

**THE DIALECTICS OF THE BLUEBERRY MUFFIN: TOWARDS A  
PHILOSOPHY OF LOVE**

by

Nosakhere Abubaker Jumanne Griffin-EL

Lincoln University, History, 2005

University of Pittsburgh, School Leadership, 2008

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
School of Education in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2011

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

This dissertation was presented

by

Nosakhere Abubaker Jumanne Griffin-EL

It was defended on

June 15, 2011

and approved by

Jerome Taylor, Associate Professor, Africana Studies

Sean Hughes, Associate Professor, Administrative and Policy Studies

Stewart Sutin, Clinical Professor, Administrative and Policy Studies

James Jacob, Assistant Professor, Administrative and Policy Studies

Dissertation Advisor: Michael Gunzenhauser, Associate Professor, Administrative and

Policy Studies

Copyright © by Nosakhere Abubaker Jumanne Griffin-EL

2011

**THE DIALECTICS OF THE BLUEBERRY MUFFIN: TOWARDS A PHILOSOPHY  
OF LOVE**

Nosakhere Griffin-EL M.Ed., Ph.D.

University of Pittsburgh, 2011

This dissertation study was a process where I purposed my life in the personal, educational, and societal contexts within three periods in my life: high school, college, and graduate school. My conceptual framework draws on the writings of Paulo Freire and Martin Luther King Jr., bell hooks, Cornel West, and Maulana Karenga because their works seek to understand contradictions that limit human beings from living up to their human potential. Although their works are similar, they have different foci. Freire and Karenga's writings are driven by a humanist desire to human transformation, while King's, hooks', and West's works are rooted in a theological foundation for individual transformation. All of the scholars embed love within their writings, which they declare is essential to individuals working to assist in the development of a better world.

For my methodology, I use autobiographical writing, which allowed me to reflect on my personal, educational, and societal contradiction within three periods in my life: high school, college, and graduate school. Upon reflecting on my life, I analyzed it using my conceptual framework. The result of my dissertation project was the creation of a philosophical framework I call Transconceptualization. This framework seeks to understand the self in the past and present in order to move beyond contradictions to live a new life in the present and future.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>PREFACE.....</b>	<b>XV</b>
<b>1.0 INTRODUCTION: DIALECTICS OF THE BLUEBERRY MUFFIN.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1.1.1 Thesis.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1.1.2 Research Questions:.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1.1.3 Methodology.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1.1.4 Theoretical Perspective.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.1.5 Significance.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.2 STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2.0 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2.1 SOCIETAL.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2.1.1 Dehumanization.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>2.1.2 Humanization.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>2.2 THE PERSONAL.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>2.2.1 Fatalism.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>2.2.2 Prescribed-Praxis.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>2.3 HOPE.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>2.3.1 Praxis.....</b>	<b>17</b>

2.3.2	Speech.....	18
2.4	EDUCATIONAL .....	20
2.4.1	Banking Method of Education.....	21
2.4.2	Problem Posing Education.....	23
2.5	CONNECTING THE THEMES .....	25
2.5.1	Dehumanization and Humanization .....	25
2.5.2	Fatalism and Hope .....	26
2.5.3	Prescribed-Praxis and Praxis.....	27
2.5.4	Banking Method of Education or Problem Posing Education.....	27
2.6	SYNTHESIS.....	28
2.7	LOVE AS THE CENTER OF LIFE.....	31
2.7.1	Love .....	32
2.7.2	Defining Love .....	32
2.7.3	Fatalistic Love .....	33
2.7.4	Transformative Love .....	37
2.7.5	Individualized Love .....	39
3.0	METHODOLOGY: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING AS METHODOLOGY .....	42
3.1	AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING: DIARY, JOURNAL, AND MEMOIR WRITING .....	43
3.2	THE PURPOSE OF TRADITIONAL AUTOBIOGRAPHIES .....	44

<b>3.3</b>	<b>PURPOSING OPPRESSED PEOPLE’S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL TRADITION: THE USE OF INDIVIDUAL VOICE FOR COLLECTIVE STRUGGLE .....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>3.4</b>	<b>OPPRESSED PEOPLE’S VOICE IN AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>3.5</b>	<b>SUMMARY OF WEMAT AND OPAT.....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>3.6</b>	<b>AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING AS METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>3.6.1</b>	<b>Chronological Order.....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>3.6.2</b>	<b>Theme.....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>3.6.3</b>	<b>Autobiographical Pact .....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>3.7</b>	<b>USING THE METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>3.7.1</b>	<b>The Self as Individual and Collective.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>3.7.2</b>	<b>Presentation of Stories.....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>3.7.3</b>	<b>Using Theory and Metaphor as Themes that Frame Stories.....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>3.7.4</b>	<b>I am who I say I am.....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>3.7.5</b>	<b>Using Diaries, Journals, Pictures, Videos, and Published Documents as Stimuli for Reflections .....</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>3.7.6</b>	<b>Quality Study.....</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>3.7.7</b>	<b>Triangulation.....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>3.7.8</b>	<b>Critical Reflectivity .....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>3.7.9</b>	<b>Positionality .....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>3.7.10</b>	<b>Thick Description.....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>3.7.11</b>	<b>Concluding Thoughts on Autobiographical Methodology .....</b>	<b>63</b>

3.7.12	<b>Strengths and Limitation of Methodology</b> .....	63
3.8	<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	64
4.0	<b>HIGH SCHOOL</b> .....	65
4.1	<b>FROM THE FIELD OF DREAMS TO HOOD DREAMS</b> .....	65
4.2	<b>HURT ALL OVER (HAO)</b> .....	68
4.3	<b>KNUCKLIN FOR RESPECT</b> .....	74
4.3.1	<b>Learnin How to Sneak</b> .....	74
4.3.2	<b>The Juan Knuckle</b> .....	79
4.3.3	<b>Seth Knuckle</b> .....	81
4.3.4	<b>The Tim Knuckle</b> .....	84
4.3.5	<b>Probation</b> .....	87
4.3.6	<b>Felicia</b> .....	90
4.4	<b>BASTARD</b> .....	91
4.4.1	<b>My Mother</b> .....	92
4.4.2	<b>Maternal Family</b> .....	93
4.4.3	<b>Ideological Supplement for Family</b> .....	96
4.4.4	<b>My Father</b> .....	98
4.5	<b>INTERNALIZING EDUCATIONAL OPPRESSION</b> .....	99
4.5.1	<b>Preemptive Bustin</b> .....	101
4.5.2	<b>The Warfare of Learning</b> .....	106
4.6	<b>MS. LEE</b> .....	111
4.7	<b>UNIVERSITY CITY HIGH SCHOOL</b> .....	116
4.7.1	<b>Freshmen Year: From Shy to Bully</b> .....	116



4.7.2	Ms. Simmons .....	120
4.8	THE LUNCHROOM BRAWL AND THE POSSIBILITY OF EXPULSION .....	124
4.9	A CHANCE AT A DREAM.....	129
4.10	FIGHTING OPPRESSORS WITH THE PEN AND TONGUE.....	131
4.11	FREEDOM SCHOOLS.....	135
4.12	HIGH SCHOOL SUMMARY .....	141
4.12.1	Personal.....	141
4.12.2	Educational.....	142
4.12.3	Societal .....	142
4.12.4	Dialectics of the Blueberry Muffin .....	143
5.0	COLLEGE .....	144
5.1	FRESHMEN TRANSITION WEEK.....	144
5.2	DR. HERRING: THE EDUCATABLE EDUCATOR.....	147
5.3	DR. FRANCIS.....	151
5.4	RASHEEDA .....	154
5.5	FINDING MY FATHER-SIDE .....	162
5.6	DREAM AT RISK.....	170
5.7	MAKING HISTORY IN A TIME OF CONSEQUENCE .....	173
5.7.1	Track Fight .....	173
5.7.2	The Sunday Rally .....	176
5.8	EDUCATIONAL EXILE .....	184
5.9	RETURNING TO LINCOLN .....	192

5.9.1	Towards the Presidency .....	194
5.9.2	Radio Debate .....	196
5.9.3	The Eve of the Election Results .....	197
5.9.4	Conflict as President-Elect.....	199
5.9.5	Precursor to Plan .....	201
5.9.6	The Culture of Academic Corruption: A Case for Academic Revolution. .....	204
5.10	THE PRESIDENCY AND THE BEGINNING ACADEMIC REVOLUTION .....	206
5.10.1	Walk Rule: Faculty Support of Academic Mediocrity to Attack the Dr. Washington.....	206
5.10.2	A Cloud of Uncertainty .....	208
5.10.3	The Planning the Shut Down .....	209
5.11	THE END OF MY PRESIDENCY .....	214
5.11.1	Zafeerah.....	217
5.12	SENIOR YEAR.....	223
5.13	SUMMARIES .....	225
5.13.1	Personal.....	225
5.13.2	Educational.....	226
5.13.3	Societal .....	227
5.13.4	Dialectics of the Blueberry Muffin .....	227
6.0	GRADUATE SCHOOL.....	229
6.1	TEACHING FIFTH GRADE: PRE-GRADUATE SCHOOL JOB .....	229

6.1.1	Introduction to Citizenry Charter.....	229
6.1.2	My Class.....	230
6.1.3	Student Behavior and Love.....	230
6.1.4	Teaching Class: The Kersey Way and the Nosakhere Way.....	233
6.1.5	Leaving Teaching.....	235
6.2	<b>DREAMING IN SPITE OF .....</b>	<b>238</b>
6.2.1	My Dream .....	242
6.2.2	Brotherly Love in Pittsburgh.....	244
6.3	<b>SCHOOL LEADERSHIP .....</b>	<b>250</b>
6.3.1	Human Learning.....	251
6.3.2	Organization and Vision Class with No Visionaries.....	255
6.4	<b>PREPARING FOR AND GETTING THROUGH CORE .....</b>	<b>260</b>
6.4.1	CORE AND STASTICS: THE SINK OR SWIM SEMESTER.....	263
6.5	<b>ANNA.....</b>	<b>271</b>
6.5.1	Addicted to the Feeling of Love .....	272
6.5.2	Anna’s Love and Life as Donut .....	275
6.6	<b>THE PH.D. PROGRAM: THE ART OF KEEPIN IT REAL AND NOT KEEPIN IT REAL .....</b>	<b>278</b>
6.6.1	The Struggle to Keep the Dream .....	278
6.6.2	Not Keepin it Real.....	280
6.6.3	Keepin it Real .....	282
6.7	<b>SOCIAL FOUNDATIONS IN EDUCATION.....</b>	<b>290</b>
6.7.1	Co-teaching.....	290

6.7.2	Lack of Preparation .....	290
6.7.3	Non-Reading Literates.....	291
6.7.4	Teaching Class.....	292
6.7.5	Over preparation .....	293
6.8	<b>GRADUATE SCHOOL SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>294</b>
6.8.1	Personal.....	294
6.8.2	Educational.....	294
6.8.3	Societal .....	295
6.8.4	Dialectics of the Blueberry Muffin .....	295
7.0	<b>INTRODUCTION TO TRANSCONCEPTUALIZATION .....</b>	<b>297</b>
7.1	<b>AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL REFLECTION AS A PROCESS .....</b>	<b>297</b>
7.2	<b>FREIREAN ANALYSIS OF MY AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL REFLECTIONS</b> <b>.....</b>	<b>298</b>
7.2.1	Freirean Concepts (The Personal).....	298
7.2.2	Freirean Concepts (The Educational).....	298
7.2.3	Freirean Concepts (The Societal) .....	299
7.3	<b>TRANSCONCEPTUALIZATION .....</b>	<b>300</b>
7.3.1	The Model African Union: The Chicken, The Rooster, and The Egg .	300
7.3.2	Definition of Transconceptualization .....	302
7.3.3	Foundations of Transconceptualization.....	303
7.3.4	Beyond Freire Towards Transconceptual Ideal in the Personal Context . <b>.....</b>	<b>304</b>

7.3.5	Beyond Freire Towards Transconceptual Ideal in the Educational Context.....	307
7.3.6	Beyond Freire Towards Transconceptual Ideal in the Societal Context... ..	311
7.3.7	The Transconceptual Ideal as Life .....	314
7.4	BEYOND THE BLUEBERRY MUFFIN: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS.....	315
7.5	BEYOND THE NOSAKHERE OF THE PAST: TOWARDS A NEW NOSAKHERE.....	317
7.5.1	The Personal.....	318
7.5.2	The Educational: Life as Student .....	323
7.5.3	The Educational: On Being an Educator.....	325
7.6	THE SOCIETAL .....	327
7.6.1	On Being a Citizen .....	327
7.7	IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE.....	328
7.7.1	Characteristics of Love: Educator .....	330
7.7.2	Love as Action: Educator .....	331
7.7.3	Characteristics of Love: Student .....	333
7.7.4	Love as Action: Student.....	335
7.7.5	Implications for educator and educational leaders.....	337
7.7.6	Implications for Students .....	339
7.8	IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY .....	340
7.9	IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH.....	341

<b>7.10</b>	<b>LIVING, LEARNING, AND LEADING THROUGH LOVE PROGRAM ....</b>	
	.....	<b>342</b>
<b>7.11</b>	<b>IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY .....</b>	<b>343</b>
<b>7.12</b>	<b>CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AUDIENCE .....</b>	<b>343</b>
<b>7.12.1</b>	<b>Personal.....</b>	<b>343</b>
<b>7.12.2</b>	<b>Educational.....</b>	<b>344</b>
<b>7.12.3</b>	<b>Societal .....</b>	<b>344</b>
<b>APPENDIX A</b>	<b>.....</b>	<b>346</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>.....</b>	<b>363</b>

## **PREFACE**

My name is Nosakhere Abubaker Jumanne Griffin-EL. My names in order mean God's way is the only way, noble or father of nobility, born on Tuesday, strength and vigilance, and God. When my mother named me, she gave my life a great purpose.

I would like to thank God for never leaving me through many ups and downs. During the darkest days of my life when I wanted to give up, God has always shown me the light. As a young man, I prayed for God to give me the strength and wisdom to one day assist me in the development of a better world. Now, I am ready to participate in the struggle to assist in the development of a better world with the powerful tool of love.

I would like to thank my committee and especially the chair of my committee, Dr. Michael Gunzenhauser, who has been a mentor to me since I entered graduate school. He assisted me in moving beyond a student who made ten-minute proclamations in class to becoming a student who seeks to engage in dialogue with his colleagues. Dr. Gunzenhauser is a great educator because he poses questions to students instead of giving them answers. A special thanks to Dr. Sean Hughes, who supported me through difficult times, provided grandfather-like wisdom through colorful stories. To Dr. Stu Sutin, thank you for the many insightful conversations we had during those early mornings in the Irvis Room; these conversations had a profound impact on my educational experience. To Dr. Jerry Taylor, who whenever he saw me in the hallway of Posvar Hall or getting a free cup of coffee from Africana studies would always provide words of wisdom and inspiration. Also, thank you Dr. Taylor for providing feedback that

pushed me to move towards a deeper understanding of life. It is my desire to continue the work you have to done to transform the lives of people of Africana descent and humanity in general. To Dr. James Jacob thank you for exposing me to readings on educational theory and educational experiences in the global context. Also, thank you Dr. Jacob for providing the intellectual space to develop my educational philosophy. These men provided me with the love needed to matriculate through the doctoral process toward completion. In addition, these men had a profound impact on my life and what it means to love as friend, colleague, father, and husband.

To my family and friends, I would like to thank my mother Daralyn Griffin-EL, who did all that she could to ensure that I become a man of substance. I witnessed you struggle day after day to assist in the development of a better world. I thank you for all of the events and lectures that you took me to that assisted in my intellectual development. I love and thank you for all you have done for me because without you I would not be the man I am today. To Mr. and Mrs. Clifton and Beverly Corbin, I would like to thank you for providing me with the spiritual, moral, and emotional support. To my siblings Mtukufu, Rashaan, and John Jr. thank you for your support. To my friends Felica Charleston, Richard Harris, Nkulu, McKinley Mills, Ali Hassan, Tinika Robinson, and all those who I may have forgot thanks for all of you support. Thank you to my close friend and colleague Charles Small for being my study partner and providing meaningful feedback for the last four years. Thanks all of the Irvis Fellows for listening to all of my random ideas and getting me to think deeply about their practical implications. To Ronald Gray, thanks for always having an open office where I could express my feeling about different philosophical questions that danced around in my mind; you were a big brother to me. To Eliada Nwosu, who is the love of my life, thank you for providing moral, intellectual, and spiritual support to get throughout life in general and this dissertation process.



To the School of Education, thank you for providing me with the K. Le Roy Irvis Fellowship that allowed me to complete my doctoral degree. To Africana and African Studies Programs, thank you for the food great conversations, emotional support, and love I needed to complete my graduate studies. Thank you to Monique Howze who was like a big sister to me, by providing advice and emotional support through my graduate school experience. Thanks to Dr. Vernell A. Lillie, whose stories provided me with profound insight on the man, scholar, and citizen I could become. Thank you to Dr. Covington-Ward for providing me with professional and intellectual support during the comprehensive examinations and overview process. Thanks to Oronde Sharif for the many conversations and encouragement throughout my graduate experience. Thank you to Mrs. Marlease Bennett who always took to time out of her busy schedule to assist me in the dissertation process. I would like to thank Brother Jamal Arif and Wayne Matthews in the African-American collection section of the library for always helped me find books, journal articles, and always being open to meaningful dialogue. Lastly, I would like to thank Lincoln University for providing me a chance to dream.

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION: DIALECTICS OF THE BLUEBERRY MUFFIN**

One evening, I was spending quality time with my Anna. The time read ten o'clock, and I decided to head back to my grandparents' home on public transportation. From her house, I had to walk, take two trains, and bus. I walked two blocks to the EL train and that took me to City Hall. When I arrived at City Hall, I would take the Orange Line train to Board and Olney where I would wait for the 18 Bus. When the bus came, it took me to my grandparents' home. On a good night, the trip took me an hour. This night was a bad night and it took around two hours. When I finally arrived at Olney, I was hungry and I knew I would not be able to eat once I got to my grandparents' home. When I first moved into their home, Grandpop told me, "Nos, I got a rule around here. If you don't get home before Grandma puts food away, then you can't eat." I promised to abide by his rule.

My grandfather is a very stern man who does not like when people break his rules. So, when I looked at my cell phone and it was midnight, two things crossed my mind—I did not want to go to sleep hungry and I did not want to break his rule. Considering my options, I decided to buy a blueberry muffin from Dunkin Donuts. I walked in the store and headed to the counter to purchase a blueberry muffin. After expressing my thanks to her for the service, I walked towards a counter made for people to quickly eat and go. While eating the muffin, I was simultaneously staying alert for the bus that would complete my journey home. Each bit of the

muffin slowly satisfied my hunger. Focusing on the muffin temporarily prevented me from being cognizant of my surroundings. All of sudden everything would change.

Standing to the right of me was an African-American male who appeared to be in his mid-20s or early 30s. His youthful face was framed with the pain of being forgotten. He wore a heavy black jacket to keep him warm in the cool May night. His wooly hair had a sandy brown tint. Beside him was a duffle bag and more than one trash bag. After taking the last bite of the muffin, I glanced down at the man's hand and saw he was also eating a blueberry muffin. The bus arrived and I left the store to return to my grandparents' home.

Reflecting on this man was not a mere intellectual exercise; this reflection was a reminder of what could have been my life. As a child, I grew up in a single-parent working class household where my mother emotionally checked in and out of my life and my father abandoned me. Educationally, I did not take school seriously, which resulted in me failing both the seventh and ninth grades. Socially, I wanted to prove to people that I was a man, which meant fighting and verbally bullying other kids. By all means, I was headed down a destructive path—a path which might have led me to eating the muffin as a dinner instead of a snack. I could have been the man who was looking for a safe and warm place to sleep instead of catching the bus home. I could have been the man who had all of his worldly possessions in trash bags instead of having a bag full of school supplies. This experience in the *Dunkin Donuts* brought me to wonder what the purposes of my life were.

## **1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The process of understanding the purposes of life is difficult because it requires being critical of yourself and traditional notions that you accepted as important to purposing your life. Although answering what is the purpose of life is a complex task to undertake, I believe it has to start with the individual. I understand life as a multifaceted experience that is personal, educational, and societal. Within these experiences, the individual has different yet connected experiences that aid him/her in conceptualizing the purposes of life. Personally, an individual should understand what his talents are and construct a dream based on those talents. Educationally, he should grow to understand his dreams while acquiring skills and knowledge that assist him in turning his dreams into a life-mission. Socially, upon graduating from the formal educational process, the individual should be prepared to transform his/her life mission into a lifework—in the occupational and citizenship contexts. Allowing the individual to purpose his life is what I call the *Transconceptual* philosophical framework.

### **1.1.1 Thesis**

In the age of global competition, economic advancement forces the individual to capitulate to the societal, educational, and personal visions devoid of her own creation. As result of accepting these visions, the individual is objectified and only exists within society as an object, while the elite who have conceptualized these visions exist as subjects in society. Eradicating this contradiction requires the individual to engage in the reflection process. My articulation of the aforementioned idea is not just a theoretical proclamation. Rather, in this dissertation study, I

will put myself through a reflective process based on my experiences as an individual, student, and citizen, utilizing autobiographical writing. Below are questions that will guide my inquiry.

### **1.1.2 Research Questions:**

1. How can autobiographical writing contribute to my purposing my life as an individual, student, and citizen?
2. How does the Freirean framework assist in the understanding of the personal, educational, and societal contradictions? Specifically, what solutions does this framework offer in order to resolve these contradictions?
3. How do love and lovelessness connect the individual to or disconnect the individual from the transformation of the individual, education and society?
4. What are the roles of individuals in developing meaning in their personal, educational, and societal lives?

### **1.1.3 Methodology**

I conducted this study using autobiographical reflection. Autobiographical reflection is a process in which a person engages past experiences in the personal, educational, and societal contexts. The intention of the reflection is to understand how past reflections and actions have contributed to who I am today. Additionally, engagement with the reflective process will provide me with the opportunity to transform myself. Lastly, this study allows me to develop a reflective process that I will be able to use within my pedagogical practice inside and outside of the classroom.

#### **1.1.4 Theoretical Perspective**

For this project, I develop a hybrid theoretical framework. This framework is rooted in the Critical Theory and Africana Thought Traditions. Critical theorists' historical genealogy begins with the Frankfurt School in Germany in the early 1920s. These scholars, who were Marxist in their political orientation, sought to illuminate the contradiction or the inequality between the ruling-classes and the working-classes, offering revolution as the means. One critical theorist, Paulo Freire, transformed Critical Theory to fit within Brazilian time, space, and culture contexts. Authors from the Africana Thought Tradition are utilized as a supplement to Freire. Authors presented represent the radical element of thought. Radical is contextualized in both revolutionary and loving contexts. The revolutionary side addresses the need to transform society and educational institutions, while the loving side seeks to transform the individual to be able to engage in the transformation of the previously stated entities. Even though I abstract ideas from the authors from these traditions, I do not rely dogmatically on them in the analysis of the project. Instead, these authors' ideas contribute to the development of a new philosophical framework I call Transconceptualization.

#### **1.1.5 Significance**

Autobiographical writing is a tool used by oppressed people to articulate messages about the lived experiences of a member of their group or a person who believes his or her story is compelling. Autobiographical writing can be the articulation of a person's lived experiences from cradle to the grave or a compilation of stories within a specific period. Some autobiographical writing, namely memoir, seeks to present the individual within collective

complex contexts. For example, Newton (2009) in *Revolutionary Suicide* discusses his life from birth to the acme of the Black Panther Party Movement. Within this text, Newton attempts to use his life as a tool to critique society and social structures through a Marxist lens. Conversely, President Barack Obama (2004) discusses his lived experiences to display his search for the meaning of his life and identity as a biracial man in the United States of America. Betts (2009) discusses his life as an African-American boy who has been incarcerated; his story is that of a boy who grew up with other boys within the prison system. All of the authors mentioned shared an intention to write across complex contexts, which span discussions of race, gender, class, and political and social climate of America. Of the aforementioned authors, Newton's and Obama's autobiographical writings were used as my model. I intertwine the theory implicitly throughout the study, just like Newton did. I express an overwhelming desire to continue to dream even in the darkest moments of my life. Lastly, I use Richard Wright's style of dialogue too. In the book, *Black Boy*, he uses whole pages of dialogue to illuminate central ideas to the story; I did the same in my study. Taking into consideration these authors' intentions for engaging autobiographical writing, I use complex contexts to assist in the development of a Transconceptualization wherein relationships develop among the personal, educational, and societal.

## **1.2 STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION**

Chapter Four, titled *High School*, is about the experience of my youth. The purpose of this chapter is about my personal, educational, and societal experiences as a young African-American male growing up in a working-class community in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Personal

experiences with my mother and childhood friends are discussed. My educational experiences begin with me getting held back in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and being inspired in 8<sup>th</sup> grade by Ms. Lee. Additionally, my experience at University City High School is detailed with specificity towards my participation on the school newspaper. Socially, I discuss my two-year experience with Philadelphia Freedom Schools.

Chapter Five, titled *College*, is about my experiences as a young man. This chapter seeks to discuss my life as a college student at Lincoln University. The personal experience begins with my pursuit of my dream to become a Black Studies major, my first serious relationship, and finding my paternal family. The educational experience presents my educational mentorship with Dr. Francis and how he inspired me to achieve intellectual greatness, my academic struggles, and my intellectual development. Socially, I discuss my experience in leadership positions on campus. I discuss my time as a resident advisor, student body president, and student trustee. This section is devoted to my struggles with various groups at Lincoln University that include the student-body, student leadership (senate and president's council), faculty, administration, and trustees.

Chapter Six, *Graduate School*, is about my life as a man. This chapter discusses my life as a graduate student at the University of Pittsburgh and my transition from living in a majority Black setting to life in a majority White setting both inside and outside of the classroom. Personally, I discuss my dream and why it led me to come to Pittsburgh, my relationship with my fiancée and two breakups with her and the after-effects on me. Educationally, I discuss my struggles with balancing my scholarship between Black issues and human issues, grappling with anti-intellectualism from Black and White students inside and outside of the classroom, my over



commitment towards my intellectual and academic pursuits, and my co-teaching a college course and college teaching seminar class experience.

Chapter Seven, *Introduction to Transconceptualization*, makes meaning out of my personal, educational, and societal experiences. The intention of this chapter is to present my philosophical framework based in love. I examine my lived experiences while critiquing them with the intention of transforming to be more loving. Educationally, I examine my life in school to present a purpose of education grounded in love. Socially, I seek to understand how my personal and educational experiences have shaped an understanding of the purposes of citizenship.

## **2.0 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Understanding the purpose of life is a complex process. For Freire, understanding the purpose of life lay in understanding the societal and educational visions and the impact of both on the individual. Freire contextualizes the problem within the societal, educational, and personal contradictions as an outcome of oppression, while offering liberation for the individual (oppressor and oppressed), schools, and society. The Freirean Framework presents themes that denounce oppression and announce liberation within the personal, educational, and societal contexts. It is important to note that Freire's ideas are based on his experiences as individual, student, and citizen within Brazilian and international contexts. Thus, his ideas are presented as a way of thinking, not as a universal truth. Understanding his ideas and way of thinking permits me to mix his ideas with those of scholars from the Africana tradition with the intention of making the ideas relevant to my experience. Both Freirean and Africana scholars seek to address oppression, liberation, and interconnectedness with the personal, educational, and societal context.

### **2.1 SOCIETAL**

The societal is an element that affects by either seeking to dehumanize or humanize the individual. Dehumanization is marked by the individual reflecting and acting like the oppressor-

class, which maintains situations and conditions that limit human possibility. Humanization is marked by the individual reflecting and acting to eradicate situations and conditions that limit human potential. Dehumanization and humanization define the individual's role as either living within oppressive society as an adapted-being or as an agent seeking to transform society. This section seeks to understand both visions.

### **2.1.1 Dehumanization**

Dehumanization is a process in which the oppressor and oppressed are caught in an absolute contradiction between being subjects and objects in society. Existing as an absolute subject in the societal contradiction implies that one class has the ability of conceptualizing its ideal society. On the other hand, individuals can live as absolute objects in society. The ability to reflect and act on the reflection is the foundation of what it means to be human, while the inability to engage in the aforementioned is a melancholy existence known as oppression. Freire (2008) notes that dehumanization is marked by “those whose humanity has been stolen” and by “those who have stolen it,” which leads to both oppressed and oppressor living in a contradiction (p. 44). People who restrict human beings from reaching their full human potential are oppressors, while those whose humanity is limited are the oppressed. Freire (2007) declares that dehumanization is a process that reduces the oppressed to the state of animals:

If man is incapable of changing reality, he adjusted himself. Adaptation is behavior characteristic of the animal sphere; exhibited by man, it is symptomatic of his dehumanization. Throughout history, men have attempted to overcome the factors, which make them accommodate or adjust. (p. 4)

People who are oppressed exist as adapted beings and accept the unjust society as a predestined place. Assistance offered by the oppressor-class is an act of false generosity because the oppressor-class will never act in a manner that transforms the societal contradiction. Their reform of society provides a benevolent form of oppression but never eradicates it; this is what Freire calls false generosity. Societal conditions that make life easier for the oppressed-class, while not destroying the system that creates oppression, maintain an unjust order (p. 5). Dehumanization is a process that socializes the oppressed to live as objects and their oppressors to live as subjects within the societal contradiction.

According to Freire (2007), prescription enforces the oppressor-oppressed contradiction by affirming the oppressor as citadel of humanity (p. 45). Once the oppressed view himself or herself as inferior, they will fear freedom. Fearing freedom will make the oppressed act in prescribed ways; the oppressed will assist in the maintenance of society. Freire declared:

One of the basic elements of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed is the prescription. Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with prescriber's behavior, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor. (p. 47)

Prescription occurs when the oppressed-class "adhere to status quo," which I contend is the essence of prescribed praxis (Darder, 2009, p. 36). Fear of freedom is marked by the oppressed engaging in a form of praxis that is based on their oppressor's reflection and action style—prescribed praxis. Lacking hope, the oppressed-class will begin to live as the oppressors live.

Freire believes that in order to break this cycle of the oppressor-oppressed contradiction the oppressed must use violence. Freire breaks from the traditional notion of violence, which

defines it as a physical act or actions by one person or group of people against another person or group. For Freire violence is the reinforcement of poverty, death, and despair; hence, Freire makes the argument that violence is structural, not just a physical act (Freire, 2006, p. 44). According to this notion of violence, any act with the intention of preventing or limiting human growth is an act of violence. Discussing violence, he asserts that it is perpetuation of the contradiction:

Analysis of existential situation of oppression reveals that their incept lay in an act violence—initiated by those with power. This violence, as a process, is perpetuated from generation to generation of oppressors, who become its heirs and are? Shaped in its climate. This climate creates in the oppressor a strongly possessive consciousness—possessive of the world and of men and women. (Freire, 2007, p. 58)

The result of the violence enacted on the oppressed is distortion of humanity. Now, those in the oppressed-class do not seek to pursue their full humanity; rather, they seek to be like the oppressor-class. The violent process of dehumanization imbues the oppressed-class with a fear of becoming free void of the oppressor-class. Fearing freedom causes the oppressed to cling to the methods of living utilized by the oppressor-class as the only way. The pursuit of the oppressed-class to be like the oppressor-class will never assist in the development of society, schools, or individuals. The only alternative for the oppressed-class is to seek freedom through a process that both humanize themselves and their oppressors.

### **2.1.2 Humanization**

Humanization is a process that seeks to liberate the oppressed and oppressor classes from the absolute contradictions. As a precursor to a struggle to humanize the society, the oppressed-class

has to become aware of the societal conditions that prevent its pursuit of full humanity. Awareness of the societal conditions requires the courage to dream of a better world (Freire & Faundez, 1989, p. 44). Dreaming of the ideal world requires them to act too, which Freire describes as a “historical task in life.” A liberation struggle causes men to relate to the world by “mastering” and “humanizing it” (Freire, 2007). In the struggle to liberate society from oppression, the oppressed realize that it is:

something unfinished, not as something inexorably given; it has become a challenge rather than a hopeless limitation. This new, critical optimism requires a strong sense of social responsibility and of engagement in the task of transforming society cannot mean simply letting things run on. (Freire, 2007, p. 10)

As a result of realizing the world is unfinished, the oppressed can choose to name it. Through the act of naming, the oppressed-class realizes their subjectiveness, which strengthens their resolves to create the world where they can pursue individual and collective dreams (Freire, 1978, 1985, 1997, 1998, 2004, 2007; Freire & Faundez, 1989). Dreaming and acting in the world in their manner is a true sense of generosity because it leads to the eradication of contradictions that limit the potential humanity of both the oppressed and oppressor classes.

Freire frames liberation as a conquest that requires the “ejection” of the oppressor and of the oppressed. Freire cautions the oppressed-class to not revert to reflecting and acting like the oppressor-class because it threatens the struggle to eradicate the absolute contradiction in society. Ejection of the oppressor involves constructing a society that is void of structures that dehumanize human beings. However, upon ejection of the oppressor, the oppressed-class realize they do not know how to reflect and act as free men/women. Liberation is a “painful” process; it is the duty of the oppressed to be fearless in humanization. Freire offers violence as an essential

tool for liberating both classes from the societal contradiction. For Freire, violence used by the oppressed-class is intended to be out of “love” because it can assist in the development of a new society (Freire, 1998, p. 45). Following Freire’s line of logic, one of the first areas to be violently attacked is the mind of the oppressed, which is held in check by fatalism.

## **2.2 THE PERSONAL**

In the personal context, life is impacted by two ideologies—fatalism and hope. Fatalism imbues individuals with the belief that they and their world are unchangeable. Hope presents individuals with an understanding that they and their world are incomplete and in need of transformation. Reflecting and acting within a fatalistic context infers living as an object in the societal contradiction. Reflecting and acting within a hopeful context implies living as a subject in a society void of a contradiction.

### **2.2.1 Fatalism**

Fatalism views society and human beings as pre-determined objects incapable of change. When people believe that the future is an automatic event that occurs, regardless of their actions and reflections, they “submit themselves to the myths of the ideology” (Freire 1985, p. 16). Submitting to ideology means people will adapt to the world with no intentions of changing it—Freire calls this ideology fatalism. Fatalism is an ideological barrier that prevents the oppressed-

class from envisioning themselves and society as changeable through their own actions (Freire 1998, pp. 26-27; Freire, 2007, p. 4). Freire (2004) emphasizes the effect of fatalism by declaring:

It must be emphasized that the discourse on the impossibility of improving the world is not one that verifies impossibility; rather it is an ideological discourse intended to make possibility not viable. (p. 16)

Fatalism, as an ideology of impossibility, imbues the oppressed with a false consciousness causing them to believe that they are mere objects in society, while affirming the oppressor-class position as permanent subjects. Living in the world as objects reduces the oppressed to the state of animals, which merely react to the changes in their environment (Freire, 2004, pp. 15-16).

Freire (2007) contends that animals have no “historicity,” which traps them in time (pp. 3-4). Lacking the ability to escape from time, animals are prisoners of it. A fatalistic society devalues dialogue among the oppressed-class. Preventing the oppressed from engaging the dialogical process socializes them to be reactionaries in life. Dialogue, as form of external reflection with others, is the precursor to transformative action or what Freire calls “praxis.” Acting without reflection is fatalistic and will not result in long-term transformation. As long as the oppressed lack the ability to discuss issues affecting their lives, they can never understand what it means to be free. In other words, allowing the oppressed to engage in dialogue with no intention of allowing them to act is a product of fatalism. In other words, when the oppressed act without reflecting or speak with no intention of acting it is activism; when they speak with no intention of acting it is verbalism (Freire, 2006, pp. 87-88). Freire addresses anti-praxis in the following way:

if action is emphasized exclusively to the detriment of reflection, the word is converted into *activism*. The latter — action for action’s sake — negates the true praxis and makes



dialogue impossible. Either dichotomy, by creating unauthentic forms of existence, creates also unauthentic forms of thought, which reinforce the original dichotomy. (p. 88)

Freire's notion of praxis also implies that the oppressed-class engaging in praxis does not necessarily mean they will assist in the eradication of the contradiction. When the oppressed-class engages in a form of reflection and action that is akin to that of the oppressor-class, it is a direct result of dehumanization and the internalization of their oppressor. This form of praxis is what I call prescribed-praxis.

### **2.2.2 Prescribed-Praxis**

Prescribed-praxis is the reflection and action of the oppressed as a result of their internalization of the oppressor. Reflecting and acting like those who oppress only changes who oppresses; it does not rid society of oppression. Furthermore, prescribed-praxis allows the oppressed to become the new oppressor-class without eradicating the contradiction that oppresses them. In other words, this process allows the oppressed to move from objects to subjects of society; conversely, the oppressor-class move from the subjects to objects of society. Fanon (1963) asserted that the, "colonized dream of taking the colonist's place. Not of becoming a colonist, but replacing him" (p.16). Prescribed-praxis is the process of thinking, speaking and acting like the oppressor is a result of not having hope that they can be free of their oppression.

## 2.3 HOPE

Transforming the contradiction from being the object to subject in life occurs when the oppressed have hope that they can transform themselves. Having hope means the oppressed realize their incompleteness, which creates the possibility of the oppressed becoming subjects, who can name and transform their society. In the struggle to transform society, the oppressed “problematize” the society with the intent of changing it in the future. Consequently, the oppressed-class engages in the act of making history (Freire 1998, p. 69; Freire, 2006, pp. 43-44). Freire identifies the making of history as a continual process that begins with the aspirations, concerns, and values of the oppressed and defined by them (Freire, 2007, p. 4). According to Freire (2006), “Hope is rooted in men’s incompleteness, from which they move out in constant search — a search which can be carried out only in communion with others” (p. 92). Hope creates the possibility for the oppressed to construct a society where there are no absolute subjects or objects; rather, a balance between the two—subject-object unity.

### 2.3.1 Praxis

Praxis is a process in which the oppressed engage in reflection leading to the development of theory causing action that transforms society (Freire, 2006, pp. 87-88; Freire & Faundez, 1989, pp. 6). As the oppressed reflect on society and their own humanity, they act in the world to transform themselves and their society. Engaging in praxis requires unity of reflection and action. Once unified, the oppressed have to become the subjects who act in the world. Adhering to praxis allows for the constant realization and solving of problems in society. According to Karenga (2002) who, though he does not use the term praxis, he articulates an idea that enhances

it, “Black studies focuses on the African *initiative* and *experience* in the world. The concept of initiative points to Black Studies stress on self-understanding and self-assertion in the world” (p. 4). Karenga adds *initiative* and *experience* to the concept of praxis that people of African descent should study their history to understand how they engaged in the praxis in the past. He also offers *self-assertion* and *self-understanding*, which imply that before a person can engage in praxis, they have to understand himself/herself then act in the world. The implication can be made that Karenga is arguing that praxis has to take into consideration both individuality and the culture that the individual comes from. Although, in the above passages he speaks directly about the collective experiences of Africana people, it can be inferred that he also is speaking of people of Africana descent as individuals. The organization of society’s education either encourages or discourages the masses from engaging in praxis.

### **2.3.2 Speech**

Engaging in prescribed reflection infers speaking in a prescribed manner. Speaking prescriptively is the result of internalization of the ways of the oppressor-class. Fanon (1967) addressed the notion through the use of language. For Fanon, language is a tool to communicate to one’s cultural group; once the oppressed-class ceases to speak like those of their group, they engage in prescriptive communication practices (pp. 17-18). Interestingly, Fanon’s rationale for the oppressed-class abdicating their own language is that they deem it to be inferior and themselves as inferior. Speaking about Afro-Caribbean students during the colonial era, he asserts the following about prescriptive speaking:

it must be understood that the Negro wants to speak French because it is the key that can open doors which were still barred to him fifty years ago. [The] Negro who comes within

this study we find a quest for subtleties, for refinement of language—so many further means of proving to himself that he has measured up to the culture. (p. 38)

Speaking as themselves, they affirm the oppressed as the citadel of humanity. Once the oppressed-class speaks like the oppressor-class, they are incapable of changing the world because its terms and definitions are rooted in their oppressor's culture.

hooks (1989) extended Fanon's notion of language and its articulation of culture. Speaking about her personal experience, she believed that her voice was impacted by the "culture of domination" (p. 16). Although there is a common understanding that living in a free society means that a person has the right to freedom of expression, hooks asserts the oppressed-class does not have that same privilege. hooks argues that to speak is based on one's position in society.

Within the situation of colonization of domination, the oppressed, the exploited develop various styles of relating, talking one way to one another, talking in a way that allows one to be understood by someone who does not know your way of speaking, your language.

The struggle to end domination, the individual struggle to resist colonization, to move from object to subject. (p. 15)

When speaking to the oppressor-class the oppressed-class member speaks as an object; however speaking to a fellow member of the oppressor-class, he/she speaks as a subject (hooks, 1989, p. 15). The difference between the styles of speaking is based on the subject-object contradiction.

Both Fanon and hooks call into question the notion of speaking. The use of voice is a powerful tool that can empower the oppressed to move beyond reflection in order to name their world. Lacking the ability to speak authentically causes the oppressed to use the language of the oppressor-class, which prevents the transformation of society. To speak is the power to name the

world; thus, those who speak like their oppressors legitimate the oppressor-class and its societal structures. If a people cannot name the world using their own language, then transformation will never occur. Prescriptive speaking prevents the eradication of the subject-object contradiction.

The struggle for the oppressed to liberate themselves requires them to speak in a hopeful manner. Speaking with hope aids the oppressed in their undertaking to transform themselves. With hope, the oppressed are able to make meaning out of life, which creates the possibility of changing the social conditions. Speaking as “an act of resistance” infers political awareness that leads to critical consciousness (hooks, 1989, p. 14).

The struggle to end domination the individual struggle to resist colonization, to move from object to subject, is expressed in the effort to establish the liberatory voice—that way of speaking that is no longer determined by one’s status as object—as oppressed being. That way of speaking is characterized by opposition, by resistance. It demands that paradigms shift—that we learn to talk—to listen—to hear in a new way. (p. 15).

Learning how to speak requires of the oppressed-class a personal transformation, which allows the oppressed to name the world. However, the oppressed cannot speak as their oppressor speaks because these patterns maintain the contradiction that the oppressed are seeking to resist. The mastery of hopeful speech exhibits in the oppressed person an ability to reflect personally so he/she can act differently in the world (hooks, 1989, p. 29).

## **2.4 EDUCATIONAL**

The fourth aspect of life is the educational. In this aspect, schools serve as the socializing agent for society. An oppressive society imbues students with the idea that they and their society are

unchangeable. A society rooted in freedom allows schools to be institutions that encourage students to transform themselves and their world. In oppressive schools, students are taught their future roles as objects in society. In liberated schools, students are taught their future roles as active subjects in society. Essentially, the life in schools is a microcosm of the life in society. Both the *banking method of education* (oppressive) and *problem posing education* (liberatory) are alternatives to contrasting societal visions.

Schools are places where a society socializes its future citizens. If a society is oppressive, then its educational system will dehumanize students; if a society is centered on liberation, then it will humanize students. Oppressive education provides the answers to students, an approach which Freire calls the *banking method of education*. In this method of education, students are taught what the teacher knows, and he/she trains the students to assist in the maintenance of an oppressive society. On the contrary, education as an act of liberation poses problems and questions to students, which assists students in understanding how to make and remake their world. Freire calls this method *problem posing education*. Both types of education imply a desire for students to be either subject or objects in the role as future citizens in a society.

#### **2.4.1 Banking Method of Education**

The *BME* is the process that socializes students to exist with the societal contradiction. The purpose of *BME* is to reproduce an experience in schools that keeps the oppressed in a cycle of powerlessness (Freire & Faundez, 1989, p. 34). The roles of teachers and students are predetermined by *BME*. Students are “passive and docile beings” that cannot exist without knowledge from teachers (Freire, 1985, pp. 8-9). Lacking the ability to exist without teachers, students are defined as incapable of thinking and/or acting on their own. As passive beings,

students are only capable of receiving information from teachers. *The BME* provides students with the skill of reading words in books, but it does not assist students in critically analyzing the world. Their education is irrelevant because it detaches the communal and personal needs and wants, and replaces them with information that enforces the oppressive structures.

In an effort to socialize the oppressed-class into the object role in the societal contradiction, the oppressed-class students are imbued with knowledge deemed relevant by the oppressed-class. The *BME* views the educational process as giving gifts from the teacher who is the possessor of legitimate knowledge to the students/recipients. In this method of education, teachers distribute knowledge as a gift that grants the oppressed-students access to a better life inside of an oppressive society. Freire uses the banking method metaphor to describe the teacher-student contradiction. In this metaphor, students are the depositories and the teachers are the depositors. The depositor comes to the bank to deposit money in his/her account; at any time, the depositor can come back to the bank and withdraw money from his/her account (Freire 2006). Freire argues the example of the depositor and depository is the same as that of the teacher and student since the teacher offers information, which the students can recite back upon request. The idea of teachers as the possessors of knowledge and students as receivers of it “castrates curiosity” by providing all of the answers (Freire & Faundez, 1989, p. 35). When students lack curiosity, they become dependent on the teachers.

Teaching as an oppressive practice socializes human beings to be lifeless objects. As an object in the educational contradiction, dialogue is absent from the interaction between the student and teacher. Not engaging in dialogue prevents students from reflecting on educational content as it relates to them, while socializing students for silent life in the society. Freire (2006) discusses what dialogue should not be in the classroom setting:

dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's "depositing" ideas in another; nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be "consumed" by the discussants. Nor yet is it a hostile, polemical argument between those who are committed neither to the naming of the world, nor to the search for truth, but rather to the imposition of their own truth. (p. 89)

The lack of dialogue between students and teachers creates a "culture of silence" in the classroom. Anti-dialogue as a tool of the *BME* socializes students for voiceless life. Lacking the ability to speak, students accept the world as a predestined place that they cannot name or change. They remain dependent on the oppressor-class, which is the ultimate purpose of the *BME*.

#### **2.4.2 Problem Posing Education**

The overall purpose of *problem posing education (PPE)* is to make the learning process relevant for the needs of the oppressed-class by making students the subjects of their learning. As subjects of the learning process, students are provided with an opportunity to problematize educational content to use they may transform themselves and their world. Educators who problematize the world pose questions to students, which assists students in understanding how they relate and how the educational content relates to the world. Relating the content in class to themselves and their world assists students in the process of becoming fully human, which creates the possibility of transforming themselves and assisting the world (Faundez & Freire, 1989, p. 40). According to Freire (2008),

Problem-posing education is revolutionary futurity. Hence it is prophetic.... Hence, it corresponded to the historical nature of humankind. Hence, it affirms women and men as



beings who transcend themselves, who move forward and look ahead, for whom immobility represents a fatal threat, for whom looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are so that they can more wisely build the future. (p. 84)

Teachers who pose problems through questions to students encourage students' curiosity. Allowing students to develop their independent thinking skills assists students in "finding" their "voice," which assists in personal empowerment (hooks, 2010, p. 21). Freire believes that education as a process affirms dialogue as important to the process.

Dialogue creates an opportunity for students to reflect on lived experiences, which exposes those in the educative process to different ways of thinking. When students engage in an educative process that supports personal reflection, they can develop solutions based on their reality. Essentially, the practice of dialogue assists in the construction of meaning, which serves as the foundation for action in society. According to hooks (2010),

When students are fully engaged, professors no longer assume the sole leadership role in the classroom. Instead, the classroom functions more like a cooperative where everyone contributes to make sure all resources are being used, to ensure the optimal learning well-being of everyone. (p. 22)

Freire believes that the act of dialogue is love, which he believes is a courageous act (Freire, 2008, p. 89). When teachers create a classroom environment where students can engage in dialogue, they show their love of students. This love is based on their "faith" that students are able and responsible to become fully-human (Freire, 2008).

Education as an act of liberation seeks to assist students in understanding that they and their world are unfinished (Freire, 2004, p. 15). In the context of Freire's notion of hope, the

educational process should declare the possibility of changing society, while denouncing the structures that prevent the oppressed-class students from reaching their human potential (p. 18). Education as liberation is a process where students and educators reflect on ways to free themselves from “unjust” reality (p. 19). Education as a practice of liberation assists students in thinking of ways that they can participate in the development of a better society.

## **2.5 CONNECTING THE THEMES**

### **2.5.1 Dehumanization and Humanization**

Dehumanization is a process that forces people to adapt to society. In this context, the oppressed have to adapt to the oppressors’ notion of humanity. Thus, the oppressed have to act in accordance with their oppressor-class because they are the citadel of humanity. Humanization is the process through which people develop their agency to transform themselves and society. This is a constant process of slowly rejecting their former oppressors’ conceptualizations of themselves, society, and education. Thus, in this process the oppressed use violence, which Freire deems is out of love and necessary for the development of a better society. Although Freire articulates the notion of violence as a necessary element in struggling for a liberated society, I believe that the use of violence is problematic because it sets a negative precedent for the oppressed in struggling for their freedom. If the oppressed use violence to liberate society, then they might have to use violence to maintain their society. Violence will not solve problems of the oppressed; it only contributes to the oppressed reinforcing the cycle of oppression that

existed during the oppressor's reign. However, if the oppressed want to move towards humanization, they have to do so using new methods differing from that of their oppressor.

### **2.5.2 Fatalism and Hope**

Freire argues that fatalism allows people to foresee a future where they merely adapt. Conversely, hope offers a way for people to conceptualize themselves and their roles in the development of the ideal society. Hence, fatalism and hope call into question the meaning of living. Should people accept society as a pre-determined entity? Should people think of society as an entity that can be made or remade based on the desires of the people? An educator who asks the aforementioned questions takes a stance believing students should be taught not merely to adapt but to be agents in the world. Favoring fatalism makes people objects in society. On the other hand, those favoring hope believe the students should be subjects and objects in the learning process, the development of a new society and the educational system.

There is a need to resolve the inequity between the oppressed and the oppressor. Freire offers violence as a solution to this imbalance; he believes that the oppressed must use it to destroy oppressive society. The rationale provided for such an action is that when the oppressed use violence it is out of love, while the oppressor's use of violence is out of hate of humanity. Though revolutionaries affirm this notion, King (1986) critiqued violence as a "darkness" that cannot eradicate oppression (p. 176). King Jr. believed that non-violence was a legitimate tool to assist in the development of a better society; he likened non-violence to light, which he declared could assist in the development of a better society. Freire's articulation of violence is highly problematic because he contradicts himself. How can he critique the oppressed for internalizing the oppressor, while advocating violence? If the oppressed are going to lead the transformation

of society and educational systems, then they have to do so by reflecting and acting differently from the oppressors. In other words, they have to become *Praxian*, which are people who reflect and act. Reflection is the process of thinking, questioning, reading, and listening to other people leading to constructing plans, organizing people, and acting in the world.

### **2.5.3 Prescribed-Praxis and Praxis**

Freire's ideas about praxis imply that it is a dialectical process that can be negative or positive. Praxis is a negative process when the relationship between theory and practice is broken. Hence, people who reflect and do not act engage in verbalism, while people who act and do not reflect engage in activism. In the discourse on negative praxis, Freire does not articulate when the oppressed engage in what would be considered a form of praxis from their oppressor's perspective, though it can be implied through his writing that the oppressed could engage in this praxis that is oppressive. Prescribed-praxis is a term used to denote praxis as process in which the oppressed reflect and act like their oppressors. Engaging in praxis allows people to both visualize and make a better society. Whether praxis is positive or negative is important in understanding why society is rooted in oppression or liberation.

### **2.5.4 Banking Method of Education or Problem Posing Education**

The banking method of education is a process where the students are the receivers of knowledge and teachers are the givers of knowledge. In this process, the students become the object of learning, while the teacher is the subject of the learning process. This experience prepares students for life in an oppressive society. Conversely, problem-posing education views the

students and teachers as both subject and object of the learning process. Viewing students and teachers as both subjects and objects implies that experiences of both should be expressed inside of the classroom. When students are able to share their experiences inside of the classroom, it prepares students for a future role as participants in society. In sum, education is socialization for either oppression or liberation.

Those who engage in dialogue have the possibility of naming the world, while those who do not engage in dialogue accept the names that are developed by the oppressor-class. Naming is an essential element of his philosophy, he establishes the dialogue as fundamental to the education; students engage in praxis to transform their reality. On the other hand, those students who do not engage in dialogue can only adapt to the world. Dialogue allows people to develop their voice and express opinions on issues in society. The use of the voice can be problematic if it does not affirm the goals and objectives of an oppressive society. Hence, when the oppressor class develops an anti-dialogical culture, it is to maintain an oppressive society. Those advocating for the development of a liberated society should teach the oppressed how to engage in dialogue because by doing the aforementioned, they will be able to create a society in the image of the oppressed-class.

## **2.6 SYNTHESIS**

Within the Freirean framework exists an opportunity to understand the three aspects of life. On the societal level, Freire describes oppression and liberation of the individual. In the educational context, he illuminates both as processes that prepare students for their future role in society. In the societal context, he examines the societal vision and its impact on the individual. In the

personal context, life can be understood as either having a fatalistic or hopeful vision about self or society. In understanding life, Freire provides three concepts that assist in the transformation of life in the personal, educational, societal context.

First, a society caught in a subject-object contradiction will establish an educational system that socializes students to exist with the contradiction. In *BME*, students are objects and teachers are the subjects in this learning process. Similarly, the oppressed are the objects of society, while the oppressors are the subjects. The oppressors name the world and the oppressed accept the names given to them by their oppressors. Teachers are the definers of legitimate knowledge, and students are the recipients of these forms of knowledge without question. Hence, the oppressed learn to act without thinking, which does not assist the oppressed in personal or societal problem-solving.

Second, Freire's connection among societal, educational, and personal oppression provides a language to the experience of the oppressor and oppressed. Not only does he provide a language in the context of terminology, but also he provides a language that allows readers to understand in depth the experiences of the oppressed and oppressor. For scholars working with or seeking to work with oppressed groups, Freire's ideas provide a way to think about how to engage them. He assists in the development of a consciousness that can lead to the harmonious relationship between scholars and the oppressed. A harmonious relationship can lead to the construction of theory, which can lead to practice, which ultimately creates the possibility for the transformation of society and the educational system. Without the language describing the condition of societal oppression, a scholar could be left describing society using the language of the oppressor; hence, the scholar, though well-intentioned, will name the world the same way the oppressor does and no change will occur. Therefore, using Freire's framework creates a space for

scholars to conceptualize the experience of the oppressed within the temporal and cultural context of their society.

Lastly, Freire provides an opportunity for the scholar from the oppressed-class to insert his/her voice in the discourse on societal and educational oppression. For far too long, the voice of the oppressed-class has been represented by scholars from differing socioeconomic experiences—either wanting to be one with the oppressed or wanting to represent the oppressed-class's voice within a particular discourse or discipline. The charge of Freire to the oppressed to lead the struggle for societal transformation creates a space, not just for the discourse of the oppressed-class intellectuals, but for them to develop and implement policy. Hence, the notion of praxis is essential to the oppressed-class because without it they merely help perpetuate oppression instead of ending it. As a scholar and a member of the oppressed-class, he affirms my duty to conduct research as well as reflect with members of my class on ways in which we can eradicate societal and educational oppression collectively.

Freire's works provide a way to conceptualize education and its interconnectedness to society. He illuminates the contradiction between the oppressors and oppressed in the societal context, while showing how the contradiction between the teacher and student is the basis for the contradiction. Teachers are the subjects of the learning process, while students are the objects of the learning process. Making the connection between the oppressed-class's position both in the school and society allows for the inference to be made that schools socialize students for their future roles in society. Therefore, addressing educational problems facing oppressed people would have to be connected to addressing societal problems facing the same people. Hence, solving the educational problems of oppressed people will not assist the oppressed in the long-term because the societal issues will still affect them and eventually prevent any long-term

change from occurring. Lastly, Freire's work asserts that changing the educational system and society is a process that must be led by the oppressed. If the oppressed-class is to lead the liberation struggle, then they must do it with a non-violent love.

## **2.7 LOVE AS THE CENTER OF LIFE**

In the struggle to liberate society from oppression, the oppressed will articulate notions of love. Understanding the purpose of love is important to their struggle. If the oppressed articulate notions of love only for the members of the oppressed-class, then the transformation of society will not occur. On the other hand, articulating a notion of love that is all encompassing is essential to the development of a better society. In the Africana experience, there have been leaders and scholars who articulated notions about love that affirm the need to only love those who are Black. This notion of love is what I define as narrow or fatalistic love. Other leaders and scholars express notions of love that encompass both Blacks and other racial groups in the United States of America and the world. This notion of love is what I call broad or transformative love because it is inclusive to all of the human family. Additionally, hooks and West will be used to define the elements of transformative love, which is individual, collective, and global in nature. It is my contention that in order to transform the personal, educational, and societal, love has to be the center of the struggle. Without love, the conditions that limit the personal, educational, and societal the struggle for transformation will never be achieved.



### 2.7.1 Love

Whether it be personal, educational, or societal oppression, love's importance to it is equally great. Without an inclusive notion of love, the oppressed can never transform themselves or society for the betterment of humanity. In the Africana experience, there have been leaders and scholars who talked about love that affirmed the need to only love those who are Black. This is what I define as fatalistic love. Others leaders and scholars talked about love that is all encompassing in both racial and human contexts. This notion of love is what I call broad or transformative. It is my contention that love is caught in the contradiction that traps the personal, educational, and societal.

### 2.7.2 Defining Love

King (1963) defined love using three Greek terms: *eros*, *phila*, and *agape*. *Eros* is a romantic connection between two people based on a mutual attraction and affection (p. 36). *Phila* is "intimate affection" between two individuals who are friends (p. 36); people love because they are loved (p. 36). Both forms of love are based on sentimental affection whether based on romance or friendship (King, 1963). *Agape*, which King defined as the most powerful love, was rooted in "understanding, creative, and redemptive goodwill for all men [and women]" (p. 36). hooks affirms King's notion of love by saying, "We must think of not just romantic love, but love in general as being about people mutually meeting each other's needs and giving and receiving critical feedback" (hooks & West, 1991, p. 56). King believed when a person loves it is because God loves all human beings. Returning to the idea of transforming society, the

oppressed-class have to engage in the highest form of love, while being cognizant of the types of love that prevent liberation.

### **2.7.3 Fatalistic Love**

In the Africana tradition, militant leaders and scholars explicitly or implicitly offer notions about love. Their notions of love are similar to *eros* and *phila*, but have troubling consequences when attempting to aid the oppressed-class to wage and win their liberation struggle. For people of Africana descent, leaders and scholars have expressed the need to love based on the race or common heritage; this is an *eros*-like love. Blacks also have been told that they should love each other based on their common oppression and oppressor; this is a *phila*-like love. These notions of love are problematic because they act exclusively based on race and oppression; hence, those who are not Black or suffering from oppression (or the same form of oppression) are unable to be loved by Blacks.

In *Message to the Grassroots*, Malcolm X (X & Breitman, 1990) implicitly defined love as a desire to be free from oppression and oppressor. He articulates the notion of love by using a plantation metaphor and the two types of slaves who live on it—the house Negro and field Negro. The two slaves differed from each other based on their love or hatred for their master. The field Negro suffered the brunt of the slave master’s oppression, which made him “hate” the master. If anything bad happened to the master, the field Negro prayed for the worst. The house Negro was treated well by his master, which resulted in him loving his master. When the master got sick, he saw the master’s sickness as afflicting himself. In this speech, love for the master was equated with an acceptance of oppression, while hatred for the master exemplified the desire to be free. Malcolm X’s metaphor was used as a critique of the Civil Rights Movement’s leaders,

who believed that Blacks should love their oppressor regardless of the physical and structural violence they suffered from them. Malcolm X believed that hating the oppressor and oppression meant love for Blacks and freedom.

As result of the physical and structural violence inflicted on Blacks by Whites who supported racial segregation (Jim Crowism), Malcolm X was a proponent of Blacks isolating and strengthening their community economically, socially, and politically, which he called Black Nationalism. He believed that Blacks had “the political, economic, and social evils” that afflicted the Black community (X & Breitman, 1990, p. 38). Economically, Black Nationalism seeks to control the businesses and flow of dollars in the Black community. Politically, it wants politicians representing Blacks interests through the development of meaningful legislation. Socially, it works to eradicate the social ills that impact the community (e.g. substance abuse), while creating a social network among Blacks (X & Breitman, 1990, p. 40). This philosophy implies love as praxis seeking to transform the Black community while not being concerned with eradicating ills affecting the larger American society. This notion articulated by Malcolm X is fatalistic love because it seeks to reverse in the oppressor-oppressed contradiction between Blacks and the power structure that oppresses them.

In Tavis Smiley’s (2007) annual town hall meeting, named the *State of the Black Union*, Louis Farrakhan expresses fatalistic love rooted in the Black Nationalist philosophy. In his speech, he references a conversation between Harry Belafonte and King. In this conversation, King expressed his fear of integrating Blacks into America, which he defined as burning the house. King told Belafonte that Civil Rights leaders had to become “firemen” and put out the fire in America (Smiley, 2007). Farrakhan references this conversation to prove that Blacks were still suffering from similar oppression that the Civil Rights Movement sought to eradicate.

