playground and beat me in front of all of the children. That was the most embarrassing thing that ever happened to me in my life, and I spent the entire time at that school trying to live that down. I was teased on a daily basis. I was always getting into fights with someone who made gestures and references to that incident. I really don't remember
learning anything after that at school. After going to summer school to make up the seventh grade units, I did just enough work to pass each class each year. My teachers didn't seem to care; they didn't try to change my attitude about school or even try to make me feel better about the incident. Sometimes when the students teased me, the teachers made no attempt to stop them. I was miserable throughout junior high school. The one thing that saved my junior high years from being a complete washout was that I got a job in the ninth grade.

I got an NYC (National Youth Corp) job through the YMCA. I worked at an after school center operated by the Catholic church in the neighborhood. My boss was Sis. Rosemary. At first, I thought that Sis. Rosemary was the meanest person in the world. She would always pinch my ear and pull my hair. Even though I was taught to respect nuns, I used to mumble remarks under my breath. Sis. Rosemary wanted things done a certain way, and she made us do things over if they weren't to her satisfaction. I seemed to have gotten into more trouble than any of the other workers; she was constantly threatening to fire me. She always nagged, and I always mumbled under my
breath. One day, she pulled my ear really hard and said, "Young lady, you're a 'mell of a hess.'" She called me that many times and never once did she tell me what it meant. Each time that I asked, she simply smiled. (Until this day, I still don't know what it means.) This went on for two years. During the third year, we became friends, and I did everything that I could so that I would be assured of keeping the job. I did keep the job. I worked after school from three to six and during the summers from eight to six.

Working in the center was the only thing that kept me going to school. I knew that my mother would never permit me to work if I stopped school.

I was very surprised at myself when I got my first check. I didn't spend it on clothes as I had dreamed of; instead, I took my little sisters to lunch. At this point in my life, clothes were no longer a problem. With so many girls in the house, we were able to swap clothes. That worked out quite well for all of us, and it kept us from begging mother for clothes. While I worked, I also gave my mother two dollars each week. I was proud of myself because I was going to senior high school as a working girl.
I was happier in senior high school than in any other school (although I still really didn't like school). In high school I developed a special circle of friends--about ten. I actually began to enjoy going to school. Then it happened--the incident that caused me to drop out of school. It was two weeks before graduation. I had purchased a class ring, and I bought a beautiful white graduation dress. One day the seniors were called to the auditorium to practice. The counselors called the names for line-up. All of the names were called but mine. Everybody started giggling; it was very funny to my friends, but it was embarrassing to me. I stood there alone thinking that there must have been an oversight. Finally, I had the courage to ask the counselor if she had overlooked my name. I still remember the pang of her words as she said, "Oh, no, Patricia, you won't be graduating. I'll talk to you in my office after practice." The counselor explained that I was lacking two units. She explained that when I went to summer school, I had made up only two of the four units I had failed. She suggested that I should come back and graduate with next year's class or go to summer school and get my diploma upon satisfactory completion. All that I
could do was cry and think that I was the only of my ten friends who didn't graduate. My mother was disappointed, but she did her best to comfort me. She said I should get a job this summer and go back and graduate next year.

Related Experiences

That summer, I got a job at a large supermarket (as a matter of fact, it was one of the chain stores of the supermarket where the candy bar incident happened). I had planned to work only that summer and return to school in September. Somehow, things didn't work out that way. I continued to work. I began helping my mother with bills, buying special treats for the younger children and for her. There was never any mention of going back to school. Soon, I was twenty-one. All of my friends were getting married. Here again, I felt like I was being left out so I got married.

My husband (the crayfish and beer guy) joined the Air Force, and I had to move out-of-state with him. That was a lonely time for me because I wasn't accustomed to living without plenty of people around me. I called my mother several times a day. During the summers, I sent for my little sisters to stay with
me. After two years, I had a child, and my loneliness wasn't so bad. I had another child two years later. We moved around quite a bit because of the military. My husband and I stayed married for twelve years without separation. During this marriage, at age twenty-eight, I received my GED.

When my husband and I separated, I moved back with my mother. I started working at various jobs. One day I took a really good look at my life, and I didn't like what I saw. I decided, then, that I wanted more out of life than what I had and where I was heading. I wanted more out of life for myself and for my children. I wanted to be a better role model for my children. I knew that the only way that all of those things could happen was for me to go to school. I was frightened; I felt dumb, and I felt silly, but I took a chance. Now, here I am, a college student; and for the first time in my life, I love school.
APPENDIX B

DANIEL KELLEY: "THE DOUBLE AGENT"

