

BLACK GENERATIONAL DIALOGUE(S): UNPACKING TENSIONS AND  
LEARNING THE COMMONALITIES OF EDUCATION VALUES IN ONE RURAL  
COMMUNITY

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Education (Culture, Curriculum, and Change).

Chapel Hill  
2007

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **MONIFA GREEN BEVERLY: Black Generational Dialogue(s): Unpacking Tensions and Learning the Commonalities of Education Values in One Rural Community (Under the direction of Dr. George W. Noblit)**

This dissertation is a generational study of the experiences of Black residents in Nottoway County, Virginia. The study illustrates moments in time, which reflect the educational, social and economic experiences of these residents. Through oral history narratives presented, I weave together stories using the interviews of 21 residents, an intergenerational focus group, and archival data. Generations denote discourse communities, chosen to demonstrate changes in the educational system in Nottoway County. The generations reflect those educated (1) in segregated schools (ages 55 years and older), (2) during desegregation (45-55 year olds), (3) in only desegregated schools (25-35 year olds), and (4) recent graduates (18-21 year olds).

This research seeks to understand the values of education for both older- and younger-Black generations within the context of one rural area. In order to understand these values, this analysis is both emic and culturally sensitive; moreover, the analysis and interpretations are co-constructed with participants. The narratives presented in this study are holistic accounts; moreover, I discuss positionality, reflexivity, and most importantly, an understanding that the knowledge of my participants is a necessary condition for understanding the phenomenon.

This research ensures that the educational stories of Black residents will not go unheard. It is important to document life histories as this community continues to wrestle with racism, economic deprivation, and generational divisions. In addition, the process of desegregation and

the growing phenomenon of resegregation must be contextualized in the history of education for Black Americans and the continual struggle for “at least equal” education.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*  
(Hebrews 11:1, KJV)

This has been a long, arduous journey. In the process, I have been blessed with loved ones and friends that have ensured my successful completion of this dissertation. I am not able to acknowledge everyone for everything that they have done. But, I want to acknowledge the following people for their immense contribution to my finishing this document and subsequently my degree.

- I want to thank my dissertation participants for their stories and wisdom.
- Thank you to my Culture, Curriculum & Change Cohort and my friends that I have met in Graduate School for your support, knowledge, and encouragement.
- Thank you Dr. Sandy Darity for encouraging me to attend UNC and supporting my decision to change course.
- I want to thank my advisor, Dr. George Noblit, for his unending words of encouragement and thought-provoking conversations.
- Thank you, Committee, for your guidance during this process and your great patience as I got it done.
- And, ultimately I want to thank my family for the unending love and support that you have shown. My sister, Dara, has been an example of what a professional is and should be. My parents have given me so much love and support.
- And, to my husband, Travis: We have been growing together for 13 years. We have celebrated the completion of high school, undergraduate, and now graduate school. Thank you for EVERYTHING!

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

*I think also, during that time, it was a feeling of things will get better if I just persevere. There was a lot of hope, maybe that's the word. There was a lot of hope, and it worked. I think that maybe that's what's lacking now. There's not much hope. People don't see the reason for it all, maybe. (John, age 60)*

*It's like they don't care if we make it or not. It's like if you make it, you make it, if you don't, you don't. It's up to you. It's like it's all on us. (Edna, age 18)*

This is a generational study of the experiences of Black residents in Nottoway County, Virginia. The study illustrates moments in time, which reflect the educational, social and economic experiences of these residents. Through oral history narratives presented, I weave together stories using the interviews of 21 residents, an intergenerational focus group, and archival data. As Michele Foster (1997) explains, “Life history and the associated techniques of oral history and personal narratives are forms of analysis that can bring the experiences of Blacks...into view in ways that reveal the complexity of their experiences” (p. xx).

I use “generations” to denote discourse communities. I chose the important I chose important eras of change in the educational system of Nottoway County. I believe these discourse communities are better understood as educational generations, and this denotation will be used in the dissertation. The generations reflect those educated (1) in segregated schools (ages 55 years and older), (2) during desegregation (45-55 year olds), (3) in only desegregated schools (25-35 year olds), and (4) recent graduates (18-21 year olds). It is important to document life

histories as this community continues to wrestle with racism, economic deprivation, and generational divisions.

This dissertation grew out of a pilot study of seven Black high school students' post-secondary plans (Beverly, 2003). One expression from those high school students is above. The purpose of the pilot study was to understand the participants' post-secondary aspirations and their preparedness for those aspirations. During my pilot work, I was privy to informal conversations of Black teachers and adults in the community. I found a tension with older generations on what they perceive to be a lack of value in education with younger generations. By older generation, I mean adults 45 years or older who either attended segregated schools or have gone through desegregation.

Many of these adults wondered if Black students at Nottoway High School now value education at all. During this time, I also was reading sociological achievement literature, which found that Black students are not achieving as well as their White counterparts. From these experiences, I began to wonder not if Black students valued education but in what ways they valued education. I also wanted to know if the value of education has changed over time. I hypothesized that the younger generation (18-21 year olds) had a different value of education, but I wanted to understand how that value of education corresponded with their lived experiences. In addition, I became interested in the community's transitions and relationships between generations.

I identify as a resident of Nottoway County. I first became a resident at nine-years old when my family moved back to Virginia. Nottoway is where my father grew up, left for the military in his teens, said he would never come back, and then returned in 1986 when he was "called into the ministry." I attended school in Nottoway from 4<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade. I left for college and have not returned to live there permanently. I decided to do this research in Nottoway

because of my concern for its residents. This is where I graduated, where I met many of present friends and my husband, where my parents and his parents live, and where many of our extended family now live. Nottoway is where I first started clearly seeing and fighting injustices. I also have witnessed industry leave and illegal markets emerge and thrive. In the face of these transitions, I want to understand the effect on participants' lived experiences and if the value of education, a professed belief in the importance of education (Philipsen, 1999), has changed for Black residents in Nottoway County over time.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Much of the research in education, pertaining to the Black-White achievement gap has focused on the structure of schools (Ferguson, 1998a), structure of standardized tests (Jencks, 1998), and teacher perceptions (Ferguson, 1998b). Researchers have found teachers' expectations of students' performance may affect students' motivation, effort, and achievement (Ferguson, 1998; Hallinan, 2001). Research also has focused on the attitude/achievement paradox for Black and low-socioeconomic (SES) students (Agnew & Jones, 1988; Mickelson, 1990).

John Ogbu's (2004; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986) oppositional theory caused shockwaves in the research community. Ogbu claimed that as "involuntary minorities", or people who have been enslaved and colonized, many Black students have an oppositional culture, which lowers Black students' achievement. In addition, Ogbu and Fordham (1986) claimed that the oppositional culture may be due to "the Burden of Acting White." Many researchers such as Tyson, Darity, and Castellino (2005) have worked to refute the "Burden of Acting White" theory. They explained:

Social scientists have produced little empirical evidence to substantiate the claim that an "oppositional peer culture" or burden of acting White" is pervasive in the Black

community, or that either explains the underachievement of Black students or some part of the Black-White achievement gap. (p. 582)

Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006), however, explained that the focus on the achievement gap is misplaced and must be looked at as the “education debt,” which has accumulated over time. For Ladson-Billings, this debt has historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral components. Ladson-Billings explained that the historical debt is the systematic and sustained inequities that have plagued Black Americans. She described those inequities in the following way:

In the case of African Americans, education was initially forbidden during the period of enslavement. After emancipation we saw the development of freedmen’s schools whose purpose was the maintenance of a servant class. During the long period of legal apartheid, African Americans attended schools where they received cast-off textbooks and materials from White schools. In the South, the need for farm labor meant that the typical school year for rural Black students was about 4 months long...Why then do we not expect there to be an achievement gap? (p. 5)

Ladson-Billings also explained that the economic debt consisted of both school funding disparities and disparities in salary based on race. Sociopolitically, the debt is the exclusion of people of color in the civic process. In addition, she contends, “...a moral debt reflects the disparity between what we know is right and what we actually do” (p. 8).

This research is couched within the framework of Ladson-Billings “education debt.” It investigates how schooling has affected Black residents in one county in rural Virginia over time. It seeks to understand the trajectory of schooling experiences in the context of education at particular moments in time. As Timothy Tyson, author of *Blood done signed my name: A True Story* (2005), said in a recent lecture: “People say history is irrelevant, but we’re swimming in it.” I contend, we are swimming in stories of the past and I will continually work to ensure that those stories will not go unheard. The process of desegregation and the growing prevalence of resegregation (Tatum, 2007) must be contextualized in the history of education for Black Americans and the continual struggle for “at least equal” education.



## **Research Questions**

As stated, the purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of Black residents in Nottoway County and if the value of education, a professed belief in the importance of education, has changed for Black residents over time. Ultimately, all of the participants' schooling experiences are fully racialized, but how are the generations' lived-experiences different? The guiding questions for this study are the following:

1. How is education valued in each generation?
2. How has the purpose and value of education changed (or not) over time?
3. How are the generations' lived experiences different?
4. How have past educational experiences affected participants' current life experiences?

## **Nottoway County**

Nottoway County is a rural county in Southside Virginia. The region is named Southside because it is geographically below the James River and approximately 60 miles southwest of Richmond, Virginia. Nottoway was first inhabited by the Iroquoian nation tribe called Nadowa. English settlers named the area 'Nottoway' in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century (Rich, 2006; Nottoway County, 2006). Nottoway County was first Nottoway Parish, a district of Amelia County (its neighbor to the North), and Nottoway Parish became Nottoway County in 1788. The county has three incorporated towns: Blackstone, Burkeville, and Crewe. The county website explains:

The County's three towns were incorporated in the late 1800's, all along what was to become the U.S. Highway 460/Norfolk Southern Railway corridor that bisects the County. Industrialization blossomed at the same time, exploiting the ease of moving raw materials in and finished products out. County manufacturing often utilized the area's abundant natural resources, particularly agricultural products, timber, and wood products. (Nottoway County, 2006)

Tobacco was a cash crop for Nottoway during the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, many Black residents were sharecroppers, working for large White-owned farms.

This work, done by many teenagers, meant large amounts of time away from school as many Black students were “required to stop attending school to assist with the farming chores” (Rich, 2006, p. 9). The county also is known for Fort Pickett in Blackstone, VA, which is a 45,867-acre former Army base established in 1941. Presently, Fort Pickett is used by the Army National Guard.

The county website explains, “Today, the county continues to enjoy a healthy diversity of people and economic interests. Small business has thrived, as evidenced by the vitality of its three towns. Nottoway manufacturing facilities produce a wide variety of goods” (Nottoway County, 2006). This is in contrast to descriptions by participants interviewed for this study. For example, one participant explained:

I would say just flat-footed and straight-up, Nottoway was better 50 years ago than it is today. It’s right at the brink of going as it should, but I still believe that there are a lot of diehards who really only want a golf course, a drug store, and enough room to ride their little horses and they are just fine. [They are] not willing to make room for industry to bring jobs, not willing to make room for all people to make a few dollars. I think that is what is stifling Nottoway more now than anything else. (John, age 60)

Another participant remarked:

Well a lot of the things we had, business and stuff, we don’t have anymore. We are drying up. We had an army base [Fort Pickett], of course the National Guard is there now [temporarily]. But, we had beaucoup people, lots of people. I think we are on the rise. I noticed now people are beginning to build houses. (Evelyn, age 53)

The 2005 estimated population of Nottoway County was 15,650. According to 2004 data, 58.8% self-identify as White and 40.3% self-identify as Black. In addition, 2.2% self-identify as “Hispanic or Latino” origin, 0.1% self-identify as American Indian, 0.4% Asian, and 0.3% reported “two or more races.” Approximately 17.2% of the population lives in poverty as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. In 2000, 64.4% of persons over age 25 reported being high school graduates; moreover, 11.1% of persons over 25 reported having a bachelor’s degree. This

is a marked contrast to the state of Virginia, where 81.5% of persons over 25 reported being a high school graduate, and 29.5% had a bachelor's degree (U.S. Census, 2006).

### **Freedom of Choice and Mandatory Desegregation**

Articles from Nottoway County's two local papers – *The Creve-Burkeville Journal* and *Courier Record* contextualize major changes in the education of Black residents. After *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Nottoway enacted a Freedom of Choice plan from 1965 to 1970 due to federal threats to cut funding. This section illustrates events leading up to mandatory desegregation in Nottoway County, Virginia. Because much of the newspapers' information regarding the Black community's responses was shaded due to lack of Black staff, subsequent research on this matter will involve primary documents from additional sources.

On July 2, 1964, the Civil Rights Act was passed by the 88<sup>th</sup> Congress. And on July 30, 1964 a group of Nottoway county White citizens purchased a private residence in Blackstone as a corporation and turned the property over for use as a private school for White children “when the need arises” (“Group purchases”, p. 1). As several White residents prepared for the “race mixing problem” (“School Board”, 1966, p. 1), the Nottoway County School Board worked to understand the new law.

The U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) mandated that Nottoway implemented the 1964 Civil Rights Law or face losing federal funds (“County school board”, p. 1965). County school officials were in disagreement over what to do with such a mandate. The School Superintendent, H. L. Blanton suggested that the School Board take no action until the “state board sets the pace”. But, A. T. Jenkins who was Chairman of the School Board, explained, “In the long run we are going to have to sign it.” Ultimately, an unnamed

author of a January 14, 1965 article asserted, “The HEW is an effort to *Blackmail* localities into complying with the Civil Rights Law (“County school board”, p. 1, emphasis added).

Eventually, Superintendent Blanton did submit a voluntary plan for desegregation, named Freedom of Choice, to comply with the HEW directive (“School board gets ‘Freedom of Choice’”, 1965) and presented that plan to the school board. The *Crewe-Burkeville Journal* explained, “Even though three members openly expressed doubts that it would be accepted by the federal government, the Nottoway County School Board voted 3-1 Monday night to become the first school board in Virginia to submit a voluntary local plan for integration in compliance with the recent directive from [HEW]” (p. 1)

For the NAACP, the Freedom of Choice plan was “totally unacceptable.” Instead, they suggested that the School Board discard the plan entirely and begin immediately “the complete and total integration of Nottoway County Schools” (“School board begins”, p. 1). The School Board responded with the following statement:

We have given careful consideration to all the problems presented to us in your letter to which you attach a petition signed by a number of colored citizens of Nottoway County. We have taken steps to give all parents of the county complete freedom in the selection of the school which they wish their children to attend. We believe that this approach to the problem meets the requirements of the Constitution and will result in the best educational opportunity for all the people of the county without racial discrimination. We appreciate the cooperation of the members of your organization in an effort to solve the mutual problems with which we are all confronted. Litigation in our opinion will hamper rather than help in this effort. (“School board begins”, p. 1)

As the NAACP demanded desegregation and not Freedom of Choice, several White parents continued to work to establish area private schools. A July 8, 1965 article explained that many parents had already enrolled their children in newly-established private schools in Blackstone, Amelia and Farmville (“Tentative plans are underway”, p. 1). These schools are now Kenston Forest, Amelia Academy, and Prince Edward Academy, respectively.

The first iteration of the Freedom of Choice plan was not accepted by HEW as the school board advertised the plan in racial terms. Instead of allowing students to choose a school that they wanted, the plan said that “any child could apply to either the formerly all White or all Negro school nearest his home” (“Nottoway County’s voluntary plan”, p. 1). The revised plan, however, was approved by HEW and was listed in the July 29, 1965 *Crewe-Burkeville Journal*. The portions of each section that follow are important in understanding the climate of Nottoway Schools at this moment in time:

**Section I:** The School Board plan is to allow any parent or child to make application for the child to attend any of the schools they desire [either from nine 1<sup>st</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> grade elementary schools or three 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade high schools]

**Section II:** After receiving notice of the School Board’s assignment policy published in three local papers for four weeks each pupil and parent will be permitted to make an effective free choice of the school [s/he] wishes to attend on forms provided for this purpose.

**Section III:** The School Board plans to operate its schools on a freedom of choice principle. The exercise of choice will be mandatory with respect to all grades. A choice must be exercised by the parent or guardian of each child as a condition to that child being admitted in the fall of 1965... The parent must make a choice each school year.

**Section IV:** There will be a series of desegregated meetings of our Principals and Head Teachers with the Superintendent, to discuss appropriate steps to carry out this plan.

**Section V:** The Nottoway County School Board will operate a transportation system. All bussing of pupils will be on a nondiscriminatory basis and will in no way inhibit a pupil’s choice of school.

**Section VI:** Extracurricular Activities: There shall be no discrimination based on race, color or national origin with respect to services, facilities, activities and programs sponsored by or affiliated with a school of this system.

**Section VII:** (1) All system wide staff meetings and joint in service programs will be conducted on a desegregated basis, beginning with the school year 1965-66. (2) Beginning school year 1966-1967 steps will also be taken toward the elimination of segregation of teachers and staff personnel in the schools resulting from prior assignments based on color, race or national origin. (3) Beginning school year 1965-66 no principal, teacher, service personnel or other staff member will be demoted, discharged or not re-hired or threatened there with on the basis of pupil’s choices.

**Section VIII:** Beginning with school year 1965-1966 this School Board will not provide transportation for attendance at public schools outside this district or at any private schools.

**Section IX:** There shall be no discrimination based on race, color or national origin with respect to the teaching program of Piedmont Sanatorium operated by the Nottoway County School Board.

**Section X:** The School Board recognizes the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as the law of the land and intends, in good faith, to obey this law. (“Nottoway’s school integration plan”, p. 1)

Letters were sent May 1965 and on September 2, 1965, approximately 150 Black students attended “formerly all White schools” (“Nottoway county schools open”, p. 1). Though these Black students attended now predominately White schools, there is no evidence that White students attended all-Black schools in either of the papers or in participants’ oral histories. And only a handful of teachers desegregated the staff at each school. As an April 7, 1966 article in the *Courier Record* warned, “the HEW officials also pointed out that the freedom of choice plans for desegregation are acceptable only in the ‘initial stages’ of desegregation (“Some teacher integration”, p. 1).

As the pressure mounted for mandatory desegregation, the school board tried to figure out ways to keep Freedom of Choice but “quietly proceed with plans for total integration should the federal government require it” (“Federal court suit”, p. 1). In August 1965, HEW threatened to cut Nottoway’s federal funds unless they eliminate its “dual school system.” Since the school board decided that they could not “come up with a better plan than the ‘freedom of choice’ plan”, they decided to meet with Dr. James Bash of the University of Virginia “who specialize[d] in helping end school segregation” (“County’s school desegregation case”, p. 1).

Now, with the threat of mandatory segregation, several White parents and White students mobilized in an effort to keep Freedom of Choice. Petitions were circulated through the county, in an effort to ask the School Board to delay their decision on discontinuing the

county's Freedom of Choice school plan. According to the *Crewe-Burkeville Journal*, the petitions reported the following:

Since we the parents at Crewe High School are basically concerned with quality education being offered to the students of Nottoway County and want to preserve our free public educational system of schools, we, the undersigned, hereby request and implore the members of the Nottoway School Board not to rush into drawing up a plan to abolish the dual school system of freedom of choice. We believe very strongly that the Freedom of Choice Plan is constitutional as stated by our President-Elect, Richard M. Nixon. Our present plan of freedom of choice for every student, we believe, would preserve and extend quality education and individual rights and freedom; whereas, the abolishing of this plan would do the opposite. ("Citizens to ask school board", p. 1)

Students formed the Save Our Schools (SOS) committee at the predominately-White Crewe and Blackstone High Schools. They explained:

The purpose of the SOS organization is to promote the continuation of the Freedom of Choice system in our schools....We call on all students from both public and private schools, who feel that the Freedom of Choice system is the only democratic system, to support our organization. ("Students form SOS committee", p. 1)

To distinguish themselves from violent activities by such groups as the Ku Klux Klan, the SOS proclaimed, "We are an organization of students who wish to work in a dignified and orderly manner for the preservation of our school system, no act or acts of violence can or will be tolerated from its members."

After five years of Freedom of Choice and multiple meetings with HEW to defend their defiance of the Civil Rights Act, the Nottoway County School Board succumbed. Below is the desegregation plan, which was reprinted in the January 29, 1970 issue of the *Crewe-Burkeville Journal*:

Commencing with the opening of a school in September 1970 assignments to schools in Nottoway County will be on the following basis:

- 1) All students in grades 10, 11 and 12 inclusive will attend Luther Foster High School in Nottoway---hereafter to be renamed Nottoway Senior High School.
- 2) All students in grades 7, 8 and 9 will attend either Blackstone High School (hereafter to be renamed Blackstone Jr. High School) or Crewe High School (hereafter to be renamed Crewe Jr. High School).

- 3) All students in grades 5 and 6 will attend either Blackstone Elementary School (hereafter to be renamed Blackstone Intermediate School) or Ingleside Elementary School, Burkeville (hereafter to be renamed Burkeville Intermediate School).
- 4) All students in grades 1, 2, 3 and 4 will attend either A. G. Richardson Elementary School, Blackstone, -- grades 1, 2, 3, and 4 (hereafter to be renamed Blackstone Primary School) or Watson Elementary School, Crewe, -- grades 1 and 2 only (hereafter to be renamed Crewe Primary School or Burkeville Primary School).
- 5) Faculties of the existing schools in the county shall be reassigned among the schools in such fashion as to destroy all signs of racial identity and new employee in all categories shall be employed based on qualifications without regard to race.

What is most hurtful to me is the change of names for each school and particularly the Black schools, for naming is synonymous with power (Willinsky, 1998). As a student of Nottoway High School, I was in the Luther H. Foster building for four years. I only knew about the history of Luther H. Foster because my father, who was a student there, provided the oral history. But, he chose to educate me. He chose to tell me the story and to share its proud history. If he had not, I would not have known otherwise. This project is my way of continuing and expanding that oral history for its educative purposes and for the purposes of documenting the history and Black education.

To this end, the dissertation is organized in seven additional chapters. In chapter two, I review literature in the field to provide a framework for understanding Black educational experiences and values in education. In chapter three, I provide an overview of the methodologies that guided the data collection, my positionality, and a description of the data analysis processes used to interpret the data. Chapters four through seven present the narratives of each generation separately as they discuss their lived experiences with family, in their community, and in schools. In addition, a dialogue composed of interview and focus group data is presented chapter eight and conclusions and implications are presented in chapter nine.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The value of education for Blacks in America is evident by their struggle for the formation of schools in the South in addition to the debates of Black intellectuals on the best education needed to liberate Black citizens (Anderson, 1988; Woodson, 1933/1998). This value was also prevalent in the fight for civil rights and equal education, evidenced by the lawsuit *Brown v. Board of Education* and the subsequent Civil Rights Act of 1964. As Anderson (2004) explained in his article on the anniversary year of *Brown*,

Altogether, the historical scholarship on African American education in the South provides no basis for the assumptions that Blacks in slavery, Reconstruction, or Jim Crow came to view education or academic success as threats to Black identity or as values antithetical to African American traditions. On the contrary, education was highly valued as a means to both liberation and individual success. This is not only evident in the social history of African American culture and education but also in the hundreds of autobiographies and memoirs written by African Americans. (p. 367)

In this chapter, I will discuss Black education, particularly in the South, at different moments in time. The chapter is organized in the following sections: Value of Education for Blacks – Pre-Civil Rights Era; Segregation; Desegregation; Affects of Desegregation; and Value of Education for Blacks – Post-Civil Rights Era.

#### **Value of Education for Blacks – Pre-Civil Rights Era**

If you can control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his action. When you determine what a man shall think you do not have to concern yourself about what he will do. If you make a man feel that he is inferior, you do not have to compel him to accept an inferior status, for he will seek it himself. If you make a man think that he is justly an outcast, you do not have to order him to the back door. He will go without being told; and

if there is no back door, his very nature will demand one. (Woodson, 1933/1998, pp. 84-85, *sic*)

This is how Carter G. Woodson, writing in 1933, described how mis-educating African Americans, or people of any race, could result in feelings and subsequently actions of inferiority. *The Mis-Education of the Negro* presents struggles within the Black community because of educational attainment and the distance that schooling can yield. Woodson was writing during the era of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, where the doctrine of “separate but equal” dominated the South. In addition, within the realm of education for Blacks, the debate over what type of education for Blacks was beneficial, was in the forefront. He stated the following:

For a generation thereafter the quarrel as to whether the Negro should be given a classical or a practical education was the dominant topic in Negro schools and churches throughout the United States. Labor was the most important thing of life, it was argued; practical education counted in reaching that end; and the Negro worker must be taught to solve this problem of efficiency before directing attention to other things. (p. 12)

I have provided a “dialogue” between W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington to illustrate a debate waging in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century over the proper education for Black Americans. I want to acknowledge Anderson’s (1988) warning that the “The Washington-Du Bois controversy merely represented one of the last great battles in the long war to determine whether Black people would be educated to challenge or accommodate the oppressive southern political economy” (p. 77). I have provided four quotations from Du Bois and Washington on the education of Black Americans.

The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men...Men we shall have only as we make manhood the object of work of the schools – intelligence, broad sympathy, knowledge of the world that was and is, and of the relation of men to it – this is the curriculum of that Higher Education which must underlie true life. (Du Bois, 1903/2006, para. 1)

In a certain way every slave plantation in the South was an industrial school. On these plantations young colored men and women were constantly being trained not only as farmers, but as carpenters, blacksmiths, wheelwrights, brick masons, engineers, cooks, laundresses, sewing women and housekeepers. (Washington, 1903/2006, para. 4)

It has been claimed that the Negro can survive only through submission. Mr. Washington distinctly asks that black people give up, at least for the present, three things, - First, political power, Second, insistence on civil rights, Third, higher education of Negro youth, and concentrate all their energies on industrial education, and accumulation of wealth, and the conciliation of the South. (Du Bois, 1903/1995, pp. 87-88)

My experience is that people who call themselves 'The Intellectuals' understand theories, but they do not understand things. I have long been convinced that if these men could have gone into the South and taken up and become interested in some practical work which could have been brought them in touch with people and things, the whole world would have looked very different to them. (Washington in Harlan, 1983, p. 204)

One can assert that the difference in Washington's and Du Bois' theories were because of region (Du Bois in the North and Washington in the South), slavery (Du Bois was born a free man and Washington a slave), or intellectual influences. Du Bois was influenced by Humanists such as Charles W. Eliot, and Washington by Samuel Armstrong, who through the Hampton-Tuskegee idea, sought an ideology that did not challenge traditional inequalities of wealth and power in the South. Both Du Bois and Washington had the same goal – the advancement of Blacks in the United States, but with very different paths (Anderson, 1988). They differ on the purpose of education for the Negro. As Anderson (1988) explains:

Despite Washington's concerns about industrial education for the masses, in actuality both he and Du Bois were seeking to educate, organize, and direct the same segment of Afro-America, the 'talented tenth' or the black intelligentsia. Had Du Bois advocated higher education for the few and Washington merely proposed industrial education for the masses, a compromise might have been feasible...Both Washington and Du Bois, however, looked primarily on 'selected youth' (prospective teachers, editors, ministers, and businessmen) to guide the race's social development" (p. 104).

Anderson further explains that Washington's Tuskegee was founded to train Negro leaders. And, within the Talented Tenth, Du Bois (1903/2006; 1903/1995) does contend that industrial training of both Black and White men is valuable. In his Atlanta Exposition Address, Washington asserts,

Nearly sixteen millions of hands will aid you in pulling the load upward, or they will pull against you the load downward. We shall constitute one-third and more of the ignorance of crime of the South, or one-third its intelligence and progress; we shall contribute one-

third to the business and industrial prosperity of the South, or we shall prove a veritable body of death, stagnating, depressing, retarding every effort to advance the body politic. (p. 4)

Moreover, in the Talented Tenth, Du Bois (1903/2006) asserts,

Here is a race transplanted through the criminal foolishness of your fathers. Whether you like it or not the millions are here, and here they will remain. If you do not lift them up, they will pull you down. Education and work are the levers to uplift a people....Education must not simply teach work – it must teach Life. (para. 42)

Woodson (1933/1998) concludes that during this time period, neither industrial nor liberal education succeeded in benefiting a majority of Blacks. For Woodson, Blacks who become mis-educated have a different discourse and value system than those who have not “benefited” from formal education. And this presents problems within the Black community. Though one may argue that education on the terms described by Du Bois and Washington perpetuates the similar cycle of oppression that plagued Blacks in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, I am using their narratives, and Woodson’s critique, to assert the history of Black educational values.

### **Segregation**

As Irvine and Irvine (1983) clarify, Black segregated schools had autonomy and this led to feelings of independence and control over one’s space. They further explain,

Black schools during the segregation era were also extremely complex organizations. They were not only educational institutions in the narrow sense of that term, but they addressed the deeper psychological and sociological needs of their clients...these schools functioned to solidify the communities they served by providing clothing for needy children, by being the centerpiece of community pride in sporting events, and by serving as the core focus of individual and collective aspirations...In effect then, the Black schools were for intent and purposes black-controlled, controlled in the sense that they were administered by black principals, staffed by black teachers and served a black student population. More significant to the issue of independence is the fact that these new schools represented and took on uniquely stylized characteristics reflective of their members – patterns of communication, cultural preferences, and normatively diffused modes of behavior. (p. 416)

Black schools, even with a paucity of resources, were in charge of honing Black minds and creating confident adults.

Vanessa Siddle Walker's (1996) *Their Highest Potential* is one of the definitive texts on Black segregated schools in the South. In it, she documents the history of Caswell County Training School (CCTS) in North Carolina, and discusses its relationship to the community, the activism of the parents, and the determination of the teachers from 1933-1969. For Walker, "The book is a story of the history of one segregated school. It seeks to capture the special circumstances of a particular time and place in history and to understand the type of schooling that was created in response [to that history]" (p. 11).

As Walker (1996) also explains, the conclusions of perspectives, especially her perspective of CCTS in North Carolina,

...demonstrates that retrospective evaluations of segregation must not combine legal, sociological, and academic issues uncritically. Instead, each of these issues must be evaluated independently, and the particular contributions and limitations of each must be considered, if an evaluation of desegregation is to include the full complexity of perspectives. (p. 11)

Therefore, It is important for me to understand the history of Black education as I seek to study the values and educational experiences of Blacks in Nottoway County.

### ***Values and the Social Construction of Virtue (1996)***

Noblit and Dempsey (1996) presented an ethnohistorical qualitative study of two schools: Cedar Grove School (segregated White school) and Rougemont School (segregated Black school). Couched within this ethnohistory is a theoretical discussion on the social construction of virtue. For the authors, virtue is defined as an "assignment of moral traits to individuals by others as well as by themselves" (p. 14). Embedded in the social construction of virtue are value conflicts over education. Noblit and Dempsey look toward "everyday life" for not only variants in these values but also alternative possibilities.

For Noblit and Dempsey (1996), the major value conflict about education in our culture is “oratorical” and “philosophical.” The oratorical idea is grounded in excellence. “The source of virtue and morality is in the distant past, and we must strive to recapture it so that we may approach the ideal of a virtuous life” (p.4). The philosophical idea is grounded in equity. “For philosophers, the good and true are located in the future. This requires values of tolerance, individualism, and freedom (p. 4). This value conflict is inherent in schools. “Schooling is fundamentally a moral, not a technical, enterprise. Schools, as social institutions, express our values more than achieve goals...schools are less about instructing facts and more about constructing morality” (p. 3). For Noblit and Dempsey (1996), the communities interviewed for both schools did “much more than recount history. They were engaging in the construction of moral narratives” (p. 13). Therefore, “the moral narratives tell us as much about the values of these peoples today as they do about the nature of the schools then.” (p. 13).

Noblit and Dempsey’s (1996) discussion of Rougemont School is of most interest for my dissertation. The Rougemont community, churches and school “embodied the oratorical idea... [because] the truth was known and definable. The challenge was to live up to it, especially in a world full of trials of one’s faith” (p. 117). The depiction of Rougemont School and the segregated community paralleled the lived-experiences of my older-generation informants. They described teachers who demanded excellence. One of my older informants explained, “Mediocrity was just not accepted.” Noblit and Dempsey (1996) explain,

Rougemont was a community of strong and shared values. They valued hard work, religious faith, discipline, and individual and collective responsibility. They took care of their own and expected each to look to the others’ welfare. The neighborhood was their place and they shared the responsibility for it. (p. 123)

### ***Value of the Struggle***

For Noblit and Dempsey (1996),

In African-American communities, getting an education is equated with struggle...education and civil rights are historically linked. Education is a civil rights in itself, and it prepares the knowledge and credentials for better employment, and is a prime source of employment for educated African-Americans (p. 124).

Hughes (2006) also described African American struggle and hope for education. He explained, “massive transgenerational efforts [came] together in order to transform, or to find openings, or to resist – ultimately to balance educational struggle with hope” (p. 10). Hughes described educational experiences of families in rural Northeastern Albermarle North Carolina. As Willis Biggs’ (a participant in the study) said, “There’s hope in education,” but Mr. Biggs also believed many of the white teachers had little hope in Black students in desegregated schools. Mr. Biggs further explains, “They [white teachers] didn’t have hope so you had to get it from home” (p. 91).

But, what happens when students have little hope in school and home, and even community? How do these students then value education? Hughes explains that Mr. Biggs got hope from the (1) few remaining Black teachers in desegregated schools, and (2) “timeless messages” or what Philipsen (1999) calls “myths used as guidance.” Philipsen explains, “Myths allow the cultural actor to maintain his or her belief that education is important, despite the fact that his or her life is characterized by actions that fundamentally undermine this very belief” (p. 140). Hughes (2006) and Philipsen have very different views of the older-generation’s stories. But, what is consistent is that their stories talked of education for advancement. Moreover, there was hope in the struggle for education.

### **Desegregation**

Cecelski (1994) discussed issues of schooling during desegregation, with emphasis on events in North Carolina. In addition, Cecelski discussed not only education of Blacks but also the reciprocal effects of the community on education. Cecelski chronicles the process of

desegregation in Hyde County, North Carolina after *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, where the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that racially segregated public schools were unconstitutional. As Cecelski stated in his introduction:

Blacks lost important symbols of their educational heritage in this desegregation process. When black schools closed, their names, mascots, mottos, holidays, and traditions were sacrificed with them, while the students were transferred to historically white schools that retained those markers of cultural and racial identity. (p. 9)

What we see is a story, like Nottoway County, where a community desegregates, and they must ultimately decide what to do with their schools. For many, the decision was to close schools that were used by Blacks during segregation. Nottoway County, in contrast to Hyde County, did not close the “Black schools.” Instead, they used facilities such as Ingleside School, which changed to Burkeville Intermediate, and Luther H. Foster, which changed to Nottoway High School. Instead of closing the physical building, the county instead erased all “symbols of [Black] educational heritage.” Cecelski issues forth a story where this decision was challenged and Black citizens brought about change.

Noblit and Dempsey (1996) discussed the value change when Rougemont desegregated. When the Rougemont School was segregated, it followed an oratorical idea to a degree. Teachers “wished to instill virtues in the students and bind them to their cultural histories as Americans and African-Americans” (p. 144). Black teachers recognized the following:

Not all Americans are Westerners...Yet they also taught with the purpose of trying to help all African-Americans improve their status in American society. This effort at collective mobility meant that African-American students also had to know their own heritage and understand that individual best efforts were necessary for collective mobility but less likely to alter their personal status or situation.” (p. 144)

But, has this collective mobility and collective responsibility persisted in the face of desegregation? Moreover, how has the purpose and value of education changed for younger generations in desegregated schools?



Noblit and Dempsey (1996) explained changes in Rougemont School during desegregation. Before Rougemont was closed, it became a school for Black and White elementary students in the community.

The school was no longer just for their [Black community's] own. At Rougemont School the concern with creating an atmosphere in which a child's social, emotional, intellectual, physical, and moral needs could be met on an individual basis – a decidedly philosophical idea. This was, of course, a bit of a change for the rather oratorical heritage of Rougemont School. The presence of an outsider group (to Rougemont) meant that the school's identity with community was undercut. There was now a varied clientele... *The lesson for both schools is that when difference was introduced, each school increased stratification, and accommodated more to the philosophical idea.* [p. 138, emphasis added]

Cecelski (1994) does not offer a succinct definition of education. He does, however, discuss how desegregation could necessarily harm the educational process (such as student and teacher morale, lack of Black role models, disappearance of Black educational culture, etc.) and subsequently the education of Blacks. Cecelski concluded:

The consequences of losing black schools and educational leadership proved far-reaching. Though many white educators taught black students with dedication and without prejudice, southern school leaders in general acted determined to fetter black talents and aspirations within the desegregated institutions. They tracked black children into lower-ability, vocation, and special education classes to disproportionate rates, leading to virtual segregation within many schools... Black students also encountered other classroom problems, including hostile attitudes, high rates of suspensions and expulsions, low academic expectations, and little encouragement (p. 170).

Therefore, for education to occur in a desegregated school there must be student participation (as we saw in the protests of student activists in Hyde County), student interest, a valuing of students, true compromise of ideals, and an unbiased educational process.

### **Effects of Desegregation**

Since many Blacks lost their educational heritage in the desegregation process, many post-desegregation theorists, such as Shujaa would and should be concerned with what effect desegregation, and the loss of important Black culture within school, has on Black students now.

*Too much schooling, too little education* (1994) and *Beyond desegregation: The politics of quality in African*

*American schooling* (1996) are edited collections of the ongoing search of meaningful education for African Americans. I have used these works in my dissertation as a way of understanding how Black scholars view education for the younger generations in Nottoway County (18-35 year olds). Shujaa (1994), the book's editor, stated that *Too much schooling*

...essentially offers a critical examination of the schooling and education of Black people in the United States of America... [and] the analyses presented here are thought to have a great deal of relevance for Black people in other societies where, as in the United States, white-supremacist ideology has produced institutions that sustain anti-Black racism" (p. 12)

Like Woodson (1933/1998), collaborators in these texts are trying to figure out ways in which Black students can be educated effectively. The authors suggest that a rethinking of the way Blacks approach education and schooling is necessary. William Watkins in *Beyond Desegregation* (1996) suggested that Black researchers revisit the research of "early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Black intellectuals" such as Carter G. Woodson (p. 5). Siddle Walker in *Beyond Desegregation* (1996) revisited her work of Caswell County Training School (CCTS) and suggests that caring be part of discussions on school reform. She explains, "an understanding of segregated schooling serves several important functions in the educational literature; among them are providing a historically accurate and balanced portrayal of African American schooling and offering an opportunity to provide context for discussions on school reform" (p. 210). She juxtaposes her story of CCTS with a short narrative of "Man," a 16-year old "pushed out" student who sees "school as a place where he encounters enemies" (p. 9).

In *Too much schooling, too little education*, Carol Lee (1994) offered an idea of what education should be like for Blacks. She stated the following:

An African-centered pedagogy is needed to support a line of resistance to the imposition of Eurocentric biases. It is needed to produce an education that contributes to achieving pride, equity, power, wealth, and cultural continuity for Africans in America and elsewhere. In addition, such a pedagogy is needed to foster an ethical character development grounded upon social practice within the African community. (p. 296)

She also believes that “education [in general] is defined in ways that ignore time, space, gender, and culture” (p. 296). Shujaa (1994) stated that there is a strategic difference between schooling and education; however, the implied expectation is that “education” will be an outcome of “schooling.” He further explains that there may be an overlap, but that Blacks get more schooling than education. He provides definitions of schooling and education:

Schooling is a process *intended* to perpetuate and maintain the society’s existing power relations and the institutional structures that support those arrangements...Education, in contrast to schooling is the process of transmitting from one generation to the next knowledge of values, aesthetics, spiritual beliefs, and all things that give a particular cultural orientation its uniqueness. (p. 15)

Therefore, for Shujaa, schooling is a way that leaders of a nation are able to socialize students with the values of those leaders, even if this socialization is inherently racist and detrimental to these students. He states that “when multiple cultural orientations exist within a nation-state, it is the leadership among the adherents to the politically dominant cultural orientation that exercise the most influence on the ‘concepts, values, and skill’ that the schools transmit” (p. 15). He contends that Blacks must be “educated” – transferring knowledge, values, and cultural uniqueness from generation to generation.

### **Value of Education for Blacks – Post-Civil Rights Era**

*Young, Gifted, and Black* by Perry, Steele, and Hilliard (2003), chronicles achievement of Black Americans. In a three-part essay, Theresa Perry produces a “Theory of African-American Achievement.” She begins her first essay by discussing the history of Black education. She explains the following:

Evidence of the history and the African-American narrative tradition suggests that African Americans have understood the distinctive nature of the task of achievement. And out of their lived experience, from slavery to the dismantling of segregated schools, they have developed and enacted a philosophy of education...This philosophy was freedom of literacy and literacy for freedom, racial uplift, citizenship, and leadership. (p. 6)

Perry's "philosophy of education" is the impetus for the value of education, the professed belief in the importance of education (Philipsen, 1999).

Perry (2003) explained that there are differences in values and the attainment of educational achievement for Blacks in the post-Civil Rights era because of the prevalence of the idea of intellectual inferiority. She provided the following insights:

In the post-Civil Rights era, the task of achievement for African American youth is much more complicated. The idea of African Americans' intellectual inferiority still exists as part of the "taken-for-granted notions" of many people in the larger society, irrespective of political orientation. But at the same time there is the illusion of openness and opportunity... The ideology of the African-American inferiority is perhaps more robust today, in terms of its impact on students, than it was in the pre-Civil Rights era. In the pre-Civil Rights era, African American children and youth lived in communities, attended schools and churches, and were members of organizations that, in response to the larger society's explicit ideology about African Americans' intellectual competence, communicated a counternarrative about their intellectual capacities. (p. 96)

As Perry admits, the sites for the counternarrative of intellectual capacity and I contend discussions of the value of education have dwindled. Though the "visible, in-your-face manifestations of oppression have been mostly eliminated" (p. 97), Blacks are being inundated with symbolic violence. Perry creates a list of events that complicate the achievement of Blacks in the post-Civil Rights era:

1. Schools or spaces in schools are not intentionally organized to forge identities of Black students as achievers.
2. Schools provide few spaces that are intentionally designed to buffer Black students from day-to-day experience of racism in the school, and the explicit and subtle impact of the ideology of Black inferiority.
3. Schools are not likely to have a narrative counter to the "narrative of openness and opportunity," one that talks about Black achievement in the face of constraints and limits.
4. Schools make few attempts to systematically organize occasions to create desire, to inspire hope, to develop and sustain effort optimism or to intentionally create multiple contexts that socialize students to the behaviors that are necessary for them to be achievers.