Instead of affirming King's notion of Blacks being firefighters in American society, he declares that Blacks should let United States of America burn and they should unite and isolate themselves from American society. Farrakhan's proclamation indicates a love for Blacks while it also implies hatred or absence of love for those who are not Black. This idea implies that *agape*-like love cannot exist with a Black Nationalist philosophical framework because it only seeks to help Blacks because they are Black, which not seeking to help others, even those who developed in structures that limited their human potential. Fatalistic love is self-destructive because of its lack of interconnectedness between Blacks and the larger human family.

Carmichael (2007) affirms the need of African people to love themselves, while addressing the oppression that caused them to hate themselves and love their oppressors. For him, in order to confront the oppression, Blacks must experience an undying love for themselves, which he asserts "forgets about reason" (p. 148). In order to forget about reason, Blacks have to love each other as a family; Black men and women have to view each other as brothers and sisters. This love, he believes, is sacrificial to the cause of liberating Blacks from their collective oppression. Carmichael believed that Blacks had to disassociate themselves from American society by proclaiming that they were Africans not Americans (p. 150). For Blacks to present themselves as Africans and not Americans, it serves to connect them to the Pan-African struggle which seeks to liberate all people of African descent across the world from oppression. Although Carmichael, who was a Pan-Africanist, sought to globalize the notion of love for people of Africana descent, his ideas are also problematic because they are only concerned with people based on racial affiliation and collective oppression.

These notions of love have to be understood within the space, time, and cultural context. For Malcolm X, love for Blacks meant loving each other, not loving Whites who supported Jim

Crowism, and uniting in the struggle to eradicate conditions that limit Blacks' human potential. Farrakhan, like Malcolm X, believed that Blacks should work to eradicate the ills that limit human potential, while adding that Blacks should stand by and watch the larger nation fall from the societal ills that plague it. Carmichael sought to internationalize the Black Nationalist notion of love by connecting to the global African family. Within this context, Blacks should have an undying love for one another, which meant waging a global liberation struggle to eradicate the conditions from which people of African descent suffered. Although these leaders each discussed love, it was limited and would not assist in the liberation of Blacks, nor would it assist in the development of a better society or world.

West (1993) is critical of these limited notions of love because their foundation was rooted in "sentimental feelings" and "tribal connections"; instead of being based on "egalitarian relations within the outside the Black community" (p. 38). According to West (1996)

The most effective and enduring black responses to invisibility and namelessness are those forms of individual and collective black resistance predicated on a deep and abiding black *love*. These responses take the shape of prophetic thought and action: bold, fearless, courageous attempts to tell the truth about and bear witness to black suffering and to keep faith with a vision of black redemption. (p.90)

Black Nationalism prevents Blacks from freeing themselves and their oppressors from the contradiction. hooks (1991) asserts that the leaders of the Black Nationalist Movement as well as the Civil Rights Movement sought economic sufficiency and political power as the primary goals, while abandoning love, which she believes is all inclusive and transformative for all human beings. However, when Blacks engage in a love based on race, it prevents them from liberating themselves and their oppressors from oppression.

#### 2.7.4 Transformative Love

In the sermon, *Loving Your Enemies*, King addresses the need for *agape*-like love (transformative love). King (1957) individualized the notion of love between enemies. King did not start by discussing the evil in an enemy; instead, he began by calling on the individual, who was suffering from hatred to reflect on the contradictions within himself/herself (<http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu>). King (1957) believed that within all enemies good exists; just like in all good people evil exists. However, it was the task of the individual who suffered from hatred to find good in the hater. Finding good in the enemy prevented those who were suffering from hatred from attempting to defeat their oppressor. Instead of defeating of the oppressor, the oppressed help. The love of the oppressor by the oppressed creates the possibility of transformation of the contradiction that binds both classes in absolute subjectivity and objectivity.

In the struggle to transform society, the oppressed have to learn to love themselves and their oppressors. Without love, the oppressed will become like the oppressor-class in their reflection and action. The absence of love means the oppressed-class would hate their oppressor; such an action would compromise the liberation struggle. Thus, King (1986) attempted to define love, not as an emotional feeling, but as a combination of care and power.

What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive, and that love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best... is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love. (p. 172)

Love is power seeking to correct the societal ills through justice. Love could be understood as the praxis that seeks to transform society by eradicating societal ills. This eradication has to be

through non-violent action, which was concerned with Blacks as well as Whites. King believed that the use of violence by the Blacks would not bring justice; instead, it would merely distort the personality of Blacks, which would be contradictory to freedom. Thus, King did not want a society where Blacks served as the new oppressor-class.

King (1986) was “concerned with a better world” that provided “justice” to the oppressed, unified people based on the “brotherhood and sisterhood” of humanity not of just race. He said:

when one is concerned about that [a better world], he can never advocate violence. For through violence, you may murder a murderer, but you can't murder murder. Through violence you may murder a liar, but you can't establish the truth. Through violence you may murder a hater, but you can't murder hate through violence. Darkness cannot put out darkness; only light can do that. (p. 175)

King observed that love was the light that can transform society, and individuals acting without love would not be able to liberate themselves or others from oppression. He declared that a person could have the talent of being a great public speaker, but without love the speech will not assist in the transformation of society; a person might have the intellectual capacity to matriculate through the higher educational system, but without love his/her academic achievement means nothing; a person could struggle to make the world a better place, but without love his/her actions are in vain (King, 1986). By this logic, King was declaring that love had to be the center of man/woman's praxis, and it had to be concerned with the welfare of all people.

Love by the oppressed-class is non-violent reflection and action that seeks to liberate society of conditions that limit or inhibit human beings from reaching their potential. Love is the

reflection by the oppressed-class with the intention of understanding the contradiction that exists within themselves and society. Love is a form of praxis that seeks to transform the societal contradiction so that no oppressors or oppressed classes exist, while people seek to live up to their human potential.

### **2.7.5 Individualized Love**

Love in a collective context is being concerned with Blacks and the rest of humanity. Loving Black people and the rest of humanity cannot be the only form of love enacted by an individual. He must learn to love himself too. In essence, love has to be individualized. A fatalistic individualized love manifests itself in two ways: the individual only focuses on herself or she puts the love of people and humanity before herself. Transformative individual love affirms the person's role and responsibility to love himself, his race, and humanity. Understanding fatalistic love and transformative love on an individual level will assist in the liberation of the oppressed-class.

King (1963) framed fatalistic individualized love in the context of hardheartedness and softheartedness. When a person has a hard heart, she lacks compassion for others; she is unmoved by pain and suffering others experience. This person lives a self-centered life that prevents her from enjoying communion with others (p. 5) People who enter the hardhearted person's life are viewed as tools or objects for the purpose of advancing her own happiness. The hardhearted person is incapable of loving herself and others. Conversely, a softhearted person wants to freeze time because he is comfortable in the traditions in society. When living in an oppressive society, the softhearted person adjusts to oppression, instead of seeking to liberate himself and others from it. He fears change and sides with the majority even when it is to the



detriment of himself and others. Essentially, this is the life of conformity (King, 1963). Whether too soft- of hard-hearted, both extremes cause individuals to love in a perverse manner that is antithetical to the struggle of liberation.

Although hooks (2001) does not use King's terms, she does discuss individuals who express a love of self void of others. For hooks, African-American females have engaged in a fatalistic individualized love, which can be seen as either hardhearted or softhearted. As a result of suffering from Black male patriarchal oppression, some Black women have chosen the diva route. They choose to put themselves before their families, calling to mind the actions of the hardhearted. With diva-love, Black women begin to recklessly love themselves over anyone else (p. 41). At the other extreme from diva love, sacrificial love places family over personal well being. This love results from women compromising their physical well-being for the needs of those around them, calling to mind the approach of the softhearted. Both of these forms of love operate within extreme contexts, but they occur as a result of any form of oppression. Both types of love, whether enacted by men or women, are a threat to the liberation struggle. A liberator cannot love others so much that she sacrifices her well-being. Conversely, a liberator cannot love himself to the point of neglecting others around him.

Engaging in transformative love on an individual level is non-conformist. The Praxian is focused on issues that prevent human beings from reaching their full human potential. These individuals have tragomonic hope, which understands that oppression is a part of reality, while hoping for better days (West, 1996, p. 57). In other words, those who engage in transformative love are dedicated by lip-service and life-service to the justice, peace, and brotherhood/sisterhood in the racial and human contexts. In her pursuit to transform the world, she also wants to transform the internal contradictions that prevent her from being the best

human being possible. In sum, she who engages in a transformative love has a fundamental belief in the transformative possibility of others, herself, society, and societal structures regardless of contemporary conditions.

The works of Freire present the framework to understand personal, societal, and educational transformation through love; the works of hooks, West, and King present transformation in the personal, educational, and societal contexts by embedded love within Africana experience. Although the work of Karenga implies within the personal, educational, and societal context, it is not explicitly stated; however, Karenga notion of the aforementioned is combinational and centered in a collective struggle for people of Africana descent. It is important note that Karenga's work is rooted in the 1960s Black Movement. My framework does not seek to present these ideas as universal truth. Instead, these authors' ideas should be understood as contributions to the framework that I reconceive to fit within the contemporary time, space, and cultural context. In the process of melding the ideas from the authors, I add popular artifacts to enhance the complex ideas. The intention of doing the aforementioned is to assist the oppressed-classes in working towards personal and educational transformation.

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING AS METHODOLOGY

According to the *Oxford English Online Dictionary* (2010), autobiography is, “The writing of one's own history; the story of one's life written by himself” (Oxford English Online Dictionary, para. 1). The etymology of autobiography is rooted in three Greek words “*auto*,” (self) “*bio*,” (life) “*grape*” (writing); simply put, autobiography is self-life-writing (Smith, 2001, p. 1). Smith (1993) supports the Oxford’s definition by adding that traditional autobiography, written in traditional format, seeks to present the individual as a person void of the world. Howarth (1974) argues that autobiography is a self-portrait of the totality of life. A person “systematically” writes about his/her experiences to provide a display of his growth from humble beginnings to personal greatness. Pascal (1960) adds to the discourse by saying, “Autobiography is only one form among many in which a writer speaks for himself and the incidents of his personal experience” (p. 2). Larson’s (2007) description of autobiography encapsulates all of the aforementioned authors, when he says:

For generations, the autobiography has told its author that his life should glow with the author’s profession, ideas, and accomplishments; it should follow a life path that’s eminent and consequential; it should rely on summary and be publicly tactful. The autobiographer should also be finished with life. What’s done is done. Decisions now are irrelevant. Life is prior to the writing. (pp.76-77)

Larson's summary follows the traditional Western European notion of autobiography, where the author gives a personal history beginning from birth to greatness (Pascal, 1960, p. 2; Smith, 2001, p. 2). Other scholars like Smith (2001), Smith and Watson (2001), Hall (2009), Popkin (2001), Velasco (2004), and Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) argue that autobiography is more than a history of a person's life; it is about man's interactions with and their impact on other people and his world. In addition, when transformative scholars write autobiographies, they tend to connect their lives to larger societal issues (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Hall, 2009; Popkin, 2001; Smith, 1993, 2001; Velasco, 2004)

### **3.1 AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING: DIARY, JOURNAL, AND MEMOIR WRITING**

Autobiography in its traditional format does not provide the flexibility to discuss life in an in-depth way from either an individual or collective perspective. Some writers have turned to autobiographical writing to reflect about their lives. Karpaik (2000) asserts that autobiographical writing is a reflection of events; this form of writing entails writing in diaries or journals and writing memoir. According to Larson (2007), memoir provides the author with a chance to engage in an in-depth reflection about an experience, not the totality of lives (p. 16). Olney (1993) writes that memoirs exude "an extensive concern with actions and experiences others than those of the writer" (p. 6). According to Sayer (1975), diaries are autobiographical documents, but they are not autobiographies because they reflect a single point in a person's life. Memoirs are not autobiographies because they are "too external" (p. 243). Attempting to express unity between autobiography and autobiographical writing, Pascal (1960) believes that all

autobiographies have autobiographical writing and all memoirs have autobiographical information (p. 5). He goes on to say that, “both [are] based on personal experience, chronological [order], and [are] reflective” (p. 5). Autobiographical writings like diary, journal, and memoir writings express a person’s feeling about a particular space and time, but do not seek to provide larger meaning of one’s life in the totality of a person’s experience. Memoirs provide an individual with the chance to reflect in an in-depth way about a particular experience. Diary and journal writing tend to reflect an individual’s private feelings, while memoir tends to engage the individual’s experience with others and within a collective context. One can define autobiographical writing as an individual’s feelings about an experience or experiences within a particular time, space, and context, while lacking connectivity to the totality of an individual’s life.

### **3.2 THE PURPOSE OF TRADITIONAL AUTOBIOGRAPHIES**

According to the scholars of autobiography, its history begins in the Western European culture (Karpiak 2000, p. 32; Lehman 1952, p. 42; Nussbaum, 1989, p. 2; Pascal, 1960, p. 2; Sayer, 1975, p. 243; Smith, 2001, p. 21). From its inception, men wrote autobiography as “personal expressions of the meaning of life” as it related to his commitment to God. St. Augustine’s famous *Confessions* was the first autobiography written in 397 AD. In the Western European tradition, autobiography was a process with which only men could engage. The term Western European Male Autobiographical Tradition (WEMAT) will be used to discuss this specific autobiographical experience. Lehman (1952) states the “religious tone” of autobiography was heavily influenced by Christianity; he reinforces the following claim by saying:

A religious tone was imparted to the autobiography by the coming of Christianity, with its innate tendencies towards self-examination and its insistence on the obligation of regarding God as the ultimate judge and redeemer of the individual. The most significant and certainly by far the most important exemplar for the West were the *Confessions* of that early Father of the Church St. Augustine. The question as to how far these can directly be regarded as autobiography has been much discussed. (p. 42)

Augustine's text is revered for its importance because he connected his "awareness of grace and praise to the Creator" in a chronological way (Lehman, 1952, p. 43). Pascal (1960) deepens Lehman's argument regarding St. Augustine's *Confessions*, as a "spiritual movement" that "takes place a "series of impact and scenes at specific times and places" (p. 23). Essentially, St. Augustine's autobiography supported the dogmatic religious culture of the era (Pascal, 1960). God was the subject of society and man the object of God's will (as articulated by the religious nobility). The Western-Europeans were oppressed by this religious dogma. As Western Europe moved into the Renaissance Era, the focus of autobiography would transform from man being the object of reflection to the subject of his own reflection.

During the Renaissance, men began to move away from autobiography centered on God. This era shunned man for writing about his religious transgressions throughout his life. Pascal makes the following comment about the transformation from God-centered to man-centered autobiography:

In this decisive period autobiography is both exploratory and self-confident. The inner self of the earlier religious autobiographies owed the justification of its worth to a common religious belief. The self that is now the object of devoted attention, valued

likewise for its peculiar inner quality rather than its outer achievement, asserts its worth for its own sake, without a transcendental prop. (pp. 51-52)

The movement from God-centered to man-centered also marks the beginning of the European middle class asserting itself as independent of the religious dogma that held agency hostage prior to the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Pascal, 1960, p. 51). According to Bruner (1995), as a product of moving away from religious dogma, the Western-European man sought “individuality, power, and autonomy” (p. 166). Other scholars frame this progress as man moving away from the emotional self to a rational-self. The emotional-self man acts according to the will of God, while the rational man acted according to his thoughts about the world independent of God. The shift of WEMAT came with the coming of the Renaissance Era in Western Europe.

Western European culture went through a transformation in which intellectuals no longer wanted their thoughts to be beholden to “confessions” to God; instead, intellectuals wanted to assert their agency in the world as men who did not have to follow a God-given script developed by religious nobility. The Western-European intellectuals wanted to define their lives based on their thoughts about their experiences in the world. Smith (1993) captures the societal transformation and its interconnectedness with autobiography during the European Renaissance Era:

The meaning of Western selfhood was one such meaning of privilege in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and it secured its privileges by means of specific historical phenomena, that is, by means of philosophical, economic, political, theological, scientific, and literary influences. The inaugural moment of the West’s romance with selfhood lay in the dawn of the Renaissance, during which time the notion of the “individual” emerged, a universal human subject who is marked individually. (p. 5)

The transformation of Western European culture from God-centered to man-centered called for the need to produce new autobiographies that would affirm the new or universal way of life. In other words, the WEMAT was a struggle to rid man and society of the religious oppression and place man as the subject of his destiny. In the pursuit of making man the subject of his destiny, the intellectuals of this era sought to write about the “universal man,” who had common qualities and ambitions (Smith, 1993, pp. 5-6). According to Pascal, the writing of the universal man by Renaissance intellectuals was a form of resistance:

One may understand its breakthrough in the eighteenth century as a significant element of the process of self-assertion and self-realisation of the European middle-class, shaking itself of the values and forms of aristocratic culture and boldly probing into its own spiritual foundations. (p. 51)

Intellectuals wrote autobiographies centered on the totality of individual life independent of external influences. Essentially, these autobiographies were from birth to a stage or stages of accomplishment. As stated earlier, the notion of accomplishment entailed acting in a rational way that the intellectuals of the Renaissance Era defined as manhood.

### **3.3 PURPOSING OPPRESSED PEOPLE’S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL TRADITION: THE USE OF INDIVIDUAL VOICE FOR COLLECTIVE STRUGGLE**

The rigidity of the WEMAT prevents people from the oppressed-class from articulating their lived experiences. Thus, instead of seeking to frame their experiences within the WEMAT, oppressed-classes developed their own autobiographical traditions that differed from their counterparts. The Oppressed People Autobiographical Tradition (OPAT) has various beginnings,



but the significance of the tradition is not rooted in its universality; rather it lies in the purpose of writing the autobiography. Before going into detail about the OPAT, it is important to note that I use the acronym consciously to connote the struggle of oppressed people to liberate themselves through autobiographical reflection. OPAT is a direct reference to but not limited to a tradition of autobiographies written by feminist, Chicana/o, and Africana scholars. Referencing these different traditions is important because it allows for the transformation of the WEMAT conceptualization of the purpose of autobiography and autobiographical writings.

### **3.4 OPPRESSED PEOPLE’S VOICE IN AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING**

According to Bruner (1995), autobiography and autobiographical writings are impacted by inner dynamics and societal forces. From the period of the enslavement of Africans in America to the Black Movement of the 1960s, autobiography and autobiographical writing have been used to articulate “alienation and redemption” of African-Americans and as a “form of rebellion” (Brunner, 1995,p. 167; Brunner, 1995, p. 171). Velasco (2004), who speaks about the Chicana/o autobiographical tradition, declares that those scholars writing from the “border paradigm” seek to critique American society. It provides an alternative view of what it means to be American which uses different “language and cultural aesthetics” (p. 314). In other words, the Chicana/o scholars are seeking to resist the oppressive conditions of society that force him/her to be silent in and adapt to society. They will use ideas from their experiences to discuss their lived experiences (Velasco, 2004). Hollis (1994) discusses the experiences of working-class women from a small, all-female liberal arts college who used autobiographical writing with the intention

of developing their voice (p. 57). Essentially, Velasco, Brunner, and Hollis all discuss autobiography as a tool to assist in the development of oppressed people's voices as a precursor to action of the oppressed subjects in the societal transformation.

The OPAT allows the oppressed to articulate experiences as a person and member of a specific group—based on class, gender, race, or all of the above. Smith's (1993) and Hall's (2009) ideas about autobiographical writing by the oppressed are aligned with those previously mentioned above. For Smith, autobiography is a time when the oppressed “restages their subjectivity” in society, while developing a “strategy for resisting” societal oppression (p. 156). When authors from the OPAT engage in the previously mentioned, they engage in what she call “autobiographical manifesto” (Smith, 2001, p. 157). Smith discusses autobiographical manifesto in the following way:

Purposeful, bold, contentious, the autobiographical manifesto contests the old inscription, the old histories, the old politics, the *ancien regime*, by working to dislodge the hold of the universal subject through an expressly political collocation of a new ‘I.’ (p. 157)

The purpose of writing by an OPAT author is to become a “revolutionary subject” while framing her identity as a tool to connect fellow oppressed people. Furthermore, OPAT scholars are not just resisting dehumanization as an individual, but they are using their experience as a “call” to assist in the development of a movement to transform society (Smith, 1993). Hall suggests that the autobiographical manifesto is a tool that “critiques of the various forces of oppression—social psychological, economic, and political—at work in society” (pp. 91-92). Hall, who writes about the autobiographical writing of the African-American journalist, declares that the “African-American autobiography of the individual life story has always been representative of something greater” (p. 92). Furthermore, he emphasizes that the African-American

autobiographer who writes from the autobiographical manifesto perspective tends to see himself as a member of a “marginalized group,” so his stories seek to present personalized issues in a collective context (Hall, 2009).

Writers of the OPAT are seeking to tell life stories to connect with other oppressed-people. The connection they are seeking is not one centered in superficial unity; rather, they engage in personal reflection attempting to make oppressed-people aware of oppression (Smith, 1993; Hall, 2004). Thus, the usage of “I” is important because it has a dialectical meaning. When “I” is used by authors from the OPAT, it is used to connote the person as an individual and member of group that is being oppressed. By using the individual and collective “I,” the author can denounce societal oppression from a perspective of how things feel as a person and member of a group. Essentially the OPAT authors seek to write about their lives in society with an emphasis on how they feel.

### **3.5 SUMMARY OF WEMAT AND OPAT**

WEMAT and OPAT provide differing examples of the purpose of autobiography. On the one hand, autobiography from the WEMAT provides stories of accomplished men who made it independent of outside forces. The life of the WEMAT author was predestined because he acted according to a prescribed notion of success. The prescribed notion of success is articulated by the author with the intent of framing himself within a universal tradition of man and what it means to be accomplished. It is important to note, as stated early, that the notion of accomplishment for intellectuals moved from being committed to acting in accordance to God’s will to being centered on individual agency independent of God or any other external force. Conversely, the

OPAT has many beginnings, but all seek to assist in the development of a better world through the liberation of oppressed people as individuals and members of oppressed-classes. For a scholar writing from the OPAT, there is no fatalistic future to come; rather, the future is one developed by the oppressed people, and the author is merely using her voice as a tool to assist in the liberation of the oppressed people of her class/group or society as a whole. The evolution of OPAT is seen, not by centering it in God or the individual, but in meeting the needs of the oppressed within a given historical and contemporary context. WEMAT affirms and socializes people into the oppressive societal conditions, while OPAT seeks to illuminate oppressive conditions and provide solutions to liberate all people from these oppressive conditions.

### **3.6 AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING AS METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.6.1 Chronological Order**

Autobiographical writing is a conscientious process that seeks to understand the meaning of the totality of life or an experience. Whether a personal reflection presents a person from birth to accomplishment or from the genesis of a particular experience, both are organized in chronological order. Smith suggests that autobiography is strictly focused on chronological order, while memoir does it but not from a totality of life perspective. Pascal (1960) states that an autobiography is a “coherent shaping of the past” (p. 5). For example, in the autobiographies of Nkrumah (1957) and Newton (2009), who were revolutionaries of the 1960s and 1970s, both began their stories from birth to greatness. Conversely, Obama (2004), Betts (2009), and King (1998) all write in-depth reflections chronologically about experiences that occurred within a

certain time period or periods in their lives. It is important to note that both Obama (2004) and Betts (2009) wrote memoirs, while King's autobiography was comprised of letters, speeches, and sermons organized in chronological order by an editor. Obama begins his book with finding out his father was dead, but flashes back to him growing up in various places, and ends with him getting married. Betts begins his story with him committing armed robbery and ends with him finding redemption through education. King's book begins with a letter he wrote about his family and life, being born and raised during the Great Depression, and ends with a speech titled *Unfilled Dreams*. Autobiography and autobiographical writing differ in their approach to chronology only with regards to whether the author wants to present the totality of an experience or life.

### **3.6.2 Theme**

The second element of autobiography and autobiographical writing is theme. Themes are used to give meaning to the totality of the author's experience or life. According to Howarth (1974), themes may come from an author's political, religious, philosophical, or cultural perspectives (p. 366). Essentially, themes aid the author in expressing the central message of his life, while metaphors assist in the development of or realization of the theme of the autobiography. However, some authors might choose to make a metaphor the theme of the book. For example, in Newton's autobiography, titled *Revolutionary Suicide*, his story is framed around becoming conscious of the individualistic middle-class life style and abandoning it to liberate the working-class people from American oppression. Conversely, Betts, in his book *A Question of Freedom*, organizes the work around the theme of freedom and the pursuit of it while being incarcerated. The use of theme and metaphor are tools to assist the reader in understanding the message of the

autobiography. Additionally, the author can choose to have sub-themes that lead up to the larger theme. In Obama's memoir, he presents general themes such as "Origins," "Chicago," and "Kenya"; even though all of these themes are general, the stories presented with these themes contribute to the reader's understanding of why his dream is that of his father. King's writings are thematic and metaphorical within letters, speeches, and sermons, but lack an overarching theme or metaphor because they are a compilation of autobiographical writings. Themes and metaphors assist the author in expressing a message about his life or an experience in its totality.

### **3.6.3 Autobiographical Pact**

In autobiography and autobiographical writing, the author is telling a story about herself, while in memoir the role of the author differs. Lejeune (1989) clarifies the role of the author in autobiography by saying, "In order for there to be an autobiography... the author, narrator, and the protagonist must be identical" (p. 5). In memoir, the author can tell a story about an experience with others, as he/she understood it from the perspective of being a member in the group and an individual. In either writing form—autobiography or memoir—the story has to be true. Some authors call this the autobiographical pact. Lejeune explains the autobiographical pact in the following passage:

The author is defined as simultaneously a socially responsible real person and the producer of a discourse. For the reader, who does not know the real person, all while believing in his existence, the author is defined as the person capable of producing a discourse, and so he imagines what he is like from what he produces. (p. 11)

As a result of the author using his real name, he will tell truthful stories. A truthful story in autobiographical writings does not mean it is told exactly the way it happened; rather it is told

with honesty and integrity by the author. Thus, whether the author is describing his life in totality or the totality of a particular experience and whether that description places him as narrator or actor, it has to be truthful respectively. For example, Obama (2004) tells a story about a man attempting to convince him to give up his dream to become a community organizer; instead, he attempts to convince Obama to get a good job that will pay enough money to live a comfortable life (p. 136). In this reflection, Obama is both the narrator and actor. However, the reader, not being present when the conversation occurs, has to trust that Obama is telling the truth about this particular experience. The roles of the author are dynamic; he is the actor and narrator who tells the truth about the totality of life or an experience.

### **3.7 USING THE METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.7.1 The Self as Individual and Collective**

In the context of autobiography and autobiographical writing, I reflect on my personal feelings as an individual from a working-class male from the Africana experience. I unify autobiography and autobiographical writing for in-depth reflection that has led to transformation in my life. In this study, I am both the narrator and actor or subject and object. I have reflected deeply on an experiences based on my feelings as an individual and member of a group. In the reflection as an individual was reflection chance to express my feelings. I chose to discuss the following concepts in tandem and in isolation: pain, grief, disappointment, happiness, and success. Some of my experiences evoked positive and negative feelings; as the author I had to analyze those stories to understand them, while using love to move beyond it. At times, I wrote as a member of

group, who sought to understand my reflections and actions to move beyond these experiences in the future.

### **3.7.2 Presentation of Stories**

I present a grand-story and sub-stories. The grand-story illustrates the larger meaning of life in with a given experience, and all other stories to supported it. For this study, the grand story is the pursuit of love. Throughout my life, I have pursued love in personal, educational, and social contexts, and it is around this pursuit that all of the stories are framed. On the other hand, the sub-stories are used to add depth to the grand-story. The stories have a starting and ending point. Stories do not jump to different life experiences; the writing remains within a life-experience for depth purposes and upon completion offers a reflection on a particular experience. All sub-stories are organized in the order of occurrence. The organization of the stories is done to ensure the reader is able to understand my transformation from phase to phase.

### **3.7.3 Using Theory and Metaphor as Themes that Frame Stories**

As an individual and member of a group, I have framed my experiences using a theoretical framework or metaphor. The usage of theoretical framework is, but is not limited to, my personal experiences based on my membership within a particular group. Using a theoretical framework means that I use literature that affirms or illuminates my experience. Metaphor is also a tool used to frame an experience. For example, I use lyrics from songs, movie scenes, personal poems, ideas from scholars, and experiences from life to frame stories. Within this study, lyrics from music are used to an added illustration to the story. Essentially, the music is used as a soundtrack



to the study. The use of theory, metaphors, popular culture, and/or events from my personal experience to frame stories are done with the intent of illuminate the personal, educational, and societal purposes of my life, which assists in the development of the *transconceptual philosophical framework*.

#### **3.7.4 I am who I say I am**

As the writer, the stories presented are true. First, my name in each piece is the same name with which I was born. I own the experiences in this study, which requires me to present situations as true. My truthful experiences are dark, sad, happy, and joyous in nature, but still these experiences are articulated from a truthful perspective. It is important to note, this process of writing was difficult because there is a possibility that stories presented might betray myself and others. At times, I would go into deep depressive trances, which caused me to temporarily stop writing. Additionally, I acknowledge that all cannot be remembered as it occurred in the past, but with a humanized tone I have attempted to display the complexity of myself and others who were involved in the various experiences. The names of individuals, who had a positive impact on my life are real, while the names of those people having a negative impact on my life are pseudonyms. In sum, the *autobiographical pact* is truthfulness in the author's presentation of himself and others encountered in the story.

### **3.7.5 Using Diaries, Journals, Pictures, Videos, and Published Documents as Stimuli for Reflections**

In this study, I used various items to assist me in my autobiographical reflection. First, I wrote in journals and diaries about ideas and experiences that have impacted me throughout my life. With these diaries and journals, I jotted down ideas that I used to refresh my memory of significant experiences, which I then used to develop my philosophical framework. Second, I used media to assist in my autobiographical reflection. Pictures and videos are very important to my reflections about my family. Lastly, I used articles written when I was the editor of my high school newspaper and writer for my college newspaper to add clarity to my reflections. In sum, all of the documents assisted me in reflecting deeply about my life as a person, student, and citizen.

### **3.7.6 Quality Study**

A study's quality can be determined by many things, one of which is its theoretical orientation. With the autobiographical writing, quality is determined by the author's connection between life and experience of members of his/her group for liberation from oppressive conditions in various contexts. Thus, the author takes a subject role in discussing life within society and societal institutions as a member of a group. In order to ensure the aforementioned, this study had a peer debriefing element. I met bi-weekly with two scholars who have used a similar methodology to ensure I adhere to this methodology. Feedback from these debriefings assisted in the development of a quality study, as I explain later in more detail

### 3.7.7 Triangulation

Triangulation is comparing data that relates to the same topic whose origin differs. The purpose of this is to reference only one form of data can be problematic because it can lead to “undetected error” which can lead to “incorrect analysis” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 183). In addition, these data are used to “counter various possible threats the validity of our analysis” (p. 184). In the context of autobiographical writing , the lived experienced on the author should be connected the experience of his/her group (i.e. race, class, gender, or all of the above). In this study, I did not interview anyone in the group. Autobiographical manifesto is a document that to inspires the “readers to take action” in society to transform society (Hall, 2009, p. 93). The autobiographical manifesto seeks to connect the individual to the collective. When presenting stories, he/she speaks as a “member of a group or community” with makes him/her both participant and observers within their life, or what Smith (1993) calls an “auto/ethnographer” (p. 161). Hence, when the author speaks, he/she represents both me and us or me and us.

Within this study, I have used popular culture artifacts to connect my experiences to that of other oppressed-groups. The purpose is not to present the totality of my experience as universal; rather, I sought to connect pieces of my experiences as similar to members of the same group. Lastly, in order to sure that the stories presented in this study are true to my experience, I have used journals, poems, videos, photographs, articles, and research papers. The following is example of the triangulation data sources I used in my study.

Chapter	Documentation
High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Articles from University City High Newspaper (U-City News)</li></ul>

School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poems published in (U-City)</li> </ul>
College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Articles published in the Lincoln University Student Newspaper (Lincolnian)</li> <li>• Memos from Presidency</li> </ul>
Graduate School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pictures</li> <li>• Articles</li> <li>• Papers</li> <li>• Journals</li> </ul>

**3.7.8 Critical Reflectivity**

Mertens (2005) asserts that the role of the research is to understand the “psychological state of other to uncover the dialectical relationship” (p. 259), while in autobiographical manifesto this takes a different form. The author, in order to ensure quality, seeks to understand his/her personal contradictions that contribute to his/her understanding and conceptualization of reality (p. 259). Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) acknowledge that all knowledge is “consequential” and the publishing of the “research findings can shape the climate in which political and practical decisions are made” (p. 15). In the context of autobiographical manifesto, the book might be used to speak to other members of his/her class to resist oppression, while also producing members of oppressive class to act against the group.

During this process, I met with colleagues and friends who read my study. One of my colleagues, Chantae Earl, read provided feedback on my study, which she connected it to the

work of Critical Race Theorist scholars who write auto/ethnographies to present counter stories to the dominant discourse on life within institution. With this feedback I realized that my work had an intellectual space to fit in (although not perfectly). In conversations with Eliada Nwosu, she constantly pushed me to understand the implications the stories had for my future work as an educator and leader in local, national, and global contexts. Feedback from a close friend, Kareem Rivera, allowed me to see how the story that discussed my relationship with Rasheeda initially didn't state how it ended; I acknowledged it and revised the section. Kareem's also was able to see my story connected to my conceptual framework. Lastly, he said the study read like a movie, which he didn't want to put down.

The autobiographical manifesto is “future focused” where the author brings “issues to the light” to assist in the “empowerment of the marginalized” (Hall, 2009, p. 91). As a future focused document, it reveals oppression and oppressive conditions, while offering a path towards transformation for the individual, society, and societal institutions. According to Smith (1993), “Calling the subject into the future, the manifesto attempts to actively position the subject in a potentially liberated future” (p. 163). Authors who use autobiographical manifesto seek to address prevent people from realizing their human potential, and it offers a path towards liberation for the individual, his/her racial, gender, class group affiliations , and society.

Autobiographical manifesto represents a struggle for “self-realization” in the midst of “social, political, psychological” oppression (Hall, 2009, p. 94). In doing so, a quality autobiographical manifesto should connect the individual to the collective, while critiquing anything that limits the human potential. The autobiographical manifesto author confronts traditional notions of identity that suggests a predetermined manner of reflection and action as a member of a particular group (p. 160). Additionally, autobiographical manifesto insists on

“temporalities and spatiality of identity” which presents to the public how and why individuals of particular groups reflect and act (p. 160).

### **3.7.9 Positionality**

All research is based on a particular perspective, while admitting to its “incompleteness” and is only respective positions based on class, race, and gender. Within the autobiographical manifesto, the author speaks from his/her location as a member of an oppressed class. The author writing within this context seeks to “contest or appropriate position of power” based on the lived experience, but the author does so “as member of a marginalized group” (Hall, 2009, p. 91). The author breaks from the ideological “I” that confines him/her to an object-life for subject-life (Smith, 1993, p. 158). The author writes an autobiographical manifesto with the “intent on bring out the culturally marginalized experiences out from under the shadow of an undifferentiated otherness,” while locating the stories within a time, space, cultural context of that he/she exist in” (p. 158). The document essentially becomes a process where the author seeks to address the contradictions that oppress him/her and his/her group. This study showed the contradictions I dealt with from high school to graduate school and my struggle to move beyond those contradictions towards a new life.

Additionally, within this context I sought to “contest or appropriate position of power” based on the lived experience, but the author does so “as member of a marginalized group” (Hall, p. 91). I broke from the ideological “I” that confines him/her to an object-life for subject-life (Smith, 1993, p. 158). The author writes an autobiographical manifesto with the “intent on bring out the culturally marginalized experiences out from under the shadow of an undifferentiated otherness,” while locating the stories within a time, space, cultural context of that he/she exist in”

(p. 158). The document essentially becomes a process where the author seeks to address the contradictions that oppress him/her and his/her group.

This study was critical of the “various forces of oppression... at work in society,” while understanding how this power impacted them as an “individual and member of a group” (pp. 91-92). The author within autobiographical manifesto “politicizes the private and personalizes the public” (p. 160). This is done to show the complexity of the life of a member of an oppressed-class. Externally, an individual might be the victim of oppression, but, internally, the individual might be the oppressor of others within his/her grouping or individuals who are of different groups (p. 160).

### **3.7.10 Thick Description**

Lastly, a quality study has “thick description” in it. The researcher should provide detail to assist the reader in understanding, “time, place, context, and culture” that the author is writing from (Mertens, 2005, p. 256). Howarth (1974) likens an autobiography to a *self-portrait*, and the author reflects on his/her her thoughts and actions of the past with and without other people (Howarth, p. 364). Bullough and Pinneagar (2001) offer a complementary notion of “thick description” in autobiographical writing, which is centered on “character development” and “dramatic action” (p. 17). This study sought to understand the pivotal events that have assisted understanding the purposes of life. Sayer (1976), who cites Pascal, suggests that autobiography is a “reconstruction of the movement” by “establishing stages in the individual life” (p. 243). Within the autobiographical manifesto tradition, thick description allows the oppressed-class writer to “[expose] and [describe] the inner working of repressive systems” (Hall, 2009, p. xxiv). Nor does it allow for the oppressed-class author to offer vision for the future (Smith, 1993).

### **3.7.11 Concluding Thoughts on Autobiographical Methodology**

In conclusion, engaging in autobiographical reflection has been done for many different reasons. A good autobiography seeks to make meaning out of life. The author who engages in autobiographical reflections seeks to express the complexity of life, while framing it in a manner that while reading or at the duration of the reading the autobiography the reader is able to take something away from the document that adds to his/her life. A good autobiographical reflection is like a good sermon. When the preacher is preaching, the person sitting in the church should feel like the preacher is speaking directly to him/her. Once it is done, the person leaves the church with new insight about life and is inspired to transform themselves or aspects of the being. Thus, a good autobiographical reflection presents stories in a manner that has the reader believing that the author is telling a story directly to him/her. A good autobiographical reflection is honest reflection seeking to understand the internal and external contradictions of with life as a means of becoming a better human being. When a reader has completed my study, he/she should feel like a member of church who leaves after a good sermon.

### **3.7.12 Strengths and Limitation of Methodology**

Autobiographical reflection has both strengths and weaknesses. The strength of this methodology is that it gives an individual the chance to express personal experiences with the intent of transforming the personal, educational, and social contexts within which an individual exists. Reflection creates the potential for an individual to transform himself, while providing an impetus for others to transform themselves. The limitation of this methodology is that the author might articulate experiences that might cause emotional discomfort of the individual and those



whom he describes within these experiences. Since autobiographical reflection is not from the WEMAT, scholars will critique it because it intertwines the individual and collective contexts for understanding of the purposes of life. Although there are positives and negatives to this methodology, it allows for the individual to examine his/her life with the intent of acting differently in the future.

### **3.8 CONCLUSION**

Engaging in autobiographical reflection has been done for many different reasons. A good autobiography seeks to make meaning out of life. The author who engages in autobiographical reflections expresses the complexity of life, while framing it in a manner that permits the reader to take something away from the document that adds to her life. A good autobiographical reflection is like a good sermon. When the preacher is preaching, the person sitting in the church should feel like the preacher is speaking directly to him. Once the sermon is done, the person leaves the church with new insight about life and is inspired to transform himself or aspects of his being. Thus, a good autobiographical reflection presents stories in a manner that has the reader believing that the author is telling a story directly to her. Lastly, a good autobiographical reflection is honest reflection seeking to understand the internal and external contradictions of one's life.

## 4.0 HIGH SCHOOL

### 4.1 FROM THE FIELD OF DREAMS TO HOOD DREAMS

As children, my friends and I loved baseball. We played from sun up to sun down, from the spring until the winter. In the winter, we would shovel the snow off the schoolyard to play. We all had our baseball heroes, which we all called out before every game. My hero was Lenny Dykstra the centerfielder for the Philadelphia Phillies; he was known for his hard play. When I would come up to bat, I would tap the four corners of home plate, adjust my hat, and hold the bat as he did. When I played defense, I played it like Lenny; I would sacrifice my body to assist my team in winning games. Nothing mattered when we were playing baseball. The sport allowed us a chance to stay kids. When I played, I forgot about being poor, not having name brand clothes, or not getting girls. The only thing that mattered when I played baseball was how well I played.

As we got older, we were realizing that we weren't *young bulls* anymore. We were becoming teenagers who wanted to be *Grown Ass Men*. We became interested in getting money, girls, and expensive clothes. We slowly started to admire the *oldheads* in our community who sold drugs and smoked weed. Some days my friends would sneak to the park and smoke cigarettes and fake blunts that had household seasoning. With each action we were losing our innocence, but we still played baseball. During baseball games, our conversations began to change. Instead of focusing on winning, we began to reflect on getting girls, new sneaks, and

getting money, but we still were holding on to our boyhood innocence. The toxic environmental factors that came with living in *Da Hood* slowly started to have an impact on us. If playing baseball was our way of holding on to our innocence, then as our dreams of becoming professional baseball players slowly started to slip away so did our innocence.

We played baseball in Anderson Elementary's schoolyard; however, the people that lived across the street from the school didn't like for us to play in the yard. The elders would scream from their porches for us not to play baseball there.

Elder: Go home!

Us: We ain't do nothing.

Elder: Y'all too loud.

Us: What?

Elder: You heard me! Go play in front of y'all house!

Us: What we do?

Elder: We don't want y'all play here!

Us: Whatever!

At times, we were reckless with our language. When the elders would scream at us not to use profanity, we would apologize, but it was not enough. The elders just wanted us to leave the schoolyard. They didn't realize what playing baseball was to us: It was a chance for us to stay innocent boys; it was our immunity from pursuing the drug dreams. In a strange way, the elders were accelerating our path towards a life of crime.

Ms. Thompson was the elder who pushed us the most. She was a brown skinned lady who wore sunglasses that were in the shape of large circles, and she wore a goldish-brown wig that was in the same style as Peggy Bundy from the show *Married with Children*. First, she

complained about us playing baseball in the yard with hard baseballs. She claimed that hardballs would break car and house windows, which was true. Disrespectfully, we ignored her request because we wanted to become professional baseball players, and playing with anything but hardballs wouldn't help us with that goal. So, we ignored her request. Consequently, anytime we hit a ball over the gate, she would run after it or send one of her grandchildren to get the ball. After a while, we ran out of baseballs, and we just conceded to her request. Then, we put our money together and began to buy Soft Strike baseballs. These balls were made of a spongy material but heavy enough for our training to become competitive baseball players. Unfortunately, this was not enough for Ms. Thompson; she just did not want us to play in the yard. One day we only had one ball. One of us hit a homerun, and the ball flew over the fence. As usual, Ms. Thompson got off her porch to get the ball. One of my friends who was playing outfield tried to get to the ball before she did, but he couldn't. She grabbed the ball, and a confrontation ensued.

Us: Hey, give us our ball back!

Ms. Thompson: No!

Us: Why not? It's not a hardball. It's not going to break no windows.

Ms. Thompson: I don't care!

Us: We ain't even been cussin or nothing. We just tryna play ball! Can we have our ball back?

Ms. Thompson: No!

Us: What da fuck! What you want us to sell drugs or something?

Ms. Thompson: I don't care what y'all do. I just don't want y'all playin in this yard!

Us: Whatever!

Us: Fuck dat bitch! [Spoken so only we could here it].

A few times after this confrontation, we played baseball in the yard, but with every ball she took, it was like she was taking our innocence away. We felt rejected by the elders in the community. They contributed to us becoming thugs by not showing us love. Instead of playing baseball, we began chilling on the corners. Instead of chasing baseballs in the outfield, we began chasing the pretty young girls who walked through our hood. Instead of hitting the ball with a bat, we began to hit the wall with graffiti. Instead of seeking respect because we wanted to be good baseball players, we wanted to be known as the best tagger. Instead of calling the names of our baseball heroes, the *Old Heads* who sold drugs became our heroes. At that moment, life shifted to revolve around three things: getting respect, having sex, and getting money. We went from the field of dreams to the hood of dreams.

## 4.2 HURT ALL OVER (HAO)

At this point, we began to engage in destructive behavior, and one of those behaviors was creating a graffiti group. The development of this group was interesting because we all chose tag-names, which were based on many things of significance to us. For example, one of my friends chose the tag name of a famous tagger in the hood, another chose a name representing strength, while others chose names that reflected boldness. I couldn't decide what my tag name would be. One day, my friend Felicia and I went to the library, and we looked in a dictionary.

Felicia: Hey Nosa. What do you want to represent?

Me: I don't know. Something that sounds hot.

Felicia: Ok, well, how about *Alliance*.

Me: What?

Felicia: Yeah, alliance means to bring to people together. You can be the tagger who brings the different taggers together.

[My friend begins to laugh.]

Me: Naw, I cool.

Eventually, I chose the name: *Lone Star*. We first started tagging on paper, which turned into us tagging on walls with permanent markers in schools and in the community. Tagging quickly turned into us buying spray-paint and tagging up on walls. My friends would put their money together and go to Pep Boys, and if they saw any drug addicted person, who we called a *smoker*, they would give him or her a few dollars. The *smoker* would buy spray paint. With that spray paint, my friends would tag up all around *Da Hood*. God blessed me with terrible handwriting, which translated into me not being able to tag well; thus, my friends thought letting me tag was a waste of paint. So, I never tagged with spray paint and only a few times used markers.

Outside of tagging, my friends also began to abuse drugs. Smoking weed was their thing. They used to smoke in the park or in the back of Turner Middle School. When they would smoke, I would chill with them, but I never smoked. My mother had raised my brother and I as vegetarians. So, rebelling against her, I chose hamburgers and spicy chicken sandwiches from a local restaurant named Checkers. However, when my friends would try to pressure me to smoke, I always resisted. I explained that my resistance was based on me being opposed to smoking weed, but I was afraid of my mother. One Sunday, my mother, brother, and I were watching 60 Minutes. The week's show had a segment on Marvin Gay. In the segment, the father said that he killed Gay because he was a drug addict. My mother turned to my brother and I and said, "If I

ever catch y'all doing drugs, I will kill yo Black-ass!" After saying she would kill us if we did drugs, I remember being so afraid. So, when my friends began smoking weed, I didn't do so because of the fear I had of my mother. I didn't know if she would really kill me, but I surely was not going to test her. My friends' usage of drugs began to increase. I slowly started to stop hanging out them, but this was not the breaking point for us.

One evening, my mother sent me to the market to get some mayonnaise and relish from the supermarket. The market was two blocks away from my house, and it was located in a different *Hood*. The guys from this *Hood* were known for *dipping*<sup>1</sup> on guys. I was walking up the street, and right before I got to the corner to cross the street to head towards the market I heard:

One of the boys: Yo! Young Bull!

[The boys walked towards me.]

Me: What?

One of the boys: What you got in your pockets?

Me: What?

At that moment, I put my hands in my pockets to prevent these boys from taking the money. My mother sent me to the store to get mayonnaise and relish, and I was not going back home without, at the bare minimum, her money. As the boys approached me, my hands were firmly placed in both pockets to fool them about which pocket the money was in.

One of the boys: Run dat shit yo!

Me: Get the fuck off me!

[An old woman screams from the trolley stop.]

Old woman: Get off of him. Let him alone.

---

<sup>1</sup> Dippin on: when a group uses violence against

[I fell to the ground]

Finally, one of the boys got my hand out of my pockets, but he didn't have it. After pulling my hand out of my pocket, he realized there was no money in it, and, out of frustration, the boy tried to stomp on my face. However, he missed my face and stomped on my pinky. I narrowly escaped robbery, and I ran back down to my *Hood*. All of my friends were standing in front of C&M Variety store.

Me: Dem, niggahs from the 58<sup>th</sup> street tried to dip on me.

Asher: What happened?

Me: Da bull walked up to me like, "Yo, what you got in ya pockets?"

Asher: Damn, they tried to take ya shit?

Me: Yeah, I put my hands in my pockets, so they wouldn't get my dough, yamean?

Asher: Right.

Me: Bull pulled my hand out of my pocket, and dhen stomped on my pinky.

Asher: What? Hold up, hold up. Yo! Did y'all hear what Nos said? Dese niggah on 58<sup>th</sup> Street is reckless. Dhey ain't dipping on kats whole bodies, dhey just rolling on niggahs pinkies! What the world coming too?

[Everybody started laughing.]

Another Friend: You playing basketball later?

Me: Man, fuck y'all. I just got dipped on, and y'all talking playing basketball. Whatever!

As I walked home, I remember feeling abandoned by my friends. Real friends would have gone looking for these guys who tried to rob me, but in reality, my friends were punks. I made a conscious decision not to hang out with them anymore. This decision was painful because I felt betrayed by my friends. At that moment, my tag name became my reality—I was a *Lone Star*.



For a few months, I just stopped *chillin*<sup>2</sup> with my friends. Sometimes when I had to go to the store for my mother, I would see my old friends. We greeted each other, but I wasn't going to *chill* with them. During this period, I spent the majority of my time in the house playing video games on my Playstation. My mother began to be worried about my constant playing of video games. One day, she brought home audiocassette tapes of Malcolm X. These tapes would provide me with a great understanding of the militant perspective on the civil rights struggle. My mother knew I would not listen to these speeches had I not been able to play video games simultaneously. So, playing video games interestingly was a very educational experience. With each passing month, I saw Malcolm X as a hero. He was a Black man who took up for poor Black people. He believed in Blacks folks' ability to make themselves and their community better. Years later, he became my measurement of manhood. I dreamed of being a Black leader who would be like Malcolm X—a strong, bold intellectual, and a lover of Black people.

Although I wanted to be like Malcolm, I was more like the Detroit Red version of Malcolm X. In my *Hood*, we had this phrase, "I ain't never been no bitch." Using this phrase let someone in particular and others in general know that no individual would be disrespectful to him, because if they did a fight would ensue. In *Da Hood*, many people used this term, but one of the people who popularized this phrase was Brody. Brody was known for *knuckin*<sup>3</sup> people for no reason. Asher and I would laugh because it seemed that he just knucked when he got bored. Regardless of why he constantly fought people, we looked at him as a *cannon* who wanted to die. It was as if he wanted someone to kill him, but the crazy thing was that we looked to him as

---

<sup>2</sup> Chillin: not to do something.

<sup>3</sup> knucklin: to fight

a hero. One day Asher and I were sitting on the step, and he began telling me about a fight that Brody had got into the previous day.

Asher: You heard about the bull Brody.

Me: Naw, what happened?

Asher: Da niggah got in a knuckle with some kats from a different hood in the square.

[A small park that old head sat in to smoke weed and drink alcohol].

Me: Damn, so what happened.

Asher: Da niggah Brody was talkin shit to da bulls. Cuz you how da bull Brody be, always tryin to get into da knuckle heat [heat is a term used as a verbal exclamation mark].

Me: So, what happened?

[Asher begins to laugh.]

Asher: So, yamean, dhey was on some arguing shit. So, Brody was like, “Yo fam” I ain’t never been no bitch. Hand me a box [referring to a desire for him to fight].” Dhen, the bull was like, “Yo fam, I’ll let you get da first hit.”

Me: Da Bull is a cannon.

Asher: Guess da otha bull did?

Me: What?

Asher: Da otha bull pulled out a hammer [referring to a gun]!

Me: What?

Asher: Da bull tried to bang [referring to shooting a person] Brody! Da niggah blocked da bullets!

[We began laughing]

After this incident, Brody was immortalized. Asher and I created a verb in tribute to Brody—Brody-on. To act like Brody was to be fearless, bold, and strong. If you wanted to be like Brody, you could not fear going to jail, getting shot, or facing physical danger. If you wanted to be like Brody, then you had to initiate fights for no reason. If you wanted to be like Brody, then you had to express your strength by brutally punishing another person. I was not fully committed to getting my *Brody-on*, but I was moving dangerously close to it.

### 4.3 KNUCKLIN FOR RESPECT

#### 4.3.1 Learnin How to Sneak

Asher moved next door to me during my eighth grade year. Before he had lived across the bridge, where there was another *Hood* with boys who were known for *dippin* on boys for no reason. Even though he grew up across the bridge, he wasn't like those guys. He was laid back and known for being one of the popular kids in school. He dressed well and had a crazy sense of humor. When he first moved next door, he and I would speak, but that was about it. As time progressed, we would hang out more and more, but I was still a little cautious because of the betrayal of my old friends. I thought he would do the same. As time progressed, my friends were still punks, but I began to trust Asher. He became a kind of brother to me. He taught me to stand up for myself, and he taught me how not to be bullied.

Asher: Yo, Nos.

Me: Yo?

Asher: Why you let dhese bitch-ass-niggahs talk shit to you?

Me: Man, fuck dhese niggahs.

Asher: Naw gang! Don't let no niggah talk shit to you gang!

Me: Yeah.

Asher: Nos, if you know you can't beat'em sneak'em!

Me: Yeah.

Asher: Dawg, don't let no niggah chump you dawg. Sneak'em [a term used to connote being bullied].

The *sneaking*<sup>4</sup> of dudes who disrespected me was becoming a part of my personality; however, getting in the mental state of *sneaking* people was difficult, because I hated fighting. When I fought a person, it would turn into three fights. If I won the first fight, then the person would come back and fight me again. After that fight, he might want to fight again to let everyone know that the earlier fights were lucky ones for me. Therefore, prior to meeting Asher, I didn't fight that often. Boys would bully me verbally and physically. Like a big brother, Asher forced me to stand up for myself.

In eighth grade, my class went on a trip on Valentine's Day. I had just got off of the bus from the trip to the University of Pennsylvania. I had just impressed my eighth grade crush Marcia Poole, who I had bought roses for during the trip. As I walked into the store, I saw Asher, some of my old friends, and a bunch of other kids trying to get into the store. I waited to enter the store, and I closed the door. The owner of the store only allowed a few students in at a time during afterschool hours to prevent theft. As I waited to enter the store, standing near to the door, an older boy named Jamone pushed me and an argument ensued.

Me: What!

---

<sup>4</sup> Sneakin refers to an individual who pre-emptively starts a fight by swing first

Jamone: You ain't getting in till I say so.

Me: Man, whatever.

[He pushed again.]

Asher: Yo, Nos, dat niggah a bitch! Fuck'em up Nos. Nos, Nos, sneak dhat niggah!

As I looked to my left, I saw Marcia. If her eyes could have talked, then she would have properly said, "What are you going to do?" If my eyes could have spoken back my response would have been, "I ain't never been no bitch!"

Me: What, fuck you!

Jamone: Young bull, don't get out of pocket! [Referring to me defending myself.]

Asher: Sneak dhat niggah!

Jamone: I wish you would!

I closed my eyes and swung, and my fist connected with the side of his cheek. Instead of him being my bully, he all of sudden became a coward. With every swing, I found myself feeling free from fear. Jamone hit me a few times, but I couldn't feel it. I was breaking away from being the guy that people could bully. The fight ended with him leaving the store while I got handshakes and *pounds* from those watching the fight. More importantly, Marcia was impressed and shortly after she became my girlfriend. Asher's method was working. I was gaining respect from guys and girls in my *Hood*.

My hot temper was complemented by my *sneak'em* philosophy. During the summer of 1997, I was getting into a vast amount of fights. Essentially, I was getting my *Brody-on*, but there were other fights that would shake my superficial notion of manhood. A few weeks before school started, I was walking away from the bus stop on my way home. Three boys were walking behind me. One boy named Louis screamed out at me:

Louis: Yo! You Rope?

Me: Naw, dhats my homie.

Louis: Yo! You Rope?

Me: Naw, fam.

I continued walking down the street, and I didn't think anything of it. When my friend Joe's mother yelled out, "Noseph<sup>5</sup>, come here!" I turned around and saw that Louis and two other boys were still following me. Ms. Charleston asked me why the boys were following me, and I told her that they were looking for Mike. So, Ms. Charleston made me sit with her until the boys were long gone. After waiting about 15 to 20 minutes, I walked home. When I arrived home, Asher and Jarir were sitting on the step.

Me: Yo, you know da bull Louis from 56<sup>th</sup> street?

Asher: What about him?

Me: Him and da two twin bulls were followin me down da street asking me about da bull Mike.

Asher: Andrew?

Me: Yeah! Dhey were like, "You Rope?"

Asher: So what was your like?

Me: Naw, dhats my homie. So, Ms. Charleston was peepin game, and she was like come here, and dhey just got dhere bounce on.

Asher: Dam, dhats dem AOT niggahs. Dhey were tryin to dip on you gang.

Me: What? I ain't even taggin wit y'all motherfuckas.

---

<sup>5</sup> Noseph was a name Felicia's mother called me because it was close to her son's name.

Asher: Yeah, but, you from dhis hood. So, they probably was like we going fuck one of dhem up. Plus, we on beefing shit wit dem niggas.

Me: What?

Asher: Yeah, dhey were crossing our tags out. So, we cross dhey shit out.

Essentially, I was caught in the middle of two graffiti groups tag-beef. Reflecting with Asher and Jarirh, I realized that another graffiti group in a different hood guys were going to get me whether I was a part of the my hood's tag group or not. Therefore, I was going to get *sneak'em* next time I saw them. A few days later, I was walking to the market with Jarirh. When we got to 58<sup>th</sup> Street, I saw Louis and the twins.

Me: Jarir, dhese go right there!

Jarir: Who?

Me: Da Bulls who tried to roll on me!

Jarirh: Steal him!

[I walked over to Louis.]

Me: Yo, fam you tried to dip on me?

[I swung hitting him in the head.]

Louis: What?

Me: Yeah! Motherfucka, you tried to dip on me.

[I punched him a few times and he began running.]

Me: Yeah! Who else wants some?

This was the beginning of a string of fights. A few weeks later a kid named Nathan came down to my *Hood* looking for the guy who beat Louis. When I heard Nathan talking, I realized that he was talking to me. I was sitting on the step, and he was standing in front of my lawn. He kept on

saying, “Someone gonna hand me a box!” Expressing the aforementioned was an invitation to fight, and so I took this invitation. I *snuck’em*, and he stumbled backwards on a car. Someone grabbed me off him, and he said, “Hand’em a fair one.” This time I allowed Nathan to get in his fighting stance, and when he was ready I charged him. I knocked him to the ground, and I began swinging on him some more. Within minutes the fight was broken up again. This time Nathan and all of his friends headed back to their *Hood*.

#### **4.3.2 The Juan Knuckle**

After getting handshakes from the fellas, I went to relax in the Square Park with the *Old Heads*. An hour passed, and then we saw about fifteen boys walking towards the Square. Nathan had gone back home to get his *Old Head* Juan, who was a few years older than me. Juan was a notorious bully, who was slightly tall, reddish-brown skin tone, poppy eyes, and curly-hair, and he wore in a high-top fade (a box hair style). He entered the Square:

Juan: Who snuck my young bull?

[I stood up on the bench.]

Me: I did.

[Speaking in a calm tone.]

Juan: Hand me a box.

He walked towards the street towards an alleyway. He turned to us and said, “Anyone wanna take his box for him?” One of my old friends responded by saying, “Go ahead Nos.” As we walked toward the alleyway, the temporary high of being a thug faded away. Fear pervaded my mind, body, and soul. I didn’t want to fight, but I had to because I wasn’t *gonna be no punk*.



When we reached the alley, he took off his shirt and tossed it to one of his friends. He wore a tank-top, which we commonly referred to as a wife-beater. We stood in our fighting stance, and we began to do the pre-fight dance. He and I moved our feet and hands to signal our readiness to fight. The fight began with me swinging first, but my punches didn't seem to impact Juan. He absorbed my punches like an older cousin taking the punches of his baby cousin. With one punch, he had demoralized me, and I quickly bowed my head covering my face. All I could think of was the shame of going to school the next day. How was I going to explain a black eye to the girls in my class? Juan kept screaming, "Pick your head up young bull. I don't want to stomp you." Asher screamed, "Nos, pick ya fuckin head up, fam," but I didn't want to fight. I just wanted it to end. Juan would hit me a few more times before the fight ended. I was in a temporary daze.

All of sudden, I heard Asher say, "Yo, Nos, run!" I turned around and saw a man with a baseball bat peaking from behind a bush. Immediately, I started running, and the man chased behind me. If this man had caught up with me, then he would have killed me or caused me severe bodily damage. After a few minutes of running in a zig-zag pattern, the man tripped over the curb. When he fell, one of the *Old Heads* named Julian walked over to the man:

Julian: Yo, fam why you chasing the young bull?

The Man: He and his friends beat my son up.

Julian: Yo, young bull? Y'all roll-on Ahmad ? [Speaking to me]

Me: Naw

Julian:[Turning to my friends] Y'all dip-on Ahmad ?

Someone: Naw!

Me: I handed a fair one.

Julian: Go home, Old Head!

The Man: Ok, ok. I'm just checking.

Before the Nathan incident, I had gotten into a fight with Ahmad , who was a boy who lived in my *Hood*. A few weeks before our fight, I was sitting on my step talking to a girl on the phone. Ahmad disrespected me, and the girl I was talking to heard what he had said. My response was simple: "Next time I see you, I'm going to steal you!" Before Lil Rob came down to my *hood*, Ahmad was walking down the street, and I was content on fulfilling my promise. When I saw him, I walked towards him, "What now?" I followed the comment by swinging and connecting with two punches to his face. The fight ended within minutes with him running home. He left screaming, "Ima get you, watch." Ironically, I had forgotten about that fight, but the man who was chasing me was Ahmad 's father. Although he almost killed me, he actually saved me from being brutally beat by Juan. This fight humbled me, but I was still trying to get my *Brody-on*.