Family Experiences

I remember growing up always preferring to be with my father. My mother seemed never to understand me; there always seemed to be a gap between us. (Later, however, I found that she understood me better than I understood myself). As a young boy, I felt like I was my father's right hand man. I would travel everywhere with him. Whenever you saw "Ike," you saw me. I didn't call him "Ike" but everyone else did or "Brother Kelley" or "Bygazzi." I traveled all over the neighborhood delivering packages with my father; he delivered cases of things to bars, things to churches and packages to neighbors. My father also worked in the church as financial secretary. My father did other things around the church, for he and the pastor were good friends. I went to church more than most of my friends. The entire family went to church on Sunday, Monday, Thursday and Saturday. We were considered a good Christian family. We were Baptist.
I grew up in what I would describe as an upper-lower class area. The neighborhood was relatively quiet except when the father across the street would come home drunk. There would always be a big family brawl with lots of fighting, screaming, and cursing. This would last until late into the night. At first, the neighbors would get alarmed and try to stop the fighting, but after a while nobody seemed to even notice what was happening because it became a weekly occurrence, sometimes on Friday night and sometimes on Saturday night. We were basically good children and didn't get into trouble. Our leisure time was spent playing in our yard when we were younger and playing football in the streets as we got older. We had a modest house, but it was large enough to accommodate us—eight children and both my parents. None of us had our own rooms. At first I shared a bed with my older brother who had a bladder problem. I can vividly remember many nights when I was awakened by a warm, wet sensation moving over my legs and back. After a while my father knocked out the wall of the double house and enlarged our house. Now, I had my own bed, but I shared the room with my sister who
played the radio so loudly that I could never have any peace and quiet.

Since I was the baby of the family, I experienced a variety of treatments from my siblings. My oldest brother and I had a close relationship. Everyone credits our closeness to the fact that he named me. My oldest sister always took me places and treated me like I was her little boy. Everyone says that is why she became pregnant as a young teenager—to have her own child to play with. My second brother, Arthur, taught me the value of money. I worked for Arthur—cleaning his room. He was a "wheeler and dealer." He made me do much more than he was paying me for. My brother, Marvin, was the rough one. He was always saying that he was going to make me a man. He used me as a constant punching bag. Most of my childhood cuts and bruises came from him. Mona, Marvin's twin, used to take me wherever I wanted to go if I paid her. Then, there was my brother Rodney. We were really buddies. He was more responsible for taking care of me than any of the others. Having that many brothers and sisters meant that I was in a continuous maze trying to please, obey or outsmart one or the other.
My mother did the chastising in the family. When she called us in a certain tone, we knew that we were about to get a beating. We always tried to counteract the beating by beginning to cry as soon as we thought we had done something wrong. Sometimes we tried to escape by running. She never ran after us; instead, she would send the brothers and sisters after the guilty one. There was no escaping seven brothers/sisters who gained pleasure at each other's performance during the beating. Some of the performances were so spectacular that they produced various nicknames for us. I earned the nickname "Firestar" when I disobeyed my mother by locking myself in the bathroom in a hot tub of water with the heater at full blast. To this date, I don't know how I got out of the bathroom, but I did. When I did, I passed out in the nude. After my mother knew that I was alright, she whipped me for disobeying her. My mother would also make us get our own whipping switch from a tree in the backyard. Many times my brothers and sisters volunteered to get the switch for my whippings. We would get whippings for such things as staying out too late, not taking baths, not doing what
you were told to do and missing or sneaking out of church.

Sometimes, I would spend the summer in the country on my grandfather's farm in Mississippi or in Virginia with my grandmother. I preferred going to Mississippi because there were so many interesting things to do on the farm. I rode horses, tended animals and plucked corn. There I was the center of attention. On the contrary, staying in Virginia was boring and just like being at home. Everybody there left for work early, leaving me at home alone, and came home late. When they came home, I was like a waiter for all of the grown-ups. I was constantly serving them. There I was giving them all of the attention, and I got none. I didn't like going to Virginia, and my mother stopped sending me to Mississippi after my father died.

I was ten years old when my father died. I cried only when I was told about it. At the funeral, I didn't cry because I knew that he was a good man and that he was going to heaven. I also knew that he would not want me to be sad and that he would want me to go on with my life and be strong like his "little
man." My childhood seemed to end with the death of my father.

My mother became head of the household, but she did not work. I vowed to myself and promised my father through a secret prayer that I would not be a burden on her and that I would help her all that I could. However, my mother seemed to be making me into a mama's boy. She would not let me play with the older boys, and she kept me close to her. I was always getting beat up and other children were always taking things from me. The day that I decided to take control of my life was the day that I named myself a double agent. It happened after a boy from another neighborhood beat me up and took ten dollars from me. I was really angry because I had saved that money after working endlessly for my brother and doing odd jobs in the neighborhood. I knew that if I went to my mother, she would say not to worry about it and that the Lord would take care of that person. I knew also that if I went to the police, they would not believe that I had ten dollars or, perhaps, would not even listen to my story. I decided, then, that I would get my money back so I started stealing. I didn't
perceive it as stealing. I felt like I was getting back what so many people had been taking from me.

I got to be really good at stealing. Other children used to get me to steal things for them. My brothers and sisters knew what I was doing, but my mother didn't. I gained the respect and admiration of all of the children in the neighborhood. This was, of course, among the children. The adults thought I was the ideal child. I had been identified as a smart kid in school and as a good church member. The adults continuously praised me for my good church attendance and for always having my Bible. They even predicted that I was going to be a preacher. This was my objective: to paint a picture of me as a perfect child so that if I ever got caught, no one would believe it. Everyone would support me and back up any story I created.