5. There is a conspiracy of silence about how racism in and out of school blunts effort optimism.
6. African-American parents, as the first generation of African Americans to experience racism and its impact on achievement in and allegedly “open and integrated” society, might possibly not have figured out how to develop institutional formation and pass on psychological coping strategies to their children that respond to this new context. (pp. 99-100)

Perry’s (2003) work not only explains the philosophy of education but also how institutional structures in post-civil rights schools can affect younger generations of Black students. Her work, coupled with Gloria Ladson-Billings’ (2006) “education debt” allowed me to cross the span of time. Perry’s work prompts me to think of changes in the philosophy of education across time and Ladson-Billings’ work clarifies the institutional and societal structures that have impacted the educational system, and I contend the value of education. Ladson-Billings takes us from a deficit model of the achievement gap to an empowerment model of the “education debt.” With this framework, I can narrate the lived experiences of Black residents and glean spaces where the debt and change in the philosophy of education are evident. In order to do this, my study has to be emic (Patton, 2002), and has to be culturally sensitive (Tillman, 2002), as I will discuss in the next chapter. To truly understand the complexity of lived-experiences and values in education, I will use these theories to ground my study knowing that this Black community has much to say.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

We listen, if we listen well, with our whole selves (body, spirit, intellect, eye, imagination) and respond, in conversational form, in a way that indicates to the person we are interviewing that we have really heard. If we have not really heard, that is painfully and immediately evident and the interview is a failure (Clark, 2002, p. 87).

This is a qualitative study using oral history interviews. This study's methodology is also guided by (1) emic qualitative research (2) Tillman's (2002) culturally sensitive research approaches, and (3) and my positionality. I also discuss my thoughts on reciprocity in this chapter. In addition, I present my data collection and data analysis techniques.

#### **Oral History**

For Ritchie (2003), one does oral histories to “ask the questions that have not been asked, and to collect the reminiscences that otherwise would be lost” (p. 46). It is an academic, cultural and artistic practice, and is generally defined as the “narration, representation and interpretation of history through recorded interviews with eyewitnesses” (Clark, 2002, p. 89). I am using oral history as a source of dialogue and to ensure that the stories of Black residents in Nottoway County will not be lost.

For Clark (2002), who is influenced by Paulo Freire (1970), oral history is also a liberatory exercise. She also sees oral history as a “cultural community development,” which addresses issues of justice and reconciliation. To this end, she instructs the reader that cultural community development is linked in four distinctive ways:

1. Oral history restores the subject to history by documenting the history of communities that may have been excluded from historical accounts and encouraging individuals to see themselves as historical actors. It is possible through oral history projects to encourage people to remember as a way of entering and transforming history. (p. 91)
2. Oral history is a dialogical encounter based on rapport between interviewer and narrator, which can support healing, reconciliation and development. (p. 94)
3. Oral history is an artistic practice that can transform relationships and build new cultural perspectives, opening up new dialogues about the past. (p. 95)
4. Oral history is a liberatory practice which can empower communities to speak for themselves and act on their own behalf. (p. 103)

Clark's (2002) third distinction is similar to Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed (1979; 1992), and creating performances of research as a way of connecting a social web of meaning about schooling and engaging audiences beyond the academic community (Hanley, et. al., 2006). I view this as a mechanism for community development around pertinent issues and reciprocity.

### **Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research captures a scene, and is comparative either within the context of the study, space, and/or place. Preferably emic (of or relating to features or items analyzed with respect to their role as structural units in a complex system) and not etic (takes ideas outside of the system and applies it to the scene), qualitative research seeks to be holistic (Patton, 2002). The phenomenon of the study is understood as a complex system; moreover, complex interdependencies are revealed and the phenomena cannot be reduced to linearity. I believe qualitative research yields reflexivity, which "reminds the qualitative inquirer to be attentive to and conscious of the cultural, political, social, linguistic, and ideological origins of one's own perspective and voices of those one interviews and those to whom one reports" (Patton, 2000, p. 65).

As Patton explained, the philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry requires “a fundamental appreciation of naturalistic inquiry, qualitative methods, inductive analysis, purposeful sampling, and holistic thinking” (Patton, 2000, p. 553). In addition, the researcher discusses her predispositions and makes her positionality explicit, while acknowledging her academic or personal orientation. Qualitative research utilizes multiple modes of data collection: in-depth, open-ended interviews; direct observations; and document analysis. Qualitative research also utilizes triangulation – “providing diverse ways of looking at the same phenomenon but in adding credibility to strengthening confidence in whatever conclusions are drawn” (p. 556). In addition, qualitative researchers seek methodological skill, sensitivity, and integrity.

Kleinman’s (1991) discussion of fieldworker’s feelings and Noblit’s (1999) discussion of commitment both offer insight into my beliefs as a qualitative researcher. For Kleinman (1991), field researchers have been taught that science is not value free and our emotions express our ideologies and values. As researchers, we have expectations and feelings that affect the research and become part of that process.

For Noblit (1999), ethnographic researchers must make the following commitments – a commitment to people, knowing that people construct culture; a commitment to understanding knowing that an obstacle to that understanding is our own values; a commitment to learning realizing that we must expect to be ever ignorant; and a commitment to advocacy to alter injustice and clearly articulate people’s views. In qualitative research, I am the research instrument. I am charged with observing and interpreting a social world; a world that I have chosen to enter. I also decide what to observe (people, relationships, exchanges); and I ultimately interpret through my lens.



## Culturally Sensitive Research

*Culturally sensitive research approaches use qualitative methods such as interviews (individual, group, and life history), observation, and participant observation. These and other qualitative methods are used to investigate and capture holistic contextualized pictures of the social, political, economic, and educational factors that affect the everyday existence of African Americans, particularly in educational settings (Tillman, 2002, p.4).*

Tillman (2002) extended Collin's Black Feminist Thought (1990) and Dillard's (2000) theory of "endarkened" feminist epistemology to qualitative methodology. For Dillard, naming feminist epistemology "endarkened" is purposefully in contrast to the term "enlightened" as a way of expressing new and important feminist insights. She defines this "endarkened" feminist epistemology as the articulation of how reality is known when based in the historical roots of Black Feminist Thought. It embodies a distinguishable difference in cultural standpoint and is located at the intersection of culturally constructed socializations of race, gender, and other identities and the historical and contemporary contexts of oppressions and resistance for Black women.

With this, Tillman (2002) provided a framework for how to think about culturally sensitive research. For Tillman, culturally sensitive research approaches are based on the following:

- (1) culturally congruent research methods (used to investigate and capture contextualized and holistic accounts);
- (2) culturally specific knowledge (using the particular and self-defined experiences of Blacks and maintaining their cultural integrity);
- (3) cultural resistance to theoretical dominance (revealing and understanding unequal power relations that may marginalize or exclude multiple realities; privilege and neutrality are continually questioned);

- (4) culturally sensitive data interpretation (positioning experiential knowledge as legitimate and necessary for analyzing and reporting data); and
- (5) Culturally informed theory and practice (development of theories and practices intended to address specific circumstances of the participants' lives).

I am using Tillman's approach in this research because it emphasizes the cultural standpoints of both myself and my participants; moreover, it "positions culture as central to the research process" (p. 3). African Americans are at the center of my inquiry; moreover, my analysis and interpretations are co-constructed with my participants. The narratives presented in this study are holistic accounts, as I maintain cultural integrity. Tillman's approach calls for me to state my positionality, be reflexive and most importantly, understand that the knowledge of my participants is a necessary condition for understanding the phenomenon in Nottoway County.

### **Positionality**

Positionality, which began in feminist literature, allows me to clearly state the lens through which I interpret a social world. For Maher and Tetreault (1993), writing in the feminist tradition and citing Haraway (1988) and Harding (1990), positionality means that important aspects of our own identity, exemplified in race, class, gender, age, etc. are markers of relational positions rather than essential qualities. The effects of these aspects and their implications change according to the context. Maher and Tetreault (1993) also contend that feminist thinkers (and I believe qualitative researchers) see knowledge as valid when it comes from an acknowledgement of the knower's specific position in context.

Villenas' (1996) discussion of the colonizer/colonized dilemma has had a profound effect as I think through my research and my positionality. Her work makes me view positionality not only as informing methodology but also as a power dynamic. As I go into the

field, my “authority” as representative of the university (here, as a graduate student) affects the way participants view me, the way they decide to answer questions, the way I gain entrance into the field, etc. And though I deal with issues of isolation and oppression within the academy (as colonized), I am simultaneously a representative of this institution (as colonizer).

As Kleinman (1991), Noblit (1999), Morris (2004), and the authors in *Women in the Field* (Generett & Jeffries, 2003) have done, I too must succinctly state my positionality and how it informs my research. I work to discuss my lens as a Black woman. I think of Collin’s (1990) assertion of both/and. I am simultaneously both black and woman. I work to think of both/and with my participants. To acknowledge complexity, I work to use the words of the participants and their definitions; to not take anything for granted. But, this work must be continual. For me, the learning curve has been steep. I look back at some of my question, research notes, and analyses and ask, “What was I thinking?” How did I miss such an important probe? How did I just assume what s/he meant? How did I make such a complex person and wonderful person so boring and flat? These are all questions that I struggle with as I research and as I write.

Though I do not consider this work to be postcritical ethnography, I do subscribe to its tenet of reflexivity. Meaning, I believe my work should be “collaborative, dialogic, and educative” (p. 106). I have learned a great deal from Paula Groves’ (2003) book chapter in *Women in the Field*. She talks about the Insider/Outsider dilemma, and uses her work to add to Villenas’ (1996) discussion. What is most helpful in this research is Groves’ discussion on researchers who study “one’s own.” As Groves explains:

Because the “exotic other” is usually the subject of study in traditional ethnography, studying one’s own can become a site of conflict. Researchers who study their own have been suspect of deviating from the research project’s purpose – to describe and understand culture – because of the shared assumptions and biases that the researchers carry by the nature of their “sameness” to their research participants (p. 103).

This “sameness” is magnified when I go “home”, to my county, and interview people who may have known me from childhood. It was extremely hard not to assume what they were saying – not to be too familiar. In addition, I have been out of the county for quite some time. I want to know – to be an insider, but I do not know because I am ultimately an outsider. Not only because I am now the researcher but also because I have been away. I am one of the people who we talk about in the interviews; a person who leaves Nottoway to get an education and does not come back. Though participants did not talk about “these people” negatively, my initial reaction was to feel guilty about leaving, to wonder if I am doing my home community a disservice, to wonder if leaving and then coming back to write about it will make a difference. Because ultimately, I do believe my scholarship should. Groves (2003) further explores the notion of studying “one’s own.”

In the case where researchers find themselves “studying” in their own communities, where they are on the one hand the researcher, and on the other hand the researched, the learning process usually begins with questions of boundary crossings. What identity do we perform at any given moment – that of the researcher or that of the researched? What happens when both identities are performed simultaneously and are in dialogue? Can we really be insiders once we have aligned ourselves with academic institutions? (p. 107)

In the spirit of this dialogic process, I will attempt to answer these questions by stating my positionality as it relates to this study. I will incorporate my positionality statement when I first went into the field with my thoughts on the study now.

### ***My Positionality***

I wrote the following positionality statement while I was in the field conducting interviews. I have presented it here because I still believe it presents an accurate depiction of my positionality regarding this research.

I refuse to ever believe that Blacks are inherently inferior intellectually or morally. My family’s legacy and my lived experiences tell me differently. I remember my father telling me stories of African kings and queens before slavery. Though many stories may seem romanticized, they taught me of a history before slavery, before forced bondage, before

three-fifths. Instead, my worldview was contextualized as someone who was a superior being, a proud sister, a human being capable of living and not only existing. Couched in these stories, was the necessity of education – not only for myself but also for my race. My race consisted of all brothers and sisters. Though my family did not, in my opinion, discuss the black race in the Diaspora, they focused on the United States and provided stories of the civil rights movement. My father made sure to tell me about Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, and Nat Turner.

In Spelman, I learned about Black Women activists – Angela Davis, Pearl Cleage, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, and Sister President Johnetta B. Cole. My first memory of Spelman College was a letter sent to all "freshwomen" with our first reading assignment – "Interlocking Systems of Oppression: Race, Class, and Gender". It provided a way of thinking about Black women's oppressions as both/and, as Collins (1990) asserts and not either/or. These experiences have shaped my worldview as a Black woman and as a researcher.

### **Reciprocity**

The conversational exchange of the research interview invites participants to recount their educational stories; moreover, in telling their stories and sharing experiences, the study participants illuminated and "made real" the educational experiences of Black residents in Nottoway County. For Glesne (1999), reciprocity can be in the therapeutic effect of the interview process. She explains, "What specifically is therapeutic about the interview process is the unburdening effect of the respondents' saying safely whatever they feel...The therapeutic dimension of a good interview is part of what [I] return to [my] respondents" (p. 85). Patton (2002) found that giving participants recordings of the interview and transcripts was a way to continue family histories. He explained, "Participants in research provide us with something of great value, their stories and their perspectives on their world. We show that we value what they give us by offering something in exchange" (p. 415).

I have salient memories of two of my participants and how I could actually know that the interview process was therapeutic. Though many talked about how the memories visited were wonderful, Hazel (age 51) asked for a copy of the interview for her daughters to know their family history. Lewis (age 20) found a feeling of importance as we did our interview in a public

setting. He found that people were watching our interaction and that I was not only asking him questions about his life experiences but also I was writing down his thoughts.

I also believe that the act of writing this document and the knowledge and understanding gained from this study may be useful to a broad educational audience. The study should be particularly beneficial to the Nottoway County community. I intend to share the research findings with this community. Moreover, this study may contribute to continuing literature on the experiences of Blacks in education.

### **Description of Key Participants and Sampling**

For the purpose of this study, I interviewed 21 Black residents in Nottoway County Virginia: five participants educated in segregated schools (ages 55 years and older); six participants who experienced desegregation (45-55 year olds); five participants who were educated in only desegregated schools (25-35 year olds); and five participants who are recent graduates (18-21 year olds). I interviewed participants with varying socioeconomic status, gender, school experience, and who grew up in different towns/areas of the county. For the older generation in particular, I interviewed participants who only attended segregated schools, who were part of “Freedom of Choice,” and who experienced the beginning stages of desegregation.

Below is a table that indicates pertinent demographic information on each of the participants. Although participants, on average, have fared well economically and socially, the overall criterion was predicated on their status during their K-12 education and not their post-secondary educational attainment. For my sample, 93.8% of the participants (age 25 and older) have high school diplomas and 43.8% (age 25 and older) have at least a bachelor’s degree. This is much higher than what the 2000 Census data reports for the county (see pp. 6-7)

#### **Table 1:**

**Participants' Demographic Information**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Highest Level of Education</b>	<b>Current Position</b>
<b>18 – 21 Year Olds</b>				
Jamal	21	Male	H.S. Graduate	Janitor/Maintenance National Guard Reservist
James	18	Male	11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	High School Student
Latoya	18	Female	H.S. Graduate	2-year College Student
Lewis	20	Male	H.S. Graduate	Correctional Officer National Guard Reservist
Michelle	20	Female	H.S. Graduate	4-year college student
<b>25 – 35 Year Olds</b>				
Brian	29	Male	Masters Degree	Guidance Counselor
Greg	30	Male	H. S. Certificate of Program Completion	Odd Jobs Caregiver for elderly man
Darrell	30	Male	Informational Technology (IT) Certificate	Desktop Computer Supporter Minister
Kim	27	Female	H.S. Graduate 3.5 years of college	Head Bank Teller
William	33	Male	Bachelors Degree	Assistant Principal
<b>45 – 55 Year Olds</b>				
Harold	56	Male	H.S. Graduate	Retired/Part-time bus driver
Evelyn	53	Female	Masters Degree	K-12 School Administrator
Gloria	54	Female	Nursing School Graduate	Registered Nurse
Hazel	51	Female	Masters Degree	Middle School Teacher
Laura	53	Female	Bachelors Degree	Elementary School Teacher
Tiffany	47	Female	Associates Degree	Criminal Justice Correctional Officer/Counselor
<b>55+ Year Olds</b>				
Debra	58	Female	Associates Degree	Communication Specialist for national organization
Joanne	59	Female	Business School Graduate	Secretary to State Director of Housing Organization
John	60	Male	Master Degree	High School Teacher/Pastor
Sarah	65	Female	Degree in Business Management	Retired
Sheila	67	Female	Business School Graduate	Retired

The nature of fieldwork often involves on-the-spot decision making about sampling populations in order to take advantage of new opportunities during the data collection process. Thus, Patton (2002) argued, and I agree, that an emergent qualitative design such as this must include the option of adding to a sample to take advantage of unforeseen opportunities after fieldwork has begun. I used purposeful sampling approach; specifically, I combined criterion sampling and snowball sampling. This approach is used to locate “information rich cases” from key informants. I first interviewed three well-situated individuals – Evelyn, John, and Sarah – who agreed to be my key informants. I asked them for their recommendations of other possible participants.

Evelyn attended Crewe High School (segregated White high school) during Freedom of Choice. She recommended that I interview Harold, Gloria, and Laura who also attended Crewe High School. Evelyn is also involved in community and church events and she recommended that I interview Joanne because of her experience in segregated schools. John is a high school teacher and a pastor. In addition, he attended segregated schools. He recommended that I interview Debra, who attended segregated schools; William, who is an assistant principal; Hazel, who is a teacher and a former coworker; and Michelle, who he knew during her years in high school and who he continues to communicate with since her high school graduation. From there, Michelle recommended that I interview Lewis; moreover, Lewis recommended his friend Jamal. During the day of the interview, Lewis and Jamal came together, and I subsequently did a group interview with them.

Sarah was a key informant because she is heavily involved in the community and she also wrote a book regarding the history of Black education in Nottoway from 1865-1950. Sarah talked about her educational experiences in “the country” of Crewe. She recommended that I interview Sheila because she had a different experience growing up in the town of Blackstone



during segregation. I knew Latoya from a summer program during her elementary school years; and I wanted to get her perspective as a high school graduate. In addition, a student that I personally know from the high school recommended James, who was a friend that she believed, was “articulate.” She was not old enough to participate in the study, however.

I have had informal conversations with Tiffany, Brian, Greg, Darrell, and Kim about their educational and professional experiences in Nottoway County. I asked Tiffany if she would consent to an interview because of her experience with mandatory desegregation. In addition, I asked Brian, Greg, Darrell, and Kim to participate in an interview because of their varied experiences in Nottoway High School and their differing decisions to stay or leave Nottoway post-high school.

In all of my sampling decisions, I worked to ensure that different voices were represented. I purposefully talked with adults 55 and older who grew up in different parts of the county, and had different lived experiences educationally and economically. I interviewed adults who were 45-55 year olds to understand their experiences during Freedom of Choice and mandatory desegregation. I interviewed 25-35 year olds who had different experiences in school and different post-secondary decisions. In addition, I interviewed 18-21 year olds who grew up in different regions of the county and had varied educational experiences. In addition, I purposefully interviewed present educators/administrators/staff in Nottoway County Schools – William, Harold, Laura, and John – because of their interaction with current students.

### **Data Collection/Conducting the Study**

Once I contacted participants, I conducted extensive data collection seeking multiple sources of information. Data collection consisted of interviews, document analysis, and a focus group.

## ***Interviews***

I have been influenced by Seidman's (2006) work on in-depth interviewing. Because the essence of this study is grounded in the experiences and perceptions of adults in Nottoway County, I conducted interviews using a variation of Seidman's (2006) phenomenological in-depth interviewing model. His three-step process allowed me to contextualize the participant's experience in their life histories. Seidman's three steps are the following: (1) life history, which can help to identify the context of participants' experience; (2) the details of current experience, which enables participants to reconstruct their experiences in light of the research topic; and (3) reflection on meaning, which encourages participants to reflect on the meaning that particular experiences hold for them. Additionally, Tillman (2002) suggests using life histories because it is a culturally congruent research method.

Seidman (2006) affirms that exploring alternatives to the structure and procedure of this method is often warranted. Consequently, I undertook a variation of Seidman's method that included an extended first interview followed by a generational focus group. I used his three step approach during the interview to frame my questions (See Appendix A).

## ***Focus Group***

In general, a focus group is usually an interview that is conducted with a small group of individuals (6-12 people), and typically lasts for one-two hours (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Patton, 2002). The purpose of the focus group is to get data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of other participants. Therefore, I conducted an intergenerational focus group after all interviews were completed in an effort to attain richer intergenerational discussions.

Ultimately, I decided it would be beneficial to have at least one focus group to ensure that everyone's voice was heard. Seven participants attended the focus group: three who were 55

years and older; two who were between 45-55 years old; and two who between 25-35 years old.

Unfortunately, no 18-21 year old participants were able to attend. I asked the following questions:

- (1) What is the purpose of education for the Black community?
- (2) What effect did desegregation have on the school system in Nottoway County?
  - a. Teachers
  - b. Students
  - c. Community
- (3) How are Nottoway's race relations now? How does it affect educational experiences?
- (4) What is the future of Nottoway County?
  - a. Educational system
  - b. Economy
  - c. Community
- (5) What would you like me to say about Nottoway?
- (6) Is there anything else you want to add?

These characterizations were gathered from previous individual interviews. My hope was to foster a sense of collaboration and community that might facilitate further discussion.

Participation in the focus group, as with the interviews, was voluntary.

### ***Document Analysis***

I used relevant documents that provided context to the educational and economic experience of participants. Document analysis in qualitative inquiry makes use of excerpts, quotations, or entire passages from organizational, clinical, or program records, memoranda and correspondences, official publications and reports, and personal diaries (Merriam, 1988). In this research, resources include relevant newspaper articles, the Virginia's Superintendent Annual Reports, school yearbooks, church documents, and U. S. Census data.

## **Data Analysis**

I transcribed 10 interviews along with reflective field logs, and a transcriptionist was hired to transcribe 11 interviews. After transcribing, I used a modified Glesne (1999) model of early data analysis, which included the following: (1) reflective field log (memo writing), (2) analytic files, and (3) rudimentary coding schemes. As I further analyzed the data, I created codes and a “code book.” Glesne also recommended creating monthly reports; however, Seidman’s (2006) creation of a profile better served me during my dissertation process.

### ***Reflective Field Log***

Glesne (1999) explained that writing personal memos is synonymous with keeping a “reflective field log, which I personally refer to so that it will not be confused with “memoing” (Lofland, J. & Lofland, L.H. 1995; Charmaz, 1983; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The reflective field log allowed me to document my thoughts as they occurred in the field. Much of my reflection occurred during the long drives to Virginia and as I traveled around the county to different participants’ homes. Therefore, I used my digital recorder, and then transcribed those thoughts into my field log.

### ***Analytic Files***

Glesne (1999) explained that analytic files build as you go. Initial files may include interview questions, people, and for my study, generations. I likened these initial files to “families” in ATLAS.ti software, which I used. Glesne further explains as “data and experience grow, [I] will create relevant specific files on the social processes under investigation, as well as on several other categories such as subjectivity, titles, thoughts for introductory and concluding chapters, and quotations from the literature” (p. 131).

### ***Rudimentary Coding Schemes***

Rudimentary coding schemes are synonymous with Lofland and Lofland's (1995) "initial coding" stage and Seidman's (2006) "reducing data." Initially, I created rudimentary coding schemes as I sorted data into analytic files (Glesne, 1999) as I looked for what I could define and discover in the data (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Seidman suggests "reducing" data inductively, and not deductively. "That is, the researcher cannot address the material with a set of hypotheses to test or with a theory developed in another context to which he or she wishes to match the data" (p. 117). In short, rudimentary coding schemes allowed for my initial response to the data, through my lens and my knowledge of the study at that time.

### ***Coding***

Lofland and Lofland (1995) presented two states of analytic coding: (1) initial coding, and (2) focused coding. Initial coding, as explained above, is an inductive approach, and was my initial response to the data. Focused coding occurred when I assessed how I coded the data. For example, I determined which codes occur more frequently, if subcodes were required, and if codes should be collapsed or consolidated. Glesne (1999) suggests creating a code book, which houses both major codes (families) and subcodes. I used both a code book in the field and ATLAS.ti to aide in coding transcripts.

### ***Profiles***

I generated a profile for each participant by coding large passages (rudimentary coding/initial coding/reducing data) of the original transcript, and creating a narrative (Seidman, 2006). Creating profiles allowed me "to present the participant in context, to clarify his or her intentions, and to convey a sense of process and time, all central components of qualitative analysis" (Seidman, p. 119). The use of first-person accounts of my participants was necessary in creating their profile.

## *Narratives*

In chapters four through seven, I offer narratives from the four generations. The narratives are arranged by major themes for each generation and are the words of the participants, unless indicated. The data were coded, paying close attention to Clandinin and Connelley's (2000) metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space and Tillman's (2002) culturally sensitive research approaches. Clandinin and Connelley's space consists of the "personal and social (interaction); past, present, and future (continuity); combined with the notion of place (situation)" (p. 50).

Initially, I planned to create composite narratives for each generation to understand their experiences and perceptions. It became glaringly obvious; however, that variation in voices would not permit it. For the 18-21 year old participants, the male and female voices were quite different. Two of the men talked about "playing" in school and their regrets for playing. In addition, the two women were in post-secondary education and talked about their experiences. For the 45-55 year olds, there were variations based on if one participated in Freedom of Choice and/or mandatory desegregation. In addition, there were class distinctions for both 45-55 year olds and participants older than 55.

Ultimately, I decided that all of the voices were distinctive and composite narratives were not appropriate for this study; therefore, the narratives are organized thematically. As Glesne (1999) explains, "By analyzing the data, the researcher generates a typology of concepts, gives them names or uses 'native' labels, and then discusses them one by one, illustrating with descriptive detail" (p. 166). With this in mind, I provide a detailed description of each participant and then a thematic narrative based on their educational experiences. I begin with the older generations and end with the youngest generation. I then create a dialogue composed of

interview and focus group data and pertinent research in Chapter Eight and my conclusions in Chapter Nine.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **GENERATIONAL NARRATIVES: 55+ YEAR OLDS**

Debra, Joanne, John, Sarah, and Sheila shared their experiences in Nottoway County. John and Sarah grew up in Crewe; Joanne and Debra grew up in Burkeville; and Sheila grew up in Blackstone. I realized that I had perspectives from Black residents who grew up in the “country” of Crewe and Burkeville, and one participant who grew up in the “town” of Burkeville, but did not have a participant who grew up in Blackstone. Sarah remembered Sheila from school and suggested that I interview Sheila because she grew up in the town of Blackstone. Although Nottoway is a rural community, residents distinguish parts of the county by being “in town” (the corporate limits) and being “in the country” (beyond the corporate limits).

I have provided family narratives for each participant and community narratives for each town to understand their lived experiences. In addition, the participants discussed their current life experiences and their journeys after leaving Luther H. Foster (Black segregated high school), which all of the participants attended. Before Foster, however, participants attended different Black segregated elementary schools. Sarah and John went to Fergusonville School (in Crewe); Debra attended Burkeville School and Ingleside School (both in Burkeville); Joanne also attended Burkeville School; and Sheila attended A. G. Richardson (in Blackstone).



## Debra

Debra is 58 years old and works as a Communication Specialist in Washington, D. C. I interviewed Debra at her parents' home during one of her visits to Nottoway. She has a different lens than many participants, and her candor was quite informative as I learned about her lived experiences. She also talked about her family and her reasons for leaving Nottoway

Debra grew up in Burkeville in the "country." Unlike many participants who had small communities even in their rural setting, she found her house to be isolated, with neighbors more than a mile away. She explained:

See we were raised on a farm. We were isolated. We didn't grow up with black people as neighbors. We had some neighbors that I guess were like a mile or two away, but didn't have people close. We didn't live as close to people as we live right now, like our house where you could walk and interact. We lived on a big farm surrounded by white people, because our grandparents worked for the people. They could walk up to the barn or somewhere like that. That's where my grandmother did housework. And then by them working on a farm, you know, like my grandfather, he would go to work early in the morning, before daybreak to milk cows and stuff. He would come back and we'd be getting ready for school, then my grandmother would go and work the house, the larger house, the big house. And then she would do breakfast and maybe a little laundry, and then she would come back at noontime.

And then [my mother] worked at the factory. Crewe Garment [Factory]. She used to walk and catch rides. You know she didn't have a car. She used to walk to Burkeville or catch a ride with somebody to Burkeville. And then they had milk trucks in those days and they had a route, and you could actually catch a ride...people in those days would actually give you a ride and be in no danger. If they knew you had a certain pattern or were struggling, you know people would swing through there. You know she used to catch rides with different people [and] they would bring her [to work].

We didn't have like expressions and terms that they have now. All I remember as a child is that I existed. I used to daydream a lot, and we didn't have resources, and we didn't have a phone. All the socialization we did, if it wasn't in the house...of course there was nobody you could really pair off with, because [my sister], she was younger than me. She was a bookworm. Like me, I used to like to play hopscotch. I used to like to jump rope. I used to like to dance. That was my outlet. If I could dance, that was my escape. I liked literature, and I used to like world geography because I traveled in my mind.

In addition to daydreaming to escape the isolation, Debra also escaped through television. She remembered getting a television when she was six or seven years old, and she

used to sit and watch it “until the station went off at 12 o’clock or 12:30.” Her analysis of television in her life as a child is interesting because of the opinions she formed regarding race.

She recounted:

The things I was interested in when we did get TV, you know we only had black and white images on TV. We had Amos and Andy on TV. But that Nat King Cole, I used to soak up every bit of Nat King Cole I could. I thought that was so fascinating to see a black person on television, but I didn’t know about black family life. See we used to watch you know back in our day, they had some good westerns on and the Indians always lost. Do you know I used to sit on the edge of my seat hoping they’d kill them [the cowboys]... I’m tired of seeing the Indians talk baby talk. I’m tired of Tonto kissing up to the Lone Ranger, when Tonto to me seemed like he was kind of intelligent, and he sure was sharp. To me Tonto was sharper than the Lone Ranger. Tonto had a little bit of class because he was kind of rough, kind of rugged looking. I said that baby-faced Lone Ranger, I’m tired of him bossing Tonto. You know but when you are a child you don’t know how to express it. I used to get so tired...why is Tonto always the man’s colored man? He was always the...you know that word that we’re not supposed to use.

Debra began her schooling at Burkeville School and then went to Ingleside in 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

She shared her experiences as she entered elementary school, starting with primer grade at six years old. She recounted:

I started school in 1954 in primer [at] Burkeville Elementary School, a little three-room school. I went three years. I went to primer grade; I skipped the 1<sup>st</sup> grade, so I went from the primer grade to 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and then the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. And the only way you caught up was if you skipped the 1<sup>st</sup> grade. If you could read and write and do everything the 1<sup>st</sup> graders could do, while you were in the primer grade, you were skipped. Because see, we were taught a lot of stuff at home because we had a lot of kids in the house. So therefore, when we started school, we could read and write at six years old. And we didn’t know all about phonics and all of that, but we knew our ABCs, we could write. We knew birthdays, we knew dates. We knew a lot of stuff because there were older kids in the house. And then in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade I went to Ingleside. I think they stopped skipping kids’ grades like that because they cut out the primer, because that made a lot of the black kids a little bit older when they finished the 12<sup>th</sup> grade than a lot of the white kids.

After graduating from Luther H. Foster and working for about a year in the county, Debra entered the military. From there, she moved back to Nottoway but ultimately moved to Washington, D.C. where she currently lives. She said she made her decisions for the following reasons:

I knew I wanted to get out of school as quick as I could, but as far as a vocation, I didn't want to be a nurse. I didn't want to be a teacher. And what else did I see? I see that a factory is hard work. I ain't saying I wouldn't do that. And then when I started watching television... Yeah, I believe there's a way out of here. Then when I really got out, I went to school and took a course or two, but there were no jobs around here...so I ended up going into the military. And that's when I really learned what was available. You know by meeting people from different states, different places. I said this world is wide. This world is OK after all, because I didn't feel too good about that [before].

[My mother] got a loan for me to go to Durham Business School. I went down there to that school. I was so disappointed. I didn't like the way it looked. They had a dirt road leading down the hill to some apartments...I heard so much about that school, read the books. I'm going to Durham Business College. [I] got that loan and I went down there. I did not like that school...so I took a course at Career Training Institute in Richmond. I used to drive [my mother's] car to the bus station in Burkeville and catch the greyhound bus, or she used to drop me off... [and] I took up keypunching. And then the only jobs that Black people could get was in a bank at night in Richmond. How was I going to get from Burkeville to Richmond at night? So then I went to the military. I said at least I've got some training I could use when I went in.

I was in the Women's Army Corps. I was in about 2 years because I got pregnant with my son. Then I came back and I had [my son] here. And then when I left here I went to Washington, D.C. My grandmother gave me \$100, and to D.C. I went! And I've been in D.C. ever since. So I didn't start college until I went to D.C.

Debra began working for the government in Washington, D.C. for the Department of Defense and stayed for 10 years. She now works as a Communication Specialist for a service center of a national organization. She plans on retiring in four more years, when she is 62.

### **Joanne**

I interviewed Joanne in her home during the holiday season. She is known in Nottoway for her generosity. But, I was still surprised when she gave me a present for interviewing her. She also prepared breakfast as we sat and continued our conversation after the interview at her kitchen table. Our interview was very much a conversation. Joanne has a rhythm to her speech, which involves saying your name during her sentences. I kept that rhythm here for authenticity.

Joanne, 59, grew up in the town of Burkeville and had vivid memories of her family, which meshed with her community and church memories. Joanne explained:

I was an only child. I'm an only child. My mom and dad's only child... But I want to let you know, Monifa, let me tell you that I know that those two people loved me. Oh, I know, but they gave you what you needed, not all of your wants. You see what I'm saying. And, Monifa, I tell you, I had, just like I told you there were plenty of kids, so even though I was an only child, I never thought that I was [selfish]. People say, "An only child would be so selfish." I never felt that way, never thought that, because see we were so close knit here. There were plenty of children on this street that I had to play with.

And of course, Monifa, when I was coming up, you were disciplined. They wanted you to behave. You know, you had guidelines, you know. You had your work clothes, your school clothes, and then you had your little church clothes. Well, when you came home in the evenings from school, you took those school clothes off, and you put on your work clothes, because see, you had to go outside and pick up chips and things like that, bring in wood, see. Now ever since I can remember, Monifa, we've had running water here, because we used town water. Now I have seen some springs, Monifa. Don't you think I haven't seen springs because you've got to have springs here in this area too. But we had running water, so I never remember me going to the spring to get water.

I was born and raised right here in Burkeville. I went to business school in Richmond for two years, and even though I was living in Richmond during the week, I came home every weekend. So I have been here all of my life. Now, Monifa, I've got to tell you, just like I say I was born and raised here, it was a two-story house, my mom's home place over on the next street, one street over from here. And I was born in my grandmother's bedroom. At that time the women didn't go to the hospital to have babies. You must remember, Monifa, I'm 59 years old. And there was a doctor here, and he delivered me right in my grandmother's house, right up on the next street. Well, I've been here ever since.

In addition to her memories of playing in the community and doing chores for her family, Joanne also talked proudly about her church and her memories of attending church with her grandmother.

At an early age I joined Macedonia Baptist Church. All right, Monifa, you should go to church with my grandmother. And of course I was young. We are young, but I'm going to get in church and show off. You know. Well, my grandmother just took me right out of church and just fanned my behind good. A lady [had] a two-story house right across from the church...and she came out there and she said something to my grandmother about giving me this spanking. But I want to let you know, Monifa, she carried me back. People never carried a child back home after they spanked them in church, they carried them back in church and they set them in their pew. But don't you know, Monifa that

was one of the best things that could have ever happened to me. Now I was small and I can't tell you [how old I was], but I was a young child when that happened. Well, from that day to this day, I know how to go into a church and respect that church. You know how to act when you go into a church. There are certain places, Monifa, that are just sacred, and that's that church and that cemetery. These are places that are sacred places. When you go there you don't expect to be tearing up and acting up. These are sacred places.

Joanne attended primer through 4<sup>th</sup> grades at Burkeville School. She then went to Ingleside School from 5<sup>th</sup> through 7<sup>th</sup> grade, and Luther H. Foster from 8<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Joanne began Burkeville School at age six. She showed me her report card from primer grade, which presented her scholastic achievement, health record, and attendance. The teacher graded her on reading, arithmetic, writing, health, art and music. In addition, the teacher checked children's eyes, ears, throat, teeth, weight, and "five pointer" in October and April of the school year. She also constructed the following experiences of her schooling:

When I started Monifa with the primer grade, just like I tell you, I've got the report card here for you to see. And then they built Ingleside School. That was over here where the school is now. So when I started over there, Monifa, I started in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, which meant I went from the primer to the 4<sup>th</sup> over here. And oh, we were so excited going to a new school, Monifa, Ingleside. And so I started over there in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. So it was 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> over there.

But now you must remember, Monifa, for my entire schooling here in Nottoway, I did not go to an integrated school. When I graduated from Luther H. Foster in 1965, the schools were still segregated. So all the time I went it was all black. Now you notice, Monifa, on this report card it says the primer right here... So you see, Monifa, [I went] from the primer and then [I] went to the second. So that's what you called a skip. I skipped the first and went on, and this report card my mom always kept and you see it was S's. It used to be S's and U's, Satisfactory and Unsatisfactory. And this was the scholastic achievements, and this was the citizenship and personality development on this side. And it's just amazing to go back through some of those cards just to see how well you did.

After attending Ingleside, Joanne went to Luther H. Foster from 8<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. She talked about her first time riding the bus and meeting students in different parts of the county.

Oh, I was catching the school bus then. In my neighborhood, I had walked all this time, but now I was catching the school bus. Oh yeah, riding the school bus. And so I never will forget the number. [It was] Bus 25. Each bus had a number on it, and it was Bus 25, and Mr. Parker was our driver. Oh, he was the nicest person that you have ever met. Just as patient with us as he could be. I can see him now. You're making a whole lot of noise, Monifa, and he was so low-keyed and quiet, you could see those eyes looking through the rear-view mirror, and very seldom did he have to raise his voice. He was just so mild mannered. And Monifa, you know that Bus 25, I mean it picked up here, but I mean he had a big route. Oh, he had a big route.

When I went to Luther H. Foster, you had Blackstone, Crewe, and Burkeville, all these areas that went to [it] that was our high school, Luther H. Foster High School, and that supported all of Nottoway, you see. But that's when you really...because up on this end it was a lot just Burkeville, but that's when we came in contact with other people. That's when I met your Dad. When we went to Luther H. Foster, see. We came in contact with other people there. Sure, and then Monifa, I graduated there in '65, and I want to let you know that it's been more than 40...we've celebrated our 40<sup>th</sup> class reunion year before last. And Monifa, it's just amazing how we still have a closeness. Now you know it wasn't 100 percent participation at that class reunion, but let me tell you, those of us that gathered, we were just so happy and so glad to be together. And Edward Tisdale, he was one of our Senior Sponsors, and he spoke at that 40<sup>th</sup> reunion, and Monifa, he said that he was just so proud of us. When he started with us, when he came to Luther H. Foster he was right out of college, so he was young too.

After Joanne graduated from Luther H. Foster in 1965, she entered Smith-Madden Business College in Richmond, a segregated business college, and she majored in "Professional Secretarial." She would take the Greyhound bus to Richmond and she stayed with a family in Richmond in one of their vacant rooms. She went to business school during the week and returned home to Burkeville for the weekend. After two years, Joanne graduated and received her certificate. And she "has been working ever since." She is currently a Secretary to State Director of Housing Organization. Like many residents of Nottoway County, she travels one hour to Richmond for work.

## **John**

John is 60 years old and well known in the community as a pastor and high school teacher. I interviewed him in his home as he thoughtfully answered each question. He grew up

in the “country” of Crewe and he talked about his family’s living conditions and family memories. He explained:

The housing wasn’t the best. No running water in the house that is. There was a little joke that the only running water we ever saw or had was when we ran to the spring to get it and ran back home with it. That was the only running water. The house was a basic four-room house. A lot of us would share a room, usually it was set up where you had the kitchen, and the living room might have had a bed in it to accommodate the young girls, and then there’s another bedroom that would accommodate the fellows, and then the other bedroom belonged to the parents. It was far from adequate, but it did what it had to do.

John’s family lived and worked on the property of a White farmer, who took time out to teach him about farming. John also began working at approximately six years old, to earn money for his family. John also described the community where he lived in the country and how the residents earned a living in farming. He recounted:

My thoughts would be one of people, Blacks and Whites, trying to make it. Jim Crow was prevalent, but it wasn’t as striking to me as I guess when I got older and I heard some of the things that took place. We lived in the rural [area], and most times we lived on the property of a farmer, and most of the farmers whose property we lived on were open to teaching me how to drive tractors, and they also were very encouraging to me to get an education and to acquire things. They even talked to me about the value of property and stuff like that. So I guess I was blessed in that. I was always challenged by them, so really to think about it, it would be one of hardship for Blacks and Whites, especially if you didn’t have a job like on the railroad or something like that, to live off of the land. Tobacco was a cash crop item that was very big during the time I was coming up, and that’s where my first job was working in the tobacco fields.

[How old were you when you started your first job?]

I would imagine I was probably about six to eight [years old] or something like that. Well what we did, the little kids would do...I would have been a little kid at six or eight, we would hand the leaves. What happened is, the older people would take the mule and they had what they called a sled. I guess if you wanted to get some sort of measurement it would be maybe 2-feet wide or 3-feet deep, and maybe 8-feet long, and they would actually go out in to the fields and pull the leaves and put them in this wagon type thing drawn by the mules, and they would bring it back up to another location where we would stand around a table after they took it out of the wagon-like thing and laid it on the table, and then we would hand three leaves at a time to a stringer. This person, what they had...they would string them up...they would put a little string on the end of it and the leaves would actually be handed to the stringer and they would wrap a string around it. In other words, you’ve got three leaves, and they would wrap it and flip it on the other side and wrap three more and wrap three more and then flip it on the other side

until you had a row of leaves on both sides of the stick. And then what they would do is then you would put it in the barn and we had to build a fire... [and] the tobacco was cured or dried by wood. There were all kinds of oak wood and [we would] slide it into a concrete type shoot and it would heat up and the heat would go up into the barn to cure the tobacco.

Since John started working at approximately six years old, he said that he was not able to concentrate on his schoolwork as much as he wanted. He did complete elementary school and went to Luther H. Foster.