### **4.3.3 Seth Knuckle**

Late one evening, I was playing basketball at the *Courts*, the basketball courts located on 61<sup>st</sup> and Baltimore Ave. Some of my old friends were riding a bike, and a guy named Seth was standing by watching them ride his bike. His bike was an old-school bike we commonly referred to as the beach-curser. It was called the beach curser because of its similarity to the bike in the movie Friday. Just like in the movie, the bike was a point of contention. Now, everybody was riding the bike. As soon as I grabbed the bike to ride it, Seth reacted. He was screaming at me to "get da fuck off of his bike" or else he would "knock me da fuck out." I didn't take too kindly to him speaking to me in this manner. Everyone had ridden his bike, and he said nothing to everyone

else. In some strange way, I thought: “If other people were riding his bike and he didn’t say anything, then I had a right to ride the bike, too.” Seth ran toward me and began screaming that I get off his bike. I got off but not before arguing with him.

Me: Yo fam, everybody was partyin your bike. Now, you wanna be on some gangster shit with me. Fuck out of here you bitch-ass-niggah.

Seth: Fuck you up, Nos.

Me: Yeah alrigh. I fuck you fam.

Seth: Do it then!

Me: Put your shit up! [A request for him to get in a fighting stance.]

The fight began with me swinging on him and rushing him. Seth fell, and I began *stomping* him. In *Da Hood*, *stomping* someone shows power and powerlessness. The person who *stomped* was seen as a man, and the person being stomped was seen as a weak and worthless person, which we commonly referred to as a *bitch* or a *bitch-ass-niggah* (*BAN*). Being *stomped* meant a person would lose respect from everybody in *Da Hood*. With each *stomp* I was gaining more and more respect. Consequently, I was taking his respect and creating a situation where he would have to react in an extreme way after the fight was over. The fight ended with someone pulling me off of Seth, and I screamed, “I’m *Da Mobb*.” Then, I kicked Seth in the mouth.

Seth got up, picked up a stick, and began chasing me with the stick. As I ran away from Seth, his little brother hit me in my face. I stopped and punched him in the face, and he began to cry. Seth got closer to me, and he swung the stick again barely missing me. I ran with my eye on him, not paying attention to my surroundings. I was so hype that I ran into a bleacher and hit it hard. When I turned around, there was Seth.

Me: Drop da stick and hand me a box!

Seth: You like sneakin niggahs?

Me: Drop da stick!

Seth: Ima fuck you up!

Me: Drop da stick.

Seth: Aight!

When he dropped the stick, we began fighting again. We were very close to each other and traded hits. We stepped back, and I noticed my right sleeve had two cuts in it and was bleeding. I screamed, "Dhis niggah gotta knife! He stabbed me!" I ran towards my house, and Seth picked the stick and chased me. As I got close, Ms. Pebbie, who was Asher's mother, was sitting on the steps and noticed Seth chasing me with a stick. She screamed from the steps, "Drop the stick!" Seth dropped the stick, and we began the pre-fight dance. We threw a bunch of symbolic punches hitting nothing but air. A large crowd gathered, but neither Seth nor I wanted to fight, So, we let the fight naturally dissolve. He went home, and I sat on my steps. Moments later, Asher and I noticed a large crowd walking down the street. Seth and his family were walking towards my house. We noticed that Seth had a crowbar. Asher ran in the house and got his Louisville Slugger baseball bat. Asher dropped the bat in his yard. As he got closer, Asher's mother began talking to Seth' family about what happened. I stood in Asher's yard right by the bat. Seth parted from the crowd and began walking towards me with the crowbar, and while I looked at him, I bent down and grabbed the bat from the ankle-high grass. I put the bat on my shoulder to connote my readiness to use the bat. When he threw down the crowbar, I dropped the bat; then, he pulled out a gun. The gun was all black and small. It reminded me of a cap-gun I used to play with as a kid, but this was no game. The irony was that no one noticed the weapon

because they were all arguing. I looked at the gun and said to Seth, “You got it.” He responded with a simple, “Yeah,” and then he and his family left but not before issuing threats.

Within a few seconds, my life could have been drastically changed. We could have fought using the bat and crowbar, which would have caused serious bodily harm. More than likely, we would have been arrested and served jail time. Seth could have decided to shoot me, which at worst could have resulted in my death. Some people would have used this event to change their life, but for me it was an illustration of Seth’s weakness. Instead of fighting me, he had to go get a gun. He was a bitch, and I was strong because I beat him with my hands and *stomped* him. By pulling out a gun on me, he reinforced the idea that I was becoming the kind of man who could only be stopped with a gun. I was still committed to getting my *Brody-on*.

#### **4.3.4 The Tim Knuckle**

One of Asher and I’s common practices was to walk around *Da Hood*. Sometimes we looked for girls while other times we just walked to waste time. One evening, Asher and I were walking around on 60<sup>th</sup> Street, and an incident occurred. A mother had been brutally beating her daughter while her son held the girl, his sister. There were a group of girls talking about the incident when we walked up. The girls began telling us that the daughter had tried to run out of the house, when her brother, , had grabbed her. Once he grabbed her, the mother began beating her. The girls were pretty upset about how the mother beat the little girl. When Tim suddenly walked up, the girls began directing their comments toward him. An argument began between Tim and the girls. I joined in the argument, and he responded by saying, “Mind your fucking business!”

Asher: Damn, you gonna let da bull disrespect you like that?

Me: Hold my rollie [Referring to my watch].

I walked towards Tim and began swinging. He absorbed a few punches, and then he began grabbing me. I was extremely frustrated by him not allowing me to swing. This frustration was felt by my friends, which resulted in them jumping into the fight. They didn't jump in to break it up, they jumped in to *roll-on* Tim . After the girls began screaming, "Stop, stop, leave him alone," we ran down the street.

Tim was a guy that was called a stone-cold punk. He would speak disrespectfully towards people, but he was not able to support his talk with action. We had a saying for people like him, "All dat mouth and no action." He was an easy target for a fight, because I knew it would just be another victory in my mental win lose column. A few days later, I was walking with Asher, Jarirh, and Larry, and we saw Tim. He shouted at us. We ran towards him. He put up his hands, which signaled he was ready to fight. Larry walked toward Tim. He threw a soda bottle in the air. When he threw it, Tim looked at the bottle, which resulted in Larry rushing towards him throwing repeated punches. Larry landed many of his punches resulting in Tim falling to the ground. When he fell, we all ran towards him and began *stomping* him. A woman screamed out, "Get off of him!" We all stepped back and gave Tim room to get up. Then, he began talking trash again. He put up his hands to signal that he wanted to fight. This time he was standing on someone's lawn. We all ran towards Tim, and this time the fight would turn brutal. One of my friends picked up a brick and hit him on the head with it. My other friends *stomped* him repeatedly. I began yelling, "Chill yo, Chill! Let's be out!" I heard women screaming to their neighbors to call the cops. I grabbed my friends, and we ran towards Turner Middle School.

In the back of the school, there was a way to climb onto the roof. We thought the best place to hide from the cops was by getting on the roof. We stayed on the roof for about an hour, and the whole time we were thinking of a way to get back to our houses without getting caught

by the cops. We decided that we would climb down from the roof and then run towards the nearby train tracks because they lead to the Courts. From there, we could take the driveway to an alley, which would take us a few doors away from our house. When we got to the Courts, we stayed down for a few minutes, and then we decided to make our break home. We all arrived home without incident. A few days had passed, and we all thought the incident was over. We had laid low by going home and staying in the house after school.

After a few weeks of lying low, I got bored. I remember when I got home from school I rang Asher's doorbell. He stuck his head out of the window.

Asher: Yo!

Me: Comin outside?

Asher: Naw, gang. What's up wit you?

Me: Nothin, bout to head to the library.

Asher: Yeah?

Me: You coming?

Asher: I fallin back gang.

Me: I'm out.

I walked to the library, and on the way I saw Larry. He decided to join me on my journey. In those days, we went to the library because we wanted to talk to girls or get on the computers. This day all of the computers were being used, so we had to sign-up and wait for one of the librarians to tell us it was our turn. When we walked into the library, we saw Tim with his little sister. Rather than decide to leave, we chose to stay and wait for our turn to use the computer. Tim's sister walked out of the library very slow, and Larry and I thought nothing of it. An hour passed. Larry and I were laughing and joking about something. Then, I heard a walkie-talkie. I

looked up. Two police officers were walking towards us. One word popped into my head, “Fuck.”

Tim had pointed us out as the boys who had beaten him up a few weeks ago. A young African-American male officer grabbed me by my arm and escorted me to the exit. He stopped and said, “You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say will be used against you in a court of law.” He continued to talk, and all I could think about was: What am I going to tell my mother? The officers put us in the back of the car and drove us to the 55<sup>th</sup> and Pine police station. I was officially heading down the path of self-destruction.

After a few hours, my mother arrived at the police station. She wanted to know what happened. When she asked me, I told her that Tim pulled a knife out on me, which made Larry jump into the fight. Without question my mother believed me, and I stuck to the story. We would go to court for the next few months, but each time we did Tim wouldn’t show. The last time we arrived the Judge said that if Tim didn’t show the charges would be dropped. That day Tim did decide to show. If we pled guilty, my lawyer told us that we would not get any time; we would just receive probation and have to do community service. Before the judge would hear the case, my lawyer entered a plea of guilty to misdemeanor assault charges for both of us. The judge accepted our plea. He was lenient on me, but he sentenced Larry time in a detention center because this was not his first offense. The Tim fight was a crossroads in my young life: Who was I going to become?

#### **4.3.5 Probation**

For the rest of my freshmen year, I was on probation. I was assigned a probation officer named Ms. Guizner. She was a middle-aged white woman, with a thin build and blonde hair, who wore



glasses. As a part of my probation, I had to check in with a probation officer every month. She would make school visits and house visits. In school, she asked questions to all of my teachers about how I was performing in class both academically and socially. At home, she would ask my mother about how I was interacting with both her and my older brother. She also would ask about whether or not I was completing my hours of community service. I was very afraid that year that one mistake would lead to my incarceration. So, I made a decision to stop hanging around the kids from my neighborhood.

During my probation period, my mother and I experienced an extreme rift. I was growing more and more rebellious at home as the days, weeks, and months progressed, and my mother was losing her patience with me. My mother and I would have bitter arguments where we would exchange horrific insults with one another. With each insult, I began to emotionally detach from my mother.

Mother: Nosa! It's your night to do the dishes.

Me: I don't feel like it!

Mother: You heard what I said!

Me: No!

Mother: Goddamnit! I said go do the dishes.

Me: What!

Mother: You Black ass don't know to listen! You are disobedient.

Me: I ain't doing nothing!

Mother: I call Ms. Gizner to take your Black ass to jail, think I'm playing.

I resisted, not wanting to do dishes or any chores in the house, because of the way my mother treated me. I knew that, between my brother and I, he was her favorite. At an early age, he was

classified as mentally gifted. In addition to his mentally gifted classification in school, he was an exceptional artist. Meanwhile, I had failed the seventh grade, and I was on the eve of failing the ninth grade. In other words, my mother was extremely happy with him, while being extremely disappointed in me. As a result, I felt discontent with our relationship because I thought at that time she didn't believe in me.

Out of pain and longing for motherly affection, I was angry and bitter. I expressed my frustration with my mother through silence and profane tirades. I just didn't *give a fuck about nothing*. The names that she called me were evidence of her emotional abandonment. She was just like my dad, who had both physically and emotionally left me. I felt like I had no one. In ninth grade I wrote a poem titled "Been There" that captured the pain of this period:

Who has ever been there for me?

Not my deadbeat dad or my chickenhead girlfriends.

Nobody been there to help me out when times were hard.

And anybody who was there hit the fifty-yard dash and left me high and dry, never to be seen until things got better.

The people who once cared [about me] the Most High sent to an early grave.

Years went by and I asked myself how could I go on by myself?

Every time I got close to a person, things got tough and they bounced never to be seen again.

What's a brother to do when problems arise and I have to walk through by myself?

This poem was an illustration of my hopelessness. I battled with whether or not I should surrender, whether or not I should fulfill the negative prophecy people laid out for me. In this state of pain, I turned to one of my peers—Felicia.

#### **4.3.6 Felicia**

The majority of my teenage years, I was in love with Felicia. She had a deep brown complexion, long midnight black hair, and she wore glasses. Seeing her would instantly cause a shortness of breath, which prevented me from saying anything coherent when we were in each other's presence. One day, I mustered up the strength to ask her to be my girlfriend. She declined my invitation and offered me something greater—her friendship. We spent most of our friendship talking on her steps. When my mother and I were going through extremely difficult times, Felicia became a bigger sister.

She was the person who listened to, encouraged, and celebrated my achievements. She was also the person who made jokes and helped me laugh about my life. When I was in seventh grade, I played on a basketball team with her brother Joe. Now, her brother was a talented basketball player, and one game he had on some sneakers that did not have any traction. So, he was sliding up and down the court. The coach told me to take off my sneakers and give them to Joe. When Felicia heard this story, she teased me all the time; it was like a Draw Four card in the game of Uno. Whenever I played around with her too much, she brought up the incident. One summer, I was playing in a basketball league. In the middle of the week, my coach notified me that I was going to start on Saturday; this was my first time starting in a basketball game in my life. Saturday morning my phone rang, and I picked it up:

Me: Hello?

Felicia: Hey, Nosa.

Me: Yo, what's up Felicia?

Felicia: Hey, I heard you were starting today.

Me: Yeah.

Felicia: Congratulations, and good luck.

Me: Thanks.

I remember, after I hung up the phone, feeling special. She listened to me and cared about me. If Felicia had not been in my life, it would have been even more difficult for me to deal with my experiences of rejection. She was the big sister, who provided me with motherly support.

#### **4.4 BASTARD**

The story of my mother and father was both puzzling and painful. They were two people committed to the struggle of Black people, but neither one of them could fully commit themselves to loving each other or their son. I was the son of parents who never married. I was the son of parents who had a severe dislike for one another. I was the son of a mother who felt abandoned by the man who promised her love only to leave her with a child who she would have to raise alone. He didn't want to have another child, and she did. Both my mother and father were victims of tough experiences, and both of them sought ideological solutions to cure scars they had on their hearts. My mother chose African culture, while my father chose Black Nationalism and philosophy.

#### 4.4.1 My Mother

My mother's life was centered in fighting against oppression, which took the form of employers, family, friends, and my brother and I. Mom believed in the old adage, "What goes around comes around." As a proponent of that ideal, she wanted to do what was morally right—"Do unto others as you want them to do unto you." Her desire to do what is right in the world is one of the guiding ideals that has stayed with me throughout my life. As a compliment to her moral grounding, she was a strong proponent of Afrocentricism. When I was younger, she would take my brother and I to lectures and events on African, Caribbean, and African-American culture. From the time I could speak, I knew I was a person of African descent. Africana culture was not statically presented or discussed at these events, rather event organizers sought to instill hope and agency in their listeners. These events presented Africana culture as a way of life and as a tool to assist in the transformation of society. Mom provided me with an intellectually rich foundation, but there was something missing—love.

Initially, childhood affection from my mother was great; however, as time progressed, I realized that I did not have the family structure that other children had. Becoming conscious that I did not have what others had, I began to feel sad. In lieu of recognition, my mother's life battles began to intensify. These struggles reduced my mother's ability to provide affection. My mother had to take both my brother's father and my father to child-support court. On another front, she struggled with my uncle who, upon the death of my maternal grandparents, attempted to claim all of my grandparent's wealth that was in the form of a duplex and four-bedroom house. As a child, I remember he threatened to put us out on the streets all the time; many months I remember having to take clothes to school for fear he would evict us. If my uncle wasn't causing aggravation, then his tenant who lived up stairs did. As a child, there would be nights where I

woke up hearing the man upstairs beat up his girlfriends. One sad day after school, he turned his cowardly rage on my mother. The tenant had decided to barbecue in front of a house that had bushes and a large tree. My mother objected because she felt that he was creating a fire hazard. She asked if he could stop barbecuing on the lawn, and he turned and began punching my mother in the face. My brother ran in the house and got a hammer, and I hit the man in the back with it. When the man stopped hitting my mother and she ran away from him, he picked up the hammer and flung it toward me, narrowly missing me. Shortly thereafter, my mother filed a police report. I remember crying all night during that week. There was nobody who could protect us. My mother and uncle would spend over twenty years in the legal system attempting to settle who would get the respective properties.

My mother was a paraprofessional in the Philadelphia Public School system. As an employee in the school system, she worked in the library. My mother, who was also a strong proponent of reading, would fight day after day with school leaders because of either their abuse of the library or their neglect of students. When my mother came home, she would often get on the phone discussing the corrupt acts of the day. My mother was a fighter, who fought noble battles in life because she wanted to make her environments better. Looking back on my childhood experiences with her, I have acknowledge without her I would have been able to be the man I am today. However, our relationship has taught me that I have to learned how to love as much as I struggle to make the world a better place.

#### **4.4.2 Maternal Family**

Every year, my Aunt Willie would have a gathering of the family at her house. Her husband, Uncle Griff, was my maternal grandfather's brother. He was a mean man who never smiled at

my brother or me. Whenever he spoke to us, he had a red viciousness in his eyes. He sat in a recliner chair as if it was his throne and my brother and I were his subjects that had to react to his requests at a moment's notice. This man was a like a cruel dictator that ruled out of fear. He always threatened to beat us if we didn't sit still and stay quiet. Whether I ate there for Thanksgiving or Christmas, I truly hated seeing him because he treated us with so much disrespect. He disliked my brother and I without getting to know us. Uncle Griff was old school, and he believed that kids ought to fear their parents—they ought to have respect. But I quickly realized that his old-school treatment towards my brother and I was also about who we were to him—bastards.

One year, my Uncle Griff was playing this game that he always played—mercy. In this game, the kids in the family would shake his hand, and he would squeeze until we said, "Mercy." All of the kids wanted to play the game with him because after one of the kids would say mercy he would reward them with a five, ten, or even a twenty-dollar bill. So, of course, all of the kids wanted to play. I remember my cousins Jamila and Eric playing the game and at the end receiving ten bucks apiece. This encouraged my brother and I to go to Uncle Griff to play. However, when Uncle Griff would squeeze both of our hands, our reward was unlike that of our cousins. Instead of giving us dollar bills, he dug in his pockets and then showered our hands with coins. I remember feeling demoralized because I thought that my brother and I just didn't play the game as well as my cousins. I also remember overhearing a conversation that my mother had with my Aunt Cookie, a conversation that made me realize why Uncle Griff treated my brother and I so poorly.

My Mom: Cookie, now you know that ain't right! He gave Jamila and Eric twenty dollars, and gonna give Kufu and Nosa quarters. Now Cookie is that right? He only does that cuz I didn't marry neither one of their fathers.

We were mistreated because we didn't have daddies in our lives, but what had we done? Was it our fault that our daddies decided not to be in our lives? Was it our fault that our daddies and our mommy made decisions that placed us in this situation? Did my uncle take into consideration what pain my mother must have felt raising two boys without any help? Did my uncle realize that by rejecting us we were reminded of our abandonment by our fathers. Uncle Griff was fixed on being hard on two boys who needed his love. He decided to reject us because of our bastardness. The irony is that when he got sick none of my cousins that he had showered with gifts wanted to care for him. Instead, it was my brother who appeared during his last days to help him out.

I always believed that family was supposed to be an institution that produced and exported love unconditionally. I was supposed to be loved by family members regardless of circumstances surrounding my birth. Instead, I was rejected. Looking through my family album, I found pictures of my cousins and my brother when they were taken home from the hospital as newborn babies. From my birth and childhood, I found none. I never asked my mother about the absence of pictures. Instead, I concluded that it was a result of my being a mistake. Being rejected placed a large scar on my heart that made me believe that I was unlovable. With every painful experience, the scar would deepen. There was an internal struggle that I was losing, and my thoughts and behaviors were evidence of this painful experience. Instead of waiting for the sun to rise in my life, I lived in an emotional cave that was dark. I lost the belief that I could be loved by anyone. Every holiday season, I would drift into a painful daze.



#### 4.4.3 Ideological Supplement for Family

After Thanksgiving, my mother would prepare for Kwanzaa. This holiday was considered by some to be the Black Christmas, but, in reality, it was a holiday that celebrated the achievement of African-Americans for seven days. Children are supposed to receive seven gifts that are representative of the principal of each day. My mother was not a strict Kwanzaa follower; she would buy my brother and I the latest video games for Nintendo, Supernintendo, Genesis, or Playstation I. However, she did take my brother and I every year to hear the creator of the holiday, Dr. Maulana Karenga. Dr. Karenga would speak at Temple University, and his lectures would be centered on the principle of each day of Kwanzaa and its relationship to contemporary issues. He began every speech by saying:

Dr. Karenga: Habari gani.

Crowd: Nzuri Sana; Habari gani.

Dr. Karenga: Nzuri; asante sana.

Dr. Karenga: Brothers and sisters, we have to be mothers to the motherless, fathers to the fatherless. We have to make the world better and more beautiful than the world we entered.

[Somebody might yell from the crowd “Teach”, which signified their agreement with what he said.]

Dr. Karenga’s speeches always provided some hope because he talked about building a better world and providing family to those who needed it. His speeches would discuss the reliance of Black people not just on other Blacks in America, but also on Black people across the world. Dr. Karenga was different than other people who talked about Africa. He spoke of Africa as a place inhabited by kings and queens, and he argued that, if African-Americans were ever going to

reach the greatness that their ancestors reached, we would have to first accept our African ancestry and destiny.

Dr. Karenga preached an Afrocentric ideology that provided me with critical strength. This ideology made me hope for a better life for myself. Because of his teachings, I was always imbued with the belief that, in order to have a better life, I had to assist in the development of a better world. During Kwanzaa, my mother would read a story about a king from the ancient kingdom of Mali. In the story, there was a king who had two wives, and they both bore him sons. One son was born healthy, and the other son was born crippled. A war broke out between Mali and another nearby kingdom, and the warring army murdered everyone in sight except the crippled son and his mother. When the chief of the warring kingdom saw the son, he laughed at the crippled boy and told his mother to leave with him and never return to the kingdom or else he would be murdered.

The mother took her son away from Mali and the kingdom. Every day the mother pushed the son to learn how to walk. Each day he took steps and fell, but he made progress. He would study the art of war, while attempting to walk. As the years progressed, he was able to walk and he increased his military understanding. Eventually, he organized and trained a group of men who would later become his army. The former crippled boy waged a war against those who took his father's kingdom and murdered his family. He recaptured his father's kingdom. The boy whose life was spared because he was crippled returned to take back his father's destiny. Hearing this story every year provided me with hope. Instead of giving up, the son decided to take mental and physical steps toward his destiny. I, like him, had to decide to take steps towards my destiny, but doing so was difficult because many people had condemned me to social death even before I was able to determine my life path.

This Afrocentric holiday and this core story provided me with the hope that I could be something in life regardless of my birth; it also taught me that in order for me to develop my path I had to assist in the development of a better and more beautiful society than the one I was born into.

#### **4.4.4 My Father**

My father, who was never around, abandoned me physically and emotionally. As a child, I remember him denying that I was his child. One day, I called him:

Me: Hello.

A Boy: Hello.

Me: Can I speak to John Corbin?

A Boy: Who's calling?

Me: His son, Nosakhere.

[My father picks up the phone.]

My father: Who is this?

Me: Nosakhere, your son.

My father: You aren't my son.

[He hangs the phone up].

I cried myself to sleep only to be awoken by my mother's loud tirade. She profanely denounced my father and his rejection of me. When my birthday was weeks away, I would pray that my father would call and wish me a happy birthday. Envision the dialogue between the two of us: No, I did not want a toy or money; I wanted him. For years, June 8<sup>th</sup> was the day that I wished

for my daddy to arrive in my life. With a blow of the candles year after year, I began to internalize my bastardness. Life as a bastard was full of pain and a belief that I had no future.

All I could think was: “Fuck it.” The fuck-it mentality spread through my body like cancer. His lack of love caused me to look in the mirror and see a boy who was worthless. If my father did not love me, then why would anyone else love me? As a child, I felt rejected. I was a human-mistake. Feeling such a lack of self worth prevented me from having intimate relationships.

#### **4.5 INTERNALIZING EDUCATIONAL OPPRESSION**

When I was younger, I hated school. I just remember going to class was something I had to do. My classroom experience every year would start with the attendance call. I hated this moment the most because it was the time when students would laugh at my name. The teacher began the day by reading each name on the roll sheet in alphabetical order. Before the teacher got to my name, he/she would take a long pause, then she/he would attempt to pronounce my name:

Teacher: [Pause] Na, Na, sa, ka, hair-ree, Griffin-EL?

[Students begin to uncontrollably laugh.]

[Teacher calms them down.]

Me: No-sa-care-ree

Teacher: No, sa, k-hair, re.

Me: No-sa-care-re.

Teacher: Do you have a nickname?

Me: Nos.

Teacher: Nose?

[Students start to chuckle at a low-level.]

Me: Never mind.

As a student with an African name, I got used to students and teachers constantly mispronouncing it. My fellow students would always tease me about my name. Some students even had the audacity to ask me, “Was your mom drunk when she gave that name?” There would be days that I went home crying after being teased so much by my peers.

For African-Americans, there has been a blatant disrespect for African culture by Americans. We tend to embrace other people’s cultures rather than embracing our African culture. Students would attempt to convince each other that their heritage was mixed with everything but African blood. Kids would tell stories about a great-great-grandmother that was white or a Native American to reject their African heritage. These claims weren’t taken seriously unless students were able to prove it through the texture of their hair, which was either straight or curly. Once I attempted to define myself as having Indian in my blood:

Me: I got Indian in my blood.

Female Student: Whatever.

Me: On my granddad side.

Female: You might have Indian in your blood, but it ain’t in your hair!

Students that had lighter skin also could support the claim that they were not 100% Black. Essentially, having “good” hair and lighter skin was the proof that supported the claim that they were truly something other than Black, but without such evidence such claims were dismissed.

Attempting to construct family histories about being something other than Black is a part of the practice of internalized racism in which Black children often engage. A kid without wavy

hair and darker skin was cursed with being lighter than Black, but most of all, he was cursed with knowing that his skin and hair made him worthless because he didn't have any or enough white or other blood in him to offset the curse. Black people are constantly bombarded with images affirming white culture as valuable and beautiful, while images of Black culture are deemed ugly and valueless by the media. Thus, those Black students who exuded more Blackness than others were treated poorly. Therefore, as a child who was verbally tattooed with an African name, I was the victim of the African Assault caused by other people of African descent who had internalized a Racist Eurocentric culture.

I recall being called an African booty scratcher—a term that connoted African people's laziness and inability to be motivated to do things for themselves. I remember being bullied by the boys in my class, and I remember being described as unattractive by the girls in my class because of the verbal curse etched across my identity like the tattoo on Mike Tyson's face. I hated school because my classmates didn't value who I was. At times, I would be angry with my mother for not giving me a regular name. Why didn't my mother name me John, Robert, or Anthony? I wanted a name that made me no different, but the same as everyone else; in fact, the more mainstream or "White" the name the better. I had to live and be punished by my classmates with no hope in sight of changing my Afro-verbal tattoo. As an attempt to fit in at school, I Anglicized my name by calling myself Nosacare.

#### **4.5.1 Preemptive Bustin**

Learning in school was secondary to my desire to win respect from my classmates. I was going to be accepted by my peers by any means necessary (even if it meant enacting verbal forms of violence against people who were of a similar status as me). Desiring to be equal to my dominant

Anti-African classmates, I took a preemptive stance. If President George W. Bush classified himself as “The Decider,” then I was “The Buster.” People’s personal spaces were like Iraq, and I was President Bush—I didn’t need a reason to invade. I was preemptive with my *bustin* because if I feared that if I didn’t get somebody, then they would get me.

Sitting in the back of class allowed me the chance to preemptively bust. When the teacher would present her lesson to the class, I would not pay attention. Instead, I was like a ghetto anthropologist existing within my school culture (I was an outsider, in reality). I was a participant-observer, who examined an environment hoping to see something that was interesting enough to study. Once I found that person to examine, I began to collect data in my head; I would focus in on him/her to see if he/she had something that would allow me a chance to engage in the preemptive *bustin*. Normally, I did this to the people who were either as unpopular as me or even more unpopular than I was. If a guy came to school needing a haircut, I would sit in the back of the class formulating a joke.

Me: [With a silent whisper so the teacher would not hear me.] Raheem?

Raheem: Huh?

Me: You should go to LA.

Raheem: Why?

Me: So, you can try out for the Clippers basketball team.

Raheem: Why would I do that?

Me: Cuz you know you ain’t gonna make da team, but at least you can get a free cut.

Interestingly, one of my friends used the same joke against me when I was in need of a haircut, and, just as my friend was attempting to embarrass me, I, too, was attempting to do the same to Raheem. I wanted to call attention to this boy’s haircut and his inability to get a hair cut.

Essentially, it was like I was saying, “I broke, but he’s broker than me.” Doing the aforementioned allowed this boy to be seen as unfavorable, which took the attention off of my name and me. I always had to do preemptive *bustin* in class because I knew an honest mistake made by an adult, the lack of a fresh haircut, or a mis-matched outfit, would make me into the joke. I had to be the *Preemptive-Buster*, and my commitment towards this preemptive-bust-construction earned me the classification of class clown by my peers and troublemaker by my teachers.

In middle school, the intensity of my *preemptive busting* was routinely aimed at a girl named Jessica Johnson. Jessica always wore her hair naturally, pulled back in a ponytail style. If there were a person whose hair style exemplified how Jessica wore her hair, it would have been Brandy, who was a popular R&B singer in the late 90’s. Her eyes were round with pointed cat-like ends that showed bright, childish joy. Her skin was a deep chocolate. Her clothes were like that of other working-class kids, which lacked a name brand, but were practical, keeping a kid cool in the spring and warm in the winter. Academically, Jessica was always on task, answering questions in class with an intellectual sharpness that made her an exemplary student. All of these traits made Jessica unpopular because most girls had straight hair and attempted to wear name brand clothes. For Jessica, for whatever reason, she didn’t have those assets that would make her popular. Additionally, she was smart, and to be smart was not a characteristic that was valued. Although she was different from me, she and I were both unpopular.

Ms. Smith’s class was organized in a U-shape. Students sat on both the left and right sides of class, while another group of students sat in the middle. I sat in the middle, while Jessica sat to my right. Her close proximity to me made her an easy target for my *preemptive bustin* assaults. My jokes about Jessica were centered on her hair. I gave her the new name “Beadie



Bead,” which was a term that I took from one of my favorite shows. In the late 1990s, the famous African-American comedian Martin Lawrence had a weekly television show, *Martin*. In the show, he constantly made fun of an African-American woman named Pam, who was a darker skinned woman who always wore a hair weave. Martin’s jokes, just like my jokes, had a central theme, which was to dehumanize a woman grappling with one of her most sensitive issues—her hair. Martin called Pam “beadie-bead” because of her nappy hair that was underneath her straight European-like hair-weave. Martin constantly displayed his dislike for Pam and her hair. However, for me, it wasn’t that I did not like her hair or that I thought she was ugly, rather, she was the female me minus the Afro-verbal tattoo—unpopular.

Jessica’s natural hair style reminded me of my mother. My mother wore natural hair and not just any natural hair; she wore a shag. A person who wore a shag had a low cut on the top and the lower half at the back of their head was a mini-Afro. Additionally, my mother’s hair had grayed early. After I was suspended, when my mother came to school for parent-teacher night or reinstatement hearings, my peers would verbally punish me. When my classmates saw my mother’s naturally gray hair, they would ask whether she was my grandmother. My mother was an avid Afrocentric advocate: she was proud of being Black and celebrated African culture. As a daily manifestation of her Afrocentricity, she wore hair that was not straightened or dyed. Knowing that these standards of beauty were not valued by my community and my peers, I had to engage in *preemptive busting*, or else be a victim of racist assaults by classmates. In sixth grade, Jessica was my victim.

Me: Hey Jessica, I mean Beadie Bead?

Jessica: What, Nosakhere?

Me: There was a song came out about you?

[Other students snickering.]

Me: Wanna hear it?

Jessica: I hate you, Nosakhere.

Me: Lay you buckshots on my pillow, and just relax relax....

The joke was a play on a song by Toni Tony Tone's song *Lay Your Head on My Pillow*. Buckshots was a term developed by Martin Lawrence to describe the small naps that are located in the back of a Black woman's head. Black women refer to the back of the head as the *kitchen*, which tends to be a difficult place to straighten when she is getting her head pressed. As a result, small naps that either couldn't be or can't be straightened will remain. These small circles resemble small circles similar to that of a bullet casing (buckshot). I consistently used Martin-like terms to describe Jessica.

Life for Jessica was a living hell when I was around her because I didn't want to be the victim of my peers. So, I victimized Jessica. One day I began busting on Jessica, and she turned to me and said, "What did I ever do to you? Why are you so mean to me?" I couldn't verbally answer this question. So, I just silently responded with a shameful smile. If I would have had the courage and been honest enough to answer her question, then I would have probably responded by informing her that I hated myself.

I was a kid who was being hurt by others, so instead of standing up and fighting the oppression I faced I decided to accept it. Fatalistically, I believed that I would only be accepted if I ignored who I was and if I punished others who reminded me of who I was. I lost my ability to dream, and my dreams were replaced by my desire to be accepted by people who only accepted the norms that made Blacks as a collective believe in their own inferiority. I was the person of African descent who despised his African heritage. I was caught in the oppressive contradiction.

#### 4.5.2 The Warfare of Learning

In seventh grade, I remember learning about Africa, which didn't come up much in school. This was something that I knew, so I decided I was going to participate in this class. The teacher began her lesson about African pre-slavery. In her presentation, she began by saying:

Mrs. Hart: All human beings came from Africa. That means Black and White people. Africans' religion was animism. Can you say, animism?

Class: Animism.

Mrs. Hart: Animism is when people worship plants, animals, and rocks.

[I raised my hand.]

Me: Ms. Hart, that's not true. Africans didn't worship rocks or trees. They had their own Gods, too.

Ms. Hart: Where did you hear that from?

Me: My mom.

At that moment, Mrs. Hart began to quote from the textbook that affirmed her statement. This was a very demoralizing moment because I had been taught that African people were great; I was taught that they were kings and queens who built great kingdoms. When my mother had read stories to me from Africa, she had never mentioned the worship of rocks or trees. I thought that if someone was lying it must be my mom.

Me: None of the stories my mother read to me talked about dem [referring to African people] worship no rocks.

Mrs. Hart: Well, your mother is the teacher?

After this incident, I remember thinking of school as some bullshit I had to do. I would think to myself, "What the fuck is the point if they going to be on some lying shit? Fuck it." *Fuckitness*

was my daily praxis. Not giving a fuck meant verbal fights with teachers, physical fights with peers, and a fight to educationally stay alive in a system that attempted to kill my cultural identity.

Educational violence seeks to destroy the indigenous part of a student, his/her humanity, and replaces this part with a humanity that doesn't exist within the student's space, time, and cultural context. Some victims of educational violence opt to anesthetize themselves to the pain of the violence by ignoring painful comments in order to get through a situation. Conversely, there are people who choose to fight this violence with violence. The fighters of violence use an arsenal of disrespectful slogans and actions to demoralize the original perpetrators. Education as an act of violence transforms the classroom into a theater of war. Students become either enemy combatants or allies. The teachers become the mercenaries of war, whose purpose is to win at any cost this war, which calls for the assassination of the soul of the students.

What the students that fight don't realize is that winning in the classroom does not ensure victory in the long-term. I learned this the hard way. My constant fight with my teachers got some students to laugh, often making my point the salient point of the day, but even as I won my battles, I lost the war. Losing the war in seventh grade meant repeating the grade. My not wanting to go to school at all was reinforced by my *fuckit* perspective. I began to play hookie from school at least four or five times a month, spending the day over at my friend Rocky's home.

Roc: Yall, tryna hookie today?

Me: I'm down. I got a test today and I didn't study so I aint fuckin wit school today.

Roc: What about the yall?

[Joe, Buck, and Spanky all agree, but as we move closer to Roc's house Spank decides to go to school.]

Me: Awwwwwww, you on some bitchin shit. Fuck that school shit. I got first on Triple Play!

We would play video games all day until 3pm, and at that time we would go home. When I played hookie with my friends, I felt happy, free, and able to be myself. We set up tournaments and set firm rules: (1) Lose by ten points and the game is over; (2) No pushing reset or slamming the controller when losing; (3) After two losses you were eliminated from the tournament; (4) and No cheating, which could mean many things, among them pressing the other person's controller to prevent the scoring of points. We were organized and there were rarely fights among us, with the exception of constantly teasing the guy who lost the game being played. We were free from educational violence, but this freedom was only a short-term fix. It was as if we were on a self-parole from the theater of war. Within the theater walls, I was dying and becoming more and more fatalistic.

Life in school was a constant reminder that I was a student combatant. When I walked into school, I would be greeted with an intense look similar to a football player who was getting ready for a game. The facial structures that I encountered appeared to lack the ability to smile. All my teachers' eyes spoke a common slogan, "Don't try me, cuz I ain't the one." After this was verbally expressed, normally the teacher followed with a condemning finger point. Every day I walked into school, I felt like a prisoner of war, who was viewed as less than human. One teacher, Mr. Jones, never let me forget this feeling. I remember him being a tall man who wore red-brown tinted glasses and was slightly balding. Although he was balding, the bit of hair he

had was in a jerricurl. He was always a well-dressed man. Mr. Jones was the disciplinarian of the wing where my classroom was located.

Mr. Jones' verbal violence would cause me to believe that I was destined to a life of failure. The year after I failed seventh grade, I was sent to Mr. Jones' office because I was misbehaving in class.

Mr. Jones: You don't learn, boy?

Me: What?

Mr. Jones: You just won't get it through your thick head will you?

Me: Maaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaannnnnnnnnnnn.

Mr. Jones: Close your mouth.

[My face and body language was in a state of paralyzing anger.]

Mr. Jones: Weren't you in seventh grade last year?

Me: Yeah, but my mom said she was going to take me down to school board to take the test.

Mr. Jones: There ain't no test, boy. You failed, and you're going to be in seventh grade for the rest of the year.

Me: No, I ain't.

Mr. Jones: You sit around in class and don't learn nothing. All you want to do is talk and play games.

Me: Ms. Hart don't like me. She always be putting me out of class.

Mr. Jones: Boy, her liking you don't got nothing to do with you learning. She got her's and you have yours [referring to education]. You need to keep you month shut and pay attention in class.

Me: Whatever.

Mr. Jones: Whatever what boy? That's your problem. You got no respect. I wonder how you talk to you mother.

Me: What?

Mr. Jones: Shut up!

[At that point, my eyes became red, and I was attempting to hold back the tears.]

Mr. Jones: You think you're tough. But, you're not! You aren't going to make it past 18. You going to be dead on the streets or locked in some jail.

[I began to cry].

Mr. Jones: Clean yourself up and don't let me or Mrs. Hart tell me that you got in anymore trouble today. You need to act like you got some sense.

Mr. Jones provided tough love to students who needed it. This tough love was a part of the educational violence I was the victim of as a student. This violence caused deep scars on my heart, which made me develop a hatred of my self and others. Because I was the enemy combatant, Mr. Jones, Ms. Hart, and many, if not all, my teachers sanctioned such violence. I felt hated by those who were supposed to love me. They wanted me to act like I had sense, which meant acting in a prescribed manner; in other words, they wanted me to act like them. Acting like them meant I would have to reject who I was. Doing the aforementioned, deepening my *fuckitness*, aided in my dying before I would even have a chance to grow up. Not only did I hate school; I hated myself, too.

#### 4.6 MS. LEE

After completing my second year of seventh grade, the next year I would go to room 813. Ms. Lee led this class. As the year went on, she took a special interest in me, and I didn't know why. Her class was the first place where I could talk about Africa and African people, and it was the first time that I heard a teacher speak positively about Africa and African people. She allowed me the chance to speak; she would even let me bring in documentaries and movies to show to the class. In her class, I had the occasional slip-up where I would get into a shouting match with a peer or almost fight someone, and she would restrain me physically or verbally. It became clear to me that Ms. Lee would not let the *fuckitness* take over my life – she cared. One time, I was about to get into a fight and Ms. Lee said and did the following:

[Ms. Lee grabs me by the arm.]

Ms. Lee: What are you doing?

Me: He hit me first; so I hit him back.

Ms. Lee: Do you want to fail the eighth grade?

Me: Ms. Lee, he hit me first.

Ms. Lee: Look, I am not going to let you fail. All of these other teachers think that you are dumb as a doorknob, and you're proving them right.

Me: So?

Ms. Lee: You are too bright to be acting so dumb. You know I know your uncle.

[A confused look came across my face.]

Me: I ain't got no uncle you know.

Ms. Lee: Yes, you do, Victor Griffin. He went to University of Pennsylvania with me. He was in Wharton's Business School when I was in college.



Me: How you know that's my uncle?

Ms. Lee: Cause you the same last name!

Me: My last name is Griffin-EL.

Ms. Lee: Stop acting stupid. I am not going to let you fail like he did. You're going to succeed whether you like it or not.

Me: But he hit me first.

Ms. Lee: Get in the room and do your work.

Ms. Lee was a short, heavy-set women, who had a light-complexion. She wore glasses, and she had a clumsy sense of humor. When students would bust on each other, she would stop the busting by pulling an African-American joke book, *The Dirty Dozens*, which had hundreds of jokes. So, when students would start busting on each other she would get her book and recite jokes from the book, about both students. At the time all the class would laugh, but the laughter was not at the two students, nor at Ms. Lee. We laughed because the joke was funny. She was a master at unifying students and making us feel like we were a family.

For once in my life, a teacher believed in me, and she was willing to help me reach my dream. This perhaps was one of the greatest moments in my educational life because she let me know that I could dream instead of living the nightmare of *fuckitness*. Ms. Lee began to treat me like her son, and she nurtured me along the way with positive and negative reinforcement that was centered in love.

During the fall of my eighth grade year, Ms. Lee asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. As a child, I remember the only positive Black man I saw on a consistent basis was Bryant Gumbel, who was a reporter the *Today Show*. Every morning, I would awake up to the Today Show jingle that ended with a man saying, "This is the Today Show with Bryan Gumbel,

Katie Couric, and Matt Lauer. Live from Rockefeller Plaza, Today Show.” As a child, I was impressed with his ability to ask the tough questions to local, national, and international leaders. He was my hero and only Ms. Lee knew. Like most boys growing up in the Hood, I had the traditional dream of being a professional athlete, but I had another dream—to be a journalist.

When I told Ms. Lee about this dream, she told me, “Well, we will start a newspaper.” Though I worked hard for the school paper, even interviewing one of the greatest college coaches, John Cheney of Temple University, none of the articles I wrote ever made it to press. Regardless these articles assisted in the development of a better future for me in few ways. First, there I was living near the high school named University City High School which was located between the University of Pennsylvania and Drexel University. This school was the only school in the city to offer a program in both photography and journalism; the program’s name was photojournalism. In this program, I would learn how to develop film, layout a newspaper, and manage a newspaper staff. With my dream of becoming a journalist, I knew that this school would be the place that could start my dream.

Ms. Lee notified me of an Open House at the high school, and she encouraged me to go. I went home and told my mother. She decided to take off work, so I could go to open house. My mother made me dress up, which at that time I was not accustomed to doing. I wore a cloth tie that was square at the bottom, and I carried a briefcase. Now, this wasn’t any type of brief case; it was a snakeskin briefcase made in West Africa. In the briefcase, I carried my articles; I was ready to make a great impression on whoever was in charge of this program. A student met my mother and me at the door, and she led us to the corridor where the photojournalism program was located. When we arrived, I was introduced to a girlish looking white woman with brilliantly rusty-red hair. She greeted my mother and I with a smile that made her look more silly than

serious, but something about her felt warm. I began telling her about my dream to become a journalist and how coming to this school would assist in my accomplishing this dream. Then I pulled the articles out of my brief case and began to show her my work. Ms. Simmons was very impressed with my writing and with me, as a person. My interaction with her would leave a lasting impression that would make a difference in the future.

In the fall of 1997, I was supposed to start my freshmen year in high school at John Bartram High School. I was going to be a student in the Communications Department, a department whose focus was on careers in communication related fields. Since I wanted to be a journalist, this school offered great opportunities for me to learn about and receive practical experience about how to operate a newspaper. In my heart, I didn't want to attend Bartram High School because all of the boys in my *Hood* attended the school. I knew attending this school created the possibility for me to get into a lot of drama. Therefore, I continued to dream about going to University City High School, because Ms. Simmons hadn't contacted me about being admitted to the school. By the end of the summer, I was prepared to attend Bartram.

On the day of freshmen orientation, I heard the phone ring. I was in the bathroom preparing myself for school. When I came out of the bathroom, I looked at the caller ID and there was a number on the screen that I had not seen before. Also, the red light on the caller ID signified that someone had left a message. I decided to check the message.

Caller: Hello, my name is Ms. Simmons from University High School, and I am calling for Nosakhere Griffin-EL. I am sorry I hadn't gotten back to you until now. If you are still interested in coming to be a student in our Multi-Media Small Learning Community, then give me a call back at 215-387-5600. Goodbye.

After hearing the message by Ms. Simmons, I quickly hung up the phone and called her back, and told her I was still interested in going to University City. She told me to come down to the school, and she and I would fill out the necessary paperwork to make me an official student at the school. I used the tokens my mother gave me to ride the trolley to 34<sup>th</sup> Street and Chestnut, and once I arrived there I walked down one block to 34<sup>th</sup> and Filbert Street where University City High School stood.

Walking up the path towards the steps that led to the platform where the entry doors were, I saw many faces I had never seen in my life. Seeing so many new people made me nervous. When I reached the top of the steps, I saw Ms. Simmons, and I greeted her with a hello in the form of a question:

Me: Ms. Simmons?

Ms. Simmons: Nosakhere.

Me: Yes.

Ms. Simmons: How are you?

Me: Fine.

Ms. Simmons: I'm going to take you to the front office and one of the secretaries will help you get registered.

Me: Ok.

I was extremely excited about being admitted to U-City because it meant I would have a chance at fulfilling my dream to become a journalist. It also meant that I would have a chance to develop my name on my terms. For most of my life, other people had had the terms to define me. Going to U-City gave me a chance to be a person of my own making, in a positive context. In my *hood*,

I was known as my brother's little brother; in school, I was known as a class-clown; at home, I was known as a failure. Now, I had the chance to be someone great.

## 4.7 UNIVERSITY CITY HIGH SCHOOL

### 4.7.1 Freshmen Year: From Shy to Bully

My first few months at U-City, I was a very shy student. I would arrive to school and lean on the gate to a parking garage until the morning bell rang. In the mornings, the first class I went to was advisory. This was the class where teachers took attendance and students ate breakfast. Normally, I would sit in class and not say anything to anyone. One day I was sitting in class and a student with a big head, and poppie eyes with a slight reddish-yellow tint walked over to me.

Student: Hey, what's up young bull?

Me: Chillin.

Student: What's your name?

Me: Nosakhere.

Student: Where you from?

Me: Southwest [referring to the section of Philadelphia I lived in.]

Student: So, why you come to Uni?

Me: I wanted to get my newspaper-on.

Student: Ok, I feel you on that.

Every day, I came in to see my advisor. He would sit and talk to me for a few minutes, but for the most part I didn't talk to people. Philadelphia was a very territorial city. People didn't

venture to different parts of the city unless they were visiting family, and even if they did they still represented their *Hood* as if it was the Mecca of Philly. Representing your *Hood* meant keeping it real and not letting anyone from other *Hoods* disrespect you because doing so would be a reflection on your *Hood*. Keeping to myself would prevent me from having to represent my *Hood*, because if I didn't say anything no one would bother me; thus, I would not have to represent anywhere. I was conscious that I was a minority student because very few people who grew up in my section of the city went to this school. On the other hand, the majority of students at U-City were from North and West Philadelphia.

The students from *Da Bottom* felt like they owned the school. These sentiments stemmed from their parents' struggle when the school was first built. In the early 1970s, the school was built for the sons and daughters of professors of the University of Pennsylvania and Drexel University. The intention of the school district was for the school to become a magnet high school focusing on math and science. Many of the homes belonging to members of a working-class and working poor community called The Black Bottom (or as many of my friends called it *Da Bottom*) were knocked down when the school was built. However, members of this community did not stand idle, allowing these two universities to build schools only to deny their children entry into the school. Many of the grandparents and granduncles from the community were leaders in a movement to open the school up to the community. Therefore, there was some merit to the belief that they owned the school. During those first few weeks, I rarely got into any conversations with students, especially a contentious conversation that would lead to a potential fight. My shyness was more of a defense mechanism than a character trait.

As freshmen year progressed, writing for the newspaper brought me joy, but it didn't bring me popularity. As my wall of shyness started to slowly fall down, my comedic persona

returned. Instead of not saying anything to my classmates, I would begin *bustin* on them. Returning to my life as a class clown placed me in a position of having to fight. Just like in middle school, I rarely busted on people who were popular or who could fight. I busted on people who were as defenseless as I was. In ninth grade, my victim was Ibrahim.

Ibrahim was a refugee from Somalia. He and his family had fled to America because of the constant instability in their country. The country suffered from drought, civil war, and a lack of social service infrastructure. Ibrahim was a heavy-set boy. As a kid, I remember late on Saturday nights watching a local show that came on Channel 48 called Urban Expressions, the only non-cable television program that showed the latest music videos. During the commercial breaks, the network would show Feed the Children commercials. These commercials would show images of Africa and images of African people with flies on their eyes, living in severe poverty with their stomachs bloated due to a lack of food. A white man with a white beard would appear, who was balding except for remnants of hair on the side of his head. He looked like the secular version of Santa Claus. He would say, "It only takes one dollar a day to feed this child." For many of my peers, this was their introduction to Africa and African people. So as I mentioned, Ibrahim was from Somalia, a nation that was always on the news when I was in high school. When I found out Ibrahim a heavy-set kid was from Somalia, I was shocked.

Me: Ibrahim?

Ibrahim: Yes?

Me: You not from no Somali.

Ibrahim: What? How dare you.

Me: If you from Somali, then why you so fat?

Ibrahim: If you are from America, then why are you so ugly? Nose.

Me: Fuck out of here?

Although my understanding of Africa and African people was different because of the educative experiences my mother exposed me to, I chose the racist propagandist version of Africa and African people. Ibrahim, just like Jessica, would provide me the chance to show that I was different from these outsiders.

Our English teacher, Ms. Marinzini, took us on a class trip to the Edgar Allan Poe house. My classmates had just finished reading the famous story, “Tell-Tale Heart”. I say my classmates because I don’t remember anything from my freshmen year of high school, but I do remember Ms. Marinzini giving lectures on Poe because she took us on a trip to see his house. On that day, I remember being disrespectfully curious, and I found a victim—Ibrahim.

[In a conversation with one of my close friends, Jefferson Jackson, a.k.a. Jeff-Jackson or Jeff-Jack.]

Me: Jeff-Jack.

Jeff-Jack: Yo?

Me: Peep, Ibrahim.

Jeff-Jack: What about him?

[Jeff-Jack begins to laugh.]

Me: He’s an African booty scratcher. Yo, da first time da bull saw da toilet heat was when he got America.

[Jeff-Jack and others join in on the laughter.]

Me: Yeah, da bull Ibrahim was like, “Oh, God! What is this thing?”

[Jeff-Jack and others are laughing in the back of the bus uncontrollably.]

Me: Guess what I told him? A toilet.



[Everyone begins to laugh.]

At that point, Ibrahim gave me a cold killer look that expressed intense anger and pain, and his Ethiopian friend told him not to pay me any attention. I returned a cold stare with a lifeless smile. As the trip went on, I remember Ms. Marinzini pulling me to the side.

Ms. Marinzini: Nosakhere, Ibrahim told me you have been picking on him. If you don't stop, I am going to have to go to Dean Blacksmith.

Me: Aint even say nuthin to da bull.

Ms. Marinzini: Nos, don't make me go to Dean Blacksmith.

Me: Aight, aight. I'll stop.

Ms. Marinzini: Ok now.

I always feared being suspended because it would mean that my mother would have to come up to school, and I would be seen as different, just like Ibrahim. Being different from my peers would cause me to be victimized by them. So, I respected Ms. Marinzini's request to leave Ibrahim alone.

#### **4.7.2 Ms. Simmons**

For most of my freshmen year, I grappled with wanting to fulfill my dream of becoming a journalist and wanting to be popular. The majority of the time, I chose popularity because no one respected smart kids; they were nerds. I wanted to be respected by the popular kids. Developing my popularity was difficult because people became popular in different ways. Some kids were popular because of the clothes they wore; my mother couldn't afford nor would she buy me expensive clothes. Boys who played on the basketball team had the pass-of-popularity; I was a baseball player, but I was not popular for this because black kids considered baseball to be a

*white-boy sport*. People who sold drugs had popularity because of the money they possessed; I didn't sell drugs either. Other students had to become popular through other means like either fighting or being a class-clown.

For me, I chose a blend of both of these final options. Sometimes, I would *bust* on someone so badly that the person would want to fight. In the case of girls, they either would request their boyfriends, brothers, or cousins to fight me; conversely, guys would either want to fight me or want to get me *rolled on*. Although I was in a different environment, I was acting just as I acted in middle school. Many of my teachers believed that I was a lost cause, but Ms. Simmons never gave up on me. She provided me with unconditional love, and she sought to protect me whenever anyone attempted to bring harm to me.

In the fall of 2000, I wrote an article in the U-City entitled "Leadership in the Black Community". In the article, I described the Black community as a disorganized community, who suffered from Black on Black crime and lack of leadership. At the time, the Black leader that was always in the media was Jessie Jackson. My criticism of Jackson was the following:

We don't need any more of these Jesse Jackson sorts of leaders who mug for the camera at any chance. These leaders aren't helping the struggle at all if anything, they are impeding it. Now, I know there are a lot of people saying that Jesse Jackson has done a lot for African-Americans. He did, but what he is doing now is useless to us as a people.

In the National Football League, Ray Rhodes had just been fired from the Green Bay Packers' head coach position, and Jackson was on many shows talking about this incident as an unfair. I remember being upset at Jackson for advocating that Rhodes should get his job back while masses of Black people were suffering. My article did three things: 1) provided a solution to the Jackson-type of leadership, 2) categorized White people as oppressors, and 3) declared that

Blacks should separate from the larger American society until the Black community had properly addressed its own political, economic, and social issues. The White teachers at U-City were upset about the article and thought it was contributing to a toxic school culture. The principal of the school, Ms. Florence Johnson, and Ms. Simmons refused the teachers request to stop me from writing about race. However, Ms. Simmons offered the teachers the chance to respond to my article.

One teacher decided to write a letter to the editor entitled, “Response to ‘Leadership in the Black Community.’” Mr. Pagnozzi declared that my article was “counterproductive and racially insulting” because I “portrayed white people as the oppressor.” He believed that framing all white people as oppressors could cause a division between students and teachers. Instead, he believed that human beings had to work together to make a better world. Additionally, he referenced Blacks students’ positive affect on his life and his hopefully positive affect on their life. However, his concluding paragraphs posed a problem:

I should hope that my students have gone on in life to make something out of themselves. I should also hope that many of them are entrepreneurs and leaders of the community. Not loud mouths, but constructive citizens that know the difference between real change and rhetoric of demagogues. There are those within communities all communities that would like to keep their constituency poor and ignorant; it gives them their power base. Only education can free thinking can break the chains of economic and political slavery. We have come a long way in this country towards real freedom. We have a long way to go. To think in separatist terms sets the clock back on the struggle and insures that small minds will succeed.

In response to Mr. Mr. Pagnozzi's article, I wrote a response entitled, "Nosakhere's Response to Mr. Pagnozzi." In the beginning of the article, I declared that I was not a "separatist" but a "realist" who believed that a sick people needed to "eparate from society to get ourselves together I sought to address Mr. Pagnozzi's implication that I was a "racist" when I used the term "white oppressors." Thus, I sought to clarify what I meant by "white oppressors":

The white oppressor that I am talking about is the majority of faces sitting in Congress. These are the ones who are oppressing my people, by letting guns and drugs flow in the streets, building jails instead of building new schools. These people allow drugs on our streets so that young people, especially African-American youth can fall into the trap. They go to jail and serve stiff sentences as cheap labor. This is the oppressor I speak about.

The tragedy of Mr. Pagnozzi's letter wasn't that he decided to critique my ideas, but that he chose to be combative with a student. In retrospect, this was a teachable moment, an opportunity to teach a student how to engage in the art of dialogue with an elder within this school community. Mr. Pagnozzi decided to attack a frustrated teenager who was in search of solutions for his community. By doing this, he affirmed my belief that "whenever people of African descent speak of the enslavement or their ancestors, there is always someone who wants to shut them up". Ms. Simmons was not going to let anyone silence me. She stood up for me not because she agreed with my ideas. She stood beside me because she believed in my freedom of speech.

#### 4.8 THE LUNCHROOM BRAWL AND THE POSSIBILITY OF EXPULSION

Ms. Simmons' support went beyond free speech. In the spring of 2000, I was standing in the hallway and a group of students with disabilities were looking for a kid named Jim. Apparently, Jim had been *bustin* on the students, and the student had gotten upset and decided they wanted to confront him. The students surrounded Jim, and they began arguing with him. All of sudden, the public safety came in the hallway and disbursed the crowd. The students with disabilities had never bothered anyone; so when these students decided to confront Jim for *bustin* on them, it became a running joke throughout the day. While in art, Jim and I got into an argument and I referenced the altercation that morning between him and the students. He responded to my reference by saying that he and his friends would *roll on me*. I didn't take his threat serious, and at the end of art-class I headed to lunch.

At the end of lunch, I looked across the lunchroom, and I saw Jim and his friends sitting there looking at me. I told my friends Jeff-Jackson and Kyle what happened in art class, and I mentioned how Jim said his squad was going to *dip on me* after lunch. Kyle, who was from North Philly and was the toughest guy in our crew, said, "We out y'all." We headed to the exit doors in the lunchroom, and so did Jim and his squad. My friends and I walked through the exit doors and a few seconds later, so did the other boys. One of my friends named Trevor hollered, "Nos!" When I turned around, there was guy creeping beyond me as if he was going to attempt to *sneak me*.

The guy: Yo! You was talking about my squad?

Me: What?

The guy: What niggah? You was talkin bout my squad?

Me: Fuck you talkin to?

At that moment, I grabbed his face and pushed him to the ground, and then a bunch of boys jumped on me. All I felt were repeated punches to my back and rib cage. A girl screamed, “Get off of Nos,” and then she began throwing punches at the boys who were beating me up. When she jumped into the fight, the beating I was taking stopped. I began to swing on anybody who was with High Life. One kid Tony attempted to swing at me, but then he faded back into the crowd. With so much chaos going on, I just acted like I didn’t see him. School security rushed into the lunch hallway, and they began to break the fight up. They had blocked off one side of the hallway, and I couldn’t swing on any of the guys who were *beating on me* earlier. When I turned around, I saw Tony. I ran towards him. He thought I didn’t see him throw the punch earlier. As I ran in his direction, I threw a punch that knocked him to the ground. All of the students watching the fight made a harmonious sound affect, “OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!” He fell and hit his head on the bottom of a plastic trashcan. Public safety grabbed me and slammed me against the wall—the fight was over.

The NTAs gripped me by my arm and escorted me to my small learning community. When I got there, they told me to point out all of the students who I was fighting. As I pointed to the guys who beat me up, I had an ominous feeling. After pointing the boys out, I was taken to Dean Blacksmith’ office. All of the boys were in the office, and Dean Blacksmith began to investigate what happened.

Dean Blacksmith: Nosacore, what happened?

Me: Look, right, I was chillin in the hallway before advisory and the slow kids from da first floor came up looking for da bull Jim. So, when found him dhey was gona dip on him. So, me and my homies were on some laughin type tip. So, everybody was bustin on Jim and his squad. Basically, dhey like a gang, dhey call themselves High Life.

Dean Blacksmith: So, what did that have to do with you?

Me: Da bull was talkin trash art, so, I started callin him and his squad Low Lives for talkin trash to the slow kids, dhen da bull said he and his squad was gona dip on me after lunch.

Dean Blacksmith: Ok.

Me: So, when I was bouncing from lunch Jim and High Life, kats were chillin waiting for me to bounce. When got throw the doors, my homie Trev was like Nos. I turned around and da bull was trying to sneak me, yo.

[Dean Blacksmith stops me and begins asking Jim about his side of the story. Jim affirms with slight alterations exactly what I said.]

Dean Blacksmith: Nosacore, so, when you walked out the cafeteria what happened?

Me: Da Bull asked me why I was talking about his squad? I walked over to him and said what? He looked like he was going to hit me and mugged da bull and he fell.

Dean Blacksmith: [He begins to laugh and so do the NTA in the room.] Time out, let me hear what happened from the young man.

The guy: Da bull Nos mugged me, I fell and got up and.... [He was interrupted by laughter by everyone in the room.]

Mr. Tony: [who was a NTA] So, Nosacare mugged you and you fell?

The guy: Yeah, he mugged and I fell.

Dean Blacksmith: You better be glad he didn't hit you with a closed fist.

[Everyone laughs.]