At home, in church and in school everybody always told me how handsome and how smart I was—everybody, that is, except my mother. She would tell me that I was conceited, that I tried to play God and that I was full of B.S. She was especially hard on me and upset with me when she would catch me in the mirror admiring myself. Still, I never thought of
myself as any of those things. I thought of myself as a con-artist.

After a few years, my conscience began to bother me; I felt like a hypocrite. I began to dislike myself for deceiving people, but I continued. Then, one day, I got really greedy. I stuffed so much candy in my pockets that they began to bulge. As I attempted to pay for the candy that I was buying (ten cents worth) I noticed the cashier looking strangely at me and my pockets. I became frightened and prayed and promised that if I didn't get caught, I would never steal again. (I do believe that if I had not been Brother Kelley's little boy, the cashier would have stopped me.) On that day, I decided that it really wasn't such a good idea to be a double agent. I decided that I would concentrate on being a good student. I asked God to help me to resist the temptation of stealing.

School Experiences

Elementary school is where I met my two best friends. It is also the place where I first saw an adult get the full, fearful attention of every child within the sound of her voice. This person was the principal of the school. The principal of the school
was white, and the majority of the students were black. Everyone in the school respected the principal. For most of us students, it was more fear than respect. This principal was like the drill sergeants we would see on TV. Every morning after reciting the pledge of allegiance, we lined up in rows according to classes. The principal marched down each row, inspecting us and looking at each of us without changing her expression. We were always so afraid of her. I even tried not to breathe when she passed me. While this inspection was going on, there was absolute silence. We left the auditorium and entered our classroom in complete silence. This morning routine was very frightening to all of us. We nicknamed the principal "Evil Eyes" because she seemed to be trying to put a spell or a curse on us with her eyes. If by chance, somebody dared to talk or move, he/she would have to go to detention. Once the principal heard some noises behind her. When she couldn't determine who had made the noises and nobody would tell her, she kept the entire school in detention for a week.

I was identified as a very bright, quiet student. However, I was really a sneaky, talkative, mischievous kid. This was a second double agent identity that I
created for myself. For example, I was usually the instigator in some "get rid of the teacher" schemes, especially when the teacher was white. I remember how we did terrible things to a white art teacher (female)--from tacks in the chair, removing chalk from the board, not doing homework to the entire class pretending to become sick from the lunch. Nevertheless, whatever we did, that teacher did not give up, did not report us to the principal and kept coming to class fully prepared. We finally realized that some white teachers did care about black children. At the end of the year, every student in the class hugged and kissed the teacher. Some of the girls even cried on the last day of school.

Looking at the other side of the issue, I can also remember an incident with one of the black teachers. This was really a nice teacher. She, too, never fussed, never sent us to the office and was always prepared and pleasant, but she gave us lots of homework, much more than any of the other teachers. Some teachers didn't even give us homework. We decided (rather I announced to the class at recess) that we would stop doing Mrs. Jones' homework. After a few missed assignments, Mrs. Jones confronted the
class asking, but not really expecting an answer, why we didn't do her homework anymore. She answered her own question by saying that it was because she was black. She went on to say many things that none of us could appreciate until later in our lives. I do remember that she talked about struggle, helping to prepare us to get good jobs, and about helping us learn to write and speak properly. (She was our English teacher.) I was really sorry and ashamed that I had organized this against her. Still, no one told that it was my idea. As I reflect, I think that she must have suspected that I was the organizer. From that point on, whenever she left the room, she left me in charge. I didn't like doing that because it meant being a "rat." I never told on anyone.

Elementary school is also where I saw my first incident of cheating. Since I was a good student, I was always prepared for a test; I was naive enough to think that everyone else was. We were taking a test, and I saw a boy next to me pull out a little note from his pocket. I thought it was a note from his mother to the teacher. Instead, he started reading it and then writing things on his paper. I finally realized what was happening, and I was shocked. I thought that
was very unfair of him to get right answers by copying while I had to study. Suddenly, I realized that I was no better than he when I was stealing. This was the beginning of a consciousness-raising for me.

In elementary school, I became determined to do better than the girls. In every class, it was always a girl who was the top student. I usually came in second. Finally, at the sixth grade promotional exercises, a boy received the top honor, and I was that boy. I was very proud, and I felt like it was a victory for every boy in the school.

Deciding where to go for high school caused a conflict between my mother and me. I wanted to go to the district school with my friends; she wanted me to go to the magnet school. She won, and I went to the magnet middle school disappointed, angry and afraid. During my eighth grade year, I was suspended for reading a Playboy magazine in class. The teacher (white/male) called on me and wanted to know what was more interesting than the lesson. He took the magazine and escorted three of us to the office. The teacher talked to the assistant principal (white/male) about ten minutes and then told us that we were being suspended. Our parents were called to take us home.
This school had a majority of white students, a few black teachers and one black counselor out of three. The students were always cordial to one another during school hours. After school there were always fights with blacks against white.