After finishing high school, John decided to leave Nottoway to find gainful employment and have different life experiences. He explained:

The reason for leaving was the limited opportunity that I was faced with. That was the main reason for leaving. Another reason was that I knew that there was a greater and wider world than I had been dealing with for whatever, 15, 16, or 17 years, whatever it was. And I had dreams and I had visions, and I didn't think they all could have been accomplished here. I wanted to go to college. I wanted to do some things, and it just couldn't happen during that time here as far as I was concerned.

You don't notice a lot of prejudice issues, you don't notice a lot of hatefulness when you're younger, but once you step over that whatever age society has determined, you now act like a man and look like a man, or think like a man, things do kind of change. So sometimes you have to shake the dust and try something new. And that's what I opted to do. Also I wanted to help my family, and I wanted to get a job or something and send money back home, things like that.

John returned to Nottoway and has worked in the school system since the early 1990s after earning a Masters of Divinity. He is also a pastor in a neighboring county.

### **Sarah**

Sarah is 65 years old and a graduate of Luther H. Foster. Before I interviewed Sarah, I first went for a visit with my mother because Sarah was on a county-wide committee that created the book, *Nottoway County Virginia Heritage: 1789-2006*. We went to order a copy of the book and I also learned that she was working on a book of her own regarding the history of Black education in Nottoway. My fieldnotes about our first meeting are the following:



We entered [Sarah's] house through the sun porch in the back full of comfy wicker-like furniture. She was transferring her television from her bright yellow kitchen into the sunroom when we entered. She said unlike many people, she doesn't have central air in her older house in town, but relies on window units to cool parts of her home. My mother chimed in, "We do too!" She said she preferred to meet around the kitchen table, a sturdy wood table cleared so that we could talk and work. Around her sunny, yellow kitchen were black memorabilia – an old "Mammy" statue in the glass cupboard, old replicas of cereal boxes, older looking chicken statues, etc.

[Sarah] was writing a book about the county: complete with the educational story of Black folks from 1850-1940. She explained that she went to a workshop in the Western part of the state, which was "put on by a Black man." She found out through one of her community contacts about it. My mother later explained, "[Sarah] is a person that connects the white and black communities. She goes to the meetings and knows about most of the events in the county." A man who was doing a history of his closed segregated Black elementary one-room schoolhouse presented this "workshop". He said the history of the school should be documented and he was encouraging everyone he knew to do it for their closed segregated elementary schools.

[Sarah] said she started with her elementary school, but extended to all elementary schools in the county because she did not know if the story would be told otherwise. She explained that she was so excited that a "young" person was interested in the history of the county because the history of how Black folks struggled for education is "so important." She and my mother both lamented that they didn't understand why the "younger people in school did not take school seriously." They believed that younger people were unaware of the struggles of their elders. What occurred was a three-hour discussion regarding Sarah's work, resources, and current events in town (especially the church scene). They both encouraged me to keep researching Black education and encourage others to do the same.

In short, this conversation with Sarah, before I entered the field, gave me confirmation that I was on the right path. We met at a later time to conduct the interview at that same sturdy kitchen table.

Sarah grew up in the "country" and she described the differences that being in different parts of the county create. Since she lived eight miles from town, community was in the local church. She explained:

Family basically, it was not all the same in Nottoway County, and what I have found is where you live in the county made a difference as to how you saw things too. You see, because I lived out in the country, what you call the country, which is 8 miles from town. Blackstone and Burkeville had a very thriving Black community right in the corporate limits. And that made a big difference when you could walk house to house, and you

could walk to church. Now we walked to church too, even though it was far. But the most striking thing I think would be in a rural farm area, that you would not have an immediate neighbor, you see. So then school and church becomes the center of your universe almost.

Sarah began Fergusonville School at six years old with primer grade, and skipped 1<sup>st</sup> and went to 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. She explained, “If you picked up really quick or whatever it is, [the teacher] would what they called at that time skip you, but you had to get permission of the visiting superintendent to put children in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade.” Sarah stayed at Fergusonville until 5<sup>th</sup> grade and then went to Watson School in a different area of Crewe, for 6<sup>th</sup> grade. She then entered Luther H. Foster from 7<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade, and graduated in 1959. She said the county was “experimenting” with her class, but ultimately found that 7<sup>th</sup> graders “don’t mix with high school students.” Therefore, the next year, Luther H. Foster housed Black students from 8<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grades.

After graduating high school, Sarah moved to New Jersey when she was 20 years old. She moved there because most of her relatives lived in New Jersey, having migrated there to find jobs in the area. She talked about the importance of having relatives that would allow you to stay with them as you “get on your feet.” She explained:

So at that time in the ‘50s, whoever was already established in the city would support and let the other one come, so you didn’t have to worry about any place to stay, and that was an unspoken, or maybe spoken sometimes, but you just always knew that you could go to your relatives if you were ambitious and you were going to work. I mean they weren’t going to let you sit there, but they would let you stay on long enough for you to get on your feet. And when I think about it now, that was wonderful that they would do that, because people have stopped kind of doing that, you know.

Sarah returned to Nottoway County in 1994 after retiring from the corporate world. She explained, “I’ve been in the business world basically...and many of those [jobs] were in management, dealing with people. My jobs have always been people oriented, like personnel or management.

## Sheila

I interviewed Sheila in her home in Blackstone. She was excited to talk to me about her experiences growing up and also discussed current politics in the county. She and her husband are involved with the Nottoway Civic League, an organization established in 1981 and sponsors educational events and events for senior citizens, in addition to providing a facility for the NAACP meetings, and family and church events.

Sheila grew up on the outskirts of Blackstone. Her mother was active in the NAACP and her schools' PTAs. Her father worked at Fort Pickett. So, Sheila provided memories of the Blackstone community but also the fight for civil rights in the county. She talked about her memories in Blackstone growing up.

The kids in the city called us in the country, but really... Well, the way it's set up, this is [the] country. We're not in the town of Blackstone, although my utilities and so forth is from the town of Blackstone, we're considered county. This is where I grew up. And my home place would be right by where...see where that truck is, and it was a two-story house [points out the window], which we were all raised up in. I'm understanding that from years back, my family lived like in the camp area, like my father and all of them. And then my father worked at Ft. Pickett and that was kind of unusual job for a Black man to have. It was a plumbing job, but that was still unusual for a Black man to have.

And like I said, because we were who we were, and my mother was really active in the schools, we would be sitting in the assembly and she'd end up being the person that was the guest speaker. And you know how sensitive you can be about your parents. We wanted to make sure she said the right thing. You would just sit there on pins and needles, but she would know that she was going to be there, but she wouldn't let us know.

Sheila also remembered attending church in Blackstone and having different activities. She explained, "We used to have plays and things, but it was Black church to Black church." She further explained, "All of my life I've seen that, the things that have happened really good for the black people have come out of the black church." Sheila is still active at the same church she

grew up in where she created a 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary book that she allowed me to use as archival data.

Sheila first attended Nottoway Training School in 1946, which had a connected high school and an elementary school. She entered school in the first grade and did not have primer. She entered in the first grade and said where you entered depended on what you knew. She recounted:

Yeah, but it was the high school and elementary school at that time, and then when the new school was built, Luther H. Foster was built, well even before that they changed it to A.G. Richardson, they changed it from Nottoway Training to A.G. Richardson, and so I left A.G. Richardson and went the Luther H. Foster.

And when I started I went straight into the 1<sup>st</sup> grade, and a lot of that was based on what you know. And having older brothers and sisters, you know because I come from a family of 10. The first five was much older, and then I remember being with the second five going to school. I am next to the youngest out of the five.

Sheila graduated from Luther H. Foster in 1957 and left right after graduation to attend school in D.C. She recounted:

Yeah, I left in fact the weekend that I graduated I left, and I went to DC, and I went to Cortes Peters Business School. I graduated from Cortes Peters Business School, and I worked in the Federal Government. I got married when I was still working in the Federal Government, and we went to Alaska. My husband was in the military. And then when my mother got sick when we were in Alaska, and we came back early. She died right after that, and he took early retirement to move home so that my dad could...we could be with my dad. I still continued to work. I went to Ft. Lee to work. In 1988 they had an early retirement, and I took an early retirement, so I retired at 49 because I started working in the Federal Government at 18.

When Sheila and her husband moved to Nottoway County in 1991, she talked about her fight to retire as a computer programmer; a job that was new to her and that she fought for in a class-action suit. She explained:

But I really kind of got into that because even getting into the computer situation that was because of a class action suit. Because I had worked in the Federal Government...Let's see, I was a GS7. And when I came here, after my mother died and [my husband] retired, so we'd be near my father. I came here and I applied for a job at Pickett, and you know how that is. They had already promised that job to somebody. It don't matter how

qualified you are. So when I questioned why I didn't get the job [they said] "and blah blah blah." They said that somebody kind of out-qualified me, and I knew the person that got the job. A white person and I knew it, and they didn't have the experience and had never been the grade or anything, and it was just going to be a Grade 4 I think. So what they did right after that I got a letter from them and they said they had a GS2.

But see they can't change my salary for 2 years, so I played their game. That was because they knew they had messed up. So then they said the job was at Ft. Lee. So what I did, I came down early. I played their little game. And then I think after that in 3 months they gave me a 3, and like in 4 months they gave me a 4, and I didn't even apply for it. Then in about 6 months I got a 5, and then I knew right then they weren't going to give me anything else, so I started applying for jobs, and being turned down, and I knew that I was more qualified. So I filed a complaint because I worked as an EEO [Equal Employment Opportunity] counselor, at Ft. Wainwright in Alaska and Ft Lee.

Yeah, so I played their game. And so they hemmed and hawed and hemmed and hawed, and then we had this class action, and I put my complaint in the class action suit. I got \$2,000, but I got priority consideration, and what that meant was that any job that was at the level that I had been like at the 7 or the 9, 11, that I could apply for, and I would have to be trained. So then I trained to be a computer programmer at the government's expense, because those were the only jobs opening up at my grade level. And so by getting the priority consideration, and then I got in that field, and that was kind of the way to go, because that was the way everything was going. So I trained.

Sheila has had a lifetime of activism in her community, starting with her mother and father as examples. I presented the above narrative because it illustrates her continued fight.

### **Memories of Town**

Community memories for this generation were of shopping and socializing in town. John, Debra, and Sarah remembered traveling to Crewe from the country on Saturdays. Since Joanne grew up in the town of Burkeville, she talked about her neighborhood. John also remembered going to Burkeville for his first movie experience. John, Sheila and Joanne talked about Blackstone, which is the biggest town in the county.

#### ***Crewe***

John, Debra and Sarah provided memories of Crewe as a child when they would come to town from the country to shop and socialize. John explained that Crewe was a bustling town and he described the shops that he remembered.

What I remember when I was younger, maybe eight or nine, ten, whatever; Crewe was a bustling little town. It had a theatre, it had a bowling alley, it had probably two drug stores, [and] it had at least three supermarkets. It had probably about three auto repair shops. Let's see, one, two, three, seems to me this place called Kenslow Clothing Store had been there forever, so we had it and there was Wilson's Department Store.

And that was there, and you actually had ice cream fountains. Of course there was a problem when we were younger of going in there to get a little ice cream without an issue. But there were maybe three restaurants. The earliest restaurant I remember that was owned by blacks was Page's Café. But you had a restaurant on the first floor of the hotel there in Crewe. They had a blacksmith shop... They actually took their horses. There was a place we called the ice plant. You could go by and get a 50 lb block of ice and put it on the back of your car bumper. I remember the little streets and the little houses were always neatly kept. Most of the people who lived in town worked for the railroad, so they had a fairly decent income. So I would say maybe 50 years ago it was a bustling little place.

Though Debra grew up in Burkeville, she remembered going to town to eat and socialize. She would listen to older Black women in the community as they talked. She recounted:

On Saturdays when people went to town and stuff like that, and we used to walk the street, but you know young kids and adults don't have no business sitting up in no café together, but we did it... And when they went to get their groceries I used to just stand up on the corner and talk to them. Those old people knew what was happening. I could go around the corner and sit at Ms. Mercer's house. You know no teenage girl have no business sitting up with those older people like that, but they were fun. They knew stuff. And they really didn't gossip, you know they didn't talk no vicious stuff. But I used to stand there and just so and so and so and they'd talk and hold a conversation, and they get in their little cab and go home I go around the street get in the neighbor's car and go somewhere else. So I used to socialize.

Sarah, who lived eight miles from town described coming to Crewe and how that made her feel as a child. She recounted:

That's my fond recollection of my childhood is being able to come to town occasionally. [We would come] maybe once a month and I mean to actually come, because it depended on a lot of things you know, but I came through town every day when I was in high school, because

the bus came through town, you know. It came right through the Main Street. At the time I was going to school it was a thriving community, Crewe was [with] lots of stores, and lots of people. And it's hard to believe, isn't it? Yeah, it was, it really was. Can you believe that you might bump into people when you walked in the streets? There were so many people standing and coming, you know. That many people could be in town on a Saturday.

What I remember most, because Crewe was segregated, I remember three black businesses and they were cafes or whatever, that kind of place where people came together... We had A&P, we had co-ops and we had various grocery stores. So people would come to town to shop, and then after that they socialized. So the places of socialization you know, I remember vividly, and for the men they had the poolroom. The men had the pool room and we had what we called cafes and you could go in there and for 25 cents you know you could sit all afternoon, because you had a 10 cent hot dog and a 5 cent Royal Crown, and then you had 5 cents to get potato chips later on. So that was a great social event to come to town, because you're going to see people. And like I said out in the country you didn't see anybody but who lived you know in your immediate area.

### ***Burkeville***

Joanne talked about Burkeville in reference to her all-Black neighborhood, which she found was "very unique" because of the closeness. She explained:

Burkeville, the town of Burkeville, is a unique little place, very unique. Let me tell you, in this neighborhood, and I just tell everybody it's so unique and special, because we have a closeness here. If you have problems, I have problems. ... We don't get in each other's business. We don't try to take care of each other's business, but if there's a need, we're there. We rally to each other. Sickness, death, trouble, we try to be there for each other.

Now when I was coming up, Monifa, these streets were full of children. There were a lot of children. We used to have a ballpark down there in front of the church. And Burkeville is just unique. Now, Monifa, when I was a child Main Street, up there where it's Agnew Street, that's our main street. But I want to let you know we had clothing stores and markets and everything. Now when I was a child, Monifa, on that main street you had markets, in your market you could go up there and they had dry goods stores, [a Laundromat] and everything.

And I tell you something that I think you always heard. You always heard the statement, and you hear the statement now, "It takes a village to raise a child." You've heard that statement. Well, that was true. Anybody around here, Monifa, any adult could correct you. And then bring you home and tell your parents what you did and why they corrected you. And that discipline I think meant so much to us. Because that kept us... kept your guards up. You didn't do anything, Monifa that you felt you were big and bad enough to do, because somebody was going to see you. And they were going to correct you and then tell your parents.

### ***Blackstone***

John, Sheila and Joanne provided their memories of Blackstone. For John, Blackstone was bigger and more progressive than Crewe or Burkeville. Though he did not venture to Blackstone often, he described it in the following way:

Blackstone was an adventure. Blackstone was very bustling. That's where the soldiers were because of Camp Pickett. They had all kinds of taxi stands, and all kinds of eateries, and had hotels down there. Blackstone was a fairly progressive type place during that time, as it is now compared to the other two towns in the county.

For Sheila, Blackstone was where she and her family fought for civil rights. She described her experiences in a local drugstore in the following narrative:

[What about Blackstone in general? How was living in Blackstone when you were growing up?]

A lot of the prejudices and things that went on, I may not necessarily have experienced them. One of the reasons is it was because of who my family was. Although we were poor, but we weren't...my family wasn't necessarily...I saw it, you know, because I can remember when the drug stores, they had the stools in the drug store for sodas and ice cream, and we weren't supposed to sit on them. And a couple of Saturdays, Wally Hurt and Mary Webb and all of them used to go in there and sit, and a couple of my friends and I we went in there and we sat on the stools too. They didn't serve us. They didn't make us leave; they reported us to our parents. And not too long after that, they removed the stools, because we just kept doing it. You know, and the things that would normally happen I guess because of who we were, you know, didn't happen. But it wasn't too long after that they removed the stools. And then they shouldn't have been in there anyway if everybody couldn't use them. So we felt like we really accomplished something.

Sheila and Joanne also remembered having events for Black teenagers Blackstone Community Center. Sheila explained:

When you say activities, you mean as far as extracurricular activities. See we had the football and the basketball... I can remember when Ft. Pickett closed. It seemed that they left one of the buildings for the use of the Blacks and one of the buildings for the use of the Whites. And Mr. Carter, who was a teacher, he was the industrial arts teacher at school. Him and his wife they formed a teen club so we would have some place to go...and it was set up with the reception hall. It had a basketball goal and so forth in the back. And we had a teen club there. And you could go there on Friday nights. We'd have sodas and you could dance. We played basketball and volleyball. You went in and you couldn't come out. So that was some recreation for the kids. Because other than that it was like these joints that we couldn't go to.



Joanne and a group of friends would travel to Blackstone during high school to attend the events at the community center, like school-related activities or dances.

### **School Memories – Elementary School**

I have divided the participants' elementary experiences into John's general overview of elementary education for Blacks in the county, and then narratives from participants about their particular schools. John found that the Black community viewed school as important "but not as important as making a living." It was hard for him and many students in his community to balance both schoolwork and the farm work needed to sustain the family. He explained:

School was looked upon by most blacks or most people in the rural area as important, but not as important as making a living. A lot of times we were challenged to work in the fields and go to school when you could. Sometimes in a given week we might go to school three days, and work two, depending. Books were purchased. You had to buy your books; there weren't any free books. No free lunch, no rental. A lot of the books were like hand-me-down type things. It was rough. It was rough. In our household we were always encouraged to go to school, and it was just part of what you were going to do. Getting it done was another thing, but we were challenged to go to school and do the best we could, but resources were limited. And sometimes you would go through a whole school year without a book. You were borrowing a neighbor's book. They would do some work and then when they were finished, they would give [the book] to you, or if they finished theirs at school, you would take the book home and do yours at home and then bring the book back. So that was the system, if you had a good friend.

### **Burkeville School and Ingleside School**

Joanne and Debra attended Burkeville School and Ingleside School in Burkeville. They described the conditions of Burkeville School and their excitement about attending a new school in 1957. Joanne explained:

All right, my first school that I went to was Burkeville School. That's what you called it, Burkeville School. But we had a good time in this community as children playing. And we used to walk to school. When we first started, we...until I got to the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, we walked to school. And, Monifa, this is where we used to come, right through here, and walk across those tracks. That's where the school was. It was a 3-room school.

Debra remarked, "Our schools were not in the best shape." She also talked about how cold she felt in school. She explained:

It was bad. We were all...we used to gather around the stove in the morning and the larger kids would make the fire in the stove, and you stand there in all your clothes, cold...you have not been cold. We're talking cold. And you know we didn't have the kind of clothing that you all have now... You just put on two pair of whatever you had. You had socks on your hands under your gloves, and nothing matched. You talk about many, many colors. You have never worn ten colors on your body at one time. (both laugh) Everything you had on was a different color, but you felt good, like we weren't as clothes conscious as kids are now. Like I remember people's faces, but I could not tell you what people wore, not even in high school that much. I could tell you who had nice clothes maybe in high school, but that was like I could count on one hand.

Everybody was neat, tried to be neat. Or prevent body odors and stuff like that, because we had health inspection. Like our teachers would check our fingernails. They'd check your ears. They'd check your neck and your face...to see if you had "crust" on it or something. But they taught us the importance of being clean. Now we took sponge baths. We didn't have bathrooms and stuff. And of course there were kids who did have bathrooms in their house, but we didn't. We would like wash off in a basin of water. You know, just keep the odors down. You'd take a tub bath when you could, but of course you didn't take one every day, because you had to go get that water and heat it and pour it into that little tin tub and all that. We didn't have furnaces. There was a stove, maybe, in every room. So you got around that stove in the morning, and took your sponge bath, and put your deodorant and your lotion on, and you went to school, but you talking about cold. It would be so cold it felt like you didn't have any shoes on. No coat.

Debra also talked about the lack of resources at her elementary school. She explained:

We had blackboards and chalk. We had oil on the floor. They used to clean wooden floors. Your feet would be greasy all around your ankles and stuff from the oil. And the bigger girls used to actually sweep the floors. They used to oil the floor at the superintendent's order. The people that worked for the state school would come and clean the school. We would oil the floors down every once in awhile, maybe once a month or something, but we had to sweep the floors in the school. We had to clean the boards, and clean the erasers, and it was sort of like self-maintained.

And we would have like programs and stuff at night when you would open the sliding doors between two of the rooms and everybody sit in the school chairs. We had no auditorium of course, no gym. We used to play under the school when it was cold at recess and we couldn't stay in the school so we would play under the school in the cold, real cold outside. We used to come down those railroad tracks, but you know it was a hazard, but we did that. We had a rod that was stuck in the embankment, and didn't know when that rod was coming out if it would come out. We used to run down the track and grab a hold to the rod and swing around and swing back up to the track. And somebody would knock [over] the girls' toilet sometime on Halloween, and we had to go to the boys' toilet.

Joanne also talked about using outdoor toilets and how they would be turned over every Halloween.

She also described the chores that were done to preserve the school building. She recounted:

You've got to understand that each community had that 2 or 3-room school. Burkeville School, because you had no transportation, so it was having these schools in your neighborhood so you could walk. And you know, Monifa, when I tell you that the floors were oiled, they used to have some people come from Nottoway. I guess they were called the maintenance people that used to go around and do repairs to these little schools. They used to come in and oil those floors. But now [students] were responsible for keeping those floors and things cleaned afterwards, you know the students.

Joanne and Debra's experiences were quite different when they entered Ingleside in 1957.

Joanne remembered the dedication ceremony and her feelings when she first entered the new school.

And I know they had [it]; they didn't say grand opening, but what was the word? I don't know, but something they had, like the dedication for this new school. Because that was a black school, see [there were] still Black schools. And the parents worked so hard and had this program, and I will always remember, Monifa, one of the songs that was sung at that service, and it was "Bless this House, Oh Lord We Pray." "Keep it safe, by night and day." It was a special program.

But then we went to Ingleside, and I went to 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>. Oh, when we got there, Monifa, we were in top class. We had a cafeteria then. Yes, indeed, but even there we had Assembly. The first thing you did was have Pledge of Allegiance. [Assembly] was always opened with the Pledge of Allegiance, and then when like the 7<sup>th</sup> grade graduation, all of that was held right at that school.

### **Fergusonville School**

Sarah talked about her experiences at Fergusonville School in Crewe. Fergusonville, like many of the Black segregated schools, was connected to her church. She explained:

School was in the same neighborhood [as church]. In fact the church and the school were maybe 300 yards from each other [because there was a]...lack of transportation and so forth. And depending on how many people populated that area, it would kind of depend on the quality of [the teachers] who would be sent out to you. And I don't think the kids in the schools in [town] realize that it was different though. They thought it was real tough for them, but it was much tougher for us out in the country because we had to get our own wood and heat the schools and so forth. I've heard different ones talking about you know the janitor bringing coal. Well, they never brought coal the whole time I was there, but it could have happened after I left you know. And I think things did change, because I'm talking mid-50s, and so forth. So schools followed basically the

same pattern...and some were one room, but in my case it was two rooms, and we had a grade called primer, I don't know if you've ever heard it.

She attended classes with students from other grades in the same room and they were divided by rows. She recounted:

[Classes were in the] same room. So when I initially started to school, yeah, I remember that vividly. The primer is the first row, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> row was the 1<sup>st</sup> grade and the 3<sup>rd</sup> row was the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. So if you were you know a curious type of person, and you were in the primer grade, you're listening to whatever is going on in the other grades too, you see, and the teacher kind of like knows that. That's why you can [skip] to another grade...so that's why I went to 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. Because you're hearing everything that the 2<sup>nd</sup> graders are doing, and yeah... [she gave] directions mostly, and then she'd tell you to practice your alphabets while she would go over to the [next grade].

Sarah saw being in a one-room schoolhouse as an advantage. She was able to learn what the 2<sup>nd</sup> graders learned in addition to her curriculum.

### **A. G. Richardson School**

Sheila went to A. G. Richardson, which was previously Nottoway Training School. Her school was newer and bigger than the schools in "the country." She talked about her perceptions of the smaller schools that were connected to churches.

But I just found it so amazing that all these churches [had schools] because I didn't realize that. And I couldn't picture...I mean we had the pot belly stoves, but we had more than one room. You know it was a whole big session, because even when they had high school and elementary at A.G. Richardson, it could be clearly separated, because of the way the building was structured. I think you can tell that by looking in the book [Rich, 2006] at some of those pictures. You know it was really separate. They could keep the little kids separate from the high school kids. You could clearly see that.

### **School Memories – Luther H. Foster**

The experiences in Luther H. Foster varied for participants. John found that he was never fully comfortable at Foster. He explained:

[I went to Foster] 8<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup>. I was always interested in school. I just never really felt that, now that I'm older, I never had all of the resources I needed to be a great

student or fulfill some of the desires I had. And people would laugh at you [and] stuff when you told them what you wanted to become.

[By people you mean peers or adults?]

Peers and adults, you know, when you shared what you were going to be, a lot of people would say things like, “You think you’re better than you are. You’re never going to do that. Don’t you realize?” They would even say, “Don’t you realize you’re black?” And I never understood that totally. I knew that there was a lot of trouble in the world. I wasn’t blind, but I just felt, hey, if I wanted it badly enough, and I put in the time, I would get it. And that’s the philosophy I had when I was young, and that’s the philosophy I have now: If you want it badly enough, you just go get it.

Though it was hard for John to find his place at Foster, Sarah found Foster to be an enjoyable time both academically and with extracurricular activities. She provided memories about increased resources, where she was able to go a school library for the first time and have central heat. She also provided insight into how students took pride in their appearance. She explained:

Oh, high school was good. I couldn’t wait to get to high school because again I think I just maybe wanted to be around people, I don’t know what it was. But after getting to high school I really enjoyed the academic part of high school. I did, you know. And I didn’t see it as anything unusual. I never did, because I was thinking that everybody did. I really did think that everybody had the same love of school and conception of it as I did. I enjoyed being able to go to the library because we never had a library in the little schools. ...I would get sent to a lot of competitions and so forth, you know.

That’s how I got to go down to Hampton’s Science Competition, and I didn’t have any special interests, it was just that I would sign up for everything because that would be a way of getting out or doing things. So that was a fond memory. I remember going to a Betty Crocker Bake-Off. Now how far can you go? Now I wasn’t a cook or anything like that. When I graduated they said I was the ‘most determined.’ But whatever I was in, I always tried to do real good at it, and I guess I just liked it. I don’t know. But high school was really fun to me.

And I think from living on the farm, and being able to get to a nice place like that, what I thought Luther H. Foster was, and I think it was for a lot of people. I think that’s why people have this fondness for Luther H. Foster, because that was the first time that we had gotten together in a situation where there was central heat. It was a big thing, you know. Central heat, and nice bathrooms, when you’ve been accustomed to going to outside bathrooms, and here are all these well-dressed teachers you know coming from colleges and so forth, and lot of them were pretty, and the men were good looking. It was just a nice atmosphere to be in. Hot lunches right there at school, and that means a lot to somebody who has not been accustomed to that. Now nobody would probably

think about it these days, because you know you never...if they've never seen anything different. But for us 7<sup>th</sup> grade was going to an atmosphere like it was just great.

We did not wear jeans to school. Most of the guys, the meager clothes that they had, would always be pressed and nice shirts and so forth...very spiffy. That's what I remember about school. You just didn't go to school raggedy looking. You didn't do that in my time. Shoes shined, the boys. The girls always clean, nice bobby socks, but you may not have but one or two pair, but that was your chore every night to wash them so they would be bleached. We were almost like in a competition I think. It does seem that way now when I look back at it. Because what I always say, Monifa, "If people did not know where you live, and how poor you were, they did not know it at school." Because that's the way we carried ourselves. You know, and somebody in your family could do hair or something, so you're going to go in there with your hair done. So that was a nice thing, because it was that pride that pride was there that you're going to look a certain way, and you've got to do a certain way. I mean some of us took it a little too far, but...but that was a prevailing thought, you know.

### **School Memories – Teachers**

Though Debra found her elementary school to be lacking in resources, she also talked about her teachers. She explained, "Well, we had good teachers" She talked specifically about her teachers and how they affected her life.

You know how that Martin Luther King, Jr. speech is, "I have a Dream?" Well, she treated us like that. It's not that she spoke that way or acted that way, because that was way way back, but she had a way of making everybody feel good. Everybody felt important. We didn't feel like a little poor straggler in her room. And she wasn't class-conscious. She was just nice to everybody. At Burkeville School we had I guess now you might call it like a principal or like it was hard to tell like who was the youngest teacher, who was the middle teacher, and who was the principal, but of course, we had a principal. So the principal was like the queen at school.

Joanne described a teacher who encouraged her to pursue her post-secondary education. She still communicates with her. She recounted:

So after [my teacher] finished St. Augustine College, she came to Nottoway County and taught, and lived with a family in Burkeville. Well [my teacher] stayed here for years, and she went back to North Carolina, and that's where she retired. I want to let you know, Monifa, that I still am in contact with her. ...This lady was so interested in seeing that I did well. She wanted to make me behave, because when I got to high school and getting into the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade, I was getting frisky [laughter]. But Monifa, she would say, "Oh, no, no, no, you don't do things like that. You don't act like that." And she was the one, Monifa, to encourage me to go to business college. Yes, sir, now I've got to tell

you, Monifa, I honestly and truthfully believe that the majority...I did not tell you all, I said the majority of those teachers were interested in us. I do not believe the majority of them were just waiting for the first of the month, payday. I don't think that. I think they were really interested in seeing that we did what was right. No I know that one, [my teacher], and I can name some more, but I still stay in contact with her today. And every time we talk, I can't help but thank her for things that she encouraged me, she wanted to see me do well. You know, yes, indeed.

Sarah talked about her teachers in segregated schools, and the amount of "duties" they performed. She explained:

That was the key when we were coming up, that we had such dedicated teachers. Oh, they were just super. They went way beyond the call of duty...because you were asking me before how did the teachers do all that. And you had to basically toe the line, because they had so much to do, and so many responsibilities, and so forth. They were everything, nursemaid, counselor. You know they were janitors and maintenance people and make sure you had lunch. They were it.

Even with the duties that each teacher performed s/he still seemed to have a connection to the community and served as role models for the participants. Sheila and Joanne describe how teachers from other states would stay with area families. In addition, Debra and John provided memories of teachers as role models for them.

### ***Teachers' Connection to the Community***

Sheila described how teachers from other states became connected to the Black community by living with residents. She explained:

But those teachers usually came in from North Carolina some place, and they kind of incorporated in somebody's home. They didn't just go out and get an apartment. So it was kind of a family thing. And the teachers could teach then because the parents were going to discipline, and it didn't matter that she was just a few years older than you. You were going to respect her because she was a teacher.

Joanne also described how her primer teacher lived with residents in the county.

[My teacher] lived here in the community. She moved in. She had a room in somebody's home. That's where she stayed. And that happened so often to our teachers. They lived with families, Monifa. You know, they didn't have a separate place a lot of time, they lived within the home.

## *Teachers as Role Models*

Debra and John talked about teachers being role models for students. They both talked how teachers dressed and how they carried themselves. Debra explained:

And our teachers were very, I would say, sophisticated. They weren't loose. They were very lady-like and sophisticated. Therefore, you had a good role model of how to carry yourself if you chose to. You knew how to groom yourself and be nice, because like I said they would check your nails and make sure you were well groomed...make sure your hair was combed, and they would teach you things.

John discussed how he was influenced by his male teachers and how he uses the lessons learned from them as a teacher now. He explained:

Most of the information that has gotten me to this point, I got it from caring teachers and other people, not from home. I got love from home. I got encouragement at home, but mostly what I got from home was, "We just don't have it." So there was no need to ask. It just was not there. So others took the time to share, you know. The teachers took the time to tell young men and show young men by example, how to dress. I can still see them old dudes. SHARP. Shoes always shined, Mr. B with that pearly white shirt, perfect necktie, [and] perfect suit. I mean that was Mr. B. You know. And he wasn't the only one. Because of teachers like Mr. B, I am very much aware of appropriate dress.

Most of the teachers I ran into were fair. They were God-fearing people, most of them were, and God knows I found out later they weren't being paid a lot of money, and a lot of times they were being dogged by their employer just as much as anybody else. They weren't respected a lot. We had people who wanted to be doctors who were teachers. They gave us what they had. For instance, segregation was real. It's still real. But there was still hope, and I think that's what allowed us to override barriers, and one great writer said, "Nothing will stop an idea whose time has come." And we just felt that our time had come. And we pushed towards it. I never had any idea that I would not acquire things or live better than I was living then.

John also shared his memories of his elementary teacher at Fergusonville School who fed him under the guise of discipline. He recounted:

We had this one teacher, Ms. O, when I was in elementary school. Ms. O had much wisdom and she had much love. Ms. O was able to tell when you were hungry. A lot of times Ms. O would ring a bell. That's how you did it. They had this old bell that they would ring, "ding-a-ding-a-ding," and you would go outside and have recess. And just before I would run through the door, Ms. O would say, "[John], sit down. I need to talk with you." And all of my buddies would say, "Uh oh, [John] is in trouble." And I thought I was too, but after everybody had left, she would go in her desk and pull out these old Fig Newtons, and she'd give me three in a napkin. She would say, "Sit over there and eat these Fig Newtons." And I would say something like, "I'm fine." And



she'd say "Sit down and eat the Fig Newtons." And man, they would be good because God knew I was hungry. And I would eat them and run outside, and everybody would say, "Ah, you're in trouble, you're in trouble," and I'd say, "Yep." But I feel good about it. The teachers cared then, and maybe that's why I care even in my teaching assignments. That somebody cared enough about me, and I kind of pass it on. Though Debra had memories of teachers who were role models, she questioned if all of them had the "heart for it." John, in his narrative about role models also remembered that teachers may have chosen other professions, like medicine, if they were able to.

### **School Memories – Parent Involvement**

Sheila and Joanne talked about parent involvement, where their mothers participated in school activities. John, Debra and Sarah's parents were not able to actively participate. For as Debra explained:

Your parents had to work...your parent can't take leave and come. Like high school that was a long way you know from Burkeville [and Crewe] to Foster. So if your mother is working two jobs, or working one job and coming home to three kids or four kids, this and that, house, you ain't got time to double back and go back to a PTA meeting.

Sheila discussed how involved her mother was in schools and with the NAACP. Her mother was a "Room Mother" and also did public speaking.

But what I really remember in the school system, and I guess a lot of it was because my mother was a part of it. I remember real, real strong PTA. To the extent that they had what you call Room Mothers, and my oldest sisters, because they had younger kids, they served with room mothers along with my mother, and what they would do, like if a kid was out of school for a couple of days or for whatever, they would find out about it. And sometimes it would be that they didn't have clothes. Sometimes it would be that the parents were keeping them home because they didn't want them to walk to school by themselves, and see the PTA and the room mothers working together, they helped with that. I found that in the older days although maybe our parents wasn't as educated, education meant a lot more to them, I think, than some of the parents now. I'm finding that in this day, that you'll see some of the parents are so young; they've been dealing with some of the teachers that are still there. And they have little or no respect for them...because my mother only had like about a 7<sup>th</sup> grade education, but she was President of the PTA for many years, and worked really hard for kids getting their education. She even worked with some of the people when they started integrating [the schools] selecting special groups of kids.

Joanne also talked about the involvement of parents in the school's PTA.

I'm trying to think, Monifa. I guess it was really how we stood; you know our classes and things, and activities, different activities that were going on. Because, Monifa, let me tell you, even though we were in school and everything, those parents were very supportive of us. They had a PTA.

[That was what I was going to ask. One of the questions I had was parent involvement and how that worked.]

Yeah, PTA. and your fund-raisers and things came with that PTA. Yeah, those parents were highly involved. Money-raising projects, Maydays, and things like that. Have you ever heard of wrapping the Maypole?

All right, well see, these were activities that the parents backed, your money-raising projects. I never will forget, and what project this was, I don't know, but it will always stick in my mind. This was like a little raffle ticket, and somebody had built this house, and little house, the cutest little thing, and if you could guess what was in that house, you had a chance of winning that house. This was a raffle-type thing, and it was a money-raiser. These were things, candy bars, to sell candy, and things to raise money for different projects, and of course we had trips...I don't remember having any trips as long as I was over on Burkeville, but after Ingleside, we moved in to Ingleside, I think there were school trips. Now I don't remember going anywhere on school trips, but I know buses used to come after I went to high school, and they would go take kids on school trips then.

And you know, money wasn't flourishing, but you would have projects, selling dinners and raffles and things to raise money so the kids could participate. Because a lot of times, Monifa, maybe parents couldn't afford...they maybe had 3 or 4 children in school, so maybe they couldn't afford to pay for each child to go on a trip, so they would have fund raisers. And it was the PTA, Parent Teachers Association. That's what the PTA was. And they would meet, Monifa, I want to say monthly, but I'm not sure. But they used to have their meetings at night. I remember hearing some of the parents saying, "Oh, I have to go to PTA meeting tonight," you know.

Yeah, so the parents were involved, and the parents came to the school to see about the children. You know, Monifa, you didn't have the telephones and the cars and all of this stuff. They would give you a note to take home, and you had better give that note to your parents, too. The teachers wanted to let the parents know, "Well, your son acted up in class today," or "Your son did such and such a thing today," and Monifa, you were afraid, even though you felt like...or "Your son got to fighting today," or "Your daughter was involved in this or that." And you knew maybe that the note was about you, but you were afraid not to give it to your parents, because you knew you were going to get a spanking. And then they were going to the school to talk to the teacher about you. So the parents were heavily involved.

## School Memories – Privilege

The notion of privilege in the Black community and in school emerged in the interviews for this generation. Debra and Sarah were all from families who worked on the farm. They all readily admitted that their families did not have a great deal of money. They also talked about privileges that they saw for students who may have been lighter-skinned or had better grades. When I asked Sarah, “What would be some positives and some negatives [of school]?” she said the following:

There was some, what shall we call this, when we’re going to talk about skin color division. There was. I have to be very honest. In my time in the ‘50s there was.

[And was that evident just by comments?]

No, as who was chosen for what... [Like] Homecoming queen and that kind of thing, you know. There were some brown skin, but for the most [part], the majority would be fair. Cheerleading [was] the same way. I think it turned some people off you know that would have been more into school. I think I got chosen for maybe a little more...because I was a little bright...But there were a lot of divisions based on skin color.

[Now would the students make comments at all?]

Not so much at school, but it was just a kind of subtle thing. Underlying uh huh, and our school, because see, the teachers were hard on you. So if you called somebody a name they probably would deal with you. And that was one of the negative things that I remember of childhood of kids calling each other “Black” and so forth, and it being derogatory.

And that became very imprinted in some people, and I guess others they never talked about it. I think I was the type that always absorbed everything, so I could see it, but I don’t know whether a lot [did], but I remember you know that privileges would be given to [certain people]... So the negative side of our education when I was in [school], was that they perpetuated this kind of thing, you know, knowingly or unknowingly. That sometimes the staff did perpetuate that kind of thing.

Debra described her experiences at Luther H. Foster, where there were cliques and “teachers’ pets” who may have been light-skinned or made better grades. She explained:

You know teachers and everybody had their little pets and cliques. And there were pets and cliques among the teachers, and pets and cliques, you know, black people had a little

class struggle. That messed us up... If you were the pet, you got an A. If you were a semi-pet you got a B, and if you were in between, you got a C, because the teachers really didn't want you to do that second year. So if you were kind of quiet and kept your mouth shut and didn't show off, you would pass.

I was barely getting out of English, you know, because we spoke one way and wrote another. So that's kind of hard, too. Where the emphasis should be on speaking correct English all the time, therefore you'll be a better writer, and you'll never get caught off guard, using the wrong kind of English. And then we had class conscious. We had little cliques and stuff in high school, where the teachers had different cliques, but I found what was most damaging to us educational-wise was the teachers had pets... [They were] usually light, or extremely smart.

You had to be something they could brag about or make them look good. And more than likely the most well behaved ones as far as the teacher was concerned were the ones that looked more like white people. To me it was like the teachers were ashamed of themselves. We had teachers that to me were dark or handsome because they were dark. To me how you actually look is what makes you beautiful, not what you add or copy from somebody else.

You see, it's not the students' fault. You know, it was to their advantage to be favored. You know they weren't going to turn it down. No, because everybody was struggling. And some little kids, you know, in different areas, if they had the chance, they would iron for white people, or do housework, and may work at that Methodist Center [in Blackstone]. Some of them did work part time, and they were nice people. You know all of them weren't stuck up, or nasty or disrespectful, but they were the teachers' favorites and you know they got on.

They had black history. I didn't have black history until I was in a community college. I didn't know what black history was. I had a husband, two kids, and a full time job, the first time I took black history. Ooh, if you had me [study] some Black history in elementary school I guarantee you I would have been into it, because I thought we were (interruption). I thought black people were workers. I really thought...I knew...I was glad to be here, I was glad to be alive, but I really thought as far as education was concerned, I really thought we were second-class citizens. I thought you had to be like half white, and you had curly hair to be intelligent or well thought of or to get a break. Because everybody I knew that didn't look like that was struggling.

## Conclusions

I had the distinct pleasure of going to the 1965 Luther H. Foster Class Reunion's church service. The feeling of pride by each graduate was unmistakable. In addition, Joanne and John participated in the reunion events. Joanne was one of the reunion coordinators and John was

honored to preach the service. The reunion colors were pink and black, and the motto was the following: “Tomorrow’s end will depend on what you begin today.” They also proclaimed, “It’s not the years in your life, but the life in your years.”

The narratives above depict the early years of each participant. The emergent themes for this generation were surprising to me for I did not anticipate the marked differences that persisted. John, Debra and Sarah’s narratives were altogether different from that of Joanne and Sheila. Without knowing income levels, one can assume differences in schooling experiences were because of class distinctions and/or region of the county. In addition, schools were sites of self-maintenance and smaller schoolhouses where a teacher would assist multi-grade students row by row.

Debra, who grew up on an isolated farm, was most critical as she found that Nottoway’s Black communities and schools had “no resources.” Though she talked about some of her community experiences positively, she reiterated throughout the interview that Blacks in the county were working with very little. She did not find the support she anticipated, but admitted in the interview that she did not know the questions to ask.

John had a very different experience on the farm, where he interacted with both White and Black residents and learned from them. He did not feel that he was the best student because he began working at six years old to aide his family. But, his memories of Ms. O and Fig Newtons provide an affective image of the myriad roles Black teachers performed in segregated Black schools.