This would be the last time I would laugh during this meeting. Dean Blacksmith informed me that I would be suspended for a week with the intention of being expelled. Getting expelled from

U-City meant I would be transferred to Bartram High School, which would be the educational graveyard for me. Sadness fell upon my soul. Had I proved right everyone who had said I was a failure? Were Mr. Jones and Ms. Hart right? Were Ms. Lee and Ms. Simmons wrong?

Ms. Simmons walked into the meeting and sat down in a chair across from me. Then, she made an inquiry about the fight. Dean Blacksmith told her what happened, informed her that I was going to be suspended for a week, and said that I would be expelled at the end of the suspension. A few minutes later, Ms. Johnson, who was the principal, walked into the office.

Ms. Johnson: How dare you disrupt the learning environment. I will not tolerate this in my school. I want them out! None of you will ever be students at University City High School again!

Ms. Simmons: I would like to know what I can do to prevent Nosakhere and Kyle from being expelled?

Ms. Johnson: Ms. Simmons, these students started a riot in the lunchroom and disrupted class throughout the entire building. Do you know how many students could have been hurt?

Ms. Simmons: I understand Ms. Johnson, but Nosakhere and Kyle are good students and I would not want to see them leave University City. I would like for both of them to have a second chance.

Ms. Johnson: No.

Ms. Johnson was a no-nonsense educator. Some of the students joked that she was the female version of Joe Clarke from the *Lean on Me* movie. She was known for walking into classrooms and demanding that teachers turn off videos that had nothing to do with educational content and teach. Before she was the principal, University City was a school where gangs ruled the



hallways, but when she became principal, she literally transformed the school. Just like Joe Clarke, she was a zero tolerance educator, and she appeared to be firm on her stance of kicking Kyle and me out of school. Mentally, I was preparing to attend Bartram, but in my heart I was hoping Ms. Simmons would work some magic and get Ms. Johnson to see me as she did.

Coming back from suspension, my mother had to reinstate me. I was under the impression that this was a formality and that the following week I would be enrolled at Bartram. When my mother and I walked into the office, Ms. Johnson informed my mother and I of the havoc and the potential crisis that the fight could have caused. However, she told us that she would be giving me one more chance. Another fight would result in immediate suspension. I was so happy that I would not have to go to Bartram and bury my dreams of becoming a journalist. Ms. Simmons believed in my potential even during the darkest hour. She believed that I would turn my life around.

As a student, I remember hearing many teachers talk about how they loved students and how they came to work everyday to make an impact on students' lives. In many cases, these teachers' articulations of their ideas were lip-service. They had not committed to their ideas in life-service. Ms. Simmons came everyday to work because she loved her students. During the days before our newspaper deadlines, she would buy pizzas for the newspaper staff, and when it got late she drove us home. She invited us to her home at least twice a year. For most of the students on the newspaper, Ms. Simmons was a consistent positive role model in their life, who provided constructive feedback, assisting everyone in becoming a better person. Ms. Simmons was not just a teacher; she was a mother to me who loved me even when I didn't love myself.

#### 4.9 A CHANCE AT A DREAM

During my senior year, I had calmed down. I wasn't getting kicked out of class, and my fighting days were over. I continued my *bustin* activities, but only with friends. I didn't want to be expelled nor did I want to let Ms. Simmons down. One day, during the fall semester, there was a career fair in the lunchroom. I had stayed after school to work on the newspaper because deadlines were approaching. Ms. Simmons told me to take a break and go to the career fair. I did so just to appease her. When I entered the lunchroom, there were many employers and universities who were attempting to convince students that they should apply for a job or admission at their institution. Before coming to the fair, I had a desire to go to college, but it was a lifeless theoretical proclamation to say that I was ambitious. In reality, I spent three years playing around seeking respect and popularity. Thus, I thought my only option was to go to the Community College of Philadelphia, which, like Bartram, was considered an educational graveyard. My other option was to go to cosmetology school to become a barber. College was not an option for me because my grades reflected a student who had not achieved anything.

Walking into the career fair was fun because I got a bunch of free pens, pencils, and college pennants. As I neared the end of my collection of free junk, I noticed a table with an orange and blue tablecloth. In the front of the table, there were three pictures of three of the distinguished alumni of the university—Langston Hughes, Thurgood Marshall, Kwame Nkrumah. A young man stood at the table. He was a brown skinned man with a haircut that was dark on the top and light on the sides; he wore his cut like the rapper Nas. I walked over to him, and he greeted me:

The man: Hello, my name is Darnell Edwards.

Me: I'm Nosakhere. Yo, Nkrumah went to Lincoln?

The Man: Yes, he's one of our great alums.

Me: Man, if Lincoln can make a president, then it got to be a good school.

The Man: You got that right.

Me: Yo, I mean, I would really like to come to Lincoln.

The Man: So, what's your GPA?

Me: On da real, I'm not a good student. Like a C+, but I been on newspaper and I'm an all-star baseball player. But, if you give a chance I will turn my life around.

The Man: How?

Me: By doing my schoolwork. Matter fact, I'll going to get my portfolio.

The Man: Ok.

I went to my locker and got my portfolio with all of my newspaper writing from my freshmen year in high school. I showed Mr. Edwards, and he was impressed with my work. He gave me his card and told me that he would help me get into Lincoln University, but he could not make any promises. I spent the whole evening talking to Mr. Edwards. As the evening came to a close, I told Mr. Edwards, "If you let me into Lincoln, I would not let you down!" At the end of night, I had a slight hope that he was sincere about his offer because it was my only hope at attending college.

From September until March, I called Mr. Edwards every single day. One morning, I was leaving for school and, apparently, neither my mother nor brother had picked up the mail. The majority of the mail was for my mother, but there was one piece of mail addressed to me from Lincoln University. Out of nervousness, I didn't want to open the letter because I thought it was a rejection. After all, I had not been a good student, and when I took my SAT exam I got a 620. In my mind, there was no way I was going to school. In my small learning community, none of

the students had received acceptance letters, and I just knew it was a rejection letter. At the trolley stop, like a mouse caught in the kitchen I was paralyzed by fear. I didn't want to open the letter.

After a few stops, I put my pen to the edge of the envelope corner. I ripped it open from the top and removed the letter. I placed the envelope in the seat beside me, and I placed the letter in my lap. Still in fear, I opened the letter folded in three sections. First, I read the date, and my eyes strolled down the paper. The first word after the date was, "Congratulations." I screamed, "Yes!!!!!!!!!!!" People on the trolley turned around and looked at me, and I quickly placed my head down. However, for the next thirty minutes, I couldn't stop smiling. When I got to school, I quickly went to Ms. Simmons' classroom to show her. She congratulated me and made a copy of my acceptance letter. Then, she placed it on the bulletin board. It was one of the happiest moments of my life because I was given a chance to make something of my life, even as my grades and suspensions reflected a student who didn't deserve another chance. Mr. Edwards, like Ms. Lee and Ms. Simmons, was willing to give me a chance to make a life for myself.

#### **4.10 FIGHTING OPPRESSORS WITH THE PEN AND TONGUE**

At U-City, all of the students had to walk through the auditorium to go through the metal detector. One morning, a boy had walked through the metal detector and kept on beeping. The NTA repeatedly asked the student to go through metal detector, which wasn't an abnormal request. What was troubling was the NTAs, who made fun of the boy's steel toe boots. The crowd of boys waiting to go through the metal detectors began laughing, too. The boy fed out of

the auditorium in embarrassment. The NTAs in the school had a tradition of bullying students. In my sophomore year, I wrote an article, “NTAs, Bullies With Power?”

Something has to change and that is the abusive NTAs. They treat us [referring to students]. bad I mean, some might say that I know because I was in and out of trouble last year. Sometimes I walk down the hallway and hear the foulest things come out their mouths. They have no respect for us students. I say that [they must] go!... Why must we as students have to put [up with] this abuse day in and day out?)

Essentially, this disrespectful act by the NTA towards the boy with the steel toe boots was consistent with how they treated students in general, and their actions were reminiscent of how they had treated me, too. So, with the school newspaper coming out in a few weeks, I decided to write an article critiquing their oppressive actions towards students.

A few days after the publication of the article, I was leaving school after a baseball game. Officer Henry was sitting at the sign-in desk. He asked whether we won and our response was “No.” Officer Henry began laughing and making comments about how my teammates and I were garbage.

Me: What?

Officer Henry: You heard me. Y’all are garbage and can’t play.

Me: Whatever! We’re better than the football team. We won more games than Dean Blacksmith ever won. So, if we were garbage than so is your boss.

Officer Henry: I ain’t Dean Blacksmith.

Me: Well, your garbage too!

Officer Henry: That ain’t what your momma said.

Me: Well, tell your wife I want sneaks back from underneath her bed.

Officer Henry: Don't talk about my wife!

Me: You heard me! Tell our wife I'm comin through to get my sneaks.

[We both start hollering at each other. Ms. Johnson walks in from the her office to see who is arguing].

Ms. Johnson: Nosacare, lower your tone. You're talking to an adult.

Officer Henry: That right!

Me: Oh, now you're a grown man? A few minutes ago you were a kid. You want to be a kid. I'ma talk to you like one.

Ms. Johnson: What happened?

Me: He gonna talk about my team is garbage. Dhen da bull gonna start talking about my mom, and my mom and his wife is cool. He gettin his disrespect on. Now he wanna act like he's an oldhead. You not [talking to Officer Henry]!

Ms. Johnson told me to go home, and I left. The next day I was waiting to go into the metal detectors. As I got closer to the metal detectors, I was able to look and clearly see the discontent on his face. Officer Henry was looking at the backpacks on the conveyer belt. Mr. Tony and Officer Brice were waiting on the other side to pat down students who beeped when they went through the metal detectors.

When I got through the metal detectors, I beeped. Normally, they let a student return to empty his/her pockets, and then go back through the detector—not this time. These NTAs were going to teach me a lesson for my article and my argument with Officer Henry.

Mr. Tony: Get over here, we gotta pat you down.

Me: Whatever.

Mr. Tony: Spread'em and put your hands up.

[He began patting me down, but his pats felt like slaps to my legs and rib cage.]

Me: Fuck outta here! Fuck is wrong with you? Don't pat me down like that.

Mr. Tony: Shut the fuck up, and go back through the metal detector.

Me: Man, fuck you! Who da fuck y'all motherfuckas think y'all are? Y'all aint fuckin God.

Officer Brice: [Starts walking towards me.] I know you better shut yo mouth.

Me: Fuck all y'all bitch ass niggahs. Y'all only fuck wit us cuz y'all know we aint gonna stand up to y'all. If y'all don't won't nobody fucking wit yall kids don't fuck with us!

Officer Brice got closer to me and pushed me into the auditorium seats. A few seconds later, all of the NTAs had grabbed me. One of them had his hand around my neck, and the other NTA had me by my arm. Dean Blacksmith, who was the acting principal as a result of Ms. Johnson going away on business, decided to suspend me for three days.

After I served my suspension, I had to have a reinstatement hearing with Ms. Johnson. When my mother and I arrived, Ms. Johnson welcomed us into her office. My mother started off the meeting by acknowledging that I had temper and a nasty mouth, but she felt it was no excuse for me being accosted by the NTAs. Ms. Johnson affirmed my mother's sentiment. She began by telling my mother how proud she was of me and how I was destined to do great things in my life. In addition, Ms. Johnson informed my mother that the incident between the NTAs and I probably stemmed from the article I wrote in the newspaper. She said that she would deal with all of the parties responsible accordingly.

In high school, my life was like a baseball game. I was the batter who swung at bad pitches early, like down in the count two strikes and no balls. When a batter has two strikes, he/she has to be selective at the plate. In some cases, he/she has to swing a close pitch and hope

to foul it back. Sometimes the umpire calls a close pitch in favor of the batter, which should have been called a strike. With each foul tip the batter gets, he/she is able to keep his at bat alive. In addition, as the batter fights off pitches, he/she tires the pitcher, which causes him/her to throw balls. Once this occurs, the count goes from no balls and two strikes to one ball and two strikes. After a while, the batter gets more focused, and the pitcher becomes more and more tired. Now, the count is three balls and two strikes, one pitch away from a walk, strikeout, flyout, groundout, or line-drive hit up the middle. Early on, I made many mistakes, and I should have not been given a second chance, but there were people who believed in my potential even when grades and behavior reflected something else.

#### **4.11 FREEDOM SCHOOLS**

During junior high school, Ms. Simmons approached some of the members on the newspaper about participating in summer programs. She suggested that I participate in a program at Lycoming College, but I resisted participating in this program because it was located at an all-white university. I didn't want to go because I thought going to an all-white college was selling-out. Hence, I resisted either aggressively or passively any attempt by Ms. Simmons to try to get me to fill out the application. One day she handed me a pamphlet on a summer program named Philadelphia Freedom Schools. This organization was based on the Freedom Rides that occurred during the Civil Rights struggle. Participation in the program meant teaching elementary school students about the Civil Rights struggle, reading and discussing weekly materials, and participating in community service projects. After reading the program description, I was excited and decided to apply for the program.



After the application process was complete, I received a rejection letter. I was hurt because I thought this program would assist me in becoming a leader like Malcolm X and Dr. King. Ms. Simmons came to me and asked whether I really wanted to participate in this summer program, and I responded by saying, “Yes!” Ms. Simmons’ husband, Corey, worked with the Community Outreach Department at the University of Pennsylvania, and he knew a gentleman named Kenny, who was the funding director of Freedom Schools. Ms. Simmons or her husband contacted Kenny. A few days later, I was accepted into the program.

As a participant in the program, I had to go to Haley Farm in Tennessee. The only thing I can remember thinking was that I was going to be catching an airplane. This was a big moment in my life because no in my family had every flown on an airplane, and it would be my first time leaving the Northeast. The morning of the trip, my mother and I woke up very early. She called a cab to take us to Benjamin Franklin High School on Board and Spring Garden. My mother was extremely nervous for me. My mother had a fear of planes, which she believed had a high probability of crashing. When she found out that I had to take an airplane to Tennessee, she nearly told me I could not participate in the program. I cannot remember what changed her mind, but something did. As students from across the city arrived for the Freedom Schools program, I could tell my mother was afraid. She was letting her baby get on an airplane that could crash. The chaperones began to usher the students towards the yellow school buses that would take us to the airport. At that moment, my mother dug into her coat pocket and gave me a good luck charm and said:

Mother: Nosa, be careful, you hear me?

Me: Yes. I will.

Mother: Love you. Call me when get there.

Me: Ok. Bye mommy.

Mother: Don't forget to call me.

My mother walked towards the train stop to return home, and I walked on the bus and sat in a window seat nervous about my first flight.

As the bus traveled from Board and Spring Garden to the airport, I became very nervous to the extent that my stomach became nauseous. When we arrived at the airport, we quickly moved through the check-in and safety check. The delegation of students and chaperones waited in the seating area for the plane to arrive and within a few minutes the plane came. Now, my nervousness and nausea dominated my body. I walked through the tunnel and many of the students were laughing and joking, but I was quiet and fearful, just like my mother. In my hand, I clutched my mother's good luck charm, which minimally calmed my mind and stomach. I sat down and quickly buckled my seatbelt. Minutes later, the plane started moving and my nausea became apparent on my face. With pain of fear on my face, I closed my eyes waiting for the plane to take off. The plane slowly arrived at the runway and began to move faster and faster and all of sudden the plane slowly rose off of the ground. Students on the plane screamed in fear, "AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!" Their screams provided me with a cathartic feeling because I too wanted to scream. But I didn't -- I was too cool for that. A few hours later, we arrived in Tennessee, and I had survived my first plane ride.

At the beginning of the trip, I was amazed at my surroundings, but this feeling would quickly be trumped by teenage boredom. I went from session to session listening to lectures about African and African-American culture, which I had heard since I had been a kid. I felt like none of these educators were teaching me anything new. After dinner one evening, we had to attend a lecture by a professor by the name of Dr. Clarke. I thought it would be another boring

lecture about African and African-American history. Dr. Clarke was a tall skinny guy with a Southern accent, and he wore an African shirt with a baseball cap. He was a young man with beautiful passion. When we sat down, he informed us that we would be watching the *Eyes on the Prize* documentary, and afterward we would have a discussion. Most of the students, me included, just wanted to go to sleep after a long day of constant lectures.

After the documentary was over, Dr. Clarke grabbed the microphone and began speaking. I can't remember what he said, but I do remember feeling inspired. For most of my life, I read books, listened to tapes, or watched documentaries about great leaders, but hearing Dr. Clarke speak made me realize that I was in the presence of one of those leaders. After he was finished speaking, I was one of the students who wanted to talk to him about the ideas he expressed in the speech, but I also wanted something more—I wanted to be mentored by him. All of a sudden, to be an intellectual was a cool, and I wanted to be just like him—I wanted to get my *Dr. Clarke-on*.

During the summer, every Wednesday night at Temple University, we would come together to discuss weekly readings. First, we were broken up into small groups, and adults, who were called academic advisors, would facilitate dialogues between students. After the small-group dialogues, we entered the auditorium to hear Dr. Clarke give a lecture on the major themes from the readings. He cited page numbers, provided analysis of the text, and related the readings to contemporary issues. Dr. Clarke was not merely the manifestation of educational excellence; he became my exemplar of manhood.

My last year in Freedom Schools, Dr. Clarke and I had a falling out. My friend Nikky and I decided to start a newspaper we called *Conscious Sense*. In the newspaper, we wrote articles seeking to inspire our fellow Freedom School members to struggle to make the Black

Community. She and I were radical, and we had moved away from idolizing Dr. Clarke. We wanted to think and act, avoiding the control of adults. Dr. Clarke and the other elders who were in leadership positions in Freedom School didn't take too kindly to our radical stance. As radicals, we sought to "do our own thing", which meant we stopped reading weekly readings. When we had to go to the small-group meetings, we discussed the ideas of Malcolm X and Marcus Garvey. She and I were Black Nationalists, and we sought to spread that gospel within an organization that was radical but not nationalist. Increasingly, she and I felt the elders of the organization were holding us back. We began to categorize them as Uncle Toms because they were not willing to support our revolutionary ideas. As time progressed, a huge gap grew between the elders and us.

At the closing ceremonies for the Freedom Schools, two former civil rights organizers served as the keynote speakers. The second presenter began to talk about how she struggled to make America a better place and how there were many Blacks who died for us to have an education and vote. She said, "We struggled so that you all would live a better life. Now, you young people can do whatever you want with your life. You can even be the president of the United States of America!" Nikky turned to me with a silly look on her face, and she pointed to a paper she had written on. It read, "Nos, what's the difference between fantasy and reality, and which one does she live in?" I started laughing uncontrollably because, at the time, it was farfetched as a Black person to dream of being the president. We lived in a racist America where structural racism would never allow a Black man to become president. So, I wrote "fantasy," and we continued to laugh.

One of the academic advisors named Nkosi was sitting at the table with us. He was a short brown-skinned guy from New York. Because of his muscular build, Nikky and I knew him

as the diesel dude. Also, he always looked mad. He responded to our laughter not by telling us to shut up. Instead, he began giving us a short speech:

Nkosi: Yo, son! Y'all can laugh all you want, but dhose kats got heart! Dhey were bit by dogs and got beat by cops for something believed in. I don't know too many kats today who would do the same. Yo! Dawgs son! Dawgs! Yo son! Dawgs!

When he spoke, I quickly removed the smirk off my face, and I paid close attention to Nkosi. After he was finished, I sat quietly and pretended that I was paying attention to the speaker. Meanwhile, Dr. Clarke and the other elders were infuriated by our disrespect.

The next day there was a dinner for all of the students and academic advisors in Freedom Schools. Nikky and I were both headed to college in a few weeks; she was headed to Fisk University and I to Lincoln University. Before the night was over, Dr. Clarke and the rest of the elders called Nikky and I over to the table to have a discussion. I felt like this was going to be their chance to chastise us for our actions the previous day. I felt relieved because there was nothing they could do to us. Dr. Clarke focused his attention on me:

Dr. Clarke: Nos?

Me: Yes, doc?

Dr. Clarke: You and Nikky's behavior yesterday was disrespectful. You know that, right?

Me: Yeah.

Dr. Clarke: Ok, ok, just checking.

Me: I'm saying doc, Blacks can't be the president of this country. That ridiculous and to tell us that is a lie, yo. Only way the Black man gonna be the president of country is if he goes back to Africa. That's what Garvey said in his book *Philosophies and Opinions*.

Dr. Clarke: That's your plan to go back to Africa? How are going to do that?

Me: I don't know.

Dr. Clarke: Ok, just asking.

Me: How come when we us young bulls start getting our revolution-on, y'all ol'heads be on some naw not right stuff?

Dr. Clarke and the other elders began to reference how I hadn't completed the majority of weekly assignments and intellectual work was the precursor of activism. Dr. Clarke began to question what type of movement I would lead without an intellectual foundation. Dr. Clarke finished his chastisement, and Mama Nia began talking. She began talking about how some organizations either serve their purpose or the people in the organization out grow them. The meeting ended with Nikky and I being forced out of Freedom Schools. The following summer they officially cut ties with us by not offering us summer employment.

## **4.12 HIGH SCHOOL SUMMARY**

### **4.12.1 Personal**

During my high school years, my life could have been headed down a destructive path that would have left me eating a blueberry muffin as a dinner and not a snack. As a young man on probation, one mistake would have placed me in the custody of the state of Pennsylvania. More than likely, I could have spent my youth in various juvenile detention facilities. If I had allowed the pain of familial rejection to define my life, then I would not have developed the agency to become something more in life. Throughout my life, I believed that, even though I was born a

bastard and abandoned by those that I loved, I was not going to let my birth and my family circumstances define me. I was going to move beyond all of these struggles.

#### **4.12.2 Educational**

As a student, my teachers and administrators believed I was destined for failure. I believed their perception of me, and fatalistically I projected the same perceptions onto my classmates. In the cases of Jessica and Ibrahim, I verbally punished them because I hated myself. I wanted to be something other than what I was; I wanted my name to be different. I was an oppressor who sought to dehumanize others so that the popular kids might accept me. My hatred of myself was matched by my hatred of school. When I was in class, the teachers saturated me with knowledge, but they rarely took into consideration my personal experience or my African-American culture and history. In addition, I did not feel like many of these educators cared about my success; I developed an anti-school position, which was rooted in a *fuckit* mentality.

#### **4.12.3 Societal**

As a young man, I was waking up day after day hating my life. With every passing day, I was walking down a fatalistic path towards death and destruction. I could have grown up to be a killer or a drug dealer never to realize my human potential. I could have failed out of my school, never to attend college or graduate school.

#### **4.12.4 Dialectics of the Blueberry Muffin**

Many supportive characters have blessed my life. Although my mother and I had a very contentious relationship, she provided me with many opportunities to learn African culture and the cultures of other people across the world. She was my exemplar, as a person who fought for her rights regardless of whether or not others supported her. Ms. Lee was a teacher, who looked beyond my behavior and my failing of the seventh grade. Instead, she saw a student who had the potential to be great; her support of me took the form of her encouraging me to dream. With her encouragement, I dreamt of becoming a journalist, a dream that led me to University City High School.

At U-City, Ms. Simmons unconditionally supported me; even when I was wrong, she stood by affirming my potential to do something great with my life. Without Ms. Simmons' husband (who connected me to Kenny at the Freedom Schools), I would not have been admitted to the Freedom Schools program. As a member of this program, I was exposed to various mentors who would further assist in my development. Of all of these experiences, meeting Dr. Clarke was one of the great moments of my life. My participation in Freedom Schools gave me the confidence to realize I could do anything in life. The confidence that I gained allowed me to approach Mr. Edwards and ask him for a chance to go to Lincoln University. Mr. Edwards helped me to apply to and earn acceptance to Lincoln, because of his ability to look past my previous academic failures. Reflecting on my high school years, I realize that if people would have judged me only for I who was in the past, than I would have never been able to transform myself and pursue my dreams. These supporting figures led me toward the muffin as a snack and not as a dinner.



## 5.0 COLLEGE

### 5.1 FRESHMEN TRANSITION WEEK

When I entered Lincoln University, I was looking for a chance to make myself into a *stone cold* intellectual. For years, people believed that I was not going to do anything productive with my life. My mother had low expectations of me because of my lack of academic achievement in school. In my younger years, I was told I would be nothing in life, just like my father. My brother would constantly tease me, calling me a failure. Teachers who didn't like me believed I was destined for death or jail, while teachers who did like me were unclear about what I was going to do with my life. Although I was headed to Lincoln University, my life was still seriously doubted, but I was driven to prove wrong the individuals who doubted me. My experience at Lincoln University would begin with me attempting to prove to all those who either doubted me explicitly or implicitly that I could achieve.

During Freshmen Transition Week, every single day I wore an African shirt. These shirts had loud colors and designs. My favorite shirt was red and green tie-dye with gold embroidery, and it had long short sleeves and extended just above my knees. When I wore African attire, I was seen as different from everyone else. I wasn't just a regular freshmen, I was "*Da Bull* with *Da dashikis*." In addition to wearing the dashikis, I wore fake-Malcolm X glasses. I created an image of myself that was centered on intellectual seriousness and Afrocentricity. My fellow

freshmen classmates and other upperclassmen that were a part of the student leadership didn't see me as failure or a trouble maker. They saw me as a kid who was *sharp*.

Whenever I went to freshmen transition week sessions, I would make long-winded comments followed by a question. Sometimes, my comments and question connected to the speaker's point, but in many cases, these comments were loosely connected. Hence, my intention of asking the question and making these comments had little to do with me seeking to engage in a dialogue with speaker, nor was it about me seeking to understand the speaker's perspective on a particular issues. Instead, I wanted to show everyone that I was different and that I was a *stone-cold intellectual*.

At the last session titled Greek Life, students and administrators from the African-American Greek lettered organizations presented. Once the presentation was over, they opened the session for questions. I raised my hand, and Ms. King, who was the junior administrator and facilitator of the session, called on me.

Me: I have a question.

Ms. King: Go head, young man.

Me: Aight. Look right, how come y'all call y'allselfes Greeks? The Greeks stole all their stuff from Ancient Kemet or most people call Egypt? Shouldn't call y'allselfes like Ancient Kemeticians?

A Student: We know that the Egyptians gave birth to Greek civilization. That's why my organization [speaking of Swing Phi Swing] reclaims the Kemeti Phi.

Another Student: Black Greek organizations are different from the Greek's your talkin bout. We have a tradition of scholarship and service in the African-American community. Some of the great leaders of our race were Black Greeks.

Me: I hear y'all and all but just think it's time to change the name of our organizations. For example, the NAACP uses the term "Colored." Black folks don't call themselves colored no more. Or like Marcus Garvey's organization, the UNIA, he used the term "Negro." I ain't no "Negro." I'm African!

Ms. King: Ok, we're going to end this sessions, and if you have any more comments or questions feel free to come up and ask us at any time.

This interaction between the leadership of these organizations and myself was an exercise where I was not only showing that I was different I was showing that I was smarter than other people. After the session, many of the members of the organizations came up to me and wanted to finish the conversation.

As we walked out of Wright Hall, one of the student leaders, who was a part of the Swing Phi Swing, came up to me and started talking. As we started talking, I noticed a crowd surrounded me. With the leadership of the organizations and other students surrounding me, I couldn't help but feel a bit nervous and entrapped. As the young lady and I were talking, all I could pay attention to was this guy who seemed to be a bit older than other students (maybe he was a five or six year senior). He was speaking in a loud aggressive tone, "What the fuck! Who da fuck dis he think he is? I'll fuck'em up." His "brothers" in organization calmed down his aggressiveness, and I turned my full attention back to this young lady.

Young lady: You have good ideas, but they don't matter if you present them in a way that people don't understand what you are trying to get at. It's like putting a pizza on a platter or a garbage can lid. Motherfuckas ain't gonna eat the shit on the garabage can lip, yo!

Her message went on deaf ears at the time, but it stayed in my mind. She presented me with a lesson that I would not appreciate until years later. However, at that moment, I was a star. I was a different student, who had made a name for himself. One of my friends would give me a nickname, which she called me for the first few months of school, “Revolution.” Other students thought I reminded them of Lawrence Fishburne’s classic portrayal of a militant Black Nationalist student leader named Dap in Spike Lee’s movie *School Daze*. This was the first time in my life that I was able to define myself and not be defined by others. Although I was defining myself at the expense of other people, in a strange way I felt liberated.

## **5.2 DR. HERRING: THE EDUCATABLE EDUCATOR**

On Tuesdays, I had a class named the Clinton Presidency with a first year professor named Dr. Todd Herring, who was from Mississippi. Many students at Lincoln wondered why this young white professor from not just the South, but, a place known for its aggressive racism, decided to come to a Historically Black College or University (HBCU). Along with my classmates, I had a superficial belief that he was a racist. His first few lectures in my class and other classes would affirm this belief. However, this was not affirmed because he treated Black students as if we were inferior or called us niggers. Rather, we believed he was racist because he naively propagated the same racist theories and historical interpretations through his lectures that Blacks had been imbued with for years. Truthfully, Dr. Herring was no more racist than a Black professor, who propagated the same racist ideas, but what made him different than his African-American colleagues was he was a white man from the South.

Every Tuesday and Thursday, I went to class with the intention of proving Dr. Herring wrong. He would come to class and preach the gospel of the American dream, which none of my fellow colleagues had ever experienced. My argumentative stance in class was rooted in my anger at never having had on a consistent basis a good education. Here was this white man who lived a privileged life telling me, a little black boy, about how to be able to live the American dream. One day, my colleagues and I hadn't read the assigned readings. Dr. Herring stopped teaching class and lectured us about education and the American Dream.

Dr. Herring: You know, class, there are many people who would love to sit in those seats and get an education. There are many people who pay taxes that fund the loans you take for your tuition and living expenses. So, when you don't read or come to class prepared to learn, you are wasting their money as well as your own.

I remember thinking to myself that this white *bull* was *outta pocket* for telling us we were wasting our money, but he was telling the truth. However, as Dr. Herring's antagonist, I had to disagree with him not on principal, but because he was white.

After this incident in class, I decided to read because there was no way I was going to prove that Black stereotype right, which was that Black folks don't read. There was a saying, "If you ever wanted to hide anything from a Black person, put it in a book." As result, when I read, I did so to disprove this stereotype and to attack what he stood for: The American Dream. Our educational war would come to a halt for a day. For example, Dr. Herring was lecturing on a chapter in the book we were to read for the week.

As I was walking to class one day, my childhood friend, Asher, who also went to Lincoln too, ran up to me.

Asher: Yo!!!! Did see what happened?

Me: Naw! What happened?

Asher: Dhese Arab-kats just slammed mothafuckin planes in the World Trade!

Me: Fuck outta here.

Asher: Dawg, that shit was just on the news!

Me: Whatever yo!

Asher: Aight gang.

When I went to class, Dr. Herring made the announcement that the terrorists had attacked America. All of sudden, fear pervaded my mind, body, and soul. Dr. Herring lead us to the media center, and we watched the World Trade Center fall to the ground. I felt like it was a nightmare that we couldn't wake from. I thought to myself, "What next? Will they hit Philly too? Where's my mom and brother?" We watched the newscast for a few minutes in total silence. Thereafter, Dr. Herring dismissed class, and we all headed towards our dorm rooms. I was in total shock not knowing what was going on. As I walked down the pathway from Dickey Hall towards McRarry Hall, thoughts of my family dominated my thoughts. When I got to the quad, which was an area on campus where three dorms where located, all I could hear was students blasting their radios. I was a bit behooved that students were carrying on as if nothing had happened. I sat in my room for an hour out of pure fear and boredom. Then, I decided to leave and walk around campus.

My journey around campus led me to the library. The newspaper section was located in the basement of the library. I read a few of the Black newspapers to calm my nerves. After read a few articles, I decided to see if the cafeteria was opened. As I headed out of the library, a young woman approached me. She was an average height, curvaceous woman with inviting eyes, sharp lips that had a beauty mark at the end, and shoulder length dreadlocks that went past her

shoulder. During freshmen transition week, I remembered seeing her, but I didn't approach her because she didn't appear to be a freshman; she looked more like a transfer student, who was a little bit older than me. On this day, she stopped me, and we began talking about what happened in New York. When the conversation ended, she told me her name, Rasheeda, and I told her mine.

In sequential classes, Dr. Herring restructured the class syllabus to discuss Middle Eastern Politics. In one of his lectures, he began to give the historical context of Middle Eastern politics. In this lecture, he mentioned all of the countries that were a part of the region. One of the countries he mentioned was Egypt, which has always been contested as either African or Middle Eastern. Racist-Eurocentric scholars had always placed Egypt in the Middle East and discussed it as a place that had a hybrid-racial identity.

Afrocentric scholars believed this was another attempt by Whites to present people of Africana descent as people who had no history of civilization, which infers that these people have not made any meaningful contributions to humanity. Therefore, when Dr. Herring made this comment in class, I went back to my room, and I found all of my books that referenced Egypt. The following class, I returned with all of my books. When class started, I raised my hand, and Dr. Herring called on me. I read each of the sentences from each book that I had brought to class to disprove his ideas. He walked towards me, and when he arrived at my desk he took a book off my desk and spoke.

Dr. Herring Well, you know Nosascare, these books are interesting. Have you read all of them?

Me: Naw.

[He starts reading books out loud in class. After finishing, he makes a request.]

Dr. Herring: Nosacare?

Me: Yo, Doc?

Dr. Herring: Can I borrow this book?

Me: Sure.

I thought Dr. Herring would return the knowledge from these books with knowledge from his educational experience. Instead, he returned my attempt to prove him wrong with his willingness to learn from me. I didn't know how to react. On one hand, I showed all of my classmates that I was right and this white man was wrong, but I also learned something more important—Dr. Herring was not a racist from the South, he was a compassionate learner-educator. At this moment, I didn't see him as an enemy. Instead, I saw him as a potential mentor, friend, and ally in my intellectual and social development.

### 5.3 DR. FRANCIS

After an Act 101 meeting on the second floor in Dickey Hall, I headed to my dorm to prepare for my next class. When I got to the stairway, a man stopped and introduced himself as Dr. Francis from the history department. He notified me that this was his first semester at Lincoln.

Dr. Francis: Hey, that a nice shirt you have on.

Me: Thanks, it's my hero Marcus Garvey.

Dr. Francis: You know who he was?

Me: Yeah, he was on some back to Africa tip.

Dr. Francis: That's right young brotha. You ever read any of his books?

Me: A little, but I got his book in my room.



Dr. Francis: Oh, yeah? Hey man, I gotta run but stop past the History Department sometimes so we can talk about Garvey.

Me: No doubt! I got this magazine too and bring that past, too.

Dr. Francis: Hey, young brotha you can call me Zizwe or professor Z, but the Euros call me Dr. Francis.

Me: Ok, I stop by next week.

Dr. Francis: Forward ever.

The following week, I went to Dr. Francis office on the third floor of Dickey Hall. When I walked through the office doorway, there were two double seat couches on both the right and left side of the small waiting area. The couches were made of wood with red cushions. Once I walked past these seats, to the left was a small hallway that had two offices on my right, one straight ahead, and to the right of that office was a conference room. The first office was for adjunct professors, the second office was Dr. Francis's office, and the last office belonged to the chair of the department. At the other end of the office, there was the political science professor's office. This place would be my home for the next four years, and the men in the history department would be my father-figures, who helped me in my in dark times and celebrated with me in my joyful moments.

Dr. Francis was a first year history professor, who graduated from Temple University's Black Studies program. He had been the mentee of the father of Afrocentricity, and he was a member of the All-African People Revolutionary Party, which was an African socialist organization led by Kwame Ture. The organization's main mantra was "Home is Africa." Their mission was to go to college campuses and recruit students to become a part of their

intelligentsia, who would assist in the development of a better Africa and African world. He wrote his dissertation on Kwame Nkrumah and considered himself an Nkrumahist.

When I got to Dr. Francis office, he was typing at his computer. I humbly knocked on the door and greeted him. I let him know that I was the student who he talked to a few days ago on the stairway. He remembered by responding with a simple, “The Garvey shirt, right?” We began talking about Garvey and his philosophy of *Back to Africa* for the Black man in America. At the end of this brief conversation, I pulled out the book from my bag. I said, “See Doc, I told you I had it.” He was concerned about me having the book. He wanted to know whether or not I had read it, which I hadn’t. We exchanged pleasantries. He told me to read some of the book, and we could discuss it next week. With excitement in my voice, I agreed to come back next week.

The next week I returned having read a number of pages. However, I had some trouble reading a chapter from the book because Garvey used the term *serf*. When I went to Dr. Francis’s office, I told him I stopped reading the chapter when I came across a particular word. I asked him what the word meant, and he returned my question by telling me to go ask Todd, who I knew as Dr. Herring. I went down to Dr. Herring’s office, and I asked him, “What’s a serf?” Dr. Herring gave me a definition, context, and various stories of different European usages of the word. This mini-lecture lasted for at least 20 minutes. At the end of the discussion, I went back to Dr. Francis’s office.

Me: Yo, Doc? How come you didn’t just tell me that a serf was like a slave?

Dr. Francis: Yo, Nosacare, you don’t have a dictionary?

Me: Naw, for what?

Dr. Francis: So, you won’t have to ask people what words mean.

Me: Oh.

Dr. Francis: You got a book voucher?

Me: Yeah, why what's up?

Dr. Francis: Go to the bookstore and get a Webster's Dictionary.

Me: Cool. Yo, Doc I got another question....

Dr. Francis: Man, I don't have the time to talk, but go get that dictionary and come back tomorrow.

Me: Cool.

[The next day I returned.]

Me: Yo, Doc, I got that dictionary.

Dr. Francis: Nos, did you read what is going in the news today?

Me: Naw, what happened?

Dr. Francis: Go check that out, then come back and we can talk about that.

Essentially, Dr. Francis had consciously developed a alternative educational development program for me. He wasn't going to spend time talking to be about reading because if he did I would have fought him. However, this tactic pushed me to read, and, eventually, this strategy would become a part of my academic ethos. These interactions with Dr. Francis assisted in my struggle to become academically excellent.

## **5.4 RASHEEDA**

A few weeks after 9-11, I started courting Rasheeda, who many guys on campus wanted to date. At first, I was willing to play the courting game and compete with other guys for her attention. She and I would hang out in my room mainly. In the beginning, I would show her documentaries

that I had on various issues like Africa, Africans, Black Nationalism, and other stuff pertaining to Africana culture. She and I would watch them and have conversations about the content of the movies. I was attracted to her stunning beauty, and her boldness, intellectual curiosity, and sharp intellect. As the weeks progressed, Rasheeda and I began hanging around the same group of friends, who sat in the same part of the cafeteria every day.

At Lincoln, the café was divided into four sections: the far right section was for the popular people, the middle section was for the church people, the top left was designated for the conscious/ power black students, and the bottom left was for the international students from either Africa or the Caribbean. Rasheeda and I sat in the conscious section, but within that section was a table led by a guy named Will Wright, who was a poet and the president of SPEPOS poetry club. He was a hood-philosopher, who transformed his experiences into verbally pleasing phrases that were digestible to his audiences. Nearly everything he said at the table was valued more than what others said; when there was a dispute between us, he was the one who negotiated peace between the parties. He was the unofficial leader of the conscious students, and we followed him.

Eventually, Rasheeda became a member of SPEPOS, and I followed her by attending meetings and presenting poetry at the Lion Den. I temporarily toyed with poetry as a hobby to impress her enough that she would exclusively date me. Prior to a SPEPOS meeting, Rasheeda and I had a conversation about us becoming a couple, but she refused and informed me that we could be friends. I decided I was through with her and poetry. But then all I could think of was this saying my mom always said, "Finish what you started." My mom's words caused me to leave my room. As I walked, rain started to pour down from the sky. My heart felt the pain of rejection, and my ego would not allow for me to cry over this rejection, but when the raindrops

fell from the top of my head and rolled down my face, my hurting heart found solace. I arrived at Wright Hall from the back entrance. When I entered the room, I saw Rasheeda sitting with a guy named Douglass, and, at that moment, I felt that she was not the girl for me. After the meeting was over, I greeted everyone including Rasheeda, and I quickly left. I went back to my dorm room to relax and to forget about Rasheeda. I closed my eyes that evening awaiting for a new day to start.

Although I had vowed to myself that I would not think of Rasheeda in a romantic context, I still sat at the conscious table. After eating one day, she and I had a conversation. Shockingly, she agreed to be my girlfriend. As the week progressed, she and I began to fall in love with each other. Nearly everyday, she and I were with each other, and some days we stayed together all day, only breaking to take showers in our respective dorms. We spent so much time together, my roommate told my mother I had moved out. These good times would quickly turn into bad times. Rasheeda's financial aid didn't go through, and her academic standings at the university were in jeopardy. She didn't tell me everything, but I could sense her hopelessness and fear of leaving schooling. With Thanksgiving break a few days away, she had some relief from the drama of school.

During break, Rasheeda and I called each other almost every day. On the Saturday before coming back to Lincoln University, she informed me that she had to tell me something, but the conversation could not be done over the phone. In my heart, I knew it was going to be terrible. In my mind, I knew she would not be coming back to Lincoln University for the spring semester. During the drive back to Lincoln, I felt very afraid because Rasheeda was going to leave me. She and I had developed a strong relationship that made me feel loved. The thought of her leaving me caused me to go through emotional concussions. Who would love me if she left? I felt the

potential of being abandoned again. First, my mother had emotionally abandoned me, and then Nicole had broken up with me. Now, Rasheeda? No, I was not going to let that happen. No matter what I was going to try to make it work.

When I arrived back to campus, I hung out with a few of my friends, but I got tired so I returned to my room to sleep. Late in the night, I was awoken by a knock at the door. I opened the door, and there stood Rasheeda with her hair down to her shoulder, a red fleece full-zip jacket, and her head was slightly tilted toward the ground. She came into the room, and she fell asleep in my arms that night. In the morning, she left my room, and I wouldn't see her again until the evening. I arrived that evening ready to have the conversation.

Me: What's up?

Rasheeda: Nos?

Me: Yo?

[She grabbed my hand and we sat on the bed.]

Rasheeda: I went to this concert a few weeks before I came to Lincoln, and I had sex with one of my friends.

Me: Ok

Rasheeda: I went to get a check during the break and and.....

[She starts crying and gets up off the bed. During this time, she mumbled some non-understandable words, and then she fell to her knees.]

Rasheeda: Nos, Nos, I sorry!

[I fell to my knees and began crying.]

Me: What? What?

Rasheeda: I'm, I'm, I'm pregnant!

Me: Is it mine?

Rasheeda: No, it's the guy from the concert.

Me: What?

Rasheeda: Nos, I sorry.

Me: Is ok.

Rasheeda: Are you goin to leave?

Me: Naw, I here for you through it all, yo.

There were two reasons why I decided to stay with Rasheeda. First, she provided me with feelings of love, and this was something I was looking to receive on a consistent basis. Second, my dad was never there for me, which made me want to be a great dad to my children; this situation would allow me to become a father and to provide the love I never got as a child. I took the opportunity with Rasheeda, and I was confident I would not fail her. Rasheeda and her situation would be my opportunity to liberate myself from my painful childhood.

The last weeks of school I spent with Rasheeda at the expense of my schoolwork. The semester ended with me having a 2.4 grade point average. I returned home and my mother told me, "If your Black ass don't improve your grades. You gonna be going to Community (referring to Community College of Philadelphia (CCP))". Just like in high school, I feared going to CCP because it was a place where many people went when they flunked out of a four-year institution, and, before they knew it, their dream of going back to college was over. I didn't want that to be my fate; therefore, I was determined not to go back to Philadelphia. I was going to balance being with Rasheeda and becoming a *stone-cold scholar*.

The spring semester started with me taking different classes; now my favorite classes were African-American Experience and Pan-Africanism. These classes allowed me a chance to

learn more about African-American and African history, and to learn more about Afrocentricity. I went into the semester as a serious student. More importantly, Dr. Francis and I became closer as a result of my academic and intellectual development. He began to show me the fatherly affection I had craved for most of my life. When Doc decided to take a walk around campus, I was right by his side. In class, he would call on me to read definitions from my dictionary or make comments citing page numbers from the textbooks. Dr. Francis propped me up as an ideal student, and his affirmation of my performance made me feel loved. For the first time in my life, a man, who I saw as a father figure, loved me.

Rasheeda's pregnancy was a rough and difficult process. She was very upset because she had to drop out of school and return home to the Bronx section of New York City, where she lived in the projects. She and I communicated nearly every day, even though we lived in an era where there were no cell phones, which meant I had to purchase phone cards. As a student who had a work-study job, I couldn't afford to buy phone cards on a consistent basis. Rasheeda's parents would not allow her to call me long-distance. We decided to write letters to one another. One day, Rasheeda found a glitch in the Lincoln University 1-800 number system, which was connected to the admissions office. She was able to figure out that if you hit a few buttons, it would cause the phone calls to go to the operator. In the evening, all calls that would go to the operator during the day would go to public safety, and they had access to all of the students' numbers on campus. Rasheeda would ask the public safety attendant to connect her to my room, which she did every night.

Rasheeda and I planned a trip for me to come to New York. At the time, I had a friend in college who had an aunt that lived in the same projects that Rasheeda lived, and he arranged for me to stay with his aunt. During the day and early evening hours, I planned on seeing Rasheeda



and in the evening I would stay with my friend's aunt. I got a ride from Lincoln to the Greyhound bus station in Philadelphia, and I took a two-hour ride to New York. When I arrived in New York, I had to wait for Rasheeda to come pick me up. While I was waiting for Rasheeda, I stood in front of a stand that had many souvenirs. I walked over to the stand, and as my eyes strolled over all of the stuff, I noticed a ring. I quickly bought this ring with the intention of proving to Rasheeda that I was serious about us. Unconsciously, as long as Rasheeda was able to express her love for me and make me feel loved, I was going to stand by her. Rasheeda was my drug that filled the void left by my unhappy childhood. I was ready to ask Rasheeda to marry me because I didn't want to lose the feelings she provided.

After I waited for an hour and half, finally, Rasheeda arrived with her friend. I quickly got in the car, and I sat in the back. I hadn't seen her since we left for Christmas break. Now, it was clear that Rasheeda was pregnant. Her stomach was very large, her nose was bigger, and it had a slight shine to it, but I still loved her. We arrived at her house, and as soon as we opened the door, I was greeted by a group of dogs. Her mother and father, Ms. Claudine and Mr. Clarence, walked down the hallway and greeted me with smile and long hugs. Rasheeda gave me a tour of the apartment, and afterwards we sat in her room and talked for a short time. Her mother called her out of the room, and I told her that I needed to call the person I was supposed to stay with over the weekend. When I called my friend's aunt, she told me I couldn't stay with her, but I would have to take a train to a different part of the Bronx and stay with another person. When I told Rasheeda about the turn of events, she made a humble request to her parents: "Can Nosacare stay with us?" Her parents debated it for a while. Then, Rasheeda came back to her room, where I was sitting, and told me the good news—I could stay with her for the weekend.

That evening Rasheeda and I talked about everything; we were excited about seeing each other for the first time. Before she left to go to sleep, I went to my bag and pulled out the gift.

Me: Babe, I got you something to show my love for you.

Rasheeda: Really, what did you get?

Me: Close your eyes.

Rasheeda: Ok.

[I pull out the ring that was in a black box.]

Me: Rasheeda.....

Me: Oh, my God.....

Me: I will you.....

Rasheeda: Nos.... [With a smile on her face.]

Me: Marry me?

Rasheeda: Yes!!!!

She hugged me and began to cry. Once again, I was feeling loved by Rasheeda, which made me feel whole. I wanted to keep this feeling because without it I wouldn't survive. Rasheeda made me feel like a man, like I was wanted. Later on that night, when I was sleep, Ms. Claudine woke me up, hugged, and kissed me, and then she said, "Welcome to the family." All of sudden, I was accepted and loved by people, not for who I was in the past. Rather, I was loved for who I was that night. Other people made me feel like I was mistake and not wanted. I couldn't give that feeling up, not because of distance, pregnancy, or any other barrier that might arise.

My second trip to New York was her baby shower, which was a few days before her birthday. At this event, I was formerly introduced to her family as the baby's father and her fiancée. Throughout the day Rasheeda was complaining of pains. Jokingly, she said she was

having contractions, but no one believed her because we thought she was imagining things. In addition, everyone thought she was wishing out the baby, so it could be born on her birthday. After the shower was over, she was still complaining of pains, and later that night we went to the emergency room. The doctor notified us that it was a false alarm. We returned home, and a few hours later Rasheeda was complaining again about her pains. We went to the hospital again, but this time it was no false alarm. On Rasheeda's birthday the baby was born.

Freshmen year ended with me getting what I never had—family. Dr. Francis became the father who provided me with the fatherly-feedback and acceptance that I always wanted. Rasheeda provided me with the feeling of female love that had been absent from my life. My classmates saw me as a *stone-cold intellectual*, while administrators saw me as a potential student-leader. I was headed towards greatness.

## 5.5 FINDING MY FATHER-SIDE

During my Christmas break, my mother saw my father on the bus. When she came home, she told me that he was in Philadelphia and probably worked in a school as teacher in one of the North Philadelphia schools. Eventually, I found the school where he was working, and I called him.

Me: Hello, can I speak to John Corbin.

My Father: Yeah, yeah, speaking.

Me: It's your son. My name is Nosakhere Griffin-EL.

My Father: I know who you are. So, so, how are you?

Me: I am doing well. I'm a student at Lincoln University. I just finished my first semester. I'm on spring break, and I was wondering if we could get together.

My Father: Yeah, yeah, we can do that.

I gave my father my home and campus number. I was expecting for him to call, but he never did. This encounter with my father was different from my experience when I was younger. I could hear regret in his voice and humility. When the Christmas break ended, I went back to Lincoln thinking that I would never speak to him again. After the spring semester ended, I asked my friend Felicia to go with me to my father's school in North Philly. Together, she and I chose a day to go. When the day came, we took a journey from Southwest to North Philadelphia. During the journey, I was extremely nervous, and I was in deep thought about what I would say to my father when I saw him.

As a child, I remember seeing my father a few times. Once when he came to my house, I was only four or five years old. The second time I saw my father was when my mother had taken me to a child support court case in New York. My mother and I were waiting in the security line at the courthouse. While we were waiting, I was randomly staring at a man. My mother bent down, described the man I was staring at, and said, "That your father." I saw him one other time, but I never could remember what he looked like. Throughout my life, I could have walked past him, and I would have never known that he was my father.

When we finally got to the school where my father worked, a man who was in charge of the sign-in desk greeted me. I explained to him why I had come to the school.

Me: Excuse me sir, does John Corbin work here?

The man: No, he had a heart attack a few months ago.

Me: What!

The man: Yeah, who are you?

Me: I am his son, I been looking for him my whole life.

The man: Wow! You look just like Mr. Corbin. I can't help you here, but let me give you a pass and you can go up to the office. They should be able to help you out.

Me: Thank you.

Felicia: I hope he's ok, Nosa

Me: Yeah.

We walked up the office where there was a group of secretaries. One of the ladies greeted me:

A lady: Good afternoon, Sir, how may I help you?

Me: I am looking for John Corbin.

The Lady: He's on sick leave. Can I help you with anything?

Me: well, I heard he had a heart attack, and he's my dad, and I need to talk to him.

The Lady: I am sorry, Sir, we can't give you his number, and how do we know you are his son?

[I pull out my birth certificate and point to his name.]

Me: [I raise my voice] Look, if he dies, then I might never meet my father-side of me.

[Felicia grabs my arms.]

Felicia: Nosa....

Me: Naw, yo! Look I'm just asking you to help me find my dad....

The Lady: Look! We can't give you his number; its against the law—confidentially.

Me: So, basically, you telling that you are willing to let me never meet my father....

[Felicia interrupts me.]

Felicia: Nosa, she can't do nothing... [I interrupt her.]

Me: Yo, dhis aint cool, yo!

[One of the secretary walks from the back of the room.]

The second lady: Look young man, calm down. I go to church with his father.

Me: My grandfather ...

The second lady: Give me your number. I will give it to his father on Sunday.

Me: Thank you.

After this lady took my number, I continued my request to get my father's number. Felicia became more forceful, and she grabbed my arm in an assertive motherly manner. We walked out of the school. As we walked to the bus stop, I was engaging in a profane-lanced tirade. When we got back to *Da Hood*, I hung out over at Felicia's for few hours before going home.

Once, I got home I looked on the caller-ID. I saw a number and name that read Corbin; it was my grandfather. I returned his call and we began to talk:

Me: Hello, can I speak to Mr. Corbin?

Grandpa: Speaking.

Me: Hello, my name is Nosakhere Griffin-El, and I am your grandson.

Grandpa: Yeah? Ms. Linda gave your number, and she told me you came up to John's school looking for him.

Me: Yeah...

Grandpa: Look young man, John ain't never tell me about you. So, all of this is new to me.

Me: Yeah? Well, can I meet you?

Grandpa: Yeah, but ain't gonna promise you nothing because I don't know who are.

Me: Can I come up this weekend?

Grandpa: I going to be busy this week, but next week you are welcome to come up, but I can't promise you nothing.

Me: Ok, thank you sir.

Grandpa: See you then.

When I got off the phone with my grandfather, I was not shocked that my father had not told his family about me. I was hurt though. This feeling subsided because of the potential meeting with my father's side of my family. My mother came home. I told her what happened and that I was going to see my grandfather in two weeks. At some point during this week, my mother and I were walking down the street. We walked past a man named Mr. Bill, who I had known since I was a kid. When I was a kid, I would spend time in the local library, and he would spend time talking to me. At that time, I thought he was a pervert, but he wasn't. Once we had walked past listening distance from Mr. Bill, my mother told me, "He knows your father." Mr. Bill had worked with my father at Turner Middle School and was close friends with him. Now, Bill's talking to me made sense; he knew who I was—John's son.

The Friday before Memorial Day, I saw Mr. Bill waiting for the bus. At this moment, I was going to ask him about my father. I really wanted him to give me my father's number so I could call him and find out why he had not called me. However, he would do so something better.

Me: Mr. Bill.

Mr. Bill: Hey! How are you?

Me: My mom said you know my dad.

Mr. Bill: Who your dad?

Me: John Corbin.

Mr. Bill: [He gives me a fake response.] OH!!!! You look just like him. I do know your father.

Me: Yeah, I heard I like'em.

Mr. Bill: You know about your brother, right?

Me: Brother? Naw, what's who is he?

Mr. Bill: Rahsaan. Yeah, he was in a plane crash a few years ago and almost died. He was only a few who survived a crash.

Me: Really!

Mr. Bill: There was an article in the Tribune [the black newspaper in philly.]. Let's walk over there I'll show you.

Me: Cool.

We went to the library, and he showed me the article. He left, and I thanked him. I sat in the library and read the article at least two times. In the article, there was a picture of him and an email. I wrote it down and headed home. When I got home, I emailed my brother. In the email, I informed him that I was his brother, and that I didn't want anything except a relationship with him. I didn't hear back from him until the following Tuesday.

Rahsaan emailed me back and informed me, just as my grandfather did, that he had never heard about me. At the end of the email, he left his number, and I emailed him back with my number. Rahsaan gave me a call during lunch time, and he informed me that he grew up on 56<sup>th</sup> and Baltimore, which was a few blocks away from where I lived. When I was a very young kid, I remembered seeing him on the trolley. He was a skinny, light skinned boy who wore a high-top fade hair style and had glasses. However, when I got old enough to walk up four blocks, he had moved away. Our conversation ended with him saying that he would come see me around 3 p.m.



When it was time for me for he and I to meet, I left my house and headed across the street to the Square Park, the place we agreed to meet. I sat outside of the park for about ten minutes waiting for my brother to come. Getting anxious, I got up and walked from the outside of the park to a place on the inside where I could sit. I noticed a man sitting in the park, but I didn't think it was him. As I was sitting, I nervously looked at my watch almost every other minute. I soon became frustrated, thinking he stood me up; so, I bowed my head in anger. When I looked up, I heard:

Rahsaan: Yo! Yo! Yo! You look just like the Da Bull. You look just like the Da Bull. Yo, you look just like the Da Bull!

Me: Yeah? [Began smiling.]

Rahsaan: You look just like the Da Bull.

After this brief encounter, we talked for a few hours. I told him I was going to Grandpa's house on Sunday. He told me he would take me, which I was happy about because I didn't want to take public transportation. He left and we kept in contact during the week. When Sunday came, he picked me up, and we went to see my grandfather.

I called my grandfather, and I told him when Rahsaan and I were going to arrive. When we got close to the house, Rahsaan gave me his cellphone and told me to call our grandfather to tell him we were near, which I did. As he began parking the car, I felt nervous. I looked out of the back window, and I saw an old man at the screen door of the house. He stuck his head out and waved at us. We got out of the car and headed toward the house. When I got close to my grandfather, he stared at me through tinted glasses and extended his hand. I shook his hand, and he invited me in the house.

We all sat down in the living room, and he turned to us and said, “Well, I can’t deny you. You look just like John!” My grandfather accepted me as a member of the family. Later on that day, my grandfather’s wife, who was not my father’s mother, came home. She was the nicest woman I had ever met in my life. Although she was not my grandmother by blood, she loved and treated me as if I was, and I did the same. The day ended with grandfather, Rahsaan, and I going to my Aunt Ronnie’s house. This was the first time I had ever met her, too. Her response to seeing me was, “Oooooooooo, you just like John. I felt like I going back in time looking at you!” I had finally found my father’s side, and they accepted me. A few years later, I would meet my father. In many of conversations, I realized that he was a man who did not was living with the pain of contradictions of his past. These contradictions were preventing him fully being the great father I know he could be.

As the years progressed, I would call my grandfather every Sunday. When my mother and brother decided to move from Southwest Philly to the Mt. Airy section, I was able to eat Sunday dinners at my grandfather house. During the dinners, I would get to know my grandparents. My grandmother always referred to me as “Suga.” So, for years, I thought that was her nickname for me. Once we finished eating Sunday dinners and watching television, my grandfather would take me home. Every time we got in front of my mother’s home, he would park the car, and we would begin to talk. We would sit in the car for hours talking about life. He would make declarations and tell stories from his life that reinforced his ideas. Some of his ideas I agreed with and others I didn’t, but I was just happy to have him in my life. It was almost like his car was a classroom, and he was the teacher. These countless conversations with him would shape my ideas about manhood, fatherhood, and husbandhood. Each Sunday I would hear him

saying, “Don’t take no wooden nickels.” I would get out of the car, and he would drive away once I walked in the house.

Over the years, he and I would develop a strong relationship. In many ways, he saw our relationship as a chance to show me the love he didn’t show my father and to help me not to make the same mistakes he and my father made in their lives. When he was younger, he ran the streets, had many relationships with different women, and had many children. In his elder years, he would attempt to do right and be the man he wasn’t in his youth. When I came into his life, my cousins and other family members had been through many trials and tribulations. He had a severe discontent and rough exterior when it came to them. If they weren’t going to do things right, then he wasn’t going to put up with them. They felt he was overly moralistic towards them, and they had an unspoken agreement to keep their distance from each other. Although I knew my father’s family, I learned that his was not a perfect nor romantic situation; his family was like many Black working-class families in *Da Hood*—needing repair from previous actions.

## 5.6 DREAM AT RISK

Sophomore year I took a class titled *English Composition*. A professor named Dr. Dewey taught the class. He was a white male who was slightly balding with reddish hair. In classes, he was a very playful teacher, who made many jokes and was very animated with his speech. With his playful attitude, humor, and my participation in class, I thought I was passing the class with at least a B grade. Mid-term came, and he gave back a few papers with a worksheet of feedback. When I received my paper, it read F. As soon as I read this grade, my mind and body went into shock. I thought to myself: How was I going to pass this class?

After class, I went to the A.C.T. 101 program to show the paper to Dr. Gooden, who was the Director of the program. She gave me a simple response: “I told you that you need to spend more time in the writing lab.” For months, she asked me to go to the writing lab to improve my writing, but I didn’t want to make time for it. When I got this grade, I realized that I had to or else I would not pass this class. Dr. Gooden suggested that I meet with him to discuss my paper and to get targeted feedback on how I could improve the paper and my standing in the class. The next class after his lecture ended, I asked when we could meet. We walked to his office, and we scheduled a time for the following week.

Before the meeting, I made a conscious decision to dress in business casual attire. I wore a sky blue Oxford shirt, blue khakis, and brown shoes. When I got to the English Department, I walked over to the secretary, and I told her I had an appointment with Dr. Dewey. She told me to take a seat, and she walked over to his office and informed him that I had arrived. She came over to me and said he would be out shortly. He came out and extended his hand, and we shook hands and exchanged pleasantries. We walked to his office, and the meeting began.

Me: Doc, I gotta an F on the mid-term.

Dr. Dewey: You have some serious problems with it.

Me: So, how can I improve it?

Dr. Dewey: You, something?

Me: What?

Dr. Dewey: College is not for everyone. Have you ever thought about trade school?

Me: Naw.

Dr. Dewey: With your writing there’s no future for you. I just don’t want you to waste you money.

Me: Well, can I draft it?

Dr. Dewey: Yeah, I guess you could.

Me: Can I re-write the other papers?

Dr. Dewey: You can, but I don't think it's going to help. You should probably drop my class.

Me: Naw, Ima pass it. So, you are going to let me write the paper.

Dr. Dewey: Yeah.

Me: Thank you, Doc.

