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**The Legacy of African-American Teachers in Jim Crow
Mississippi**

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**The Legacy of African-American Teachers in Jim
Crow Mississippi**

by

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Report

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I dedicate this report to the countless African American teachers and students across the state of Mississippi who daily “make a way out of no way” to equip themselves with the tools they need to change their world.

Your work is revolutionary.

The Legacy of African-American Teachers in Jim Crow Mississippi

by

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

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This study examines the educational philosophies and classroom practices of African American teachers in Mississippi prior to desegregation. The author collected the oral histories of fifteen former teachers and students from rural and urban districts across the state of Mississippi. Their responses were analyzed through the lenses of womanist pedagogy, educational capital, and the ideals of prominent early 20th century African American education scholars. In many ways, the archetypes for African American set by famous intellectuals were rarely met within the schools represented in this study. The responses of the participants, however, revealed a number of ways in which teachers created positive learning environments for their students despite the lack of resources and the hostile environments in which they taught.

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Introduction

The 1954 Supreme Court ruling in the *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* case decided that the maintenance of a racially segregated school system in the United States was “inherently unequal.” The court determined that segregated schooling violated the 14th amendment of the Constitution by not providing “equal protection of the law” for African American and other minority students. One impetus for the appeal for integration as a key civil right was the stark inequality in funding and teacher pay in African American schools as compared to White schools. By integrating, many assumed that all children, regardless of race, would have access to a quality education. However, nearly 50 years after the mass effort to integrate public schools, inequities between African American and white students persist.

With segregated schools having been determined to be inferior due to their lack of resources and the negative psychological effect this had on African American students’ self perceptions, questions arose as to how those schools operated and how African American teachers and students remained motivated to obtain an education despite the odds against them were (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1997, 2002, 2005; Siddle-Walker, 1996; Kelly, 2010; Foster, 1997; Polidore, 2010; Stewart, 2013). Few scholars have addressed these questions, and even among those who have revisited the learning environments created in segregated schools by African American teachers even fewer have drawn a connection between *de jure* segregated schools of the 20th century and predominantly African American, *or de facto*, segregated schools today. Although countless scholars address the contemporary issue of providing an adequate education for African American students, few have looked to the

past to uncover the philosophical motivations and pedagogical techniques used by African American teachers in segregated schools. The erasure of the voices of former African American teachers is compounded by the dearth of scholarly research on the issues facing African American students in the contemporary rural American South.

Prior to the 1954 Supreme Court mandate to desegregate schools, scholarly conversations on the topic of African American education centered around segregated schools in the rural and urban American South. However, after the national attempt to integrate schools, the narrative around African American schooling focused on northern post-industrial urban centers. This shift occurred despite the large concentration of African Americans who historically have resided in the South, and Deep South. As Morris & Monroe (2009) point out, African Americans make up 12% of the United State population; of that number 47% live in ten states that make up the South (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia). Among those states, Mississippi and South Carolina have state populations that are approximately 40% African American. As of 2010, African American made up 79% of the population in Jackson, MS.

Given its current demographics, and its history, Mississippi is an ideal site to study African American education. Mississippi has not only had a significant African American population since Reconstruction, it currently boasts one of the largest concentrations of African American elected officials, administrators, and teachers (25%). Unfortunately, this state is also characterized by its legacy of school segregation, re-segregation, poverty, and poor academic performance (Stedrack, 2014).

The following study records the educational philosophies, pedagogy, teaching practices, and educational experiences of African American teachers and students who taught and learned in segregated schools in Mississippi. I conducted personal interviews with former African American teachers and with students who attended and taught in segregated schools in East Mississippi prior to 1970. In the following section, I review the educational philosophies of prominent early 20th century African American scholars. Scholars who left extensive documentation revealing their beliefs on the how African American students should be educated include W.E.B. Dubois, Anna Julia Cooper, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Booker T. Washington, and Carter G. Woodson. Other, scholars and institution builders who left a less substantial collection of writings are also included in the overview. I consider texts on African American educators from the dawn of the 20th century and how their pedagogy may have been put the ideologies of prominent educational scholars into practice.

While a number of scholars have brought attention to the caring and nurturing environments created by African American teachers across the segregated South (Walker, 1996; Fairclough, 2007; Foster, 1997; McCluskey, 2014; Casey, 1993 etc.), few focus on African American teachers in the state of Mississippi. A study of Mississippi's educational past would provide the historical context within which to study the current state of African American education in Mississippi.

Historical Overview of African American Education in the South

Public school systems were introduced in the South during Reconstruction. Prior to the abolition of slavery, African American bondsmen and women were denied, de jure

or de facto, the opportunity to learn to read and write. Despite clandestine efforts among individuals on some plantations, upon emancipation the majority of formerly enslaved Africans were illiterate. As Thomas Webber (1978) points out, this should not discount the informal education that took place within the slave quarters, which taught children the skills needed to survive and grow under the harsh reality of white supremacy. Webber's work *Deep Like the Rivers: Education in the Slave Quarter, 1831-1865*, provides an overview of some of the valuable lessons taught to African American children by their mothers, fathers, grandparents, community members, preachers, siblings, and friends.

Despite planters' efforts to instill in enslaved children a conception of themselves as inferior to Euro-Americans and a feeling of complacency with their position as slaves, young African Americans received an alternative message within the quarters (Webber, 1978, pg. 153). Through familial ties, religious philosophy, church services, song, dance, and story telling young slaves were reminded of their humanity and superior morality compared to the planter class (Webber, 1978, pg. 91). Not only did enslaved mothers, fathers, grandparents, preachers, and older siblings teach young slaves basic skills pertaining to plantation labor and the upkeep of their own homes, they also taught them the value of remaining loyal to the slave community and approaching whites with caution. While plantation life as a system worked against the cultivation of familial and community ties among African bondsmen, resistant efforts of love and vows of loyalty and protection within the quarters enhanced the likelihood of survival.

Upon emancipation, many African Americans endeavored to become literate in addition to trying to locate family members and navigate the process of forming

communities as free people of color (Anderson, 1988). Northern missionaries addressed the issue of illiteracy through the establishment of schools that educated young and old alike. However, the goal of education would extend beyond the acquisition of literacy at the conclusion of Reconstruction and the dawn of the 20th century. Parents, educators, elected officials, and white northern philanthropists began to consider the question of African Americans career orientation and training. James Anderson's (1988) work on the history of the education of African American students from Reconstruction to the Great Depression outlines the debates that existed over which educational philosophy should drive the curriculum provided for African American students and the efforts to educate a teaching force capable of preparing students to enter the professions and occupations available to them. He discusses the various efforts to establish industrial, liberal arts, common, and normal schools as well as the motivations behind each. In addition to Booker T. Washington and W.E.B Dubois, prominent 20th Century African American scholars like Anna Julia Cooper, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Carter G. Washington and other had their own opinions on what African American students should be taught.