Four of the five participants left the county for many years and Debra is the only participant who has not returned. Throughout their journeys, the military and family/friends provided the necessary avenue for each participant to gain skills and create a “toe hold.”

Community was essential for families who worked hard to survive, fought for civil rights, and struggled to become educated.

## CHAPTER V

### GENERATIONAL NARRATIVES: 45-55 YEAR OLDS

I interviewed six 45-55 year olds – Harold, Evelyn, Gloria, Hazel, Laura, and Tiffany – who shared their experiences in Nottoway County. Harold and Laura grew up in Crewe; moreover, Harold grew up in the “country” and Laura in town. Evelyn and Gloria grew up in Burkeville. In addition, Hazel and Tiffany grew up in Blackstone. Four participants – Harold, Laura, Evelyn, and Gloria – attended Crewe High School (the White high school) during Freedom of Choice. Hazel and Tiffany attended segregated Black schools until mandatory desegregation in 1970. All of the participants attended segregated Black schools for elementary school, which included A. G. Richardson, Ingleside, Mt. Nebo, and Watson School.

I have provided family narratives for each participant and community narratives for each town to understand the lived experiences of Black residents in Nottoway County then. In addition, the participants discussed their current life experiences and their journeys after leaving high school. For this generation, there was marked difference between those participants who grew up in the “country” and those who grew up “in town.” In general, the differences came because those who grew up in town melded their memories of family with their memories of community. For Gloria, Harold, and Hazel, their memories of their family life were in the “country.”

## Harold

Harold is 56 years old with a booming voice and keen wit. Though he is one-year older than this generational span, I included him because of his experiences with Crewe High School during Freedom of Choice. I interviewed him in his home after we first visited and reconnected. Harold was my bus driver when I was in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade and he is a pastor in the community along with my father. As we sat in the living room, after he chastised me for knocking on the front door (no one who is a friend or family member comes through the front door), he rocked in his recliner and for almost every question exclaimed, “Monifa, you’re taking me back, girl!”

Harold is a graduate of Luther H. Foster. He attended Crewe High for one year and then returned to Luther H. Foster because of the intense backlash to his family and neighborhood by the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and to him personally by peers in the Black community. Before we discussed his experiences in school, we first talked about his memories of community and family as a child. Harold explained how community life and family life were synonymous. He commented:

But as a child with community, well, really with us being Black in this community back in the ‘60s, everybody had their own little activities. Most of the time the community [we] all grew up in [was] the family because all the family was right within walking distance. I could leave here and I had family that way, that way, this way [points], and everywhere we went we walked, because we didn’t have transportation, and most all of the activities and all of the interests that you had were mostly family oriented, because that’s all you had to deal with were families.

[And so this is home place, this area?]

Yes, that’s our home right down there where my brother lives, that white house right there. That wasn’t where we were born at, but that was where we were reared up at because we moved there in 1954. Our home place is right up on this next road, this dirt road... But we moved here in ’54. I think about [three siblings] and me was born up there. And [my brother] was born down here. And [my sister] was born in the hospital.

Harold started with primer grade when he was six years old at Watson Elementary.

Primer grade began before 1<sup>st</sup> grade, and Harold, as one of my first participants to be



interviewed, explained what primer was. It is pronounced by many in the community as “prima” and caused many Black students to graduate from high school when they were 19 or even 20.

Harold explained:

Yeah, I went to primer grade when I was 6 years old. And most folks were going to 1st grade at 6 years old. We’ve got to go...when I went to 1st grade I was 7 getting ready to turn 8...when I went into the 1st grade! And then when we get down to the Crewe High School, they were graduating, which they do now, at 17. And I ain’t graduate until I was 19, because my birthday’s late.

After graduating from Luther H. Foster, Harold moved to Baltimore, Maryland approximately one day after his high school graduation. He explained, “One reason we left was because of the employment situation.” When he said we, I thought he meant him and his current wife. However, he explained that he left Nottoway to go to be a lab technician in New York, but stopped in Baltimore, MD to see his then girlfriend (now current wife) and “never made it any further” and they married in 1969. Though her family is from Nottoway, her parents migrated north when she was young seeking employment. Harold explained his reasoning for leaving Nottoway after high school:

And when they left here and went up there to get work, they were paying a dollar an hour, and during that time a dollar an hour was more than any other job was paying. So all our family left here and went North to the steel mills and got jobs, and then of course when the old folks went then they had room [and said], “Let that boy come on up and get a job. There ain’t nothing there [in Nottoway].” When I left here I said to myself, I’m not hauling no more pulpwood, and I ain’t pulling no more tobacco. I’m sick of tobacco. I’m going to get me a good job. I’m going to get me a clean job. I ain’t working for all these [White people]. You all ain’t paying me or nobody either.

After retiring as a professional bus driver, Harold and his family moved back to Nottoway. He now drives the school bus for Nottoway County and provided his perceptions of current students during our interview.

## Evelyn

Evelyn is 53 years old and a school administrator in a neighboring county. I also interviewed her at her home in the living room late in the evening. She has an uncanny memory as she vividly took me through the town of Burkeville, remembering each business and its owner. She grew up in the town of Burkeville and talks about her experiences in the close-knit community. Though Evelyn talks about the stores and jobs in Burkeville, she also talked about her neighborhood, “The Bottom.” She recounted:

Well, now my community was basically, [when you] come on down McCahan Street, Dimmick Street and Cauthorne Street. That was basically our community. And we called that “The Bottom.” And it was one hundred percent African-American, and we had two churches in the neighborhood. And then we had a community center. The community center came about when we were teenagers, maybe 12, 13, something like that. But there was also a Presbyterian Church where the community center was in the first beginnings of my, you know, my life in the community. And basically you had middle class folks. Everybody worked at the hospital or the schools. The state hospital, which was a tuberculosis hospital, [was] the only one in the State of Virginia for African-Americans. [It is currently called Piedmont Geriatric Hospital]. [We had] the park...it was a big piece of land and we had a swing there. And that was the park, and everybody hung out basically at the park.

Everything was basically centered around the church and of course, we had Paris Inn [the dance hall], but all the activities pretty much were the churches. There wasn't a division in churches. I can remember doing arts and crafts in the basement of a house up the hill from... where we used to go and do arts and crafts, like a little summer school. But most everything was the church or the school. They had activities that promoted leadership. You had plays, you had glee club, [and] you had movies on Friday. I can remember you had Junior League, which was like a club.... We didn't have a lot of dances. We had a lot of activities, more so than dances at school.

Evelyn first attended Ingleside Elementary from 1<sup>st</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> grade and then entered Crewe High School during Freedom of choice when she was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. She attended Crewe High School until her senior year when Nottoway underwent mandatory desegregation. Evelyn graduated from Nottoway Senior High School (formerly Luther H. Foster) in 1971. Evelyn completed her bachelor's degree and ultimately decided to earn a master's degree in speech pathology. She explained how she made her decision:

Well, see, in school, even when we were in high school, it's not like it is now. I mean you had to tell the guidance counselor you were going to be something. Every year, twice a year they would ask you for an update on what you say you want to be. What do you want to be? And you were kind of geared toward that. I mean, once I made my decision in 8th grade, I never changed my mind, like these people now say, "I don't know." I knew that I wanted to be a doctor. I didn't feel like I was smart enough to be a doctor, and I didn't think I could stand the blood. And then I didn't want to be a nurse because my mama had to work on weekends. And then I knew I wanted to do something in the medical field to help people, ...that's when I found speech therapy, because that was one of the new professions then. And I thought about social work. So I said, "Oh, no. I'll go into speech therapy." So pretty much that's how people made decisions and plans, and parents pressed them. If you said you were going to school, you were going to school. And it was every parent's dream that their child was going to do something successful.

She has been working in the neighboring county for more than 20 years. Though she began her work as a speech pathologist, she now is Coordinator of Instructional Services

### **Gloria**

Gloria, age 54, grew up in Crewe and Burkeville. She first lived with her grandparents, owners of a small grocery store across from Watson School, in Crewe. She then moved to Burkeville when she was 13 after her father built the same home where we had our interview. Gloria, who now lives in New Jersey, was visiting family during the holidays and graciously agreed to be interviewed during her vacation. She remarked, "Well, it's been interesting being interviewed from this standpoint. It got me to thinking of things that I hadn't thought of in many a year."

Gloria talked about her experiences in Crewe and Burkeville, and the feeling of community fostered by church and community events. She also talked about her Cotillion, a vivid memory because of its meaning in the community and for her personally. Gloria explained:

We were very active in [our church], and the older generations saved the younger generation because they kept us active, and they were very supportive, and they worked hard with the younger people...some of my younger sisters have vivid memories of each generation helping the other... We had 4H clubs, and church groups, and a variety of

community groups that we were very active in. And that kept our minds blooming and focused on the good things, not the negative things that we encountered.

[How did the sense of helping younger generations become valid for you?]

Well it was something that we grew up with, something that was instilled in us because one hand washes the other. You just can't go out there and just be alone without giving a helping hand, because as I said, that was instilled in us through family values. And we saw that happen in our own families, so it was just second nature for us to do it. In the meantime, we had fun doing it. In 4H clubs we did different skits. We made clothing. We modeled them. We did different plays, and as I said, we had fun, had a lot of fun. [Even though] the actual goal was to actually present this play...it was also a learning experience where we learned different things about home economics, sewing, [and] community speaking, actually we learned how to carry ourselves, and it was a great experience.

[And how would you describe Burkeville when you were growing up, or Crewe?]

Well, both of them were, not saying that they're still aren't, but both of them were more prejudiced then. The experience was a good experience because of our families. We were by today's standards, we were poor, and didn't know it, because we had a lot of love, plenty of food, and family gatherings, and that love brought us together, so we had a lot of fun. And the prejudice didn't matter, because we had a home base, a very strong and supportive home base.

As stated, Gloria discussed her experiences in a debutante cotillion. I present her narrative here because of the meaning it had for her and because she discusses how businesses in the community supported the event. She recounted:

Also what was a good experience for me was, as I said, with Crewe being so prejudiced from the beginning; we also had a debutante [cotillion]. I became a debutante. And that was through Crewe. And that was a very good experience. As a matter of fact, they taught you how to carry yourself as a lady, also different etiquette experiences, and it was a great experience for a lot of Black girls.

It wasn't integrated. Even though the schools were integrated, [the cotillion] wasn't. And there were a lot of prominent people in the community that sponsored the Debutante Cotillion. And it was a great experience... And it was a good learning [experience] too because as I look back, it really gave you some stepping-stones on how to carry yourself in the community, in life, in general. And yet it was a very formidable experience. It has a personal value to me because my debutante ball was in May of 1970, and that was the same year that my dad died. And I have great memories of that year.

It was almost like it was a wedding, but yet it was a very formal gathering. The men were in tuxes. And the girls were in white gowns. We got our presentation into the world and

in front of your parents and noteworthy people in the community, and it was a very good experience. But with my dad, he was able to present me. But at that time my dad loved to dance, and after the formal dancing happened with your escort, first you dance with your dad and then your escort. Well, my dad was a very good dancer, and he twirled me around as if I was a bride. And then the real music started, and he really got down. And it was like the whole floor just parted just to see us dance in the middle.

This narrative provides a good example of how community and family memories melded for many of the participants. It also provides context into the lived experiences of some Black residents. Though my familiarity with Cotillions is relegated to a picture of my college roommate in her white gown, I get a sense of the importance of this event in establishing one's place or a family's place in the Black community. Gloria explained that the cotillion was sponsored by Black businesses in the area and why she felt it was important in the community:

It was a very good experience for young women, and it transcended more than what you were being taught at school, and especially from the standpoint of a Black young lady. They had debutante balls for White young women, but it was very extravagant, but ours were just as extravagant. And in many ways you had restrictions when we were integrated. And yet the segregated ball, it was wonderful, because it was being given by your people, and you were excelling in front of your people. So it was a very great experience.

Gloria first attended Watson School at age six and stayed there until 7<sup>th</sup> grade. She then attended Crewe High School in 8<sup>th</sup> grade along with Evelyn. After high school, she moved to New York to live with an aunt and continue with her schooling. She ultimately received a bachelor's degree and is now a registered nurse in New Jersey. She explained, "Well, I've been blessed. I've had a good life. I got married. I have a son. I'm a registered nurse. I've traveled extensively, and I expect to continue. Now it's a phase of working and looking forward to retirement!"

## Hazel

Hazel is 51 years old and presently a middle school teacher in a neighboring county. She agreed to be interviewed at my parents' home in the morning before she left for a family trip.

Hazel, like all of the 45-55 year old participants, is a Christian; moreover, she discusses how her faith has brought her through struggles throughout life. Hazel also taught me first hand how reciprocity can occur during the interview process itself. She proclaimed:

[The interview] brought back those memories going through all that stuff. It made me really appreciate my self, talking about that, even more appreciate what God has done in my life. Yeah. I can sit here while I'm talking to you, and I can sit here thinking about [it]. I can see myself now running around like a little child here and there. There's a lot of things going through my mind right now... I mean, there's a whirlwind of things just coming at me that, wow, this is your life. This is my life. Part of my life growing up, I mean I've had some more experiences between now, being married and having [two] children and all of the places I've been, but from my childhood to my 12th grade, that's deep.

After the interview was over, Hazel also talked about the importance of sharing her story with her daughters. She already works to create scrapbooks and keeps family mementos, and she wanted a recording of her interview to pass on to her daughters.

Hazel grew up "in the country, rural" as she put it. She talked about her family and her memories of Blackstone growing up.

[If I asked you to talk about growing up in a rural area and reflecting on your family, what are some of your memories of your family or your siblings?]

Well at that time I lived out in the country. It was 5 of us, and my father, even though he had a degree in agriculture education from St. Paul's College [a local HBCU]; he didn't actually use his degree. So he just decided he didn't want to go that route. So he got a job working as a laborer in Blackstone, so the money made at that time was kind of...it wasn't that much and it was kind of rough for us. So my grandparents who lived right down below us kind of took a lot on them. They had a little bit more than my father had, so we kind of...things that we were going without, we always got from my grandparents. They were always there to help my father.

My father worked at this place at Blackstone, first it was Bear Groceries. He worked there a little bit, and then he worked at a shoe place and Velvet Textile. But you know at that time there wasn't a whole lot of money, so my father had to make ends meet, but he

did. We were never without food, but we just didn't have everything everybody else had. We struggled but we still had us. You know, family was always together. My father made sure we had something to wear, clothes and food. But we just didn't have all the wonderful things that everybody else...well, not everybody else, but most people. So we were kind of considered I don't want to say low, as people say, quote end quote, between low and middle class as far as the finances, economics. But we were a spiritual background family; church oriented, so that always kept us going. God always provided for that. So it was interesting. You know what; I wouldn't take nothing for that upbringing; because it was an upbringing that God had us go through.

It was the family closeness, the struggle and appreciation of one another, and the little we did have, we did appreciate it. Even though as a child I always said that if I ever...I think that helped put my mind to want to do something, go to school and educate myself more so I could help my family. Because I knew the situation that my dad was in, and my mother didn't work. She was a housewife. She worked before they got married in New York.

We spent a lot of time as little children down at my grandmother's house, playing. There were eight of us on the farm. It was just over 100 acres of land that was split between my uncle and my dad and my family. So we were always playing or something. The place where our home is now, that's the place my uncle owned. We used to live with our cousins. My mother and my father lived a little bit down the road, but it was walking distance, like five minutes. And my grandparents lived right in the middle. So we would always be down there, and play. You know, all those kind of things, and that's all we did. You know before they integrated schools, you know.

Hazel graduated from Nottoway Senior High School after having an interesting educational journey. She attended Mt. Nebo School from 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. They then consolidated the Black schools to the town of Blackstone; therefore, she attended 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade in Old A. G. Richardson and 7<sup>th</sup> grade in new A. G. Richardson. She then went to Luther H. Foster for 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Mandatory desegregation happened during her 9<sup>th</sup> grade, so she had to go to Blackstone Junior High School for 9<sup>th</sup> grade. She then returned to Nottoway Senior High School (formerly Luther H. Foster) for her 10<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade years.

After graduating from high school, she attended Virginia State College (now University) via a "Basic Grant" from the federal government. She attended college because she wanted to help her parents financially, which she has been able to do. She worked on campus to earn money for her living expenses. She graduated from Virginia State and ultimately received her

master's while living in Alabama. At the end of the interview, as she reflected, Hazel summarized her journey in the following manner:

My 1st through 3rd grade at Mt. Nebo Church School; my 4th through the 6th at old A.G. Richardson; my 7th grade at the new A.G. Richardson; and my 8th grade and my first year at Luther H. Foster, and then they integrated. I went back to Blackstone for junior high after they integrated it. They brought us from the [junior] high school, and then the 10th through the 12th at Nottoway Senior High (formerly Luther H. Foster). I went on, been to college, then I went to Columbus [with my brother and worked at a Developmental Institute with the "severely mentally retarded"] for two years and then came back. Went to Alabama and worked on my Master's there, and then [my husband and I] left and went to Germany, stayed there 5 years, came back to the State of Washington, stayed there for about 2 and half years. My husband went back overseas and then we came here [to Nottoway]. I've been here ever since he came home [in 1991], and this is where I've been.

### **Laura**

Laura, 53, is currently an elementary school teacher in Nottoway County Schools. Evelyn suggested that I interview Laura because of Laura's experiences with Freedom of Choice. I did not realize when I made my initial call to her, that I would be interviewing my fourth grade teacher. I remember the impact she had on my life as a student who was new to Nottoway County and it brought back memories for me of how much I loved her classroom.

Laura grew up in Crewe where her father was one of only a few Black men who worked with the railroad, "on the yard." Though Laura spent some time in the "country" of Crewe, most of childhood was in the town of Crewe on a street that was all Black. She described her family and was very proud of her father's occupation. Though Crewe is not a hub for the railroad now, according to Laura, Sarah (age 65), and John (age 60), Crewe was a "bustling" town when they grew up because of the railroad. In addition, Sarah explained that Crewe was founded to accommodate railroad workers and John explained that when he grew up most people in town worked for the railroad. Laura provided the following observations:



And my Daddy always had a good job. He worked with the railroad. Now my Daddy was one of the lucky ones. There was about three of them working out there with my daddy called “on the yard.” My Daddy was a brakeman. He was a switchman first and then he was a brakeman. They were the only Blacks on the yard out there for years. My daddy went on the railroad like ’52 or ’53, ’53 probably. I don’t know when those other men went out there, but you know they always wanted the Black people to do more...have jobs as laborers on the railroad. The White boys come on out and get top jobs.

[How would you describe the community when you were growing up?]

Well, we mostly hung with family, because like we used to live over there near [Watson School], over there in the country. A lot of those people, relatives, were in walking distance to us. And my daddy was raised on Lipscomb Street. That’s how come we ended up over there. [My daddy’s] parents gave him land where I grew up... with six children in my family. Our house was back in what we call the “bushes,” but we played amongst ourselves mostly. We went to church every Sunday, Sunday School every Sunday...and we used to go to ball games.

[When we moved to town] we played out in the street, and my cousin lived up the street, too, because my uncles, both of them built houses there too...There were people that had been there for years, and then my daddy and his two brothers built their houses there, and then Mr. [S]’s son built his house there. And then in later years all those other houses...that used to be all bushes all the way up there.

Laura attended Watson School before going to Crewe High School in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. She graduated from Nottoway Senior High and worked four years in Nottoway at two different factories, first at a shoe factory and then at a factory that assembled electrical parts. After soldering electrical parts into a board for 4-5 months, Laura decided, “Factory work is not for me.” She explained that she always wanted to be a teacher and decided on elementary education. She attended Virginia State College, where she earned her bachelor’s degree. Laura has been working in Nottoway Schools since 1979.

### **Tiffany**

Tiffany, age 47, moved to Blackstone from Florida when she was a young child. She talked about her mother moving with five young children to escape abuse and start a new life for

her family. Tiffany reminisced about family trips, when her mother would say, “Rise and shine, Babies!” before bringing them to their new adventure. The best way to describe Tiffany is energetic. She lifted my spirits the minute she walked into my parents’ home, with her use of the word “awesome” and the humorous inflection in her voice. Her transcription was peppered with the phrase “[laughter]” as we talked about her journey and lived experiences in Nottoway.

After her move, Tiffany and her family lived in the “country” and then moved to the town of Blackstone. She first explained her journey to Virginia and then her memories of family after her move. Tiffany constructed the following experiences:

[And did you find it a big difference when you moved between the rural area and the town?]

We were living on a dirt road in the country.... [There was] no traffic because it was a dead end. [When we moved to town] we had to get used to the houses because they were closer together of course, and traffic. But other than that, things stayed the same. We could just go wherever we wanted to go. We were little country kids and we became town kids. Isn’t that something, as small as Blackstone is, to consider it a town!

[What about your memories of your parents or brothers and sisters or family traditions?]

My mother was awesome. We did everything together. We traveled a lot. My childhood was...my father now, when we were in Florida those years weren’t as good. He was abusive. I wouldn’t have called him abusive then. I just thought he beat me every day for [no reason]. I know I wasn’t a bad child, because I was quiet. I don’t know whether he was frustrated or what, but I mean, every day I used to get a beating for something. I didn’t breathe right or I didn’t [do something]. My mother, that’s why I love her so much; she loved us so much she said, “I want my kids to be able to laugh in the household. I want to hear it all through the house; I don’t want my kids to have to be quiet when he comes home”. So she left. You know, it was a lot then. Because she finished school maybe when she was in the 8th grade, and went to bring us up from Florida, there were five of us then, to bring us up from Florida by herself and not knowing exactly where she was going or what she was going to do. And I think I love her even more for that. So once we got here, I mean our childhood was just like no other. We traveled; we went everywhere.

You know how kids are now when you go to school and you don’t have a certain thing or you’re supposed to be going on a trip and you can’t go because you can’t afford it, we never went through that. She always made sure we had...and I know it was a struggle for her, because, looking back, you know we talked about it several times how we would all be at the table, but she wouldn’t. And it didn’t dawn on us that there wasn’t enough

food and she was making a sacrifice. It never dawned on me...I mean everything was so...we never missed a meal. I mean we had our biscuits and that's why I like them now! But you know it never dawned on us, because the atmosphere and everything was so light and always so happy, and the Christmas she had those five red lights under the tree, and that was a sacrifice for her. She always made sure...like she sheltered us from any hurt.

Tiffany attended both old and new A. G. Richardson, Blackstone Junior High School, and Nottoway Senior High School where she graduated in 1978. She explained, "I had my diploma, but I just couldn't march. I got my daughter and my diploma in '78. That was my pride and joy." Though she was offered a scholarship and a possibility for employment in Washington, D.C., Tiffany ultimately decided to raise her daughter in Nottoway. Her mother said that she could raise Tiffany's daughter, but Tiffany explained:

My mother was willing to take my child. You know I think about it a lot, even then, because of how she raised us, I wanted to be responsible, because I felt it wasn't fair, because it was my choice, it wasn't hers...What got me was having to sign her over to my mother; to me that was [saying] she isn't mine anymore. That just blew my mind. I was like wow. Sign her over? I just remember those words. "No, that's my child." So I stayed and went to a trade school. I went to Southside Skill Center... [and was trained as a] clerk/typist for six months and then stenography for 6 months.

Tiffany said, "I have had so many jobs, trying to find the right job. That's amazing because I didn't find it until 40 something." She first worked with domestic violence victims and is currently a Correctional Officer and Counselor. She earned her Associates Degree in 2000 and is currently working on her Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice.

### **Memories of Town**

Community memories for the 45-55 year old participants were memories of their respective towns because travel between towns during the 1950s and 1960s was prohibitive due to lack of transportation for many. Though numerous Black residents went to other towns for work or school, they frequented businesses in their town. Therefore, Laura and Harold talked

about their memories of Crewe; Hazel and Tiffany described Blackstone; and Evelyn described Burkeville. The descriptions of each town consisted of numerous businesses and industry, and the participant's feeling of community. During this time, towns were "bustling" during the week and on Saturday with shoppers. As more citizens were able to purchase transportation and bypasses were built, which allowed travelers to circumvent two of the towns, many of the businesses in Nottoway that once thrived have subsequently closed. In addition, conglomerates such as Wal-Mart and fast food restaurants have taken the place of sole proprietorships.

### **Crewe**

Laura talked about the number of businesses and the activity that Crewe had. For Laura, growing up in Crewe provided the following experiences:

It was nice. And [we had] a theatre at one point, but Blacks couldn't go. That was way before my time, but I remember hearing about it. It had two laundries. It had a beautician and two barbers, a café; it was a booming little town. You wouldn't think it now, if you see what they've got now. [But then] a little old restaurant came in there called the Lovin' Oven, specializing in fried chicken. And a liquor store will always be there, of course. It had two or three insurance companies. And they had about 5 taxis on the street. They'd take you anywhere you needed to go; pick you up and take you shopping; and [you would] do your shopping and go back home. And they always had a bank there. It was a booming little place when I was growing up; 'cause we used to walk the street on Friday with our friends, you know, walking around.

It was nice growing up. And the garment factory was right down there. A lot of people worked there. Well, railroad was always there. Garment factory was a big to do. The veneer plant in Burkeville was a big to do. Even over [in Blackstone] Craddock Terry was [big employer too]. I used to work over there before I went to college. Craddock Terry Shoe Company.

They had a grocery store for a little while. They always had two drugstores. They had an A&P, Johnson's Super Market, Crewe Co-op, and Norton's. We used to have a dollar store that was in Crewe, Dry cleaners.... [Crewe] was a booming little town.

Laura's memories of Crewe were very similar to James (age 60), who also called Crewe "bustling" and Sarah (age 65) who said Crewe had "lots of stores, and lots of people." Harold's

discussion of the town of Crewe was couched in a narration of how parents found out “you messed up in school.” Harold explained:

And one thing about it with it being a close-knit community, everybody knew everybody’s parents or grandmother. You could almost ask my momma and daddy of any of the kids in school, they knew everybody’s guardians...and knew who they were staying with and all they had to do was see them in the grocery store. They didn’t have telephones. [Parents would] see [each other] in the grocery store, or at church, or any of the places where they frequent at night, and all they do is say, “Well, you know that old [Harold] messed up in school, and blah, blah, blah...And the next thing you know, I got a whipping because somebody in school told my daddy that I messed up in school, and I got to get a whipping for something that I thought was over and done with. [Parents] bring it up because they only could tell it when they got a chance to talk, like on a weekend when they went to town, over there at Page’s Café or over in the colored folk parking lot. .... And [the parking lot] had mud puddles and holes.

[So, is that what the town gave...?]

I don’t know who gave [it]...but that was the colored folks parking lot. That’s where [Blacks] parked when they went to town. And it didn’t have no gravel; it didn’t have nothing. Mud holes...and that was then accepted just because that’s all they had. And everybody went to that parking lot. They would go over there and park in the colored folks’ parking lot, and from the colored folks’ parking lot they would head straight to Page’s Café. And we used to come even when I was a kid that’s where they hung out. And even when I left Baltimore...went to Baltimore and came back here, they were still hanging out in the ‘60s; they were still hanging out in the parking lot and going over to Page’s Café. We [had] Goldberg Paris Inn, Jimmy Hayes’ Thrills, Coach Collins’ Midway and Rosebud. Everybody, most during our years, everybody hung between Midway, Thrills, and Goldberg Paris Inn.

Harold described social places that Black residents frequented, but he also shed light on the differences in maintenance of those places in town for Black residents.

### **Burkeville**

Evelyn described the town of Burkeville and the businesses present when she was young in addition to the previously mentioned memories of her community. Evelyn also described the jobs that Black people would generally work in town. She recounted:

Well, through town, the main drag was Route 360 Business. And it’s pretty much the same when you came in on 360 Business now. If you came in heading west, there was Paris Inn on the right, and on the left was Morris Electronics, and then of course,

Bradshaw's as it is now, and it was a service station. And the little gray building has been there for eons. Roy C. Jenkins right beside Bradshaw's was Herbert Hall's Oil Company. And right across from Bradshaw's was Bassett Veneer. That was a big employer for the county and surrounding counties. A lot of African-American worked there processing wood and logs and they made furniture, I mean the logs were made to use the Bassett Furniture you hear from up in Martinsville.

Then there was the Purina Feed Place and there were chicken houses back there behind that, where Mrs. Nunally's [beauty] shop is, that was the Purina, that's where we got feed and stuff. And behind that was chicken houses, a whole bunch of chicken houses, and there we bought eggs and stuff from there. And where the bank is now was the Tasty Freeze

And then you kept down, and where the ballpark is was actually Burkeville High School. That was predominantly White. And they tore that down. And then where the town building is now, used to be Sovereign Bank [then it became] Virginia National Bank. And then Lush Thrift was where that body shop is. Lush Thrift was a tractor place. And then there was the Market where Burkeville Market is. That was Owens' Market. And across from Owens' Market was the movie theatre.

There was also a car service, automotive place, garage, hardware store, a White beauty parlor, another grocery store and a Laundromat in addition to the Municipal Building and post office. As with Crewe, most of those businesses, except for the current ones she listed, are not there.

## **Blackstone**

Blackstone is the largest town in Nottoway County and home to Fort Pickett. Fort Pickett has been a major hub for Blackstone and three neighboring counties. Residents work there and use the facilities for community affairs. For example, my prom and countless wedding receptions have been held there.

Tiffany and Hazel shared their memories of Blackstone. Since Tiffany lived in town, her memories coincide with events with friends and family. Hazel's memories of Blackstone are of working conditions. Tiffany commented:

We could walk places. Yeah, we could walk uptown. We could walk to the Dairy Queen. My best friend was right around the corner... [I remember the Trading Post. The Trading Post, that was an old store, and they sold clothes and shoes. That was three blocks from the house. That's the first thing that comes to mind. It was so old. We had a Montgomery Ward, like Sears... [And] I remember how friendly people were and how

comfortable I felt in Blackstone. Everybody knew us and everybody knew we were [D]'s kids. And it was just a feeling of comfort. That's why I'm still here. I never worry about being stranded. I never worried about getting hurt even, because there was always somebody close by that I knew.

When I asked Hazel, "Do you have any memories of Blackstone as a town?" She offered the following observations:

Well, I've always felt as a Black person, African-American, that I knew...well at that time they didn't use African-American; they used Negro. Black people were limited. African-Americans were limited to job opportunities. I knew that that was always in my mind that we had to struggle, and I could always remember it was this big thing when Black people go into a store. People would be walking behind them to see if they're going to take something. You know, it was just that...I don't know if people were scared of each other or what, but I remember that. That would always be a thing, and our parents would always say, "Don't touch nothing. Don't do this. Those people are watching you." It was a lot and everybody in Blackstone used to say that, and people complained about it to the NAACP. That was something that was brought up to the attention of them at the time, because you couldn't get no jobs, and finally they did hire Black people in those small stores. They had to [or there would be a boycott. There was a boycott one time. I remember that.

[Oh, when was that?]

It was like when I was...I can't remember what year that was, but they boycotted some of the stores in Blackstone, and Petersburg, up in there, especially up in areas like small areas. And finally they started hiring people, African Americans in the banks and the small store. And things started getting a little bit better. But they did boycott.

[Was that through the NAACP?]

Uh huh. Yeah. I was a small child, maybe about 8 or 9, but I remember that. It was probably in 1963 or something. I think I was still at the old Mt. Nebo School. I remember that. But it was no jobs. Most of the people had to work away, out of town. You could get better jobs out of town than you could in Blackstone.

Hazel's memories reveal the struggle for employment for Blacks at that time, but her discussion of how she and her family were treated in Blackstone's businesses are also reminiscent of how I and many Black shoppers are still treated in many stores. Her narrative also shows the influence of the NAACP as we have seen in newspaper articles and other participants' narratives.

## School Memories – Segregated Schools

Conversations about segregated schools in Nottoway County were actually descriptions of an interlocking social system of school, family, and community. In most instances families donated land and money to erect each community school. Schools were either partially financed and/or affiliated with a church as Mt. Nebo and Watson Schools were. Also, my participants and Vanessa Siddle Walker's (1996) story of segregated schooling illustrate the involvement of parents with schools.

The driving forces of all the Black schools were their dedicated teachers. All of the participants talked about their teachers in glowing terms. Evelyn explained:

All of our teachers were all known on a professional basis. It was never a first name basis of a teacher. I never saw a teacher with bare legs until I went to the White school. Teachers wore stockings and dresses or suits. Everybody wanted to be like a teacher. We wanted to look good. We wanted to smell good like the teachers. I mean they were our role models. Most of the time teachers used to be from your community. I mean they were people who were born and bred here for the most part...you might get somebody who had gotten married and moved here, but for the most part, teachers had a connection.

In addition to their status in the community, participants discussed the amount of work Black teachers did at their elementary schools. Teachers would have to prepare schools for their students. For example, Hazel discussed how her teacher not only lit the two potbelly stoves at Mt. Nebo School on cold days but also taught multi-grade rows of students. Hazel recounted:

Well, we had 1st grade reading books, 1st, 2nd and 3rd, and they were different colored. One was blue, and the other was blue/green, and the 1st grade was red. So we had those kinds of textbooks and a little workbook. "See Jane run," you know that kind of thing. But you know, this teacher, my 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grade teacher, she taught those kids. It was like one row was 1st grade, one row was...depending on how many you had in each grade...you had two rows of 2nd graders, but the room was big and one row was for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd. And she had the board and the desk in front of her. She had everything organized, and she would start us off. She would tell us to get the 2nd grade something to read or 3rd grade something to do while she worked with the 1st grade. She would go from row to row, it was like a circle, you know, just go from one to the other and come back.



Evelyn also talked about how teachers would handle large classrooms of students efficiently. She described the community that was created in the classroom because of the teacher's actions:

Well, [in] school you had classrooms. Some classrooms sometimes were even double, like 4th and 5th. But school, it was very disciplined. They usually divided the classes based on I would say ability or whatever. I know you used to have the red birds, the blue birds, and the yellow birds. The red birds were on top of their game. The bluebirds were average, and the yellow birds, the red birds had to teach, to help. And there was a lot of collaborative teaching, you know, without teachers. I mean you had the teacher there, but once you knew a skill, then you were taught to share it with the person who didn't know it. So the red birds, if they had done well, then the chances are that the teacher would ask you to help the yellow birds while she was doing the blue birds. Now you know people will make the comment, "That's what you're getting paid to do." But I think that that's why students were able to excel, because they were taught that they were obligated to...they were a class, and a class was a family, and you had to look...you watched out for each other. It was truly we didn't want any child left behind, truly.

Though Evelyn describes a system of "tracking" within this classroom, she sees it more as being able to help your "school family" and simultaneously learn about obligation and excellence.

Though it was not stated in this quotation, she was a "red bird," and one could argue that she sees the class differently in her privileged position.

Black segregated schools were aligned with Christianity, fostering the relationship between school, community, and family. As Evelyn explained:

Like when you come in the morning you would have devotionals. That's the first thing you would have was devotionals. On Monday the teacher would ask everybody who went to church or Sunday School. And you know if you didn't go to church or Sunday School, the next week you were determined you were going to be one to raise your hand to say that you went to church or Sunday School.

Though participants attended different segregated schools, for their elementary grades, they had common experiences and views of the segregated education as supportive community schools. Harold also discussed his memories of Luther H. Foster. He talked a great deal about discipline he received from his teachers, mostly in the form of "whippings." Only Hazel talked about discipline in segregated schools, which she immediately said did not happen to her. But, Harold exclaimed:

But I needed it. I needed it. I thank the Lord for my whippings. Yes, I do, too, because if I had not gotten correction back when I was young, it might seem cruel with rules and whatever, but if you have [to have] some kind of way to correct children now to let them know that if you do this, this is what's going to happen to you.

In addition to punishment, Harold also talked about classes and events at Luther H. Foster. He talked with great pride about the Math Science Conferences between Foster and neighboring Black high schools. He explained:

[Luther H. Foster] used to have something they called the Math-Science Conference. And that was something. And it was the Math Science Conference where all your brainy students would get together, they would have a certain time during the year where you would have this conference and all the students from all the area high schools, and schools in the district would get together... And they, all of us or some of us who had or was supposed to have a little knowledge in certain subjects would get together, and you would represent that school in this particular subject...like math, and science, and most of them were math and science, but anything that came under math, like algebra, and well we didn't have calculus and stuff.

I don't know what year it was, but I know I did it about two years that I went to represent Luther H. Foster in Math. And the teacher asked me because I was supposed to be a whiz with numbers. I used to love numbers, figures...The teachers were really upset because they were thinking that there was no way in the world that with all of our brains...and none of us placed...But anyway, that was one of the big things during that year – the Math Science Conference. I did enjoy going to that. That was a time when we didn't have no clothes, but you would put on your little \$2 suit and everybody dressed up with their little ties on because you were going somewhere and you're representing something. When we went to those Math-Science Conferences you wanted to look like you knew something [even] if you didn't (laughter).

### **School Memories – Freedom of Choice**

On August 26, 1965, *The Crewe-Burkeville Journal* informed the public that for the first time in history, Nottoway County schools would be open on an “integrated basis” (p. 1). The newspaper estimated that 151 “Negro students” would attend formerly White schools. On September 2, 1965, Evelyn, Gloria, Harold, and Laura were four of the approximately 30 Black students who entered Crewe High School. Though the facility is referred to as Crewe High

School, it housed 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades. Third grade students attended Burkeville School for one year. Harold explained his first impressions:

Well the first year when we went over there, that first integration, not integration but 'freedom of choice' – it was just like bussing. We were bussed over there, and [the White students] would all stand up on the sidewalk, and as we walked in the school, during that first time, most of them never been in any kind of fellowship or any kind of classroom or connection with Blacks besides maybe in a department store in town, and then you couldn't go in certain stores. So they really didn't have too much dealing and interactions with Blacks then, and some of them...it was kind of rough there for a while. Kind of rough, because every hallway you went to and every classroom they put you in every class had to have a Black in it, so most of the time we were always in a class with one Black, and you're sitting in the class by yourself. I said to myself, "Lord, have mercy." Then when the bell ring and you see [a Black student] out in the hall, [you would say] "Oh Lawdy! Oh, but I gotta go; gotta get to class."

But it was something. But it wasn't that bad... Kids are going to be kids, and during that time when I was 16, it didn't really make too much difference, because I'd fight just like the next man. It didn't make no difference. If you want to fight, that's what you're going to get, a fight. And that's what really it came down to, to the point that there weren't too many guys over there. [It was] mostly girls. There weren't too many guys over there, except like me and my brother, my little brother; he was down in the elementary level, so he wasn't even in high school with us. [It was] me and my brother, and my cousin, and [about four other guys].

Harold has made a clear distinction between "integration" and "Freedom of Choice." With Freedom of Choice, Nottoway County Schools were able to say the county was integrated without truly eradicating the dual school system or racial injustice.

Gloria discussed the first week of classes and the amount of time it took to feel a semblance of safety in Crewe High School. Gloria understood that *Brown* and actions of the NAACP forced Freedom of Choice. Gloria recounted:

It was forced. And after *Brown vs. [Board of Education]*, and different court cases that were won by the NAACP, for the schools to integrate, that's how it happened. Because Crewe High School was lily White for all those years, and then at that time it was integrated. And it was difficult because we were being forced to be together. And in many ways it was understandable being young at that time that the Blacks didn't want to go with the Whites and the Whites didn't want to be with the Blacks, but legally the courts forced integration. But yet from another standpoint, the Whites had everything. They had the best tools and education that the county and the state could provide, and the Blacks didn't. And it was important for the Blacks to get the same education as the

Whites, but yet in racist times it was difficult, because when we first started there, the buses had to have a police escort.

[Inside [the bus] or like behind it?]

Behind [the bus] and inside [the school] the first day. Yeah. And really the first week, the police were there. And prejudice rears its evil head in many facets. Because number one as I said they didn't want you there. Number two, they didn't think you were smart enough to be there. They didn't want to give you the education that you had every right to, but legally they had to. And many of them, you know, especially the guidance counselors, the teachers, just expected you to do poorly, but many students proved them wrong. But as I said, we had had the background of positive learning, because in many ways we were told that you have to be twice as good as the White man. So it made you excel and made you want to excel, mainly because they said you couldn't do it.

[Would you say that it subsided within a year?]

Oh, it took a couple of years, because as I said, they didn't know us, we didn't know them. As I said, that fear was always you know in the background. But yet, there were a few nice people that made it better, because our family knew a few of the people. For instance oh, my Goodness ...some prevalent names in the community, these people who ran businesses had children going to that school, and they were cordial, but distant, whereas others could be very resistant and mean. And then as they found out that we weren't going anywhere, they came around. But initially, it's unfortunate, but the children lived what they learned, so they had evidently been taught racism, because it was talked about in their homes, and being young teenagers, young men, with testosterone and hormones flowing, they were pretty negative. But as I said, they came around, because they saw that we had protection, and we were going to be there for the long haul, because that was the law, and the counties and the State had to follow the law.

Gloria's discussion of having the "background of positive learning" reverberated with Evelyn's statement. Evelyn also discussed the hardships she endured at Crewe High School, but she believed her elementary school prepared her. Evelyn explained:

Well high school, I went to an all African-American elementary school. When I left 7th grade I went to Crewe High, which was during the time of Freedom of Choice, so I had the choice of going to Foster, which was the Black school or Crewe High. And the reason I went to Crewe High was it was 3 miles from my home versus 16 to go to the African-American school. It was rough. It was the first year of desegregation. There was a lot of unfortunate taunting and harassment of African-American students. There was cheating of grades. There was spitting on folks, taking all the seats from us on the bus. There was a lot of abuse, a lot of abuse. But we were strong students, and so I mean you know...we trusted NO ONE basically there. So, we didn't have anybody to go to.

[Which was totally different from your elementary school experience?]

Uh huh. So you had to be responsible, and when I say responsible, if your teacher gave you a grade, we kept EVERY paper that teacher had. We averaged our grades ourselves. And you would find out many times they had deliberately taken your grade. We didn't have to get our parents. We would go to them. We were capable of showing them, "Show me how you got this because these are all my papers." You know, we were very vocal in a positive manner. We were not fearful. We had great confidence; the African-American school gave us great confidence in our abilities. We were able to communicate. A lot of the kids now are not able to communicate.

Evelyn presents a level of distrust that is consistent with many of the 18 – 35 year old participants. Her description resonates with Laura's, who talks about the White teachers not being receptive to Black students. This perception and experiences at Crewe High School, unfortunately, changed Laura as a student. She recounted:

[So how was your experience in Crewe High School?]