Dr. Dewey: No problem. Email me your drafts, and I'll read them over and give you feedback.

Me: Thanks, Doc.

I left that meeting demoralized. I was having serious doubts about my college career. I began to think that all of the stuff my teachers had said about me throughout my educational experience was true. I was a failure, and I had just slipped through the cracks. I didn't know what to do.

I went to Dr. Francis and Dr. Gooden. When I went to Dr. Francis, he made fun of the situation. After talking to Dr. Francis, I went down to the ACT 101 program and talked to Dr. Gooden. In tearful short and long rants, I expressed my fear of failing. She listened and provided compassionate feedback. Before I went back to complaining about how he told me to drop out of school, she informed me of a plan that would help me pass the class and pass it with more than a C grade. It was simple: Go to the writing lab every day and draft each paper at least five times before handing it in to Dr. Dewey.

Each paper I wrote for that class I drafted at least ten times. Every draft that I wrote I also emailed to Dr. Dewey, and he sent me feedback. I also met with him during his office hours to

discuss the readings and to make sure my papers were correct both in content and grammar. At the end of the semester, I passed the class with an A-, a grade that I was extremely happy with.

## 5.7 MAKING HISTORY IN A TIME OF CONSEQUENCE

### 5.7.1 Track Fight

One Thursday, I was working on a paper for Introduction to Religion class. I heard commotion in the hallway, but I ignored it because the track-team was always roughhousing during the evening hours. When the commotion affected my concentration too much, I decided to open my door to tell the track team to stop roughhousing. As soon as I opened the door, I saw an older man with a screwdriver in his hand, and he was surrounded by group of young men. Seeing the young men surrounding the older man caused me to go into temporary shock. I closed my door, and I moved away from the door because I feared someone would pull out a gun and start shooting. I ran to my phone, and I called public safety.

Meanwhile, I still heard screaming and hollering in the hallway. I made a decision to open the door again and to see what was going on. When I opened it this time, I saw boys running in and out of a room. Apparently, this was the room where the main fight was occurring. I looked around, and I saw a guy named Logan bleeding. A group of boys from the track team began running after him, and he headed to the bathroom. The track boys chased him. I ran towards the bathroom, and I saw Logan being *stomped* underneath the bathroom sink. I screamed a simple, “Yo,” to get the track boys’ attention, which caused them to stop *stomping* him. These

boys ran out of the bathroom and fled back to the room where everyone was fighting. I grabbed Logan , and I told him to go into my room and not to open it for no one.

When Public Safety arrived, the fight stopped, but there was still the potential for the fighting to break out. At this time in Lincoln University's history, Public Safety officers didn't have guns; as a result, students lacked respect for them. Therefore, even though the fights had ceased, I was still concerned about Logan 's safety. I went to my room and asked Logan what happened.

Logan : Yo, Nos, man, I didn't do nothing. I just wanted to go home yo!

Me: What happened?

Logan : Early today, they dipped on me.

Me: Who?

[He names two boys who are on the track team and another who is not on the team.]

Logan : Yo, I called my dad, and he and my brother packed my shit in the car. I just wanted to go back to Philly and never come back. My brother knocked on the door, and da bull who dipped on me opened the door. My brother stole him [pushed him in the face].

Me: Damn, yo....

Logan : Yo, they [referring to the track team] just ran in the room and just started fucking my brother up.

Me: So, who was the old head?

Logan : Dad [Logan started crying]. My brotha, yo! My brotha, yo! Dhey fucked him up yo...

Me: Calm down yo....

Logan : I gotta check on my....

Me: Chill yo, if you go out there, dhey are goin to fuck you up too, yo...

Logan : [He starts crying] My brother yo!

Me: Ima go check, but don't open my door!

I left my dorm, and I just saw students leaning on the hallway walls. I looked down the hallway, and I saw a white woman pulling a stretcher. Ishmael, who was an RA on my floor, walked towards me, and we greeted each other. As the woman walked past us with stretcher, one of the track team members named Kangaroo screamed, "You don't need no stretcher. Y'all need a fuckin body-bag! Dhat nigga dead!" While he was talking, I walked towards the room, but I was afraid to look in the room because I didn't want to see the body of a potentially dead man. When I looked in the room, I did it from an angle. All I saw was a lifeless leg laying there, and at the end of it was a Timberland boot. My worst fear was true—this man was dead.

Administrators and police officers came to the dorm. Calm fell upon the dorm as everyone just stood in the hallway in shock. Most of us were whispering that nothing was going to happen to the track team because this was the trend at Lincoln University. The track team was known for winning Division III track championships, which brought extra funds to the university. As a result, the administration tended to be lenient toward the team, or at least that was the perception. I stood at the end of the hallway with Ishmael and the other RAs. Coach Sebastian, who was the coach of the track team, came to the door and made an announcement, "Hey, everybody get in your rooms and go to sleep. We have a track meet in a few hours." I heard this, and I went into a mini-tirade, "Dhat's some bullshit yo! How he gonna be on some we gotta meet, when bull probably on some dead type tip?" My fellow RAs were telling me to



“chill,” which I did, but I was still upset. Later that evening, we had to fill out an incident report at the public safety office, then I went to sleep.

### **5.7.2 The Sunday Rally**

Earlier in the week, a fraternity had gotten kicked off of campus as a result of hazing. What made this instance interesting was that the fraternity had two members that were the President and Vice President of Internal Affairs. Additionally, the LAMBDA's were on the verge of winning every single student government position. They ran a ticket called the “COUP” which referenced their desire to control the government. When they got kicked off campus for hazing, student government was in a short-term and long-term crisis. A coalition of students ranging from the radicals, party-goers, and church-goers got together to plan a rally. The sole purpose of this rally was to fight to bring the frat back on campus.

There were many leaders. Douglass was a radical type who wanted to be seen as progressive and radical, but he didn't want to do the intellectual practice necessary to be a radical. Douglass was always running for the student body presidency, and his participation in the rally would ensure he would get votes. If he did extremely well, then he would win the presidency. On the other hand, if the administration stayed true to their policy of kicking the frats off campus, then Douglass would win the presidency by a landslide. The conversation on campus was that the administrator wasn't going to bend on this issue, which meant Douglass would become the next president of student government.

On the day of the rally, I was doing sign-in, and a work-study student, was coming to relieve me from my duty. Mike asked me whether I was going to go up to the rally, and I told him, “No.” During this time at Lincoln University, I was very pessimistic about student politics,

which was the sentiment of many students. In fact, students believed that the administration controlled student politics. Though this rally was organized by students, I believed it would not have any impact on the frat's situation. Mike and I sat there and talked about other things that had no relation to the rally. He and I noticed that there were gangs of students walking towards the U, which was a section on campus in front of the Living Learning Center Building. I walked towards the crowd to see what was going on. Truthfully, I was bored, and I wanted a quick laugh. When I walked towards the Freddy-statue, I saw students walking towards the chapel. When I got to the chapel, the students who organized the rally made announcements on how we had to be composed and respectful or one of the students who was a part of the student ministry, would not open the chapel. After a loud "Yes!" by the crowd, the door of the church was opened, and the rally started.

The rally wasn't organized at all. The idea was for students to ask questions to the administration about their leaders being kicked off campus, which would hopefully pressure the administration to bring the frat back on campus. In reality, students didn't care about the frat and student leaders being kicked off campus; they had other grievances they wanted to present to the administration. Students presented range problems: no heat, no hot water, bad café food, poor education, bad professors, etc. The rally was headed towards disorganized, and the goal of getting back at the frats was slowly slipping away.

I sat in the back of the chapel with a bunch of girls I knew from my education courses. During the beginning of the rally, I told the girls that Douglass was the leader of the rally, and they should vote for him. When I wasn't telling them to vote for Douglass, I was cracking jokes or critiquing students for their comments. A group of female students, who ran from the track team, got on the microphone and spoke about the incident that happened that Thursday. Once the

girls finished speaking, I turned to Casey and said, “That’s not what happened! Dhey beat dude down so he could be on some dead type tip.” Casey told me I should go up and tell everybody what happened. I left the comfort of the back of the chapel, and I headed towards the line to speak on the microphone.

I was nervously standing in line. This was the same type of feeling I used to get as a Freedom School student. Whenever there was a guest speaker, I would begin to feel very nervous, but I would overcome that feeling by speaking the truth, or what I thought was the truth. This incident was no different, and I felt like I had to speak the truth this time. When I finally got to the microphone, I said:

Hello, my name is Nosakhere Griffin-EL, and the great Dr. King said, “There comes a time when silence becomes betrayal.” I live in the worst dorm on campus—McCrery hall. I’m a resident advisor and even in my freshmen year, I didn’t feel safe [in this dorm]. With the recent events that happened right across the hall from me, I still don’t feel safe. Um, you have track team members who brutally beat down a guy. True, he shouldn’t have been up here. They didn’t beat dude down, so he could walk away with arm on some broke type tip. They tried to kill this guy. Not only that—the track coach doesn’t have any regard for human life.

[I am interrupted by a loud roar from the crowd—some people agree and others disagree. The secretary of student government begins speaking.]

Wanita: We not here to attack the track team.

Me: I’m using them as an example because they have no regard for human life. Any time a person is brutally beat, knock out, knock out cold in a room in a coma and the track

coach says, “Everybody go to sleep because we gotta track meet in morning. That’s crazy!”

[Applause interrupts me]

I don’t care what anybody says. These sports teams get away with murder...

[Cheers interrupt me again.] It seems to me as a student, the only reason why these track teams and basketball teams get away with stuff is because they bring money to campus. I don’t care how many track meets y’all win [speaking directly to the track team]. If y’all act like criminals, y’all criminals... [Askia, who was the treasure of student government, takes the mic from me. The crowd erupts in cheers].

I felt like there was more that needed to be said, but I was not allowed to say it. I had said in a public setting what most students discussed in the privacy and safety of their dorm rooms. I had confronted the group of students, who terrorized the campus like Taliban did Afghanistan. As the rally ended, I realized the consequences of my actions I couldn’t go back to my room.

According to the Vice President of Student Affairs for the university and the Chief of Police, the track team was waiting for me to return to my room. They were met by a group of students who were willing and ready to defend me. Some people in the group were other students, some were my friends, some just agreed with my position, and others just wanted a reason to get into a knuckle with the track team.

Chief Lawson : There’re a group of boys from the track team who are waiting for you to get back to you room. We [speaking of himself and Dr. Roberts] suggest you stay somewhere else this evening.

Me: What?

Dr. Roberts: Yes, Nosacare. It will only be for the evening.

Me: Alight.

As we walked toward the exit of the chapel, I saw Dr. Francis with an umbrella in his hand, wearing a blue rain jacket and a black Kangol hat. The first words that came out of his mouth were, “You could pass up the coffee?” This was a reference to Malcolm X’s speech “The Ballot or the Bullet.” In the speech, Malcolm X uses this term to discuss the leaders of the Civil Rights movement engaging in dialogue with President Lyndon B. Johnson, though nothing comes out of these meetings. Malcolm believed these dialogues had no purpose because nothing changed, but the Black leaders were able to get a cup of coffee. Dr. Francis, like Malcolm, believed my words were meaningless, and I should remain silent on the issue. My words this night caused me to lose my freedom because I wanted to have some coffee. I walked out of the chapel, and I got into the Public Safety jeep, fearing for what my future was going to be at Lincoln.

Chief Lawson and I arrived at the public safety office. He told me that I would stay at the guest house and that I was not to call any of my friends. Chief Lawson left and an officer escorted me to the guest house that was right across the street from Public Safety. The officer was supposed to let me in one of the rooms, and I would sleep there for the night. But the keys didn’t open any of the rooms. The officer told me instead to sleep on the couch in the living room in the guesthouse, and he would check on me through the night. When he left, I lied down on the couch, and in the midst of both boredom and fear I called my friend, Kandaka. For most of the conversation, I was ensuring her I was ok. She told me that Rasheeda had called her because she hadn’t spoken to me that night; I asked Kandaka to let Rasheeda know I was doing well. I would call when I could. Kandaka asked me where I was staying, but I refused to answer her question because she might accidentally tell someone about my location. After the conversation with Kandaka, I headed towards the couch and fell asleep.

The morning came, and I awoke to housekeepers talking loudly and making breakfast. They greeted me, and they asked who I was and why was I lying on the couch? I briefly informed them what happened that evening and that public safety had allowed me to stay here. The housekeepers went back to the kitchen, and I started watching the television until the public safety came back to pick me up. During this time, I wondered what was going to happen to me. The officer came to the house. As we walked to the public safety office, I was thinking to myself, “Will I have to leave Lincoln?”

When I got to the building, I sat behind the sign-in counter near a young lady named Zafeerah. She and I began to talk about what happened the previous evening. We talked for a few minutes, and then Chief Lawson interrupted our conversation by telling me to come his office.

Chief Lawson : Nosacare, Dr. Roberts is on the phone and he would like to speak to you.

Me: Ok.

Dr. Roberts: How are you feeling, Nosacare?

Me: I’m good. Can I go to class?

Dr. Roberts: Right now, it does not seem like a good idea for you to go to class today. I suggest you take a few days off.

Me: Why?

Dr. Roberts: We can’t guarantee your safety.

Me: So, you telling I gotta bounce?

Dr. Roberts: We think it is the best decision. You just have to leave until things cool down. Think about it, and let me know.

After this conversation, I felt betrayed and upset. By asking me to leave, I felt like Dr. Roberts was implying that I had been wrong. I was a Dean's List student, student leader, and a role model, but I was being asked to leave. The track team terrorized the campus—not me; it was the track team, who was constantly in trouble—not me. However, what hurt the most was that Dr. Roberts and Chief Lawson could not ensure my safety. This led me to have serious doubts about staying at Lincoln, but my ego wouldn't let me cave.

Time progressed, and I hadn't made up my mind about whether to stay or to leave. During lunch, Chief Lawson ordered me pizza, which I ate with Zafeerah. When I was done eating, he asked me again whether or not I had made my decision. I told him, "No," and I asked could I make a phone call. He granted my wish, and I called my friend Asher.

Me: Yooooo!

Asher: Yo, Nos?

Me: Yo, gang, dhey tellin me I gotta bounce.

Asher: What? Why?

Me: Cause Dr. Roberts and dhem saying they can't protect me.

Asher: What! Yo, gang, that fucked up yo. You know the squad got your back. We ain't gonna let those track niggahs dip on you yo. If dhey fuck wit you, we gonna fuck'em up yo! Dawg, you know my peeps, if they come up here, its gonna be teddy bears all of fuckin campus dawg! Let'm try some shit yo!

Me: I know.

Asher: What you gonna do?

Me: Don't know, but Ima hit back when I decide yo.

Asher: Aight yo, don't be on some bitchin shit; dhese niggas aint shit. Don't be scared  
Nos.

Me: True. Ima hit you back.

Asher: Aight, peace yo.

When I got off the phone with Asher, I had decided that I was going to leave campus. This conversation with Asher led me to believe that there was a great possibility of violence, fights that could lead to fatal consequences. On one hand, if I stayed and a fight broke out, then there would be a bunch of Black men being expelled from school. I didn't want that fate for my friends, the track team, or myself. On the other hand, if I stayed and a fight broke out, then there could be a group of Black men critically or fatally injured. None of the options made me feel comfortable or confident enough to stay. I decided to go into exile.

Before leaving campus, I went back to my dorm room to gather some of my things, and my resident coordinator decided to give me a ride home. He and I had to walk to the gym because he had to hand director of Residence Life who was the director of Residence Life, some paperwork for the room selection process that was occurring. We got to the gym, and I saw some of the track team players. They all gave me the *mean mud*, which is a stare that infers a desire to cause bodily harm. I returned their stare with my own confident stare, allowing them to understand my lack of fear. My stare was interrupted by a yell:

Coach Sebastian: Excuse me, young man. How are you doing, I'm Coach Sebastian? You had something to say about me, and I want to tell you that you don't know me! Ok? You don't know me. Before you speak about me, know what you're talking about. Cause you don't me!



I decided not to respond to him because had I done so the track team boys would have severely beaten me up in the gym. Instead, I kept my mouth closed, and Mr. Robinson walked towards me and escorted me out of the gym. We walked back to the dorm, and he drove me home to Philadelphia.

## 5.8 EDUCATIONAL EXILE

I got home around five o'clock in the afternoon. I opened the door to our one-bedroom apartment. My mother was home, but she was shocked to see me home during the beginning of the week. She screamed, "Nosa?"

Me: Hey, Mom.

My mother: Why are you home?

Me: They told me I had to leave campus.

My mother: Who?

Me: The administration?

My mother: Why?

Me: The track team beat some dude up, and I spoke out about it, and they told me I had to leave because they couldn't protect me from the track team.

My mother: What! Oh, my God, Nosa.

[We stood in the room in silence.]

My mother: They can't protect you? You not going are you?

Me: I don't know...

[She interrupts me.]

My mother: You getting outta there!

Me: I should leave?

My mother: No Nosa! I said, No!

Me: I'm going to New York for a couple of days.

My mother: To Rasheeda?

Me: Yeah.

I took this time so I could see Rasheeda and Asata, and more importantly because I needed some time to think about what I was going to do. If I could have stayed home, then my decision would have been made for me. Going to New York gave me the chance to reflect on the situation and to decide whether or not I would stay. I left Philly to go to New York not knowing what I was going to do.

When I arrived at Rasheeda's home, her mother, father, and I talked to me about the situation. After explaining the situation, they came to the same conclusion as my mother—I needed to transfer. However, just as I told my mother, I had not made my decision. Rasheeda and I spoke privately about the incident, in which, she believed as I did, that the track team would violently retaliate against me (if not immediately when I returned, then they would act eventually as the semester progressed). She wanted me to transfer, but I asked her, "Why?" I pushed back against this idea of leaving school because of these thugs. I didn't see leaving because of them as a valid reason, but Rasheeda couldn't understand the rationale of staying to prove a point either. However, my ego would not allow me to give in to the thugs' demands. I had decided that I was going to stand up.

I called my mother to inform her that I got to New York safely. She asked me whether I was going to stay at Lincoln. Before responding, I took a deep breath and told her I was going to

stay. My mother didn't even let me complete my sentence before interrupting me with constant pleas of "No, Nosa! I said, No!" As she demanded me to leave, my resolve became stronger. Her demands went back to pleas, and as the conversation continued she began presenting solutions to my Lincoln problem. The most attractive solution was for her to pay for me to go Howard University. This was attractive because my mentor Dr. Clarke taught at the university. Going there was always my dream because it was considered the Mecca of all HBCUs. Attending and graduating from Howard carried significant weight in the Black community because it would allow for the possibility of becoming a part of the Black social elite. My mother solution's for me to go Howard weakened my resolve about staying at Lincoln.

I ended the conversation with my mother and called Stephaney, a friend who attended Howard. I explained to her what happened, and I told her I was ready to transfer and come down to D.C. to go to school at Howard. She, just like many people, was in shock by the track team's and Lincoln's behavior. Word got back to Dr. Clarke, and he sent me an email telling me he would help in any way to transfer me to Howard. A few days later, I spoke to Dean Spellings, who was the Dean of Students, and I asked him: If I transfer, what are my options? He told me he would call me back because he had to consult with Dr. Roberts. Later that afternoon, he and I spoke:

Dean Spellings: You have three options.

Me: Ok.

Dean Spellings: One is to complete your assignments and email them to your professor and receive your grades at the end of the period. The second option would be for the university to relieve you of all financial aid obligations, including loans, but it would be as if you had not attended school at all. The third option would be for you to come back

next week and resume your studies at the university. You would still have your post as an RA, but if you decided not to return in the position, you would still be afforded housing since you have missed the room selection period.

I thanked Dean Spellings for the options he gave me, but I was not prepared to make a decision. All signs were pointing for me to leave Lincoln, but before I made my decision I called two people—my brother and Dr. Francis. After I finish talking to both of them, they both asked a simple question: What do you want to do? In reality, I wanted to stay at Lincoln, but going to Howard and studying under Dr. Clarke would provide me with a chance of becoming one of the great leaders of my time. Although the chance to become a part of the social elite was attractive, my heart was still at Lincoln.

Instead of stressing over my decision, I decided to enjoy the time I had with Rasheeda and the baby. On Wednesday of that week, Dr. Francis had called, and he had some news for me. According to Dr. Francis, the campus was in an uproar about my leaving. In a faculty meeting, one professor, who didn't have the story correct, informed his colleagues that I had been brutally beaten by the track team, and I was currently in a coma. Other faculty members made mention of a Dean's List student having left campus because the administration couldn't protect me. Students began talking about me standing up to the track team as a noble act, and they were saying that I would be a good person to be president. When Dr. Francis informed me of the students' feelings, I was more than flattered. For the first time in my life, I was respected as a leader, not as a comedic oppressor. I wasn't the failure; instead, I had become a hero.

Dr. Francis began talking about the possibility of me running for student government. I didn't take the conversation seriously because my friend, Douglass, was running. He was looking to be the frontrunner of the race, and I didn't want to cause a conflict between us. In addition, I

wasn't a politician either. I thought politics was a corrupt practice, and I wanted no part of it. Earlier in the year, I had performed a poem about politics, and I said, "Politics ain't nothing, but a pile of tricks, and if you play it you'll be a pile of shit!" My commitment at Lincoln was to become a *stone cold scholar*, and not to become a politician. As the conversation continued, I considered this to be an opportunity to transform the Lincoln campus.

Dr. Francis: Nos, students think you' da man would stand up to the administration. Half the people said it, I know and you know, don't like you.

Me: Yeah: Yeah, a lot kats don't like me. But, Doc, president that's some bullshit, yo. What I am I gonna do?

Dr. Francis: Ssssss<sup>6</sup>, Nos you mean it is nothin you would want to change at Lincoln?

Me: Yeah.

Dr. Francis: This is the time, Nos. You have everyone's attention, and many people are willing to support you running.

Me: Yeah?

Dr. Francis: Write you out a platform....

Me: What's that?

Dr. Francis: Where's your dictionary, Nos?

Me: In my room...

Dr. Francis: So, you took clothes and no books with you? So, you ain't doin my fuckin work, uh? SSSSSSSS, you gotta work on that academic shit.

Me: I hear you.

---

<sup>6</sup> A sound affect he made before he spoke.

Dr. Francis: Go find a dictionary and look up the word, and work on the platform if you decide to come back and run.

Me: Cool, peace Doc.

Dr. Francis: Forward.

In addition to the decision of whether to come back to Lincoln University, I now had another decision to make: Should I run for president of the student government association? In my freshmen year, I had been selected to be a senator of the History Club, but Corey, who was the president of the organization, told me I couldn't serve because my GPA was not high enough. In addition to that non-experience, I briefly served as the President of the Debate Team, but I quit before the end of the fall semester. Serving as the president would give me a real chance of changing the campus in fundamental way. Now, I had decisions to make.

When Rasheeda went to work on Thursday, I decided to brainstorm my ideas about a potential run at the presidency. I developed this thing Dr. Francis called a "platform", mine was centered on three core ideas: unity among student-body, academics first, and social uprightness. Later that night, Dr. Francis and I talked about my core ideas and how these ideas would make a better Lincoln. Dr. Francis had asked students: What are your concerns and what kind of candidate would ensure that your concerns would be met? The students didn't think any of the candidates would meet their concerns. Once they responded with the aforementioned, he mentioned that I was considering running for the presidency, and I was willing to listen to and work towards meeting their concerns. Dr. Francis had these conversations within all of his classes, and he informed me of all of the students' ideas. Our conversation ended with me not making any decision, but being back in the middle.

Before Rasheeda went to work during the evening shift, I talked with her about my going back to Lincoln and potentially running for the presidency. She asked a bunch of questions around my safety, the potential rupture in my friendship with Douglass as result of running, and concerns about time and energy required by the presidency. These were questions that I couldn't answer, but I decided to reflect and make my decision. Dr. Francis called me again and asked had I made my decision, which I hadn't done yet. I told him I was going to come back to Lincoln, but if Douglass decided to implement my ideas in my presidential run, I wouldn't run. Dr. Francis responded by saying:

Nos, there's no way you can come back to campus without being the president because the track team would eventually get you for disrespecting Coach Sebastian. SSSSSSS. Running for president would keep you in the public eye, which will reduce their ability to fuck you up. Douglass ain't never gonna implement your ideas. He is running on ego, but the masses think you are the best candidate and they are willing to work with you to develop a platform. What you gonna do Nos?

I didn't give him a response. I merely told him I was going to make a decision by Saturday after speaking to Douglass. However, I did decide to return to Lincoln without a run for the presidency.

Later on that evening, I made a phone call to Douglass. Our conversation began with pleasantries and questions of whether or not I was returning to Lincoln. The conversation progressed, and I expressed my views on the state of Lincoln and my ideas to improve it. I gave him the harsh news that I was considering a run for the presidency.

Me: Douglass, I talked to Dr. Francis. He and I had a conversation earlier. He told me students wanted me to run, but I told him you were my homie and I didn't wanna run against you.

Douglass: Sooooo, let me get this straight you are considering running for president?

Me: I mean, yeah, put I wanted to talk to you about some of my ideas.

Douglass: Your ideas about changing campus?

Me: Yeah.

As the conversation progressed, he became extremely upset with me because of his fear of losing the election. He believed that if I ran for the presidency, it would split the vote because most students saw him and I as the same. We decided to table the conversation, but I knew what I was going to do—I was running for president. When we talked again, I told him I was running for president, which consequentially ended our friendship and began my walk towards greatness.

Before leaving New York, I had told my mother of my decision. When I spoke to my mother, I expressed my desire to return to Lincoln, which she strongly disagreed with. She constantly responded to me by saying, “Nosa, I said, no!” I held to my resolve by saying:

Why should I leave Lincoln for some thugs? That's my school! If I don't stand up now, then when will I ever do so? All my life, you told Kufu and I to stand up for something, now you tellin me back down? Naw, going back to Lincoln, and I'm goin make a difference.

Once again, my mother responded with discontent with my decision, pushing me not to return. The phone ended with my mother and I in a deadlock. I called my eldest brother on my father's side, Rahsaan. I told him that I wanted to return, but my mother didn't want me to go back. He said:



Rahsaan: Tell your mom, I'll be responsible for you. If anything happens, she can blame me.

[I call my mother back, and she still is upset about my decision. She responds to Rahsaan's comment.]

My mother: You my son, and I said no! You are disobedient! I said, "No, Nosa!"

Me: I want to go back to Lincoln.

My mother: I said, "No!"

Me: Mom, I'm going back!

My mother: You get on my nerves! Bye Nosa, do what you want! Don't ask me for nothin, you hear me?

Me: Yup.

I had decided to go back to Lincoln, and in only a matter of days I would return to the place that I was in exile from for a week. I would go back to campus as a target of the track team, and I had made an enemy out of a former friend. I was returning to Lincoln as the writer and actor of the drama of my life.

## 5.9 RETURNING TO LINCOLN

Monday morning my brother picked me up from my mother's house, and I headed to Lincoln. My brother had scheduled a meeting with Dean Spellings, Chief Lawson, and Coach Sebastian. I invited Dr. Francis and Dr. Gooden, who were both like parents to me, to the meeting. When we got to the meeting, Coach Sebastian was not there, which made my brother cautious about leaving me at Lincoln because the purpose of the meeting was to get assurance from Coach

Sebastian that his players would not bother me. As we waited for him to come, my brother told Dean Spellings:

Look, he's not here, and it seems like he is not taking this situation serious. If any thing happened to my little brother, I would hate for the local news to get a hold of this situation. I want my brother to stay here because he wants to stay here, but if the coach doesn't show up, then I have no other choice—I'm going to go to the news.

Chief Lawson and Dean Spellings both assured me of my safety, but my brother wasn't convinced this was enough. He wanted Coach Sebastian's assurance. Dean Spellings temporarily left the meeting and called Coach Sebastian on his cell phone. When he came back to the meeting, he informed us that Jones would arrive within minutes. Coach Sebastian arrived and told my brother and I, "You don't have to worry about nuthin, young man! I told my team if anyone bothers you, they gotta answer to me, you here me? You don't have worried about nuthin." The meeting ended with all of us shaking hands, and Coach Sebastian invited my brother and I down to the gym where he restated his proclamation to his team. At that point, my brother and I felt relieved, and the fear was over at least for the short-term.

Another element of my returning to the campus consisted of me moving to the Living Learning Center (LLC), where I would still serve as an RA. After moving all of my stuff from McRarry to LLC, I went to the cafeteria where my students greeted me as a sort of a hero, and with every conversation, I expressed a desire to be the president of student government. Later on that evening, I went to a meeting Dr. Francis had organized. This meeting was composed of students from various organizations, nationalities, and grade point averages. All of the students had a common concern: Change Lincoln. During this meeting, Dr. Francis and I would take notes on the student concerns, and at the end all of the attendees agreed to promote my platform

if I articulated the agreed among ideas at this meeting. Later in the evening, Dr. Francis and I crafted a platform based on the needs and concerns of the students. However, there was only one problem. The period to register for student government election candidacy was over, which meant I had to run as a write-candidate. We crafted a plan for me to speak in different professors' classes and at student organization meetings, but was it going to be enough?

### **5.9.1 Towards the Presidency**

Never in Lincoln University's history had a write-in candidate or sophomore won an election. With these facts, many students thought it was hilarious that I was running, while other applauded my efforts thinking it would be great publicity for an eventual run in my senior year. Although it never had been done, I believed that victory was possible. With every class presentation I made and each conversation I had with students, I began to believe and envision myself as the future president. Dr. Francis and I knew students would say they would vote for me, but when Election Day came, would they do it? I had two secret weapons that would propel me to the presidency—the international students and Beaufort Jenkins.

International students at Lincoln were traditionally disenfranchised. These students sat in the bottom corner of the cafeteria and were locked out of the political and social culture on campus, but they were solid academic students. I knew if I won them over, their vote would propel me to the presidency. A student-leader in the organization arranged for me to speak at the International Students Association (ISA) meeting, but she echoed the same sentiments of majority students—I had no chance at winning. However, she let me speak to the students anyway. During my speech to the ISA, I declared that presidency would assist in a development

of Lincoln that would respect their cultures and wouldn't attempt to force them to assimilate into the larger campus culture. I said:

We are going to create a campus culture that is like a salad, not a melting pot. You know, in a salad, you have tomatoes, salad, salad dressing, croutons, and onions. When you eat a salad, you appreciate all of those things. All of those things are in a salad bowl. The different elements of the salad are different types of students and the salad bowl is Lincoln. We need to create campus where everyone is respected for who they are and where they are not forced to be something else.

After speaking and listening to ISA students, they agreed to support my candidacy. However, I think part of the reason these students were willing to support my presidency was because none of the other candidates had directly spoken to them. If there was a low voter turnout, then I had a greater opportunity to win the presidency because I had the swing voters.

In addition to the International Students, I had another secret weapon. B.J., who had been a good friend of mine throughout my stay at Lincoln, had unlimited access to the Lincoln University's television station. At that time, the television station only showed movies, but students had to go to Dickey Hall go and change the videos; this was B.J.'s responsibility. Also, he had access to a video camcorder that he kept in his room. On the Friday I came back from exile, I saw B.J., and we talked about me running for the president of student government. He suggested we shoot a commercial and play it on LU T.V. I agreed and we shot it that night. In the commercial, I presented my platform. B.J. played this video every day for three or four days. When the current student government official found out about this video, they made a request for B.J. to interview all of the presidential candidate and air it on L.U. T.V. too. B. J. agreed, but damage had already been done, and I was closer to becoming the president.

## 5.9.2 Radio Debate

On the eve of the election, there was a radio debate between all of the candidates who were running for various elected offices. The last debate was the presidential debate, which included three candidates including myself—Douglass, Peter, and me. The debate started with all of us introducing ourselves. After Douglass and Peter introduced themselves, I introduced myself to the student body, “Hello, my name is Nosacare Griffin-El, and I am running for student body president. Triple [referring to the host of the debate], can I briefly state my platform?” Triple responded by saying, “Ummmm, sure, go ahead.” At that moment, I presented my ideas about how to change Lincoln’s campus. I chose to give a preemptive presentation of my platform because I knew a traditional debate would not favor me. Many of the other candidates and students thought it was fair that I was able to run as a write-in-candidate, and to prove I was a candidate of content and not of popularity I wanted to clearly express my platform. Both Douglass and Peter were caught off guard by the presentation of my platform, and they were forced to discuss it. Now, not only was I on equal grounding with them, but I also had an upper hand because I was controlling the discourse.

After the discussion of my platform and other ideas, Triple M allowed students to call in and ask us questions. Many of my friends and advocates called the station with affirming comments, asking questions about the platform. This gave me even more time to discuss the vision and to clarify points that the candidates contested. Peter and Douglass were clearly upset and a bit rattled by this action. The debate ended with me as the clear winner and as the one candidate with a platform. When the debate ended, Triple M announced that this show would be replayed up until election. I walked away from this meeting confident that I had done my best, but would this manifest itself in a win?

### 5.9.3 The Eve of the Election Results

On Election Day, I woke up and walked to the cafeteria to cast my vote. This was the first time since the Al Gore election that I had voted. I walked in the cafeteria, and administrators, student-leaders, and students greeted me. All of them wished me good luck. After I voted, I spent most of my day in the History Department and with my friends. The evening came and voting had ended, and the election committee took all of the ballots and headed to the Student Union Building to count the votes. Before voting ended, Ms. King informed me that each candidate could have one person to oversee the vote-counting process. She asked who would be the vote counter. I had one person in mind, Kandaka. But she had told she was unwilling to do it. She was both Douglass and I's friend, and she thought any direct participation would be like taking sides between the two of us. Therefore, she declined my request. The time to count the votes was nearing, and I looked in my cell phone fanatically searching for people who could do it. When I got to the end of the list, I saw Tisa Williams, a classmate of mine who was a trustworthy person. I asked her if she could she be my counter and she accepted.

The counting of all of the positions began around 9 p.m., and it didn't end until midnight. In the meantime, I went to Dr. Francis' house to relax and talk about life, school, and this election. Hours passed by, my phone finally rang. I looked at my phone, and it read Tisa. When I hit the green button on my phone, I would hear my fate. I pushed the button and slowly put the phone to my ear. Tisa, who had a thick New Yorker accent with a hint of joy, began speaking:

Tisa: Nos [long pause], we just got finished counting the votes.

Me: Ok.....

Tisa: [Takes a deep breath and exhales.] Ummmmmmm, You won!!!!!!!  
Congratulations!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Mr. President!!!!!!!

Me: I won!!!!!!!!!! Doc, I won!!!!!!!!!! Yo, Son!!! I won.

Dr. Francis: Yeah, Nos!!!!!!!!!! Calm down!

Me: Thanks, Tisa!

Tisa: No problem. So tomorrow, Mr. President!

This victory affirmed that people believed in my potential to be a great leader, who would change Lincoln for the best. Dr. Francis and I began talking about what this victory meant for the campus. He suggested that when I go back on campus, I shouldn't be boastful nor should I use the phrase, "I won;" rather, when speaking of the victory, I should say, "We won."

Dr. Francis's strategy was right. I didn't win because I was the most popular—most people didn't like me. Instead, I won based on the platform that was developed by those in that meeting when I returned to campus. I was merely the voice of the students who had no voice in the larger political structure. Therefore, it was our victory, not mine. Before I went to sleep that night, I called all my family and friends to inform them of my victory. I went to sleep as the President-elect of the student body and as the first sophomore and write-in candidate ever to win elected office at Lincoln University.

When I woke up that morning, I had no clue what I should wear. I looked in my closet and I saw a purple-grand *booba*, which was a three-piece African suit. I ironed the shirt and pants to the suit, and I put on some sandals I had been given by a Nigerian student named Eddie. I walked out of my room with a profound nervousness, and I walked to my first class of the day, *Ideologies of Black Liberation*, many students asked me: "Did you win?"

And I said, "We did win!"

When I walked into the classroom, Dr. Muzorewa greeted me:

Dr. M: Young maannnn, did you win?

Me: Yes. We won doc.

Dr. M: [With a smile on his face] No, no, you won because I can't vote.

Me: True, well, we, the student-body won.

[Douglass was sitting the back of the class. His face was framed with bitterness and anger.]

Me: I just want to thank Douglass and Peter for running great campaigns. I look forward to working with both of them to make Lincoln a better place.

For a few days, I was seen as a hero who stood up to the campus bullies and lived to tell about it. I won an election by a landslide, and I proved all of the naysayers wrong. For a moment, I was like Nkrumah who led Gold Coast to independence from the colonial master—Britain. This euphoria would only last few a days, and then I would have to wage the fight of my early life.

#### **5.9.4 Conflict as President-Elect**

As the President-elect, my temper was tested daily, but in particular two students, John and Douglass, tested me the most. John Owes was elected as the Secretary of the student body. Although he came to Lincoln in the fall of 2002, he hung around many of the students who represented the old-guard and the corrupt politics within the student government. One evening, I was sitting with Kandaka, and he came up to me and demanded that I vote for a student to be the President-pro-temp.

John: Nosacare, I want to talk to you.

Me: Ok, I'm eating.

John: I wanna talk now.

Me: Fam, I eating and chillin with my peoples.



John: I want you to vote for Askia for President-pro-temp.

Me: Yo, fam, I not talking to right now. Hit me up during my office hours.

John: Like I said I want him to be the.....

[I interrupt him.]

Me: I catch you later, peace yo.

[He crosses his arms and walks away.]

Later on that evening, we had a meeting as the newly elected student government officials with the current leaders of government. John was at the meeting, but before it started I spoke to him: “Yo, fam, don’t ever disrespect me while I talking to my peoples. What da fuck is wrong with you? You must have lost your mind.” After doing this, rumors spread around campus that I had threatened John, but not once was it mentioned that John had been disrespectful towards me. These rumors were meant to discredit my victory and the platform. At that point, I realized whatever I did would be blown out of proportion; thus, during the closing weeks of the semester, I kept out of the public eye.

While keeping out of the public eye, I went to my friend Douglass and attempted to make peace. We met three or four times during the closing weeks of the semester. Each time we met he made claims about me “stealing his victory,” and he claimed that I would fail as president. On one hand, I knew he was speaking out of anger; on the other hand, I knew he really wanted to make Lincoln a better place. So, I offered him a work-study position where he and I would work together to change the campus, which he refused. Our beefing was like Tupac and Biggie’s beef, and all of our friends, specifically the radical students on campus, were torn between whom to support.

Rumors spread around campus that we couldn't work together; hence, when two positions opened up in SGA, he applied for the position of Treasurer of student government. This position opened because one of the candidates, who were a frat who was kicked off campus, was running uncontested. In the SGA constitution, there was supposed to be a Student Senate Hearing where candidates would present why they should be elected to the SGA position. After the presentations, the Senate would vote for the two candidates, and then the newly elected SGA board would choose the candidate to serve in the position. The night before Douglass was to make his presentation to the Senate; I went to him and discussed the possibility of working together to change the campus. He turned down my offer.

The next day, he presented in front of the Senate on why he would be the best candidate. I sat in the back of the Senate room next to Pharaoh. When Douglass began speaking, I rose from my chair, and Pharaoh began grabbing my arm saying, "Chill Chill." I tore my arm out of her hand. I walked to the two powder blue doors that led to the hallway. This simple action sealed his fate, while providing me with an eerily good feeling. Egoistically, I thought to myself, "Beat you again." When I left his room, I realized that he was going to be my nemesis for the rest of my term as President. The semester ended feeling like I was on top of the world, which quickly ended with the breakup with Rasheeda. Soon after I won the presidency she admitted to cheating on me. Years later, she married the man and they are happily married.

### **5.9.5 Precursor to Plan**

During the summer of 2003, I began my presidency with a crisis. In a meeting, I had scheduled with Dr. Roberts, he informed me that 20% of the student-body was on academic probation and only 80% of those students would return to Lincoln University. Lincoln was an institution that

produced presidents of countries, leaders of governments, great writers, doctors, and lawyers, and now the university was failing to graduate students. Within the Lincoln University community, there was a debate on why Lincoln was failing so many of their students.

Some argued that segregation allowed the academically prepared Blacks students to attend the historically white colleges and universities. Consequentially, the students who would attend Lincoln would be from working-class and working-poor backgrounds, implying that a lack of academic preparation may have been the result of ineffective schools in their communities. Thus, when working-poor and working-class students came to Lincoln, they were severely unprepared, but they came to Lincoln with a hope that this could be reversed. Instead of these students being assisted in the academic pursuits necessary to end a perpetual cycle of economic and social oppression, Lincoln would take their money and provide few support networks to aid these students in the pursuits of their dreams.

In conversations with Dr. Francis, I began to blame the administration for failing the students. I felt as if the administration was hustling the student-body; they were taking our money knowing there was little to no possibility of students achieving academically. As I reflected aloud with Dr. Francis, he pushed me not to be reactionary, but to be revolutionary. He pushed me to examine the students' failures to achieve academic excellence within campus culture. For example, during the week, the library closed at 10 p.m., classrooms in Dickey Hall, the main academic hall where students studied in the evening, was closed. If students didn't have quiet places to study, then how would they achieve academic excellence? In addition, there were few academic support networks for students. A.C.T. 101 was a program devoted to assisting students in strengthening their academic skills, but it was a program only for students who were Pennsylvania residents. Although the program was for PA residents, the director, Dr. Gooden

never turned down students who needed academic support, but, in doing so, her program was overextended. As the president, I had to construct a plan that would assist the entire student body.

Students were not completely void of blame. On the weekends, they would drink excessively and party in formal and informal settings. The week consisted of students going to class without reading required readings and expecting their professors to explain the readings in their totality. Lincoln students were exemplars of an anti-intellectual culture. For example, a professor could be conducting a lecture on the weekly reading and provide content not reflected within the text, but content that enriched the text. Inevitably, discussion of these ideas that provided an in-depth understanding of content would be interrupted by an anti-intellectual comment, “Is this going to be on the test?” The majority of students at Lincoln saw education as a process that gave them knowledge for a particular purpose—to get a job.

When the professor came to class and discussed what was in the text, students would have difficulty engaging in the dialogue with the professor because they hadn’t read the text. Dr. Francis had a saying about students and their anti-reading stances, “During slavery it was illegal for Africans to read. Now African students [referring to students of African descent] act like it is immoral to read.” Dr. Francis, who was an advocate of reading, would also say:

Dr. Francis: Student come to Lincoln and don’t even want to read. It’s like them going to McDonald’s order a Big Mac: When the cashier hands you the Big Mac you turn to the him and say, “I don’t want the Big Mac, I just want the receipt to let everyone know I went to McDonald’s.”

Dr. Francis’ metaphor expressed students’ desire to come to college for the sake of coming. All students wanted was a degree to validate that they went to college, not learning. Adding on to

Francis' notion of students' anti-intellectualism, I believed that students' viewed themselves and professors within a computerized context. As students, they saw themselves as human-laptops and their teachers as jump-drives. Each class, students expected their teachers to download information into the memory, but only the information that was going to be reflected on the test. A professor, who didn't engage students in the aforementioned way, was seen as ineffective by students, whereas a professor who did the aforementioned was deemed a good teacher who was effective. The student-body was suffering from academic sickness.

#### **5.9.6 The Culture of Academic Corruption: A Case for Academic Revolution**

Not only was the student-body having an academic sickness, I discovered that the leadership was also suffering from the same problem. The student government's constitution allowed for student who had a grade point average of 2.0 to serve as student senators. Lincoln was on a 4.3 grading scale at the time, with meant a 2.0 grade point average was like a C- or D+. I had an epiphany: If student-leaders were suffering from this academic sickness, then they would lead other students down the path of academic sickness. Thus, in my reflections with Dr. Francis, I realized that in order to change the culture of the campus, I would have to fight the Student Senate. In the constitution, this body had the power to impeach the president. Any attempt to usurp their power could potentially cause me to lose all of my perks as president, as well as my position. However, Dr. Francis always believed that I would have to fight that fight or else the vision of academic excellence would not be achieved. This was a fact I reluctantly admitted.

Dr. Francis and I began to create a plan that would assist in the development of a stronger academic culture by creating a tutoring program. This program would be funded and supervised by student government, and we would hire students to tutor students who were struggling in their

classes. There were four areas of focus: English, Math, Science, and History. The students met with the academic deans of each school (Humanities, Social and Behavior Studies, and Mathematics and Nature Sciences), and then the deans submitted names of their highest performing students who would be hired as student-tutors. Now, a big question loomed in my head: “How was I going to pay for this?”

Traditionally, student government was allocated \$110, 000. Of the funds that were allocated, most of the money went towards two events: Homecoming and Spring Fling. Fifty to sixty percent of the student government’s money was spent on a little more than eight days out of the entire year. As the president, I wanted to use some of the budget to address the student’s academic needs, and I knew that using the money for an alternative project would bring fierce criticism from my opponents. Therefore, I decided to develop a budget that allocated \$20,000 to hire ten tutors for both the fall and spring semester. I lobbied my cabinet rigorously to pass this budget, citing my original meeting with Dr. Roberts, but this couldn’t convince my fellow leaders.

During the summer, I was walking into the mailroom to check my mailbox. Damon, who was elected Vice President of Internal Affairs, approached me with some bad news.

Damon: Nosacare, I got out of meeting with Dr. Roberts, and he informed that I had step down from position.

Me: Why?

Damon: He said I didn’t meet the GPA requirement.

Me: Wow.

Damon: I wanted to know whether you would support me.

Me: I feel like supporting you will make my platform seem like something I talked about just to get elected. Plus, student government isn't everything. The most important thing for you is to make sure you're able to graduate. So, no, I won't support you in that way.

Damon's academic troubles were a symbol of the academic corruption on campus. Here was a young man who was able to exude strong leadership skills and hold elected office, but he did not have the academic skills needed to succeed. Damon was a result of Lincoln's failure to support academic excellence both in theory and action. As a result, most students clung to engaging in social activities or leadership responsibilities over their schoolwork. I used Damon's story to convince my colleagues that this was more about changing the campus culture than my coming through on a campaign promise. Eventually, the cabinet went for the idea of the tutoring program, and we would make it a line item in the budget for the next academic year.

## **5.10 THE PRESIDENCY AND THE BEGINNING ACADEMIC REVOLUTION**

### **5.10.1 Walk Rule: Faculty Support of Academic Mediocrity to Attack the Dr. Washington**

My presidency would start with controversy. The first faculty meeting I presented what the student government had been working on during the summer. I announced that student government would operate and fund a tutoring program for students struggling with their academic coursework. After my presentation, the senior class president, Ethan Robinson, made a presentation to the faculty regarding the *senior walk rule*, which stated that in order to participate in graduation the student had to complete all of their coursework. Seniors had been notified of this rule in the summer.

Ethan attempted to convince the faculty by making three points: first, students weren't notified about the rule in time to make arrangements; second, students' families had made plans to attend the Spring 2004 graduation; lastly, the seniors wanted to graduate with their classmates. Ethan's arguments weren't convincing, but he spoke at a time when the administration and faculty were at odds with each other. The administration and faculty were having contentious negotiations over contracts, and the cloud of a potential conflict loomed over the campus. Thus, when the faculty sided with Ethan and the senior class, it wasn't because they agreed with his principle. Rather, their stance was an attempt to attack Dr. Washington, the President of the university. By interrupting the stance taken by the faculty and calling it the antithesis of academic excellence, I found that I had attacked the faculty.

During the faculty meeting, I confronted the faculty for supporting this anti-academic stance. In my address to the faculty, I posed simple questions: "Would you hold your children to the same mediocre standards you are holding us to? Would you attend your child's graduation knowing they had not truly graduated?" I declared that it would be impossible for students to replace them in the future as university professors without holding them to the highest academic standards now. Furthermore, I examined how unfair it was for a student, who took class in the summer and took a heavy load during the year to ensure he/she could graduate on time, to be in the same graduation as someone who nonchalantly decided to take their last few classes when they felt like it. My plea to the faculty wasn't convincing, and they voted overwhelmingly to prevent the implementation of the *walk-rule*. At this moment, the faculty appeared to be more interested in attacking the new president than assisting in the development of an academically excellent culture.



### **5.10.2 A Cloud of Uncertainty**

After my presentation, many faculty members who were pro-administration saw me differently. Some had believed that I was going to be the puppet of Dr. Nelson and Dr. Roberts because they would see us eating in the faculty lounge or conversing on campus. The administration was very supportive of my platform as president, and they believed it would make Lincoln a better place. They had promised to create mini-computer labs in dorms, extend library hours, and open up the classrooms in Dickey Hall. All of these actions would be done partly as preventive measures to ensure that I would support the faculty during a strike. However, by this time, the administration was growing weary of me because of my closeness to Dr. Francis. The administration knew that I was both emotionally and intellectually connected to Dr. Francis because he was like a father to me, who had provided mentorship, advice, and an open house to my family and me. Hence, many thought that during a strike I would be bonded by loyalty, if not to the entire faculty, than definitely to Dr. Francis.

As the semester progressed, the promises of increasing the library hours and placing mini-computer labs in some of the dorms never came into existence. This caused me to become increasingly frustrated with the administration. Dr. Francis began to intensify his rhetoric on why students should support the faculty. He referenced the administration's lack of support for my program, how entry-level faculty members had no economic or academic incentive to stay at Lincoln, and he said that there was a moral obligation for me stand up. All of these things were true, but I stayed moderate. I didn't want to get involved for fear that I would be expelled or be suspended from school, which would potentially result in my failing during the semester. His response to my concerns was that the faculty were risking their career too. In addition to Dr. Francis's conversation, I felt compelled to support the faculty, even though I knew that the

faculty supported mediocrity among the student body. I thought supporting the faculty in good faith would motivate them to work with my administration to change the academic culture of the campus. This made me move towards supporting the faculty in their struggle; even though, I believed they were a part of the reason why Lincoln was academic corrupt.

### **5.10.3 The Planning the Shut Down**

In the beginning, many students wanted student government to stay neutral in disputes. I was cautious about staying neutral for fear that the faculty strike would last longer than a few weeks. A group of students decided to organize a shut down of the school. These students were a group of my friends and close associates. Elizabeth was the leader of the students, and she wouldn't allow me to directly be a part of the planning because she knew my direct participation would lead to my enemies removing me from office. However, she reported to me daily on the plans and who was participating in the group. In the beginning, the group started with twenty students. With every meeting, they began to cut students from the group. Elizabeth purposefully cut students because she feared some students would intentionally or unintentionally let the administration know what was happening. She and I developed a master plan to shut down the campus.

Elizabeth and I took a class titled African Revolution. In the class we were exposed to theories and historic examples of protest in Africa during the 1960's independence struggles. In one class we watched a movie titled *Battle of Algiers*, which told of the story of a man who decided to work with his fellow countrymen to free themselves from French colonialism. While watching this movie, I decided to plan how we were going to shut down the campus. In this plan, students on the planning committee would be broken up into four sections (North, South, East,

and West) that would shut down different regions of the campus by blocking the exits. Elizabeth divided the remaining members into four groups that would be responsible for running into the dorms, waking students, and convincing students to block the exits to the school in support of the faculty. We had the plan in place, and we were ready to enact it. We realized that waiting too long might allow people to become disinterested or the administration might find out about the plan.

On the eve of our shut down, the students who were a part of the planning committee met to discuss the plans for the mornings shut down of the campus. We decided to shut the campus down the next morning beginning at 5 a.m. There was consensus among us: Tomorrow we put everything on the line. Before retiring for the evening, we made a list of student demands and posters affirming our loyalty to the faculty and their struggle against the administration. At 5a.m. the next morning, we would shut down the campus. The morning of the strike we all met in front of LLC. All of the people who were at the previous meeting were in attendance. We broke into our groups, and we began running towards our regions to wake up the students.

We banged on doors and screamed in hallways for students to come out of their rooms. As my group got finished banging on doors in two dorms, we saw a cop car speed past us. A silent look cautioned that our plan to shut down campus would end tragically, but we still ran toward the North region of campus to awake more students in dorms. When we got there, we heard fire alarms, and we turned around and we saw an ocean of students standing at the bottom of the U. I received a call on my cell phone telling me to break from my group and speak to the students. In my brief speech, I told the students to head to the existing and opening gates. The students began to walk slowly toward the gates. The first part of goal had been met. Members from the committee ran past the entrance gate of the university. I asked for some of the students

to go to different parts of the campus to block the exits. Within minutes, students had successfully blocked the exits, and the campus was shut down.

The students would not let anyone or anything get past them. When a delivery came to the school, students denied access to the drivers. Some of the deliveries brought food, gas, and other supplies, but we would not move. For hours, students stayed at the exits. Because they were tiring and getting hungry, I decided to go to the cafeteria to get some food for the students. When I got to the cafeteria, I went straight to the director's office to ask for some food.

Me: Hey, I need some food for the students.

Director: I can't do that young man.

Me: Why not, they paid for their food for the morning, and I'm asking you to give them their breakfast that they paid for.

Director: I know, young man, I know they paid for their lunch, but if they want to eat they have to come to the cafeteria.

Me: What?

Director: I don't want to get involved in this...

Me: I hear you, but the students don't like the service or the food in the caf. So, after we finished at the strike we can come down and shut down the caf, too.

With fear in his eyes, the Director of Food Services caved into my demands. His workers packed apples, bananas, and sandwiches in box, and the five students broke up and went to different regions to distribute the food. Before leaving the cafeteria, Jack, who had recently won Mr. Lincoln, was sitting with his girlfriend and her friend. He screamed at me saying:

Jack: We need to say out it. You are our president and you are supposed to represent us.

Me: I am!

Jack: So, tell the students to back to stop.

Me: Look, if you wanna be an Uncle Tom and sit back and do nothin that's your business, but we're doing something.

Jack was infuriated and began to scream "Fuck you" and "Say it to my face." I knew an argument and a fight would give the administration a motive to suspend or expel. Hence, instead of arguing with Jack, I just kept walking towards the main gate.

The strike would last for another five hours before I called it off, so that students could relax and recharge. When students left, the committee who planned to shut the school down was going to plan another shut down before the end of the day, but we never did. We just retired for the night. Later on that night, Chief Lawson saw me sitting in the cafeteria.. He sat down next to me, and he told me that I had only one more chance to cause trouble on campus or I would be suspended and immediately escorted off campus by his officers. At this moment, I saw my college career flash in front of eyes. I knew that there was a plan in place to expel me if I acted again. With Thanksgiving coming soon, this would be my opportunity to lay-low until the next semester.

During the spring of 2004, I knew the administration still had plans to expel me with any action that would threaten their power. Instead of attacking the administration, I decided to continue my academic revolution among the student body. A friend, who was helping a professor compile names of students who were eligible for induction in the business and accounting major's honor society, came across Alisa Jackson's grade point average, which was below a 2.0. When I found out, I asked her to resign from her post if this, in fact, was true. She neither denied nor admitted to the whether her GPA was above or below the requirement. Instead, she was determined to do one thing—fight back. I gave her a deadline to respond to my question and

when the time came and went, I went on the most popular radio show on campus, *Love and Lust*. I announced that I was asking her to resign or deny the report. After this event, she began proceedings to impeach me.

As the weeks progressed, student government leaders were split between supporting the platforms of academic excellence or academic corruption. I was going to attack anyone who was not going to work towards assisting in the development of a better academic culture at Lincoln even if it meant my losing my position as president. Within weeks, I was attending a impeachment hearing where I would have to fight for academic excellence and my legacy as president.

The hearing lasted for four hours. Charges were presented against me. Students testified about my participation in the strike and the profanity-laced arguments I had with the administration during and after the strike. My cabinet members testified on arguments I had with them to discredit my character. Lastly, Jasmine presented charges and asked me to answer the charges against me. For two hours, I made comments and answered questions from the senators. After a while, I realized this was not a meeting where my side of the story would be heard; instead, this was a political lynching. My parting words were:

Y'all didn't come here to me out. You came here to lynch me! Fuck outta here. I'm out!  
Y'all can bring come to impeach me, but last year when the president of SGA was beatin women, y'all didn't bring up charges against him. This mothafucka [referring to Ethan, who as student senator] was a part of an administration that stole \$10,000, not once did y'all talk about impeaching them [referring to the former student government leaders].  
Fuck y'all.

Ethan got out of his chair and headed towards me, but I was pushed out of the door and Zafeerah gripped my hand leading me towards the exit. I thought my presidency was over. During the next senate meeting, Jasmine called for a vote to impeach me, but she could get the votes needed to take me out of office. Although my presidency was not officially over, it was over in practice.

The year ended with everything falling apart. My mentorship with Dr. Francis had ended with me feeling like he had abandoned me and convinced me take actions to jeopardize my educational career. Election time came and my friends who had political ambitions distanced themselves from me. My beautiful girlfriend and I had a terrible public breakup. Within a year, I went from becoming a hero to a villain. The image I had spent time building the first two years had been shattered. The year ended with me having to go re-create myself.

### **5.11 THE END OF MY PRESIDENCY**

The last weeks of my presidency was painful. I stayed out of politics and public life because I was bitter and distrustful. I didn't trust any of my former friends or my mentor. I was bitter because I felt like my friends, mentor, and girlfriend had abandoned and used me. My feelings forced me to reflect on what I wanted my life to be. I didn't want to be like my mentor because I felt that Afrocentric scholars would talk about changing the world, but they never acted on their thoughts. I vowed never be like them! Hence, the first thing I did during my senior was drop Black Studies as a major and declare myself as a History major. I hated Black Studies because of what Dr. Francis did to me; any thoughts of my experience with him would cause me to enter a dark reflective state. Therefore, cutting Black Studies out of my life was symbolic of my cutting him out, too.

Dr. Francis was a man, who claimed that he would be like a father to me, but instead he was more of a manipulator. He saw both my desire to be loved as a son and my potential as a future leader, and he used this knowledge about me to pursue his own political ambitions at Lincoln. It was as if he was re-living his college years vicariously through me. Many people saw that he was using me, but all I could see was a man who was like my father. When students verbally attacked him, it was as if they were attacking me. Hence, I would argue and viciously attack them, causing greater strife in my political and social life. No one would talk negatively about the only father figure I had known in my life.

One evening, my girlfriend and I got into a serious argument about Dr. Francis. In the argument she expressed her feelings about Poe and how he was using me. She believed that he was using me as a pawn to gain status and political power on campus, which I refuted by affirming his fatherly love for me.

Zafeerah: Him using yah Nos. Him tell you are him son, but yah think him put him son in harm's way like him do you? Him say he's yah fadher, but him treat yah like one pawn. Yah too stupid realize that him not ya' friend.

Me: Yeah, well, da bull was the only kat dhere for me when I was nobody yo. He was looking out for me all da time. So, don't be talkin shit about da bull cuz he's been like a dad to me, yo.

Zafeerah: Oh, him yah fadhah? Why him resign from SGA? Himm left you dhere? Why him friendin yah enemies like Yasmin and dem?

Me: Politics. That's da game....

Zafeerah: Nos, him distancing himself from yah.

Me: Whatever!!!!!!!!!!



Zafeerah: Yah one fool, yah-know! When him resign from SGA what him tell you?

Me: He had to focus on getting tenure.

Zafeerah: Him and you went into SGA together, right?

Me: Yeah.

Zafeerah: Alright, so, da last time him talk to you about schoolwork?

Me: What?

Zafeerah: Him don't care about yah! Him don't care if yah graduate or not! All him care about it power! Yah, one fool for believin all shit him being yah fadhah!

Me: Fucka outtah here!

Zafeerah: What?

Me: Bounce dah fuck outtah my room!

Zafeerah: When da shit hit da fan yah gonna see if really yah fadhah!

Zafeerah was very insightful and in some ways prophetic about Dr. Francis. She provided me with advice that I didn't want to listen to, because doing so meant that I would have to rebuild my whole life. For the first time in my life, I began to enjoy the feeling of being loved by a father. To break from this mentorship meant I would have to search again for the father I never had. Instead of admitting that Zafeerah's assertion was right, I would chose the feeling of fatherly love. Dr. Francis would be a major point of contention between Zafeerah and I. This conflict was one of the reasons that we broke up.

### **5.11.1 Zafeerah**

Zafeerah was an interestingly beautiful, short woman international student, whose light skin tone looked like she was kissed by the hot Caribbean sun. Her eyes—when you connected with them you lost track of the time. My thoughts would stand in deep admiration of their beauty. She was one of the most attractive women I had ever met in my life. She knew that she was possessed with a superior beauty that could instantly capture a man’s heart. After Rasheeda and I broke up, I courted her, but I realized that she was a brilliantly smart person, too. She was able to read books and discuss them with the best students. However, school was not her passion; rather, money was her passion.

Zafeerah also was one of the most materialistic people I have ever met in my life. During the courting process, I constantly had to put forth money for her because she believed that this was the way that men expressed their love. She provided the behavior of Jamaican men as a warrant for her claim that love was to be expressed in the aforementioned way. The breakup between Rasheeda and I caused a great void within my life, and my mother and I still hadn’t repair our broken relationship from my teenage years. Therefore, when Zafeerah came into my life, she served not only as my significant other but as a mother, too. The time I spent with Zafeerah made me feel loved, not totally, but enough to fill the void. Interestingly, Dr. Francis didn’t trust her just as much as she didn’t trust him. He believed that the only reason why she was in a relationship with me was because I had money. He warned me that when my term as president was over I would have to get a job to support her expensive taste or be ready to end my relationship with her.