For the most part, the teachers were okay. Most of them didn't seem to go out of their way to help us. However, I remember on white teacher (male) who really seemed to relate to us. We thought that he should have been black. He didn't conduct himself like he was playing a role on TV as so many of the other white teachers did. He was really down to earth, made jokes and tried to help us learn by using little anecdotes. I remember an incident when the history lesson was focused on the slavery period. We were all feeling hostile and upset about the treatment of slaves. This teacher said, "I'm okay! Don't get angry with me. I understand though because I know that all of us honkies look alike to you." The class did not join him in laughing at his attempt to make us feel better. This same teacher would also let us push the chairs against the wall and perform concerts for him. He would pick a group of fellows and ask us to sing some hits from the Temptations, his favorite group. As I
think about that teacher now, I realize that he was more a hindrance than a help to us. I really was glad to leave that school because I really couldn't tell who was genuine and who was not.

The summer before going to high school, I entered a pre-college program on this campus. It gave me a jump start for high school. I had decided to attend the predominantly black college prep high school. While at that school, I found myself going into a depression that I could never explain. During my first year, ninth grade, I was very competitive and had a very high average. At the same time, my brothers and sisters were doing poorly in school. I began getting discouraged with school because there seemed to have been too much emphasis on making As and Bs. I felt that the teachers didn't care or teach us about how to survive once we left the school each day. It was getting harder for us, my brothers and sisters, to survive because my mother had been leaving us periodically to go to Virginia to care for her mother. This left us children in charge of all of the household responsibilities. She left about three times during my sophomore and junior years.
The responsibilities seemed awesome, and I personally felt that I had to make sure that everything was under control. I seemed to be able to think things out more logically than any of the others. My depression was getting deeper, and the school work was getting boring. I decided that I would not pressure myself with school work. I thought about dropping out. Instead, I decided that I would take an in-school vacation and do just enough to maintain my B average. Once again, I became a double agent because I put on a happy face when I was actually very unhappy inside.

I joined the band. I remember that I had no rhythm and was always out of step. I remember that I was beat-up as a part of the initiation ritual. (Of course, the band director knew nothing of this secret ceremony.) What I remember most about band is that we practiced so long every day in the scorching sun that I got black, black, black. Meanwhile, as I continued in the pre-college program, I developed the kinds of genuine friendships like I had developed in elementary school. The program teachers were very helpful and very sensitive to our special needs and problems. I enjoyed my years at pre-college program. Each summer
during the awards ceremony I won many honors and awards for academic achievement. I actually preferred to be in the campus program rather than school. Nevertheless, I went to school regularly.

At my school, I found myself in trouble with teachers. I became the class clown or I created academic controversy. For example, I wrote an essay that my teacher (white/female) said was inappropriate for a school assignment. The essay described a telephone coming to life relating, with philosophical comments, the conversation between a male and a female teenager who were reminiscing about the pleasure they derived from their latest sexual encounter. In another instance, I had a teacher (white/female) who assigned a term paper without giving what I thought was adequate directions or guidance. As I began to turn in various stages of the paper, I would get unnecessary, constant criticism and a paper filled with red marks. I swore that the teacher was prejudice because I knew that I was right. Finally, I did get my outline approved, and I made the usual B on the paper. Later in this teacher's class, I wrote an essay for competition. I wrote on the nature of prejudice. When I didn't win, I was angry, and I
blamed my not winning on the judges' inability to accept the subject matter. For some reason, I was always angry inside. I used to read about suicide but I never considered it because I knew everyone would be shocked. Everyone would wonder why because I appeared to be such a well-adjusted student. About this time, my best friend moved away from his family. I wanted to do the same but I felt that I was needed too much.

Strangely enough, it was also about this time that my mother seemed to be interested in me. She began to ask me about my grades, and she actually sat and talked with me sometimes. I began to realize that my mother really did care for me and that what I thought was an uncaring attitude was my immaturity. I was silly enough to think that when my father died my mother should have accepted me as a man. I purposely tried not to take my problems to her, but I thought that she should have brought her problems to me. I thought that I should have been treated more like a man than a little boy. I was in daily pain and sorrow because I felt that my mother did not care about me. I either found mother figures among the females I encountered or I lashed out at them.
My mother must have sensed what I was feeling because she didn't leave us after my junior year. During the senior year, my grades improved, and I graduated with honors. My mother attended the graduation. At the same time, I was elected as Mr. pre-college, and I received the highest academic honor. My mother did not attend that activity but my sister did. Nevertheless, she told me how proud she was, and I left high school feeling very good about myself.

Related Experiences

I thought about going to college, but I decided that I was smart enough and didn't need college to succeed. After all, throughout school everyone had always told me how very smart I was. I got a variety of jobs--parking cars, grocery stock boy and cashier, fast food worker and a number of other menial positions. At first, the money was good, but most times the work was hard, unappreciated and mentally unstimulating. Some of the bosses were prejudiced; some were just plain mean; some were women; and some were just plain ignorant. Sometimes my white bosses would be just as young or younger than I. It really angered me to be bossed by somebody like that. Once
when one of those young white bosses purposely smudged a window that I had just hand-washed and said that it wasn't clean enough, I knew that I wasn't so smart after all. I knew then that if had been smart I would have gone directly to college. I realized on that day that if I wanted more out of life, I needed to have a degree hanging on my wall.