Chapter 1: Educational Philosophy of Early 20th African American Scholars

Education in Industrial, Agricultural, and Domestic Trades

Booker T. Washington was deemed the “Wizard of Tuskegee” for his ability to “maneuver against his white and black enemies, both those who defended white supremacy and those who thought [he] was too conservative” (Harlan, 1983, pg. viii). He was the infamous African American leader of the industrial education movement. He emphasized “self-help through agricultural and industrial/vocational training and development” (Dunn, 1993, pg. 27). The scholars cited label Washington as an accommodationist when it came to his tactics regarding the improvement of African American lives. Washington felt that in the early 20th century, African Americans had little choice but to work within the system of racial segregation and thus placed an emphasis on the building of African American communities by using the occupations available to them at the time: industry, agriculture, and domestic service. While his counterparts criticized Washington for not attempting to challenge the racially oppressive system that characterized American society, certain aspects of his philosophy should be lauded. Washington believed that a more pragmatic and commonsensical approach should be taken to elevate the Black race (Dunn, 1993). He was aware of the limited opportunities available to African Americans and sought to establish a stable economic foundation for Blacks before seeking social and civic rights.

James Anderson’s (1988) third chapter outlines brilliantly the motivations behind

the push for an industrial/domestic curriculum among Northern philanthropists: the preservation of white supremacy and the cultivation of a qualified workforce for industry and agriculture (Anderson, 1988). What is intriguing is the amount of control that Northern white philanthropists had over the education of African American students in the South, mostly due to their financial support and investment. In many cases, as Anderson points out, many private African American schools would petition for funds from wealthy Northern philanthropists under the guise that they would implement an industrial heavy curriculum, when in reality they would provide more of a liberal arts education (Anderson, 1988). One such educational visionary who adhered to an industrial/domestic curriculum but found ways to incorporate liberal arts courses was Nannie Helen Burroughs.

Nannie Helen Burroughs (1883-1961) was the founder of the National Training School for Women and Girls in Washington D.C. Burroughs was a follower of Booker T. Washington and the Tuskegee Machine (Bair, 2008). She adhered to a belief in not only self-help, but also racial pride. The purpose of the National Training School for Women and Girls (NTS) was to instill in African American women a level of pride not only in their race and gender, but their work as well. For the majority of Black women in urban centers across the North and South, domestic work was one of the few occupational options available. Burroughs, through her training school, endeavored to “[negate] images of African-American working women as ‘unclean’ and ‘unrefined’” (Wolcott, 1997, pg. 88). Burroughs was criticized for offering courses in the improvement of domestic service, an occupation that many women were trying to educate themselves out of. But Burroughs,

like Booker T. Washington, was aware that for working class African American women, domestic work was not only the most available occupation but a skill that was essential to the maintenance of a *proper home* as defined by Victorian Era ideals (Wolcott, 1997).

Education in Liberal Arts and the Classics

W.E.B. Dubois is often credited with being a staunch supporter of a Liberal Arts curriculum that included courses in the classics and prepared a selection of the African American student population (Talented Tenth) to be the leaders of the race (Dubois, 1903). Recent scholarship however has reexamined the life and work of W.E.B. Dubois and found that his views were not as polarizing as they have appeared to be. Alridge (1999) points out the Dubois' consideration of both a liberal arts and vocational curriculum in what he calls a "Broad-based education". According to Alridge (1999):

“.....[Dubois] began advocating more comprehensive versions of classical education and integrated a technologically advanced level of vocational training into his educational strategy for African Americans. Together, classical and vocational education, Dubois believed should expand to encompass the ideals of humanistic education as well as the processes of work and advance technical and industrial techniques.”

(Alridge, 1999, pg. 191)

However, in Dubois' most renown work *The Souls Black Folk* (1903), he stresses the necessity of an education that encourages critical thought, and not simply labor and economic gain. He equates critical thought with the acquisition of humanity when he asserts "to make men, we must have ideals, broad, pure, and inspiring ends of living

(Dubois, 1903, pg. 66). It would appear that a particular curriculum was less important to Dubois than the training of students who were able to think.

The esteemed pioneer in Black Feminism and education, Dr. Anna Julia Cooper, was another African American scholar who was a believer in the transformational effect that a classical education could provide for the Black community. Cooper, an Oberlin College graduate, was a 20th century administrator and educator at the prestigious Paul Lawrence Dunbar High School (formerly the M. Street School) in Washington D.C. (Stewart, 2013). Cooper herself received an extensive education in the classics both at St. Augustine School and Oberlin College. Like Dubois, she did not negate the benefits of a vocational education but “opposed industrial education as the dominant or only type of education” (Giles, 2008, pg. 625). Her devotion to liberal arts education, however, was evident in the integral role that she played in assisting some of her students at Dunbar High School in getting accepted to Ivy League institutions.

African American Centered Curriculum

Foundational scholar in African American history and education, Carter G. Woodson, was a staunch advocate of the inclusion of African and African American history in the curriculum taught in segregated school. His seminal work, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, highlighted the importance of achieving the *right* kind of education for the African American, one that would aid in the uplift of the race in general, not simply help a few individuals integrate spaces where they are deemed inferior. He advocated for an education that taught not only African and African American history, but also one that

endeavored to address and solve issues that plagued the Black community. He went so far as to say that an education that does not aim to uplift the race is all “but worthless” (Woodson, pg. 9, 1933), no matter how prestigious the institution.

Like Carter G. Woodson, W.E.B Dubois, espoused a belief in the necessity of a curriculum that centered the experience of the descendants of enslaved Africans in America. For Dubois, an African American centered curriculum would require that students be immersed in an educational environment that allows them to connect to their African historical roots as well as the “strengths of their lived experience in the Western society” (Aldridge, 1999, pg. 188). In addition to encouraging the building up of African American institutions through the strengthening of communal ties (Dubois, 1912), an African American centered curriculum could provide a remedy for the psychological turmoil caused by what Dubois calls “double consciousness” (Dubois, 1903). Double consciousness is “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (Dubois, 1903, pg. 3). Dubois claims that the spiritual goal of the American Negro is to “merge his double self into a better and truer self” (Dubois, pg. 3, 1903), however, “in this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both Negro and an American” (Dubois, 1903, pg. 3). An African American centered curriculum would allow the Black

student to see his or her self through the lens of their own community's' historical struggles and triumphs in American society.

Nannie Helen Burroughs also incorporated African American history into the curriculum taught at the National Training School. Burroughs, inspired by Woodson establishment of Negro History Week and the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASAALH), not only offered courses in Black History, but infused this legacy into her other courses. She also encouraged her students to interact with this information by hosting programs and performances' that allowed them to memorize speeches made by famous African Americans (Bair, 2008). As Bair (2008) points out, "... the primary goal of the Black history program at the NTS was to give students the ability to confront the worst forms of bigotry without losing their identity or their dignity." (Bair, 2008, pg. 24). Burroughs, being a woman very much concerned about not only African American students but also the race as a whole, founded the International Council of Women of the Darker Races (Barne, 1978). This organization, like ASAALH, sought to unearth African American roots and history. Other school founders Charlotte Hawkins Brown and Mary McCleod Bethune joined her organization as well.