In April of 2004, Zafeerah and I would get into an argument that would consequently begin the process of us breaking up. During this week, she and I had an argument, which left me

wanting to leave to go Philadelphia for the weekend. However, Dr. Francis had organized a program called the Pan-African Initiative, which he wanted to be a precursor to a campus-wide organization to address issues pertaining to African people. I didn't want to go because of the argument between Zafeerah and I. She was going to attend the meeting, and I didn't think it would be wise for me to be at the meeting with her. Additionally, I thought that an argument between us would set the Pan-African Initiative back. Dr. Francis kept on insisting that I attend the meeting. At his request, I decided to stay on campus this weekend.

Saturday came and I was working in a computer lab in her dorm reserved for student organizations, thought it was rarely used by any of the organizations. I had decided to go the computer lab to work on a paper. Deep down, I went there to run into her, so we could make up. When I got to the office area, she was sitting reading a book. I approached her:

Me: Hey, what's good wit?

Zafeerah: [in a cool tone and facial expression] Fine and yourself?

Me: Still mad?

Zafeerah: I wasn't mad. You just lied.

Me: About?

Zafeerah: Ok Nos.

Me: What?

Zafeerah: You got that money from Bynum and you never told me.

Me: Why would I tell you?

Zafeerah: What? You remember when you were complaining about him not releasing the money? Now, I don't have no business knowing anything?

Me: Yeah. Dhats my money, you aint got shit to do wit dhat!

Zafeerah: Yah, one rude boy! Me nah catah to yah! Fuck yah! Go suck yah matha's puss!

[At this time, she got up out of her seat and gathered her stuff and headed for the door].

Me: Yo, why you acting like dhis? You treating me like shit, yo. Da fuck!

[She turns around.]

Zafeerah: Its over! Me nah be wit one stingy mon!

[I grabbed her hand.]

Me: I love you.

Zafeerah: So, why didn't yah tell me about da money.

Me: It's not your fuckin money! Its mine! Poe said that's the only reason your fuckin wit me!

[She slaps me a few times.]

This incident occurred in front of a window in the office area. When I looked up, a group of students were looking. I heard one guy scream, "You cool, yo?" I was shocked because this was the first time in my life I had ever been hit by a woman.

In this state of shock, I left the office area and headed to her room. When I got there, I broke down in tears, and screamed, "How could you do this to me? I love you." She rushed towards me and spit in my face and swung at me. I grabbed her and screamed, "Stop, Stop, stop." I hugged her and carried her to the bed, and I placed my weight on her to prevent her from hitting me. Within minutes, her roommate came into the room and grabbed me. I quickly released Zafeerah, but not before she hit me in the face again. The resident advisor, Sabrina, came into the run, separated everyone, and asked me to leave. As I walked out of the room, Zafeerah grabbed the collar on my shirt, and she yanked it, causing my shirt to rip down past my shoulder. When I turned around again, she spit in my face. Walking out of her room, in pure

embarrassment, I fled past a group of female students. When I got to my room, I fell to my knees and I laid down face first on the ground in my room. I began to cry as an acknowledgment that our relationship was over.

A few days later, I went to the Pan-African Initiative Meeting. I hadn't wanted to go, but Dr. Francis' people kept on saying I had to be there for the people regardless of what happened between Zafeerah and I. So, I attended to show that she had not affected me. When I got to the meeting, I stayed there for an hour, and then I decided to leave. Then, I went to my room and decided to take a walk. On my way, I ran into Zafeerah, and an argument ensued. We shouted at each other at the top of our lungs. Our relationship was close to being over, but not quite. We would spend the beginning parts of that summer attempting to build a new relationship, but it was not until a trip to St. Thomas that everything ended. Both Zafeerah and I won scholarships to travel to the St. Thomas to attend a two-week global leadership institute.

Before going to St. Thomas, Zafeerah and I went shopping for the trip. This shopping spree was for the money that she and I had argued over. I spent money on her to buy her love back. With each dress, shirt, shoes, and other items I bought, I was hoping to bring her closer and closer to me. I was hoping that the stuff that she told me about Caribbean men spending money to express their love was true, but this was a fallacy. After this shopping spree I was broke, which meant that my expression of love in her context was over. Subsequently, our relationship was heading towards a complete close.

During the time in St. Thomas, she and I were struggling with getting back together. The pain we both caused each other was too much for both of us, but I was still willing to work on us. While at the conference, there was a professor named Dr. Blyden. After class one day, he asked me to stay behind because he wanted to talk to me:

Dr. Blyden: Nosakhere, when I read your application and I heard you speak in class, I was impressed. I couldn't believe that you came from a poor family because it is not reflected in how you speak or interact with your colleagues.

Me: You think I lied on the application?

Dr. Blyden: I'm just saying your application doesn't reflect your performance at this institute.

Me: Ok.

I left the meeting thinking that Dr. Blyden believed that I had lied on the application. I ate dinner by myself that evening, and I quickly returned to my room. Later on that evening, Zafeerah came to see me. I told her what Dr. Blyden had said to me and this resulted in an argument between us.

Zafeerah: Its always somethin with yah, cha! Yah, can't neva [never] be wit-out problem.

Me nah wanna take up for yah nah more. Me can't badha [bother] wit yah. Me nah[no], me nah, wanna be wit yah nah more.

Me: What? Yo, I thought we were getting our work on? I doin what you asked me to do, yo!

Zafeerah: Yah always in some shit. You can't ever just live a normal life. Me wanna a life of peace; me wanna relax; me nah wanna stressful life. Yah see me? Me nah badhah wit yah nah. Yah, let one pigney [child] always in some troubah.

Me: Da bull [the guy] came at me! I was on some chill shit!

Zafeerah: Me nah wanna nah more!

She left me that night. She was serious this time. The next two weeks I spent in pain. I would see her holding different guys hands or walking in and out of their rooms. When we were not in class, I would walk around the campus sitting in different areas looking at the wonderful flowers

and plants. When I could sleep, I would walk to a different UVI campus. Across from the dorm where I was staying, there was a hill, and at the top of it was a bench. This bench overlooked the beach and airport. I would sit and go into a daze, looking at either the clam water or the airplanes taking off and landing.

When I sat on this bench, I escaped from the world; it was a chance for me to reflect on my life and to talk to my God. I would ask God to give me strength in my struggle to me a better man. Occasionally, a security guard patrolling the campus would interrupt me. There was a night when I decided to lay down on the bench. I fell into a deep sleep, and I felt something or someone in my presence. I opened my eyes, and a dog was inches away from my face; it barked and backed up. At that moment, my eyes searched for something to hit it with. When I picked my eyes up past the one dog, I noticed he was with a pack of dogs. I noticed a chair, and I picked it up over my head. The dogs began running. It was almost as if the dogs were checking to see if I was alive. I was, in theory, but in practice my heart had been broken, causing me to act outside of the classroom as a live body without a soul.

During this stay, in St. Thomas, I realized that my life had fallen apart. So, I began blaming everything, starting with Dr. Francis. I sent him an email discussing my discontentment with him, explaining how I felt he had used me and lied about my being like his son. I followed up this email with a phone call. In this call, I affirmed my desire for us never to speak again. I felt like he had done the same thing that Elijah Muhammad did to Malcolm X. In the conversation, I had informed him that Zafeerah and I broke up, which he believed invoked this call. I was frustrated because all that was important to me was gone within a year. For the first time in my life, I had had it all: I had been accepted by my peers, loved by a fatherly figure, deemed attractive by women, respected as a stone-cold scholar, and seen as a hero. My breakup

with Zafeerah was a symbolic end to an old image. This event signified a need for a new Nosakhere. When I left St. Thomas, I left with a plan to be a new man.

## 5.12 SENIOR YEAR

My senior year, I stayed out of the public life. When I returned, the new president of student government, Abraham Hoff, came to me and asked me to head up an initiative. He met with me four or five times, and each time I had declined because I had a deep seated fear that the administration was going to expel me. After my presidency, the administration had stripped me of all of my scholarships and denied my application to receive a single room. I was conscious of their surveillance over my every move. I thought that working with Abraham would be a signal to them that I still had political ambitions, which would jeopardize my standing at the school. Hence, I rejected the President's request because I feared that I was seen by the administration as a threat. In baseball terms, I was like a hitter who was down two strikes and no balls with an umpire behind the plate, who I had previously had an argument with during my last at-bat on a close pitch where he called a strike. One bad look or a simple argument and I would be ejected from the game. Instead of testing the umpire, I just wanted to stay to play this game, and I had resolved that I would win the game.

Instead of hanging with the traditional intellectual crowd, I hung around *Da Squad*. When I first got to Lincoln, these guys were primarily Asher's friends, but they became my friends, too. In the beginning of the fall semester, Kulu or Ku and I got *mad cool*. At lunch and dinner, I would sit with him and the soccer team. The majority of the team's players were from Africa and the Caribbean, and they were cool with me because I had fought for their rights as president.



Interestingly, no one really knew Nos, they knew Nosakhere, my formal presentation of myself. Only Asher knew Nos, but he was spending the fall semester in England. Those evenings sitting with the soccer team in the cafeteria people realized I had a sense of humor. I would laugh and joke with them for hours. Hanging with the soccer team and *Da Squad* was my return to normalcy, and it was my way out of public life.

My dress was different, too. I stopped wearing dashikis and replaced them with business casual clothes. I wore khakis, button-up shirts, ties, and hard shoes. Moreover, I matched the business casual with a low-cut hair style and a clean shaven face. I stayed away from anything that was Black or African; I left all of the so-called conscious students on campus alone. All these actions were symbolic gestures letting everyone know that I was not the same Nosakhere. Many people thought that this was a strategy that Dr. Francis and I had developed to covertly take over the campus. In part, those who believed that were right—minus the Dr. Francis and power thing. I wanted out of public life, and I wanted to be left alone. I wanted to graduate from Lincoln, and I knew that changing my style of dress would fool the administration and my political enemies.

During homecoming, there was a convocation, and the guest speaker was the famous writer Omar Tyree. After his speech, there was a cabaret in the cafeteria. Dr. Roberts attended this event as the administration representative. I sat at a table by myself waiting for a young lady that I was dating to arrive. He walked over to my table.

Dr. Roberts: How are you Mr. Griffin-El

Me: Doing well, Sir. How about you?

Dr. Roberts: I can't complain. I just wanted to say I'm proud of you. You have been any trouble. I heard you have been keeping a low profile.

Me: Yeah, I'm trying to graduate and make Lincoln proud.

Dr. Roberts: Alright now.

Me: Thanks for not kicking me out of school, Doc.

Dr. Roberts: You were close.....

[We begin to laugh.]

Dr. Roberts: Nosakhere, I hear you were having some trouble with financial aid.

Me: Yeah, my scholarships were taken away.

Dr. Roberts: Stop in next week. I can take care of that.

Me: Thanks, Doc.

Dr. Roberts: No problem, keep up the good work.

I did as he requested. I stayed out of politics and anything that seemed political. I was focused on schoolwork and hanging out with my friends. At the duration of the year, I decided to end my dream of going to graduate school to pursue Black Studies. Instead, I choose to go into education because I felt like it was the best place for me to enact my God-given talents.

## **5.13 SUMMARIES**

### **5.13.1 Personal**

When I entered Lincoln University, I wanted to be different. Throughout my relationship with Rasheeda, she filled the love void. Our relationship with each other was based on a utilitarian love. I pursued my relationship with her because she gave me the love I rarely received as a young man, and she loved me because I was willing to help her take care of her daughter.

Unfortunately, this relationship was unfair to both of us: For her it was unfair that she had to provide me with all of the love that my mother had not given me; on the other hand, I was a freshmen in college taking on fatherly responsibilities for a child that was not mine. This level of parental responsibility was problematic for me because, at that time, I did not know how to be a man nor did I know how to be a father. Regardless, I took on this responsibility because I wanted to be the father that I never had to Rasheeda's baby, and I wanted to prove to my mother that I was not my father. After Rasheeda, I dated Zafeerah who was verbally and physically abusive. Our relationship was only based on attraction both physically and intellectually. Throughout the relationship, I took her abuse for the chance to experience love with her.

### **5.13.2 Educational**

During my time at Lincoln, the pursuit to become someone manifested itself in my struggle to become a *stone cold scholar*. Dr. Francis' academic mentorship assisted me in my development of reading skills that assisted me in my personal development. Although I had developed academic skills, I was making up for all of the time I spent in high school not doing any work. After my freshmen year, I thought I had accomplished my *stone-coldness*, but Dr. Dewey humbled me. When he told me that I should drop out of school, I felt like the Nosakhre from high school. Dr. Dewey showed me that I was no different; I was the student who people said was destined to be a failure in his life. Dr. Gooden and the ACT 101 program assisted me not only in passing the class, but I also earned an A. Proving Dr. Dewey wrong was more about proving to myself that I was not a failure and that I could strive towards greatness.

### **5.13.3 Societal**

As a leader, I attempted to make Lincoln better. As a resident advisor, I spoke out against the track team and their coach for their oppressive actions on campus. Speaking out against these offenders placed me in a vulnerable position where no one could protect me—not my friends or the administration. Although I had doubts about returning to Lincoln, I decided to come back and lead during a moment where I believed I could change the campus culture. As president, my leadership style was fatalistic; I only acted in accordance to my platform and Dr. Francis' platform. I would lead a strike where students would shut down campus, and I would attack the faculty and administration for their anti-academic policies. I did not have the time or the energy to transform the campus, but I did make an impact. My presidency ended with my losing everything; I lost the love of a man who was like a father to me. When I lost Dr. Francis, I felt like my father had abandoned me for the second time. After surviving this year, a deep pain forced me to go through a year of recovery.

### **5.13.4 Dialectics of the Blueberry Muffin**

As a college student, I was stuck, trying make up for what was lost in my childhood. Because I did not have the motherly love I critically needed, I had a pattern of entering into relationships that were unhealthy. I wanted to prove to my mother that I was different; therefore, I dated women who reminded me of my mother because I wanted to save them. In a strange way, I thought that by saving these women my mother would shower me with love. My mentor-mentee relationship with Dr. Francis provided me with the fatherly love I never received; I never thought the day would come when I would not be close to him. Running for and serving as

president gave me the chance to be hero. I left Lincoln University as a student who had great potential and as a student who never fully lived up to his potential.

Reflecting on these early experiences, I wonder what could have happened: What if Rasheeda and I would have stayed together? I might have started a family, which would have made it difficult for me to go to graduate school. What if I had never met Dr. Francis or Dr. Gooden? I might never have developed consistent reading habits or study habits; these two individuals were pivotal in my intellectual and academic development. What if I had just given up when Dr. Dewey told me I should drop out of school? Giving up would have resulted in my returning to Philadelphia without graduating from Lincoln. This choice would have prevented me from pursuing my dream to go to graduate school. What if an administrator at Lincoln had kicked me out or expelled me for organizing the campus shut down? I would have left Lincoln University without the skills and experiences I needed to go on to graduate school. What if my mentor-mentee relationship with Dr. Francis had never fallen apart? I would have never chosen to go into the field of education. I never would have been able to dream a new dream.

Lincoln University provided me with the experiences that I needed to be a great leader. Once I left the university, I was beginning to develop the confidence be who I always wanted to be—an educator. My dream was to open up a school that would make a difference in the Black community. In addition to starting my own school, I still wanted to become one of the greatest scholars of my time. Hence, I knew that if I stopped reading and thinking I would not be able to discover how to make change in the world. Looking back, my trajectory is interesting, I could have either dropped out of school or gotten kicked out, but neither happened. Thus, I was able to eat the muffin as a snack, not a dinner.

## **6.0 GRADUATE SCHOOL**

### **6.1 TEACHING FIFTH GRADE: PRE-GRADUATE SCHOOL JOB**

#### **6.1.1 Introduction to Citizenry Charter**

In the summer of 2005, I was hired as a fifth grade teacher at Citizenry Charter School, a charter school located in the Center City section of Philadelphia. When I got the job, I was excited about becoming a teacher because I would have the chance to teach and make an impact on the lives of young Black children. In the middle of August, I would go to a week-long professional development and orientation session. During this week, I would meet other people who worked at the school, and I would meet the members of the fifth grade team.

The Chief Executive Officer of the school was a forceful lady named Ms. Kersey. She ruled the school with an iron fist. As educators, we were not to teach our own way. Instead, we were to teach her way. Within the professional development sessions, Ms. Kersey had a running theme, “I pay you all good money. Above what the school district pays their teachers. If you don’t like the way I am doing things here, then you can leave.” After the week was over, I remember feeling that this was going to be a punitive educational environment. I wasn’t going to be teaching in a place where I would be able to be creative, nor would I have the freedom to develop an educational pedagogy that reflected my talents. I would have to teach her way.

### **6.1.2 My Class**

When the year started, I had 20 students in my class. After my first week, I realized that I had many students with behavior problems. I went to my head teacher, and I had a conversation with her about the students in the class. She explained that I was given the students who “needed a male figure in their life.” This was extremely problematic because I was a first year teacher with little educational training. I had been assigned to teach all the students who had high needs and behavior problems, while my colleagues’ classes were more balanced in their composition of students.

Almost every day, I was raising my voice at the students. Rarely was I able to get through a lesson without having a student interrupt class. The first month of teaching was terrible. These students worked my nerves daily. During this period, I was close to losing my class and being demoted as a long-term substitute teacher. Slowly, I started to gain control of the class. The students and I began to bond, causing them to see me as a father figure. I believe that their behavior started to change when word got around to that I was going to be demoted; suddenly, they began to behave differently to save my job. Another factor saved my position—breakfast.

### **6.1.3 Student Behavior and Love**

Every morning, the school provided breakfast to students. The students would eat breakfast in their classrooms. One morning all of the cafeteria aides ran out of high sugar cereals. The students had to eat Corn Flakes and Rice Krispies, which upset them. The day had its trials and tribulations, but nothing that prevented me from teaching for an extended time. However, the next day the students ate all of the high sugar cereals, and they had terrible behavior. On the third

day, I gave my class low sugar cereal, and again on that day I observed less misbehavior. After this epiphany, I never gave those kids high sugar based cereal again because the sugar was like a drug that prevented them from being able to focus on their learning.

As the year progressed, I realized that these students were just like a younger version of me. They didn't come to school just to get an education. These students came to school to be loved. One female student named Lacey wanted to be an adult so bad; she would come to school with lip-gloss on, and every morning I would tell her take it off. One morning, I had given the students an assignment to do at their seats. I was sitting at my desk and looking to see if they were on task. When I made eye contact with Lacey, I said:

Me: Lacey, come here.

Lacey: Yes, Mr. Griffin-EL.

[I pull a tissue from a box of Kleenex.]

Me: Here...

Lacey: Mr. Griffin-EL, I just put it on. Please, I'll be good.

Me: Lacey, you are going to have the rest of your life to be grown, trust me. Enjoy being a kid.

Lacey: Mr. Griffin-EL.

Me: Lacey you know what happens to little girls who want to be grown?

Lacey: What?

Me: They grow up, and they want to live their childhood as adults.

Lacey: Ok.



Lacey was a very smart girl, but, like many of the students in my class, her father didn't live with her. She spent the majority of her time with an older sister, who was setting a bad example, and with a mother who worked two jobs to do what she could.

Another student named Robert was a typical boy who needed to be loved by a father figure. Some days, if I didn't call on him, then he would cross his arms and complain.

Robert: Mr. Griffin-El, I had my hand raised, and I had the answer. You didn't even call on me.

Me: Robert, I called on you a few minutes ago.

Robert: Yeah, but I had the answer though.

Me: I can't call on you all the time.

Robert: It's not fair.

I realized that his complaining had less to do with him knowing the answer and everything to do with him wanting to be called on. He just wanted attention from me. Some days, I would pull him to the side and talk to him and he would tell me that I was treating him unfairly. So, one time, I pulled him and another student who behaved similar to him aside for lunch. We sat and ate together, and we talked about baseball and cartoons. I began to realize that these students weren't bad; they were a younger me—they wanted to be loved by their teacher as a parent should love their child.

Of all of my students, my favorite was Nzingah. She was a girl with a sharp mind. She sat in the front of the class, and she always had something to say. She was a bright-eyed kid who, when she raised her hand, simultaneously smiled. Her curiosity forced me as a teacher to be more innovative; her questions made me think more deeply about the content I was teaching. When I would call role, I would call students by the name, and I would give them a nickname to

let the students know that our class was like a family, not just like a collection of students. After I called her name, she responded back:

Nzingah: Here, Mr. Griffin-Elf!

[She then grabs her ears.]

Me: Excuse me?

Nzingah: You give all of us nicknames. So, I giving you one, Griffin-Elf!

Me: Ummmm, I think you're stepping out of line.

Nzingah: So, you can give us a nickname, but we can't give you one?

Me: [I smile.] Ok. Fine you win.

During that first class period, all of the students would raise their hand, and say, "Mr. Griffin-Elf, I mean EL." Each time I responded with a brief smile and answered their question. In many cases, the students didn't have anything to ask; they just wanted to call me Elf just like their classmates had done. Moments like these made me enjoy being a teacher.

#### **6.1.4 Teaching Class: The Kersey Way and the Nosakhere Way**

The textbooks I used in class were boring and out-dated. I realized the students were not interested in the content. I was assisting students in developing their academic skills, but I could tell, because of the texts I was mandated to use, I wasn't having an impact on them. So, I went away from my Ms. Kersey's pedagogical demands. In Philadelphia, there was a free newspaper named *The Metro*. This newspaper was written on an eighth grade level. I would read over an article to make sure the content was age-appropriate, and then I would pick words out that they wouldn't understand. We would read the articles together, and then we would discuss the content together as a class. The students liked reading the newspaper and discussing it in class. However,

with the testing season coming soon, I had to stop using the newspaper in class, and I had to use workbooks that prepared students for the test.

I hated teaching from these books. As an educator in this environment, my practice was to tell students that learning wasn't what mattered; the ability to pass a test mattered. Many of these students had reading problems, and focusing on the test decreased their desire to learn. But when we used newspaper and discussed the content, students who had learning impediments were open to learning. One of my students, Tiffany, went home and complained to her mother about my teaching from workbooks all day. Her mother called me:

Tiffany's mother: Hello, may I speak to Mr. Griffin-EL.

Me: Speaking...

Tiffany's mother: How are you doing?

Me: I'm doing well, and you?

Tiffany's mother: I have a problem. Tiffany told me all you do is teach from a workbook all day.

Me: Yes, the Terra Nova test is coming up, and Ms. Kersey wants the students to be prepared to take the test.

Tiffany's mother: Yeah, but, you can't prepare them by just teaching workbooks all day.

Me: Ms. Davids, I understand, and I am against this 100%, but you have to take it up with my boss.

After the conversation, Ms. Davids understood why I was only teaching from the textbooks and from workbooks. However, as an educator, I felt like I was cheapening the educational experience for these students. On the one hand, drilling the students with the content that might come up on the test would assist them in passing the test, which in turn would assist the school in

meeting Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). However, by teaching to the test, I was merely preparing these students to be future workers who would take directions from their future employers. I wasn't preparing students to be active citizens. I was helping these students to pass a class, but I was failing to prepare them to be future citizens.

### **6.1.5 Leaving Teaching**

My mentor Kenny and I met up one weekend to have lunch. During our meeting, he told me that he knew the Ms. Kersey. The following week, Ms. Kersey asked to speak to me after school. All day long I thought Kenny had called her, and I thought she was going to tell me they were friends. I arrived in her office with a big smile on my face, and we began to talk.

Ms. Kersey: Mr. Griffin-EL, I got a phone call from a lady.

[At this point, I think Ms. King has called her to tell her about her discontentment with my teaching from the workbooks all day.]

Me: From who?

Ms. Kersey: From a Sedgwick Realtor, a lady informed me that you got accepted into school and you would be leaving in January.

[With a look of shock on my face.]

Me: I haven't decided whether I am going or not.

Ms. Kersey: What are going for?

Me: School leadership, I want to be a principal and open up my own school.

Ms. Kersey: Well, you need experience as a teacher first.

Me: I know, but the chance to go school might not come around again.

Ms. Kersey: You can go to school and work.

Me: Yeah...

Ms. Kersey: Anyway, let me know what you are going to do.

In August of 2005, I had been accepted into the University of Pittsburgh's Administrative and Policy Studies program. At that time, I was two weeks into my fall school semester. I didn't have any family or friends in Pittsburgh, which meant I would not have a place to stay. Therefore, I postponed my acceptance into graduate school for a semester.

At the time, I was living with my mother. When I told her I was going back to school, she was upset with me because she wanted me to help my brother and her pay the mortgage. This was problematic for me because they had decided to move into a two-bedroom house, which meant that they planned on living there together without me. Additionally, I wasn't a part of the process to pick the house; thus, I felt like they had the freedom to do what they wanted without consulting me. I felt like I unfairly had the obligation to help pay for a house that I didn't lobby to buy. Her anger with my deciding to go back to school erupted one morning. We got into an argument, and she told me that I had to move out. For a few days, I stayed over at my grandparent's home, but I was also looking for an apartment. I thought to myself that I was going to have to put off school until the next fall.

Then, my Uncle Clyde called me up, and he began pushing me to go to school. He believed that if I waited anything could happen. I could fall in love, get my girlfriend pregnant, or find a better job that paid more. All of the options declared one thing: if I stayed in Philly, then I might not ever go back to school. Therefore, he told me to sit my grandparents down on the couch, and then I needed to make the case that if I stayed with them I would be out of their house by the end of January. For now, I needed to stay with them if I wanted to go to school. I listened to him, and I found the strength to ask if I could stay at their house.

Me: Grandma and Granddad, I was wondering if I could stay here till January. I mean, I really want to go to school. It's my dream to get my Ph.D. I am just asking to stay here for a little longer.

[With anger in his eyes, my granddad stares at me.]

My grandma: Well Suga, I know it's you dream and your grandpa and I want to support you, but you're going to have help out around here. Give us a few here and there.

Me: Ok, that works.

My grandfather got out of his recliner seat and mumbled a few words, which I returned with a smile and thank you. In the past, my other relatives that had stayed with him had caused strife between him and my grandmother, which led him to him forcefully expressing his desire for the visitor to move out. This caused strife between my relatives and him, too. At this time, he and I were close, and he didn't want to have to kick me out or develop ill feelings towards me. When I moved in, I knew it had to be only temporary.

Initially, my going to Pittsburgh stayed up in the air because I didn't have a place to stay, and I didn't know whether my financial aid had gone through. Therefore, when the realtor called Ms. Joyner, I had not decided whether I was going to graduate school or not because, at the time, nothing was guaranteed except my being accepted. So, I told her I would let her know my decision soon. After visiting Pittsburgh a few times, I informed her I was not returning. A week before Christmas break I told the students I would not be returning. This broke my heart, but I promised them I wasn't leaving because I didn't like them or teaching. Rather, I was leaving to pursue my dream.

## 6.2 DREAMING IN SPITE OF

During the beginning of the Spring Semester, I came to Pittsburgh with the intention of pursuing my dream to become an educational leader. On January 4, 2006, my grandparents, my girlfriend, and I took the five-hour ride from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh. We left early in the morning, which resulted in my falling asleep for most of the ride. When I was awake, I was extremely nervous. I was going to a distant city, and, for the first time in my life, I was going to be in a place with relatively no familial connections. I was going to have to establish new social and intellectual networks, which made me excited. However, nervousness lurked in my heart like a lingering cold.

After falling back asleep, my grandfather began parking the car. When the car stopped, I opened my eyes and saw I saw the place where I would rest every evening. Through the window of the car I saw a two-story house with a red and white awning, and sandy brown bJuans. The top floor had three windows, while the first floor had one window and a door. Through the door there was a small vestibule with mailboxes labeled by the room on the left side, and on the right side there was a door. The room on the first floor was where the landlord lived. Her name escapes me, but I remember that she was a tall African American woman in her early to mid-thirties. She had curly hair, which she always wore straight back in a ponytail. When she spoke, it was with a heavy Pittsburgh working-class accent. I knocked on her door; she greeted me and gave me the key to my room.

I walked outside showing my grandparents and girlfriend the key. This was the signal that we could start unloading my stuff into my new place. My grandmother, girlfriend, and I grabbed a few boxes and headed towards the house. I led the way up the steps, and as soon as I got the top of the steps I was hit with an intense heat. When I was kid, intense heat was

categorized as *project heat*. In the Housing project, there wasn't a way for the tenants to control the level of heat; thus, the heat was always on high. On this day, the heat in my new place was on *project level*, and we immediately felt uncomfortable.

As I placed the boxes I was carrying onto the ground near my door, I opened the door. Then, I carried the box inside, and placed it on the floor of my new room. My grandmother and my girlfriend did the same. As I turned around and looked into my grandmother's face, it was as if the worry that was in her heart had overflowed. My eyes connected with hers through her glasses; she sensed that I knew she didn't approve of the house. She attempted to comfort me by saying, "Don't worry, sugar, its going be ok." Her comment was followed my girlfriend saying, "It's ok, Nos." As soon as they finished speaking, I realized I had made a terrible mistake in my housing decision.

Originally, I had picked this place because it was cheapest place. The house was a reflection of the amount of money I was going to be paid. My grandfather made a comment that was strikingly different from my grandmother and my girl. He brought his box up to my room and looked around. Then, he looked me in the eye and said:

Grandpa: Hey, ain't no time to stand around, you got more boxes to unpack. Come on, Nos.

[He and I walk down the steps, and he stops after walking down two steps and begins to speak in a serious whisper.]

Grandpa: Nos, hear me and hear me well. Start looking for a new place tomorrow. Have your shit out of this place by the end of the month. Nos? You hear me?

Nos: Yes.



My Grandfather looked directly into my eyes throughout the entire conversation. My grandfather's eyes and his face said something different than that of my grandmother and girlfriend. His eyes said, "You gotta be strong and do what you gotta do because ain't no turning back now." I returned his serious look and comment, with a shameful smile that admitted, "I should have got a better place." At this point, the nervousness that slightly pervaded my body prior to getting this house turned to doubt, a doubt that was as dominant as a cancer. This cancer was weakening my resolve: Would I be able to achieve my dream?

Prior to coming to Pittsburgh, I had quit my job as a fifth grade teacher. I left my hometown for an unfamiliar place so that I could pursue a dream; I left friends and family, social and educational connections, and my girlfriend. All that was important was in Philly. I went from stability to instability, and this house I was staying in didn't help at all. We traveled around the city, getting a few things from my room and visiting one of my grandmother's friends. After leaving from the friend's house, we headed back to the new house. As the car got closer to the house, I didn't want to go inside it; instead, I wanted to go back home to my family. I was ready to give up on my dream. My grandfather parked the car, and my grandmother and girlfriend walked up to my room with the a few things we had purchased for my new place.

As we placed the things in my room, my girlfriend turned to me and said, "Nos, I'll stay with you and help get the place in order." My grandmother responded, "No, suga, he'll be ok. You can visit him after he gets things in order." Essentially, my grandmother was not going to allow her to stay with me because she was already worried about me staying. My grandmother was not going to have this on her conscience her, too. I affirmed my grandmother's declaration, and I told my girlfriend she could come up later. I walked them both out, and my grandfather got out of the car.

Grandpa: Nos, don't be wearing none of those business clothes out here, cuz these people people around here gonna be able to pick you out a mile away. Blend in, you hear me?

Me: Yeah.

[Speaking in a whisper tone.]

Grandpa: Nos, get yo Black-ass out of here by the end of the month. These folks around here don't look too friendly.

Me: Yeah.

Grandpa: Love yah. You're going to be fine, and remember, you came up for a reason! Don't let nothing get in your way of your education. You hear me?

Me: Yeah.

[He extends his hand, and we do a half hug and embrace. Then, he whispers in my ear.]

Grandpa: Nos, I love yah.

Me: Love you, too.

Grandpa: Don't take no wooden nickels, hear me?

Me: Gotcha.

My grandfather started the car. When the car was ready to go, my grandfather dipped his head as if he were saying goodbye and staying strong. My grandmother waved happily, which was a façade of how she was feeling inside. Ann, who was sitting in the back of the car, waved, too, and blew me a kiss. She rolled the window down, "I love you, Nos, I call when I get home." I responded with a quick, "Ok, love you, too." As they rode away, the car got to the end of the block and made a right at the corner, and I wondered to myself, "Am I going in the right direction or is this a big mistake?" I wouldn't be able to answer this question immediately. For the time being, all I could do was try to focus on my goal.

My first few days in Pittsburgh were filled with a fear of failure. Lincoln University had prepared me to be a leader, but it did not equip me with the academic skills I needed to succeed in graduate school. Every morning I rode the bus from home to campus thinking, “Was I too ambitious? Will I fail and return to Philly and not accomplish my dream? Was this a mistake?” My financial aid difficulty during the first few months assisted in my negative thinking. I had filled out all of the forms I needed to complete in the summer time, but for some reason these forms never got to the University of Pittsburgh. If the financial aid didn’t go through, then I would have to go back to Philly.

### **6.2.1 My Dream**

When I first entered graduate school, my dream was to open up my own charter school. I was going to use my graduate school experience to learn how to organize schools and develop positive school culture. In addition, graduate school would give me a chance to read books that would assist me in developing my educational philosophy for the school. I had friends who prescribed to Black Nationalism that believed I didn’t need to attend the “white man’s school” to develop a framework to develop a school, but I felt that it was this type of analysis that kept Black people isolated from the larger American society. I proposed that if Black people were ever to develop a higher sense of agency, that would come as the result of them pursuing education, not an ideological training that many young Black leaders promoted. I saw Black America’s problems as economic, political, social, and intellectual. The school I dreamt of developing was named the Institute of Collective Excellence (I.C.E.).

ICE would be an all-male boarding schooling that would provide both manual and intellectual training to the students. The idea came from the debates that occurred in the early

1900's between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Dubois; these two leaders debated about the merits of an intellectual-based education versus manual labor training. Instead of engaging in this debate in contemporary times, I believed students should be exposed to both manual labor experiences as well as intellectual-based experiences. Hence, I coined the phrase "collective excellence," because, from my perspective, the Black community could not fully develop if every individual was expected to pursue an intellectual-based career, nor could the community develop if every person was expected to pursue a manual labor career. In fact, the individual had to choose a field based on their talents, personal dreams, and aspirations.

Within the school there were going to be four academies, or Academies of Collective Excellence (ACEs). Each academy would be named after a famous African-American in that respective career field. For example, the ACE for economic development and vocational training would be named after Booker T. Washington (i.e. Booker T. Washington-ACE). In addition to naming the ACEs after African-American historical figures, I wanted to name the academies after individuals who donated money to the school. If a lawyer donated money to the school, then his/her name would be the name of the particular department because it is important for students to know that there are real life examples of success in the Black community.

I.C.E. was going to be a self-sufficient school by creating a broad network of African-American supporters from various fields and experiences. African-American scholars were going to work with educators, educational leaders, and parents to develop curriculum, textbooks, and other learning materials centered on the school's vision. Business leaders and athletes would either donate money or raise funds to assist in the development of the school's annual budget and endowment. Politicians and community activists would assist in the development of service learning projects for students. My dream was to develop a framework for my future school, and

my graduate school experience would assist me in becoming an educational leader of substance, not just rhetoric.

### **6.2.2 Brotherly Love in Pittsburgh**

Before coming to Pittsburgh, I had lived in an all-Black community, attended all Black schools, and I had gone to a Historically Black College/University (HBCU). Although as a Black man in America I was a part of the racial minority, I had always been surrounded by Black people in Philly. I was always a part of the racial majority. As a high student, I watched movies on the Civil Rights Movement, but that experience was foreign to me. As a result of Blacks holding public positions of power, I experienced classism not racism. Conversely, Pittsburgh was a city where Blacks were in the racial minority. For the first time in my life, I was in the racial minority, and I felt that I would have to prove that I was better than or equal to my white counterparts. My first semester, I was focused on reading everything I could put my hands on. If I was going to develop the framework for my school and be better than or equal to my counterparts, than I had to spend my time reading.

Most days, I arrived on campus around 10 a.m., and I left around 1 a.m. From 4:30 p.m. until 7:15 p.m., I was in class, then I spent the rest of the day in the library. The major reason why I spent so much time at school was because the house that I was staying in was unsafe. One evening, I was returning home from campus. I got off of the bus, and I walked up the block to my house. This day like all days the entrance was open. When I arrived at the step, I pulled out my key, and I walked towards the main door that led to a stairway that took me to the floor where my room was located. I turned on the light, so I could see the key hole; all of sudden, I

turned to my right and a woman was standing there shaking. She was a very thin, brown skinned woman, who wore a wool scully hat with a winter jacket. I was scared out of my mind.

The woman: Umm, umm, umm is is Tyrone there?

Me: Who?

The woman: Tyrone, he lives upstairs.

Me: Ahh, I don't know, but I check for you.

The woman: Thank you, sir, I don't mean to bother you.

Me: No problem, you ok?

The woman: Yeah, can you tell him I waiting for him down here?

Me: Ok.

I walked up the steps thinking to myself, "What the fuck! I am living in the house with a drug dealer." Everything about this woman explicitly stated that she was on drugs: her extremely thin physical build, slurred speech, and her constant shaking. Never in my life had I ever been in such close proximity to a drug addict. Anything could have happened. She could have pulled out a knife and stabbed me, or she could have arranged for me to be robbed one evening. When I got to the top of the stairs, I quickly unlocked the door, and I went to my room. Once again, I thought to myself, "Is this dream worth it?"

After this experience, I would spend the major amount of my time on campus for fear for my safety. Although I had an external force keeping me on campus, I used this time productively, reading and re-reading the chapters my professors assigned to me. As a student coming from a university that didn't provide me with adequate academic experience to successfully complete my graduate program, I knew that I had to work twice as hard as everyone else. When I was at Lincoln University, there were many professors who didn't academically

push students hard because they had low expectations for us. When we graduated from Lincoln University, most of us who had a grade point average above 3.0 believed that we were the best of the best. In reality, our professors held us to mediocre standards. Hence, I, like many of my colleagues, struggled during the first semester of graduate school.

I remember sitting in classes feeling lost as my professors discussed topics and themes I had never heard of in my life. Often I walked out of class thinking, “Is this dream worth it?” This question lurked in my mind every single day until I met an older African-American student named Arthur. He and I both had a Monday class together, and we met haphazardly during a break. As the only African-Americans in the class, we quickly bonded. He was from a middleclass family, while I was from a working-class single parent household from Philly, but regardless of our class-positions we united.

Arthur became a big brother and a fatherly figure to me; he was always there to encourage me and to let me know that I could make it through this experience. This mentorship and friendship I developed with him is what gave me the confidence to fully engage in my educational experience.

Me: Graduate school is hard, yo.

Arthur: Nosakhere, you can do it!

Me: Yeah, but, I sit up in class and I don't know what's going on.

Arthur: Do you read assigned readings?

Me: Yeah.

Arthur: Do ask any questions in class?

Me: Naw, I be fallin back.

Arthur: Nosakere, never be afraid of asking questions. You're paying for an education, and you should get the most out of it. If you're not asking any questions, then you're wasting your money and you aren't learning. You feel me?

Me: Yeah, but, I tryin to be that Black bull that's on some dumb stuff.

Arthur: Hahaha, dumb person is the person who needs to ask question, but is afraid of asking it because he thinks he is going to be seen as dumb. Don't you know that the question you might ask about four or five people in the class might have the same or a similar question in their head, but they're afraid of being seen as not knowing, too?

Nosakere, you have to value your education more than you value your ego.

Me: I feel you.

This conversation with Arthur was a spark that led me to engage in the graduate process in a different way. Instead of sitting in class meekly, I asked questions of my professors and engaged in critical dialogues with my colleagues. In the evenings, I would read and outline the chapters. If I had time, I would find readings that supported the weekly reading. Without Arthur during that first semester, I don't believe I would have made it through my first semester of graduate school.

Thursday evening after class, Arthur and his wife gave me a ride home. When we got to my place, they had a shocked look on their face that I was staying in such a dump. The look on their faces was similar to the look on my grandparents' and Ann's face when they first saw my place. The following day, Arthur and I talked about my place.

Arthur: Nosakere? How do you like your place?

Me: I'm tryna be out but I just don't have the time to look for a new place.



Arthur: My wife saw the place and she was concerned. She was like, “You gotta get Nosakhere out of that place.”

Me: Yeah.

Arthur: So, what did your family say when they saw the place?

Me: They were shocked, but they knew how bad I wanted to come to accomplish my dream, so they let me be.

Arthur: I feel you, but that place is unacceptable.

Me: Yeah.

Arthur: I mean if you like it, then pardon me, sir.

Me: Naw, I wanna bounce, but I just don't have the time to find a place.

Arthur: I hear you, but did you see that place. You gotta make time, you feel me?

Me: True.

Arthur: We gonna get you out of there

Me: Thanks yo.

Arthur: Start looking, Nosakhere.

A few weeks later, I found an apartment in the Shadyside section of the city. However, there was one problem, I needed to put a 600 dollar deposit on the apartment, and my last check from teaching was in Philadelphia. In a few days, I was scheduled to go to Philadelphia to speak at my grandparent's church for a Black history celebration. I worked out a deal with the realtor, and they were going to give me until the following Monday to pay my deposit. Arthur urged me not to go to Philly without moving out of the apartment first because he believed I would get robbed. This assumption was true, but I had no other alternatives.

Although Arthur made a strong case, I was still set on my plan. However, this plan would be suddenly altered. During the week before I was supposed to go to Philly, I kept finding hairpins in my room. Now, this was odd because I hadn't invited any females over for company. I thought to myself, how are hairpins getting into my room? First, I thought maybe when I moved in Ann or my grandmother had pins on their heads, and maybe these items fell out of their hair. Upon deep reflection, I realized that neither one of them wore hairpins. Then, I had an epiphany, someone was staying in my room during the day while I was away at school. All of a sudden, Arthur's idea of leaving for Philly without moving made sense, but still I had no alternatives.

On the Tuesday before I was scheduled to leave for Philly, Arthur asked me whether or not I had figured out what I was going to do. I informed him that I was going to stick to the plan and move when I returned from my trip.

Arthur: Nosakhere, if you leave for Philadelphia, then you will probably return to your apartment and all of your stuff will be gone.

Me: True, but all I got is a bunch of clothes, Playstation, and books, and Black folks don't steal books.

Arthur: Nosakhere, you are willing to take that risk?

Me: On the real, I don't have a choice.

Arthur: Your grandparents can't mail in the check?

Me: Yeah, they could, but suppose the mail and one of the people in the house gets it, then I'll be fresh outta luck, yanamean?

Arthur: Take this walk with me.

Me: Cool.

[We walk out of the office, and I begin taking a journey toward the bank].

Arthur: Nosakhere, I'm going to lend you the money so you can get this apartment. My wife would kill me if she found out what I was doing, but she saw the place you lived in and both of us are concerned about your safety.

Me: Thanks, yo! I really appreciate it.

Once he gave me the \$600, I took the next bus to the apartment complex and paid the deposit. I filled out the paperwork, and I was given a key to my new apartment. I went to class that evening but I remember feeling excited about moving into a new apartment. As soon as I got home, I began packing my things. Within a day, I was packed and out of that apartment. I left for Philadelphia with peace of mind, and I resolved that I was on the right track toward accomplishing my dream. When I got back to Pittsburgh, Arthur informed me that Dr. Patrick gave him the money for my apartment deposit and I didn't have to pay him back.

### **6.3 SCHOOL LEADERSHIP**

In the beginning of my graduate school experience, I felt overwhelmed. Academically, this was most rigorous educational experience I had ever had. Socially, I had to adjust to life as a racial minority, which meant that I believed (at the time) that I had to prove that I was a different kind of Black person. Hence, when I went to class, everyone had to know not only that I had read the required materials, but that I had read extra readings, too. In every class, I sought to prove to my white classmates that just because I was accepted through an affirmative action program, I was not a slacker. During the first semester, in every class I went into, I felt the weight of my race on my shoulders. Whenever I spoke in class, I felt not as if I were speaking as Nosakhere; instead, I

felt like I was speaking as the Black man who happened to be Nosakhere. Within the professor-student relationship, I felt like poor academic performance would not be seen as Nosakhere can't handle graduate school work; rather, my performance would be seen as an example of how Black students can't handle graduate school work. Although no one, neither teacher nor classmate expressed any of these sentiments, I was a young Black man, who was a part of a racial and socioeconomic group who had been traditionally oppressed by societal structures; thus, I thought of myself as an individual who had to prove his humanity on the stage called a classroom.

### **6.3.1 Human Learning**

The spring of 2006, I was enrolled in a class called Human Learning. This was a psychology class where I was exposed to the foundational arguments in the field as it related to the learning process in education. At first, I struggled with understanding what a synaptic gap was and why Pavlov's conditional theory related to education, but I worked really hard at understanding the content for this class. Monday evenings were devoted to studying and outlining the selected reading material of the week. When I had difficulty with the readings, I would call some of my old professors or friends who majored in psychology from Lincoln University. By reading and contacting people in my network, I began to understand the basis of psychology.

One week, I had a paper due for class, which I had worked hard on. I was excited about getting my first grade in the class and about receiving feedback. The following week the paper was returned, and it had a C grade on it. After class, I waited to speak to the professor about the paper.

Me: Doc, I wanted to talk to you about my paper.

The Professor: Yes?

Me: Well, I don't think this grade is reflective of the amount of work that I put into this paper, and I was wondering how would I go about improving it?

The Professor: You schedule a time to meet with me this week or next.

Me: This week works for me.

The Professor: Until our meeting, I am going to hold on to your paper.

Me: Ok.

The days leading up to the meeting, I was very nervous because I had worked hard on the paper. In addition to working hard, I knew I was willing to work even harder to ensure I fully engaged the concepts that were to be covered. The day of our meeting, I arrived early and notified the secretary that I was there to see my professor. She showed me where his office was, and I headed towards it. When I got to the office, he was sitting at his desk. He asked me to give him a few minutes. I returned to the waiting area and took a seat. As I sat in the waiting area, I was extremely nervous. The fear of failing his class began to dominate my thinking.

A few minutes later, my professor appeared again and told me to come to his office. As we walked to his office, I still had a mixture of nervousness in my body and fear in my heart and mind. I was thinking to myself—if I fail this class, then it's like all Black people have failed this class. When I got to his office, he offered me a seat, and the conversation about the paper began.

Me: Good afternoon, Doctor.

The Professor: Thanks. I looked over your paper. You have some major problems with grammar. I could not read through the paper without stumbling over typos.

Me: Sir, grammar has been one of my weaknesses, but how was the content of the paper?

The Professor: The content of the paper was good; I didn't have a problem with it. In class, you make some interesting comments.

Me: Sir, I have a question....

The professor: Yes?

Me: Sir, I was wondering if I could re-write the paper addressing the typos because as stated before I don't think the grade is reflective of the work I put into the paper.

The professor: I don't let students re-write papers.

Me: Sir, this class is a major requirement for my program, and if I don't pass it I would have to take this class again.

The professor: I am sorry, but I don't allow students to re-write papers.

Me: Sir, you even said I participate in class, and I make interesting comments.

The professor: I did say that...

Me: Sir, I am not asking for a handout. I am simply asking for the opportunity to maximize this learning experience, while at the same time, achieving a high level of excellence.

The professor: I suggest you thoroughly proofread your next paper.

[I sit there in shock.]

The professor: When I was in school, I had problems writing, too. I began using a tape recorder to help write my papers.

Me: I'll try that doc. Thanks for your time, sir, have a nice day.

I walked out of the meeting demoralized. I was not asking him to change my grade. Instead, I was asking him for the chance at improving the paper; essentially, I wanted to earn my grade. When he refused my request, I thought to myself: How am I going to get out of this rough situation? Failing this class would prevent me from matriculating through my program, and leave me a step behind accomplishing my dream. These next few days, I reflected about this situation.

I feared that there were only two things I could do: scream racism or give up. I had to develop a feasible strategy to get me through this class.

When I returned to class the following week, I sat at a table that was frequented by a young African-American woman, who was enrolled in the master's program in the School of Social Work. When she arrived in class, immediately, I asked her what she got on her paper.

The Young Lady: I got an A. You?

Me: I got a like a C.

The Young Lady: Really? I am surprised because you are always talking in class.

Me: Yeah, but my grammar was off.

The Young Lady: Really? And he gave you a C because of that?

Me: Yeah.

The Young Lady: That's crazy.

Me: Yeah, but I was wondering if you wanted to get together to study because I can't get this class.

The Young Lady: Sure, let me give you my number, but I can only meet on Saturdays.

Me: Whatever's good for you. I appreciate it.

The Young Lady: No problem.

The professor arrived and before he went to his lecture for the week, he decided to discuss how graduate students are supposed to write and how they shouldn't write. The professor showed exemplars of good and bad writing. After the display of types of papers, he cautioned us to thoroughly proofread our papers because we would be unable to re-write papers. I felt like his presentation was directed towards me, so I sat in class thinking, "Wow, this dude is whack!"

Even though I didn't like him as a person, I needed to learn as much as possible to earn above a B in the class.

During this semester, I did three things: I met with him during his office hours to discuss the materials for the week, met with the young lady to reinforce my understanding of the concepts, and I went to the writing lab when papers were due. My meetings with the professor had two purposes: to let him know that I understood the concepts and to clarify concepts I didn't fully grasp. These meetings were more tactical than informational because I thought that it would be difficult for him to give me a failing grade in spite of my effort and understanding of the concepts. At best, I thought he would allow me an opportunity to re-write my papers to improve my grades; at worst, I thought he would at least give me an incomplete and let me take the class during the summer session. My meetings with the young lady allowed me the chance to receive peer feedback on my paper that would make its content and grammar digestible for his liking. Frequenting the writing lab allowed me the chance to learn how to improve my grammar, while gaining feedback to ensure a fair chance at receiving a grade that was reflective of the effort I put into the class. The end of the semester was marked by me passing the class with a B-, which I still thought was not reflective of my effort in the class. However, I wasn't going to fight it because I thought to myself, "I survived!"

### **6.3.2 Organization and Vision Class with No Visionaries**

When I entered this class, I was extremely excited about the chance to learn how to develop a school. My professor announced he would break us up into groups where we would be in charge of developing a charter school. Each group would have at least five to six students. I was excited about the opportunity to work with other students to develop a school. My classmates and I met



together during class; we all introduced ourselves and expressed our career and academic aspirations. After the introduction, we decided to set a meeting date where we would work together to develop our school. I expressed my excitement to one of my group members named John.

Me: My favorite T.V. show is the Apprentice because Trump gives the people on the show a task, and they are expected to complete it. Man, this assignment is kind like the show. I just want our school to be the best.

Jessie: Well, I'm excited that you're excited about this project. It's fun working with you.

Me: I can't wait!

Jessie: Me either, bud.

The mutual exchange of pleasantries and collegiality made me believe that this experience would be fun and exciting because for the first time, we, as teachers would be able to develop a school based on our notions of what education should be. My outlook on this project was extremely positive.

Before our first meeting, I had conducted research on charter schools in the state of Pennsylvania, and I found a report on charter schools in Pennsylvania, which discussed the effectiveness of these institutions in relation to public schools. Additionally, this report gave a brief history of charter schools in the state. I came to the meeting ready to discuss how charter schools vary in their effectiveness, which presented an essential question for our group: How are we going to make our charter school different from other ineffective charter and public schools? I was prepared to do the research and work with my colleagues to develop a charter school that would be one of the best in the state and nation. On the other hand, my classmates just wanted to get the project done as quickly as possible and with little to no effort involved.

Jessie: Hey, guys I heard this is a bird class, and all we have to do is turn the project in at the end and we'll get A's. So, let's not make this brain surgery.

[A quick chuckle from my classmates.]

Laura: Yeah, this should be an easy project. Let's make this quick and easy.

Me: Ummm, I did some research on the charter schools in Pennsylvania, and I think it would be interesting if we all did research on them and came together to develop our school like that.

Jessie: Well, I don't think we need to do research. I mean we are all professionals and have worked in the schools for an extended period of time. So, we can come with a school based on our expertise. What do you guys think?

[The rest of the group is in agreement with Jessie, but I am not.]

Me: I hear y'all and all, but I still think all of us could read about charter schools and the history of them so we can make our school the best. So, I think we should read and discuss our readings and make a school based on our common ideas.....

[One of the other group members interrupts me.]

Marry: We can all do research, but that does mean we'll all agree on what the ideal school should be. Take you for example, you probably would like an Afrocentric curriculum, and others in the group might disagree.

Me: What makes you think I want an Afrocentric curriculum...

[Jessie intervenes.]

Jessie: Ok, Nosakhere, you read the report on charter schools. Tell us what we need to know about them.

[At this point, I begin stumbling over my words, and Jessie interrupts me again.]

Jessie: Maybe, you can organize your thoughts and present them to us next week.

Me: Cool.

I left the meeting extremely upset because all my classmates wanted to do was quickly complete the project. I was very judgmental towards my classmates, and I questioned their sincerity about entering the educational profession: Did they become educators to do a job or to get a job? I answered it for them: They wanted to get a job! Believing they were only in the field for money caused me to develop a self-righteous stance, which resulted in conflicts amongst us during every meeting.

As the person who was right, I had to challenge these corrupt educators by constantly citing from required readings and extra readings. For example, I would say, “On page 35 of the reading the author says....” Now, if they happened to do that week’s reading and had a different interpretation of the text, then I would cite from one of the outside readings. I would respond to their positions by saying, “Well, I read a book named..... by..... and she says...” Essentially, these meetings were like an educational warfare, and the books and journal articles were my artillery. Whenever I spoke, I was speaking to defeat those who weren’t in agreement with me, but I was winning battles not the war. After a few weeks of using my words as bullets and page numbers as shields to their responses, I was tired and burned out. I bowed to defeat, and I vowed never to sell my soul to the almighty dollar.

Unconsciously, I was reading class and supporting materials to prove that I was different than my African-American counterparts. In this class, like many of my classes throughout my graduate experience, I was the only Black person in my major at that time; I was the only Black male. In fact, when I first got to Pittsburgh, the only time I saw a Black person within my age group was at a fast food restaurant or a clothing store. I had to let these people in my group know

that I'm not that type of Black man—I'm a scholar. Therefore, I wasn't going to come to class and be average; I was going to the best.

In the Black community, there is a perception that if you are educated with White people, then you are getting a superior education. Even in the months leading up to my arrival at the University of Pittsburgh, I was under the impression that white folks read. Thus, when I got to graduate school, unlike at Lincoln University, I supposed that students would read and engage in dialogue. When my classmates came to class without reading, a feeling of deception entered my heart. One day in class, my professor asked my classmate what he thought about the reading:

Student: Well, Doc, I enjoyed the way the author engaged the topic. He articulated ideas that I'll be struggling to express, but I never had the language to do it. I mean, I'm just in awe of his ability to engage this topic in its complexity. I'll be incorporating his work in my educational practice. Thanks for providing a reading that helps us become better educational leaders.

As I listened to my classmate, I remember thinking to myself, "He didn't say anything." The feeling of deception turned into anger. These educators sat in class talking about students and their inability to perform academically because of their parents' low educational attainment or their careless attitude about education. However, they didn't read their assigned materials, or they just wanted to complete a project to get a grade not to make a difference. I wondered: Why didn't my classmates see this educational experience as a chance to transform education? Why did they only see it as a credentialing process? Instead of engaging in a dialogue with my classmates, I decided to fight them with my words and information from the books. As I fought, I slowly developed a deep pessimism towards educators and educational leadership, which caused me to develop a silent persona in class.

## 6.4 PREPARING FOR AND GETTING THROUGH CORE

In the summer of 2007, I was nearing the end of my doctoral coursework in educational administration, but I was missing one class. The name of this class was called Core, a class that many doctoral students feared. The class was a two-semester course where students had to pass both classes, but passing the class in the fall semester and failing it in the spring meant the student would have to take the class over again in the fall. Many students dodged the class, and I was one of those students. The year before I took the class, I went to the bookstore, and I bought all the books with the intent of reading the assigned books independently before I enrolled in the class. My idea was that reading these books would prepare me for the class in advance, so that I would be able to pass the class. As a result, in the summer of 2007, I started to develop a strong reading habit.

Every day, I would go to Hillman library from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. in the evening. I would sit in the African-American section of the library. On the table, I would have an Oxford English Dictionary, stacks of books piled neatly on top of each other, pens, pencils, and highlighters. I was getting ready for this class because, after all, I did not want to fail and have to take the class again. I began by reading day in and day out. I was going to not just be a good student; I was going to be the best student in Core. One day my plan to know the material in advance was altered by a conversation with a colleague, Jose, who worked in the library.

Jose: Hello, Nosakhere.

Me: Hey, what's good Jose?

Jose: Oh, everything is good. You?

Me: Chillin, Chillin. Working hard, trying to be a serious student like you. Hey, I taking

Core next year.

Jose: Really?

[Jose begins to look at the books on the table.]

Jose: I remember reading these books. Oh, [picking up one of the books I was reading] this one is very interesting. So, Nosakhere?

Me: Yo?

Jose: You have all of these books for last year's Core Class.

Me: Yup.

Jose: So, what if they change the books?

Me: Damn. Never thought about it like that.

This conversation led me to read not just the books that I was supposed to read for this class, but I sought to read any other texts that interested me. I decided that I wanted to understand not just the views that I agreed with; I wanted to come to understand the perspectives that I did not agree with, too. No topic was off limits. I read books on capitalism, socialism, Pan-Africanism, Aristotle's *Politics*, Machiavelli's *The Prince*, books on organizational management, and educational philosophy and theory books. I was going to be the best student in Core, but not because I would be able to discuss the books we might to read for the class in great detail. Instead, I would be the best student because I would able to discuss ideas in great detail that were of interest to me in-depth. Additionally, reading books written from alternative positions would allow me to show a person that I was able to understand his/her perspective, while offering the gaps in certain perspectives by presenting ideas to fill in these gaps. This summer was the beginning of my path towards becoming a scholar, intellectual, and citizen.

During that summer, there was an undergraduate student named Kareem who would come to the library. Kareem and I knew each other through a mutual friend. My friend and fellow doctoral student Oscar would go to Kareem's apartment to get a haircut from his roommate. One day Oscar and I were walking on campus, and I was introduced to Kareem. Later on that year, I decided to start a reading group on Pan-Africanism and African history. Attempting to organize this group, I went to any Black student that I met, and I told them about the group. Kareem was one the students who was interested, but the group never lasted past a few meetings. The students who were interested assumed that I would lecture or spend all of my time talking about African politics and history. Reading was not popular among these students, even though they were attending one of best universities in the country. These students suffered from anti-intellectualism, but Kareem was different. This guy actually read the texts from the reading group. After the group collapsed, he and I would meet up sometimes to ask each other about what the other was reading. We would maintain this collegiality until the summer of 2007.

As I continued my project to read every book that contained a theme that interested me, Kareem also came to the library daily. He was honest about his frequenting the library—it had air conditioning and free electricity. He would bring his laptop and books, and he would spend time reading in the library nearby. At first, he would just sit at a table close to mine. If my books didn't take up the whole table then he would sit at the same table with me. Kareem assumed that I was reading for class, which I was, but I gave him the real rationale for my reading.

Kareem: Nos, I see grindin<sup>7</sup> on that schoolwork.

Me: Yeah, but its on some type stuff.

Kareem: What?

---

<sup>7</sup> Grindin refers to an individual or group working hard to accomplish a goal or goals.

Me: See, peep game, last year, I bought all of the books for my class that I'll be taking this fall.

Kareem: Ok, makes sense.

Me: But, check it out, I am not reading to impress the professors when the year starts. I am tryin to be the best, fam.

Kareem: I feel you.

Me: So, basically, I am going to spend the whole summer grindin off this readin shit. After I get off this class, I'm going to know education in and out.

Kareem: I feel.

Me: This summer I want to read so that I can know everything about education there is to know about education. And, I'm going to read the shit that impacts it.

Kareem: You tryna be on top about ya game?

Me: Damn right.

As the summer progressed, Kareem and I would develop a strong friendship. If I came across an idea, I would start talking about it, and he would ask questions or provide feedback on the idea I presented. Hours would pass by, and he and I would be trapped in deep conversations that turned from purely intellectual to how could we change the world? Over time, the conversations I had with Kareem about the books I was reading had a profound impact on my educational philosophy.

#### **6.4.1 CORE AND STASTICS: THE SINK OR SWIM SEMESTER**

In the fall of 2007, I was enrolled in the infamous Core class as well as Statistics. Prior to that fall, I had changed advisors and I switched to Dr. Michaels. My new advisor had a belief that all



educational leaders should know statistics because without it an educational leader would not be able to make effective data driven decisions. In the age of accountability, understanding numerical data was essential, but Statistics was not my strong area. Meaning, I was not a math person. Having to take this course with Core was academic suicide because both were extremely difficult. Some students who were part-time decided only to register for one class the year they took Core, while full-time students decided to take Core with the minimum amount of course work necessary to be considered a full time student—nine credits. Being a full-time student, I was registered for nine credits, six of the credits being Core and Statistics. I wondered to myself, “Nos, how will you get through this one?”

My first class in Statistics were fine. I taped the professor’s lecture, and after class I went to the library and I studied all night. As the semester progressed, I was falling behind and fast. The mid-term came and I received a C on the exam. If I failed this course, I would lose my scholarship and my graduate career could be in serious jeopardy. Fearing that I would fail the course, I went to Dr. Michaels to ask her for help.

Me: Doc?

Dr. Michaels: Nosakhere?

Me: I need help with stats.

Dr. Michaels : Why? You’re not doing well in the class?