I am now enrolled in school during the day while I work at night. I am majoring in business finance so that I can make lots of money. I know that I can achieve, and I am determined to let nothing stop me from getting my degree.
APPENDIX C

SHIRLEY FRANKLIN: "A GENETIC WARRIOR"

Family Experiences

The unrelenting, throbbing pain that I experience during a full blown sickle cell crisis where every bone in my body--my elbow, wrist, shoulder, chest, back, hip, knee and ankle--hurt at the same time makes me wonder why I was born with this disease. The pain is so excruciating that all I can do is scream. The pain never slackens. The medicine knocks me out for about twenty minutes, and I wake up in the same intense pain. This kind of pain lasts for two or three days. When I was younger, I could not bear the pain. Now that I am older, I bear it without so much physical and verbal performance.

I was born in Port Arthur, Texas. My parents divorced when I was two and a half years old. After that, my mother had a baby boy. The three of us lived together several years before my mother's boyfriend came to live with us. Although he and my mother never married, he became a good stepfather to my brother and me. They had two children together which made me have another brother and one sister. After he came to live
with us, we moved from Texas to a small town in Louisiana where I spent my early childhood.

We had a small house with two bedrooms, kitchen and bath. The town had one red light and was divided by a railroad track. Blacks stayed on one side of the track and whites stayed on the other side. There was a grocery store that was positioned between both sections. The blacks stayed to themselves, and the whites stayed to themselves. There was very little racial problems in the town. We all went to school together but really didn't mix otherwise.

When I think about childhood, I think mainly about being sick much of the time. I think I have tried to block out most of those memories of being sick. However, some are still very clear. I remember walking along the railroad track going to the grocery feeling a bit tired and weak. My brother says that I started moaning and slouched down on the tracks. One of the larger boys in town picked me up and carried me home. My stepdaddy took me to the hospital. I can remember screaming and yelling all the way there. I remember also how I would plug my ears with cotton when my little sister went into a screaming rage during the times she was experiencing a sickle cell
crisis. On one of those times, she didn't come home again. She left our house cradled in my stepdaddy's arms. She was screaming and wrenching more than I had ever seen her do before. I felt so sorry for her because she was so young and small and because I knew exactly how she was feeling. The family visited her everyday. I would always stay with her until dinner so that I might feed her. My sister didn't seem to get better within two or three days as she normally did. She developed pneumonia. She was connected to lots of bags, tubes and machines. I remember leaving the hospital one night feeling very sad because I could not get her to eat her jello and because she would not talk to me.

Later that night, my mother and stepdaddy came home. My mother was shaking and crying; my stepdaddy was trying to console her. They told us that my little sister had died. The primary cause of death was sickle cell; the secondary cause was cardiac arrest. I had a very hard time accepting her death. For at least a year, I pretended that my sister had gone to California to be a model. Whenever, I went into a store, I would look at the magazines, hoping to see her on the cover of one of them. I refused to let
anyone tell me that she was never coming back. No one could convince me that she wasn't a model. We had talked about her being a model because she was so pretty. She had long blondish hair. We looked completely different because we had different daddies. (Actually, I am the only legitimate child that my mother has.) After my sister's death, my mother began treating me differently. Things changed drastically; she became very protective of me. She used to try and do things with us even though she worked quite a bit. She worked at a nursing home during the day and did private duty sitting at night. She saved so that we could move to another house. She bought a trailer home that was very large—three bedrooms, two baths and the usual kitchen and living room.

My summers in my hometown were spent mainly at my cousin's house. We would play spin the bottle and sit around and talk about "girlie" stuff. This was our evening routine until I came home really late one night. My mother was terrified, thinking that something had happened to me. She beat me that night and forbade me to go back to my cousin's anymore. She always thought that my cousins were too "womanish." After that, my evenings were spent playing cards for
money on the front porch and playing basic childhood games like jumprope, marbles and jacks. The little girl next door had a pink and white bicycle that she would let us ride sometimes. (Having a bike was a real luxury.) The summers I remember most and the ones I enjoyed most were the ones that I spent with my father.

My father continued to live in Texas after we left. I visited him regularly, sometimes on holidays (except Christmas) but mainly in the summertime. My father always did take care of me. He didn't pay child support, but he always sent me clothes and was responsible for my health insurance. Within a period of time, my father had remarried twice. I knew the first wife vaguely. I tried to warm-up to her, but she didn't want to be bothered. She even kept their daughter, my stepsister, from developing a friendship with me. My father's third wife, however, was very nice. We became close friends. I enjoyed visiting and living with them. They had a very nice house where I had my own room and my own things. The house was like a palace to me; there were three bedrooms, living room, a den, two bathrooms and a kitchen where the stove sat in the middle of the floor. It was
enclosed by a brown picket fence, and there was a pear tree in the backyard. Near the edge of the yard was a garage with two small apartments above it. They also had a dog that I liked very much.

I remember becoming ill during one of my visits. I remember feeling cold that entire day. My daddy couldn't understand that because it was really hot outside and very comfortable inside. Before the day was over, I began running a temperature. My stepmother did everything that she could, but she was unable to break the fever. My daddy and stepmother were very nervous and frightened. They had never experienced my having a crisis. They carried me to the hospital. The doctors tried to break my fever. After several unsuccessful attempts, they decided to send me home in a helicopter. Then the fever broke. When I was released from the hospital, my daddy sent me home within a few days. This was unusual because I usually stayed the entire summer. I think that he and my stepmother were more frightened than anything.