Social Graces

Another form of education went beyond preparation for a particular occupation. African American educator, Charlotte Hawkins Brown, founder of Palmer Memorial Institute in North Carolina (1902), emphasized training in the social graces. According to Ms. Hawkins-Brown "in order for the Negro to get even half the recognition which he

may deserve, he must be even more gracious than others, more cultured, more considerate, more observant of the little courtesies and social finesse if he would gain a decent place in the sun” (McCluskey, 2014, pg. 75). In fact, according to some of her former students, social graces took precedence over the traditional liberal arts education offered at Palmer. Charlotte Hawkins Brown taught her students the proper way to dress, hold conversation, and dine. While her views may be classified among other accommodationist like Booker T. Washington, she believed in the intellectual potential of all of her students, but was aware of the social world in which they lived, a world that considered the Negro to be socially inferior and uncultured: Palmer Memorial Institute sought to dispel this myth.

Racial Uplift through Education

All of the educational scholars discussed thus far, and arguably most educators of the time, adhered to a philosophy of racial uplift. They believed that through either a liberal arts, vocational, or common school curriculum that the social and economic position of the African American national community would be elevated. W.E.B. Dubois and Anna Julia Cooper believed that it was through the training of a Talented Tenth that leaders would emerge to guide the race to social equality and justice (Johnson, 2000; Dubois, 1903). This group would be encouraged to attend post-secondary and graduate school and be immersed in liberal arts curriculum that would permit them to critically challenge the Western racial paradigm (Johnson, 2000). Booker T. Washington, on the other hand, believed elevating the race would require the establishment of a strong

economic foundation through vocational training (Dunn, 1993; Harlan, 1983). Booker T. Washington's protégé, Nannie Helen Burroughs, believed strongly in vocational training, but did not place an emphasis on financial and capital gain. Burroughs, being advocate for the Black working class, "...scorned the social climbing of the elite African Americans and sought to emphasize the value of hard work and strong families" (Wolcott, 1997, pg. 89). For Burroughs, education was not an avenue to be used to flee wage labor, but a way to improve the occupations that African Americans were currently working in (Wolcott, 1997).

Class and Gender: Who Should Be Taught What

Though all of the educational theorists discussed thus far were dedicated to the uplift of the African American community as a whole, their individual philosophies catered to specific facets of this community in the 20th century. The most obvious distinction was the division of curriculum according to class. The ideology of racial uplift, or "lifting as we climb", among many of the scholars required that a certain learned faction of the African American community assist in the elevation of the race by taking the religious and intellectual reins. W.E.B. Dubois' philosophy, discussed previously, embodies this ideal. Though he believed in the importance of vocational education (Aldridge, 1999), he still believed that a portion of the African American student body should follow a curriculum track that would foster "...intelligence, broad sympathy, knowledge of the world that was and is, and of the relation of men to it..." (Dubois, 1903, pg. 33). This group would be the schoolteachers, college professors, preachers, entrepreneurs, lawyers, doctors, etc. By virtue of their education and professional status, this group would not only be the leaders

of the race, but would make of the bulk of the Black middle class. Anna Julia Cooper also ascribed to the “Talented Tenth” ideology, she also argued for “women’s full inclusion in educational settings and processes” (Giles, 2006, pg. 626). She made it her life’s work to advocate for the inclusion of African American women in the effort to uplift the race through education.

The philosophy of Nannie Helen Burroughs and Booker T. Washington centered around the experiences of the working class. As a pragmatist, Booker T. Washington was aware of the occupations available to Blacks and chose to work within these vocational occupations to uplift the race. But as W.E.B Dubois (1903) noted, vocational education and the Tuskegee Machine would be impossible to maintain had it not been for men and women with degrees in higher education that taught these courses. Nannie Helen Burroughs, like Booker T. Washington, focused less on social climbing and more on the occupations available to urban African Americans. Burroughs however focused on bringing dignity to the domestic work of African American women through her training school in Washington D.C. In addition to offering courses that enhanced the skills required in domestic work, Burroughs placed an emphasis on “sexual restraint and morality” in order to resist the “labeling African American women as sexualized and immoral subjects” (Wolcott, 1997, pg. 91).

Another key leader in African American education and champion of early childhood education was Lucy Craft Laney. Laney was dedicated to the training and education of young African American women in the South. She was the founder of Haines Institute in Augusta, GA. Her vision for the school not only included a culmination of

liberal arts and vocational training, but efforts to “dispel notions of black inferiority, especially pervasive myths about black women being incapable of teaching black children” (McCluskey, 2014, pg. 39). She adhered to Victorian ideals of motherhood, piety, morality, and the integral role of woman in improving life in the Black home. She, however, did not believe that women’s sphere of influence should not be confined to the home. Laney promoted the involvement of women in institution building and community activism; she believed the “women should enter every field of human endeavor ‘without trepidation’” (McCluskey, 2014, pg. 21).

Chapter 2: African American Women in Education

This analysis shows that African American women scholars and educators played an integral role in not only the theorization of African American education but in creating institutions that put their ideas into practice. While many focus on Booker T. Washington and Tuskegee, few are familiar with the work of his colleagues Nannie Helen Burroughs and Lucy Craft Laney at the National Training School and Haines Institute. While most can summarize the philosophy of W.E.B. Dubois, few consider the dedication of Anna Julia Cooper to the idea of the Talented Tenth and the promise of a liberal arts education.

Club Women and African American Education

African American women scholars and educators played a significant role in the development of African American education. Whether they fostered a belief in vocational or liberal arts training for the working or middle classes, women like Nannie Helen Burroughs, Charlotte Hawkins Brown, Anna Julia Cooper, and others fought for educational equality for African American students broadly and African American girls and women specifically. Many of the women who founded and lead private and public schools for Black students were connected through a network of clubs and organizations formed by educated Black women for the purpose of elevating the race. Anna Julia Cooper, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Charlotte Hawkins Brown, Lucy Craft Laney (founder of Haines Institute in August, GA), Mary McCleod Bethune (co-founder of Bethune Cookman College in Daytona Beach, FL), and others were all “clubwomen” who were members of various organizations like the National Council of Negro Women and the National Association of Colored Women. It was this work that allowed them to not only

impact the lives of African American students, but the African American community as well.

Anna Julia Cooper, Nannie Helen Burroughs, and other Black clubwomen used the feminized profession of teaching (as well as nursing and social work) to uplift the race by simultaneously combatting anti-black racism and sexism (Shaw, 1996). As Johnson (2000) put it, these women were uniquely positioned within this “female sphere of influence to foster a definition of education as a cornerstone of racial uplift, community development and institutional transformation” (pg. 160). While intra-racial and inter-racial gender discrimination have relegated African American women to professions most closely associated with domesticity, many used these positions to elevate the race.