Me: No, I not a math person.

Dr. Michaels : Do you study?

Me: Yes, but I am lost. I wanted to know whether you could help me.

Dr. Michaels : Oh no, you got to get through this one on your own.

We spoke for a few more minutes, but she refused my request for help and just told me figure it out. Suddenly, I realized that this advisor was attempting to see whether or not I was going to sink or swim. I left her office, and I called Ann. I expressed my frustration about the class and how I feared that was going to fail it. Ann told me to go the professor of the class and to meet with him, which I agreed to do. However, I was ready to drop the class.

The next day I went to Professor Dr. Michaels's office, and I asked her if I could drop the class. She told me that if I dropped the class I would not be a full-time student. If I were not a full time student, then I would lose my scholarship. I was in a difficult situation: either way if I failed the class or dropped the class, I would lose my scholarship. I was headed toward failure. In a panic, I called Ann to break up with her because I thought to myself there is no way her family will let her marry a man who flunks out of school.

Me: Ann, you should get you bounce on.

Anna: Why, what's wrong?

Me: Man, I not what you think I am.

Anna: Nos, is this about that class?

Me: Ann, Ima fail. Dhen what am I gonna have? Nothin! I feel like I was set-up.

Anna: Why?

Me: Why would she register me for this class knowing that I had writing problems? Dhen I go to her and ask for help, and she was like naw, figure it out.

Anna: Nos....

Me: Ann, I goin to fail. What don't you understand? Ima have mad debt and...

Anna: Nos, calm down....

Me: All I wanted was a chance. I know that I have ain't da best education, but I worked my ass off. She just turned her back on me.

Anna: Did you ever think about getting tutored?

Me: Naw, the reason to take this class was because she recommended it. I thought she would help me through it. That is what an advisor is supposed to do -- not let the student just fail.

Once I got off the phone with Anna, I returned home and I realized that I had faced similar situations at Lincoln. Just like at Lincoln, I had to figure out a way out of this situation. I began praying at night, asking God to give me the strength and wisdom to get through this situation. I emailed a professor in the Research Methodology Department, and I asked her if she could tutor me. She declined, but she recommended a student who could, Denise.

A few days later, Debora contacted me, and she informed she was willing to tutor me. I was excited, and I began to believe that I could pass this class. After four sessions, the tutor told me that she wanted to be compensated for her time. I was shocked that she asked me for money, not because she was asking me for it, but because she had tutored me four times and never mentioned it. Had she said up front she wanted to be paid for her services I would have been ready and willing to compensate her. Moreover, I saw the world in a different way than the tutor. When I was an undergrad, students would come up to me in the cafeteria, and they would ask me for help on their Black Studies or Black history assignments. I would help them, and I would not ask for anything in return. But this tutor wasn't me. I had a decision to make: Should I just tell her "No" I don't want to be tutored, or should I just look past my disappointment and pay her? I called my trusted mentor, Reverend James.

Me: Hello, can I speak to Reverend James?

Rev. James: Nosacare? Hey God-son.

Me: Hey Rev. I got a problem.

Rev. James: What's wrong?

Me: Aight, peep game right. I was getting tutored by this lady right? And she tutored me a couple of times right? Dhen she hit me up on some, yo, you gotta pay me.

Rev. James: Ok, so what's the problem?

Me: I think she should let me know from the da bat that she was gonna charge.

Rev. James: Ahhhhhhh. Look God-Son, I wanna tell you something. There are two worlds. The make-pretend world and the real-world. In the make pretend world, people do things because they are right. In the real world, people do things based on what's good for them. This young lady is seeing that you need her services, and she wants to be paid for them. You're thinking that because you would help someone in need and not ask for any money that she should do the same.

Me: Right.

Rev. James: Son, you live in the real world and if want to pass that class, then you'll pay for her services or find someone else.

After this conversation, I returned the tutor's email by informing her that I was willing to pay her for her services. I paid her close to \$500 to tutor me for the semester; we met three times a week: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. In addition to meeting to go over my homework assignments, she met with my professor to make sure she and I were going over the week's work in a correct manner. During the non-tutoring days, I would meet with my professor to receive more tutoring. I wasn't going to fail this class.

The semester ended, and I earned a B- in the class. I was excited because I had worked hard for the grade. I spent hours in the Posvar Hall library studying averages, means, medians, and modes. Struggling in this class was an example of how hard work and getting past my ego allowed me to achieve. As a Black man, I could have screamed racism because my advisor registered me for a difficult class, and when I turned to ask for help, she turned her back on me. However, I did not make this choice because doing so would have affirmed the stereotype that whenever a Black student experiences difficult times, he or she screams racism. Instead of screaming, I worked hard so that I could succeed, but this experience damaged my sense of self-worth and trust.

My Core experience was one that I initially found interesting. The class was not like a traditional class. There were two professors who served as co-instructors and one graduate student. In the beginning of the year, the professors gave us a syllabus that explained that the students in the class were to develop their own individual syllabi based on the books they provided to us. Essentially, all of the students enrolled in the class were given a list of books that they had to purchase for the class, but what we wrote and how many papers we wrote would be up to us. This was educational freedom! Never, in my life as a student had anyone said, “Nosakhere, here are some books. Read them and tell me what you think about them.” I was certain that this would be a fun process, especially given that I had spent the whole summer with Kareem reading and discussing books. He and I had discussions that were both complementary and combative, but by the end of the summer, we both walked away, with not only a profound appreciation for what we were reading, but also an appreciation for the need to transform ourselves as a means of changing the world.

Core was a class that was like no other class I had in my life. The first semester was a bit of a blur because I was taking statistics, but during the second semester, my mind was clear. This was also the semester when Senator Obama was running for his Democratic nomination. In class, I wrote a paper that was like a resolution; I declared the need for education to be made into a constitutional amendment. I believed that education should be free for all citizens. The next Tuesday I turned the paper into class for feedback from the professor. I gave it to Dr. Hull, and the following week, she and I spoke briefly at the end of class. We decided to schedule a meeting together. When we met, she expressed her apprehension with my writing explaining that my resolution came off as very naïve. She recommended a book that might allow me to gain a better grasp on this subject. This book was Rudy Crew's book titled *Only Connect*. After recommending the book, she asked me to write a book review for the Core.

I left the meeting feeling a bit perplexed and doubtful about my educational ideas. I didn't feel inspired; instead, I had accepted that my ideas were not good enough to be expressed in public. Thus, I spent the semester dutifully reading Crew's book, the required texts for Core, and supplementary material that I chose. Using all of these reading materials, I wrote a paper critiquing Crew's ideas about education. I spent weeks drafting this paper because I wanted to make sure it was of a high quality when I gave it to Dr. Hull. Finally, I was ready to hand in the paper to her, but before I did I briefly informed her I had critiqued his ideas using the perspectives of other authors. I was eager to hear her feedback because I had done my work. I had read Crew thoroughly, and I had used other people to critique his position. I spent weeks waiting for her feedback. I was ready to engage in a rich dialogue with my professor about the paper.

Towards the end of the semester, the teaching assistant returned my paper without any feedback on it. I was shocked that Dr. Hull hadn't provided any feedback on my paper. She described my position as naïve, and she had encouraged me to read Crew's book and write a review. I had spent weeks reading the book, planning my critique, and writing a paper, only to learn that she hadn't read it—I was hurt. I questioned whether she had asked me to read the book just to see if I would do it or whether she, herself, just didn't have time to read my work. Maybe I should have asked her, but I decided to ignore these questions and bury my feelings.

In addition to taking this class, I had applied for the Irivs fellowship. This fellowship provided students with three years of support. I interviewed for the fellowship, and I impressed the committee. However, there was one complication—my program. I was in an educational doctorate program to become a school leader, which was designed to prepare students to become superintendents. In order to become a superintendent, a student had to have, at least, five years teaching experience and some experience as a building administrator. I had none of those experiences. As a precursor to awarding me the fellowship, the committee wanted me to make a decision in my future. If I wanted to become an educational leader, then they would arrange for me to enter into the teacher certification program. If I wanted to become a future professor, then I would have to transfer to the Social and Comparative Analysis in Education program. After weeks of deliberation, I chose to enter the Ph.D. program because this program would give me the chance to study the theories that informed the purposes for education. Therefore, I left the school leadership program, and I informed my committee I was going to transfer. Even though the committee had not yet made their decision regarding the fellowship, I was content with my decision. This was not the only significant decision I had to make at this moment. I also had to decide whether or not I wanted to follow through on marrying Anna.

## 6.5 ANNA

Throughout my graduate experience, I struggled to love Ann the way she loved me in return. Slowly, we had detached from one another, as a result, of my pursuit for academic and intellectual excellence. Instead of expressing my love for her, I continued to express my desire to become one of the greatest scholars of my time. This decision meant that I woke early in the morning to go to Hillman library. Essentially, I was in the library from sun up to sun down. Jamal, who was the librarian for the African-American section of the library, always teased me about how much time I spend there, “Hey, man, we’re gonna have to get you a cot.” I saw the time I spent in the library as my opportunity to become a *stone-cold scholar*. I would read my class reading, outline the chapters, and then read other books outlining these books with the intention of connecting those readings to class readings. Doing this work left little time for me to talk to Ann.

When I finished my day, I would arrive home around midnight or later. Then, I would call Ann, and we would talk early into the morning. All of my time went to my education and to better myself. Anything else became secondary—including Ann. Because I took her for granted, slowly but surely, she and I began to disconnect from one another. Always, I felt the pressure to succeed. Focusing on schoolwork would ensure that I wouldn’t fail. In the end, my under commitment to Ann was rooted in my desire to not to fail.

This push to choose scholarship over Ann was reinforced by many of my mentors. They would ask me whether or not she was in school, what her plans were in life, and what was she doing to support me. They would share stories about how people would get married to people whom they were not connected to intellectually, and they would explain that oftentimes these relationships failed. In many of my discussions, I was told of my potential to be a great scholar,



and how I had the potential to become the president of a university if I stayed on track. For them, getting married was something that I could do once I graduated from school. I was told that if Ann really loved me, then she would wait for me to finish school. I didn't want to wait because I thought I would never find another woman who would love me as she did. In spite of all of the negative conversations about my potential marriage to her, I pressed on with my plans to marry.

As the intensity of my coursework increased, I began to fear whether or not I would matriculate through my graduate coursework. I feared that if I failed—all of this money and time would be wasted. I made serious revisions to my social life to prevent failure. Weeks later, I decided to end our engagement, which broke her heart. I wanted to be the best, and I thought our relationship would get in my way. I had to focus only on school. So, in a cowardly manner, I left Ann with a broken heart. I felt like I was doing the best thing for both of us. I was going to grind ahead in my schoolwork, preparing myself to be one of the greatest scholars of all time. She, on the other hand, would be able to date other guys. This decision was one of the biggest mistakes I made in my life.

### **6.5.1 Addicted to the Feeling of Love**

As a twenty-five year old man, I was an addict. Many of my friends had chosen addictions to marijuana, alcohol, and over-the-counter medications. While their solace was found in substance abuse, I was addicted to something different. No, I did not have to buy matches to be intoxicated. I did not have to twist off a cap and press my lips against a bottle. Nor did I have to swallow pills with a cold glass of water to receive my high. No, my habit was a thing that every human being needs to survive. My habit was what parents are supposed to give to their child. My habit was what a husband professes to his wife through his wedding vows. You could not see my need

unless you took a visual stroll through my mind, down my throat, and into my heart cavity. There, the viewer would find an empty heart. The onlooker would understand what I needed—love.

As a child, I never remember needing anything. When I was hungry, I ate. When I outgrew clothes or shoes, I was satisfied with the basics. When I was intellectually curious, my mother purchased books. But, I hungered for, needed to be clothed with, and needed to be satisfied with love. At first, receiving love from anyone felt unusual. I felt uncomfortable; I still do, at times. A new love would intoxicate me such that I wanted it more and more. When this new feeling of love evaporated in the sweltering heat of this desert we call life, I awoke. When I had the realization that love was not a feeling I could have daily, a wishing for it would race around in my mind. When the possibility of receiving the feeling of love arrived, I stopped everything to have it because I did not know when it would come again. Without love, I felt as if I was worthless. I would walk the streets head low, heart empty, offering a faltering smile that could dim bright eyes with hopelessness. With love, I felt like a superhuman. I could face anything, head held high, heart full of joy, sharing a smile that mirrored my greatest hopes. Childhood experiences reinforced the idea that I was incapable of being loved. These internalized feelings caused me to view love as a temporary experience. Love became a drug, the high an addict feels from his or her drug of choice. Funny, no one knew that I was addicted to love; I hid it so well by doing my scholarly work.

Being a love addict, I, like many addicts, refused to admit my co-dependence. Love could change me from a logical person to a fiend. The women of my life were like the dime-bag of weed that the pothead smokes for comfort from a harsh world; they were the Colt 45 for the alcoholic, or the box of pills for the person hooked on over-the-counter drugs. When I would

come down from my high, a depressive spell would fall about the totality of my being. This spell caused me to view myself as worthless. Like an addict, I needed to get back with whichever woman gave me that intoxicating feeling. When the doors of a relationship were closed, I would go to my friends for solace. I can remember one break up, where my friend decided not to console me. Instead of consoling me, he sought to “toughen me up.” The conversation between he and I went like this:

Asher: Nos, you be falling for dese bitches to fast. Stop tellin these bitches you love them. Cuz, they be playin shit out of you. Fuck dese bitches and fall da fuck back fam. You be tryna marry dese bitches after first week you meet dem. Fuck'em and focus on da school shit fam. Nos, I'm tellin you, gang. But you aint listenin; he gonna go out dere fall in love with anotha bitch, den come bitchin to us about her. Yo, we don't won't to hear bout no bitches from you cuz you know what you getting into fam!

Asher: Nos?

Me: Yo?

Asher: So, you still gonna fuck with dat bitch after she played the shit out of you?

Me: People fuck up some times.

Asher: Right, but she fucked before right?

Me: Yeah.

Asher: So, you basically saying to her, it's cool that you be on some disrespect shit to me?

Me: Naw.

Asher: Naw? But you take dis bitch back? That what you're sayin, yo?

Asher: Nos?

Me: Yo?

Asher: Dere are too many bitches out dere for you to be sweatin this bitch. Too many bitches out dere for you to be on some crying over her. Fuck outta here and go crack some shorties, gang.

Asher was attempting to provide me with support, letting me know that a woman should not be allowed to dominate my life the way this one had. He provided warrants, proving why this woman was not the one for me, but I still wanted to stay with her. Terrence, like many of my friends or Black men in my age group, believe that Black women should only be courted for sex. In other words, a Black woman should not be taken seriously outside of sexual pleasure. Terrence's tough language and sexist depiction of women was wrong; he was attempting in his own way to show that this woman was not for me. He was right that she was not for me, but he did not know that she was my drug. She was like all the women in my life—my drug. The feeling of love was what I needed and what I was going to aspire for. Throughout my younger years, I sought the sensation of love as a temporarily abusive intoxicating stimulant for my mind, body, and soul. Yeah, I was addicted to women and the sensation they provided to me. One woman would be a different experience. Her name is Anna.

### **6.5.2 Anna's Love and Life as Donut**

Anna is from West Africa. Her mother came to the U.S.A., while she was still in her womb. Anna lived most of her childhood in Philadelphia. As we got to know each other, I found that she was not a drug; she was a perfect glass of water after a long run; she was a perfectly cool breeze during a sweltering summer night of pain; she was the nutrition that eradicated the sharp hunger pains in my heart; she was the light to my dark soul. Her nurturing ability was reminiscent of the

unconditional love I received from my mother early in childhood. When her hand stroked my face, she set my soul at ease. Being with her did not feel like sensational love; her love was real. Looking at Anna, people would classify her as extremely attractive. Some would go as far to say that she was beautiful, and I would agree with these people but for different reasons. Yes, Anna's angelic facial features complimented each other well. Her slightly protruding forehead provided a great introduction to her captivating eyes. Her nose and lips seemed to be divinely drawn to fit within a perfect face. Her walk was so graceful that I wondered if she walked on air instead of concrete. She was an angel, a gift from God. But I loved her because of the soul and the love she was willing to give. Beyonce's song, Halo (2009), frames how I felt about Anna. In the song, she professes her love for a man who assisted her in understanding that she could have love and be loved. In doing so, she is able to see the God in him, while also seeing the God in her. She sings:

Everywhere I'm looking now

I'm surrounded by your embrace

Baby I can see your halo

You know you're my saving grace

You're everything I need and more

It's written all over your face

Baby I can feel your halo

Pray it won't fade away

I can feel your halo halo halo

Everything the man symbolizes in Beyonce's song is what Anna Marie came to symbolize in my life. Her prettiness, though outstandingly obvious, was no match for her soul. Her innocence reflected, not the naiveté of a child, but sympathy for the pain and suffering of

others. I saw her “halo,” and it was “all I need[ed] and more.” Anna was not my drug; she was and continues to be my light. For the first time in my life, I was living love; I was not seeking it for a temporary high; I was trying to live it and show it. As the years progressed, I would open myself up to her.

Anna’s love allowed me to reveal my deepest fears in life, and she rewarded me by trusting her with unconditional love. She was able to love Nosakhere for his totality. My intellectual success led many people I encountered to describe me as a well-rounded young man (I was, externally), but no one knew that my body had a hole and its location was in my heart—I was a human donut.

Before Anna, the void in my heart was supplemented with sensational experiences. With Anna, I did not have to get high because she showed me real love. Unfortunately, I did not do the same for her. Early in our relationship, I had a habit of taking from her like an appliance takes energy from socket in the wall. Her love powered me through difficult times. Whenever I needed it, she was there and ready to give. Selfishly, I could not do the same. When difficult times became consistent in her life, she turned to me to provide the same love. Realizing that she was not the superhuman person I envisioned her to be, but someone who had problems, too, I became scared. All of those years, women were my drug. I did not know that I had not shaken my addiction. I was still acting like an addict. Even though each month I was with her I reduced my need for sensational love, I was not free from my addiction. Three years passed, Anna and I were soon to be married. Suddenly, I decided that I was not ready. In a cowardly strategy, I placed the blame on Anna using her problems as reasons for not getting married. In reality, I was the human donut who had the problem.

A few weeks later, I graduated with a Master's degree in Educational Administration. Before the graduation, I remember feeling like I was successful. I was a young Black male who was receiving my Master's degree. I had just completed the hardest year of my educational experience, and I had passed my preliminary examinations. As I sat next to my colleagues and waited for my name to be called, I remember feeling an intense loneliness. I walked across the stage, and I looked into the crowd and not one of my family members had come to the graduation. I was successful, but I had no one to share it with. I returned home and cried all night. I had listened to my mentors, but none of them were there to comfort me. Later that evening I called Anna, and we got back together. I spent the summer begging her and her family for forgiveness. At the end of the summer, she and I were officially back together. Years later, Anna and I would have breakup for good, which caused severe pain in both our hearts. Until this day, I feel terrible about what I put her through. This relationship taught me an important lesson: I need to learn how to balance my life.

## **6.6 THE PH.D. PROGRAM: THE ART OF KEEPIN IT REAL AND NOT KEEPIN IT REAL**

### **6.6.1 The Struggle to Keep the Dream**

Beginning the Social and Comparative program was much like every other part of my life. The program began with drama. In the summer, I had to meet with Dr. Duncan, and she informed me that I couldn't be admitted into the program until I took the G.R.E. Now, I knew that taking this test would not assess how hard I had worked in graduate school. Rather, this test would assess

my schooling experience prior to coming to Pittsburgh. Taking the test was a gamble because I knew that I could not rely on the three years I spent working hard in graduate school. After I took the test, I feared that my time at the University of Pittsburgh would end. However, I wasn't going to let this test hold me back. When the semester began, I decided that I going to go into my classes and engage in my coursework with the same intellectually rigorous mentality I had become known for.

For some strange reason, my scores didn't get back to University of Pittsburgh on time. The delay gave me some time to prove, class by class, that I deserved to be in the program regardless of my scores. Eventually, my scores came and Dr. Duncan scheduled an appointment with me. When I got to her office, I had an unsettling feeling. I knew in my gut that this meeting was not going to be good. Dr. Duncan informed me that my scores were too low, and she recommended that I take the test again. She also made a number of discouraging statements, implying that it didn't make sense for me to receive funding from the School of Education with such low-test scores. I responded by saying:

Look, Doc, I have worked hard since I got here. I have never asked anyone for a hand out. I have only asked for a chance to succeed, and with every chance I have been provided at Pitt I maximized my potential. I mean, all of these classes expose me to books and journal articles, talking about how race and socioeconomic status impacts student achievement on tests. Despite those facts, I have still struggled to be the best student I could be. In classes, I read what I am supposed to read for class and other texts that supplement the class readings. Doc, is it my fault that I was born in an all black working class community?



I left the meeting with my graduate career in peril. I didn't know what would happen to me. I began to question whether graduate school was for me. I left the meeting thinking she was implying that I was not Ph.D. material. I left the meeting thinking that my hard work didn't matter because, after all, I had low test scores. My notion of the America Dream had come into question! As an American, wasn't I supposed to be afforded the chance at the pursuit of happiness? Here I was spending hours in the library, reading extra books, and participating in engaging rigorous debates with my colleagues. Did none of that matter? Eventually, this problem was resolved. I was accepted into the Social and Comparative Analysis Program, but this would not be the end my problems.

### **6.6.2 Not Keepin it Real**

I had one of my most interesting experiences in the class called History of School Reform,. Every class, the professor would start the class by handing out a book with weekly TV schedules. Then, he would discuss the interesting Book TV episodes from the previous week. Once he was finished discussing Book TV, he lectured on the themes in the weekly readings. After lecturing, he allowed us to present our required weekly position papers on the readings. In the beginning of the semester, there was a class where he opened the class up for us to present our positions statements.

I raised my hand and presented my paper, which declared that it was pointless to reform the educational system without reforming society. In the middle of my presentation, a young white woman with blonde hair and blue eyes named Iris interrupted me. She said, "You make me sick when you talk about transforming society." Her eyes were filled with viciousness, and her face was pink with anger. She ended her comment with a cold stare, and I returned it with an

uncomfortable pause. The class quickly picked up the conversation, and they acted as if nothing had happened. As soon as there was a chance for me to speak again, I spoke. This time I returned to my original comment, attempting to articulate what I had said in a clear way, so that she would understand what I was saying. Once I restated my premise, I fell into a painful reflective silence.

I was in a class with a bunch of social justice advocates, and no one stood up for me. One student was a Critical Race Theorist, two students were progressives basing their work on the John Dewey tradition, one student was doing research on race, one student was a liberal democrat, and the professor was a self-proclaimed Socialist. Yet, none of these supposed allies came to my rescue during this verbal beating. None of the left-leaning social justicers took the risk of critiquing this young lady for her comments. Even the professor failed to stand up for my right to speak in class or my right to respectfully disagree with this female student. Instead, he said nothing. I realized, in this moment, that it was easy for people to talk about noble theories of racial injustice and transforming the world, but it was much harder for individuals to stand up in the face of such injustice to do the work that would transform our collective reality. After class, many of the students came up to me and said things about the girl like, “She was young and immature,” or “Her comment was a reflection on her, not you.” Still, I had the same questions: Why hadn’t they stood up for me during class? What if I would have reacted fully instead of pausing? Had I responded in class, would I have been the talk of the school?

If I had responded in full to Iris’s comment, I knew no one would have referenced her words directly; they merely would have said how disrespectful I had been toward her. As a Black man, I faced the Black standard, which essentially affirms that when Blacks act aggressively, it is a result of our innate anger, but when Whites react, their anger is reasonable because it is not in

their nature to be upset. For the duration of that class, I spoke, but not as openly as I did prior to the incident. I didn't want to be hurt like that again. Later on that semester, I saw Iris in the library, and she and I had a long conversation and about her comment in class. I expressed how the comment hurt me. She responded by apologizing and telling a story. When she was a child, she had been a part of a church that had a mission to make the world a better place. Her father had been an active member of the church. He tragically died. Her family was left dependent on the church, but the church didn't assist her family. Therefore, my comments had invoked feelings she had suppressed. I forgave her, but I was still perplexed by my social justice colleagues.

### **6.6.3 Keepin it Real**

Two years later, I had gone to Dr. Hull and asked her if could I co-teach one of the sections of Social Foundations in Education. She told me that I could teach one of the sections with Greg, and I should enroll in the College Teaching Course, which was a class where we could debrief and discuss educational issues of the week. I was excited about both educational experiences. On one hand, I was going to teach a college course, while receiving feedback from a professor and colleagues. This was going to be a great semester where I would learn if I was cut out for being a professor.

During this semester, I came to class ready and willing to engage in dialogue with my classmates. For this class, there was no textbook or syllabus. The class was based on the dialogical; meaning, class was based on students engaging in dialogue with each other on issues that we would raise organically. I was excited about this class because, for the first time in my

life, I would be in an environment where students all agreed to engage in dialogue. I was extremely excited about the chance to engage in dialogue with my colleagues.

Unfortunately, my experience in this class was as troubling as my prior experiences. Quickly, I learned that four students in the class had a prior academic relationship with Dr. Hull. These students were either currently teaching fellows for the social foundations course, or they were former teaching fellows. Thus, when they spoke in class, she and the other students engaged fully in dialogue with each other. At first, I found that it was difficult for me to keep up because they had a certain way of talking. It was almost as if they were speaking another language. I spent the first few weeks listening and learning how they spoke to one another. As a rule, I spoke sparingly. The semester progressed, and I slowly built the courage to speak regardless of my inability to speak their shared language.

Although my classmates and professor spoke about the “other” and social justice issues pertaining to race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, when I spoke in class about either race or class, my classmates would hardly listen. Their feedback and comments were superficial at best. At worst, they said nothing. Upon the completion of my thoughts, the class would return to the regular flow as if I hadn’t spoken. This frustrated me. After class, I would frequently head to my friend’s office. I would go find Eliada and vent about how my classmates never responded to my comments in class. She always responded with a simple question: “Do you ever ask them why they don’t respond to your comments?” My answer was, “Naw.” She would listen to my rants, and my feeling like I was a second-class citizen in a class full of social justicers. With her calm demeanor, she would return to her original question, and I would offer the same response. The truth is that I didn’t know how to express my feelings in a non-destructive manner, and I

wanted to keep it real. I feared that expressing my self fully could place my graduate career in jeopardy. Thus, I decided to remain quiet in class.

Every Thursday, I hated going to this class. I always arrived late on purpose. When we went on breaks, I would go and wander around the hallways in Posvar Hall and return to class five to ten minutes later as a necessary escape. At the end of class, I was the first one to head out the door. Being in class, I felt melancholy. I would sit and watch my classmates engaging each other in a full dialogue, intellectually pushing and supporting each other. I couldn't help but feel jealous. Why couldn't I be pushed and supported in the same manner by my peers? This frustration slowly subsided, and I just wished that the semester would end. I refused to keep it real. I just kept it real fake.

After teaching my first full day of class independent of Sam, Dr. Dr. Duncan announced that most of our class had called out sick, but they had made a request to her. They wanted to hear their classmate's presentation, but they had asked Dr. Hull if she could present the following week. Dr. Hull made the adjustment requested by the students who were absent, but, in doing so, my presentation would be pushed back to the following week. I was fine with the schedule change because I believed that it would give me more time to prepare my presentation. Then, Duncan announced that this week's presentation would be postponed to the following week. In the meantime, she turned to me, and she asked whether I wanted to discuss the lesson I taught today in class. Excited, I ran to my office to find my teaching materials and the lesson plans I had completed for the class. Then, I presented what I had done in class, the rationale behind my plan, and the students' responses to my class. I received some feedback from my professor and colleagues, which I thought was great. I left class that day imagining that I was

going to present in two weeks, and I would receive feedback from my colleagues in the same way I had that day in class.

The following week, after the specific student presented, that my absent classmates had wanted to be in attendance for, Dr. Hull looked at her schedule of presenters, and she called my name. I quickly corrected her, and I informed her that I was supposed to go. She responded by saying:

Dr. Hull: You presented last week.

Me: Yeah, but it was impromptu. I only presented because no one was here and everyone wanted to hear Tammie's presentation.

Dr. Hull: It was a good presentation.

Me: Yeah, but that was not what I wanted to present and get feedback on.

Dr. Hull: What did you want to get feedback on?

Me: I am working on a paper that I am going to use for my teaching philosophy.

Dr. Hull: Send it around. We'll look at it.

The class ended with me not being able to present my intended presentation. I thought this schedule change was unfair. I was working on a paper, and I was imagining that I would be given the same chance to present my work that my colleagues had received. The presentation that I gave felt like a commercial break. In fact, when I spoke in class, I felt like I was a human-commercial that no one paid attention to. Over the course of the next few weeks, I would fall into a critical silence because I felt valueless.

As I was walking through the hallway, Dr. Hull and I exchanged pleasantries. Her concluding remarks were, "Stop by my office, I am concerned about you performance in the

class.” I was confused, and so I merely responded by accepting her request. We met later that week, and in the meeting, I finally used the advice from Eliada. I told Dr. Hull how I was feeling.

Dr. Hull: Nosakhere, I am concerned with your performance in the class.

Me: [I pause] Well, Dr. Hull, I feel like I am not valued in class. Whenever I speak in class, no one responds to any of my comments, but when other people respond there is a rich discourse between students.

Dr. Hull: Do you think you could make your comments a little more inviting?

Me: Inviting?

Dr. Hull: Yes, sometimes you say things in class and we don’t know what to say.

Me: I just feel like the point of talking in class is for students ask me questions, so I can express my thoughts more clearly or make comments on points of contention.

Dr. Hull: I think if you bring this up to your classmates; it would be interesting to here their responses.

Me: Ok.

I left the meeting still thinking that it was meaningless to speak in the class. Also, I was happy that the class was nearing an end. I figured I wasn’t going to speak in class because it would just go on deaf ears again. Therefore, I was content with keeping it fake, an educational stance I would take in the last class.

Dr. Hull bought pizza, soda, cookies, and other snacks for the last class. We ate, and then we gave her feedback on the class. In my mind, I was thinking that all I had to do was get through these last few hours, and this class would be over. Everyone in the class shared a story affirming a common theme among my classmates: “This was the best class that they had ever had in their graduate experience.” After everyone spoke, there was an uncomfortable silence, and

Dr. Hull ended with a question directed at me: “Nosakhere, do you have anything to say?” I paused, and I allowed the nervousness to move from my heart throughout my body. With a clearing of my throat and President Obama’s introductory phrase of “Well,” I would lay out my severe discontentment with the class and my classmates.

Me: I sat in this class all semester. I have to admit this was one of the worst experiences I have ever had in graduate school. In most of my classes, students and professors have ignored my comments as if I have said nothing. But, this class, I had different expectations because you all are the social justice advocates in the School of Education. I hear you all talk about social justice, but haven’t seen you all do social justice. Throughout this whole class, you have treated me like a dog, but I can’t even say that because I see how some people treat dogs. You all treat me like a stray dog that walks near you, and you refuse to give it eye contact because you think it would bite you. When I speak in class, you never respond, and you never give me eye contact. After I finish talking, you return to talking as if I never spoke. When I spoke in this class, I felt like a commercial break, but not like a Super Bowl commercial because people pay attention to those. I felt like a commercial break on a regular show. You know, when it comes on you run to the bathroom or the fridge? That one.

[I pause.]

Me: This class felt like a T.V. show that had a script and main characters on it. In fact, the class reminded me of Seinfeld. In that show, there are four main characters: Jerry, Elaine, George, and Kramer. The whole show is about these four people, at times, there are people who make guest appearances, but, for the most part, the show is about the four characters. When I sat in this class, it felt like the class was only about a selected few. A



few of us weren't a part of the main narrative. We were sometimes allowed a chance to make a guest appearance, but for the most part the show was about the four main characters. For me, I was not a main character or a guest star who made an appearance, I was a commercial break that no one paid attention to when it came on.

[I pause.]

Me: Throughout this class, I heard many of you all talk about Social Justice, but I never have seen you all enact it or do it. For example, a few years ago, I sat in a class where a student turned to me and said that I made her "sick." She straight up disrespected me and infringed upon my right to speak freely in class. I was the "Other" that you all talk about, but none of y'all stood up for me. Lawrence and Sally, both of you were there, and you said nothing. Even Kevin was in the class, and he said nothing, too. However, if we read something or a topic comes up in class everyone is ready to speak about how it is oppressive. But, when oppression is in y'all's face, y'all don't say anything.

[I pause.]

Me: This class reminds me of my favorite movie when I was a kid, Friday. In the movie there was a guy name Debo, who was the oppressor of the movie. Then, you had Smokie, played by Chris Tucker, and Craig played by the rapper Ice Cube. In one scene, Smokie is in the street selling drugs to two Mexicans. He looks down the street and runs back to Craig's porch, and he says, "Debo," and Craig says, "What?" Smokie says, "Debo!" Smokie and Craig take off the jewelry and put it in a little box and hide it. Red, who was also sitting with Craig and Smoke on the porch says, "I'm just gonna tuck mine in" [referring to a gold chain he's wearing]. Debo comes up to the step and says, "What y'all got on my forty?" He was referring to a 40 oz of liquor that people in working class

communities drink. Essentially, Debo wanted them to pay for his alcohol for the day. Everyone responds to him by denying that they had any money. Debo walks over to Smokie and grabs his pockets to check if he has any money. He turns to Red and asks him same question, “What do you got on my 40?” Red says, “Nothing.” Debo pulls his collar back and sees the chain, and he snatches it off of his neck, and then he leaves.

[I pause.]

Me: Smokie stand up and says, “Let’s jump’em.” and Craig says, “Sit down.” Smokie says, “I got mind control over Debo. He be like shut up, when he leave, I be talkin again. I be talkin again. I be talkin again.”

[I pause.]

Me: When that incident happened, many of you all came up to me and said many things, but none of you said anything in class. When he leave, I be talkin again. When he leave, I be talkin again. But, when the oppressor was in the room, nobody said anything, that’s not social justice. I’m telling you about something I have done. I stood up many times knowing that when I did I was risking everything. I’m saying y’all gotta do that. I am saying live up to your social justice ideas. Do social justice. Don’t just talk about it.

After I spoke, my classmates expressed their joy at having me in the class. Some expressed remorse for my feeling the way I felt. Others posed the question: What could they have done in that situation? I remember thinking it’s not my responsibility to tell an individual how to act justly. It’s up to them to discern the proper action, and to ensure that action is in line with their words and personal philosophy. The class ended with people asking me if they could talk to me privately, which I was open to. Other people were mad and, thereafter, only spoke to me in the hallways in a defense manner. I had finally kept it real.

## **6.7 SOCIAL FOUNDATIONS IN EDUCATION**

### **6.7.1 Co-teaching**

In January 2010, I started teaching the course Social Foundations in Education. This experience was significant for me because it was my first opportunity teaching at the university level. In the past, I had dreamt of teaching such a course. As a student I had prepared for classroom discussions with the intent of preparing myself to be a professor in the future. As a teacher for this course, I had the chance to experiment with my pedagogical practice. The semester began with me co-teaching with a fellow graduate student named Sam.

### **6.7.2 Lack of Preparation**

In the beginning of the semester, I went to my colleague Sam, and I asked if he and I could meet to prepare for class. My intentions were to meet with him to discuss the chapter we were supposed to read for class, to review the students' weekly responses to the reading, and to organize a lesson plan to execute that week. He responded to my request by saying, "If you want to meet me before class that's fine. I get here around 2:30 on Tuesdays and Thursdays." I remember being confused by his notion of preparation, because the class began at 3 p.m. Essentially, we would only have 30 minutes to prepare for a class that had 50 students. Because I assumed Sam knew what he was doing, I decided not to push him on further plans for class preparation. Instead, I decided just to follow his lead.

One day, as we were walking down the hallway toward the class, Sam informed me of the lesson plan for class that day. In my mind, I thought this is a terrible way for him to

communicate his plan for class. When we got to class, he began the classroom discussion by saying, “I don’t have anything planned for us to talk about today; I just wanted to get your responses on this week’s reading.” The class sat in silence until a brief dialogue began. He would ask questions and the students would respond to him with instantaneous responses, similar to a group of people responding to a person’s Facebook status. After the status-like conversation, Sam broke the students into small groups to discuss the readings. After he spoke, I thought to myself, he is not taking the preparation for this class seriously. His lack of preparation could potentially have a detrimental impact on these students who are learning how to become future educators; interestingly, the students never complained about his lax teaching or his non-preparation for the class. Instead, they, too, took a nonchalant/non-serious approach to the class.

### **6.7.3 Non-Reading Literates**

During small group discussions, students were supposed to engage in rich dialogue about the weekly readings. The plan was for students to discuss their personal experiences based on their observations in local high schools or based on their lived experiences as it related to the reading. As an educator, I had no problem with students sharing their personal experiences, but in many cases, I found students’ conversations to be nothing more than mere chatter. These students, who were majority white, had a negative perception about Black students, who they commonly referred to as “disadvantaged students.” The future educators in my class talked about how “these students” could not read and write, and how all they wanted to do was have sex, sell drugs, and engage in other non-productive activities.

After one particular conversation about “disadvantaged students,” I decided to interrupt the conversation. I interrupted not with the intent of educating these students on why Blacks

students from working-class communities engage in self-destructive behaviors or on the reasons why they might not be able to read and write; rather I wanted to encourage the students to relate their ideas to the text, so we could develop solutions to the problems based on their observations.

Me: Wow, I really think the conversation brings up problems within the educational system as it relates to the education of working-class students or as you call them “disadvantaged students.” Where in the text does the author address these concerns?

[Students remain silent and begin to look at each other and through the book. One student breaks the silence.]

Male student: I’m going to be honest I didn’t read this week.

Before leaving the small group, I posed questions to the students, and I requested that they take the class period to review the text. These students were living a contradiction; on one hand, the “disadvantaged” students didn’t read because they couldn’t read; on the other hand, the Social Foundations students could read, but decided not to read. As the semester progressed, I realized that many of these students weren’t concerned about helping “disadvantaged students,” they just wanted to get jobs.

#### **6.7.4 Teaching Class**

Sam and I had agreed for me to teach for a two-week period. During this time frame, I was determined to restructure the class and to push these students to think and read critically. My first class started with me standing in front of the class. I said, “Ladies and gentlemen, take everything off of your desk. Put away your blackberries, blueberries, Chuckberries, and Halieberries because we are going to have a quiz.” The students all had a look of shock on their faces. Some students even looked at me with great displeasure, their faces said, “Whom does this

guy think he is, giving us a quiz?” After a few seconds of silence, I said, “Didn’t you hate it when a professor gave you a quiz to see if you read or not? Didn’t you hate it when a teacher asked you a question about the reading so you could just regurgitate the answers from the text?” The students’ faces illustrated a state of confusion. Pencils and pens were in their hands, and they were ready for me to ask a question for them to answer. Then, I informed the students that we were going to do things differently today; we were going to have a “different type of quiz.” This different type of quiz was one where students would pose a problem and a question, which would be used for the classroom discussion.

#### **6.7.5 Over preparation**

When I taught, I was determined not to teach like Sam. I was going to create an educational environment where all of the students would engage in dialogue about the concepts presented in the reading and offer their personal reflections within this context. In my preparation for teaching the class, I considered two issues: students didn’t read and/or they were disinterested in the weekly readings. When students didn’t read, they were unable to participate in the classroom discussion from a textual perspective. If students were interested in the reading, they would only engage in dialogue, and they would let me know they had read. Hence, I decided to use popular culture examples because it would allow students who hadn’t read a chance to participate in the discussion from a textual perspective, and the pop culture examples would give contemporary relevance to complex concepts within the texts. Doing the aforementioned, I created a rich classroom experience where students were fully engaged, but I never had enough time to complete my lesson plans. At the end of the two weeks, I realized I planned too many activities, which took away from an opportunity to engage in an in-depth learning experience. In retrospect,

I should have stepped up earlier, and I should have requested more days to teach during the semester.

## **6.8 GRADUATE SCHOOL SUMMARY**

### **6.8.1 Personal**

When I entered the University of Pittsburgh, I was a man who had to decide whether to live as an object in life or as a subject. For the first few years, I lived as an object, fearing that I would not have the chance to accomplish my dream. This fear carried over into my relationship with Ann. The academic struggles in my life impacted my personal life. During the semester when I took Core and Statistics, I overly focused on school. The only priority that mattered in my life was school. I wanted to finish school at any cost. I broke up with Ann because I did not believe that I would be able to love her.

### **6.8.2 Educational**

Educationally, I was constantly struggling to become a *stone cold scholar*. I remember when I met with Dr. Duncan, who thought that my GRE score was an indicator that I should not be admitted into the program. Instead of giving up, I decided that I was going to continue struggling to make myself a better student. I spent countless hours reading in the library. When I came to class, I was ready to engage in rich dialogues with my classmates about the educational issues of our time. However, many of my experiences in graduate school consisted of my attempting to

engage with students who did the minimum, who read enough just to get by. In class, I felt oppressed because I did not affirm the status quo. Many of my colleagues verbally punished me for maintaining a different perspective. I learned to keep quiet in class, which was a manifestation of my fatalistic attitudes towards my colleagues and the educational process in general. As the years progressed, I focused only on my own research agenda; thus intellectually abdicating my classroom experience.

### **6.8.3 Societal**

Societally, my experience with the Irvis Fellows was also interesting. In the beginning of my experience, the majority of the fellows, including myself, had a noble dream of reforming the educational system. During the graduate school process, we slowly began to release those dreams in order to become a part of the power structure that we critiqued. This experience with the fellows was disappointing because we had a chance to develop a framework that could have led to meaningful change inside of the school of education; instead, we chose to focus on our respective research agendas. I believe this was a tragedy, because we represented some of the greatest minds in our programs, but we refused to fight.

### **6.8.4 Dialectics of the Blueberry Muffin**

Reflecting on my graduate school experience, I believe my time at the University of Pittsburgh was pivotal in my life. Here was a chance for me to obtain a doctorate degree, which would give me the chance to accomplish my dream. What would have happened had I screamed racism when I was placed in both Statistics and Core? I would not have made it past the fall semester. I



would have lost my scholarship and I never would become an Irvis Fellow. What if I would have married Anna, at that time? She and I were having serious problems that began with my academic problems; these problems could have led to my focusing on saving our relationship rather than on accomplishing my educational goals. If I had gotten married then, I may have either given up my dream or it would have taken a much longer time for me to accomplish it. What if I had believed Dr. Duncan who believed that I was not Ph.D program material? If I had believed her, I would have left the university or internalized this belief, which would have resulted in my failing out of school.

Despite my struggles at the University of Pittsburgh, I was given a chance to dream. When my academic strength was questioned, I went to the library and read as many books and journal articles as I could. When professors and students mistreated me, I did not scream racism. I decided to work harder. Although my personal life suffered, and I lost a woman that I cared for; I gained something that no can take from me—confidence.

## **7.0 INTRODUCTION TO TRANSCONCEPTUALIZATION**

### **7.1 AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL REFLECTION AS A PROCESS**

Autobiographical writing is a process whereby I underwent a deep reflective process. At times, I journeyed through painful reflections about my life, which were secrets from my past. Some of my experiences allowed me to remember the heroic moments of my life, while other examples showed my villainous actions towards others. This total understanding of my life as both subject and object allowed me to understand my flaws and strengths. Understanding the aforementioned is a humbling process because I had to admit to the reader and to myself that I am not a perfect being; instead, I am merely unfinished. According to Freire (2001), to be human is to know that you are “conditioned” and having the desire to move beyond the previous conditions that prevent you from living life a free person (p. 54). This struggle to move beyond previous conditions implies that a person is “incomplete,” which implies there is a “permanent movement of search” (p. 57). Essentially, a person lives life in constant pursuit of the ills that prevented him from living as a free person. Admitting that I am unfinished allows me to work toward the continuous process of becoming a better person, student-educator (or educator-student), and citizen-leader.

## **7.2 FREIREAN ANALYSIS OF MY AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL REFLECTIONS**

### **7.2.1 Freirean Concepts (The Personal)**

In the past, I have grappled with fatalism and hope. Within a fatalistic context, I was willing to capitulate to the status quo because I thought I was not good enough. However, there was always someone in my life that loved me enough not to allow me to lose a sense of hope. Freire declares that hope is rooted in “incompleteness” and is “a constant search” with other people (p. 91). My teachers and mentors showed me that if I wanted to live my dream, then I had to fight for it and move beyond my previous failure. According to Freire (2004), “Dreams are visions for which one fights. Their realization cannot take place easily, without obstacles. It implies, on the contrary, advances reversals, and at times lengthy” (p. 32). As a student, I developed hope that I would have the chance to live my dream, but doing so was only because of the help of my others. They helped me see my talents and assisted me in developing a vision for myself.

### **7.2.2 Freirean Concepts (The Educational)**

Freire (2006) describes the above educational experience the banking method of education (BME). As a participant in the BME, I experienced teachers who viewed the classroom as experience process where they would give knowledge to me, which I was supposed to “patiently receive, memorize, and repeat” (p. 72). Schools were training grounds to prepare me for life as an object in society. Freire affirms the previous comment by saying, “The educated individual is the adapted person because he or she is better fit for the world” (p. 74). This educational experience saw me as lacking the ability to be human, and I was faced with having to adapt to or

rebel against the educational experience. My adaptation took the form of me engaging verbal violence and sometimes physical violence towards others in the educational environment. (The implication here is that these actions may have felt like agency but continually reinforced your being positioned as an object?)

### **7.2.3 Freirean Concepts (The Societal)**

During life, I have always sought to end the conditions in institutions that limited my and others' agency. According to Freire (2005), oppression causes the oppressed to accept their situation because they believe they cannot change it. He says,

Gradually, without even realizing the loss, he relinquishes his capacity for choice; he is expelled from the orbit of decisions. Ordinary men do not perceive the tasks of the time the latter are interpreted by an 'elite' and presented in the form of recipes, or prescriptions. And when men try to save themselves by following prescription, they drown in leveling anonymity, without hope and without faith, domesticated and adjusted.  
(p. 5)

Accepting oppression meant I was fine with living as an object within these institutions, which caused me to live in silence. Although I accepted my oppression, there was always an incident that forced me to question my life within the personal, educational, and societal contexts. I began to assert my own agency through the help of mentors and other times on my own, which had a profound impact on my agency. I enacted this new form of agency in a form to assist in the betterment of institution. In the process of questioning my life, I began to struggle to assist in the betterment of the institution I was a part of.

## 7.3 TRANSCONCEPTUALIZATION

### 7.3.1 The Model African Union: The Chicken, The Rooster, and The Egg

In the spring of 2010, I attended the Annual Model African Union Conference held in Washington D.C. This conference is a stimulation of the annual African Union meetings that occur in Africa. Universities from across the country represent African country within different committees. My committee was the union government committee, and our task to develop a framework for the eventual continental-wide government structure. As a history major at Lincoln University, my focus area was the 1960s liberation movement in Africa. During the 1960s, there were rigorous debates on whether or not newly-independent African countries should organize itself into a continental wide government. This debate had two streams of thought: the Monrovia Bloc and the Casablanca Bloc. The Monrovia Bloc believed that African countries should focus on economic development first, which should begin with regional unity; this bloc favor a gradual approach to African unity. Conversely, the Casablanca Bloc declared that African countries should politically first, which had to begin with a continental-wide unity; this bloc favored a radical approach to African unity. In 2007, the African Union debated whether Africa should unity into a continental-wide government, and the same Casablanca and Monrovia Bloc arguments were presented. The conference ended with African countries tabling the debate for another conference.

I entered the Model African Summit knowing my colleagues would present these conventional arguments about African unity, but I decided I was going move *beyond* the traditional arguments and move *towards* new ideas that would assist in the development of a better Africa. Essentially, African unity debate pose the age old question: what came first the

chicken or the egg? Instead of engaging in this binary debate, I decided to transconceptually answer this chicken and egg question. Neither the chicken nor the egg came first; the chicken and the rooster came together out of love to make the egg, which represents the future. At this Model African Union conference, I declared that it is not important whether economic or political unity should come first, but essential to Africa was us working together out of love to move beyond the ills that impede African development. With this proclamation, my colleagues were open to working toward to develop a resolution affirming the need for continental government that took into consideration both bloc ideas on African unity. At the end of the conference, the resolution was passed with overwhelming support.

The experience in the Model of African Union Conference was the beginning of what I call Transconceptualization. At the conference, I understood the history of the debates pertaining African unity, while at the same time I was able to get my colleagues to move beyond it. Once we were able to *move beyond* it, we able to *work together out of love* develop a resolution for the development of a better *future* for Africa. The essence of Transconceptualization is to understand the contradictions in the past and contemporary lived experience, while working out of love to move toward a new life or future. It is important to note, Transconceptualization infers that life is a process where the individual or humanity in general never stops personally, educationally, and societally growing because the individual and humanity are all unfinished seeking a deeper unfinishedness. Transconceptualization interrelated to Freirean framework because within the personal, educational, and societal there are past, present, and future; hence, the individual through reflection on the past can begin to act different in the present, while offering a new life free from the contradictions of the past to live as a new person in the future.

### 7.3.2 Definition of Transconceptualization

Transconceptualization is a philosophical framework seeking to understand how individuals, schools, and society are interconnected whose foundation is in love. Additionally, it seeks to transform concepts that intellectually imprison the oppressed—specifically, Africana people. Transconceptualization combines two words—transform and conceptualization. According to the Oxford Dictionary (2011), etymologically the word transform comes from the Latin word *trans*, which means “beyond” (para. 1). The definition of transform is “To change in character or condition; to alter in function or nature” (para. 3). On the other hand, concept comes from the Latin word, “*concipere*” which means to conceive (para 1). Conceptualization is, “To form a concept or idea” (para. 1). The combination of the trans and conceptualization creates *transconceptualization*—a process that seeks to understand the contradictions past and present, while using love to move beyond contradictions towards new life.

Transconceptualization engages the following concepts as interrelated in the struggle to liberate the individual and group from oppression: history, culture, education, politics, sociology, geography, psychology, and economics. Karenga (2002) transconceptualizes traditional disciplines to meet the needs of Africana people; in addition, when he writes he is writing from Black Cultural Nationalist perspective that is rooted in the 1960s Black Power Movement. The work of Karenga to transform traditional ideas impacting Africana people is an important contribution, which calls on scholars to develop new ideas that liberate oppressed-people from dehumanizing societal structures. Adding to the discourse, Stewart (Zulu & Carroll 2008) talks about how “Africana Studies specialists” do not blindly bind themselves to traditional disciplines because doing so prevents the possibility of developing “alternative strategies for addressing human problems” (p. 87). Stewart provides a complex rationale for what he calls the

*transdisciplinary approach* in the following two passages:

In introducing each subject we tried to acquaint readers with the history of the development of the discipline and how interpretations of Black life and culture have been distorted. We then attempted to indicate how progressive scholars have challenged the conventional wisdom and proposed alternative ways of examining the same phenomena using assumptions and techniques emanating from Black's own interpretation of experiences. (Zulu & Carroll, p. 88)

Stewart believes that traditional disciplines provide universal ways of thinking and acting, which limit scholars of their transformative possibility. Furthermore, if the oppressed are going to liberate themselves from their oppression, then they have to break away from traditional ideas that either limit or prevent personal, educational, and societal transformations. Although the works of Karenga and other Africana scholars inspired Transconceptualization, it is a philosophical framework that starts with the individual, and it seeks to address issues pertaining to the personal, educational, and societal.

### **7.3.3 Foundations of Transconceptualization**

The works of Freire present the framework seeking to understand personal, societal, and educational contradictions and solutions to eradicating them. The works of Karenga, hooks, West, and King are used because they seek an Africana experience and human experience centered in love. Transconceptualization does not seek to present these ideas as universal truth. Instead, these authors' ideas should be understood as contributions to the framework reconceived to fit within the contemporary time, space, and cultural context.



### **7.3.4 Beyond Freire Towards Transconceptual Ideal in the Personal Context**

Freire discusses life in the personal context as the struggle of living a fatalistic or hopeful life. The individual has to move from a fatalistic life where he/she existed either as permanent subject (oppressor) or permanent object (oppressed) towards a hopeful life as both subject-object in life. In other words, the oppressed-class move from conceptualizing their life as predetermined to see it as unfinished. When life is seen as unfinished, the oppressed can be hopeful that they can make a new life different from the fatalistic life of the past.

hooks (1991) engages the love discourse from a spiritual perspective. As a result, her notion of love is dependent on knowing God. In other words, in order to love a person must know God, because knowing God allows the individual to move beyond the pain of the past. hooks references various religious traditions as all having love as the foundation of the sacred scriptures, which affirms the notion that to love is to know God. According to hooks (2001):

The huge majority of black folks who identity as Christian or as believers in other religious faiths....need to return to sacred writings about love and embrace these as showing us the way to lead our lives. (p. 54)

For hooks, in order for personal transformation to occur, there is a need for individuals to turn to love. Love is the tool that an individual can use to resolve the contradictions that limit their human potential. hooks discussed the contradiction that both Black men and women suffer through as a result of not loving. On one hand, Black men tend to develop a “hard pose” persona that leads to self-destruction; conversely, women tend to develop a diva-like persona, which also leads to a self-destruction (hooks, 2001). Essentially, hooks work implies that where there is no love, there is no life, but where there is love, there is life that is aligned with God that moves beyond the contradiction of past and present.

West's (2004) notion of personal love is rooted in "self-examination" (p. 208). West pulls from the Socratic tradition to define personal love, which asserts that the unexamined life is not a life worth living; since West is coming from a theological perspective, it can be implied that all life is worth living. Thus, an individual has to engage in reflection as a precursor to action. West's provides the following as a rationale for personal reflection:

This love of wisdom is a perennial pursuit into the dark corners of one's own soul, the night alleys of one's society, and the back roads of the world in order to grasp the deep truths about one's soul, society, and world. This pursuit shatters one's petty idols, false illusions, and seductive fetishes; it undermines blind conformity, glib complacency, and pathetic cowardice. (p. 208)

To love oneself is to understand the contradictions that limit personal growth. This process allows an individual the chance to act differently in the future. Without it the individual is not able to live in the future as a transformed-being.

According to King (1998), self-love is important to a personal transformation. He defined that self-love is the accepting yourself. King acknowledges it is a difficult process for a person to undertake, but it is necessary. When an individual does accept himself, he/she will constantly seek to be like others; an implication can be made that an individual seeking to be like other people are engaging self-hatred. Thus, King presents self-acceptance in a theological context, which he believed began by realizing the God given "tools" a person possessed. For King, the term tools can also be understood as talents. King proclaims the following:

And you know what loving yourself also means? It means that you've got to accept yourself. So many people are busy trying to be somebody else. God gave all of us something significant. And we must pray every day, asking God to help us to accept

ourselves. That means everything. Too many Negroes are ashamed of themselves, ashamed of being black. A Negro got to rise up and say from the bottom of his soul, I am somebody. I have a rich, noble, and proud heritage. However exploited and however painful my history has been, I'm black, but I'm black and beautiful. This is what we've got to say. We've got to accept ourselves. And we must pray, Lord, Help me to accept myself every day; help me to accept my tools (King, pp.123-124).

Here King presents self-love as the act of accepting yourself through understanding personal talents. I would extend King's notion of self-love to also mean the development of a dream. If a person realizes his/her talent but never organizes his/her life to enact those talents in society, then those God-give talents will be vain individual and societal contexts. Therefore, a person should develop a dream.

Karenga's (2002) notion of the personal is rooted in the Black Power Movement of the 1960s. His ideas of the personal were largely informed by his struggle to revolutionize American society to be free from oppressive forces impacting Blacks and other oppressed-groups. When he conceptualizes the personal, he uses the term "self," which is mainly defined with the collective historical experience of people of Africana descent. For him, an individual has to be "self-understanding and be self-asserting" (p. 4), which he defines as:

African thinking, acting, producing, creating, building speaking and problem-solving in their own unique way in the world. This concept of which is also called agency or the capacity and will to act, is extended to mean the capacity and will to make history, create culture and address critical human concerns in the meaningful and successful manner. (p.

4)

Explicit in his statement is agency, which is the essential element to Karenga's work. He wants the individual to understand the experience of Africana people from the perspective of what his/her people have done in the world; instead of viewing the Africana experience as being centered around what has happened to the people (Karenga, 2002). Inherent in Karenga's notion of the self in the collective context is the need for the people to move beyond a fatalistic collective toward a hopeful life. Within a Transconceptual framework, he presents the individual as needing to understand himself/herself as a member of the Africana experience. His notion of agency for Africana people can be used within an individual context too; thus, life within the personal context means he/she must realize who he/she was in the past and is in the present and work to develop a new self for future. Karenga's notion of the personal does not explicitly use the term of love, but is the movement to transform the self for the development of a better self in the future is love in action.

### **7.3.5 Beyond Freire Towards Transconceptual Ideal in the Educational Context**

Second, within the educational context seeks to move beyond fatalistic schooling experience towards a transformative educational process. Within the fatalistic schooling experience, teachers are the permanent subject in the classroom and school, while students exists a permanent objects. Conversely, the transformative educational process sees teachers and students as co-learners (subject-object unity); in other words, the teachers speak and listen to students and students speak and listen to teachers in the dialogical process. According to Freire (2008)

The teacher is no longer the merely the-one-who teaches, but the one who is himself taught in a dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. (p. 80)

In the transformative educational process, teachers and students are seeking understanding of particular concepts, which requires both seriously engage the process. Teachers have to prepare for class by articulating the author's intentions of the concepts represented in the text and also related the text to lived experience of the students in the class and humanity in general. Students should prepare for class by reading the weekly reading materials, and they should read supporting materials to enrich the classroom discussions; additionally, students should be willing to bring the personal experiences and the experience of humanity in general to classroom and attempt to relate it to the text.

hooks offers ideas of love in an educational context. In her discussion of “engaged pedagogy” she discusses the need for there to be a relationship between student and teacher where both are “leaders and facilitators” of the learning process. This affirms the notions that teachers can learn from students and students can learn from teachers, but both should take a journey of meaning making within the classroom setting. Thus, a teacher should not just cover material he/she deems important; instead, he/she students be able to make information relevant to their life (hooks, 2010, p. 19). hooks proclaims,

When we take risks, we participate mutually in the work of creating a learning community. We discover together that we can be vulnerable in the space of learning, that we can take risks. Engaged pedagogy emphasized mutual participation because it is the movement of ideas, exchanged by everyone, that forges a meaningful working relationship between everyone in the classroom. This process helps establish the integrity of the teacher, while simultaneously encouraging students to work with integrity (hooks, p. 21).

The educational process presented by hooks has love as its foundation, which creates the possibility of students developing “independent thinking” which allows students to “finding [their] unique voices;” doing the aforementioned is an “empowering” experience for students (hooks, p. 21). Another way to view hooks’ notion of educational love is that it is a process that encouraged to develop personal dreams and understanding how the classroom experience can assist them in making it a reality.

West’s notion of educational love can be implied in his writing, but it is not explicitly stated. Within West’s writings, he asserts the need for the Black intellectual to be connected to his/her community, which means he/she has to understand and incorporate the traditions of his/her people within his/her intellectual life. West and hooks critique Black intellectuals in the Africana Studies, who reject or do not use the religious and musical traditions of Black people because both “play a fundamental role in the history of Black people” (p. 38). West believes that not using these traditions within Black scholarship causes Black intellectuals to divide from the Black masses. West (1999) believes that the Black intellectual is too “preoccupied with Euro-American” culture and seeking an “escape from the negative stigma of being Black,” which are symptoms of self-hatred (p. 305). Hence, to be a “successful” intellectual means that the intellectual has to reject the cultural traditions of his community. West says:

[T]he ‘successful’ black intellectual capitulates, often uncritically, to the prevailing paradigms and research programs of the white bourgeois academy, and the ‘unsuccessful’ black intellectual remains encapsulated within the parochial discourse of Afro-American intellectual life. (pp. 305-306)

West's assertion that Blacks should incorporate music and religion within their work addresses the disconnection between intellectuals and the Black community; using religion and music will make concepts presented in their writing accessible to the Black masses. West's ideas are transferable to educational love because it implies that an educator should consider the traditions of his/her students in pedagogical practice. Considering the aforementioned means educators do two things: searches for cultural exemplars to content presented in the weekly reading or allows students the opportunity relate the content to their cultural experience. Educators who do this enact love in the classroom.

Karenga conceptualizes the educational within an Ancient African historical context, which he calls the "activist-intellectual tradition" (p. 7). The educational process within this context seeks to assist students understanding how they can become "commit[ed] to using their knowledge and skills in the service of the people" (p.7). Karenga conceptualizes the purpose of education as:

Therefore, in these and other African societies, the commitment to learning is based on the conception of knowledge that values knowledge not simply for knowledge sake, but rather knowledge for human sake. In a word, knowledge is considered important not simply to enjoy oneself or even simply get a job, but because of its value and role in improving the human condition and enhancing the human project or human future (pp.7-8).

Education within the activist-intellectual tradition is a process seeking to understand and develop new forms of knowledge that can assist in the development of a better world. Here Karenga blurs the lines between educational and societal. He believes that an individual learns to assist in the develop a better world. Thus is both educational and societal of love because the individual will

begin to see how his/her educational experience should be used not just for his/her personal benefit, but it should be used for the benefit of Africana people and humanity.