During one of my summers with them, my stepmother lost her baby. I was very disappointed, and my stepmother was devastated. (I later learned that my stepmother had previously lost a baby and her husband
in an automobile accident.) After losing the baby, she and my daddy seemed not to get along anymore. They were constantly arguing and fighting. Eventually they separated and divorced. Although the separation was probably well on its way, for a long time, I felt responsible for the break-up. My guilt stemmed from my telling my stepmother, very innocently, about a man and lady who had ridden with my daddy to take me home after one of my visits with them. My daddy had told me that the woman was his male friend's cousin. During one of our frequent talks, I chatted on with my stepmother about his woman, describing her in detail and repeating bits and pieces of the conversation. Shortly, after that, I would hear my stepmother crying and yelling at my father. Sometimes I would hear this lady's name within the fuss. I really didn't understand what was going on, but I felt in my heart that I had caused this problem between them. My grandmother and my aunt were upset and accused my stepmother of "picking me" for information. To this day, no one ever believed that I volunteered all of that information to my stepmother. I told her freely and innocently within what I thought was harmless conversation. After the separation, my daddy lived
with that woman for five years. I never went to visit
them. Whenever I went to Texas after that I visited
with my grandmother and my aunt.

School Experiences

The thing I remember most about school is how
much fighting I used to do. I found myself always
fighting because of my illness. If I were not
fighting my schoolmates for teasing me, I was fighting
a sickle cell attack. I had a fight in kindergarten
with a girl who made a remark that I don't even
remember today. After the fight, we became best
friends. My fights, however, were mostly with boys.

I once had a terrible fight with a boy who called
my daddy a "bastard." That angered me to no end
because I loved my daddy so much. I was always very
defensive about my daddy--first because he didn't live
with us and secondly because I knew that he was good
to me. This was really a nasty fight. Both of us
were scratched, and our clothes were torn. The
teacher punished us by not letting us go to the
bookmobile. (Going to the bookmobile was a treat for
us in this little town.)

The cause of many of my fights was my physical
appearance. I was very, very skinny; I had an
exceptionally large protruding stomach, and I was "sway-backed" (as my grandmother called it). While in fifth grade, I had a fight with a boy who told all of the children that I was pregnant. We fought after school. (Most times, I didn't win the fight but I would never give up.) I went home crying and told my mother what had happened. My mother explained that I was not pregnant and explained how girls get pregnant. (At that moment, I knew that I was going to fight that boy again for thinking that I was doing that.) My mother also explained why my stomach was large. She tried to explain why I had this disease. She explained that she was a carrier of a disease called sickle cell anemia. She said that it meant that my blood didn't always go through my body like everyone else's. I cried and pretended that it was not true. I was very ashamed of having sickle cell anemia. I wanted it to be a secret. The next day, I tried to make the boy understand that I wasn't pregnant and that I had a special sickness. When he laughed at me, I started fighting him again. We were punished at recess this time.

While in sixth grade, a boy twice my size asked why was I always in the hospital. I told him that I
was sick. He began teasing and called me "sick-ee." I fought with him until the teachers pulled us apart. Also while in sixth grade, I decided to share my secret with one of the girls. Before the end of the day, she had told everyone. They were whispering and teasing me. Needless to say, I had several fights that week. Then, the children started avoiding me and running away from me. I jumped on one boy who held his nose at me. After that incident, the principal put me out of school. He called my mother and said that he was sending me home because the children were afraid that they could contact sickle cell anemia. After comforting me, my mother went to the school and "told him off" for being so ignorant. There were about three months left in the school year, but my mother took me out of that school. She sent me to my grandmother's where I finished the sixth grade. My grandmother lived on a plantation where she worked cleaning house. She was raising my little cousin so I had a playmate. Each day we had chores—picking berries, feeding the chickens and sweeping the yard. I really didn't like it there because there were no comforts like home such as air conditioning. I was happy when my mother and stepdaddy took me home.
I spent my seventh and eighth grade years at the high school in the town. The teachers seemed to treat me much better than my elementary school teachers. With some of the teachers, I used to get special favors. For example, I made the basketball team and the cheerleading squad. I wasn't very good at either. I had very little athletic skills, and I couldn't dance well or keep a simple rhythm. Regardless of the reasons for my selection, I enjoyed being given special treatment.

I was trying really hard to enjoy school, but I couldn't seem to. The teasing continued and the fighting got worse. I had developed a really nasty personality by this time. Meanwhile, my mother and stepfather talked about leaving our hometown. They always seemed to talk about it more seriously each time that I got in trouble at school. It finally did happen. I am not sure if they left because of me or if they left for other reasons. Nevertheless, we moved to the big city.

I began my ninth grade year at a large high school in the city. It was scary to me at first. When I began making friends, my adjustment was easier. I decided that I would take another approach to
dealing with my illness. I started talking about it and really tried to make my friends understand. They pretended to be interested, but they really weren't until after I started getting sick so regularly. I remember being sick quite a bit during high school. I think that the only thing that saved me from not being kept back in any grade was that I was a fairly good student. Despite all of the fighting, I always had good grades. I didn't have nearly as many fights in the city as I did back home. I remember having a fight because one guy told some of my friends that another guy was feeling on my legs. I had another fight at a dance, and I got put out of many of my classes and was sent to the office.