As Black women stood at the intersection of two oppressed groups, their relegation to a few feminized professions can cause one to view these educators as only victims of racial and gender oppression. While this is an accurate conclusion, in some ways it does not embody the attitude that these women approached their very important work with. As Shaw (1996) points out, not only was the route to higher education an escape from the sexual exploitation that plagued domestic and agricultural workers, but it was an essential tool to be used to elevate the status of their communities. Due to 20th century gender restrictions, Black women were responsible for the cultivations of their homes while simultaneously feeling compelled to advance the cause of civil rights for their race. By being uniquely positioned at the helm of both the public and private spheres of the African American community, professional Black women were able to incorporate the resources of the home, the school, the church, and the community and provide a unique

womanist/feminist critique of these institutions at the same time.

Black Club Woman Educators and the Black Church

The Black Church, was one of the few institutions controlled by African Americans, and was a staple of the 20th century African American experience. Many clubwomen professed a Christian faith and incorporated that faith into their curriculum. Nannie Helen Burroughs was a member of the National Baptist Convention. Noticing the discrimination that women suffered under the male dominated convention, Burroughs helped to form the Women's Auxiliary to the National Baptists Convention in 1901. These women were dedicated to the spreading of the gospel domestically and throughout the Diaspora (Bair, 2008). The organization of this group inspired Burroughs to found the National Training School for Women and Girls. In addition to providing vocational, liberal arts, and African American History course, the school placed an "emphasis on spiritual training and moral conduct" (Wolcott, 1997). Lucy Craft Laney also incorporated Christian ideals on morality into her curriculum at the Haines Institute. Anna Julia Cooper, though she worked in a public school, placed an emphasis on her Christian faith in her written work and philosophy (Giles, 2006).

Conclusion

African American scholars, from as early as the Reconstruction Era, advocated for race elevation through education. Their work was not as polarizing as contemporary historical analysis would have us believe. W.E.B. Dubois, though a champion of liberal arts education and the Talented Tenth, realized the importance of vocational education and access to schooling for all children (Alridge, 1999). Followers of Booker T.

Washington and the Tuskegee Machine, like Nannie Helen Burroughs and Lucy Craft Laney, incorporated liberal arts courses into the curriculum taught in their schools. Both parties saw the importance of the inclusion of African American history in the classroom and were dedicated to the ideal that education, in it many forms, was key to racial uplift. African American women scholars and educators made a significant contribution to the field by using their unique position and perspective to build and lead institutions that not only combatted racism, but sexism as well.

With the dominant educational ideologies of the early 20th century for African American students being established, the next section focuses on the ways in which everyday educators approached their work with national discourses like racial uplift in mind.

Chapter 3: Black Teacher Pedagogy and Practice in the Jim Crow

Era

African American teachers during the era of Jim Crow brought unique philosophies, talents, and life experiences to the classroom. Their unwavering faith in the power of education to uplift the race, dedication to the communities in which they served, and relationships they built with students and parents facilitated positive learning environments. This section focuses on how African American teachers in segregated schools approached their profession, their students, and the communities in which they served. What can be noted are the ways that various educational ideologies discussed above were put into action within classrooms (ex. African-American centered curriculum, womanist pedagogy, respectability, etc.)

Dedication to Education as a tool for Racial Uplift

The desire for literacy among the descendants of enslaved Africans was at the center of their fight for citizenship. Having been alienated from heritage and homeland in Africa, they realized that in order to attempt to create a new home in the Americas, an understanding of the language, literature, philosophies, and thought processes of the dominant culture would have to be accomplished in order to assess their own position within the existing social order. In her portion of the co-authored book *Young, Gifted, and Black: Promoting High Achievement among African-American Students*, Theresa Perry (2003) expounds upon the African-American philosophy of education. Drawing upon literary scholar, Robert Steptos' phrase "freedom for literacy, and literacy for freedom" (Perry et.

al, pp.12, 2003), Perry provides historical and contemporary examples of African Americans who were motivated by this philosophy and were thus able to overcome great adversity in order to obtain an education. Though she uses the life stories of individuals some may consider to be exceptional (Frederick Douglas, Ben Carson, Harriet Jacobs, Malcolm X, etc.), their will to become literate in a society that did not acknowledge their humanity, let alone intellectual capacity, was a feat that multiple African American students attempted to accomplish.

Most African American teachers espoused this belief in the power of education to uplift the race, but it took on two different meanings during the course of the 20th century. Between the onset of Reconstruction and the slowing of the First Great Migration, African Americans connected the achievement of secondary and post-secondary degrees to economic and social elevation. It was during the stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression that followed that African Americans realized that in an anti-black racist and capitalist society, educational accomplishment alone would not guarantee economic success or social equality (Kelly, 2010a; Fairclough, 2001). It was at this point that African American scholars and educators began to see education as a means to clandestinely fight against racial stereotypes that portrayed African Americans as inferior and instill in children a sense of self that would prepare them to navigate the Jim Crow nation with their humanity in tact (Ramsey, 2012).

Encouraging and Uplifting the Race Within the Classroom

Many former students and teachers within African American segregated schools reflect through oral history the ways in which educators incorporated discussions on race

and African American history into their curriculum and daily classroom activities. Michele Foster (1990), includes the reflections of an African American high school teacher on the wisdom that he passed on to his students during informal discussion in schools prior to desegregation:

“The big difference was that I can see we were able to do more with the Black students. In other words, if I wanted to come in this morning, have my kids put their book under the desk or on top of the desk and I’d get up on top of my desk and sit down and just talk to them. ‘ Why are you here? Are you here just to make out another day? Or are you here because the law says you must go to school? Are you here to try to better yourself?’ This kind of thing I could talk to them about. ‘Well, now I’m here to better myself. Well what must you do? What are the requirements? Do you know where your competition is?’ And I could talk to them about things like that. ‘Your competition is not your little cousin that’s sittin’ over there. Your competition is that white person over there in that other school. He’s your competition. He’s the one you’ve got to compete with for a job. And the only way that you’re going to be able to get that job is that you can’t be as good as he is, you got to be better.’” (Foster, 1990, pg. 134)

It was this “hidden curriculum” (Foster, 1990) that many former teachers grieved the loss of after the attempt at integrating schools in the mid 20th century. In addition to discussing candidly issues of racial inequality, teachers infused into their lessons facts about African American history. Geraldine Davis, a former student at the Fargo Agricultural

School in Arkansas, revealed the ways in which her instructors at her smaller school house and those at Fargo bought textbooks on infamous African Americans with their own funds from teachers and the community (Chafe et. al., 2001).