Oh God, that was awful. I didn't want to go... In 7th grade I had my first experience with more than one teacher. I had three teachers. And one of them taught the math and science, I think. And the other ones taught the language arts and the social studies. Then we had a PE teacher, and a Bible teacher. We had 4 teachers. We had Bible too. She taught a Bible class, and music... We had a music teacher, a bible teacher, a PE teacher, and had another teacher for social studies and science. Five teachers, there were five. And that was my first experience with that, because I came from a per se one-room school, where there was just one teacher teaching everything. So that was a big experience. And that was a shock to my system too. I was a straight A student until I went there.

The teachers really did not...they weren't very receptive of us. They taught us because they had to. You know what I'm saying? And they weren't too bad. The teacher that I...Mrs. [R], you probably know her...She was my 7th grade language arts teacher. So she was very friendly. I remember her. She continued to be friendly to this day when I see her. You know when I worked, I taught under her as a principal too. So she was nice, and another one was Mr. [P]. He was a teacher/minister. And he was OK. So my 7th grade year...I didn't do well there, with the literature, I remember. I wasn't used to having literature like that, and I remember doing OK in spelling and grammar. But that literature part...one thing stuck out in my mind and it was just hard for me. And that was a shock to system, because I was used to making A's. You know I was smart. But then, I kind of like said, "Well you are over here with these White people; maybe you don't belong here," to myself.

And of course, you know, I'm going to tell you honestly. The White boys were friendlier than the girls. They were. Some of those boys I see right now they speak to me and talk

to me. They were friendlier than the girls. See when the girls see the White boys talking to you; they start to picking at you. You see that kind of stuff. They picked at you or they called you names, and you being going into the auditorium for a program, all the Black sitting right together, and no White people sitting two seats in front of you, you know. They segregated themselves in the auditorium, and lunch the same way. You know we had to really be strong to stay there, because some of the children who started with us, they didn't stay. They went on to Foster. They didn't stay. Because I guess they went home and told their parents...you know, parents said, "I'm not going to subject my child to that." That's sort of like bringing slavery back almost, you know.

So a lot of us we stuck there, and it got better as we got older. But I remember 9th grade Algebra I. [The teacher] would not call on us. [My friend] and I were in there, the only two Blacks. He would not call on us. You know how math teachers send children to the board. He would not call on us to go to the board to work a problem. You raise your hand and ask him for help. He would stand a mile off from you and say something like, you know, "I told you this and you should know it," this kind of stuff. And I sat in there and I used to just cry about that in the evening and tell them I didn't want to go back there. [My mother] said, "Just try to stick it out." And I failed that class. The first class I failed. I mean I had trouble with the literature, but I got an F on my report card from this man. And he just didn't try to help you at all. And I remember that so well because [my friend] and I would be over there together, and they wouldn't talk to you. The teacher wouldn't help you and talk to you. It was miserable. But you know, that was a learning experience too, because I remember that man to this day, and after growing up and moving on, I heard a lot of White people say how nasty he was....It turned me off from math; I took no more math.

Harold, Gloria, Evelyn, and Laura presented cases of overt racism. Their stories make the journey for educational "equality" more real. They and their parents decided that they should attend Crewe High School to ensure that they had a good education – as Gloria asserts, "the same education as the Whites." Though they were educated in the same school, same classrooms, and by the same teachers, they were not getting the same education. Instead, they were schooled, both in an academic (Shujaa, 1994) and colloquial sense. In essence, they were "schooled" by many of the Whites that you may be here, but you will never be as good as us.

### **Backlash**

Because of this "schooling" and many of the community experiences, Laura talked about students who decided to go back to Luther H. Foster instead of finishing high school at Crewe

High. Harold was one of the students who decided to leave after his first year. He talked about backlash from the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and from the Black community. Harold explained:

[Now what did freedom of choice mean to you and your family, and did it affect your lives at all?]

Well as far as freedom of choice when we first went, it didn't really affect us too much in the school life, beside the children, but then it affected the whole neighborhood, because during that year, during the freedom of choice years [is] when the Ku Klux Klan [became increasingly violent]. But during those years, that's when the Ku Klux Klan really rose up to the top. When we started going to school over there. The Ku Klux Klan blew up mailboxes. They blew up our [mailbox and] all of the folk that they thought that went over there called this integration as they called it, they blew up our mailboxes, and they burned crosses at our houses.

Oh, yeah, right there; when I came in from school, they had burnt a cross, had a cross burning down at the mailbox, a great big old cross, and had done set it on fire. And when I came in from school I ran to the house scared to death. It was like Octoberish; like around close to Halloween time or something like that. And I came home that evening because it was dark, and I told my daddy, "There's a fire at the mailbox!" I came home running because I was scared when I saw fire at the mailbox; I'm thinking fire at the house. Then they blowed up all of our mailboxes, put bombs in the mailboxes and blowed them up, and even the White people in the neighborhood that we lived in, they were putting bombs in their mailboxes, and blowed up their mailboxes too. But I don't know how you're going to put that in the paper because they were called "Nigger lovers." They would put them in and [our White neighbors] wanted to know, "Why did they blow up our mailboxes?"

And then when you went over to some of the businesses in town, and the kids were there. We were always picked on because they thought that we were causing trouble by wanting to go to "their school." [They would ask,] "Why do y'all want to come to our school?" You know, and that kind of stuff. And [we had] plenty of neighborhood brawls in town over going to the school over there. And do you know that little Billy's Tasty Freeze? It's now called Luigi, a hog dog place, foot long. That place was there when we were in school. And that was a hangout. That was a hangout for all. They didn't have a whole lot of eating-places...and we used to go over there and get our little hot dogs, and Dad would say, "Ya'll go ahead."...And then there was always a lot of stuff said because they were the ones that were coming over to the school and would always spread it over into the community involvement and stuff. And I remember my Daddy sitting in the car saying, "That's right. Y'all go on over there, and I dare one of them," and my Dad was pretty young back then in those days, and of course we were young too, we were waiting for something to happen so we could [fight back] but most of the time there would always be a crowd of them and maybe one or two of us.

Harold knew the culprits who burned the cross and were part of the KKK organization. Harold proclaimed in an earlier statement, “During that time when I was 16, it didn’t really make too much difference, because I’d fight just like the next man. It didn’t make no difference. If you want to fight, that’s what you’re going to get, a fight.” Through this bravado, however, lies the initial fear that the heinous symbol of a burning cross provides: an initial fear that one’s family is also harmed and the feeling of being “scared to death” that this is a possibility.

Gloria also explained how the Backlash from the KKK affected her, her family, and the Black community. She recounted:

And those were volatile times. They were very volatile. And you heard many stories throughout the community that it would never happen, and that there were different statements being made that you know, “the Blacks should stay in their schools and the Whites should stay in their schools, and everybody was fine. Why did the government have to interfere?” People were being...racism was used in many ways with people’s jobs and you know, they were told that if their kids went to the White schools that they might not have work for them, and there were different types of tactics that were being used. But the NAACP was very powerful and stood behind us, and the actual United States Government was behind us that stated that we had every right to the same education as Whites.

[What did integration at that time mean to your family personally? Did it have any affect on it?]

My immediate family? Yeah, it did, because there was fear. There was an important value being placed on it because you know, your child was getting the same education that a White child was getting, which is their inevitable right, but they were denied. The fear was not that the children were going to that school, but the fear of what could happen, because there was violence involved. They would throw rocks at the bus. They would, you know, the Ku Klux Klan was very prevalent then. You know, you had concerns that you know your home would be invaded, or something would happen to your child going to school, and luckily we had parents that talked to us and gave us that comfort that nothing would happen to us.

But just picture yourself as a young child being forced into a situation that could be volatile. So it was really an odd situation for a child to be in, because leaving the comfort of your own family and space and the sameness of going to school with people that looked like you, where you felt safe, to an unsafe environment with people you didn’t know, people that you feared, people that you didn’t feel had your interests at heart. But you know, in time you get over that, because you demanded the same rights as every



White child. So inevitably we got those same rights, and went to school without a problem. But initially that fear was there definitely.

Harold and Gloria present a volatile time – a time of fear and violence. Their stories are very similar to stories of desegregation in the South as Black citizens worked to desegregate schools.

In addition, to backlash from some of the White citizens in Nottoway County, Harold and Laura talked about backlash from the Black community as well. For Harold, the threats made by the KKK and the comments of the Black community made him ultimately decide to return to Luther H. Foster. He recounts:

See we always played with these guys [our White neighbors]. We all played together as children. I thought, “Shoot, it ain’t no problem to go to school over there. And I went over there the first year, but I didn’t stay. Of course the reason I didn’t stay was, it wasn’t nothing to do with the school; it was me. I was 16. I had turned 16 years old, and everybody was going out to dances and all girls and things and nobody would talk to me because I’m a traitor. All the Black girls, that was about during the ‘60s. During that time they say, “Oh, you want to be with the White folks, and you’re going over there and dance with the White folks.” Because we go over there for a little dance, and all the boys go over there and dance and everybody [would] get a dance. [They’d say] “Go up to Crewe Community Center to dance with the White folks. I told Mother, I said, “Mother, it’s rough now. I can’t handle it.” Sometime I regret that I did it, but that’s neither here nor there. But I enjoyed the year that I went over there, but I only stayed one year.

[My] English teacher, she taught me English over there, and [she] wanted to know, “Harold, why you going back? And I really couldn’t tell her that I had gotten mannish. But I told Mother, “I can’t handle this. I’m going back to Foster so I can get me a girlfriend.” (Laughs) My mind was in the wrong place.

[There are not too many people that did both [Crewe High and Luther H. Foster], would you say?]

No, not a lot of them went to Crewe High School and went back to Foster. I think I may have been...I can’t really recall anybody going back but me, that started out in ’65. I really can’t think of nobody but me. One of the reasons, because you know when you’re 16 and 15 and mannish, you want a girlfriend. You want to hold her hand or get close, and my thing was when I went back to Luther H. Foster, I was always treated like an outsider, because I went over there with the Whites, and they said, “Why didn’t you stay over there. What did you come back for? Why did you come back?” That wasn’t from everybody. That was just from some of the select folks. Because they were wondering what did they...”Oh, you liked to do that so well with the White folk, why did you come back?” It really wasn’t about none of that. It was just that it was me;

because I wanted to get involved...I knew I wasn't going to marry a White one. So I had to get back to look around...

Yeah, and as far as...and then the teachers when I went back, when I left Crewe High School, most of the teachers were wanting to know why I was going back, and then when I got back to Luther H. Foster, all the teachers there wanted to know why was I coming back, because my grades were...I had good grades, so they were asking what was the reason why I was going from Crewe High School and coming back to Luther H. Foster. And of course I don't know what I told them. I don't really know what I told them. I'm trying to run through my mind and remember what I told them. All I know is I'm back!

Though Harold couches his decision to return to Luther H. Foster in peer relationships, he does admit that he told his parents how hard it was at Crewe High School. In addition, Harold said the following poignant comment at the end of the interview: "It's like they felt we were raping the Black community [with Freedom of Choice]." This is how he described the Black community's response to Blacks who went to Crewe High School for Freedom of Choice. He felt this was the Black communities' perception of he and others who chose to go to Crewe High School in lieu of Luther H. Foster before mandatory desegregation. His words, and his intonation, have stuck with me since the interview. Rape is such a volatile and complex word denoting violence and pain. Though Harold's discussion of peers' responses to him at school dances were said with such levity, this quotation, said after "the tape stopped running" speaks volumes to me.

Laura also discussed the backlash she received from the Black community. The statements did not seem to affect her as much because of her father's ideals. She explained:

Well, I've heard comments from people saying they were over there with the White people. "You know they think they're something or better than us." You know, stuff like that. Some of them did, but like I told you how my Daddy was. He wanted his children to have the best...the same thing White people enjoyed, so he explained to us, "That's why I want you all to go there. You deserve to have the same thing they have." But see, by him working on the railroad with those White engineers all those years, he heard them say the different stuff that they did and we didn't have in our school, you know, stuff they had. And like football games and stuff like that, and playing sports and stuff like that.

The sacrifice for better facilities and material conditions seems monumental to me in retrospect. These participants have stepped into a hostile environment from a supportive and cohesive community under the façade of equality. Notwithstanding, their courage in the face of overt racism is astounding.

### **School Memories – Desegregation**

Compared to surrounding counties, Nottoway had a relatively well-planned integration strategy, brought on after numerous pleas were denied by HEW to keep “freedom of choice” going. In 1970, after five years of Freedom of Choice, Nottoway County underwent mandatory segregation. In the fall, Evelyn and Laura attended Nottoway Senior High School (Luther H. Foster) for their senior year, and Hazel and Tiffany attended Blackstone Junior High School (Blackstone High School). Gloria and Harold graduated from Crewe High School and Luther H. Foster, respectively before mandatory desegregation occurred in Nottoway County.

#### ***Nottoway Senior High School***

Evelyn and Laura described the first year of desegregation of Nottoway High School. Evelyn talked about the change in environment from Crewe High School as Black students went from the overwhelming numerical minority to the numerical majority. Evelyn provided the following observations:

It was I think well planned, the integration. Of course you had some teachers who couldn't get beyond [it] who couldn't have respect for the new law, but for the most part, you know, we made it without any major incidences. [But] it was very trying. Now we had 51 percent African-American [at Nottoway Senior High], so it was very different again, because we had been denied [before]. Anything that had an election well we weren't allowed to run [at Crewe High]. For instance there was the pep club. You had to be asked to join the pep club, so no African-Americans were asked to join it when we were at the White school. The clubs and things you pretty much had to be asked to join. So when we got to the 51 percent of course, again we were strong and we elected. If it hadn't been for rules and regulations changed to accommodate [White] students,

everything would have been all Black. And the Whites knew that they were going to have [power because the] Blacks were more in the majority so then they would nominate people that they had gone to school with. But most of them declined because when we were at the White school, they didn't think we were worthy to belong to anything, so they were really trying to split the vote.

Through Evelyn's narrative we see that "enemies" were not trying to become allies in this new environment. Laura talked about being in Nottoway Senior High as they were still undergoing construction to accommodate the increased number of students. She explained:

[Mandatory desegregation] was mass confusion, because we were coming from three schools [well really] two schools because Foster's children were already there. A lot of Black people made comments: "What are they coming in here for? Even told us, y'all were up there with those White folks and now you're coming to our school." They made comments like that, but my whole senior year, all I could do was hear those air hammers, and they were doing all that construction, building those 8 classrooms.

MB: So they added on to Foster.

Yeah, they had to [with] all those people. And we had no prom, no senior stuff. We had Baccalaureate up at the Pavilion. They had Baccalaureate up there on a Sunday, and they had graduation up there, but we had no prom or nothing like that. We had nowhere to have it. They didn't have a gym. See, they were building the gym. And what they did, they had a dance at Crewe Primary for people who wanted to just go and hang out, but that wasn't very successful. Nobody attended much...you know some people suggested Pickett where they used to go years ago [from Luther H. Foster], but then the White people said, "No, we don't want to go there," and you know it ended up with just that, that little dance. But my memories of the high school were pretty good, you know. I knew a lot of the Blacks there already. They treated us kind of cold at the beginning, but it kinda...it went OK.

Sports teams and cheerleading seemed to aide in the process of integration. Laura and Tiffany provided stories in which White and Black got along during this tumultuous time. This type of bonding has been made public with stories and movies like *Remember the Titans*. Laura narrated:

And I remember even when they got ready to elect the cheerleaders. Everybody from Blackstone, and everybody from Foster, and everybody from Crewe High thought they were going to make the cheering squad. It was a mess. So what they did. They did like they used to do at Crewe High School. I don't know how Foster used to choose their cheerleaders, but they did it like they used to do it at Crewe High School. You put a sign on your back saying, "I'm trying out to be a cheerleader. Vote for me," type stuff. And

then they go and practice, like they do now sort of. They practiced, but they let the whole school vote on them. [Two of my friends] were picked, and see the [Black] girls really got mad about that because they were all Crewe High School girls. But see, White people knew them, see. So they had a good cheering squad. [Two girls were] picked from Foster...so it was a combination. They had about half and half. And that was nice after they got them picked.

[Well, speaking of that, how did it work out with sports?]

The guys were fine with the sports. You know those Black boys are always dominated football. Yeah, they worked out with the sports.

Though it was a rough start picking the cheerleading squad, it seemed that cheerleading and team sports physically brought Black and White students together. Tiffany, who is the youngest participant, also discussed her schooling and cheerleading experiences.

I don't really think [desegregation] was too big in the community. I still remember the kids sitting on the opposite sides of the room and stuff. Because even though you integrate, the law integrates, it still don't make the people integrate, so with everything we were so separate. I'm trying to remember my first White person that ever approached me or I approached them. Because we weren't raised to be prejudiced, so to me that wasn't a big thing. I think some of the teachers came over... [but] I think the teachers were more set in their ways too, and it was hard for them to adjust.

But for the students...I know my best friend, they didn't particularly care for White people...I remember being looked at strangely, because some of them you know you had never [interacted with Black students]. They were just in their world and they didn't mingle, so they didn't know how to act around us. They didn't know how we would react, you know, to different situations, or how we would react to them.

But, I remember in the 7th grade when I tried out for cheerleading. That was of course integrated, and all the girls on that squad, how close we were. Especially the White girls and we're still close. Paige and Mary and Susanne and Denise, all of them, and it was nice. We just slid on into it. We never had any confrontations or anything. It was nice. And that was just a year later. So I really don't remember going through anything.

Tiffany discussed how cheerleading helped her transition into desegregated schools and meet friends of another race. She also brought forth the conversation about teachers who opted not to teach in desegregated schools. Hazel discussed many of the reasons Black teachers did not stay in the teaching force. Since I interviewed adults who were then students, they discussed teachers who were not present during desegregation. We know from research that some Black

teachers retired because of personal convictions, but many were not rehired in desegregated districts. Hazel commented:

Oh, it was a hectic kind of situation, because first of all they had a year to get everything [done after] they had been talking about it a year before. And that summer, during the summer, they were trying to get everything in order. What grade goes here, and what kid's going to go here, and all this [about] the bus routes. It was a big thing I think [for] everybody, not just the Caucasians, [but] the African-Americans; I think everybody was a little afraid. Seemed like there was a little tension about how this is going to work [and] what's going to happen.

[Teachers would say,] "I can't discipline kids like I used to do before we integrated. This one will get out of control. Our Black kids might lose a little bit of the push that Black teachers gave them. How are the White teachers going to teach the Black kids?" And then the White community was [saying], "How are the Black teachers going to teach my children? Are they smart enough to teach my children, or educated enough to teach my kids like I would teach." That was a big thing right there, because that was like a stereotype thing about Black teachers being able to teach White kids, and White teachers being able to teach Black kids. Because Blacks and Whites did their own thing. They taught. We taught. But the Black teachers really taught, because they had to. We had to come up a little higher, because we had to do double, triple so that we could make it in life, and you know, I'm not saying the White teachers didn't teach, but I'm just saying we... Black teachers really instilled in us, they had control of us. But once we integrated, it looked like there wasn't no control. We lost some control, because you've got a mixed class of African-Americans and Caucasians, if you wanted to discipline an African-American like you would do before you integrated, you couldn't do it in front of the whole class, so you lost something. We lost a little bit. We lost our image that the Black teachers had put in kids.

I know at least 6 of our teachers that had retired. That's it. They knew what was going on. I know some that just gave it up. They didn't want to go through that, you know not being able to do what they did. You know. They knew that there were going to be some restrictions on teachers, how to discipline. But the first year it integrated, it went OK. You know the kids did better than what the community thought they would do.

Hazel's narrative presents the loss of autonomy that Black segregated schools had. Black schools, even with a paucity of resources, were in charge of honing Black minds and creating confident adults. Many teachers were afraid that their role in this would be lost in desegregated schools.

## Conclusions

During their segregation stories, participants provided a portrait of an insulated community where family, school and church mesh into Black-controlled, autonomous spaces where students felt safe and valued. Though material conditions were sub par, as Harold's narrative of the parking lot in the town of Crewe and other participants' descriptions of the one- and two-room school houses suggest, participants were still very proud of their communities. They described their families as tight-knit and had parents who worked hard to provide for them.

Within this society are marked class differences. Gloria's grandparents owned a store and her memories consisted of a cotillion where "prominent people in the community" gathered. In addition, Laura talked about her father working on the railroad, a coveted job by Blacks and Whites in the community. Evelyn remembered people being schoolteachers and nurses in her community. Conversely, Hazel talked about her father working to provide for his family but still needing assistance from his parents. Tiffany's mother, who came to Blackstone to escape an abusive relationship, went without food to ensure that her children had plenty. Harold, who did not talk a great deal about his family's income, did disclose that he began "handing leaves" to his mother and father in a tobacco pack house when he was six years old.

This was also a time in Nottoway when participants faced overt racism. The stories of backlash and the KKK's attempts to incite fear during "Freedom of Choice" were astounding, but I know not rare. In contrast, their narratives also describe the activity by the NAACP to enact change in the types of jobs Black adults worked and the schooling that Black children received. With this change in schooling with Freedom of Choice and mandatory desegregation, we begin to see changes that the NAACP and many of the participants' families did not anticipate.

At Crewe High School, Laura begins to question her academic ability in the face of opposition from her new teachers. In addition, Evelyn begins to distrust her White teachers and must ensure that she is getting full credit for her work. Ultimately, Harold decides to leave and return to the all Black Luther H. Foster, but still undergoes ridicule from his peers. The education for Blacks in Nottoway County has changed. With Freedom of Choice, they are in seemingly better facilities, but now with different problems. The overt racism at the hands of the White community has subsided in the narratives of desegregation as Black and White students merge. But, as Tiffany proclaimed, “Even though you integrate, the law integrates, it still don’t make the people integrate, so with everything we were so separate.” But, we see resiliency as participants hold to the strength instilled in them by their families, local communities, and segregated schools. In addition, they hold onto their Christian faith in the face of new struggles.



## CHAPTER VI

### GENERATIONAL NARRATIVES: 25-35 YEAR OLDS

Brian, Greg, Darrell, Kim, and William provided their stories for the 25-35 year olds' narratives. Their experiences in and out of Nottoway County are vast, as are their memories and perceptions of the community, schools, and jobs in Nottoway. I attended at least high school with these five participants. I know most of them well, in addition to their families. It was a unique experience to interview my peers, even more so than the older and younger generations, because I unconsciously entered into the interview thinking about their former selves – their adolescent selves. Instead, I talked with men and women, with families, careers, and thoughtful answers to my many questions.

Brian, Darrell, and William played football in school and discussed their experiences with sports and academics. Greg has a different story about his experiences in Special Education in Nottoway County Schools. In addition, Kim discusses her experiences in Nottoway Schools and now as a mother of a small child. Of these participants, Darrell, Kim, and William now live in Nottoway County. Brian lives in a neighboring state and Greg lives one hour away in an urban area.

#### **Darrell**

Darrell is 30 years old and a 1995 graduate of Nottoway High School. He attended K-12 schools in Nottoway County, and he, Brian, and I graduated together. He is now married to one

of our classmates and has three children: a 10-year old son, six-year old daughter, and an 11-month old son. He agreed to be interviewed at my parents' home before an evening program at his church in which two of his children were participating. Though Darrell has some regrets about his lack of high school academic achievements, he is now an avid reader, a deeply committed father, and someone who is respected in his community.

Before we discussed Darrell's experiences in school, we first talked about his memories of church and community events as a child. Darrell, like all of the 25-35 year old participants, had memories of church. He recounted:

I didn't hang out much with family. It was mostly friends. So, as far as family is concerned, I would have to say memories are more along the lines of church. I can't say that we really had any [family traditions] except church.

Since Darrell's father is a pastor, he spent many hours during the week, and especially Sundays, at church. For Darrell, memories of church include boredom and adult instruction. He provides the following observations:

[What are your memories of church?]

[I was] bored out of my mind. Wanting to shoot myself [laughter]! Memories of church...actually that is it. It was boring to always have to go to church. I just remember not wanting to be there a lot. But, there was also the fact that I wasn't the only kid there a lot of times, so that helped. But, then there was a lot of times that I was and that made it worse. So, I guess my memories of church weren't all that great.

It was mostly services and my interactions were probably more with the younger crowd. I mean the only interaction with older people was being instructed. So, there was not much as far as communication beyond that.

[What kind of instruction would you say?]

Nothing necessarily biblical, but maybe don't do or do; that type of stuff. That could pretty much come from anyone.

Though Darrell did not enjoy church when he was young, he did get instruction from older adults that he may not have had otherwise. In addition to church, Darrell talked about community events that he remembered. He commented:

[There were] baseball games and that type of stuff. But, let's see, parties, games, I mean not much. A lot of it was just hanging out with friends maybe doing nothing. In terms of events, it was just I guess partying or hanging out and games. [It was also] football, especially as I got older, football and that's basically it. Life is sounding boring back then!

Darrell played football in high school and hoped to continue playing in college.

Unfortunately, he was not eligible to attend a four-year institution; however, he did pursue post-secondary education at a College of Technology. He went there for 18 months, and received an Informational Technology (IT) Certificate. Darrell explained:

[How did you decide to go to ECPI or take jobs in Richmond?]

To go to ECPI, it was just, I need money and the 4-year school thing just didn't work for me, so I could go to ECPI and get a certificate, get a good job in IT. Make good money. The transition from [my job in Nottoway] to [one in Richmond] was [with my job in Nottoway], I wasn't able to finish one class because the time I got off in Blackstone...and the time it took me to get to class; I was always late. So, when I got the job [in Richmond] that sort of fixed that, although I was almost finished with my schooling at ECPI.

[Do they offer associates?]

They do now, but when I went it was just a certificate. So, now I think you get up to a master's I think. I was just working [car detail] when I first got out of high school. And, then I worked at [the job in Nottoway] for like, I don't know. This was also the time that I was going to ECPI.

Then, I went to [my present job] and I pretty much been there for the last 8 almost 9 years. I think I applied for [the job] a lot - maybe up to 4 times. But, I started off in collections. I worked in collections for a year and then I got a job in IT doing backups and restores. [Working in Richmond] was a conscious decision. I felt it was just more money there.

He is currently a desktop computer supporter in the informational technology department for a national bank and a minister in the community. He commutes one hour to work because he "felt it was just more money [in Richmond]."

## William

William also attended K-12 schools in Nottoway County, and graduated in 1992. He is 33 years old and is also married with three children: three months, 1.5 years, and 4.5 years old. I asked him what it was like to have three small children and a three-year career as an Assistant Principal. He explained, “Busy. That describes it all, busy!” His wife is also an educator in the county.

William described his feeling of community in his neighborhood within Nottoway. He explained:

[I have] many, many memories of family and community. With me living in the same home; I had the same neighbors. I’ve grown up with their kids, now I know their grandkids. And, it’s been a unique experience because they’ve known my parents, my grandparents. It’s one big family.

[Do you have some memories in particular?]

No. It’s so many good memories. That is one thing that me and my wife talk about a lot. I’ve got countless stories of times when me my buddies have gotten together and played basketball or played games and hung out. It’s just so many good memories; it’s hard to point out one or two specifically.

Though he did not provide specific memories, William did present the importance of his community to him with the closeness of an extended family. In addition to memories of his neighborhood, he had the following memories of his church:

I have a lot of memories when I was younger and I went to church. And, we would go to the lake every year; go to Kings Dominion. And, I have some memories serving on the junior usher board.

Like Darrell, William played football in high school. He was able to attend an out-of-state four-year institution where he and Brain both played football. But, before going to college, William joined the Marine Corp Reserves. He discussed his journey in the Marines, college and how he came to his present job as a high school assistant principal. William reported:

Since I graduated high school, I joined the Marine Corp Reserves, and that was right after high school. I left a week after graduation. My biggest thing was I knew I wanted to

go to school. And, I wanted to go to the Marine Corp to help pay for school as well as get me physically and mentally in a better state. Physically because I knew I wanted to play some sports. And then mentally I knew I would go there and get some discipline and just have a better frame of mind, which I did. I think that was one of the best things that's ever happened to me was going there. It was the toughest. It was the toughest thing I've ever done in my life. But, it was the best thing I've ever done because I'm a different person. I feel like I was a good person anyway, but just physically and mentally I'm on another level.

Then I sat out of school a year. I worked and did different things for a year. And, then I decided I was going back to school, which was my plan anyway. But, I just didn't have my ducks in a row when I got out of school. So, I went to school; went to [a school in North Carolina] and was there four years. After graduation from [school], I came home and was hired on the railroad. And, I worked in Durham for a year.

Lived in Durham, I worked for the railroad. And then I left the railroad and I sold cars. I worked at University Ford, you probably know. Right near the Durham Bulls. I worked there for a year. Well, really I wasn't with the railroad for a year, I guess about 6 months and then a year with University Ford, which was great. I loved it. [I] made some pretty good money. But that and the railroad, I made good money. I just didn't have any time to do anything.

So, I decided I didn't want to do that anymore. And, I came home and I talked to [Nottoway School's administrator] and I got a job at the Regional Alternative School in Crewe. That's when it was at the Skills Center. And, I taught there for four years. And, during the time, we actually moved from there over to Vo-Tech. That's where it's held right now. They moved over there to the Vocational Center because at the time, some of the vocational programs...and still they have trouble with it. The kids aren't as interested in the vocational programs because it's a lot like when we were in school. If you go to Vo-Tech you don't have time enough to get the college credits. So, you can't do both. You can't go over there and do Vo-Tech and go to college too. So, it's kind of the same thing now where kids are choosing not to go to Vo-Tech. It is very few, or not the best kids going over there. So, some of the programs are dying out. And they put the alternative program over there to make use of that nice facility.

I taught there four years and then I came to the high school. That's when I got a job teaching business at the high school. Taught business for one year, series of events happened. There was an opening at the middle school [for assistant] principal. I applied; was hired as Assistant Principal at the middle school. And, I was in my office a week. And, during that time I was at the middle school and then the assistant principal at the high school got a promotion in [another district]. So, it was an opening at the high school, so the superintendent asked me to move over to the high school. That's where I've been for the last three years.

[How is it working with teachers you used to go to, you used to be in their class?] It's unique. When I first got the job, when I first became a teacher, it was awkward more so for me than them. I thought they wouldn't have accepted me as well as they did. And, I would say that's a good thing. When I first came in, like I said as a teacher, I was

worried about Mrs. [J] and [another teacher], some of these teachers who I kind of halfway did in their class. And I was like, how are they going to accept me? And, things were fine.

Then when I was promoted to assistant principal, I had the same fear again. How is our relationship going to work now? With me being pretty much the boss now, or one of the bosses. And, it's great. They still acknowledge me as one of their students. It's not like we... They don't treat me as if I was never one of their students. But, they do give me the respect that my title entails. And, what I try to do is I still give them the respect of their age and their position and I try to be diplomatic about it. When I need something or want them to do something I don't go to them [and say] "you need to do this." I don't try to let my position go to my head. I go to them respectfully [and say], "could you do this, or this needs to be done." And you know we work together. It's a good relationship.

I would say probably 40% of the faculty [taught at the high school when I was a student]. When I first came on, 40-50% were people in the school system when I was [a student in high school]. So, it was a very unique situation.

I would think with my perspective on a lot of your questions would probably be a lot different. I won't say a lot different. It will probably be a little different than some other people because I've always been here and then you know I've got a unique... I've taken a unique path. And, I've been very fortunate. I'll be honest and tell a lot of kids at school. I've never really done anything special to get where I am other than be respectful. And, even when I was in a class like Mrs. [J]'s class where I really didn't do any work. When she asked me something [I would say], "No ma'am I don't have my homework." And, that was it. I was never rude. I wasn't disruptive. I just did what I was asked to do and I was respectful about it and now it is paying off for me. Because in any situation I'm in, I may not have this tremendous resume or whatever, but the people can't say nothing bad about me. That can't say, "Oh he was such and such, or he used to do this." So, it's helped me in the community to get certain things. Like I was talking about with the school, it's just unique working with some of the kids who I went to school with their parents. Because a lot of people our age [They have high school kids?!] Yeah, if they had kids right after school, they're coming up into the high school ranks now because a lot of them are 14, 15, maybe 16 years old.

William, like many of the participants, decided to enter the armed forces. He joined for the discipline and money for school. His journey, with multiple jobs, is common for our generation. In addition, his position as an assistant principal provided an important viewpoint and a window into the high school that the 18-21 year old participants either still attend or just graduated from.

## Brian

Brian is 29 years old and a 1995 graduate of Nottoway High School. He came to Nottoway Schools from an adjacent county in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, where he first attended Burkeville Intermediate. He described his family as “a very, very close and supportive unit” and he talked about the different family events and experiences that have shaped his life. Brian also had memories of playing with cousins. In addition, he discussed the expectations his family had for him and his memories of family traditions.

[What are your memories of parents and siblings?]

Well, I was the only child for 13 years so it was pretty much just me, my two first cousins and a host of other young cousins and people in the neighborhood. It was a good childhood, but we always were told and knew that there were higher expectations placed on us from our family. They had experienced the inconsistencies that existed professionally and academically and explained to us that we would always have to be at our best and go above and beyond the regular requirement to accomplish the goals we had for ourselves.

[What made it a good childhood?]

Well, what probably made it a good childhood was even though when it came to things, you know, we may not have had everything as most people have. But, I would say the overall love of my family and the closeness made it a good childhood. [They also provide] the support to kind of feel that you have the freedom to make choices and things like that. It gave you a certain sense of freedom and comfort that made it enjoyable.

There are a number of traditions that we still follow to this day. We always came together to eat dinner each Sunday and that is a tradition that stands true to this day. Just with holidays, in general, when we would have events like a cookout or something a lot of people from the community would come by. It just seemed like a place where people always felt welcome to come and spend time. And, we always had a designated time...to make sure we had time to really spend with each other instead of just passing by.

Brian’s family memories are tied to his memories of community, “The Bottom,” in Burkeville. This is the same community where Evelyn (age 50) and Joanne (age 59) grew up.

Brian constructed the following experiences:

The section where [my family] was had been called “The Bottom” since my father had been very young. It wasn’t in a negative way; it was just a way to separate where we lived from where a majority of the white’s lived. It was a working class section and everyone helped raise all of the kids in the neighborhood. There wasn’t a lot of violence (typical fights and things like that). And everyone went to the same church and it was a very enjoyable and safe community. There was a feel of everyone working towards something more, which encouraged most of the kids I hung around to attend college or go into the military. Even though I had all of the support I needed at home, it really helped to have an entire community that wanted the best for the kids around there.

[Did they say why the named it “The Bottom”? It sounds like it could be negative if I didn’t know better.]

It is physically down a hill that separates “Up town” from “The Bottom.”

[What are some community events that you remember?]

You mean school? Or just...Outside of church, I don’t remember a lot [long pause] besides recreational baseball and sports and things like that.

Brian remembered Homecoming and special events at his church. Church also provided instruction and a place for children during the summer. He explained:

Homecoming was a huge event for us at church. We used to have people come home from South Carolina, New York, and Northern Virginia to participate in the activities. We had a cookout and softball game on Saturday and had church service on Sunday. The entire weekend was a lot of fun. We also participated in Vacation Bible School during the summer most times and it was good to learn and also meet children from other neighborhoods and socialize with them.

Brian played football in both middle and high school. He then went to college out-of-state and played football with William. Brian earned a bachelors degree and received a master degree in 2005. He talked about his decision to leave Nottoway County for employment opportunities. He explained:

Honestly, to stay there, there was nothing for you if you stayed there. You had to go away to get yourself in a position where you can maybe come back or something. With me, my initial thing was to go to the military and not college. But things changed. I ended up going and playing football for four years, and had the opportunity to get a good education at a good school and stuff. And, it opened up several opportunities for me. I had the opportunity to study abroad for a year. It allowed me to kind of discover myself and different careers that may be interesting to me.

[What made you not go back after you left school?]



Once again, I didn't know what I wanted to do when I left school. I had a degree in hand. But you know, I wasn't really sure the jobs that were available to me back at home were exactly what I wanted to do. So, once again you know, there's just only a certain number of careers to choose from if you go back. And, when you're not really sure what you want to do, you want to go to a place that has different options for you to choose from.

He is now a high school guidance counselor in neighboring state, where he is "very involved with a number of programs at school; especially with the football team and a program [they] have for first-generation college students."

### **Kim**

Kim is 27 years old and a 1997 graduate of Nottoway High School. She is the only 25-35 year old to graduate in the "new school," which is in the same complex as Nottoway Intermediate (formerly Luther H. Foster) and Nottoway Middle School. Kim has four brothers and two sisters, and she is now the proud parent of a four-year old son who will start school in the fall. Kim grew up in the "country" of Burkeville, and she talked about her experiences with family members. Her story is similar to many participants who live in the "country" of Nottoway where their family members live on the same tract of land. Kim remarked:

Our cousins and my grandparents live near me. It's my house, then my grandparents, then my cousins' house. And mostly [my memories are] just getting out of school for the summer. And, just playing with my cousins and that's it.

In addition to family memories, Kim also had memories of church. For Kim, church was a site of fun events. Kim remarked:

My biggest and most fondest memories [are] when I sang on my youth choir at church...We just had a good time. I really liked the youth workshops we used to do. I really enjoyed those. [What kind?] It was like Youth Day and one time we had a lock-in and everybody stayed at the church and had breakfast. And, then through the day we sang and we watched videos and stuff. And, then we would have a spaghetti dinner and we had a concert. They would invite choirs out of Richmond. We just had a good time! That was my fondest memory.

After taking a year off from school after high school graduation, Kim attended a four-year institution approximately one hour away and continued working at a local grocery store during her winter and summer breaks. Kim went to college and excelled but ultimately had to leave her senior year when she became ill during her pregnancy. Although Kim was steered toward a two-year institution by her guidance counselor, she applied and was accepted to a four-year HBCU, Virginia State University. She talked about her feelings when she first attended school and her journey since leaving college. Kim recounted:

Well, by the time I went [to college]; because I took off a year before I went. I didn't feel prepared because in that year I was trying to I guess sort of say, find myself. And, in the beginning I said I am going to school because for one, I want to get away from around here. And, when I went to school, the first semester was like a party for me. And, then I said I have to buckle down and do what I have to do. So, when I first went out, I wasn't prepared at all socially.

[Were you prepared for the academics?]

Actually, I remember being in one of my, I think reading, writing, and lit class. And, I wrote a paper based on what I had learned in high school. And when I got my paper back, I had gotten a D. I was like, what is going on, I can write a paper! And then once they told me what was wrong, I was like oh, I never learned this. So, I mean once I learned how it was supposed to be set up and I rewrote it, I got a B. But, I just thought the way I had learned in high school was the way to do it.

I left [college]. I had one semester left of my senior year! And, I got pregnant. I had one semester left. It was during my last semester, and I got pregnant. And, I was trying to complete my last semester but I got really, really sick and I had to stop. And, I got sick and I went back to school thinking this was a one-time thing. But, then I was sitting in class and said I don't feel so good... And, they told me you don't need to go back and they put me on bed rest. That was 2002.

I didn't go back and I guess it was about a year that I stayed home with my son and I started working here [at the bank]. I hadn't even thought about getting a job here. And then my cousin told me why don't you think about getting a job at the bank. And, I was like it's worth a try. And, I put in the application and then one day the supervisor called me. And, I came up here and was like OK.

The work itself isn't hard. They change policies at the drop of a hat, so it is hard to keep up. It's like we have a book with a set of rules in it, but we very seldom go by them. Because as soon as they find out a bigger bank, like a Wachovia or something, is doing something then they try to implement here. And, we get screwed up a lot.

Kim's feeling of not being prepared socially or academically when first entering college is common. But, her commitment and resiliency allowed her to remain. After leaving college, she became employed at a local bank and is now Head Teller. I am not sure if she will return for her last semester to earn her college degree.

### **Greg**

Greg moved to Nottoway County when he was nine years old. Before then, he would visit regularly with his father and brother. Ultimately, he moved because his grandmother did not want his father to "drag [him] and [his] brother from Virginia to Maryland. So that's when she figured out she would take custody of [them]." Greg is 30 years old and he received a "Certificate of Program Completion" from Nottoway County.

I asked Greg to participate in this study because I have known him since middle school. I also have attended church services with him since we have been adults and he has worked for my father on different projects around the house. I had inklings of Greg's experience with Nottoway's schools because of our brief conversations, but I thought it prudent to get his perspective on Special Education programs in Nottoway Schools and the incident that resulted in his Certificate of Program Completion.

Before we discussed his experiences in school, we first talked about Greg's memories of family and community. Greg began the discussion about his father after he told me that his grandmother, who was his primary caregiver, died four years ago. Greg lamented:

I wish I had parents like that [some of his friends]. In other words, I wish my father would have been here. And, I think that's why so many young people get in so much trouble because their fathers ain't in their life. Especially with boys, you know what I'm saying. Not as much with the girls, but the boys get into more trouble. So, I am not saying I wish I could be like [my friends], I'll never be like them, I can act like them, I can dress like them, but I'll never be them. [But], I wish my Dad was around like their Dad.

Since school, Greg has been on a constant struggle to find and keep gainful employment in addition to finding people who might help him earn his G.E.D. Greg's journey has been marred with disappointments and people who are "supposed to help you...[and] not supposed to harm you." He narrated:

Now I gotta go in life trying to make like; trying to act knowing that I can't read. I mean hard words like [he shows me a word]. I already know what that says like "age" and that's an "and." I can read to a certain extent like "would," "you," "how;" those little small petty words, but not those hard words. Like I already know what this says, this says "Heinz" [he points to a ketchup bottle, but this ketchup has another brand name, not Heinz]. Tomato Ketchup [and it says catsup]

I was doing GED in Nottoway. When I was going, that's when Mr. [G] was teaching. Everything was going so well when I was going over there. My reading improved a little bit while I was over there. There was three of them: Mrs. [W] was working with me. They had the GED in the new school.

A friend of mine was telling me about a literacy class somewhere in Petersburg, meaning that they are going to try to help you read. She told me she would show me the place. If it wasn't for Mr. [G] helping me try to get my license, I wouldn't have my license today if it wasn't for him. I did it [the test] orally so they read the words to you. So, three times...I took it three times on the computer then Mr. [G] asked the question, "Can you do it orally with him?" So they took me in the back room and the lady was asking me the questions and I had to give the correct words. So, she took me in the car, right, and said, "You are a great driver." If I ain't mistaken, I got my license of July 28th of 1998.