There was one thing that seemed really different in the city school. When I was put out or sent to the office, no one seemed to care. The principal would simply tell me to sit in the office until my next class. Another thing that was different was the teachers. They seemed to be more willing to talk about interesting things than my other teachers. I remember on teacher (white/male) talked to us about birth control. He explained to us about one "sure fire" way of not getting pregnant. He told us to go
to any drugstore and buy an aspirin. (Naturally, we were all sitting attentively waiting to hear this great message.) He told us to place that little white pill between our legs and hold them together as tightly as possible. The entire class roared with laughter.

I remember also how my gym teacher (black/male) let me get away with a lot. He didn't make me dress out as much as the other students did, and he didn't make me do some of the activities that the other did. Of course, this didn't set well with my classmates. Many resented me for it, but I enjoyed it and took full advantage of the situation. Another thing I remember very clearly is the group of girlfriends I first found shortly after attending the school. These were some really interesting girls who my mother called "fast." I remember trying to fit in by doing what they did. The girls started skipping out of school to go and meet their boyfriends. I skipped out of school, but I didn't have a boyfriend to meet. One day, they decided to skip out to go to the clinic to buy birth control pills. I went with them eager to get the pills. What they didn't know was that my reasons for wanting the pills were quite different
from theirs. I wanted the pills because I had heard that birth control pills made women put on weight, made their hips big and made their busts nice and large. After getting them, I didn't take them for a month. Then, I took them for about three months and stopped because I didn't notice any change in my body parts. Also, I was relieved to throw them away because I was so afraid that my mother would find them. Basically, I enjoyed going to school there, but I experienced many extended periods of hospitalization. I always made-up my work and progressed through the years without failing a class. The violent fights had changed to very hard shoves in the hallways or quick scuffles in the locker room.

During my twelfth grade year, I enrolled in the D.E. (Distributive Education) program where I got a job with the Manpower Program. My teacher explained my health condition to the supervisor and asked that I not be given any heavy or strenuous work. I worked throughout my senior year filing papers and running errands. I enjoyed working, and I especially enjoyed having so much money for myself. After graduation, I continued to work for the program. I thought about
going to college, but I was terrified to go to another school for fear of being teased and misunderstood.

Related Experiences

After gaining what I thought was some worldly experiences, I was able to get several other clerical jobs. I moved from one job to the next; each time that there were a few dollars more in the salary I changed positions. What I remember most about all of those jobs is that I wasn't teased anymore. In fact, I was treated just the opposite; people understood (or pretended that they did); they felt sorry and babied me quite a lot. They even came to visit me whenever I was hospitalized. It was really a good feeling not to be teased about my illness. I know that this is what caused me to continue to work. One day, a lady who I had developed a close friendship with sat me down and said, (I remember the words almost exactly) "You are too smart to be working in this kind of job all of your life. Don't be like me, baby. Go on to college and make something of yourself." My friends words lingered with me for a long time. Then, I did it. Two years ago, at age 27, I enrolled in college. I have found a lot of friends and some really good and caring teachers. I have had several sickle cell
crises since starting college, but I am not going to stop. Each time that I think about how I wasn't supposed to live this long, I get more determined to succeed. I take good care of myself; I have adopted the motto of living one day at a time, and I want to be the first person ever in my family to finish college.
I consider my family an average family. My mother works as a teacher's aide in a public elementary school, and my father drives the bus for the school system. My mother was always preaching to us about the importance of going to school. Her speech was so regular and routine that we would sometimes recite it along with her, or fill in the blanks, or make body gestures to illustrate her message.

I always felt that I didn't fit anywhere in the family. I had no identity. I can still hear my mother say, time after time, "This is my oldest son, John. That's my youngest son, Kevin. This is my baby and only daughter Carolyn, and that's Richard." I didn't have a title. I always felt like an added burden. As a result, I didn't get along well with my brothers or my sister. My oldest brother always bossed us around; my youngest brother always had his way, and my sister was pampered and got too much attention. I was just there. I always felt like that.
even though my mother made sure that we did things
together. I remember three of us always participating
in a summer camp at the university. This was the one
time that I felt like a part of their family. This
was the time that I could really see that "blood is
thicker than water." This happened whenever we had to
come to one another's aid during an argument, fight or
problem with another child at the camp.

I remember also that my mother always took us on
vacations. My father never went with us; he said that
he needed to stay home to work to pay for the trip.
The vacations were nothing elaborate, within driving
distance. Whenever we went, my mother made sure that
we took a day or two to do "something educational" (as
she would say) like visiting a museum, the zoo, the
area library or simply riding through a college
campus. My mother did everything that she could to
make us understand the need for a good education.

School Experiences

Oh, how I remember elementary school! I hated to
take afternoon naps. The teachers and I always had a
tremendous struggle when nap time came. I always
seemed to be the only one not sleepy, I would pretend
to sleep and as soon as the teacher turned her back, I
would sneak around the mats and bother the other children. I also remember the daily routine of going to Catholic school. Each morning, we gathered in the cafeteria. We recited the prayer, the pledge of allegiance, and we sang "God Bless America."