Another way in which African American teachers endeavored to prepare their students for the racist world in which they were to enter as adults was through respectability discourse. Though respectability politics have been a critiqued for excluding members of the African American community and promoting a picture of the race that erases various lifestyles and experiences, Hilton Kelly (2010) makes a case for the positive aspects of this ideology within segregated classrooms. He quotes Evelyn Higginbotham's definition of respectability, which states that it "demand[s] that every individual in the black community assume responsibility for behavioral self-regulation and self-improvement along moral, educational, and economic lines; the goal was to distance oneself as far as possible from images perpetuated by racist stereotypes" (Higginbotham, 1993, pg. 196). Hilton points to the varied perspectives on what respectability should look like for African American students: Booker T. Washington-industrial/agricultural skills and autonomy, W.E.B. Dubois – Talented Tenth, Nannie Helen Burroughs- domesticity and religion, and Anna Julia Cooper- true womanhood (Hilton, 2010). In the African American teachers attempt to dispel the stereotype of the African American as lazy, unintelligent, and inferior, she/he "drew on a respectability discourse to foster a sense of purpose and of hope in legally segregated schools for Blacks (Hilton, 2010, pg. 144).

Teacher and Student Relationships: Ethic Caring

Black scholars and educators have recognized the integral role that

teacher/student relationships and ethic caring played in the preparation of the race for social, political, and economic obstacles that an anti-Black state presents. W.E.B. Dubois offers his insight into the controversial topic of integration that prevailed during the middle of the 20th century in his article “Does the Negro Need Separate Schools” (1935). In this article, he asserts that in whatever setting that the African American child is educated in, there are certain requirements that need to be met for them to achieve academic and social excellence. Dubois believed that,

“The proper education of any people includes sympathetic touch between teacher and pupil; knowledge on the part of the teacher, not simply of the individual taught, but of his surroundings and background, and the history of his class and group, such contact between pupils, and between teachers and pupil, on the basis of social equality, as will increase this sympathy and knowledge.....and the promotion of such extra-curricular activities as will intend to induct the child into life.” (Dubois, 1935, pg. 328).

The caring aspect of his assertions, as well as the personal knowledge of the background of the students can be manifested in the practice of other-mothering, with educators seeing their students as an extension of themselves and the larger community, and thus being familiar with their person. The knowledge of the historical and present position of such students is what motivates these educators to do what is necessary to properly “induct the child into life” (Dubois, 1935). In other words, these educators were involved in the social justice work of preparing their students for life lived within *the veil* and through *double consciousness* (Dubois, 1903).

Alison Stewart's premier work, *First Class: The Legacy of Dunbar, America's First Black Public High School*, provides a glimpse into one of the most prestigious high schools for students of color during the Jim Crow Era in the country. Located in Washington D.C., this school would attract hundreds of African American students from across the region for its dedication to excellence, and outstanding record of setting students up for success. Stewart chronicles some of the pedagogical philosophies that informed the teaching practices of Dunbar's educators, one being the renowned Black feminist Anna Julia Cooper. Cooper was invested in providing her students the best possible education, one that rivaled that of their white counterparts in the city, and one that placed an emphasis on liberal arts and the classics. She, unlike some of her colleagues, also believed in the ability of *all* students to learn and achieve academically. As an administrator and educator, she would reach out to students from various socio-economic backgrounds, and had confidence in their ability to tackle the rigorous curriculum.

Stewart describes Anna-Julia Cooper as "firm, compassionate, and often sympathetic" (Stewart, pg. 43, 2013). She cared for her students and advocated on their behalf, defending their intellectual capabilities to the colleges in which they applied. She encouraged her students to achieve their very best academically, and desired to see each of her students succeed, no matter their background. She, like many of her colleagues and subordinates, was aware of the world in which she and her students inhabited as scholars and future scholars of color, but she prepared her students academically to enter that world, and many of her graduates owe their success to her preparation. Cooper cared for her students and used her position as an educator to combat social injustice, and invested

in each student and class with no promise of them achieving (womanist pedagogy as well). Anna Julia Cooper, is just one educator who made a name for herself through authorship and activism, however, there are countless others who remain unnamed, but who did the important work of educating students of color.

Vanessa Siddle Walker (1996) in her historical work, *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South*, is one of a few scholars who have chronicled the operations of a Black segregated high school. Walker returned to her native home, Caswell County, NC and embarked on a journey to reveal the motivations and dedication of the teachers that taught at the all Black Caswell County Training School. Through the collection of oral histories and archival research she reveals how teachers, administrators, and the African American community worked together to provide the best education for their precious pupils. She found that “in spite of these challenges, [educators] forged a system of schools that emphasized the importance of teacher/student relationships, valued activities as a key means of developing the students’ many talents, and believed in the children’s ability to learn and their own ability to teach” (Walker, pg. 200, 1996). With these teachers becoming members of the Caswell County African American community, they joined the ranks of the already present cadre of parents who fought politically and financially for the establishment of a high school that would set Black students up for success.

Another study was conducted by a group of university scholars in Kansas, on the work of African American teachers at the former segregated all-black Douglas High School in Parsons, Kansas. J.A. Patterson and a team of scholars collected oral histories

from among former students of the segregated Douglas School in Parsons, Kansas that existed from the early 1920s-1958. Their aim was to dispel negative stereotypes that deemed inferior the pedagogical and administrative styles of African American teachers. The authors found that among many things, African American teachers were described as loving and caring. Teachers were celebrated for being teachers 24/7, for maintaining their concern for students in and outside of the classroom, and instilling in the students the confidence that they would need in order to endure the racism and discrimination that they would encounter in their professional careers as adults.

Michele Foster, an educational scholar, presents in her work *Black Teachers on Teaching* (1997), a collection of transcribed oral histories of Black teachers in the United States. This work only presents the voice of Foster, in the introduction, the rest of the work consisting of the thoughts and reflections of her interlocutors. Most of her contributors exhibited some aspect of caring and womanist pedagogy in their connections with their students and awareness of their positions as people (teacher and pupil) of color in society, as well as the injustices they faced in education. One participant, Ms. Ruby Middleton Forsythe, a teacher from South Carolina, taught in a small African American private school where she endeavored to “become a mother to all of them” (Foster, pg. 31, 1997), her students. She realized that “[y]ou have to be tender but firm and positive, [s]o you show them that motherly affection. It’s only after you’ve established some affection that you can talk about discipline” (Foster, pg. 31, 1997). She was also keenly aware of the obstacles facing African American students in education and continued to fight, on behalf of her students, for the right of her school to exist as a private institution.

Her work, and the countless names of other like her have contributed to the success of many students of African descent who would have otherwise been crushed by the ignorance of state and local powers to their right to an education. These teachers improvised in a time when African American students were an oxymoron. These educators in segregated schools took a risk on their students, they loved them as their own, and advocated on their behalf.

Community Involvement

While African American teachers took on the role of parent within the classroom, by no means was the education of African American students in the South an endeavor that rested solely on the teachers shoulders, it was certainly a community effort. Teachers worked in conjunction with parents, religious institutions, and Black entrepreneurs and community members to ensure that African American students received the best education possible. African American teachers and preachers in particular were helmed as leaders within the Black community. In many cases church services and school sessions were held within the same buildings. Teachers attended the same churches as their students, and would often solicit the financial assistance of parishioners for the fiscal needs of the local school (Fairclough, 2007). Foster (1993) discusses the “connectedness” that existed between teachers, students, and communities. In many cases African American teachers would stay within one community for an extended period of time, often several years. If they were not from the community originally, their dedication to a particular school would permit them to foster relationships with parents.