In 2004 when I went to [a church]...Have you seen these long pieces of paper where they test your learning skills? It's a piece of paper to see how, if we should go ahead and start you from kindergarten or something. I took that, so the lady called the other lady, and said, "You know what, I should have told him to stay home today!" And, I heard her. She don't supposed to be saying that! She's supposed to be helping me! She ain't helping me. So, I stopped going there all together. Because I bubbled in the paper, she looked at it [but didn't tell me anything]. They have it on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays. A friend of mine said I should have called the school she worked for to find out why she said that. Cause she probably would be told that was negative. They are supposed to help you. That's what they are there for. They're not supposed to harm you. If I was to say that, then her school would probably jump on her case or something like that and she was a much older lady. And, the only reason I didn't call the high school is because I said maybe the lady is just old! Old and senile [laughter]. I kept it to myself because I was in the church.

Since I have been in [this city], I had 5 jobs. But, let me back up. After 1996, in the beginning of 1997 my next-door neighbor got me the job at [a restaurant in Richmond]. That was the first job I ever had [she worked there and took him with her]. So, I worked

there a whole year. During the time I don't know what happened, but in 1998, the 4th or 5th month, that is when I stopped. I don't know what happened.

Working at [a restaurant in a neighboring county] is the only job I had after [the one in Richmond]. I worked with people before then doing little odds and ends. Right now I am working on my 6th job. Well, my first job was working at the car wash in [this city]. Then after that I worked at the grocery store bagging up groceries. And, I worked for this other restaurant washing dishes - the same thing I used to do for [in my other jobs]. I had gotten another job working at the car wash. Then after that, I worked with this one guy working at his house, raking his yard and cleaning out his gutters. I don't know if you consider that a job or what.

At first, I was working at...I was the groundskeeper for the funeral home. But, after they saw my work, the supervisor said "I'm [going] to try you on the inside of the building." So, that's when they gave me the job of the dressing room. Like on yesterday, I had to clean up the dressing room. I had to mop the floor, change the sheets, or whatever. And, he kind of liked it too. He says, "it smells so fresh...And, I want you to do it once a week."

I am going to still see if I could do that thing; the GED thing. Like the preacher says, all things are possible and I am going to get it." I said, if I could get my license, I can get my GED. If I can get my license, I can get anything else I want. I just have to believe in myself.

Greg's experience in school and his struggles as an adult have not changed his determination to earn his high school equivalency. He lives approximately one hour from Nottoway in an urban area. He currently does odd jobs around his neighborhood and is a caregiver to an elderly man, where he sits with him when his son cannot.

### **School Memories**

School memories for Brian, Darrell, Greg, Kim, and William consisted of describing a typical day, and their overall school experience. In addition, they talked about their experiences with teachers, guidance counselors, peers, parent involvement, and racism in school. Brian, Darrell, and William also discussed their experiences with football. In addition, I present Greg's experience of receiving a "Certificate of Completion."

### ***K-12 School Experiences***

Kim, Darrell, William, and Brian described a typical day in Nottoway High when they were in school. They constructed the following experiences:

**Kim:** Just a regular old day without any fights or anything [laughter]? We had a lot of fights. It's not really boring. You get to interact with your friends and find out the latest gossip and do your work and come home!

**Darrell:** I was late [laughter]. Wow, I was late and unprepared; not very involved. [I was] not very involved in school outside of friends and girls. There was not much involvement with actual education. So a typical day was me just sitting in class clowning or doing enough to get to the next grade. So, man, a typical day was just me messing around; playing around.

[Would you say it was common or allowed? Was it a general thing that happened?] Yeah, for a lot of the people that I hung with, and I would say in some sense it was allowed. I don't think it was something that was smiled upon, but at the same time it was almost as if they're not hurting anyone but themselves, so let it be. There was no one there pushing you to be greater than what you were. So, in a sense it was allowed as long as you were not committing any crime it seems.

**William:** I guess my typical day in high school would be ride to school, just try to meet and greet all the friends I could. Because my experience was a little bit different than the average person because I was well-liked, played sports, had a lot of friends. So, it was a social event. Even when I went to class, I had to see everybody; catch up on what happened yesterday. And, what was going on. I loved school. I wasn't the best student. I did okay. But, I loved the social atmosphere. That's where everybody was at. All your friends were there. If you weren't driving you couldn't get to Blackstone or Burkeville like talking about and you would see your friends at school everyday.

**Brian:** [It was a] typical seven period day when we had 3 minutes between each bell. Now, between those bells we got an awful lot of socializing in. I don't know what we would've done if we had 5 minutes between classes like student's have now. Of course most of my friends participated in sports of some sort so we were together most of the day during school and after school as well.

The four participants reveal multiple themes within Nottoway High School with Kim's initial thought of fights; Darrell's feeling of being unprepared but sense that it was allowed; and William and Brian's assertions that school was a way to socialize in this rural community.

Kim and William also provided overall memories of their high school experience. Kim recounted the positives and negatives of her high school experience:

The positive, I would have to say, is I learned a lot. Most of the things I learned prepared me for the world, so to say. One of the negative things was the thing about college [guidance]. Another negative would have to be the fights and you know distractions from regular school work and stuff.

I will discuss more of Kim's experience with guidance in a subsequent section. William felt the high school was a "real good school" with "good teachers." He provides the following observations:

[High school] was good. Umm, I enjoyed myself. I think we had a real good school. I think we have a good school now. But then, I think we had a real good school; good teachers. Then, I think people cared about our education, our well-being. 'Cause I know I felt at any time I could go to any teacher. They didn't necessarily have to be my teacher and I could ask them advice about life or college. And, everybody was just so helpful.

By the above statements, however, it seems that most of the 25-35 year olds enjoyed high school, and Nottoway High School provided academic and social opportunities.

### ***Teachers***

Darrell, William, and Brian relayed their memories of teachers at Nottoway High School.

Darrell told me about a memorable teacher who he respected because of "how she carried herself." In contrast, William and Brian described a teacher with which they had negative interactions. Darrell provided the following observations:

For some reason, when I think of teachers, I think of Ms. [M] And, I guess I think of her because she was one of the teachers that really didn't take anything from you. So, Ms. [M] I would definitely say...I guess she would be the exception to what we talked about earlier to people not pushing you. Most people just didn't want to push you to be better than what you were. I think she would be the exception to that. Because although she didn't necessarily come and say, "Hey! You can be better." I think she demanded that from you. You know, that would be the memory I have for her.

[Why do you think she's different?]

I think it was just how she carried herself. I mean I always look at it this way: whenever school started, for whatever grade I was in, there was always the speech. Every teacher gave the speech. "You're not going to play in my class. Blah, Blah, Blah. This is going to happen." And, they always got tried. Every teacher gets tried. And, most teachers lose. Most teachers, you find out that they are not as hard as they made themselves out to be. She was one that didn't do a lot of yelling and she didn't do a lot of begging. She just simply meant what she said and she proved it. So, I think she gained the respect, you

know that a lot of other teachers didn't... I think a lot of other teachers thought if they said the right things then it would be sufficient, but it wasn't. So, I just think she was more serious about what she did.

For Darrell, Ms. M should be respected because she expected excellence. She did not have to yell, but she was consistent in her expectations. Though I have not used her name here, I also had the teacher that Darrell described. I also worked harder in her class because she had the same expectations of me as she did for Darrell.

William and Brian's discussion of a memorable teacher were quite different. William remarked:

[What events are memorable from school?]

I guess my most...It's certain sporting events I have some key memories. And, there's one memory I had with Mrs. [J] that I will never forget. I was in her government class and I did all her homework. I did the news and little things that she required everyday. And, I put my head down and went to sleep. I didn't take any notes because I had a friend of mine that would take notes and I would copy hers. And so, I knew Mrs. [J]'s test structure, I knew based on her notes, where she gathered her test from. So, I never paid attention to her lecture and I put my head down. And she hated it.

And so, when it came time for the government trip she told me I couldn't go. She announced it in the front of the class that since you wouldn't participate in class, you can't go on the government trip. She was kind of nasty about it. And, it hurt me a little bit. But then I found out that next day that we had a baseball game on the day of the government trip so I came back to school the next day and I told her Mrs. [J], with all due respect, I didn't want to go on your government trip. [laughter] We got a baseball game. And, that's something that was real memorable. And, I wasn't nasty with her. But, I kind of came back at her because she tried to embarrass me in front of the class about not letting me go on her government trip. And, I had a B in her class and that's what burned her up. I had a B and I did nothing. I would come in; she would call on me everyday for my homework and the news and then I would put my head down.

I can certainly understand Mrs. J's frustration with a student who does not participate in class.

What I gathered from William's story here is that her "announcing it in front of the class" was most hurtful. Brian also recounts a hurtful memory with a teacher:

[What are some memories of peers/friends and teachers?]

...As far as teachers, the one that stands out most would be a math teacher I had. He was a Black male and he was so negative towards every Black male in my math class. It



was almost as if he had no hope or desire to help us be successful. Most of us in that course were doing very well in our other classes but it almost felt like he despised seeing us each day. It would have been rough to deal with if those of us didn't have each other to talk to. Even now it's difficult for me to think about how he treated each White person and Black females in the class, and then he just basically gave up on [Black males] on the first day of class.

[Why do you think the Black teacher acted in this way?]

I have no idea. Now I won't say after a certain point, it may have gotten to the point where we were just shooting negative energy off towards each other, but that is well after the fact after several attempts were made to just really figure what was really going on; establish some kind of relationship. But, it was very clear after not being in that class too long that that was not one of his main duties. And it was noticed by other students how biased the treatment was.

Brian expected to have a positive relationship with this teacher. And he appeared hurt that a relationship was not achieved with a fellow Black male.

### ***School Events – Football***

Brian, Darrell, and William played football in school, and they relayed their experiences to me during the interview. Brian and Darrell considered football to be one of their most memorable experiences. William also discussed games that he remembered, “like it was yesterday.” Brian explained:

During high school, every year for me, was always the highlight from August until November because that was football season. And to me, I would have to say, I felt like we were at a high school where we had the best spirit of any high school I could really think of during that time from when I started in '91 to '95 when I graduated. Just everyone was really into athletics and things like that. It gave people time to spend together. And I truly enjoyed each moment during that time period each year. I enjoyed the spring as well but it was something about that time that just did it for me.

Brian beamed with pride as he discussed his football career. This enthusiasm has continued as he now coaches high school football. For Darrell, football was also his most memorable event in high school. He reports:

[What events are memorable?] It would definitely have to be football - football related. I guess just particular games, and there isn't just one necessarily. Nottoway v. Matoaca, Nottoway v. Lunenburg [our rivals]. Most of my memories, eventual memories will definitely come from football.

[The actual game, team members or the feeling you had?]

I am going to say most of it is emotional, looking at certain things that happened during the game or the outcome. But, then again, there was an aspect...I guess all of it is included. But, I think the memories generate feelings first and then memories of teammates, and then certain games, and practices and things like that. So, I think it is all inclusive, but I think memories definitely generate the emotions first.

Darrell also talked about finding several of his high school football tapes at his house that he watched occasionally. For William, football was memorable, but also brought painful recollections of crushing losses. William explained:

Yeah, you know like my senior year we lost the State Championship by a point. Then like my sophomore year we played the State Championship with Martinsville at Golubic Stadium [our old stadium in Crewe]. And, with basketball, there were a couple of events where I made big plays and different things. But, there's nothing like those two football games; especially that game [senior year] was like it was yesterday and it was awful.

I remember both of the games he talked about because I was at both; moreover, what seemed like the entire community was at both. I remember writing in my fieldnotes how this interview made me think back to those games, and the distance I traveled with my family to support the team at the State Championship.

Darrell also talked about football being both a positive and negative experience in response to my question, "What is positive or negative?" To this inquiry, Darrell recounted:

Negative experiences would probably be...I thought this was going to be easy. [long pause] Negative experiences...So let me think about positive experiences...I guess I can relate it to football. Positive would be...would have been my ability to play at a higher level in college. The negative aspect of that would be that I didn't do things as far as grades are concerned that were necessary to get to the next level. So, for me that was a positive and a negative.

[When did you find out that you didn't?]

I guess I knew beforehand. But, I really found out toward the end of our senior year. Because I always had in the back of my mind that it didn't matter. That as long as you were good they were gonna accept you. So, I guess I lived in the state of denial for a long time thinking that I could get by doing nothing. So yeah, I guess I kind of knew always, but it really came true when it was too late.

[Did you find out from guidance? Or did you find out about it from Coach?]

No, it wasn't from Coach. It was from when I was trying to get into colleges.

Though Darrell played football for Nottoway High, neither his coaches nor guidance counselor ensured that he was eligible for college. This, unfortunately, is not a rare occurrence.

### ***Guidance Counselors***

Kim and Darrell discussed their interactions with their guidance counselors during high school. Kim reported being directed to community college and not a four-year institution. Also, Darrell reported having "no guidance" when it came to making post-secondary decisions. Kim's response below is to my question of what Black people in Nottoway would consider a good education. She provided the following observations:

... [During] my senior year, I had to go to [my guidance counselor] and talk to her about going to college, [and] she offered me different types of pamphlets on Southside Community College. And, that kind of threw me because I was like, "you see my grades! Why wouldn't you tell me about a four-year school?" I ended up going to a four-year school, but she never said anything to me about a four-year school. She would offer it to the White kids, but she didn't say anything to me about one. And, to me, having good grades and being on the honor roll and being accepted into college... To me Black people today they really think you are really doing something with yourself if you go to college.

Kim still wondered why her guidance counselor would not think about her going to a four-year institution. For the 1996-1997 school year, 74 of the 166 graduates (44.6%) from Nottoway High School reported going to two-year institutions; however, 52 of the 166 graduates (31.3%) reported going to four-year institutions (Virginia State Department of Education, 2006). I do not know if guidance counselors in general were guiding students or Black students in particular, to two-year institutions.

Darrell talked about football as both positive and negative. This was because he was not able to go to a college/university to continue his football career because of grades. He said he found out that he could not play "when it was too late." I asked Darrell "Was that from

guidance?” My probe was not clear enough because Darrell replied, “Or lack thereof.” I then asked another probe, and discovered that he learned about his ineligibility from the colleges he was trying to attend. Darrell’s initial response intrigued me, so I asked him about his experience with not only his guidance counselor but also his coaches. To this inquiry, Darrell responded:

I don’t remember talking to my guidance counselors maybe except once and that may not be an exaggeration to say even less than once a year. And as far as my coaches, I don’t remember having a conversation with my coaches about doing what it takes to get to the next level. So, lack thereof mostly. It would definitely be a lack thereof. Because no one ever said, hey you can do this but this is what you are going to need to do.

Though Darrell admits that he thought more about hanging with friends than focusing on academics, he still was not given the information needed to make an informed choice. He learned of his ineligibility from colleges and not his guidance counselor and/or coach.

### ***Peers***

Darrell and Brian discuss their interaction with peers in school. For Darrell, this interaction was “joking around, playing around.” For Brian, high school meant choosing your “true friends” and creating “lasting friendships.” Darrell commented:

Friends or peers? As far as school was concerned...It’s always been joking around, playing around or talking to some girls. It was always just focused on that whenever I think about it. There was never anything serious I think; maybe serious as it pertained to football. But, it was nothing really serious as far as, what are you going to do with your life? It was never that. There was always the just joking around, living for the weekend mentality.

In contrast, Brian seemed to make the decision to choose friends that would “help each other get ahead.” Brian recounted:

[What is positive or negative?]

Positives would be the close friends I had and the memories of hanging out in the parking lot just hanging out and relaxing. Negative, of course would be the social awkwardness all 9th grade males go through for the most part

[Were there other positives or negatives?]

One thing, it kind of falls into the positive and negative category – you really begin to distinguish your true friends from people who are not real friends. Okay. Positive because I really established lasting friendships with some people I know genuinely we were trying to help each other get ahead and things like that. Negatively probably because at the time you really don't see the benefit of the people you are separating yourself from or you are being separated from.

[What are some memories of peers/friends and teachers?]

Well, I still have a couple of pretty close friends from High School and we've managed to do well for ourselves. We still sit back and talk about old times and future plans.

[How have you and your friends managed to do well for yourselves?]

Sheer determination and focus; it is no secret to success. The only way you get there is through hard work.

Brian relies on positive peer relationships for “success.” He, unlike Darrell, decided to choose friends that would help him during high school and after.

### ***Parent Involvement***

Greg, Brian, Darrell, and William discussed parent involvement in school. For Greg, parents became involved when the following happened:

...when the kids [are] misbehaving or they got to pick them up or whatever especially when they had a program.

Brian provides the same sentiment. He also describes the involvement of his parents. Brian explained:

Well, my parent's were always on top of everything that was going on with me. But, as a whole most parents came down if their student had been in trouble for something. I think most of them operated under the impression “If I don't hear anything, then everything must be okay”.

Darrell and William reported that parents and other adults were involved with sports.

Specifically, an association called “The Boosters,” which William speaks of, consisted of parents/adults that raised funds and supported the football team. Darrell explained:

Of course, I can only think around the area of football. So, looking at it that way, I would say parental involvement was high. Well, [long pause] no. I guess I will have to say

it is about the same as what I see now. There is some parental involvement that's really where parents are always there, and I saw that then. My parents supported me in sports and things of that nature. But, there's also a great number of parents that are uninvolved regardless of what you are doing, whether it's sports or education. So, I would say yeah, it was definitely not enough parental involvement. The one's that were involved were always the ones that were there.

There were a couple of adults that I can remember that didn't even have kids but still supported the football team. You saw parents show up when maybe homecoming, they might show up or they may show up if their kid did something great and they were getting rewarded for it. Of course they want to come. But, I mean, said to say I didn't see a lot of involvement back then and I don't see it now.

William explained:

It's hard to say because like when we were in school, I wasn't focused on the parent involvement. It was just my parent - that was the only one who concerned me. And, you know, it's just really hard to say. I think then it was more parent involvement, but it's hard to really say at what level. Because it wasn't really anything I cared about. It was just my parent, whether he did or wherever he went, you know. And for me, the only thing I can remember are the Boosters and they had parent-teacher conferences but I don't know whose parents came or what have you

The participants talked about parent involvement at school activities or if someone was in trouble. Parents and even community members became more involved with sports teams and events.

### ***Racism in School***

Brian talked about racism in school and how his family taught him how to deal with it. He said that his family had high expectations for him. I asked him, "What would you consider high expectations?" To this inquiry, Brian responded:

For me it was just like a general thing that you are going to go on to college or do something beyond high school. That's what I meant by high expectations, like going to college or something.

Brian also said that his family had "experienced inconsistencies that existed professionally and academically" and I asked him what he meant by this. He explained:

Well, a lot of times I had relatives, when they were in school that had problems at the high school with things like academics - making sure they are getting credit for the work

that they did do. How discipline might have been issued differently for kids that were Black and kids that were White. Those are the type of inconsistencies.

Since Brian talked about his families experience in school and how that affected their advice to him and his cousins, I asked him how he viewed race relations in school when he was there. He recounted:

There was clearly racism. But, I think the biggest thing was we knew there was racism, but I think with the friends that we had and with the family backing that a lot of us came from, it in no way shape or form was going to prevent us from achieving our goals. And we talked about it, not only with each other but with families and everything. And, I know that our families have prepared us to deal with that, not only there but when you leave the county as well.

Brian shares a story of doing well “in spite of.” He is the only 25-35 participant who talked specifically about race or racism.

### ***“Certificate of Program Completion”***

Greg narrated how he received his Certificate of Program Completion. The Virginia Department of Education (2007) states that the *Certificate of Completion* is given when a “student [has] completed a prescribed course of study, defined by a *local school board*, but does not qualify for a diploma” (para. 2, emphasis added). Since 1997, seven students in Nottoway County have received this Certificate (Virginia State Department of Education, 2006). Greg described the following experiences:

I met a lot of friends [in middle school]. But, I only spent one year with Mrs. [L] and then after that that’s when I got a transfer to Mrs. [N]. So I heard, I don’t know if it is true or not, but I heard you are supposed to stay in her classroom until you get 21. Well, evidently I didn’t stay in there because...I don’t know if you know her, but me and [the principal] had issues and we couldn’t get along or whatever. So, evidently, somehow, someway, she got an attitude with me and vice versa you know. I didn’t even make it through to graduate or whatever. Because one year, when I went to Amelia-Nottoway Vo-Tech Center...See I only had one class from Mrs. [N]. And after I eat, I go to the Vo-Tech bus.

Me and [my friend], me and him, we used to hit on one another [and play]. So, when we was in the lunchroom, right. He had hit me earlier, so I hit him back. But before I went to get on the school bus, he hit me. So, evidently Mr. [W, the assistant principal] didn’t see when [my friend] hit me. But, when I hit him, he saw it. So, he said, “uh uh Greg.

Come on, come on, come on!” And he pulled me and [my friend], so I didn’t even go to Vo-Tech that day. So, he pulled me and [my friend] into the office where Mrs. [H, the principal] was at. And, boy that’s when I got hyper. When I said, hyper, they won’t believe me. When I was trying to explain myself, it seemed like for some reason or another, Mrs. [H] wasn’t going to take that for nothing. So, I told her, I said he started it first. So, when I got up out of my chair to get to the door, so I can go outside, so I could get some air, she gonna put her hand on the doorknob, and say “You ain’t going no where!”

So, when I got up, I put my hand on top of her hand to try to get her hand off the doorknob. So, when I got her hand off the doorknob...I don’t know who called the police, but somebody called the police, right. [She] said I had pushed her and knocked her down on the floor and everything. They know what happened; they know I didn’t push that lady on the floor like that!! This is everybody in that room - Mr. [W], my friend, and somebody else. They were taking her side. Everybody in that room was going to take her side. They ain’t going to believe me.

So, that’s when I took her hand off the door knob and I walked outside, and stood in front of the old high school, so I could cool myself off because she has got me all hot and hyper. Won’t gonna believe nobody, so I think right then and there...Matter of fact it happened in 1996. And then, like two weeks later, I made the [principal’s list], and whoever made the [principal’s list] could go out with the principal. Well, I made it in Mrs. [J]’s classroom, and for some reason she didn’t want to take me out to lunch. So, evidently she was still mad that I was telling the truth and she was lying.

So, I only think that is why I didn’t finish high school because of that. You know, they put that on my school record! Saying that I pushed Mrs. [H] and all that I was supposed to have done. They gave me...I don’t know where the piece of paper is. They gave me a piece of paper saying I had completed high school from this school. But no where on the piece of paper did it say that I graduated. So, I showed it to [my pastor, who is also a high school teacher] and he looked at it and said what? So, I said, How am I supposed to go through life with this piece of paper? This ain’t gonna prove nothing! So, he said [Greg] if I was you, I would go ahead...and get my GED. And, basically that is what I am trying to do now; trying to work on that.

The reaction of the principal, a White woman, to Greg, a Black young man is unfortunately commonplace in not only schools but also American society. He may have felt warranted to try to get out of the room, to calm himself in the face of injustice (to him). But, the principal believed it was assault. Unfortunately, Greg’s grandmother was not able to come to school on his behalf because of health reasons. Therefore, Greg did not have a family member who advocated for him.

## Conclusions



For these participants, stories of community, family, and school present a view into their lived experiences growing up in Nottoway. Their stories also provide their viewpoints of the county and their reasons for staying or leaving. I want to use this conclusion to highlight the participants' discussion of church, work decisions, and their experiences in school.

For all participants, church was part of their community experiences. Though I did not provide a narrative about church with Greg's perspective, he did discuss going to church in his interview and discusses how his faith helps him on his current journey. Church was boring for Darrell, but it provided instruction from older adults. For Brian, community, church and family were interlocked in "The Bottom" where family and church events were considered community experiences. For William and Kim, church was a place for fun events and memories of singing in the choir and being on the usher board. Kim describes her church memories as her fondest.

In their narratives, participants also provide reasons to stay or leave the county after finishing high school. Brian and Greg decided to leave to find job opportunities in other areas. Darrell decided to stay, but commutes to work in Richmond because it is "more money there." William, as assistant principal, has a job that he is proud of, and he lives in the same community in which he grew up. Kim, at the end of the interview, admitted that she would probably leave Nottoway to find job opportunities and different life experiences in northern Virginia.

Nottoway High School was an academic and social setting at times to the detriment of students like Darrell who "mess around" or "play around." Darrell believed he was allowed to mess around as long as he was "not committing any crime." He does discuss an exception, Ms. M, who demanded excellence. School is also a site of community events, like football games. Football seemed to bring parents, adults from the community and families in to support players.

School is also a site of contention for all of the participants. William talks about his experience being embarrassed in front of the class. Brian talks about his math teacher, a Black

male, who he believed despised seeing him everyday. Brian discussed how this experience changed him as a student as he ultimately decided to reciprocate the “negative energy” he believed he received. Darrell and Kim discussed their experiences with guidance counselors and/or coaches. Darrell did not go to a four-year college, and Kim was guided not to go by her counselor.

Through Greg’s narration, school is also a site of great disappointment and misunderstanding as he discusses his memories of the event with his principal. The principal is warranted to feel threatened by a student who is visibly upset and is trying to get out of her office and “get some air.” Greg knew he was upset, but his anger mounted as he did not feel that anyone believed him. The principal did not seem to believe his story, and then she told police and other officials that he pushed her, which he says he did not. The story also allows us to see the effects of a school event over time on someone’s current life. His discussion of his journey after high school is instructive. He links his faith to his determination to succeed and seeks to use that faith to propel him on his educational journey.

## **CHAPTER VII**

### **GENERATIONAL NARRATIVES: 18 – 21 YEAR OLDS**

Jamal, Lewis, James, Latoya, and Michelle shared their stories with me. As the 18-21 year old participants, they reflect the current educational experiences in Nottoway. In addition, they shared their hopes for the future. Jamal and Lewis graduated from Nottoway High School in 2004. They discussed their experiences in middle school and high school, and their experiences in the army. Michelle talked about her experiences at her current university as she worked to adjust and do well academically after she graduated from Nottoway High School in 2005. Latoya and James are the youngest participants. Latoya graduated in 2006 and James is currently a junior in high school. I have provided individual narratives for each participant and school narratives.

#### **Jamal**

Jamal is 21 years old and a 2004 graduate of Nottoway High School. He has two sisters and two brothers, and he grew up with his grandparents. Though he jokes most of the time, Jamal gets very serious when talking about his young son and his current career plans. After his son was born, Jamal enlisted in the Army Reserve, National Guard, and plans on going to Officer Candidate School (OCS). He is currently Private First Class, and he was able to jump two ranks because of his four-year training in the Nottoway High School Junior ROTC Program. In addition, he performs maintenance and janitorial duties at a local nursing home,

where he “washes clothes basically and does the night shift too.” He explained that his “mother was working there and she put in a good word for [him].”

### **Lewis**

Lewis is 20 years old and also a 2004 graduate of Nottoway High School. He and Jamal are best friends and they agreed to do a group interview together at a local eatery. Lewis is a self-professed “class clown,” but he also says, “I know I’m smart.” However, he regrets not taking all of his classes seriously. Specifically, he said that doing better in Junior ROTC would have meant a higher rank in the Army National Guard. Lewis wants to become an officer. He has not decided if he will attend OCS or become an officer through an undergraduate ROTC program.

Lewis is also a correctional officer at a penitentiary one hour from Nottoway County. He talked about his experience with corrections.

The best job I ever had was corrections. Corrections was right before basic [training]. I started with corrections in 2006. I am still working there now. I’m National Guard and I work corrections. I went to basic in September. So, I’ve been doing corrections for maybe 5-6 months.

[I asked how he gets time off for National Guard.]

They have to give you your time. And they still pay me. At a certain point depending on how you do it. The more you work, you get more leave time that you can leave and get paid. But, they have to keep the job. They are going to stop paying you at a certain point, but as far as the job, they have to hold that spot for you.

[What made you decide on [this facility]?]

My brother used to work [there]. My father kind of pushed me into going corrections just like he did with the military. So, he’s been a major influence. It’s a wonderful job with benefits. And that is what I am aiming for – benefits [to take] care of you.

I asked Lewis if he thought the facility an hour away was a better opportunity than Nottoway Correctional Center, which is in Burkeville. He said he was not sure but explained,

“Corrections is pretty much going to be the same depending on the level that the inmates are. How severe, how dangerous they are.”

[My institution] is not maximum [security] anymore. Level III/Level IV, which is right below maximum. Up here at Nottoway, I think it is Level III/Level II. But, it still pays the same. You go up in rank; you get more pay just like the military. The job is easy. It's easy, but you have to watch your back though 'cause you never can tell. You're closed in there with them. They are just regular people, but you don't know what they're in there for unless you look up their records. They're standing there all around you.

Just going out on the pod surrounded by everybody sometimes by yourself and you have no weapon. It's a strenuous job, a really strenuous job. You work 12-hour shifts. You are always on your feet. I think I will be alright with that now that I have been to basic. But, at the time I was tired of walking around. But, the pay is nice, benefits good. That's what it's about basically. You never get dirty unless you got a fight. If a fight breaks out you have to try to break it up. But, I am smarter than to just jump into anything.

### ***Army National Guard***

Jamal and Lewis both enlisted in the Army National Guard. I decided to present their narratives of their experiences with the armed forces together because they participated in a group interview and entered the armed forces together. They were very patient as they explained the military acronyms and hierarchy to me for I am quite ignorant as I wrote in my fieldnotes:

When we began discussing the military, our conversation lost its levity. We laughed a lot about their experiences in high school and their being class clowns, but when they talked about the military they became business like. They also were put into the instructor mode because I am so ignorant about the military and what it entails.

Jamal and Lewis explained their experience with the National Guard to me and I have created a composite story of their voices:

You go to basic training. Then you do AIT. Then you come home to your unit wherever your unit might be; wherever you're stationed at. Our unit is at Fort Pickett [in Blackstone]; right at Fort Pickett. We were lucky enough to get stationed right here.

[That's not always usual?]

No. But, it all depends because we are like National Guard. So, if there is a base near us already, then they'll put you right there. But if we were in active [duty], you would most likely end up in a whole different state or across seas. You have no choice of where you go. You might have a choice of the region that it's in, but the base specifically you won't have a choice. That's active duty.

The next step for Lewis is college and/or Officer Candidate School (OCS). Jamal said he planned to go to OCS. They explained:

You can go through the OCS through the military or you can go to college and do ROTC. And become an officer that way. The difference is that OCS is shorter than college. You go straight to it. I think [OCS] is 3 or 4 months. Something like basic training but it's to become an officer instead of just enlisted.

[So, are you thinking about OCS?]

It's going to happen. We just don't know what we are going to do yet: OCS or college. [Lewis said] I was thinking this morning when I was reading that book, *Letters to young Black men*, the good book. It was saying that we are going to have temptations as far as wanting to make that good money that officers make. He was saying how important it is to get a good education, and how other things are going to try to sidetrack us like wanting to make that officer money going straight to Candidate school. So that's why I was leaning more on doing the 4 years mixing them both up together. That's what I was thinking. To become an officer through college, you just do ROTC and it will automatically make you an officer. ROTC in college is just like in high school pretty much. They are not going to train you to be an officer per se but you can do the college ROTC and it will make you an officer when you come out [by having the BS].

[In order to do either one, you have to apply? How do you get there?]

To go to OCS...you tell whoever your commander is or whoever that is a rank above you that's in charge - let them know that you are trying to do that [OCS]. I know for college, you just try to enroll in the ROTC program, which shouldn't be a problem if you are already in the military. Because I know a lot of people are civilians going into ROTC, getting that degree and then automatically becoming an officer that way without going to basic training and enlisting first and then going to be an officer. So, that's another way you can do it. Just join the ROTC program within that college, whichever college you choose.

The Army's website (Army OCS, 2007) confirms that OCS is 96 days long. It seems that Jamal is leaning toward OCS and Lewis is still making a decision between OCS and college. Both are now Private First Class (PFC). They came in as PFCs, jumping two ranks and earning a higher salary, because of their experience in Nottoway High's Junior ROTC program. They were very proud of this achievement. Jamal remarked, "We came in PFC, we didn't come in at no private."

According to Nottoway High School's website (Nottoway High School, 2007, para. 3):

Nottoway High School provides a Naval Junior Reserve Officer Training program that has been ranked near the top of nearly 600 units worldwide. For the fourth year in a row the U.S. Navy has recognized this program as a Distinguished Unit. Each year cadets participate in various competitions and take orientation trips to naval stations across the country. Cadets also take pride in their commitment to community service, averaging over 2,000 hours each year. This program enrolls between 160 - 180 students, over 20 percent of the student body.

I asked Jamal and Lewis what made them decide to enlist in the Army National Guard.

They had different reasons for making this decision. Jamal explained:

**Jamal:** At the time I had a girlfriend...and I gotta little boy. So, I wasn't really doing too good. I wasn't happy with how my life was [going]. That was my son so I just jumped on it. I waited a whole year [after high school]. I took a year off from everything. But, the only job I really had after school was working at Hardee's in Blackstone. I had that about a year and a half. I lost that job, moved back in with my mother. I had my own house, lost that house, moved back in with my mother. I ain't have no job, couldn't find no job and nobody wanted to hire me, so I went to the military. I got paid in basic. And you don't have to spend no money. You can't go anywhere to spend it.

**Lewis:** You get paid! Not National Guard money when they only pay for your weekend, which is less than being active duty getting paid every 2 weeks. When you are in basic training you're on active duty and you are getting paid active duty money regardless of whatever your status is. At AIT it's the same thing so you're saving, you know.

**Lewis:** [I enlisted because of] ROTC. What made me join that was my brother; he was in it before me. He knows [the teacher]; he knows all about that experience. Umm, I don't know. My father he wanted me to get in there before I knew anything about it. He said, "you going to get in that ROTC" Because he is in the Army now. He's been in there 31 years - a couple years active duty and a majority of its National Guard, but he's coming up now on a little bit of retirement, but he's not there yet. He's still getting paid active-duty National Guard.

I actually wanted to join the Navy. I did join the Navy. I went to basic training for the Navy because I was thinking about getting out of... I thought I would be more experienced being that it was Navy JROTC that I was coming from. So, I went there and I got kicked out because of some [hesitantly] out of character situations. I was acting out of character and I am ashamed of that, but I've grown from that. I've learned and I feel so much better about myself because that type of undisciplined... I'll take notice of it before I actually get into another situation like that. It's just made me a lot more prepared.

But, why did I join? Because we was going to school together at Southside Community in Keysville together as soon as we got out. And, we were going and I was still carrying on just like my high school years. I just slacked off. I didn't do good at all. So, that was one strike. I had a couple of little jobs between then. And, I knew I was pretty much wasting my time so I took my youth and did something with it, you know.

## James

James, 18, is a high school junior who moved to Nottoway County in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. James was born in Baltimore, Maryland and spent a number of years in Henrico (a suburb of the capital city). He then moved with his family to Nottoway in the 5th grade in 2001. Therefore, he has a very interesting progression from urban to rural schools. During our interview, he offered comparisons of his schooling experience in Henrico and now in Nottoway. He lives out in “the country” near the county seat. After James graduates, he wants to go to a one-year college in massage therapy. He explained:

You know how those people come and they try to show you about college and stuff...it was just like that.” She was posted in the cafeteria during lunch time. When I seen it, I was like it looks like something pretty neat to do. She said you could get on a cruise and do it that way. And, I figured you could go places and do your job at the same time. The woman gave me a paper, you know I read it, but I forgot the name of it.” [I asked what and where the school was. I think the school is in Richmond, if I’m not mistaken.

James was recruited by his peer who knew him from school. She was not old enough to participate in this study, but thought that James would be a friend that was “articulate” and explain how he felt about his schooling experience. He plays football, basketball, and runs track and she cheered for the first two sports and also competed in track. Though the interview session was shorter than most of my participants, I gained an understanding of Nottoway Schools from an 18 year-olds perspective. To be honest, I thought the interview was “a bust” and I felt a bit exhausted because “I pulled for responses,” but did not get the responses I thought I wanted. Though James was not as loquacious as the other participants, he gave me an insight that I would not have had. He also taught me the importance of reviewing the “tape” after an interview before questioning its worth.



### **Latoya**

Latoya is 18 years old. As she informed me during the interview, she will be 19 in two months. Latoya graduated from high school June 2006, and is now attending a local community college and majoring in political science. She was a very good student in high school and ultimately decided to attend a two-year institution because of “monetary reasons.” Latoya has one older brother and one younger sibling. She grew up with her father, grandmother, and older brother. When I asked Latoya, “What have you been doing since you graduated from high school?” She explained:

I’ve been going to Southside Virginia Community College (SVCC) [a local community college approximately 30 minutes away] and working basically. I decided to do SVCC for monetary reasons and am majoring in political science. I am definitely leaning towards Longwood [a four-year university 30 minutes away]. All of my grades and things are supposed to transfer over to Longwood. SVCC has an agreement with Longwood so just about everything transfers to Longwood and Old Dominion University [in Norfolk Virginia, which is approximately 2.5 hours away]. I chose Longwood because it’s closer.

### **Michelle**

Michelle is 20 years old. She graduated from high school June 2005, and is now in college studying Sociology. She is also considering pursuing a Masters in Sociology after receiving her Bachelor Degree. She has one younger brother and has always lived in Nottoway. She tried to describe where she lived with such signals as “the road that is across from the turnaround.” But, in general Michelle lives in the “country” of Blackstone. Both of her parents work at a local hospital where her mother is activities director and her father is a nursing assistant.

Michelle attends Longwood, where Latoya plans to matriculate in the future. Michelle described her experiences when she first arrived at Longwood and how she is faring now. Her journey is instructive as we think about Black students in higher education

I just, I don't know, I expected to go to college; it was like, it wasn't even a second thought about I'm not going. I just knew alright I AM going. But, it came down to, I didn't know whether, I'm kind of...it's kind of like I've always been a home person. I've always been around family all the time. So, it's like, I didn't think I wanted to go away, but a part of me wanted to go away so I could get out and meet people or whatever. But, I think a lot of it had to do with the money. Because I thought about going to South Carolina with my cousin when she went, but the money wasn't really right for her and it wasn't right for me either. So, after I decided; after I looked at the money situation, I was like no, I'm not going down there. But, she went anyway. And, I'm kind of glad that I didn't go with her because she ended up having to drop out because she didn't have money.

So, I don't know; after I got to talking to my other two cousins that went to Longwood and they started telling me about their experiences there, I was like well OK, it won't be that bad, so I'll probably just go. And, I found out like one of the girls from my English class, my 12th grade English class, she said she was going to Longwood. One of my other friends, she decided she was going. So, I said, well, I'll go. I'll try it. But, I knew that I didn't want to stay on campus because like I said, I have just always been a home person. It's only 45 minutes; I'll drive everyday. It won't be that bad. And, I try to schedule so I won't have to be up there too early but I don't have to be up there too late either.

So, after I did the application process and I got in, me and my mom went up there for one of the little orientation tours or whatever. And, it seemed alright then. And, my first year I got there, I had a hard time adjusting. I had a really hard time adjusting. It was the whole social setting; the whole thing in general. Because like I said, when you're here, when you are in a small community like this, you don't have to worry about making friends because everybody knew everybody. But, then you get up there and it's like you don't know anybody and you have to start from scratch, literally. So, its like I got up there and it was like a total shock and then I didn't do so good my first year.

In general, it's like the whole high school curriculum there [Nottoway High] doesn't prepare you for college at all. It is so spoon-fed and then you get to college and it's like nothing is spoon-fed. You've got to be an adult and learn on your own. And I think now, looking back at 12th grade, it's like, [Nottoway High] didn't do that at all. They would always try to scare you and say, "It's not going to be like that in college." It's like, OK, you need to try to teach us like it's going to be in college. Because when I got to college, I was so...it was like I was so shocked. Because I expected everything to be handed to you; like this is what I want from you; this is exactly what you need to do. In college, they don't tell you that. They expect you to just know this is what you're supposed to do so do it

And, um, after my first year, I actually ended up taking a semester off because I was really contemplating on whether I should be there or whether I should try going somewhere else or doing something else because I thought about maybe dropping back and maybe going to SVCC for a little while. I ended up deciding against that after me and one of my friends I went to high school with. After we got to talking, we got really, really close, and I decided to go back.

Just knowing that somebody else was there and she felt the same way about it...She was going through the same thing. It helped me a lot to realize that I am not actually alone in this. I have other people that are going through the same thing. And, to have her...she was commuting just like I was except she was commuting from Burkeville. Me and her were going through the same things like social setting, we didn't really know anybody and me and her both are kind of introverted. Like, if you don't approach us we don't really...we can't really come out and start talking to you. It's like, after we started getting closer and started hanging out, we actually started scheduling our classes together. And, just always [having] somebody there that I can talk to, it got better.

And, after I went back and then between that and now, I've started actually liking going to school. I started actually accepting. It's like I started accepting Longwood [hesitantly]...it's not that bad. I actually like it. I've even started going out to some of the functions that they have now. At first, I wouldn't go to anything; I'd just go to school and then come home and that's it. But, this year I've actually gone to some of the basketball games and stuff like that. I'll take my brother because my brother is a basketball fanatic so as long as it's basketball, he's like "OK let's go." So I took him and my cousin and we all went to the basketball game that they had up there and he really liked it, so it's gotten better. It's like the more you get up there and the more involved you get, the better it is.

I asked Michelle if she had a sense of what her friends were doing after high school. To this inquiry, she told me about a friend who went to college, but did not have enough money to continue, in addition to her friend that now attends Longwood with her. Michelle also recounted her experience of getting to college her first year:

One of my friends went to school for the one year and she didn't have money. I know she just kind of...after she didn't have the money for it, she ended up getting married and now she is having a baby. I think now she goes to [a technical school]. Her husband is in the Navy. They went together in High School. He was a year ahead of us...another one of my friends. The friend I go to Longwood with, she's working and goes to school. She goes to school and goes home and works at Food Lion. One of my friends ended up going to the Navy and she is stationed in California. But, I think a lot of people from our class either went to school or went to the service, the military. A lot of them are going to SVCC. I went over there a couple of days and it's A LOT of people from our class that go there. If you go over there, it's almost like being in high school again because you see so many people that you know.

I think a lot of them are over there for the 2 years and then they transfer to four-year. But, I'm not sure where they are going. But, I think a lot of them just went over to get started and get their money together. Money was a big object.

My first year, I was just lucky enough to...I had a full scholarship my first year and that's what really got me into college my first year. But now, after that, I don't know how many

loans I've taken out since then. I think my mom took out 1 and I have taken out 2 or 3. My first year, we knew Mr. Yarborough [a local pastor who unexpectedly died]. He helped us because my mom and dad worked with his brother-in-law. So, after we found out, he really helped us. He got me that scholarship and helped me into college. After he died, it's like...I haven't heard anything about [someone continuing the work].