I never did like this school, but my mother insisted on my going. I wanted to go to the public school where my brother and all my friends went. I constantly did little things to annoy the class and aggravate the teacher. I think that the teachers only tolerated me because they were nuns; they were exceptionally patient, soft-spoken and kind. They called me a regular little pest. Throughout elementary school, I constantly nagged my mother to let me go to the public school.

For seventh grade, my mother agreed to let me attend school with my brother and the neighborhood children. I was very excited to go to the public school. I knew that I would have more fun at this school than I had had at my elementary school. My brother used to tell me about all of the fun things they could do at that school. I remember having a fight the first day at that school. My mother was very upset, but she said that she would give me a
chance at the school. The fights continued. I don't really remember the cause of the fights. I just know that I had to fight, and I liked to fight. This school had a good mixture of black and white students. There was a white principal who nobody liked. The teachers were about half black and white.

I remember that most of the teachers seemed to treat black and white students differently. In most classrooms, there was always a definite seating arrangement with the white students in the best areas for seeing the blackboard or getting the breeze from the hallway or the windows. The black students were punished more often than white students for some very minor incidents. When there were arguments and fights between the blacks and whites, the white students always seemed to get the benefits of explaining their side. I clearly remember one incident when the teacher was upset, and he pinpointed a group of us boys (black) as being responsible for creating the problem. He said that we would all get zeros for the day. We (the group) were very angry because we felt wrongly accused. That afternoon, just before school dismissed, we sneaked into the teacher's class and stole his roll book. We threw the book out of the
window into the bushes where we picked it up on our way home. Strangely enough, the teacher never mentioned the missing roll book. I stayed at this school through my eighth grade year.

For ninth grade, my mother insisted that I go back to the Catholic school. She said that my behavior was too upsetting. She said that I needed the discipline of the Catholic school. I had no choice so I was back at the Catholic school for ninth grade. I hated it. Actually, school was a turn off for me whether I was in the Catholic school or the public school. Even though I didn't like either school, I preferred going to public school because I had more fun, and I didn't have to do much homework. When I was in the Catholic schools, I always felt like I couldn't be myself. I had to act a way that was different from the way that I act normally, even different from the way I acted at home. It was like I had to act white for the teachers who were mostly nuns, and it seemed as though I had to act white in order for my classmates to like and befriend me. It was just the opposite in the public school. I felt comfortable and among friends in school. All of my relatives, friends and neighbors were in school with
me, and I felt like I belonged there. I never felt isolated or unwanted.

Although I did fairly well in my school work, I did nothing else at school. The principal and the coach wanted me to play football because of my size, but I refused. I was miserable at that school, and I did everything to prove it. For example, once a teacher gave a test and asked that we should check them in red pen. Since I didn't have the red pen that we were always expected to have, I asked the girl next to me to check the paper. She agreed, but the teacher became angry. We had an exchange of words in the class which included my remark, "We shouldn't be doing your job anyway." The teacher immediately sent me to the office, and the principal put me out of school. I was not allowed to return until my parent came. This was the only time that my father came rather than my mother.

After completing ninth grade, my mother again allowed me to return to the public school. I was happy to be with my brother and my friends. I tried out for the football team. I made it but had to sit out for the first year. I had a very uneventful time at school. I liked being with my people, but I found
that I didn't have to put out much academic effort. Much of the lessons we were having were easy to me because I had already had them in the Catholic school, especially in English, math and science. Therefore, I made really good grades. Because my grades were good, my mother allowed me to get a job. I enjoyed working and handling money. After I graduated from high school, I continued to work, despite my mother's insistence that I go to college.

Related Experiences

After working for a few years, I got married at age twenty-two. The marriage didn't work out, and we separated after three years. At age twenty-six, I decided to go back to school. I discussed my plans with no one. However, when I received my letter of acceptance from the university, I shared it with my mother. She was ecstatic, and so was I. She and I are both anxiously awaiting the day that I graduate, the first in the family.
VITA

Neari Francois Warner, born July 20, 1945 in New Orleans, Louisiana, is the third of eight children. She was educated in the New Orleans Public Schools and was a 1963 honor graduate of Walter Louis Cohen Senior High School.

She holds degrees in English Education, having earned the B.S. at Grambling State University as magna cum laude (1967) and the M.A. at Atlanta University (1968).

She began her professional career as a member of the English Department of Southern University at New Orleans and has since taught in the Division of Freshman Studies and in the Evening and Weekend College. In 1976, she became director of the University's Upward Bound Program and served in that capacity until 1989 when she was appointed to her present position as Interim Dean of the Junior Division.

She has received numerous honors and awards including Outstanding Teacher (1973; 1975), Campus Unsung Hero (1989), and selected as one of twelve educators from across the nation as Outstanding
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She is the mother of one son.
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Major Field: Education

Title of Dissertation: From Their Perspective: Issues of Schooling and Family Culture of Four African American First Generation College Students

Approved:

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Major Professor and Chairman

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Date of Examination:
April 10, 1992