Because of this connection and the prevailing faith that many African Americans

had in the potential social and economic rewards of education, community members donated their financial and manual resources to the local school. Siddle-Walker (1996) recalls the sacrifices that parents in her rural North Carolina town made to build and maintain a high school for black students. Parents also contributed their time and participation in extra curricular activities and cultural events. Ceremonies and events, such as commencement exercises and homecoming activities, would attract the attendance of hundreds of Black parents and community members (Moody, 1968; Fairclough, 2001). In many cases the local black school belonged to and embodied the aspirations of the segregated Black community (Rogers, 1975).

Conclusion

The work of African American teachers in segregated Black schools across the Jim Crow South has been captured by a number of scholars (Vanessa Siddle-Walker, Hilton Kelly, A. Fairclough, Michele Foster, etc.). These teachers not only put into practice the ideologies of Black scholars in education, but can also be credited with using their own positionality and personal conviction to enhance the learning experiences of their students (ex. womanist pedagogy, ethic caring). While their names may not be as prominent as Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Dubois, it was their work that brought the ideal of the ideologues to life. What many scholars are beginning to ponder are the ways that such pedagogical practices and philosophies can be implemented in classrooms today. An analysis of the ways in which education has changed for African American students in the nation and the South specifically will shed light on this possibility.

Chapter 4: Theoretical Frameworks: Womanist Pedagogy and Educational Capital

Womanist Pedagogy

Some scholars (McCluskey, 2014; Stewart, 2013; Giles, 2006; Bair, 2008) have placed the work of pioneer African American educational scholars and school founders into the framework of Black Feminism and Womanist Pedagogy/Tradition. With the profession of teaching having been historically and contemporarily perceived as a feminine profession where women are over represented, a framework that considers the unique pedagogical tradition of African American women is can illuminate the motivations behind certain practices that took place segregated classrooms.

Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant, author and Associate Professor of Sociology and Education Studies at DePauw University, has written a number of articles on the practice of Womanist Pedagogy among African-American teachers, past and present. In one of her earlier works on the subject, “A Womanist Experience of Caring: Understanding the Pedagogy of Exemplary Black Women Teachers”, Beauboeuf-Lafontant provides an outline of the tenets of Womanist Pedagogy; she defines the practice as “an embrace of the maternal, political clarity, and an ethic or risk” (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002).

According to Beauboeuf-Lafontant, the womanist educator considers herself to not only be an ambassador for knowledge in the classroom, but an extension of the parental authority in a student’s home. As educators who immersed themselves into the communities in which they taught, African American women educators in segregated

schools embodied the role of educator as well as that of role model. They were often invited into the homes of the parents of their pupils, attended church with many community members, and became involved with other social and political affairs. This position of the educator as an elite member of the community allowed them to establish relationships with the parents of their students and embody the function of *mother* in the classroom. Womanist educators endeavored to establish a familiar and familial mother-child like relationship as a foundation for their interactions with students (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002). One could say that these educators considered all of the children in their community as *kin*, and thus associates their success with the communities, as well as their own.

The Womanist educator also operates with political clarity, under the realization “that there are relationships between schools and society that differentially structure the successes and failures of groups of children” (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002). As educators of Black and Brown students, they recognize race as a factor that particularly affects the experiences of their students in and outside of the classroom. They are aware of the social structures that will create obstacles to their students academic, as well as social, political, and economic success. They are aware of the dominant narratives associated with them and their students, and attempt to empower their students by preparing them to combat these negative stereotypes by not only disproving them, but also never accepting them as true in the first place. The womanist educator is conscious of the world in which their students are entering, or have entered at birth, and their social position. The womanist educator desires to prepare them to enter that world with the confidence and the tools

necessary to change it.

The final tenet of womanist pedagogy is the ethic of risk. The womanist educator, while aware of the anti-black social structure in which her students exist and the obstacles that they face as students of color, she still endeavors to care for her students and prepare them for the world in which they will enter, with no guarantees of success. The womanist educator realizes that “social injustice is deep-seated and not easily dismantled” (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002), and yet she continues to engage with her students and her craft with hopes that social transformation will take place with this generation or the next.

The embrace of the maternal, political clarity, and the ethic of risk that inform womanist pedagogy are based within larger traditions of Black Feminist Thought and Praxis. Patricia Hill Collins, the author of the seminal work *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, asserts that “for African -American women, the knowledge gained at intersecting oppressions of race, class, and gender provides the stimulus for crafting and passing on the subjugated knowledge” (Collins, 2000, pg. 8). It is this *standpoint epistemology*, this knowledge gained through a specific experience, that informs the work and philosophy of womanist educators. The social position of African American woman allots them a particular perspective as a group oppressed by intersections of sexism, racism, and classism. Black Feminist Thought centers the voices of Black Women, those in and outside of the academy, and recognizes their ability to theorize their own experiences. According to Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought not only recognizes the intersecting forces of oppression that Black Women face and their awareness of their social position, but as a praxis, it is dedicated to social justice

and the collaborative effort to alleviate oppression for all subjected groups (Collins, pg. 37, 2000).

African American women educators, who practice womanist pedagogy, provide a unique perspective as individuals dealing with intersecting forces of oppression themselves. As stated before, the womanist educator is aware of the subjugated position of their students of color, and therefore uses their positions to aid in the effort for social justice. Those that ascribe to a Black Feminist praxis, are informed by the same philosophy. With Black Feminist Thought centering the perspectives of women who are not considered traditional scholars who theorize from within the walls of the Academy, womanist educators are positioned as intellectuals whose work is valued. Like other *ordinary* African American women, Womanist educators practice *other-mothering*- “women who assist blood-mothers by sharing mothering responsibilities— [and who] traditionally have been central to the institution of Black motherhood (Collins, pg. 178, 2000). As Black women, womanist educators carry with them a pedagogical framework that is informed by this experience. Black Feminist Thought seeks to center this experience and draw theoretically from it. Thus, Black Feminist Thought and Praxis, as well as Womanist Pedagogy rely on the Black Woman experience.

The work of Anna Julia Cooper, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Lucy Craft Laney, and many of the teachers that staffed their schools and others incorporated other mothering, ethic caring, and political clarity into their interactions with their students. As teachers-activists these women bridged the gap between their scholarship, their schools, and their community (Johnson, 2000; McCluskey, 2014). While the terms “Black Feminist” and

“Womanism” were not coined until the later part of the 20th century, the dedication of these women to the inclusion of Black women’s voices in the effort to achieve equality for the race would warrant them being described as such.

Using the contemporary conception of womanist pedagogy does not negate or ignore the work of African American male teachers. The key tenets of other-mothering, political clarity, and ethic of risk can be and were employed by both genders. What this framework does is it places the distinct work of African Americans in a feminized profession into a larger Womanist or Black Feminist tradition. While these terms “womanist” and “Black Feminist” were not widely used until the later part of the 20th century, their centering of the distinct social position of the Black woman as both oppressed by race, gender, and many cases class, allows us to draw upon the legacy of those who used this position to make a unique contribution to racial uplift.