I interviewed Latoya and Michelle on the same day and found interesting contrasts between the two. One participant was talkative about family and school; the other was very short in answering questions, but open to my probes. Both interviews were done in pizza shops - one in Blackstone, one in Crewe. In Blackstone, Michelle and I hugged even though we had never met, sat for lunch, ordered, small-talked, and then began the interview as we ate. We both were conversationalists and enjoyed talking about different topics.

In contrast, the second interview was done at Latoya's job just before her shift began. The owners know my parents and me because we are loyal patrons. As both participants said, "[Nottoway] is a close community." I came a bit earlier than my participant in Crewe, talked with the owners, and called my parents for their orders. By this time, she came to "work." The pizza place has two levels and we sat opposite where her bosses were. I explained my project very briefly (we had talked before) and we began. She answered all of the questions, but in very short, concise answers. She was willing to answer probes and discuss her feelings about school and community.

### **Community Memories**

All of the 18-21 year olds discussed memories of community, but none of them talked about "community" as I perceived it when I was younger. They kept it to family and friends, and not the church and civic events that I remembered. In addition, Latoya and Michelle talked about Nottoway being a "tight-knit community." She remembered the following about her community:

It was very tight-knit. Everybody knew everybody. All of the kids played together; but, now, not so much. I rarely see anybody. I think the only thing that really brought everybody together is the fact that all the kids played together. And now, that everybody has gotten older and doing different things, we have just drifted apart. But, they're still here.

Michelle recounted:

It's a tight-knit community. Everybody knows everybody. It was so together. So many people knew so many people. Anything happens; you can't keep your business out. You can't keep your business out of the public. It was terrible growing up [in terms of people knowing your business]. I hated it. It is one thing that made me want to move away.

Jamal and Lewis provided different memories of Nottoway County. Jamal's first thought was "running in the woods!" He and Lewis also talked about events that they remembered:

**Jamal:** Well, I remember running through the woods, going to basketball games - all that good stuff, especially football games. [And] girls! A whole lot of girls...and dates.

**Lewis:** They used to have the rec games on the weekends for basketball at the old high school [It is now the Intermediate School].

**Jamal:** I played one year. The recreational games are not a school program. It starts when you are like 12 years old. 12-16. They had them on weekends.

James only remembered family events:

We had memories of family reunions – like a lot of them at Twins Lake once every summer. [I remember] a lot of family get-togethers.

Ultimately, Michelle summarized that she did not have many memories of community:

I don't remember anything that the community would have when we were younger. The community, if they did stuff, I didn't know about it. I didn't go. A lot of stuff I remember is school-based.

### **School Memories**

This generation provided very different, and interesting, memories of school. Memories consisted of school experiences, teachers and administrators, guidance counselors, school events, parent involvement, and violence and racism. I also have incorporated some of the voices from my pilot interviews. The voices that initiated this study and continually play in my

mind. I can see their faces – three seniors, in a group interview, excited about prom. One senior, Lorenzo, had already been accepted to college. The two young ladies, Edna and Sarah, had dreams but no known plans. Their brief descriptions, at the time of the interview, are below:

**Edna.** Edna is an 18-year old high school senior and an only child. Her mother graduated from high school, but she did not think that her father had. She stated that she had been receiving advice from her uncle to go to an area college, but she did not want to attend. Instead, she wanted to go to a business school in Richmond, VA and study to be a paralegal.

**Lorenzo.** Lorenzo is an 18-year old senior. He has younger sisters, and his mother and father both received bachelor's degrees. His father works as a correctional officer at Nottoway Correctional Center, which is one of the major employers of the county. His mother is a business teacher in the high school of a neighboring county. Lorenzo seemed very knowledgeable about college entrance requirements and was excited to attend college in the fall.

**Sarah.** Sarah is 19 years old and is also a senior at Nottoway High School. She has two older siblings (one brother and one sister). Her mother did not graduate from high school, but her father had. Her mother did not work (I am unsure if this was her decision or if she was unemployed) and her father is a truck driver. She stated that both of her older siblings had been to college, but she did not indicate if they graduated. She also had chosen to go to college, specifically a local community college, where she intended to earn an associate's degree in nursing. Ultimately, she wants to work in a hospital.

Though I was not able to interview them again, I know that their words and undiluted honesty are not only affective but also indicting. They add to the discussion on school environment, guidance counselors, and teachers.

### ***K – 12 School Experiences***

Michelle talked more about her K-12 school experiences; Lewis and Jamal talked about middle school and high school, and James and Latoya talked about their high school experiences and their overall perceptions of Nottoway County Schools. In addition, Edna, Lorenzo, and Sarah provided information on guidance counselors and Nottoway High School.

Michelle is the only 18-21 participant who talked in detail about her elementary experiences. I included this narrative to understand her experience when she was younger. She continued her discussion of a tight-knit community as she recalled memories of school. She explains:

Primary school was my funnest years! I loved primary school! In primary school you didn't have to worry about being accepted. Everybody knew everybody, so it was like you knew somebody all the time. And, if you didn't have any friends when you got there, you were going to see somebody that either your mama knows or somebody else know. So, it was like, OK, I don't have to worry about making friends. The community is so tight-knit that everybody knew everybody. And, it was like when you got to intermediate school and high school, you didn't know that many people [different inflection in voice from jovial to quiet reflection]. You had to get to know a lot of people because that is when they started to integrate all of the county together.

I asked Michelle how the process of integrating all of the students from the county was. When I was in school, all students went to Nottoway Complex in the seventh grade. The middle school housed seventh and eighth grades and the high school housed ninth through twelfth grades. During the 1995-1996 school year, Nottoway County completed a new high school. Therefore, Nottoway's Complex expanded to the Nottoway Intermediate School (formally Luther H. Foster and Nottoway High School), Nottoway Middle School, and the new Nottoway High School. Presently, Nottoway Complex educates 5<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders. Michelle recounted her experience on the "process of integrating":

It wasn't that bad [getting together in intermediate school]. I didn't pay any attention to it - that there was more people in the school. I kind of just stayed with the people that I know. Because a lot of people will tell me now, 'I remember you in Intermediate School',

but I don't remember seeing you in Int. school, but you remember seeing me! I guess it's just because I didn't pay it any mind. I guess it's because I just stuck with what I knew.

In middle school, I started getting to know a lot of other people from Crewe and Burkeville. That's when we had these team things going on. One side of the hall would be on one team and another side would be on another team based on homeroom. And, it's like, they integrated us more because you never knew who you were going to have in a class then and it integrated us more. We started switching classes and all that stuff and that's how you got to know more people.

Jamal and Lewis shared their experiences in middle school. They talk about their experience making good grades in middle school and how that changed when they transitioned to high school.

**Lewis:** Well actually I always had it good in middle school for the simple fact that I always caught on to things in class and I didn't have to do any studying really. Then I got in high school and I thought I could do the same thing and it just didn't work. Then I thought I could have my fun and not study and just wasn't the same. It's easy in middle school.

**Jamal:** See up until high school, it's like you're still like really young. You get in high school; you start being more independent; you want to do things on your own. You're not thinking about what anybody is telling you.

**Lewis:** You think you are becoming mature going into the high school. But, you are really acting more stupid than you were in middle school.

**Jamal:** You just try to do so many things at one time when you get to high school because you are starting to mature and you are starting to like grow up and get out there more. You're seeing more things. You are trying to be more active. And, on top of that you have school. So it's just a whole lot of things on you at once. It can be done. It can be done. It's just that some kid's mentalities are different. Some things I want to do I'm going to do regardless! I know people in school that were real smart and dedicated to school and I used to pick on them, but hey!

Jamal and Lewis shared their changes in attitude as they went to high school. They also explained how their need to "have fun" compromised their grades and their future endeavors, which I will disclose later. Michelle also shared her first experiences in high school:

My first year was a little shocking. It was the first time we have been in the school with people who were A LOT older than us. So, it took a little getting used to. It was like, once you got to the middle of the year, it wasn't a big thing. So, every day, you would go to school and you can expect to kind of just trip out; laugh at everything. See people going down the hall. You knew everybody. So, nothing was a really big shock.



Latoya, who graduated in June 2006, had a very different tone about high school. I asked her “What are your memories from school?” She remarked:

Basically, it was just drama. There wasn’t no real workload; there wasn’t really anything. I guess I was just there to be there. Everybody had their own little thing going on. Minds set on them and not actually what we were doing and stuff like that. Majority of the time, I learned something. But, it depended on what class I was in, who was teaching, who was in there.

There’s no real emphasis on [people being serious] now from anybody because teachers don’t care. And, basically, nobody else cares either. Why don’t teachers care? Well, because the students don’t care; it kind of rubs off. You have certain people that are real education strong, then you have certain people that say, “Well when I was in high school, I had a ball, so do whatever. As long as you graduate, it doesn’t matter what you do.”

After describing Nottoway High School to me, I asked her the following: “We talked about the negatives of high school, in terms of socializing and people not taking things seriously. [Are there] any positives for you?” Latoya took a long thoughtful pause and said, “I don’t remember anything positive about high school.” As if in response to Latoya’s discussion on students not taking high school seriously, Jamal and Lewis discuss their experiences in high school and what they would have changed.

**Lewis:** I used to go to school, man just to see everybody. I mean me and Jamal especially, we hung out every day. [We] had similar classes and what not. But everyday between classes or lunch we would get together and just laugh and chill. I was really a class clown. I have always been that. Always been the class clown, all the time. I just can’t help it. It’s my personality. I am not bragging, but it is. And, I really enjoy it. I like people you know.

**Lewis:** We used to go to school and do our work, you know.

**Jamal:** But we didn’t like class.

**Lewis:** As far as homework, homework was not done. Well, it was depending on the severity, you know.

**Jamal:** I tried to finish my homework before I got out of school!

**Lewis:** We took school as more of a chill time really. Now I am beginning to see how important it is as far as pay and security. I wish I had taken it more serious.

I asked Jamal and Lewis the following: “Thinking about school experiences now. What would you do differently? To this inquiry, they responded:

**Jamal:** I would probably take a couple of my classes a little more seriously than I actually did. Because, like I spent some time in my classes...I didn't put a lot of effort in some of my classes when I know I really could have.

**Lewis:** Yeah. Especially... 'cause I know we're smart. I mean just as far as studying. I could have studied more outside of school. Because when I got out, especially in high school, I was not thinking about homework, I was not thinking about any regrets [says emphatically].

**Jamal:** I was thinking about going out, having fun.

**Lewis:** I already knew the work. I felt like I already knew what the work was. I was so big headed about not doing homework.

**Jamal:** But, I know I could have at least more...because I used to be fine with a C. But I know that I could put more effort in to get a better grade.

**Lewis:** I did the bare minimum almost and it was acceptable to myself.

### ***Teachers and Administrators***

Participants recalled memories of at least one teacher who affected their schooling experience. Participants talked about supportive/demanding teachers who demanded excellence, seasoned teachers who many of their parents (and myself) had, and what I have deemed “other teachers” who did not seem supportive or caring to the participants. Jamal and Lewis talk about a supportive teacher, who they had in middle school:

**Lewis:** One of my favorite teachers was a math teacher in middle school.

**Jamal:** She was funny. She had an easy-going attitude but she was also a smart woman.

**Lewis:** And she cared.

**Jamal:** Yeah. She cared about her students. We couldn't wait until 6th period to get in her class and just be there.

**Lewis:** That's one of the teachers that knew the potential that we had and recognized it.

**Jamal:** She told both of us. She told both of us sitting right beside each other. She would wait until class was over.

**Lewis:** I had good grades in that class.

**Jamal:** I did too though. She knew we kept cutting up and wanting to be wild and laugh and joke.

**Lewis:** She was a jokester too though.

**Jamal:** I don't think she's there anymore.

I asked Jamal and Lewis, "What made you say she cared?" They explained:

**Lewis:** At the end of the day sometimes she would talk to him and my cousin [and others]. She would stop and talk to us about cutting up in class.

**Jamal:** And she pointed out me and him and was like I know you two have potential to do better in class but you need to cut out all this joking and stuff out. And told us, ya'll need to get your work done.

Michelle also recounted her experience with a middle school teacher who she believed was demanding. She later found out that this teacher was related to her.

There was one teacher that I hated...well, not really hated but she was really hard on me. I guess it was because she was kind of kin to us; she was kind of in the family. She would just push me so hard and I used to hate it then, but I guess it did me good. If I got a bad grade, she would let me know about it. She wouldn't let it slide. She would tell me; sometimes she would sit me down and tell me about it when everyone was gone.

Jamal and Lewis also talked about a "strict" high school principal who would reprimand students in the hallway and make them examples for disobeying the rules.

With Mr. [W] was strict. He'd put a combination lock for sagging pants. I myself never sagged, so I was good. But, people would walk around with combination locks and string. It was just strict. Like if you see somebody in the hall and he'd be like, "Don't be talking in the hallway." "Get your hand off of her". He was strict.

Michelle talked about teachers that I remember. One teacher, a science high school teacher, taught Michelle, her mother, and me. During the interview process, I continually tried to make connections with my participants. Many of the connections I made with the 18-21 year olds were with teachers who still taught at Nottoway High School.

We had Mrs. [G]. That was her last year teaching it. After that year, she retired. This year, she was teaching government. I don't know, it's like everybody doesn't like Mrs. [G] [laughter], but I didn't, I don't know, I didn't pay her any mind. I just did what I had to do and out of there

We had Mr. [L] for our science class and we would always laugh because my mom had him, so it's like, he must be...but he never...we would always trip out because he doesn't look that old. You don't look that old, but you had my mom, so I know you got to be up there [laughter]. It was some science class that I think was just dual enrollment and nobody ever took it because they felt like they didn't need it, but we took it, and we liked it.

Nottoway High School does not have AP courses. Instead, they offer dual enrollment with the local community college. This means, you have both high school and college credit. You can then transfer your credits to a two-year or four-year school after graduation. Michelle's assertion that few students took this class "because they felt like they didn't need it" is compatible with my experience in high school. I took a number of dual-enrollment classes, which were not publicized as a viable option to AP courses.

Michelle, Latoya, and my earlier participants (Edna, Lorenzo, and Sarah) talked about "other teachers." These teachers did not seem as supportive or caring as their other memories. Michelle explained:

One teacher, I don't know, I guess she just got lazy. We wouldn't do anything half the time, we'd just watch movies. We just started watching movies everyday. We would get in there, watch movies and so forth.

Lorenzo and Edna recounted:

**Lorenzo:** Some of the teachers, you can tell that they don't care whether you graduate or go to college or nothing. They are just in it for their check.

**Edna:** Some teachers care about you and others say, if you do it, you do it, if you don't you don't, it don't matter to me. I don't care.

By Latoya's account, some of the teachers, especially band teachers have used Nottoway County Schools as a training ground for bigger schools or districts.

I played clarinet and enjoyed band trips. From the time I was in 5th grade to the time I was in 8th grade, the band was really, really big. But, then the two band teachers left.

Someone said one moved to North Carolina and the other moved to New York. That was the end of it. I think most band teachers see Nottoway as just a stepping-stone, as a job to find their footing.

### ***Guidance Counselors***

James, Edna, Sarah and Lorenzo discussed their experiences with guidance counselors.

The participants' stories instruct us on how they perceive guidance counselors in Nottoway.

**James:** I meet with my guidance counselor once or twice a year and we talk about nothing much.

**Edna:** I didn't really meet with guidance at all like that. I met with them like two or three times because you always got to put your name on the list and sometimes they don't call you and all that kind of stuff.

**Lorenzo:** I met with guidance a few times; a whole lot in the beginning of the year and then not really after January. [We met about] colleges and classes. Most older people I talked to said don't wait on guidance counselors.

**Edna:** But, they are supposed to help us.

**Sarah:** They are supposed to guide you. You go in there and they say, what do you need and... it's like, I need some guidance. [Guidance should be] like, you know, on a one-on-one basis with a guidance counselor; rappin' about what we need to do to be successful. And, like, they don't do this.

**Edna:** It's like they don't care if we make it or not. It's like if you make it, you make it, if you don't, you don't. It's up to you. It's like it's all on us. They supposed to be there to help us. That's how it is with the teachers. It's like it's all on us. Either you get it the first time I go over it, or you just don't get it at all.

### ***School Events***

Nottoway High School may be known for many things, but in Southside Virginia it has been most known for its football program. Participants (between ages 18 – 35) talk about either playing in the games or just attending. When I was in school, attending football games is what you did in the fall – rain or shine. Michelle recounts:

When you got older and in high school, of course you would have football games every Friday. That used to be a big thing when we were in school. Every Friday night we were at a football game no matter how cold it was, we were at a football game.

Lewis and Jamal provided a list of events that they remembered from school: pep rallies, dances, and talent shows. And they recalled the dances: Valentine's Day Dance, Homecoming, the military ball, and prom night. Lewis and Jamal also talked about being in talent shows. Both participants sang in the talent shows either with popular songs of the time or with a song they wrote. Jamal explained, "We do a lot of that too. We write music."

Michelle also talked about her memories of graduation. By her account:

Graduation was in the stadium. It was horrible; well it wasn't horrible, it just wasn't right. We didn't have a speaker. I think the only people who spoke were the valedictorian and the salutatorian. I think the superintendent spoke, but that's it. We didn't have no guest speaker that came in and spoke or nothing.

She did say that Class Night was a memorable graduation activity because they did senior superlatives. Ultimately, James, who has gone to school in urban and suburban districts, explained that Nottoway has "no fun events."

They don't do anything. Like, No fun events. No...It's basically Nottoway; Nottoway High School, like the prom and homecoming and stuff like that. You go to school in the city, they wouldn't have it at the school, but going to school down here, it's right there in the cafeteria or something like that and it is not that cool. It's no activities; nothing to do after school.

### ***Parent Involvement***

All of the participants explained how they viewed parental involvement when they were in school. Latoya, James, Jamal, and Lewis talked about their overall perception of parental involvement in Nottoway County. And, Michelle talked about her experience with her own parents.

Latoya explained: "I would describe parent involvement as lacking. Yeah. We don't have any parents that want to do anything." I asked her if she saw parents at events like games or parent night. And she remarked, "I don't see any [parents]. But of course, I don't go to too many events." James said that he saw "parents around, but not everyone's parents."

Michelle reiterated this account when she talked about her experience with her mother's involvement in her schooling:

My parents, especially my mom, she was always involved in school, especially when I was younger. Whenever we would have field day or take a trip or something, she would be there. She would go. She would go with us on the trip and be a chaperone. Or, if we had field day, she'd come and make sure that she's helping with the activities. My mom was always around school. Her job was more flexible...my mom could get off at a drop of a dime. But my dad, he had a hard time getting off from work. He had to put in, in advance and all that stuff. My mom whenever...if she said something was going on at school, they let her off.

In general, it would be weird because a lot of the White moms would be more involved than the Black moms when we were younger. You would see a lot more White moms than Black moms. And, maybe my mom and my cousin that lives down the street, her mom would come every once in a while. And, it would be like our two moms and the rest of them were White moms.

As Michelle talked about her experience with parent involvement, I asked her if she thought the misrepresentation of parents was job related. I also remarked that it sounded like her experiences were mostly with moms. During the course of our interview, I did not realize that I was essentially asking her to be the social analyst. In essence I blurted out questions that I was thinking. By Michelle's account:

I could see maybe [parent involvement] was job related because you don't see too many Black families that got both parents. Most times you got single moms or something. So, I can see it as job related and they just couldn't get off work because maybe they just needed the money. But, that's how I looked at it, now that I look back. There was a lot of White moms; more than Black moms around.

Yeah, it was mostly moms. You never...it would be very seldom that you see a dad. I think really the only time I saw my dad in school was like if we had an award show. At the award shows, and I think one year when my brother was in kindergarten, we gave him a birthday party in his class, and he came that day. And, I remember because me and my cousin were in 4th grade that time, so we got out of class that day too and came down. We were all there. But, I think those are the only times my dad would come...that he would be able to come. Like the really important stuff. But, the little activities, mom would just be there, and she would take pictures or tell him about it. He would still be involved, but not able to come to a lot of stuff that my mom was able to come to.

Jamal's experience with parental involvement is at home because his guardians were not able to attend events.

It would be times when parents have been around, but me myself, you know...my mother...at times I wasn't really with my mother and what not. Umm, my grandfather was taking care of me. And, he is really an older guy, so I didn't really bother him too much. So, me myself, I never had too much parental involvement. Me in school as far as staying at school or being in school and parents being there, I didn't really get that part. But, when I go home I used to.

Lewis had a similar experience with parental involvement. He explains:

I think parental involvement really was like if you played sports and your parents would come and see you. I didn't play sports, so they never came to see me like that. They always looked out for me at the house of course.

### ***Violence and Racism in School***

During the interviews, Michelle and James discussed violence in school and their perceptions of violence in Nottoway. I asked Michelle if there was racism in school as a probe to a previous question, and her response is below. In addition, Sarah discussed her dismay that the high school did not properly honor Black History Month.

*Violence.* Michelle explains how violence has increased at Nottoway high School. She talks about her memories of violence in school and how it has changed since she has graduated.

We used to walk around before school, but the people in our school are so bad! They get the fighting. Fights were bad when we were in school, but it looks like now that we've gotten out of school, they've gotten terrible. I know you heard, before we got in the high school, like there was a big riot one day. After we got out of school, it happened again with the little kids, well smaller kids, the kids that were after us. My brother came home and told me about it one day. And I'm like 'ya'll have just gotten terrible!

When you got older and in high school, of course you would have football games every Friday. That used to be a big thing when we were in school. I don't know because now kids fight so bad at school and you have so many rules when you go to the football games now. At one time, they would make everybody sit down at the bleachers [this never happened before because part of the lure to the games was the ability to walk around the stadium and talk to friends]. It went on during one time this year because the kids got into this big fight over something. So, since all that stuff started happening, I don't think football games are too big. But, when we were in high school, it was a big thing.

James also provided insight into the growing problem of violence. For James, female students were beginning to fight more in school. He lamented:



Well, the last couple of years there has been a lot of fighting. So, now they have cameras in the parking lot; they have cameras on everyone in the hallways and in the cafeteria and stuff like that. The cameras in the hallway came this year. I think the cameras in the parking lot have been here for three years. They have cameras on the bus because they be fighting on the bus.

[Do you feel safe in the school?]

Well, something might pop off at any time. You never know. Someone might start fighting right there in the middle of class. It could be in the classroom anytime...Over stupid stuff. This year, I may have seen and heard of two boys fighting, but the rest of the time it's girls fighting over silly stuff.

I talked about my experience in school with guys fighting because they were from Blackstone or Crewe/Burkeville. And, I asked "Is this happening at Nottoway High School now?" James answered:

I really haven't heard anybody because they're from Crewe fighting. It was like that last year or the year before, but this year you haven't heard anybody talking about because they are from Crewe, Blackstone or Burkeville. The girls are fighting over boys, or what they said about them; simple stuff?

*Racism?* I asked Michelle "Was there racism?" She replied:

Not really. It's like, by the time we were in school, when I say everybody knew everybody - everybody really knew everybody - even the Blacks and the Whites. Like they knew their mama or worked with their mom or something. It wouldn't bother us. We didn't see any...every once in a while we would see somebody stupid come around and they would try to start something up. Even then, it was maybe one, two out the group. Other than that, you didn't see anything related to racial issues or anything like that.

Though Michelle discusses the actions of one or two people, she does not believe there is racism in school because "everybody knew everybody" and those actions did not affect her or other students. As stated, Sarah recounted a story about the high school not properly observing Black History Month during her senior year. She did not talk of this event as a racist act either.

Sarah explained:

But, we didn't even have Black History Month...Nothing. No pictures were up. We signed a petition saying that we wanted at least a saying about Black History Month in the mornings. They did do that, but they had it on the written announcements. They didn't have it on the intercom. They play music and everything now, but they couldn't say nothing about Black History.

## Conclusions

The 18-21 year old participants provide clear voices to the discussion of Black education in Nottoway County. Though they did not provide discussions of church or other civic activities, the participants lived experiences illustrate changes in the high school both in terms of academics and violence. Latoya and Michelle discuss their feelings about the lack of seriousness with students. James discusses his feelings about violence, especially with its prevalence with female students. In addition, Lewis and Jamal discuss their transition from middle school to high school, and how their academic work achievement decreased. They also disclose their regrets over their decisions in high school, which are important as we now see them as adults working to provide for themselves and their families.

For Latoya, school was “just drama” because students did not seem to care; moreover, she could not think of anything positive. She believed teachers were apathetic because the students did not care and vice versa. Her comments create the proverbial Catch 22. Michelle, Jamal and Lewis, however, talk about particular teachers who encouraged them to excel.

There are clear differences with parental involvement. Michelle’s mother attended major events and was active in her schools. Latoya found that parental involvement was lacking, but Jamal and Lewis determined that parental involvement was also important at home. In addition, their comments reverberate with the continual debate academics have on just what parental involvement is.

It is also clear, however, that there is increased violence in at least Nottoway High school, especially with female students and rifts between students from Crewe and Blackstone. When I talked to participants in my generation (25-35 year olds), they also reminded me about the fights we experienced in school during the 1990s. What is different, however, is the increased use of cameras (we did not have camera surveillance then) and the feeling, as James

said, that something “can pop off at any time.” In short, violence is a national epidemic that seems to be increasing. The 18-21 narratives shed light of this increase in violence and surveillance in Nottoway County.

I assert that there were racist acts in the stories of some of the participants. But, the participants did not speak of racism. Michelle said that there was not racism, but the actions of one or two. Sarah’s discussion of Black History Month, for me, was as an example of overt racism but she did proclaim this. Therefore, the 18-21 participants do not name racism in their communities or schools.

## CHAPTER VIII

### GENERATIONAL DIALOGUES AND CONCLUSIONS

In chapters four through seven, I presented narratives that reflect the lived experiences of participants. In order to understand how lived experiences and the values of education have changed, I have presented a chart to visually compare the generations, using the following themes: (1) Community memories, (2) school memories, and (3) journey since high school. These themes emerged from participants’ narratives and are used to facilitate dialogue.

**Table 2:**

**Generations’ Emergent Themes**

	<b>55 Years and Older</b>	<b>45 –55 Years Old</b>	<b>25 – 35 Years Old</b>	<b>18-21 Years Old</b>
<b>Community Memories</b>	“Bustling” towns Farming NAACP Church	Bustling Towns NAACP Church Class Differences	Church Events Neighborhoods	Tight-knit Some rec games “If they did stuff, I didn’t know about it”
<b>School Memories</b>	School-houses PTA Privilege Inadequate resources Black teachers (role models in community)	Desegregation Violence/backlash Black teachers (role models in community)	Football Games Improper guidance Disconnections	“just drama” Violence Regrets NJROTC
<b>Journey since high school</b>	Military Northern migration	College Educators Northern Migration	Leave for College Administrators Commutes Educational Journey	College Military

In addition to the discussion of themes, I use interviews from the younger generations (ages 18-35) to discuss their present perceptions of Nottoway County. I also present vignettes of the focus group narrative to illustrate the instructive dialogue of three of the four generations. The focus group was used to triangulate the interview data and emergent themes and subsequent conclusions will be discussed in chapter nine.

### **Community Memories**

Laura (age 53), John (age 60) and Sarah (age 65) talked about the number of businesses and the activity that Crewe had. Older participants also considered Burkeville and Blackstone “bustling towns.” Their narratives are a stark contrast to Crewe now. As William (age 33) lamented, “We’re losing more than we’re gaining [and] downtown Crewe is awful.”

All of the participants over 25 (N = 16) have memories of church when they were growing up. This was not the case, however, for 18-21 year olds (N=5), where no participants provided memories of church in their interviews. The older participants’ narratives reflect the important position churches had in the community. For the participants, churches were sites of instruction, social events, and community gatherings. Chatters, Taylor, Lincoln and Schroeffer (2002) explain that research and archival data from the Black community have shown that “extended families and churches are two of the most influential and established institutions within Black communities” (p. 67). This influence is compounded in rural Black communities. The authors explain, “Given this position Black churches are closely involved in the complex network of Black family life and in particular, extended family and multigenerational relationships” (p. 68).

Specifically, Greg (age 30) also relates how his faith helps him on his present journey. His discussion of linking his faith to his determination to succeed is not new. Hughes (2006)

found that families used their faith to propel them on their educational journey. Greg is continuing that faith stance on his own journey. For Greg, “faith provides hope, hope that a higher power is in control and will help one who continues to struggle” (Hughes, 2006, p. 115).

### **Generational School Memories**

I categorize school memories by desegregation, disconnects with teachers and/or administrators, parental involvement, and violence. But, I wanted to begin the discussion of school memories with a personal observation. The 45-55 year old participants present an overall positive view of their segregated experiences. The participants older than 55, however, talked about their struggles with maintaining buildings, students privileged based on skin tone, and the problems incurred with having “no resources.”

Philipsen (1999) sees the sentiments of older-generation Blacks in her study as nostalgic or even mythic. She explains, “The older generation serves “as ‘dreamkeepers’ and work hard to emphasize the need for their children to obtain a good education. This dreamkeeper function, it is argued, is an outcome of what the Black school town used to mean for its community” (p. 35). Though both generations admit to scarce resources, for 45-55 year olds, Black students and communities do well “in spite of.” Both generations agreed, however, that teachers provided an immense amount of encouragement and served as role models in the community.

#### ***Desegregation***

Brian (age 29) talked about racism in school and how his family taught him how to deal with it. During our interview, Brian alluded to racism that his family members experienced when they were in school. His aunt, Evelyn (age 53) went to Crewe High School during the first year of Freedom of Choice, and she has shared stories with her family. Bell (1980) provides a helpful discussion on the journey and struggles of Evelyn, Harold (age 56), Laura (age 53) and Gloria (age 54) during Freedom of Choice. He proclaimed:

There was a problem with school desegregation decisions framed in this antidefiance form... [Like] pupil assignment schemes, “freedom-of-choice” plans, and similar “desegregation plans”...Such racial balance measures have often altered the racial appearance of dual school systems without eliminating racial discrimination. (pp. 530-531)

With Freedom of Choice, Nottoway was able to “alter the racial appearance” and comply with HEW for five years, but the struggles of the participants persist in their stories.

Debra (age 58) and Sheila (age 67) provided their perspectives on desegregation during their interviews. I did not present this data during the narrative chapter, but I do here to facilitate “dialogue” between generations. Debra said there were better resources and less/no corporal punishment at White schools. But she said she could not have done Freedom of Choice for the following reasons:

I didn’t want it the way they integrated it when I was in school [circa 1965]. I didn’t want to be a part of no Freedom of Choice because that singles you out...Like I told you, the day somebody spits on me, or they had done some of that stuff they did to them kids, I would have went straight to a reform school or jail or wherever they put Black people that fight. I couldn’t have done that.

Debra’s assertion seems to imply that those Black students who did attend Crewe High School during Freedom of Choice did not fight. Instead, she differentiates between those who fight (like herself) and those who are passive.

For Sheila, gaining resources was not enough to counteract the loss of community at the hands of desegregation. She explained:

And I don’t want to necessarily say I’m all that prejudiced, but you know I’m not so sure integration helped the Black kids. And let me qualify that. It seemed a lot of times our kids picked up their worst habits, and the teachers didn’t have to worry so much about discipline, you know, back in the old days. The parents were going to discipline those kids, and you were going to school and behave yourself. But then we started picking up some of their traits. And then our kids lost a lot of role models.

Sheila’s statement echoes many of the “what was lost” research. She questions the benefits of desegregation as she reflects on the current conditions for Black students.

***Disconnects with Teachers/Administrators***

The discussions of disconnects with teachers/administrators began with Laura (age 53) and Evelyn (age 53) as they began their education at Crewe High School during Freedom of Choice. Laura begins to question her abilities as she faces opposition from teachers; moreover, Evelyn begins to distrust her White teachers and must ensure that she is getting full credit for her work.

Brian talked about a hurtful relationship with a Black teacher in high school. He, like many of the older participants who underwent Freedom of Choice, did not have reciprocal relationships with their teachers. As Valenzuela (1999) states in *Subtractive Schooling*,

Students' desire for reciprocal relationships with adults at school is tempered by their experience, which teaches them not to expect such relationships. Noddings (1984) has also noted, "Students' weak power position relative to school personnel makes it incumbent that the adults be initiators of social relationships (p. 104).

Brian did seem to expect this relationship, and he appeared hurt that a reciprocal relationship was not achieved with a fellow Black male.

Greg (age 30) thought he was warranted in trying to get out of the principal's office when he was upset. Greg believed he was wrongly accused and he wanted to leave to control his emotions. The principal, however, viewed Greg as an imposing Black man, or as John (age 60) explained in his narrative, "once you step over that whatever age society has determined, you now act like a man and look like a man, or think like a man, things do kind of change."

During her ethnography of Rosa Parks School, Ann Arnett Ferguson (2001) explains:

The behavior of African American boys in school is perceived by adults...through a filter of overlapping representations of three socially invented categories of 'difference': age, gender, and race...At the intersection of this complex of subject positions are African American boys who are doubly displaced: as Black children, they are not seen as childlike but adultified; as Black males, they are denied the masculine dispensation constituting white males as being 'naturally naughty' and are discerned willfully bad" (p. 80).

Greg may have felt warranted to try to get out of the room, to calm himself in the face of injustice (to him). But, instead he is seen as a man, an angry Black man who has committed an



assault, a punishable crime. He is not seen as a teenager that is trying to handle his emotions. “Boys will not be boys.” Instead, he is now a man, with an impending record.

Darrell (age 30) and Kim (age 27) talk about the disconnect they felt with guidance counselors who either did not receive guidance or found their advice to be damaging. In addition, Sarah and Edna explain their frustration when meeting with guidance. Specifically, Sarah (age 19) said “I [just] need guidance!” She, like Debra (age 58), did not know “the right questions to ask.” Researchers have found that in general, guidance counselors are “gatekeepers” for students into college (McDonough, 1998; Yogev & Roditi, 1987). In addition, researchers have found that Black students, especially, rely heavily on counselors when deciding on post-secondary education and careers (Mahoney and Merritt, 1993; Trusty, 2001).

### ***Parental Involvement***

Participants talked about parental involvement across generations. For Sheila (age 67) and Joanne (age 59), parents participated in schools by being “room mothers” or participating in the PTA. Joanne discussed the activism of the parents in building Ingleside School in Burkeville. According to 25-35 year old participants, parents were involved with school events such as football games or came to school only if their child was in trouble.

All of the above participants talked about parental involvement as “activities that occur at school” (Anderson & Minke, 2007). Anderson and Minke (2007) suggest that a measure for parent involvement should be a multidimensional construct – both at home and at school. Instead, we generally think of parent involvement only as school activities. In addition, the authors explained the findings of their study:

That is, for the parents, two thirds of whom were African American, the ways in which their beliefs about involvement (role construction) affected their involvement behaviors at home and at school varied according to their perceptions of being invited specifically to participate (p. 320).

Therefore, when thinking of parents we must consider if parents are invited to participate. We also must question if teachers or administrators foster a welcoming environment for parents.

Jamal (age 21) and Lewis (age 20) extend the conversation of parental involvement to home, and their comments reverberate with the continual debate academics have on just what parental involvement is (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Lareau & Shumar, 1996; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). For example, Jamal was raised by his grandfather, who he described as an older man. He continued with the following observations:

It would be times when parents have been around, but me myself, you know...my mother...at times I wasn't really with my mother and what not. Umm, my grandfather was taking care of me. And, he is really an older guy, so I didn't really bother him too much. So, me myself, I never had too much parental involvement. Me in school as far as staying at school or being in school and parents being there, I didn't really get that part. But, when I go home I used to.

Lareau and her colleagues (Lareau & Shumar, 1996; Lareau & Horvat, 1999) provide important insight to family-school relationships based on race and class. In her earlier work, Lareau and Shumar (1996) provide a discussion about the differences in parent involvement in schools. They explain that the lack of parental participation and compliance is related to the following:

Effects of significant and long-standing differences in social resources (such as educational skills, occupational flexibility, economic resources, and social networks) across groups. In addition, parents approach schools with different perspectives about how best to help their children in school and with different assessments of their power relative to that of schools (p. 24).

Ultimately Lareau and Horvat (1999) have found that race, even when controlling for class differences, affects parent interactions with schools. They contextualize this effect in the racial discrimination many Black parents received as students and now as parents. This racial discrimination can be seen by participants who were students during Freedom of Choice, mandatory desegregation, and desegregated schools (ages 25-35).

### ***Violence***

Many of the 45-55 year olds who participated in Freedom of Choice experienced violence in and out of school. They were faced with hate speech, people spitting on them, KKK cross burnings, and potential violence at the hands of groups of their white peers. Harold (age 56), like members of the Biggs family in Hughes (2006), had crosses burned in his yard and like Ross Winston in the northeastern Albermarle community, knows the culprits who burned the cross and who were part of the KKK organization. Harold also had the same bravado as Ross, who explained, "...we were young and crazy and we didn't care" (p. 126).

Harold (age 56) and Gloria (age 54) present stories about a volatile time – a time of fear and violence. Their stories are very similar to general stories of desegregation in the south and the particular story of Hyde County, North Carolina in *Along Freedom Road* where Cecelski (1994) describes the backlash against Black citizens at the hands of the KKK. He explains:

Especially in 1965 and 1966, white citizens drew on ancestral patterns of intimidation and social control to prevent black families from sending their children [to school]. NAACP activists in particular, were threatened repeatedly with violence... Economic coercion was a more prevalent, subtle, and effective way to stymie the NAACP's efforts for school integration. (p. 36)

The perpetuation of violence described by the 18-21 year olds and William (age 33) is very different from the violence described by older participants (45 years and older). Here students fight "over silly stuff" as James (age 18) says, like female students fighting over boys and Crewe/Burkeville teens fighting Blackstone teens. William, who is an assistant principal at the high school, talked about the students now and his view of how Nottoway has changed. Because of his position, he offers a viewpoint that the other participants do not have. He believes schools have changed in the following ways:

The school has changed a lot since we were in school, I wouldn't say solely, but mainly in the fact that it's a new building. It's a totally new building. Everything is set up differently, so that automatically changes the atmosphere of the school. And, right now, well this year it's better. But, the last two years I have been in the school and experienced it, we've been having a lot of trouble with Crewe and Blackstone. Which, when we were in school there was a Crewe and Blackstone thing, but, it wasn't bad. Maybe every now

and then; but, now it's like it's a clear division. [Students may say:] "I'm from Crewe or Burkeville and I'm from Blackstone. You don't like me. I don't like your friend. My friend don't like your friend." It's almost like a gang.

[Do you know what it is triggering from?]

It's just from like when we were in school and prior. Because from what I understand in talking to people, it's always been a clear division of Crewe and Blackstone. It's just the kids are taking it to another level now. It's just like with everything else, with everything you see on the videos, and everything you see on TV and hear. Society is getting more violent.

[In talking to some of the people, even in Luther H. Foster there was some division, but for it to erupt in violence is...Because we had some fights.]

Yeah, but it was few and far between. Well, this year it's better but last year it was all the time. And, even if it wasn't fights, it was arguments or heated disagreements. And, it was causing problems.

It is clear that there is increased violence at Nottoway High School. Watts and Erevelles (2004) explain,

Although students in urban...schools have encountered violence regularly for as long as the inner city has experienced social exploitation, high unemployment, and economic underdevelopment, that violence has earned little attention. However, now that school violence has spread to the suburbs and rural areas – formerly presumed to be safe havens – it is recognized as a critical issue in American public education (p. 271).

Violence in schools is not only a national epidemic but also an increasing problem in Nottoway High School. In addition to violence, there is increased surveillance both outside and in the corridors of the high school.

### **Journey since High School**

Older participants (age 45 and older) discussed either their journey to northern states or cities (Baltimore, New Jersey, New York, Ohio) or their journeys for post-secondary education and jobs in Virginia. Four of the five parents in the oldest generation (55 and older) and three of the six 45-55 year olds left the county to pursue careers. Throughout their journeys, the military

and family/friends provided the necessary avenue for each participant to gain skills and start new careers.

### ***Better Opportunities Elsewhere***

Brian's narrative (age 29) is similar to my own story. I never anticipated moving back to Nottoway because I did not think I would have job or cultural opportunities that I wanted. My parents encouraged me to leave, to venture out and possibly come back later. Many of the participants in this study, who are parents, also have encouraged their children to leave. Tiffany (age 47) explained her reasoning:

Jobs to me haven't changed that much. Um, I mean it's still the same unless you pull yourself out of that routine. Black people are still going to the factories. You really have to leave. I'm glad my kids left, because there's really no opportunity here. And I don't believe in...I don't believe in. And, I know it's a lot in the way of the racial thing, but I still feel like God gives us favor...But the jobs, there just aren't that many.

This "brain drain" has an effect. Businesses may not venture into Nottoway County not only because of possible blocks from the electorate but also because they do not believe Nottoway has enough qualified people, in terms of credentials, that they need.

### ***Struggles in College***

Michelle (age 20) attends Longwood University, approximately 30 minutes from Nottoway. Her story of struggle to stay in school is instructive as we think about Black students, especially first-time college goers, in higher education. Michelle's journey and decision-making strategies are very similar to rural high school students I (as part of a graduate student team) interviewed for a GEAR UP North Carolina case study (O'Sullivan, Costello, Beverly, & Askew, 2006). The case study had 66 participants who discussed their experiences with GEAR UP and their post-secondary plans. A majority of the students (77%) reported that a family member most influenced their decision making process. In addition, 34/66 students (52%) reported challenges or obstacles in pursuing their plans. The participants reported the following obstacles:

associated cost, family obligations, meeting college requirements, and fear of not knowing what to expect at college. For Michelle (age 20) and Latoya (age 18), college costs have been prohibitive. Latoya opted to attend a 2-year college because she could not afford to enter a 4-year institution directly after high school. In addition, Michelle was able to attend college only because of a first-year scholarship.

### **Nottoway Now**

Darrell, William, and Kim discussed their perceptions of Nottoway now in the following categories: families, community, schools, and jobs. I asked them to describe Nottoway now in order to understand how they viewed the county and if that observation is different from how they grew up. It also facilitates a “dialogue” between not only 18-21 participants but also older generations, and brings the discussion from past to present. I chose to focus on Darrell, William, and Kim’s perceptions because they now live in the county. I also use Michelle’s (age 20) and Latoya’s (age 18) voices as they provide their perceptions of Nottoway’s community and schools now.