### **7.3.6 Beyond Freire Towards Transconceptual Ideal in the Societal Context**

Third, within the societal context, the individual should seek to eradicate the contradiction that dehumanizes and limits human potential. An oppressive society exists because there is a contradiction between the oppressor-class and oppressed-class; the oppressor-class develops the societal vision and oppressed-class accepts that vision. The oppressor-class frame themselves as the citadel of humanity; when the oppressed-class accept the aforementioned, they engage in prescribed praxis (relating and acting like the oppressor-class) or fatalistic praxis (reflecting and acting absent as an object). The oppressed-class has to struggle non-violently to transform society to liberate themselves and oppressor-class from the contradiction. The Transconceptual Ideal in the societal context, the oppressed-class and oppressor-class seek to understand the previous societal organization toward a new society where there is no oppressor or oppressed; instead, there are only transformed individuals seeking to build a new world together.

Societal love is the process where individuals work to assist in the development of a better society. The individual who engages in this form of love is selfless (agape) because he/she will ask themselves how his /her talents can be used to assist in the development of a better society. The individual will use his/her educational experiences and skills to assist in the development of a better society. According to King & Washington (1992)

And I'm simply saying that more and more, we've got to begin to ask questions about the whole society. We are called upon to help the discouraged beggars in life's marketplace.



But one day we must come to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring. It means that questions must be raised (p 176).

Adding to King's notion of societal transformation, a person must turn his/her dream into a lifework both as citizen and worker. As citizen, he/she should join associations and/or religious institutions whose mission is centered on transformation society. As a professional, an individual should chose a career that allows him/her the best opportunity to fulfill his/her dream while helping make a better world.

In the struggle to better world, hooks returns to her central argument that love should be the foundation. Her notion of societal love is rooted in the Africana experience, but it is not limited to just a struggle to free people of Africana descent. She believes that love is creates the possibility for Blacks to healing from experiences with dehumanization. According to hooks,

Love remains for black people a crucial path to healing. In retrospect it is clear that if we do not create a foundation of love on which to build our struggle for freedom and self-determination, forces of evil, of greed, and of corruption undermined and ultimately destroy all our efforts

Here hooks is attempting to show how a loveless struggle will not assist society in moving beyond contradictions of the past and present. hooks declares that, "it is not too late to return to love" because doing so allows Black people to understand the possible of a "full and complex humanity" (pp. 16). Love gives individuals the "strength to go forward" to break from the pain of the past because it "redeems, reconciles, renews weary spirits, and saves lost souls" (hooks, p. 17). hooks' work affirms that love in a societal context means moving beyond societal contradictions that limited human potential towards developing a new society that seeks to address the contradictions of that time.

West's affirms the notion that in order to transform society love has to be at the center of the struggle. His notion of love is similar to King and hooks, who both conceptualize love within the theological tradition of Christianity. West differentiates himself from hooks and King by inserting the prophetic tradition, which ideal that is future focused. For West to love is a part of the prophetic tradition because it offers the chance to transform a society trapped in contradictions to one where the contradictions of the past and present are resolved. West (2004) asserts

The prophetic commitment to justice is foundational in both Christianity and Islam. The gospel of love taught by Jesus and the message of mercy of Muhammad both build on the Jewish invention of the prophetic love of justice. The profound tradition should inform and embolden the struggle against the callous indifferent of the plutocratic elites of the American empire about the suffering of our own poor and oppressed peoples (p.19).

West's comments' explicitly state that societal love is a tool to transform society. West description of the prophetic tradition implies that in order love, the individual has assist in the development of a better society. West's notion of the prophetic offers the individual the chance of envisioning a way he/she can use their talents to assist in the development of a better society.

Societal love is the expressed by an individual being an agent of transformation. Within an occupational context, the individual should work to advance his/her field, while considering how his/her profession can be used to assist in the development of a better world. In addition, where in the individual notices the institution is dehumanizing people within it, he/she should struggle eradicate those conditions. An individual agency should not just be limited working to advance his/her profession or eradicating contradictions within an institution, he/she should also participate in organization, association, and/or religious organizations that seek to assist in the

development of a better world. An educated individual has skills, experiences, and knowledge that could be used within these organizations that advance the work to make the world a better place. In sum, the individual who engages in societal loves people and world so much that he/she works to eradicate all of the societal ills that prevent other human from enacting their full humanity.

### **7.3.7 The Transconceptual Ideal as Life**

The Transconceptual Ideal centers the personal, educational, and societal on love because it allows an individual to move beyond his/her past and present towards a different future. In the personal context, an individual who loves themselves seeks to know who he/she is by understanding his/her talents. Once the individual understands his/her talents, he/she should begin the process of developing a dream. In other words, to love yourself is means having a purpose in life that aligns with the talents he/she possesses. Love in the educational context means a person is passionate about learning, excited being exposed to new knowledge, engages in dialogue with colleagues and educators, and develops skills to assist him/her in accomplishing the dream, while considering the implications for the development of a better world. With the aforementioned qualities, the individual is ready to turn his/her dream into a lifework in society. In the societal context, love is expressed by individuals using their educational knowledge and skills to assist in the development of better world in a local, national, and global context. Transconceptualization is a process where an individual is aware of his/her unfinishedness, but is willing to move beyond the contradictions that prevent him/her from becoming fully human.

#### **7.4 BEYOND THE BLUEBERRY MUFFIN: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

As I look back on the blueberry muffin and the man, I often wonder what both represented in my life. The muffin represents the temporary state of life. In other words, no experience last forever. Conversely, the man represented the subject-object contradiction in life. A person can live as subject in life and an event or change in environment might cause him/her become an object in life. However, all experiences are temporary, which means there are always going to be more contradictions to resolve as life progresses. My life has been a constant struggle to move beyond past contradictions that prevent me from living a full life.

Personally, the individual has to realize whether he/she is living a fatalistic or hopeful life; the individual who is living a fatalistic life doesn't have dreams; rather he/she merely adapts to life. The individual living a hopeful life has a dream; he/she acts in the world as an agent seeking to transform himself/herself as a precursor to transforming the world. The muffin within the personal context represents the temporality of life in that the muffin rarely fulfills you completely, but simply satisfies you in the meantime until the next meal. A person may be living a hopeful or fatalistic life, but neither state is permanent. Hence, the person living a hopeful life must struggle to develop a deeper hopefulness, while the person living a fatalistic life has the potential to strive towards a hopeful life. To choose to fatalism or hope informs the ongoing contradiction we must confront throughout different contexts and stages of our life.

In the educational context, the person has to decide whether he/she wants to receive information only or whether he/she wants to make meaning out of the information. The individual, who is the receiver of the information, will only adapt to the world. Conversely, the individual who makes meaning out of the information will be able to use it to develop a life mission. The muffin within the educational context views education as a lifelong process. In

other words, a person might have an educational experience where he/she is making meaning out of information for his/her larger purpose in life, this state can be temporary state; conversely, a person might be a student within an educational experience where he/she is merely the receiver of information, which could prevent him/her from being able to make meaning out of life. Throughout my life, I have been in educational environments where I have been both the receiver of information only and the meaning maker of information.

Within a societal context, the individual accepts oppression or struggles to transform society. The individual who accepts oppression and reflects and acts like his/her oppressor adheres to the status quo. The individual who reflects and acts to humanize the world adheres to a new world where people can live up to their full humanity. The muffin within the societal context represents a temporary participation in the cycle of oppression or a movement toward freedom. A person may engage in a form of praxis that affirms oppression, but an experience might cause him/her to start a movement towards freedom. Conversely, a person may be engaging in a form of praxis that seeks to humanize the world, but an experience might reverse this movement; hence, there is the possibility of enacting a praxis that affirms oppression. In my life, there were times when I sought to assist in the development of a better community, but an experience impeded and at times reversed my movement.

Life is a collection of experiences that make an individual. Each experience is temporary just like the fulfillment of the blueberry muffin. Whether the individual is living a hopeful or fatalistic life is plagued with contradictions that must be resolved in order to move towards transformation or develop a deep sense of it. Just as the man and I stood in the store, his condition was not permanent and neither was mine, but because there is more life to live, we had

the chance to continue to change ourselves. In sum, life is a process where an individual seeks to move beyond the contradictions by enacting love within different contexts.

## **7.5 BEYOND THE NOSAKHERE OF THE PAST: TOWARDS A NEW NOSAKHERE**

God does not judge us by the separate incidents or the separate mistakes that we make, but by the total bent of our lives. In the final analysis, God knows that his children are weak and they are frail. In the final analysis, what God requires is that your heart is right. Salvation isn't reaching the destination of absolute morality, but it's being in the process and on the right road (King, 1998, p. 196).

I don't know this morning about you, but I can make a testimony. You don't need to go out this morning saying that [Nosakhere] is a saint. Oh, no. I want you to know this morning that I'm a sinner like all of God's children. But I want to be a good man (King, 1998, p. 198).

My life has not been perfect, I am unfinished I have always struggled to overcome contradictions that prevented me from living up to my full human potential. I will continue to struggle to move old and new contradictions because I want to be a new Nosakhere. I purpose of my life has three parts: personal, educational, and societal. In the personal context, I articulate what I conceptualize as manhood, husbandhood, and father. In the following section, the educational, I articulate what it means to be a student and educator. Lastly, I express my general

idea of citizen-leadership. This section is a guide for my future praxis within the aforementioned areas.

### **7.5.1 The Personal**

From childhood to manhood, I have been a student. As the summer ended, I prepared for school. When the year started, I was greeted with the familiar faces of teachers, professors, students, staff members. Now, I am embarking on a new stage in my life where I can exist as a male-educator-leader beyond my previous experience; in other words, I have lived from semester from semester all of my life (from Fall semester to the Spring), and now I am embarking on a moment when I will not exist as a mere student. I will be a holistic being with a different set of responsibilities. I have the chance at defining who I want to be in this next phase in my life, which is informed by my previous experiences. The concluding section of this dissertation study is a discussion of my ideas pertaining to the personal, educational, and societal contexts.

The personal is composed of three main elements. First, manhood is the state of being a man. I understand manhood as the expression of strength, vision and goals for the self, and movement toward a viable future. Second, husbandhood is an acknowledgment of the responsibilities that I will have as a co-leader of my family. The important activities in becoming a husband are choosing a healthy partnership, addressing the love debt, communicating, learning to love, respecting my wife's intellectual passions, and respecting my wife as a person. Third, fatherhood is the act of raising a child or children. This responsibility requires me to love and to balance work and life.

In the past, I have enacted a hyper sense of manhood. As a young man, I wanted to be a gangster, which I enacted by using violence. Fighting was my way of showing people that I was

strong; it was my way of gaining respect from my male and female peers. In addition to physical violence, I engaged in verbal violence that had an equally devastating effect on the lives of people in my environment. Engaging in verbal violence allowed me access to the popular students. This was a destructive method of manhood.

In the future, I will enact manhood centered on love. When problems arise, where I would traditionally use physical and verbal violence, I will continue to use my voice as a tool to dissolve the situation. Using my voice, I will speak compassionately, and I will communicate my feelings clearly to those who I perceive as my enemies or those who harm or attempt to harm me. Manhood as an expression of strength of love forgives those who have wronged me.

I have caused pain in people's lives. This study displays some of those instances, but there are many more that lurk in my memory. Some of these experiences haunt me, and I feel unforgiving of myself. All of the times when I busted on my colleagues or the many hearts I broke, I struggle with the pain I caused the men and women in my life. My actions in the past caused me to fear the future because I thought that one day I would be punished for my actions. I want to become a man that does not fear the future because of his actions in the past. I want to be a man who lives constructively in the present because this outlook will prevent me from fearing the future.

When I was young, I felt emotionally and physically abandoned by many people. I have harbored negative feelings towards various people. These feelings have caused me to end friendships and to isolate myself from family members and colleagues. Based on these experiences, I developed trust issues, which prevented me from developing meaningful friendships or allowing family members to be close to me. I want to be a man who forgives the



family members and friends who have wronged me, while being courageous enough not to allow these feelings to prevent me from developing meaningful relationships with others.

The first element of husbandhood is choosing a wife. In the past, I have entered relationships either because I was lonely or because I feared being alone forever. Choosing my girlfriends in this manner allowed me to be in the presence of someone who filled a void, but not in the presence of someone who fulfilled me. In my life, I have constantly had people I care about come in and out. I plan to end that trend in regards to the woman I marry. This requires that I choose a woman based on various forms of love, taking into consideration her personal characteristics and values so as to be sure that they complement my own. Choosing a wife in this manner allows for me to choose a partner in life.

In my life, I have sought to be loved. In my pursuit to seek love, I have entered into relationships expecting women to provide me with the love that I did not receive as a child and young man. I have had to realize that making up for a love debt caused by other people is not the responsibility of my partner, nor is it a fair expectation for me to place on my future wife. Entering and maintaining a healthy relationship with my future wife calls for me to forgive my mother, father, and other former girlfriends for any lack of love expressed towards me. I have to enter my marriage with a trust in my wife and in myself. I have to trust that she and I will learn how to love each other.

In order to learn how to love my wife, I have to change my communication practices. In times of difficulty in my previous relationships, I chose to suppress my feelings and hoped things would workout. I was always overly self-conscious, not wanting to hurt the other person's feelings. As a future husband, I will engage in an open dialogue with my future wife. I know now that it is better to address problems immediately, rather than let them linger throughout the

relationship. I will be conscious of the feelings of my wife, and I will speak compassionately to her by choosing my words carefully and being direct.

Supporting my wife is essential to building and maintaining a healthy relationship and a healthy family. In previous relationships, I have supported my girlfriends in ways that I thought were plausible, but my previous strategies caused serious strife. As a husband, I have to learn to listen and to stay conscious to the ways my wife wants to be supported on issues, and I have to lend that support even if I am not always in agreement with her life choices (barring anything illegal or morally corrupt). Support means encouraging and providing assistance to her to in order for her to accomplish her goals. In sum, I have to be her advocate and partner.

The fourth element of successful husbandhood is learning how to love my wife. I have loved women the way I felt like loving them. Loving a woman cannot be determined by how I want to love. As a future husband, I have to listen to and be observant to how she wants to be loved. Learning to love my wife in a healthy way will add to her life and to my life, while creating a stable family for our children.

The fifth element of a successful husbandhood is to know my wife. I have been in relationships, where I have only known my girlfriend in superficial ways. At times, I would talk about common things with a girlfriend, but rarely did I engage the woman that I was with in an in-depth conversation about what she wanted out of life. If we did have the aforementioned conversation, then either I was not paying attention, or I might have made suggestions without fully understanding her perspective. Knowing my wife is important because it allows for her and I to develop a collective plan for our lives, while establishing the foundation for a future family.

The sixth element of focus for successful husbandhood is to understand my partner's passions. In the past, I have imposed my passions onto women. If I was reading a book on

African history, then I wanted her to read the same book. However, when she wanted me to do the same, I refused to do so, because I didn't value what she was passionate about personally, socially, and intellectually. As a husband, I will learn what my wife likes and engage in activities to better understand her interests. Engaging in such activities will bring us closer together. I will show that I care about her by showing her that I care, too, about what matters to her.

First, a father should show his children unconditional love. This love shouldn't be dependent on whether or not the father is in a relationship with the mother. As a child, the conflicts between my mother and father caused my father to give himself an excuse to not be present in my life. A man should never allow the circumstances between the child's mother and him to dictate his methods of affection toward his children. As a future father, I will provide my children with unconditional love; it is my intention to be married and to stay married to the mother of my children. I want my children to know that I love them not just by my saying it, but my doing it.

In the future, I must love my children when they disobey me. As a child, I remember feeling loved by my mother when I acted in accordance to her wishes, but when I misbehaved or disobeyed her there would be strife between us. Parental love shouldn't be consequential; such love should be unconditional. Parents tend to want to make the best decisions for their children because they do not want their children to suffer from any unintentional dangers. Thus, some parents try to live vicariously through their children. As a future father, I will support my children with whatever decisions they make, by posing questions, providing options, and asserting my parental authority only when necessary (as long as they are under the age of 18 years old) to ensure their safety. I will love my children in this manner because I want them to

become who they want to become and not the person who they think their father expects them to become.

The second element of fatherhood that I have identified is to find balance in my home and work life. As a college and graduate student, I focused most of my time on academic development. I wanted to be a *stone-cold scholar*, which resulted in my neglect of my home life. I now realized that spending too much time in the office or focusing on research while my loved ones are waiting for me at home is unfair to my family. Not spending quality time with my wife, children, other family members, and friends can cause me to live a very narrow life where only work matters. I plan to be a father who balances home and work life by scheduling quality time with my family. I will manage my time in such a way that I can focus effectively on both my home and work life. For example, I will plan monthly dates where my wife and I can have time to ourselves; I will plan outings where my children and I can have organized fun; I will plan outings with my friends to take breaks from my family and work life. Lastly, I want to be more human, which means taking breaks to focus on nothing but rest.

### **7.5.2 The Educational: Life as Student**

The first responsibility of a student is to read the assigned materials for class. As a student and educator, I have witnessed students who come to class not having read the assigned materials. When students do not read before coming to class, they rob themselves, the educator, and fellow students of a potentially rich and engaging dialogue about the concepts presented in the reading. The ideal student comes to class prepared having reading the materials. When students have read the reading, concepts presented in the reading can be problematized and questioned. As a future educator, I will encourage my students to further prepare for thinking by providing them with

supporting materials that will assist in a deepening of students' understandings of concepts presented in their primary reading.

Secondly, students should enter their scholarly field with a serious passion to better understand the educational process as well as contemporary issues in education. As a student and educator, I have encountered students who viewed education as a process that would provide them with a credential. Many of these students treated their education degree like a hoop to jump through, at the end of which they would be employable workers. When students view their education as a minor event that is a precursor to getting a job, the main event, they will enter their field uninspired. I have found that, oftentimes, this type of student is the type of learner who "just wants to know what's going to be on the test." Serious students view the classroom as a place where they can envision what it means to participate in a particular profession, while understanding how their profession can assist in the development of a better world. This type of serious student understands and learns for learning's sake.

Thirdly, students should learn how to balance their academic and social life. Some students either work too hard or do not work hard enough. Students, who work too hard, spend little time participating in campus life, while spending the majority of their time completing schoolwork. Conversely, students who do not work hard enough might be consumed with campus life, friendships, romantic relationships, etc. Achieving academic excellence should be the primary concern for every student (barring any extreme circumstance i.e. family issues or health concerns). However, this priority should not be the student's only concern. A student has to engage in the process of balancing his or her life, so they can become a holistic individual as they matriculate through their formal educational process.

Praxis is the fourth essential element to be an excellent student. As a graduate student in the School Leadership Program, I remember hearing some students say they were practitioners, while other students articulate goals of becoming policymakers and philosophers. On one hand, I encountered students who primarily wanted to learn about best practices; conversely, there were students who primarily wanted to learn about the theories, philosophies, and policies affecting educational systems. Oftentimes, I noticed that the practitioners took an anti-intellectual stance, while the intellectuals took an anti-practice stance. The dichotomy between these two types of students can be understood as anti-praxis. Students should not have to choose whether to be a practitioner or intellectual; rather, they should strive to be a praxian, which is a person who reflects with the intention of acting.

### **7.5.3 The Educational: On Being an Educator**

The first critical element to becoming an effective educator is to positively prepare for class. There are two types of preparation: negative and positive. Negative preparation is when an educator arrives to teach a class having not prepared in advance for teaching. When this occurs, classroom discussions often fail to enrich student understandings of concepts presented within the weekly reading materials. Another form of negative preparation is over preparing for a class. An educator who chooses this method attempts to expose students to complex concepts reflected in the reading within an ineffectively short time span. An educator who is not student-centered cannot impact student learning; when an educator uses a lecture as the primary tool of dispensing information, they show a lack of awareness of students needs as learners.

Conversely, the educator who positively prepares to teach a class arrives ready to teach and engage in a lively discussion with students. As a future educator, I will creatively prepare for

classes by using popular culture artifacts to articulate ideas represented in the text. Additionally, I will pose questions to students with the intention of challenging them to problematize concepts so that they might struggle with their real world relevance. I will maintain a passionate and student-centered class environment as an educator by creating various learning experiences for students to support their understandings of weekly readings.

Maintaining a positive perception about your students is the second element that I deem essential to being an excellent educator. In a school environment, educators sometimes have a tendency to view students in a fatalistic context; meaning, students are seen as unable to learn. Although students might exude an unwillingness to learn, an educator cannot give up on students; instead it is the role of an educator to figure out how to reach that student. The hopeful educator sees all students as able to learn regardless of their race, gender, and class positions or perceived academic performances. Thus, the hopeful educator inspires students to learn, providing each student with individual love and direct feedback on academic issues.

The third element necessary to be an effective educator is flexible mentorship. Mentorship is a process that assists students' educational, personal, and societal development. A rigid mentorship will direct a student down a single path. The mentor sees himself or herself as the knower, who tells students what experiences to engage and what books to read in order to accomplish the desired vision or goal. This type of mentorship requires that students obey the mentor and follow his or her lead. On the other hand, the flexible mentor assists students in realizing their talents. This mentor views himself or herself as someone who poses questions, presents experiences for enrichment opportunities, and suggests reading materials for consideration by students.

As an educator, my pedagogical practice will be based in creating a classroom environment centered in reflection and dialogue. In the beginning of each class, students will write a personal reflection of the reading. Essentially, they will conceptualize how the reading informs their dream; in other words, essential question the student should ask himself/herself how the reading material could help me actualize my dream. Second, I will deliver the educational context using the reading and visual, audio, or personal stories to make complex concepts simple; doing this will create the possibility invoking thoughts in students that will enrich the learning experience. Third, I will break class into small and large groups where students will make meaning out of the educational content. In the small group setting, I will rotate from group to group to help students reach the goals of the class period. Once, the small group work is complete students should present the work to the whole class. Lastly, there should be time left for large group exercises were students engage in dialogue with each other and educator. I believe that the classroom is a co-learning environment where I will not deliver content to students void of dialogue nor will students be expected to listen patiently my lectures. Instead, we will collectively transconceptualizes educational content presented in the classroom by myself and them.

## **7.6 THE SOCIETAL**

### **7.6.1 On Being a Citizen**

In the age of global competition, a person's citizenship is often defined by their productivity in the global economy. Thus, enacting productive citizenship is determined by a person's ability to



assist the United States of America in being a competitive economy. Citizenship should be about more than using one's skills for global competition. As a citizen, I plan to use my skills and experiences to assist in the development of a better society and a more socially just world. Oftentimes, active citizenship does not neatly fit into the societal structure; thus, if social structures are oppressive, the active citizen must recognize that it is his or her responsibility to act in order to transform such structures. The active citizen should speak and act up in times of consequence, and not remain idle.

First, in order to be a citizen a person must have a vision. As a citizen, I will use my talents to assist in the development of a better society and world. In the past, I have participated in struggles to change institutions, but at times, I began to engage in prescribed-praxis. For example, when I became the president of Lincoln University's student body, I was elected with the desire to make changes. As my presidency progressed, I began to reflect and act like the oppressor-class. This was evident in my attack of the vice-president because I did not address her situation out of love; rather, I did it seeking to make my platform of academic excellence a reality. To be a person who seeks to assist in the development of a better society or institution, I will take time to reflect on my actions and my necessary changes to become a better person.

## **7.7 IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE**

In this section I address characteristics of love and love as action. It is not my intention to present a prescribed plan for future educational leaders or educators. Instead, I present ideas that will contribute to the discourse on how to understand how to love and act in educational settings based in love.

Fromm (1956) discussed the characteristics that make up love. The first characteristic is *caring*, which is the active concern for someone. When a person cares for someone else, he/she works to help that person grow (Fromm, 1956, pp. 26-27). The second characteristic of love is *responsibility*. When a person is responsible for someone else, he/she voluntarily responds to the needs expressed or unexpressed by the individual (p. 28). The third characteristic of love is *respect*. When a person respects, he/she is aware of the person's individuality and is concerned with the person's growth based on his/her individuality (p. 28). The fourth characteristic of love is *knowledge*. When a person is knowledgeable about someone, he/she knows the person to the core; in other words, he/she knows what makes the person happy or sad and the desire of his/her heart (p. 29).

Fromm also discussed love as action, which is composed of six actions. The first characteristic of love as action is *discipline*. A person who has discipline does things whether he/she is in the mood or not all throughout his/her life; this action should be self-imposed. Second, love as action requires *concentration*. A person who concentrates sits still and focuses on his/her craft without interruption or being distracted from anything else (p. 109). Third, love as action requires *patience*. The individual who loves endures short-term struggle in order to accomplish the long-term success; in other words, he/she values quality of hard work versus the mediocrity of quickness. The fourth characteristic of love in action is *supreme concern*. The individual who has supreme concern devotes his/her life to constantly learning what love is, how to do it, and improving how it as an action (p. 110). Fifth, love as action requires courage. The individual who has courage takes risks, while realizing there is a possibility he/she will feel pain and disappointment (p.126). The sixth characteristic is *faith*. The individual who has faith is

committed to another person without guarantees; she/he loves with the hope that it will produce love in someone (p. 127).

### **7.7.1 Characteristics of Love: Educator**

The educator who cares for loves shows concern for students. Teachers should be concerned for students' personal growth. As a middle school student, Ms. Lee was concerned for me as a person, just as much as she was concerned for me as a student; however, her personal concern for me is what made me want to perform better in the classroom. When she grabbed me and pulled me into the hallway and made the proclamation that she was not going to let me fail, I realized right then that she cared for me. Realizing that she cared for me allowed me to begin the movement towards changing my life. By caring for students (and communicating that caring in ways that students understand), educators create potential for the students to see themselves beyond the short-term problems they face, while envisioning a better life for themselves in the future.

The educator who is responsible for students does so through voluntary works. When I was in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, Ms. Lee and I had a conversation about my desired profession, and I told her about my dream of becoming a journalist. Her reaction to my dream was to start a newspaper. By starting a newspaper, this meant she would have to spend countless hours after school (paid and unpaid) to make it come into reality. Her effort to create and work on the newspaper with me was a sign of love.

The educator who respects a student accepts students for who he/she is. Educational respect requires an educator to engage in dialogue to find out who a student is and what he/she wants to become. Ms. Lee never forced me to be what she thought I should be; instead, she

worked with me to figure out what I wanted to do with my life. As a result of knowing who I was and what I wanted to become, she was able to recommend that I attend the open house at University City. Attending this event would assist me in my movement towards transformation.

The educator who has knowledge of his/her student plays an important role in a student's life. To know a student requires an educator to spend time with a student and have common experiences. As a student in high school, Ms. Simmonds and I spent countless days after school working on the school newspaper into the late evening nights. As a result of spending this time together, Ms. Simmonds knew my core. She knew I had a dream of what I wanted to become when I grew up, and she was willing to assist me in the struggle to become a journalist. Hence, when I was nearly expelled from school, she was able to go to Ms. Johnson and stand up for me, not because I was a great student, but because I had potential that had not been reached. An educator who wants to gain knowledge about students will use in-class exercises or extracurricular activities to learn about students.

### **7.7.2 Love as Action: Educator**

As an educator, the first action of love that must be enacted is discipline. During the school day, an educator will experience good and bad days. However, an educator must have the discipline to love even when he/she does not feel like it. This should not be confused with meaning that teachers should be perfect every day; to the contrary, educators cannot be perfect, but they have to go throughout the day attempting to love their students. When I was a student in high school, Ms. Simmonds was plagued by severe migraines. At times they were so bad she had to excuse herself from the classroom for a few minutes. When Ms. Simmonds returned, she would

continue teaching. Ms. Simmonds' discipline was a shining example of her love for her profession and students.

As an educator, the second action of love that must be enacted is concentration. As a college student, I remember walking to the history department and seeing Dr. Francis reading a book or journal article on Kwame Nkrumah. When I wanted to break his focus and talk about other things, he suggested and eventually socialized me into doing the same intellectual behavior needed to become a better student and scholar. However, it was not just him telling me to make time to study that impressed me, but it was his ability to discuss Nkrumah's ideas with a profound clarity both in and outside of class. Educators who love as an action will schedule so that they can do the intellectual work required to become a loving educator.

As an educator, the third action of love is patience. In order to love a student, an educator must realize that short-term failures do not condemn students to a life of death and destruction. If education is a life-learning-process, then it means students have the potential to transform their lives in the darkest moments. When I was in middle and high schools, my teachers believed I would not amount to anything; they did not have patience. However, Ms. Lee and Ms. Simmonds were patient with me during my short-term failures, and that love has empowered me to be the man I am today. The educator who enacts love supports students during the short-term failures in the hope that they will transform themselves.

As an educator, the fourth action of love is supreme concern. In order to love students, the educator has to make learning a part of his/her life. Dr. Herring was an exemplar of an educator who made learning a part of his life. When I went to his class and presented information that was to the contrary to what he had learned as a doctoral student in history, he did not reject the information. Instead, he asked me if he could borrow my books so he could read them. His

love of learning inspired me to love learning too. I would read the required readings for class and I would read other books to deepen my understanding of the topic. The educator who loves does so by showing his/her love of learning new ideas.

The fifth action of love an educator should consider enacting is courage. Loving students requires an educator who stands up in the face of ridicule by his/her colleagues and punishment from his/her superiors. In high school, I wrote an article that discussed racially sensitive issues. Many people asked Ms. Simmonds and Ms. Johnson to censor me, but both refused. They expressed courage to stand up for my right to speech, while asserting those who disagreed had the right to respectfully disagree with me; however, neither yielded to the pressure, they both showed courage. The educator who loves does so by standing up for his/her students during turbulent times.

The sixth action of love an educator should consider is having faith. The educator who has faith in a student will believe in him/her without any guarantees or anything in return. The time that Ms. Lee and Ms. Simmonds spent with me was done not knowing who I would become. Neither assisted me in transforming my life seeking some recognition. They loved me hoping that their love would produce love within me; in other words, they loved me to assist me in realizing that I was lovable and that I could transform my life if I just loved myself. The educator who has faith in students believes that by expressing love, it will hopefully get students to realize their potential to be loved and love.

### **7.7.3 Characteristics of Love: Student**

First, the individual who embodies love cares for himself/herself by being concerned with his/her growth. In the summer of 2007, I was concerned about the infamous class titled Core. Therefore,

I spent the whole summer reading books and taking notes to prepare me for this class. At the duration of the academic year, I passed both semesters of Core. I knew if I had approached the Core class like I had other classes I would fail and the struggle to accomplish my dream would have been seriously impeded. Hence, I had to love myself enough to be concerned with my growth, which meant I had to put in the work required to be prepared for Core. Loving yourself means you have to care for yourself enough to be concerned with your own growth.

Secondly, the individual who embodies love is responsible for himself/herself. During the first semester I took Core, Dr. Michaels registered me for statistics. For even the stronger students, these two classes would have been a difficult combination, but for me it was nearly a fatal blow to my graduate career. When I asked Dr. Michaels for help, her refusal forced me to be responsible for my academic success. Thus, I decided to hire a tutor, study extra hours, and meet with my professor during office hours. To love yourself means that you must know what your problems are and seek help for them.

Third, the individual who embodies love respects himself/herself. Respecting yourself means knowing your talents. At times throughout my educational process, I attempted to engage the process like others had done it before me. When I wrote papers, I did so in a traditional manner, but at the end of my graduate experience I decided to write differently. Deciding to write a philosophical and autobiographical dissertation was based on my talent. I had always been told that I was speaking like a philosopher and a good storyteller; it wasn't until I read others' autobiographies and books in philosophy that I began to respect myself.

Lastly, an individual who embodies love does so by having knowledge of himself/herself. Here knowledge of self means to know what makes you angry and happy. Knowing what makes you happy and angry can allow for control of your emotions in times of consequence. When

taking the class with the social justice advocates in the school of education, I was saddened by their treatment of me. When I spoke in the class during the last session, I did so in a calm and controlled manner. I was able to clearly communicate how I felt about my treatment in the class. When you read the story, you will notice that I intentionally pause within the dialogues. I got this pause from President Barack Obama. Many times he was asked questions that were very controversial, and he would pause and then speak. The pause was a chance for him to organize his thoughts, and then he would clearly articulate his/her thoughts to the world. I would jokingly refer to this action by the President as *The Obama Pause*. When I was in the class with the social justice advocates, if I would not have used *The Obama Pause*, every other word would have been a profane word, but with *The Obama Pause* I was able to clearly express my ideas. To love yourself means you know who you are emotionally and you act accordingly depending on the situation.

#### **7.7.4 Love as Action: Student**

The first action of personal love is discipline. The person who loves himself/herself pursues his/her dream in happy and sad times. As a student in college, I suffered a great setback when my presidency ended. I lost a mentor, girlfriend, and many friends, and I still had to return to Lincoln University to complete my senior year. During that year, I had to continue to work towards my dream even though there were days when I held severe sadness in my heart. I would frequent the library to study for class and read a book that was not assigned for class. To have discipline means to constantly work towards your goal.

The second action of love is concentration. The student who loves learning will go spend time in the library reading and studying. Returning to the summer before I took Core, I stayed in



the library from 9am to 5pm. I would read the books, outline the chapters, and type up quotes and organize them into themes. This action resulted in me being able to speak in an in-depth way about issues pertaining and/or relating to education because I set aside time to focus on my intellectual vocation.

The third action of love is patience. As a college student and graduate, I had struggles with my writing. When I was a college student, Dr. Dewey told me to drop out of school. In graduate school, my professor in human learning told me he would not allow me the opportunity to re-write a paper for his class. In both instances, I had to have patience because I had to endure the pain of not being a good writer at the moment, while realizing if I keep working then I will be a better writer. Patience is an act of understanding your talent level and struggling to improve towards a deeper level of excellence.

The third action of love is supreme concern. As a student, you have to be devoted to learning core issues surrounding your major or program of choice. As a college student, I was a history major. During Christmas or summer breaks, I was reading a book or watching a movie pertaining to Africana studies because I wanted to know as much as possible about my major. I carried this attitude to my graduate school experience. When I would travel from Pittsburgh to Philadelphia, I would always have a book or books with me. I was always reading books pertaining or related to education because I wanted to understand how education could assist in the development of a better world.

The fourth action of love is courage. As student in college, the faculty was holding the student body to academically mediocre standards. They voted for a resolution allowing students who had not completed three classes to participate in the graduation ceremony. As the president, I decided to stand up on the behalf of academic excellence; during the next faculty meeting, I

critiqued the faculty for voting for the resolution. This critique placed me in academic jeopardy because I still had to attend classes with some professors sitting in the meeting. As a student courage sometimes requires a person to stand up for what is right in the time of consequence even if it means risking everything.

The fifth action of love is faith. Throughout my graduate school experience, there were many instances where I could have giving up the chance to live my dream. When I first moved to Pittsburgh, I lived in a house in one of the worst neighborhoods in the city. Day after day, I feared returning to my apartment, but I had faith that I would succeed. Other times, professors would doubt my academic strength. Instead of giving up, I maintained faith in myself and continued to struggle to accomplish my dream.

#### **7.7.5 Implications for educator and educational leaders**

The first implication for educational practice is that educational leaders and educators must center their pedagogical practices on love. The contemporary discourse on education is centered on data driven decision making that seeks to allow schools to meet their Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) goals. This discourse sees students as objects that information is dropped into that is regurgitated on standardized tests. A pedagogical practice shows lovelessness for students because it seeks to educate the mind of the child so he/she can be employable in the global economy. The contemporary discourse on education has to be transconceptualized. Educational leaders have to begin to develop school culture that has as its foundation love. When students walk into schools, they have to feel like every adult in the buildings loves them. In times of trouble, students need to know that even though an adult might not like their disruptive behavior, they love the child. Classroom educators have to develop a loving relationship with their

students. When teachers should pose questions to students that inspire them to grapple with information they can develop a deeper understanding of information so they can achieve academically on tests; just as important, teachers should pose questions that allow students to develop a deeper meaning of life as it relates to his/her life (in the individual and collective contexts). Educational leaders and teachers who love students will inspire students to struggle to accomplish their dreams and work to assist in the development of a better world.

The second implication of pedagogical practice is that educational leaders and teachers must love learning as a form of praxis. Through my graduate experience, I constantly hear the declaration, “I am a practitioner.” This euphemism meant they had not read what was assigned for class, but future educational leaders and educators tended to be anti-intellectuals. Educational leaders and educators have to be the model of the loving learning by making the choice to read books that both complement their educational interests and read books that are contrasting to their interests. When students see educational leaders and educators modeling love, it creates the potential of students modeling the behavior. In addition, educational leaders and educators who read things rooted in their interests or contrasting interests, they have the potential of reaching students who have similar or different interests. Thus, reading can assist the educator engaging in meaningful dialogues and developing loving relationship with students that will inspire them to develop a love for learning.

The third implication for educational leaders and educators is speech. When educational leaders speak, it has to be through love. Educational leaders and educator have to learn to speak to each other in a manner that builds and not destroys relationship. Engaging in loving dialogue addresses issues impacting pedagogical practices through compassionate feedback. When educational leaders and educators engage in loving dialogue with each other, they can transfer

this practice with their students. Loving dialogue with students begins when the educator sees the student beyond the mistake or the misbehavior. Educational leaders and educators have to always affirm students' humanity. When students' humanity is affirmed in actions, they will feel loved. When students feel loved, it produces love within them, which will lead to them moving beyond the contradiction that prevents them from living up to their full human potential.

### **7.7.6 Implications for Students**

The first implication for students is to develop learning habits centered in love. Students are attending school in an era where test scores determine whether they will be able to gain entrance into higher education (undergraduate or graduate studies). Students possibly develop learning habits that will have them focusing on grades and whether not their proficient or advancement in the standardized tests. In this environment, students will compete to be the valedictorian, while losing sight of their dreams. When students develop learning habits that are centered in love, they seek to relate educational content to their dreams. Students will pose questions to each other and educators about the educational content for the purpose of learning. Students who have learning habits centered in love will constantly contribute to the school culture.

The second implication for students is engaging in loving dialogue. In this era, students use Facebook, Twitter, and other social media sites. People who frequent these sites at times engage in destructive and fruitless dialogues. In addition, the entertainment industry through music videos, songs, movies, and television shows also encourage destructive and fruitless dialogues. When students enter schools, they are either impacted or semi-impacted by the destructive dialogues. Thus, students engage in destructive dialogues in schools. Students have to challenge themselves to engage in dialogues that can build relationships with their peers and

educators. Educational leaders should provide the space and recourses for students to organize discussions groups where they engage in dialogues about books, current events, visual artworks, and other popular culture artifacts. Students who engage in the dialogical love will prepare themselves to be transformative agents in the future.

The third implication for students is to love learning. Students have to develop a love of learning that supersedes the classroom experience. Students who seek to learn when a teacher is dispensing information will only be half-learned. Students who only read because it is assigned will only be half-learned. Students who pose the question, “is this going to be on the test?” will only be half-learned. Loving learning means students see the world as their classroom whether they are constantly learning new things that add on previous experiences; students who love learning will see themselves as subjects of their learning, which means they will be responsible for it void of former educational environment. Students should read books that contribute to their understanding of their dream; students should also read books that are not related to their dream, but will allow them to be holistic human being. When students are in the educational environment, they should pose questions to educators and fellow students; students should also present ideas from readings that relate to weekly readings.

## **7.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY**

Freire’s framework seeks to understand the contradictions of life within the personal, educational, and societal context. As stated early, his notion of love is rooted in violent-revolutionary struggle to free the oppressed from the oppressor-class that has created a society where people live with these contradictions. Transconceptualization challenges Freire’s

framework by asserting that love is the tool that seeks to liberate the oppressed-class, but as a non-violent weapon. In addition, Transconceptualization seeks to dig deeper into the notion of love. Developing a deeper notion of love will require that I continue to engage the works of Freire, while bringing together other scholars who discuss love. Two of these scholars, Erich Fromm and John A. Lee, seek to explain the psychological notion of love, while providing a typology of love. These typologies of love can be used to advance the notions of personal, educational, and societal love. This will be a powerful addition to Transconceptualization when used in participant-observant studies in my future research.

## **7.9 IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

From this study, I have developed three areas of research for my future work based on my Transconceptual framework. One research question is: how can autobiographical writing contribute to my purposing my life as an individual, student, and citizen? I will like to examine autobiographies and memoirs of famous people and leaders to understand develop their philosophy of life. Based on these autobiographical writings, I will develop a typology of types of autobiographical writing, which will contribute to my methodology and Transconceptual framework.

Second question: How do love and lovelessness connect the individual to or disconnect the individual from the transformation of the individual, education and society? I will do a documentary on my life where I will interview teachers, friends, family members, and mentors who have influenced my life. This documentary will only focus on how love of others impacted my transformations in the different contexts of life. As a supplemental project, I will transcribe

these interviews and make them into a book. In addition, I will examine music, movies, and plays through the Transconceptual framework to address the love and lovelessness and life transformations. I will do the aforementioned to make the framework to be accessible to non-academic audiences.

The third question: what are the roles of individuals in developing meaning in their personal, educational, and societal lives? I would like to conduct a study within a community where I will interview community leaders, educators, parents, and students on the purposes of life, which will be used to construct a community philosophy. This study will contribute to my understanding of the Transconceptualization and possibility could add new elements to it.

I want write a book focusing on identity transformations looking at the academic works of Cross and Karenga, while adding the cinematic works of Spike Lee, who constantly addressed the notions of identity throughout his work. In addition, I will examine the works of Aaron McGrudder through his television series *The Boondocks*. With these authors and artists, I will develop a typology of Africana identity.

#### **7.10 LIVING, LEARNING, AND LEADING THROUGH LOVE PROGRAM**

As a future educator, I plan to organize a program that teaches both educators and students how to love. This program would expose students to readings that define love. Exposing students to competing notions of love will allow them to understand love as complex theory and action. In addition, students will be exposed to popular cultural artifacts like movies, television shows, music, and visual arts. These popular culture art forms will allow students to observe love or lovelessness in semi-real situations and reflect on how they will enact love as future

educators and educational leaders. Below is an outline of how I would teach love as theory, embodiment, and action in classroom setting and/or program setting.<sup>8</sup>

## **7.11 IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY**

In contemporary times, one of the leading discourses surrounding educational philosophy is global competition. Within this discourse, an individual personal, educational, societal worth is dependent on how he/she can assist in the American being competitive in the global economy. In other words, life is seen through the narrow lens of economic production, which is important but not the *raison d'etre*. Conversely, Transconceptualization deems that life is a total experience that focuses on the personal, educational, and societal contradictions and the struggle to move beyond them. I want to continue expanding the notion of love using the works of Erich Fromm and John A Lee, who both write extensively about the notion of love.

## **7.12 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AUDIENCE**

### **7.12.1 Personal**

My hope is for people to read this book and be inspired to reflect on their life, make meaning out their lives, and develop an action plan to move beyond the contradictions of the past and present toward a new self. A person can look my methodology of to understand the rudiments of

---

<sup>8</sup> See APPENDIX A for detailed outline



autobiographical reflection and use it to examine his/her life. When individuals read this study, they should not seek to duplicate my study; instead, they should use this study as a reference point. For example, I chose to use the works of Freire, King, hooks, West, and Karenga to develop a framework to understand my life. On the contrary, another person might want to tell their life story through different scholars and non-scholars (e.g. rappers, singers, visual artist). It is important for the writer to articulate a message that is indigenous to his/her experience.

### **7.12.2 Educational**

Educators, who read my study, should see autobiographical reflection as an essential tool to the educational process. A traditional class might have an educator who delivers educational content to students in the class without providing students with the chance to make meaning out of the context. An educator who uses autobiographical reflection will create space for students to write or engage in dialogue about lived experiences and stories that relate to the context presented in class. When students are able to reflect on educational context and relate it to their life, it will create an engaging classroom experience where students feel empowered. When students feel empowered, they will begin to see the relevance in the education. Once students see the relevance in the education, they will engage in the process as a means of unlocking their talents.

### **7.12.3 Societal**

After reading this study, citizens should understand that life is meaningless unless we help assist in the development of a better world. The process of creating a better world is not one where a person has to be superhuman; rather, it is a process where a person has to use their talents

in conjunction with others to assist in the development of a better society. For example, a person whose talent is art might use it to critique oppressive situations in society. In addition, he/she might join an organization where other artists engage in the same or similar forms of art. The essential goal is for the individual to see himself/herself as a part of society and use their talents to solve problems with it.

## APPENDIX A



### A.1 PURPOSING LIFE

Guiding Questions:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What are the purposes of life in the personal context?</li><li>• What are the purposes of life in the educational context?</li><li>• What are the purposes of life in the societal context?</li></ul>
Objectives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Expose students ideas pertaining the purpose of life</li><li>• Engage in dialogue on the purposes of life</li><li>• Write reflections on the purposes of life</li></ul>
Product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students will write reflections on the purposes of life in the personal, educational, and societal contexts.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Students will write reflections on the each context of life as individuals</li></ul></li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Students will write reflections on the each contexts of life as a group.</li> <li>● Students will outline a philosophical framework <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Students will an individual outline for a framework</li> <li>○ Students will collective develop a group philosophy of life.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Students will begin to think about the purposes of their life.</li> <li>● Students will work with others to define the purposes of life.</li> </ul>

### A.1.1 Step 1: Exposure

- Students will brainstorm the purposes of life
- Reflections on the purposes
  - Students will be asked to define the purposes of life
  - Students will be organized within small groups and will come up with a general definition of life based on everyone idea of purposes of life.
    - Student will present their definition of purposes of life the class.
  - Students will be exposed to readings on the purposes of the purposes
    - These readings will come from the foundational scholars of Transconceptual Framework and others whose work is complementary to it.
  - Students will be assigned readings on the excerpts of autobiographies.

### **A.1.2 Step 2: Engaging the autobiographical excerpts on the purposes of life**

- Engage in dialogue about the different purposes of life based on the autobiographical excerpts.
  - Students will be return to their small groups and asked to come up a purposes of life based readings.
  - Autobiographical discussions on purposes of life
    - Students will be asked to share personal stories
- Transdefining<sup>9</sup> purposes of Life
  - Making purposes of life relevant to them as individuals
  - Making purposes of life relevant to the personal, educational, and societal contexts

### **A.1.3 Step 3: Reflection**

- Students will be expose to a popular cultural artifacts that expresses the various types of purposes of life
- Students will be return to their groups to discuss how the popular culture artifacts and it relationship to the various notions of purposes of Life
  - Each group will present their notions of purposes of Life to the class.
  - Students will be asked to choose songs, movies clips, and paintings that symbolize a period in their life.

---

<sup>9</sup> Transdefining: the act of understanding the original definition and moving beyond it to develop a new definition to address issues in contemporary times.

- Students will be asked to write a three-part reflection
  - The first section will be an analysis of the reading
  - The second section will be analysis of the popular cultural artifact
  - The third section each student will present a personal an outline his/her autobiography
    - Personal, Educational, Societal contexts

## A.2 THE THEORY OF LOVE

Guiding Questions:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the purpose of love in the personal context?</li> <li>• What is the purpose of love in the educational context?</li> <li>• What is the purpose of love in the societal love?</li> </ul>
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To expose students to the typologies of love.</li> <li>• To engage in dialogue with each other on the typologies of love as it relates the life contexts</li> <li>• To reflect on the various typologies as it relates the life context</li> </ul>
Product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students will write reflections on the typologies of love</li> <li>• Write an outline</li> </ul>
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students will have a complex understanding of love theory of love</li> <li>• Students will be able to relate complex understanding of love to real</li> </ul>

	<p>life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students will relate love to their life</li> </ul>
--	---

### **A.2.1 Step 1: Exposure to Love as Theory**

- Reflections on love
  - Students will brainstorm ideas about love as theory
  - Students will be asked to reflect individual on the definition of love
  - Students will be organized in within small groups and will come up with a general definition of love based on everyone idea of love
    - Student will present their definition of love the class.
  - Students will be assigned readings on the typologies of love.

### **A.2.2 Step 2: Engaging the Readings on Love**

- Expose students to typologies of love
  - Engage in dialogue about the typologies of love
    - Students will be return to their small groups and asked to redefine the typologies of love.
  - Autobiographical discussions on love
    - Students will be asked to share personal stories
- Transdefining love

- Making love relevant to them as individuals
- Making love relevant to the personal, educational, and societal contexts

**A.2.3 Step 3: Reflection**

- Students will be exposed to popular cultural artifacts that express various types of love
- Students will return to their groups to discuss how the popular culture artifacts and their relationship to various notions of love
  - Each group will present their notions of love to the class.
- Students will be asked to write a three-part reflection
  - The first section will be an analysis of the reading
  - The second section will be an analysis of the popular cultural artifact
  - The third section each student will present a personal story based on the love typology of love
  - Student will be asked to define love based on the textual, popular artifact, and personal story.

**A.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF LOVE**

Guiding Questions:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How do the characteristics of love relate to the personal context?</li> <li>● How do the characteristics of love relate to the educational context?</li> </ul>
--------------------	---



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do the characteristics of love relate to the societal context?</li> </ul>
Objectives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To expose students to the characteristics of love</li> <li>• To engage in dialogue with each other on the characteristics of love as it relates the personal context</li> <li>• To engage in dialogue with each other on the characteristics of love as it relates the education context</li> <li>• To reflect on the characteristics love as they relate the societal context.</li> </ul>
Product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual reflection on the love as embodiment</li> <li>• Group reflection on the love as embodiment</li> </ul>
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students will understand the characteristics of love</li> <li>• Student will work with each other to redefine the love as embodiment</li> </ul>

### A.3.1 Step 1: Engage characteristics of love

- Reflections on love as embodiment
  - Students will brainstorm ideas about characteristics of love
  - Students will be asked to reflect individual on the definition of various characteristics of love
  - Students will be organized in within small groups and will come up with a general definitions characteristics of love based on everyone idea of love
    - Student will present their definition of characteristics of love to the class.
  - Students will be assigned readings on the characteristics of love.

### **A.3.2 Step 2: Engaging the readings on characteristics of love**

- Engage in dialogue about the typologies of love
  - Students will be return to their small groups and asked to redefine the characteristics of love.
  - Autobiographical discussions on characteristics of love
    - Students will be asked to share personal stories
- Redefining the characteristics of love
  - Making characteristics of love relevant to them as individuals
  - Making characteristics of love relevant to the personal, educational, and societal contexts

### **A.3.3 Step 3: Reflections**

- Students will be expose to popular cultural artifacts that expresses the various types of love.
- Students will be return to their groups to discuss how the popular culture artifacts and it relationship to the various notions of love
  - Each group will present their notions of love to the class.
- Students will be asked to write a three-part reflection
  - The first section will be an analysis of the reading
  - The second section will be analysis of the popular cultural artifact
  - The third section each student will present a personal story based on the love the characteristics of love

- Student will be asked to define love based on the textual, popular artifact, and personal story.

#### **A.4 LEARNING LOVE AS ACTION**

Guiding Questions:  How do you do love?	How do you do love in the personal context?  How do you do love in the educational context?  How do you do love in the societal context?
Objectives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expose: Students will be exposed to typologies of love</li> <li>• Engage: Students will engage in dialogue and the definitions of love as they relate to life contexts</li> <li>• Reflect: Students will write reflection on the notions of love</li> </ul>
Product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students will write individual reflections</li> <li>• Students will write reflections as a group</li> </ul>
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students will begin to consider how to act through love in the life contexts</li> <li>• Students will trans-define the meaning of action through love</li> </ul>

##### **A.4.1 Step 1: Expose**

- Reflections on love as an action

- Students will brainstorm ideas about love as action
- Students will be asked to reflect individual on the definition of love
- Students will be organized in within small groups and will come up with a general definition of love based on everyone idea of love
  - Student will present their definition of love the class.
- Students will be assigned readings on the typologies of love.

#### **A.4.2 Step 2: Engaging the Readings on love as an action**

- Expose students to typologies of love as an action
  - Engage in dialogue about the typologies of love as an action
    - Students will be return to their small groups and asked to redefine the love as an action.
  - Autobiographical discussions on love as an action
    - Students will be asked to share personal stories
- Redefining love as an action
  - Making love as an action relevant to them as individuals
  - Making love as an action relevant to the personal, educational, and societal contexts.

#### **A.4.3 Step 3: Popular Cultural artifacts and love as an action**

- Students will be expose to popular cultural artifacts that expresses the various types of love.

- Students will be return to their groups to discuss how the popular culture artifacts and it relationship to the various notions of love
  - Each group will present their notions of love as an action to the class.
- Students will be asked to write a three-part reflection
  - The first section will be an analysis of the reading
  - The second section will be analysis of the popular cultural artifact
  - The third section each student will present a personal story based on the love the typology of love
  - Student will be asked to define love based on the textual, popular artifact, and personal story.

#### **A.5 AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING TO PURPOSE THE LIFE CONTEXTS**

Guiding Questions:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you define the purposes of life?</li> <li>• What is the purposes of life in the personal context?</li> <li>• What is the purposes of life in the educational context?</li> <li>• What is the purposes of life in the societal?</li> </ul>
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write drafts of autobiography</li> <li>• Provide students with feedback</li> </ul>

Product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students will turn in a 10-20 page paper autobiography based on their philosophical framework</li> </ul>
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students will have a roadmap for the life</li> </ul>

### **A.5.1 Step 1: Exposing Students to autobiographical writing**

- Presentation of autobiography as methodology
  - Themes
  - Chorological Order
- Presentation of Western European Male tradition of autobiographies.
  - Purpose of autobiography
  - Exemplars of traditional autobiographies
- Students will be broken organized in smalls to engage in dialogue about WEMAT
  - Students will discuss the purposes of autobiography with the intent of trans-defining it.
- Students will be provided the opportunity to present questions or make comments about traditional autobiographies
- Presentation of Oppressed People’s Autobiographical Traditions
  - Understanding the purpose of OPAT
  - Read excerpts from authors of OPAT
- Students will be broken organized in smalls to engage in dialogue about WEMAT

- Students will discuss the purposes of autobiography with the intent of trans-defining it.
- Students will be provided the opportunity to present questions or make comments about traditional autobiographies

### **A.5.2 Step 2: Engaging Autobiographies**

- Students will be assigned an autobiography to read.
  - Students will be organized in study groups where they will read an autobiography
    - Each study group will read an autobiography
    - Each study group will discuss the autobiography will be prepared to discuss the autobiography in a large group setting
    - Each study group will develop philosophy of life based on the author's life.
      - Each group will present the aforementioned to the class
  - Students will be required to individually read autobiographies
    - They will choose an autobiography based on their personal interests.
    - Students will lead discussion in their study groups
    - Students will develop a philosophy of life based on the author's life.
- Students will

### **A.5.3 Step 3: Writing the Autobiography**

- Students will write autobiographical reflections on their life

- Students will write reflections based on their philosophical framework based on the life contexts
- Students will share their reflections with their study group members.
  - Group-members will provide feedback
    - Verbal feedback to each other
- Student Presentations
  - Students will present one story from their autobiographical reflection that connects one of the contexts of their philosophical framework.
  - Students will discuss the general reflections the autobiographical reflection process.
- Written 15-20 page autobiographical reflection
  - Student may present alternative autobiographical reflections such as:
    - A visual artist may present art forms that represent their life in the life contexts.
    - An audio-artist may present a collection of songs, raps, or poems that represents the life contexts.
      - Although students can complete alternative autobiographical reflections they still required to write 5-10 page document that details why the choose to compete alternative projects and what artist have done similar work.



## A.6 DREAM & ACTION PLAN (DAP)

Guiding Questions:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How will engage a praxis of life personal context?</li><li>• How will engage a praxis of life educational context?</li><li>• How will engage a praxis of life societal context?</li></ul>
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• For students to work in individually and in groups to develop praxis of love plans</li></ul>
Product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Five to ten page praxis plan of love</li></ul>
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students will have a roadmap for their life</li></ul>

### A.6.1 Group Work DAP

- Students will develop their dream
  - Humanity
  - School
  - Society
- Groups will not present their entire philosophy.
  - They will be required to present only an overview of the philosophy
    - Presentation shall not exceed 20 minutes.
    - Each group will have to answer questions for 10 minutes

- Each group turns in a 5-10 page paper.
  - The individual philosophy will be based on love
- Students groups will present their collective philosophies to their classmates.

### **A.6.2 Individual DAP**

- Students will develop a (DAP)
  - This will outline how he/she will go about ensuring their dream comes true.
- Students will present their DAPs
  - Students will present their individual philosophies to the classmates.
    - Students will not present their entire philosophy.
      - They will be required to present only a section

## **A.7 L3L-PROGRAM PORTFOLIO**

### **A.7.1 Group Portfolio**

- Each group will be required to turn in a portfolio that has the following section
  - Section 1: Introduction
  - Section 2: Purposing Life
  - Section 3: Love as Theory
  - Section 4: Characteristics of Love
  - Section 5: Love as Action

- Section 6: Autobiographical Writings
- Section 7: D.A.P.
- Section 8: Reflection on the Process

### **A.7.2 Individual Portfolio**

- Section 1: Introduction
- Section 2: Purposing Life
- Section 3: Love as Theory
- Section 4: Characteristics of Love
- Section 5: Love as Action
- Section 6: Autobiographical Writings
- Section 7: D.A.P.
- Section 8: Reflection on the Process

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Betts, R. D. (2009). *A question of freedom : A memoir of survival, learning, and coming of age in prison*. New York: Avery.
- Bruner, J. (1995). The autobiographical process. *Current Sociology = La Sociologie Contemporaine.*, 43(2-3), 161.
- Bullough, R. V., & Pinnegar, S. Guidelines for quality in autobiographical forms of self-study research. *Educational Researcher*, 30(3), 13-21.
- Carmichael, S., & Abu-Jamal, M. (2007). *Stokely speaks: From Black power to Pan-Africanism*. Chicago, Ill: Annnce Hill Books.
- Carmichael, S., & Abu-Jamal, M. (2007). *Stokely speaks: From Black power to Pan-Africanism*. Chicago, Ill: Annnce Hill Books.
- Darder, A. (2002). *Reinventing Paulo Freire: A pedagogy of love*. Boulder, Colo: Westview Press.
- Fanon, F., & Philcox, R. (2007). *The wretched of the earth*. New York: Grove Press.
- Freire, P. (1978). *Pedagogy in process: The letters to Guinea-Bissau*. New York: Seabury Press.
- Freire, P. (1997). *Mentoring the mentor: A critical dialogue with Paulo Freire*. New York: P. Lang.
- Freire, P. (1998). *Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics, democracy, and civic courage*. Critical perspectives series. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Freire, P. (2004). *Pedagogy of indignation*. Boulder: Paradigm.
- Freire, P., & Faundez, A. (1989). *Learning to question: A pedagogy of liberation*. New York: Continuum. Grove Weidenfeld.
- Fromm, E. (1956). *The art of loving*. New York: Harper.
- Hall, C. L., (2009). *African american journalists : Autobiography as memoir and manifesto*. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press. Retrieved from /z-wcorg/

- Hollis, K. (1994). Liberating voices: Autobiographical writing at the bryn mawr summer school for women workers, 1921-1938. *College Composition and Communication*, 45(1), 31-60.
- Howarth, W. L. (1974). Some principles of autobiography. *New Literary History*, 5(2, Changing Views of Character), 363-381.
- Karenga, . (2002). *Introduction to black studies*. Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press. Retrieved from /z-wcorg/
- Karpiak, I. (2000). Writing our life: Adult learning and teaching through autobiography. *Canadian Journal of University Continuing Education*, 26(1), 31-50. Retrieved from /z-wcorg/ database.
- King, M. L. (1998). *The autobiography of martin luther king, jr.* Warner Books.
- Larson, T. (2007). *The memoir and the memoirist: Reading and writing personal narrative*. Athens, Ohio: Swallow Press/Ohio University Press.
- Lehmann, P. (1953). Autobiographies of the middle ages. *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 3, 41-52.
- Lejeune, P., & Eakin, P. J. (1988). *On autobiography*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Macedo, D. P., & Freire, P. (2008). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Newton, H. P., & Blake, J. H. (2009). *Revolutionary suicide*. New York: Penguin Books. Retrieved from /z-wcorg/
- Nkrumah, K.,. (1957). *Ghana; the autobiography of kwame nkrumah*. New York: Nelson. Retrieved from /z-wcorg/
- Obama, B. (2004). *Dreams from my father : A story of race and inheritance*. New York: Three Rivers Press. Retrieved from /z-wcorg/
- Pascal, R.. (1960). *Design and truth in autobiography : Roy pascal*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. Retrieved from /z-wcorg/
- perspectives series. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Sayre, R. F. (1977). The proper study-autobiographies in american studies. *AmericanQuarterly*, 29(3), 241-262. R
- Smiley, T., Smiley Group., & C-SPAN (Television network). (2007). *State of the Black Union 2007: Afternoon session*. West Lafayette, IN: C-SPAN Archives'

Smith, S. (1993). *Subjectivity, identity, and the body: Women's autobiographical practices in the twentieth century*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Velasco, J. (2004). Automitografias : The border paradigm and Chicana/o autobiography. *Biography*, 27(2), 313-338. Retrieved from /z-wcorg/ database.

Watson, J., & Smith, S. (2001). *Reading autobiography: A guide for interpreting life narratives*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

X, M., & Breitman, G. (1990). *Malcolm X speaks: Selected speeches and statements*. New York: Grove Weidenfeld.

Zulu, I., & Carroll, K. (2008). Transdisciplinary African American Studies Approaches and Implications: A collective interview with James Stewart. *The Journal of Pan African Studies* , 85-95.