By using the definition of womanist pedagogy as a framework, I can look specifically at the ways in which both African American female and male teachers cared for their students and pushed them to challenge Jim Crow society. I will look specifically for the ways in which other-mothering, political clarity, and the ethic of risk informed the educational philosophy of former African American teachers and how they manifested within Mississippi classrooms.

Educational Capital

In addition to examining the work of African American teachers through the lens of womanist pedagogy, I will also consider the transaction of educational capital, a term used by educational sociologist Hilton Kelly (2010) and drawn for Pierre Bourdieu’s

notions of economic, social, and cultural capital. According to Hilton:

“Educational capital, or the acquisition of qualifications through formal schooling, can be used in exchange for jobs and social power; the term is useful, therefore, for explaining how black teachers imagined and produced generations of black youth in resource deprived schools who later became teachers, preachers, doctors, nurses, scientists, and engineers—in spite of their subordinate statuses and the circumstances in which they were born.educational capital was particularly important for subordinate groups in an oppressive society to move beyond their social origin.” (Kelly, 2010, pg. 331)

Just as Bourdieu’s notions of capital each lead the individual into a higher level of social inclusion, institutional access, and economic gain, educational capital for Kelly can convert a “subordinate group member’s status in the larger society (e.g., from working poor to middle class)” (Kelly, 2010, pg. 331). However, within the context of Jim Crow segregated schools, class ascension was not the ultimate motive behind the acquisition of educational capital. While economic gain could be an outcome, respectability, an increase in racial consciousness, and the ability to identify and critique white supremacy were also desired outcomes (Hilton, 2010). Most importantly, Kelly points out how the acquisition of educational capital did not require a negation of African American culture in exchange for that of the dominant society. The use of educational capital did not require complete assimilation into white society, but it provided the “skills, knowledge, and credentials for

social mobility within and outside of a black social world” (Kelly, 2010).

Through the lens of educational capital, I can examine the ways in which African American teachers specifically centered education as a means to not only provide poor and working class students access into the middle class, but as a means by which students would gain a consciousness of the Jim Crow society around them and enter respectable professions that would aid in the uplift of the race.

Chapter 5: Methodology

Oral History

This study seeks to place the work of African American teachers in segregated schools in the Mississippi into a larger discourse on African American educational ideology and practice pre-desegregation. A number of studies have focused on the work of African American teachers in segregated schools, but very few consider exclusively those in the state of Mississippi, or the Deep South in general. To capture the ideologies, practices, and motivations espoused by African American educators within the state, oral histories were collected from former teachers and students in these schools who currently reside in the state.

Oral histories provide unique insight into the ways in which people “describe and perceive their experiences” (Patterson, 2011, pg 274; Ritchie, 2003). By listening to the personal recollections of former students and teachers of segregated schools in Mississippi, I gain access into a history that has largely been overlooked by contemporary scholarship. My collection of oral accounts of what took place in segregated black classrooms in Mississippi will fill a void in written archive and add a rich conceptualization of the work of African American teachers through the eyes of former students and the educators themselves.

As Patterson (2011) points out in a similar study conducted in Kansas, “oral history is especially suitable for research that focuses on the lived experiences of marginalized groups” (Patterson, 2011, pg. 274). With my participants being African American, of poor and working class origin, Southern, and some being women the collection of their unique

assessment of the segregated classroom helps to bring their voices from the margins of the literature to the center.

Study Design

Fifteen individuals agreed to participate in the study. The participants were gathered through personal connections to the researcher. Being from rural east Mississippi, many of my elderly family members, neighbors, and church members attended or taught in segregated schools in the region. To inform potential participants of my project I made a personal announcement at my home church a few weeks prior to the intended starting date of the study. This church is located in a major city in the region and thus garnered the participation of many informants who attended urban segregated schools. A second announcement was made on my behalf by a close relative to a rural church in my home community- these participants largely attended rural segregated schools in the area.

The interviews were conducted in the homes of some of the participants as well as the churches that they attend. Eleven of the fifteen informants were former students who attended segregated school in rural and urban East Mississippi. They were asked basic questions about where they are from and where they attended school, at what points in their educational matriculation they realized that they attended a segregated school, and the conditions of their school. They were then asked to elaborate on their relationships with their teachers, and their teachers' relationship to their parents and community. Former students were also asked to elaborate on the teaching style of their teachers and explain if or how they incorporated discussions of race into their curriculum.

Three of the fifteen informants taught in segregated and desegregated settings in rural and urban East Mississippi. One informant had attended a segregated school as a student but taught in a desegregated setting. Former educators were asked questions similar to the larger group, but from the perspective of an educator. They were asked what motivated them to choose the teaching profession, if and how they thought that teaching affected the race, and what they did within their classrooms that prepared students to enter Jim Crow society as adults. In addition, female and male participants will be asked in what ways they think their gender made a unique contribution to the classroom.

Table 1: Teachers

Participants	School	Subject Taught	Years of Teaching	College Education
E.H.	Apex (Urban)	Science	1971-2003	B.S. in Edu.
L.A.	Small Stone (Rural)	Math	1958-1994	B.S. and M.A. in Edu.
R.H.	New Zion (Rural)	English	1956-1990s	B.A. and M.A. in Edu.
C.R.	Small Stone (Rural)	Administration	1960-1998	B.A. and M.A. in Edu.

Table 2: Students

Participant	School	Graduation Year
P.B.	Delta (Rural)	1962
R.B.	Delta (Rural)	1965
G.G.	Apex (Urban)	1970
W.G.	Coleman (Rural)	1972
A.B.	Clayton (Rural)	1969
E.G.	Small Stone (Rural)	1954
R.C.	Apex (Urban)	1977
D.D.	Small Stone (Rural)	Did not finish
H.D.	Small Stone (Rural)	Did not finish
L. G.	Small Stone (Rural)	n/a
B. A.	Small Stone (Rural)	1955

Coding Process

Each of the interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. The interviews took place mostly in the homes of participants, but some took place in public spaces in Apex, MS (church, local community college library, and deli). Three interviews were conducted jointly with married couples, and one took place with two brothers simultaneously.

Participants were aware that they were being recorded and were given consent forms that summarized the purpose of the study and indicated how responses would be used. The interviewer asked the participants to state where they were from and where they attended primary and secondary school. They were then permitted to provide an account of their educational experience in primary, secondary, and post-secondary segregated institutions. After participants provided a summary of their educational experience, the interviewer asked questions. While a list of specific questions was created prior to conducting this study, the interviewer paraphrased the questions and asked them based upon what participants did or did not provide in their general anecdotal introductions.

The interviewer was sought specific information concerning the following themes:

- Did the schools discussed encourage or adopt an industrial/accomodationist curriculum or a liberal arts curriculum?
- Was race or racial tensions discussed in the classroom? Did students learn about African or African American History?
- How involved was the surrounding Black community? Did parents have a strong relationship with teachers? Were teachers from, or did they reside, in the communities they taught?