#### ***Families***

Darrell and William discussed their views of family now in Nottoway County. Darrell remarked:

In terms of family, I would say it is a good place to live as far as low crime rate. More bang for your buck as far as real estate is concerned in comparison to a city like Richmond.

Darrell is comparing Nottoway to Richmond, where he works. He decided to stay in Nottoway for the same reasons. William provided the following observations:

Family wise, it hasn’t changed a whole lot. From what I see, it’s a lot of the same generations. As the parents die out or...It’s not a lot of people moving in and out of the county. So, it’s a lot of the same families, in same areas, and you know I think it helps the community out a lot. Because like I was saying, with my life, my neighbors and

everybody in the neighborhood, they've known my parents, my grandparents and I've known all their family. So, it's a good community relationship. [It is] the same with people throughout the county. I know a lot of their grandparents or parents. So, everybody's close.

### *Community*

Brian, William, and Kim described Nottoway's community. For Kim, Nottoway is "Boring, Boring; it's like where are all the people. What do we do now? There is nothing to do."

Darrell described "the feeling" of community now. He talks about community for people who work outside of the county. Darrell commented:

Community: I would say that if you are not involved in some type of church or sporting events, that you probably won't see much in terms of community unless you actively seek it. Yeah, because, yeah I think that's true and I think it's true because a lot of us do work out of town. So, when we come home there is not a lot of time to do a lot of other things. So, if you are not directly involved into something specific, than you know, and I am sure that it may be different for people that maybe live and work here, but for the majority of us that live here and work elsewhere, if you don't belong to a church or some type of group, or involved in some type of sport than you probably won't get a great sense of community. Unless again you lived in an apartment complex, that would be different too.

Both Latoya and Michelle believed the county, in general, still was a tight-knit community. Latoya remarked, "You don't hear too much about the county. It's real desolate."

However, Michelle discussed her perception of the community now.

Nottoway is so tight-knit; it is so together. So many people know so many people. Anything happens; you can't keep your business out. You can't keep your business out of the public. It was terrible growing up [in terms of people knowing your business]. I hated it. It is one thing that made me want to move away. Now, since I've gotten out of school, and I don't have to deal with the same people everyday, it doesn't bother me. Because I know I just go to school; I stay [at the university] most of the day; I come home and I don't have to deal with nobody that's in town really. So, if I stay there and go home, not too many people know what I'm doing or about me.

Even though Michelle still considers Nottoway tight-knit, she believes the community is changing. For her, this change is due to "outside people" and not residents with family history in Nottoway.

It's gotten kind of worse community wise. Because, when I was smaller, we never would hear about nobody robbing anybody in Nottoway! But, now you hear about people getting stabbed at Pizza Hut and people trying to rob the delivery person here. And, it's gotten bad. It's a tight-knit community. Everybody knows everybody. But I don't know what happened between...I really don't know what happened. Unless it's like more outside people started moving into the community that we don't know. That's the only thing that I can really think of because everybody basically know everybody. But, now you walk around Blackstone and sometimes you see some people, and like you say, "I have no idea who that is." Or, you hear some people [say], "I don't know who their people are or nothing." I guess it's a lot of outside people moving in the county.

William talked about the town of Crewe and how he felt the community was not growing. William explained:

With town, I guess, especially like with Crewe, it's not a lot of growth. And, it's interesting to see how a business will open and it seems to be doing very well. And before you know it, it's closed and gone. Just like now, we don't have a grocery store. It seems like it is almost impossible that a community would not have a grocery store, but things like that have gone on in Crewe and I really don't understand it. You know, at the level I'm at, but it just doesn't seem like that is the way it should be.

Many of the participants in all generations discussed the lack of a grocery store in Crewe. They seemed to view it as a barometer for stagnation or even decline.

### ***Schools***

I chose Darrell and William's narratives to describe schools in Nottoway now. Darrell now has two school-aged children in Nottoway Schools (six- and 10-years old). When I asked him to describe Nottoway Schools now, he talked about his son's curriculum. Darrell explained:

So, in terms of school - school has changed in that they learn a lot of things faster than when we were in school. For example, I don't remember doing Algebra in 3rd grade, but my son brought some Algebra home. So, I would definitely say school has changed in that sense that things are being taught much earlier. Things are being pushed down to kids a lot sooner now than it was when we were in school. I would say that.

Both Latoya and Michelle had criticisms of the high school. Latoya talked about the high school and students who attended Nottoway High now. Michelle gave her opinion on how students have changed since she graduated in June 2005. Latoya reported:

Well, the school...the kids are bad, they are just horrible! I think there is something in the water [laughter] because everybody is pregnant. It is out of control because school



for everybody now is just a social playground. And, whatever happened in the streets, you just carry over to school. There is no real mentality there.

Michelle explained:

And school wise, you know, they've tightened up on their security and they got cameras everywhere now. When I was there, they had cameras only in the parking lot. They had cameras in the parking lot, but that's it. Now they got cameras all throughout the school; my brother told me. And I guess cause kids have gotten...it's gotten bad. They've gotten more violent now. I've seen that in the change. They've gotten real tight on their security. That's something that I thought would never happen in Nottoway 'cause everybody is so tight-knit.

Michelle also disclosed to me her discussions with younger students, and her frustration with them.

To me, I can't imagine not doing good in school. It has always been instilled in me. But, I look at a lot of like my brother friends. A lot of them are either dropping out of school or just don't care, go to school and...I know these little kids around my way. I think all of them are failing and they just don't care; like two of them just went to jail. I ask them, "Why aren't y'all doing good in school." And they're like, "I don't know. I just don't care." And I just look at them and say, "What do you expect to do with your life then? If you don't get out there and at least get a high school diploma. What do you expect to do with your life?"

When I look at them...I look at them and I'm like y'all make me feel really, really old. Because ya'll out there and ya'll make me seem like I'm so old head. But, it's not about being old head. It's about what are you going to do with your life when you get older [exasperated]. And the two that are in jail, one is 18 and one is 19 but they're still in high school. [She explained that they moved from another state and were detained a year because grades and records did not transfer]. That would be more reason for me to strive and get out, but it's like they don't care.

Both Michelle and Latoya seem to believe that Nottoway High School's students are getting worse, either because of increased violence or sexual promiscuity. Michelle's assertion that she feels like an "old head" is poignant. Her comment resonates with the literature on high achievement and peer backlash; however, Michelle has internalized this feeling of difference (Tyson, Darity, Castellino, 2005).

As stated, William (age 33) is assistant principal of Nottoway High School. He also provided his perceptions of students now. He explained:

[How do you view the students in terms of them being prepared when they leave or just their mindset? I talked to some and just don't seem as focused, but I don't know if that is a good word.]

I don't think that's a good word. Because I was about to say that the ones who want to be prepared, I think are well prepared. Cause it's like, I know when I was in school, when I left, I didn't feel as prepared as I actually was because when I left, I graduated 43, 44 in my class so I wasn't way up there. And, I was thinking well I could have done a lot better in school. Then I get to college and I'm above average. I was actually helping people do their work and papers and everything. So I was like, Nottoway didn't do as bad as I thought they did. And looking at the kids now, I feel the same way. The one's that go to class and do their work, even if they're not the best of the best, I think they're prepared to go on to college and the work world. But, it's kind of depressing because it's so many of them who just don't care. They've already got it figured it out.

It's amazing because I talk to kids and I ask them, "What do you plan to do when you get out of school?" And they'll tell me they're going to work with their uncle. They've got this one job that they are basing their life [on]. Or, they just don't know or don't care. Some of them are involved in drugs or other little things or just don't have the motivation. And, I guess a lot of it has to do with the whole family structure. Because mom didn't have an education, dad didn't have an education. They getting by - you know food stamps, public assistance, minimum wage. We're making it. And, it's never been stressed to them that you can do better. Or they've never got the motivation to want better. And, I guess you know that's just where they are. They don't need school. They are going to make it. And, it's depressing because you know that they can't make it. It's going to be a struggle for them but you can't tell them.

And you see them three or four years later - [and they said] "I wish I'd listen to you. I want to go to school." Or, you see them walking the street. And, I try to tell the kids all the time. I'm not telling you because I think I'm better than you or your family. I'm trying to tell you what I know. When I was in school, some of the same folks that had the mentality you do are the ones you see outside of Perk's, outside of Etna [two local convenience stores]. I don't call any names because I don't want to insult anybody. But, I tell them where they at. Because when you ride through Crewe and Blackstone you see them standing in front the store. I tell them, when you go home today go down by Etna or you go down by McDonalds. And, the people standing out there are the same ones that had the mentality you do when they were in school.

And, they listen to me. And, then when they leave [the say], "Oh, he don't know what he talking about. It's just hard when... And, I got this when I was at the alternative school and I tried to talk to kids and trying to figure out why they were the way they were. And, I got to thinking about it. I'm a person who has really no family relationship, really mean nothing to them. And, I'm with them an hour a day, maybe a little more. How am I going to change their perspective on life? Even if I told them something that they really took to heart, when they go home for the other 23 hours and getting contradictory signals. So, it's tough. Cause I can tell them, "you need to do this, you need to do that. And this [is] going to make a better life for you." But, when they get home, they getting

cussed at; they seeing everybody in the house smoking weed, doing things. And, that's what they're going to feed into.

This assistant principal was mindful of students "who want to be prepared." He is also quite critical of students "who just don't care." His assertions were hard to accept, but something I have been hearing more often than not. But, William takes great pride in knowing the students, their parents, and their grandparents. He seems disillusioned that he could not affect each student's life in that "one hour a day" before they go home.

I view him as an informant and do not doubt that his perception is valid. Lomotey (1994) identifies three qualities shared by Black principals and/or assistant principals: (1) commitment to the education of all students; (2) confidence in the ability of all students to do well; and (3) compassion for, and understanding of all students and the communities in which they live. He refers to these attributes as ethno-humanist and explains:

These [assistant] principals are not only concerned with the students progressing from grade to grade; they are also concerned with the individual life chances of their students and with the overall improvement of the status of African American people" (p. 204).

I contend that William does have the attributes Lomotey identifies. He seems to have a commitment to the education of all students and confidence in their ability. He also is concerned that students are not living up to their abilities. I want to reiterate the commitment William has to his students and school. Tiffany (age 47) provided the following comments:

You know, there's an [assistant] principal up there, [William], he reminds of a young John [age 60], because he would be out in the halls, I don't care whose kids they are, the discipline is the same... And I was in school the other day and I was upstairs with [my daughter] at her locker, and I heard a commotion, and I came down the hall the same time [William] ran up the steps, and he was by himself. He thought it was a fight, but he was willing to come up there, as bad as those kids fight, by himself. So you still have some good teachers.

Unfortunately, William believes many of the students are not motivated because of parental/family influences and not schools, which do not affirm the cultural capital of people of

color and/or low-income students. Therefore, I want to highlight that lack of motivation can be because of family structure, peer relationships and/or school structure. I am concerned about his comments on low-performing students' family life.

Class-distinction may determine motivation in school not only because of apathy or feelings that "we're making it," but also because of a disconnection between lower-income students in an ideologically middle-class school. Therefore, this class distinction may affect a students' relationship with school. McDonough (1998) explains the following:

Cultural capital is a symbolic good which is most useful when it is converted into economic capital. Although all classes have their own forms of cultural capital, the most socially and economically valued forms are those possessed by the middle and upper classes, which are transmitted to their offspring as a supplement to economic capital in order to maintain class status and privilege across generations... [Moreover], cultural capital is precisely the knowledge which elites value yet schools do not formally teach. (p. 183).

In addition, we have seen that desegregation provided presumably equal resources but not equitable relationships with teachers and administrators.

### ***Jobs***

Kim, Darrell and William described jobs in Nottoway now. Kim and Darrell saw promise in businesses that were coming into the county. William, however, did not see many businesses entering Nottoway County. Kim explained:

The mayor of Burkeville, Joe M., He was saying that they were trying to get more jobs in the community so that the kids that graduated and went off to college and came back would have jobs to come back to. And, to me it's a decrease. There aren't many jobs. The people that have the jobs are keeping them and the ones that are retiring - it's like they have somebody waiting in line to get the jobs that they're retiring from. [Think he said it in the paper].

I know at one of the town council meeting, he really spoke about trying to get more jobs. Because you know Piedmont is adding on a new wing, but it won't be ready for 2-3 years, so they have people commuting to Petersburg from here until they get that part open. I don't think there is anything else [coming]. That's the only thing. And, really what they've done is some of the people who work at the prison; they're going to be over there. So, it may be openings coming to the prison but you just don't know when.

Darrell said that jobs were increasing in the area “dependent upon what you want as far as income...” Darrell explained:

Job wise, I would say it has gotten slightly better but only slightly. So, dependent upon what you do it may or may not be a good place to work, and dependent upon what you want as far as income is concerned.

More jobs?

Yeah, because Wal-Mart came to Blackstone; there is still Fort Pickett there of course. Even if you wanted to start a small business you know it would be beneficial. But, Wal-Mart brings in so much from other counties. Plus, when Wal-Mart came other businesses came in as well. So, that helps. Like I said dependent upon what you want to do.

For William:

But, business and job wise, it's hurting because there's no new business coming into the county, so we're kind of stagnant. I mean, we're actually going backwards. Because in my eyes, we're losing more than we're gaining. Downtown Crewe is awful. And, like I say again, we don't even have a grocery store. That's unheard of.

Though Kim and Darrell provide hope that jobs will increase in Nottoway, the hope is tempered with concern of the types of jobs available. Kim talked about the new wing coming to Piedmont. Other participants have informed me that this wing is for a Sex Offenders Unit. Therefore, the increase in jobs will still be in Corrections. Darrell talked about other businesses that have come with Wal-Mart and the possibilities of entrepreneurship, and that is of course promising.

### **Intergenerational Focus Group**

I conducted an intergenerational focus group approximately two months after the interviews were completed. Seven participants attended the focus group: three who were 55 years and older (Joanne, Sarah, and John); two who were between 45-55 years old (Evelyn and Laura); and two who were between 25-35 years old (Brian and Darrell). Unfortunately, no 18-21 year old participants were able to attend. I want to briefly highlight their conversation by using

vignettes of the narrative during the session. The participants' words are displayed verbatim unless indicated.

An intergenerational focus group is also a way of allowing younger generations, like Darrell and Brian, to ask questions of older generations. I wrote in my fieldnotes that the entire process reminded me of the importance of griots in the African tradition, who tell oral histories in an effort to continue the stories of the community and maintain its heritage.

**Brian:** The purpose of education from my viewpoint personally, I view education as basically a tool. You know it's a tool that you use to give yourself and your family opportunities, opportunities for growth, opportunity to kind of improve yourself as well, and just to learn more, just to give you a more open view, not only on world issues, but world issues and things that may be occurring in education and things like that. Of course the main thing is that if you go into education you try to do as much as you can because you want to get gainful employment, and make a good living, you know.

**Darrell:** Yeah I would say the same thing. I'm just naturally a curious person, so I like to know how things work. You know, it's not enough for me to say, "Hey that does that." I want to know why it does that, and how it does it. So for me education is not necessarily to gain financially, but you can't escape that, and you have to benefit from it. I mean if you're going to get financial gain from more education, then you might as well take advantage of that as well.

**Evelyn:** You know we have hindsight, and people made choices because of different reasons. My parents' reason was, "It doesn't make sense to ride past schools to go to another school." You know you have a school right here. I had a school 3 miles, and that was...you know. And I'm sure in addition to that, some of the things that Laura had mentioned. However, then you go back to education after having gone through the cycle, and get to the point where we are now, and see what our children have lost through this process...

**Joanne:** Yeah, I agree.

**Evelyn:** And then you wonder was that really the right thing.

**Laura:** Yeah. I worry about that. Yeah, because even with my own daughter, we were just sitting down talking one day about Martin Luther King and different things he had done, and about other, you know black leaders. I mean she had no idea. See we learned this stuff in elementary school. And they don't even teach it in the high schools here. Because I know Mr. [W] I think was pushing for a course at that high school, you know about black history, but you know, I don't think it ever got through. But you know we really need that. Our kids are leaving high school and don't even know their history.

**Evelyn:** I think that's one of the tools I would say that's missing from education at this time, too. Is that education also is communication, and because of all of the requisites for "No child left behind," and all these other things, that there is just no communications. You had

communication with the teacher, you had communication with the parent, and the parent and teacher had communication with the student as Sarah has said.

**Joanne:** Monifa, I think in my generation it was that sense of community that was very prominent. And everybody knew everybody. You know everybody knew everybody in those little schools. And the teacher knew who your parents were, and the parents knew who the teacher was, so like you said, Evelyn, that communication was ever flowing. It was limited in the sense that you only knew the people in your community, but it was also nurturing, very nurturing. And you'd get nurtured all the way from your house to school, because there are other people who lived in that community that you would be passing by.

**Evelyn:** I think when we were talking about education we're talking about moving into a larger perspective, 1965, integrating schools and so forth, so also at the same time we moved away from...we moved to an individualism, and that was one of the...as opposed to what is good for the...the common good.

**Laura:** You know I've been told since I've been teaching that integration messed stuff up for us. We had all the disadvantages that we had when we got all these advantages, it messed up, because I tell my children all the time, like I went to old Watson, 90 percent of the children were smart, you got doctors, lawyers, and lots of different professionals that have come out of those one or two-room schools, and some of them out of the schools since they've been integrated too, but it's just you didn't find, and I didn't find, I teach school and I've got a whole classroom, of what you call slow learners. You didn't have a whole classroom full of slow learners in the same grade when I went to school. You might could pick out three or four out of the whole grade, that might have been kind of slow, and they didn't have all this Special Ed and all this other stuff, and I been told that integration messed it up.

**Evelyn:** The down side of it. You know we were always required to be our brother's keeper, like Laura said. Yeah, when you had one or two that were slow in the classroom, the smarter ones were compelled to work with that one while the teachers worked. I mean there was no Internet, you went on the board and you showed him how to write his letters while I'm doing this with the children. And there was no response from the parents. Now if a teacher asks a student to do, the parent will come and tell you, "That's what you get paid for."

**Sarah:** [Parents now would say], "That's your job."

**John:** In order to educate our children and our race of people, we need to bring down the barriers between...among us blacks, the have and the have nots, and the attitudes of some of us that "I could care less." We need to be mindful that because of who we are and the color of our skin, we're all connected, period. And I think a goodly number of us; we've lost focus on that. We've lost focus, and that is hurting us, because right within our race there is the upper class of us, and the lower class of us, and that's a new phenomenon, because I can remember when somebody would leave home and go up North. They would get a good toe hold, and they would send a ticket back to get somebody else, and bring them there to get a job, so they could get a toe hold. Each one would grab somebody. That's why I tell the Black kids, when they talk about the Mexicans. I tell them, I say, "The Mexicans are doing nothing other than what we used to do."... We didn't mind poking 6, 8, 10 of us into an apartment, some great aunt or auntie would feed you until you could get on your feet.

**Chorus:** That's right. That's true.

**John:** That's what I mean by generational. We forgot how it is to love one another, to take care of one another.

**Sarah:** The young kids don't know about the old people.

**John:** *No they don't, because we don't tell them.*



## CHAPTER IX

### CONCLUSIONS

I use this chapter to speak to the research questions that guided this study. I also provide thoughts on further study, and offer concluding thoughts. The first research question for this study was the following: *How is education valued in each generation?*

I initially I asked all of my participants a variant of the following questions: “What did people think was a ‘good’ education for Blacks in the county at the time? What was a “good” education supposed to get you?” These questions elicited more responses about educational level and less about the purpose or value of education. Therefore, I asked a specific question about the purpose of education during the focus group.

Members of the focus group provided their views on the value of education. Brian (age 29) viewed education as “a tool that you use to give yourself and your family opportunities, opportunities for growth, opportunity to kind of improve yourself as well, and just learn more.” He also explained that education is needed to “get gainful employment and make a good living.” Darrell (age 30) agreed with Brian that education is necessary to “gain financially.” Ultimately, for Brian and Darrell, the purpose of education is to give yourself and your family opportunities.

The older participants of the focus group talked of education holistically. Education for older participants is not K-12 “schooling” but education of Black history, religion, communication, and proper socialization in the community and work environment. For example, Sarah believed education was necessary to “complete you as a person.” In addition, Evelyn (age 53) explained that one of the values of education was to know one’s history. She

also contends, “Education for us as African-Americans was not just about the books, it was about being able to fit into any situation that you were put into.” For Evelyn, part of the value of educating younger people is to “teach them the rules.” She believes that the older generation has not done this, however.

At the conclusion of the focus group, the participants discussed a list of items that incorporates their philosophy of education: (1) Church, (2) Sacrificing, (3) Commitment, (4) Conversation, and (5) Communication. Perry (2003) also proposes community and church events, which work to share the story of Black educational history with younger adults and children. She proposes the following:

Racial socialization of African-American children needs to become part of the explicit agenda of parents, community based organizations, and churches...African-American families, community-based organizations, and churches need to create a parallel system of schools for African-American children and youth, which would meet on Saturday and weekdays after school. These schools could be the context for supplementary instruction in language arts, literature, and math; the intentional passing on of the African-American philosophy of education; and the education of African-American youth about African-American studies. The scholarship in African-American studies is extensive but it almost never reaches African-American students enrolled in public or independent schools. There are also many individuals with considerable expertise in curriculum and pedagogy. If our forefathers and foremothers could organize a system of native schools and Sabbath schools, then surely we can do this and more (pp. 103-104)

The youngest generation (ages 18-21) discussed how they are seeking ways to improve their lives and financial status. Jamal (age 21) and Lewis (age 20), who have graduated high school and pursued careers in the military, discussed how they could have done better in high school if they applied themselves. The young women discussed their lack of guidance from counselors and teachers/administrators; however, they voiced their determination to pursue post-secondary education.

Ultimately, educational values are based on the lived conditions of the generation. Older people did not see a “level playing field” during their formative years, but the younger generations do not have the same vision. Older generations fought for education; buying books

and battling for excellence with “no resources” in segregated schools and fighting for their humanity and respect in desegregated schools. Not one interviewee in any generation expressed belief that education was irrelevant. I gleaned from interviews and the focus group that every participant in this study deemed attaining an education was of paramount importance.

The second research question asked the following: *How has the purpose and value of education changed (or not) over time?* Participants agreed that the value of education has moved from a “common good” to “individualism.” Their discussion aligned with Noblit and Dempsey’s (2006) value conflict about education as “oratorical” (grounded in excellence and virtue of the past) and “philosophical” (grounded in equity and individualism). Evelyn further explained that “our philosophy...was one got what they needed and then they came back to pull up [another person].”

Participants discussed “what was lost.” As Laura (age 53) asserted, “I have been told that integration messed it up. Even though we’ve got a lot of advantages that we didn’t have, you know.” During the focus group, Evelyn explained that the value of education has changed in the following ways: “[The younger generations] have not been taught how important education is, nor have they been taught what education is. See a lot of them just think it’s the book. But, it involves your community. It involves your church. It involves activities outside of church.” In short, for Evelyn, the younger generation is getting “schooling” but not the “education” afforded to older generations (Shujaa, 1994). The older generation saw education as a holistic endeavor (strong emphasis on learning in the church and the community). For the younger generations, however, education is “a tool for gainful employment”, a way to ensure that your immediate family is taken care of.

The third research question is the following: *How are the generations’ lived experiences different?* As I discussed in Chapters Eight (Table 2), there are different

generational experiences, exemplified in participants' community memories, school memories, and their journey since high school. Participants (ages 45 and older) recounted Nottoway's bustling towns, in addition to activism by the NAACP and community, which encompassed church and family. As Sarah (age 65) explained, "Where you lived in the county made a difference." For many in the "country" church was the center of their social universe.

Participants (ages 45 and older) also discussed cleanliness and the upkeep of segregated, Black one- and two-room school houses. They discussed "dressing for success" and the necessity of taking pride in what you had. Evelyn attended the previously segregated White school during Freedom of Choice. She talked about her experiences with Freedom of Choice in chapter five. She refers to her experience at Crewe High School as abuse. She commented, "I mean we were abused. I mean really abused, like switching and changing our grades."

During the interview, she explained, "I had the best of both worlds in that I knew who I was, and whose I was, before I went to the integrated schools. And then when I went there, I always had a place to go back to...I had support. I had that community." The participants of the focus group readily agreed that this insular, supportive community no longer exists for Black students in Nottoway County.

Participants who are 18-21 years old do not discuss the support of the community at-large. There is a paucity of the "counternarratives about their intellectual capacities" (Perry, 2003, p. 96). Only Michelle, who is the only 18-21 year old currently in a four-year college, discussed how her parents presented the counternarrative necessary for her to be successful. She explained:

Well, I always felt like I was expected to go to school; make good grades; at least try. And, I felt like I was expected to go to college, even though my parents would never say it. I felt like that is what they expected me to do. My parents went to a 2-year college, and they got their associates degree. But, I think, it's like I always expected that they felt they wanted me to go to a 4-year college; they wanted me to do good; they wanted me to make sure I get the highest grades I could in school, and stuff like that.

My mom, I think she's trying to push me to get my master's. She has been talking about it a lot lately. [MS is interested in it and plans to stay in Sociology]. I am thinking about just going into social work - maybe not dealing with kids and family - but maybe like my cousin is...it's like she helps people to see if they qualify for different programs like food stamps and stuff like that. I like doing that or even get a job at like the workforce place; just helping people get jobs. I think I want to do something like that.

Michelle said that her influence to go to college and possibly graduate school "was basically just family." She also shared what her parents said a good education would get you.

My parents always complain about their jobs; about how they have to take so much crap off of people and all this other stuff. They say, "I want you to go to school and do this so you can get a job, and you don't have to take the crap that I take. You have the potential to be a boss, don't sit there and have to be bossed by somebody else or deal with people that you don't like just because you have to."

Darrell explained that the community has changed as well. He explained, "And I think community has changed where it's not just confined to African-Americans or just whites or what have you. It's everybody, altogether, but I think that also has caused, like you said individualism. Because a lot of people refuse to conform to other communities to have a whole community...it's no longer what's good for the community, but what's good for me." Darrell also believes current students are more accepting of "other races."

The final research question was the following: ***How have past educational experiences affected participants' current life experiences?*** Participants (age 45 and older) questioned "what was lost" during desegregation both in individual interviews and the focus group. They lamented about changes in the community and schools, and questioned the price paid for desegregation. In addition, participants who are currently educators/administrators in schools have used their past educational experiences to inform their present careers. John explained that his teaching philosophy and professional dress was influenced by past teachers. He recounts: The teachers cared then, and maybe that's why I care even in my teaching assignments. That somebody cared enough about me, and [I] pass it on."

Evelyn stated that she learned sacrifice during her educational experiences and she continues to use that concept in her daily life. She explained, “It wasn’t just a sacrifice for family. It was a sacrifice for whoever was in the community trying to do something... So many people were good to me [while I was in school], so I pass it down.” In addition, Brian uses his educational and community experiences to guide current Black high school student on how to effectively communicate with teachers and administrators.

Participants also discussed how teachers and past educational experiences influenced their current careers and goals. Joanne (age 59) discussed how her teacher encouraged her to go to business school and she still communicates with her teacher today. For John, the ridicule and awkwardness that he felt as a child for dreaming bolstered his determination to succeed and achieve his dreams. Both he and Debra were dreamers and those dreams led them away from Nottoway County. They have also influenced their present life experiences and views of Nottoway as a child and as an adult.

Past educational experiences have also allowed older participants’ to question the quandary in which we find ourselves in Black education. Evelyn asserts, “And if you look in our schools, with the history and stuff that we receive the other people’s history is continuing to be told. So ours is the only one that’s not being told. I think the other thing too is that for too long, we have depended on other people to educate our children, whereas we need to be the educators.” Her statement harkens back to the discussion in Shujaa (1994; 1996) and Perry (2003).

During the focus group, older participants discussed the holistic education they received from family, community, and the church. They discussed the way the younger generation acts in school and the way they dress. One of the participants did not understand how a Black school student could not know that it is inappropriate to be disrespectful to a teacher even when you

believe s/he made the first offense. For her, this was “common sense.” As the discussion evolved, participants decided this was “taught sense” from family and community. They concluded that this “taught sense” has allowed them to navigate successfully in the world.

### **Further Research**

One of my continuing thoughts during this dissertation process was reciprocity. As I explained in Chapter Three, reciprocity can be the therapeutic effect of an interview process. It can also be the contribution of this research in the experiences of Black Americans in education. In addition, I propose further research, which is not only liberatory, but also furthers reciprocity for this community.

I want to reiterate Clark’s (2002) notion of oral history as a liberatory exercise, especially her discussion that cultural community development is linked to oral history. My goal is to get excerpts from summaries and create a performance of the data as I and other graduate students did with Dr. Mary Stone Hanley (Hanley, Beverly, Pyne, Joyner, & Powers, 2006). This collaborative study presented positive and negative experiences of schooling of 12 individuals who represented a spectrum of race, ethnicity, age, regionality, social class, and immigrant experience. The research was an effort to learn about using arts-based educational research in performance and to inform non-academics about educational research that has impact on their lives. For this further research, I want the participants to be portrayed by teenage actors for three reasons: (1) they will learn the history of Black education in Nottoway County as they read transcripts and/or narratives of older participants, and (2) a performance will continue the intergenerational dialogue as the students “communicate” with the text and with me. I also intend to document this process so that other communities and/or researchers follow similar techniques.

In addition, further studies should investigate family educational trajectories similar to Hughes (2006) in order to understand family pedagogies by interviewing grandparents, parents/guardians, and high school or middle school students. I also think further study in the Southside Virginia community is necessary. For example, Prince Edward County Virginia, which borders Nottoway to the west, closed its schools for five years (1959-1965) instead of undergoing mandatory desegregation (Smith, 1965; Turner, 2001). This allows one to advocate for policy/political issues that will have continual effects for families.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Hughes (2006) explains the pedagogy of hope and struggle for Black families. He remarks,

[Pedagogy] is present in narratives of hope, struggle, and in narration itself. Experiences of struggle and hope are conveyed pedagogically through a particular narration reflecting intent, and cultural specificity. Narratives of struggle cannot sustain black families continuing formal education without narratives of hope, and so a pedagogical move is again made by black families to provide sustainability to the struggle for adequate education opportunities..." (p. 139).

He further explains that this pedagogy occurs with four possible conditions:

1. Intergenerational pedagogy in family and community.
2. Families learning and relearning the pedagogy and relaying it.
3. Stories shared with the researcher by families and decisions they made about what information to share is pedagogical
4. Researchers' analysis and their pedagogical narratives that [s/he] feels obligated to share. (p. 140).

I want to concentrate on the first two conditions in the subsequent paragraphs.

In a perpetually racist society, I do not believe that we can solely rely on schools to pay the debt owed to Black students and families (Ladson-Billings, 2006). This research affirms Ladson-Billings assertion of historical debt. Participants talked about the lack of resources and the need to work on farms in order to provide for families. In addition, participants in the younger generations discuss disconnections they felt with teachers and administrators and this



disconnection began with the stories of those participants who underwent Freedom of Choice and desegregation.

I believe that the intergenerational pedagogy of struggle and hope is not being passed on to the 18-21 year olds I interviewed in many ways. For many, this struggle is over or it is at best an individual journey. Overt racism, as Hughes (2006) suggests has given way to symbolic violence, and this violence is not named. Generational dialogues are needed at a time when community is disintegrating. Though my optimism is waning, I do see myself as a conduit for the conversations/dialogues to occur. The dialogues are needed to motivate students not only academically but also personally.

I have been wrestling with questions since leaving the field and engaging in the writing process. Hughes (2006) and authors such as Anderson (2004) and Perry (2003) say that Black people in general valued education because it was a way for liberation. Hughes (2006) posits it in terms of pedagogy of hope tempered with pedagogy of struggle. One of the participants, Hazel, explained:

[Desegregation times were] trying when everything was getting out of control. I don't know whether economics had something to do with it too. Parents having to work and they're not there for the kids, and not stressing the importance of education. When I was coming along they expressed the importance of education. But see the more you get the less you stress the importance of education. And kids think everything is easy, but they don't understand the struggle that the parents had to get certain things. So now society has set up everything where oh, you give your kids this, that, and that, and they think it's just easy, but it has not been easy. Everything...we are now is because of what people had to go through you know to push this. Like the NAACP with the boycott. If it wasn't for all of that, who knows what life would be right now.

Are we suggesting that Black people must have a sense of that struggle to succeed? I even wrote in my notes: "I guess I am wondering if there is no pedagogy of struggle, than what is our motivation?" What is the future of civil rights? As Hughes (2006) suggested, there must be new pedagogies. He asks, "What is to be inherently on our next pedagogical agenda, given all that has transpired in the last fifty years?" (p. 171). In addition, Hughes asserted, "...education

is institutional racialization as symbolic violence in area schools suggests that such racism and enhanced illusionary tactics will likely reproduce Black educational struggles” (p. 171). In fact, the 18-21 year olds in my study find that there is no structural racism, only the individual acts of “some” people. This unrecognized institutional racism stymies the pedagogy of struggle, which needs to be identified.

This act of struggle against endemic racism is disappearing with time. Therefore, for the younger generation, what is their struggle? This may translate to what is their motivation? But, does the subaltern need a struggle to succeed? I do not think so, but I do believe that many subalterns (which include myself) use this struggle as our barometer, our walking stick – which guides us but also protects us from impending danger.

The levels of interaction between Black and White students and society in Nottoway are changing. Though I note the resegregation of Nottoway Schools based on tracking, socially there is more interaction. Two of my participants are married to White women and many of the participants work in the community in “racial mending” coalitions. Many Whites may not view themselves as racists, but have targeted perceptions of “those” Black people. In short, the notion of institutionalized racism, for many, is dead.

As we encounter new modus operandi, how do we ascertain what to do? I still contend that there is a collective struggle for educational equity for Black students. My question is what model should we use as the Philosophy of Education espoused so eloquently by Perry (2003) – “freedom of literacy and literacy for freedom, racial uplift, citizenship, and leadership” (p. 6) – has seemingly changed? This must be the perpetual Black generational dialogue.

## Appendix A

### Tentative Letter of Invitation

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Monifa Green Beverly and I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill working under the direction of Dr. George Noblit. As partial fulfillment of the doctoral requirements, I am planning to conduct a study on the perspectives of Black residents of your county regarding their educational experiences. Your participation in this study is being requested because of your experience with the schools in your county. \_\_\_\_\_ has recommended you as a participant for this study and has given me your contact information. \_\_\_\_\_ has also allowed me to share that he/she was the person who recommended you as a potential participant of this study.

Participation in this study will require approximately two-three hours of your time. There will be one 90-minute interview and an additional hour for a focus group (if you wish to participate). With your permission, the interview will be taped and transcribed. To maintain confidentiality, you will not be identified by name on any tapes or in any reports. I will keep tapes and transcripts in a locked box in my home. Each participant will be offered a copy of his/her transcript and the opportunity to hear audio recordings. The participant and I will be the only people who have access to their tapes and transcripts. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be one of 20 participants.

Interviews will be arranged at a mutually agreeable location at a time of your convenience. Your name and any other information gathered for this study will remain confidential. The information you give will be used for research purposes only.

In the next week, I will be contacting you to answer any questions you might have concerning your potential participation in this study. At that time we can arrange a meeting to discuss the details of the interviews for the study. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study at any time.

I appreciate your thoughtful consideration of my request and if you agree, I look forward to your participation. If you do agree to participate in this study, I will provide you with a consent form at the beginning of our first interview session. We will have time to read and review the consent form together. If you have any questions, you can ask them then or at any time during the study. If after reading the consent form, you are still willing to participate in this study, we will both sign the consent form. I will give you a copy of this form for your records. You have the right to refuse or end participation at any time. You also have the right to ask questions that you may have or to contact my advisor.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Sincerely,

Monifa Green Beverly  
PhD Candidate in Culture, Curriculum, & Change  
School of Education  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

**Appendix B**  
**Interview Protocol**

**Segregation (Ages 55 and older)**

1. Tell me about your memories of your county as a child. Walk me through “town.”
  - a. Family
    - i. What are your memories of parents and siblings?
    - ii. Family traditions?
  - b. Community
    - i. What did the community look like and/or feel like?
    - ii. Civic and church events
2. What school(s) did you go to? What years were you in school?
3. What grade did you get to in school? What did people think was a “good” education for Blacks in the county at the time? What was a “good” education supposed to get you?
4. What are your memories from school?
  - a. Describe a day at school.
  - b. What events are memorable?
  - c. What is positive or negative?
  - d. What are some memories of peers/friends and teachers?
  - e. How would you describe parent involvement while you were in school?
5. What types of jobs did people have while you were a child/teenager? What age did people work and where did most people work (in The county or outside of the County)?
6. What have you been doing since you left school? How did you get here after leaving/finishing school? Please walk me through the process from “leaving/staying” in the county after school.
  - a. College, Work, Military
  - b. Marriage/Family
  - c. Community events
7. How would describe the county now?
  - a. Families
  - b. Community
  - c. Schools
  - d. Jobs
8. Demographic Information:
  - a. How old are you?
  - b. How would you describe your family?
  - c. What is your current career (or past career if you are retired)?

## Desegregation (Ages 45-55)

1. Tell me about your memories of your county as a child. Walk me through “town.”
  - a. Family
    - i. What are your memories of parents and siblings?
    - ii. Family traditions?
  - b. Community
    - iii. What did the community look like and/or feel like?
    - iv. Civic and church events
2. What school(s) did you go to? What years were you in school?
3. What grade did you get to in school? What did people think was a “good” education for Blacks in the county at the time? What was a “good” education supposed to get you?
4. What are your memories from school?
  - a. Describe a day at school.
  - b. What events are memorable?
  - c. What is positive or negative?
  - d. What are some memories of peers/friends and teachers?
  - e. How would you describe parent involvement while you were in school?
5. Talk about what happened during Freedom of Choice and/or mandatory desegregation of Blacks and Whites into The county High School?
6. What did Freedom of Choice and/or mandatory desegregation mean to you and your family and how did it affect your lives?
7. Can you tell me about the struggle as schools moved from Black schools to integrated schools?
8. Was there a difference in your relationship (experiences) with school when it was all Black and then when it was desegregated?
9. What types of jobs did people have while you were a child/teenager? What age did people work and where did most people work (in the county or outside of the county)?
10. What have you been doing since you left school? How did you get here after leaving/finishing school? Please walk me through the process from “leaving/staying” in the county after school.
  - a. College, Work, Military
  - b. Marriage/Family
  - c. Community events
11. How would describe the county now?
  - a. Families
  - b. Community
  - c. Schools

d. Jobs

12. Demographic Information:

- a. How old are you?
- b. How would you describe your family?
- c. What is your current career (or past career if you are retired)?

### Adults (Ages 25-35)

1. Tell me about your memories of your county as a child. Walk me through “town.”
  - a. Family
    - i. What are your memories of parents and siblings?
    - ii. Family traditions?
  - b. Community
    - iii. What did the community look like and/or feel like?
    - iv. Civic and church events
2. What school(s) did you go to? What years were you in school?
3. What grade did you get to in school? What did people think was a “good” education for Blacks in the county at the time? What was a “good” education supposed to get you?
4. What are your memories from school?
  - a. Describe a day at school.
  - b. What events are memorable?
  - c. What is positive or negative?
  - d. What are some memories of peers/friends and teachers?
  - e. How would you describe parent involvement while you were in school?
5. What types of jobs did people have while you were a child/teenager? What age did people work and where did most people work (in the county or outside of the county)?
6. What have you been doing since you left school? How did you get here after leaving/finishing school? Please walk me through the process from “leaving/staying” in the county after school.
  - a. College, Work, Military
  - b. Marriage/Family
  - c. Community events
7. How would describe the county now?
  - a. Families
  - b. Community
  - c. Schools
  - d. Jobs
8. Demographic Information:
  - a. How old are you?
  - b. How would you describe your family?
  - c. What is your current career?

### Adults (Ages 18-21)

1. Tell me about your memories of your county as a child. Walk me through “town.”
  - c. Family
    - i. What are your memories of parents and siblings?
    - ii. Family traditions?
  - d. Community
    - i. What did the community look like and/or feel like?
    - ii. Civic and church events
2. What school(s) did you go to? What years were you in school?
3. What grade did you get to in school? What did people think was a “good” education for Blacks in the county at the time? What was a “good” education supposed to get you?
4. What are your memories from school?
  - a. Describe a day at school.
  - b. What events are memorable?
  - c. What is positive or negative?
  - d. What are some memories of peers/friends and teachers?
  - e. How would you describe parent involvement while you were in school?
5. What types of jobs did people have while you were a child/teenager? What age did people work and where did most people work (in the county or outside of the County)?
6. What have you been doing since you left school? How did you get here after leaving/finishing school? Please walk me through the process from “leaving/staying” in the county after school.
  - a. College, Work, Military
  - b. Marriage/Family
  - c. Community events
7. How would describe the county now?
  - a. Families
  - b. Community
  - c. Schools
  - d. Jobs
8. Demographic Information:
  - a. How old are you?
  - b. How would you describe your family?
  - c. What is your current career?



**Appendix C**  
**Telephone Script for Follow-Up Contact**

Hello, my name is Monifa Green Beverly. I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I am conducting a study about the perspectives of Black residents of your county regarding their educational experiences.

This is a follow-up call to the letter of invitation that I sent you. I sent the letter because \_\_\_\_\_ recommended you as a participant for this study and has given me your contact information. \_\_\_\_\_ has also allowed me to share that he/she was the person who recommended you as a potential participant of this study. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. This means that you do not have to participate in this study unless you want to.

I estimate that approximately 20 participants will enroll in this study. You will be asked to complete a 90-minute interview and an additional hour for a focus group (if you wish to participate).

Would you be willing to be in this study and be interviewed about your educational experiences?

**If NO:** Thank you for your time. I hope you have a good day/night. Goodbye.

**If YES:** Good. Our interview can be arranged at an agreeable location at a time of your convenience. Your name and any other information gathered for this study will remain confidential. The information you give will be used for educational purposes only.

What would be a good day/time for us to meet? Where would you like to meet?

I will provide you with a consent form at the beginning of our interview session. We will have time to read and review the consent form together. If you have any questions, you can ask them then or at any time during the study. If after reading the consent form, you are still willing to participate in this study, we will both sign the consent form. I will give you a copy of this form for your records. You have the right to refuse or end participation at any time.

You can also call my advisor, Dr. George Noblit at 919-962-2513 with questions about the research study. All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to [IRB\\_subjects@unc.edu](mailto:IRB_subjects@unc.edu).

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