- How did teachers relate to students?

The answers to these probes were used to indicate in the ways in which prominent educational philosophies of early 20th century scholars manifested within rural and urban Mississippi segregated classrooms. While reviewing the interview transcripts, the interviewer remained cognizant of recurring themes among responses- they are discussed in the results section below.

Chapter 6: Context: African American Education in Early 20th Century MS

The development of a public education system in the state of Mississippi lagged behind that of states in the North as well as neighboring states in the South. The struggling agriculturally-dependent economy did not provide the most ideal financial conditions for a school system to thrive off of public funds. To exacerbate the issue, the maintenance of a segregated system provided even less resources for Mississippi students, especially African American students. According to William Couch Jr.'s analysis of the state of Mississippi's education system in the early 1950s the "problem of education is most critical in the rural areas where most of the Negroes in the state live. If you ask any of the 6000 teachers in rural Negro schools ... 'What are the worst problems that confront you?' they are certain to respond with this combination: "Bad administration, bad facilities, bad background." (Couch, 1952, pg. 226). In many Black schools he found that most did not have a library or an adequate collection of textbooks and literary works. Many were educating multiple grades in one room as their buildings rarely exceeded four classrooms. In fact, by the close of the 1940s, "of the 3,747 Negro schools in the state, 2,015 (61.2%) are one-teacher one-room schools" (Alexander, 1947). In most cases, the teachers within these learning environments had limited access to an adequate education themselves. In 1952, sixty percent of the teachers in rural districts had not finished college and had received a diploma from a high school that was not accredited. For those seeking even an accredited high school diploma, they would more than likely have to leave home as only "eight of the

98 Negro High Schools [we]re accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools Six” (Alexander, 1947).

Couch Jr.’s study did, however, point out the improvements to the system that were coming as a result of pressure from integrationist. By 1954, all Mississippi teachers were required to have a college degree and teaching certificate. Also, in an effort to avoid complying with the court ordered mandates to desegregate, the state decided to increase the amount of funding provided to black schools to create a “separate but equal” system. However, while the all-white state governing bodies were doing their best to avoid granting African Americans their civil right to an adequate education and political representations, African Americans in the state were joining the national effort to combat such oppression. He says at the conclusion of his study:

“The most heartening sign in Mississippi, however, is the spirit of awakening shared by Negro educators and citizens alike. Everywhere there is lively debate and planning for the future. More Negroes are voting at the polls or are suing for that right. Voting was one of the main topics of discussion at the 1951 convention of the colored Mississippi Teachers Association. More Negroes are seeking graduate training....The Negro in Mississippi is learning that he can get over his "bad background." He also believes that he will outlive "bad administration" and "bad facilities"- and these are good beliefs to hold in a world of crisis and insecurity. (Couch, Jr, 1952, pg. 228)

It was during this era that the participants of this study were attending and teaching in Mississippi segregated schools. The names of interviewees, schools, and cities, have been concealed or changed to respect the anonymity of the participants. The eldest interviewee started school in 1934, and the youngest graduated in 1977. Among the fifteen participants five Mississippi school districts are represented. One of the districts was within a large municipality in East Mississippi, Apex. Three of the other schools discussed were located in rural communities and counties that surrounded the previous urban school. The final school discussed is/was located in the Delta, on the far northwest region of the state.

The three smaller rural schools that surrounded the larger municipal district did not have school buildings that held more than six classrooms. Seven of the participants attended one rural school, the Small Stone School (pseudonym), in east Mississippi. They each attended at different times. The school was established in 1920 through funds collected by local Black families, the county, and the Rosenwald Fund (the local Black families contributed most of the funds). This original school had only one room, but eventually a second story was added to the building. In 1949, a fire destroyed the building and forced the students to attend classes at the Baptist church located across the street and the adjacent Mason lodge. A few years later, a six-classroom brick building replaced the burnt structure. This massive structure was built using funds allocated by the state to improve the learning environments of segregated schools and to combat arguments for integration (also known as equalization schools).

The municipal school located in Apex, MS (pseudonym) was the largest of the

schools discussed in the interviews and was attended by the second largest number of participants (five). The school was the only high school in the city designated for African American students. Prior to the establishment of high schools in the surrounding rural counties around the early 1950s, many students from these areas would attend school in Apex and live in dormitories. The school, for a number of years, served as both a high school and junior college, offering two-year degrees.

The only school located in the Delta was attended by two of the participants, a married couple. The wife, R.B., attended Morgan High School in 1964 and was involved in the civil rights activities of Freedom Summer. She, and a group of her peers led a student boycott to the high school in protest of the lack of adequate funding for textbooks. She was eventually sent away to the Northeast to finish her senior year, as racial tensions rose in the small town due to the demonstration.

Many of the participants either taught or attended school during the late 1960s and early 1970s when the state finally mandated that all schools be desegregated. Two of the participants, CR and LA were selected to be one of the first African Americans to teach in a rural white school in the district. Other participants recall the tumultuous process and provide both student and teacher perspectives on what was lost and gained with integration.

Chapter 7: Results

Industrial vs. Liberal Arts

The curriculum adopted by early and mid-20th century African American schools in the South often fell into one of two categories: industrial/trade based or liberal arts based. As was discussed in the literature review, two scholars, Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Dubois are perceived as the intellectual face of these two philosophies (although in many ways their ideals were not as polemic as many assume). Most of the responses, however, reflected the observations of Carter G. Woodson (1933) who realized that many schools lacked the resources to adopt any curriculum wholly. The eldest graduate of Small Stone School, a small community school that offered grades 1 through 11, said that many of her teachers had “little college education if any” and often only sought the most highest level of certification after they had already started teaching. None of the rural schools in question, offered classes outside of general grammar, history, and math. They simply lacked the facilities to offer industrial arts.

In spite of the inadequate infrastructure, it appeared that educators attempted to adopt a liberal arts curriculum (perhaps it was the only one that was financially feasible). Mrs. R.H. reflected on the teaching style of her English instructor and how she enjoyed the diagramming of sentences and reading the bit of literature that they were exposed to. She exclaimed sadly at one point in the interview “... we didn’t have a library, we didn’t even have a library!!” as she reflected on school conditions. The two students from the Delta, as was mentioned, remember a student-led boycott in protest of the lack of textbooks. Each interviewee mentioned how many of their textbooks had been used

multiple times by white students before they were passed down to them, and even then there were not enough.

When asked what professions were they were encouraged to enter after graduating high school, each of the teachers mentioned that college was encouraged. However, those that did not enter the teaching profession or attend college in the rural schools did not indicate that they were encouraged to do anything in particular after school. Mr. PB, who attended school in the Delta, when asked what he was encouraged to do after graduating high school, said:

As far as the teachers go, I don't remember....only Ms. B encouraging me to read...But as far as encouragement to go a different route than farming, not even farming, I don't remember any encouragement. You know, other than just better yourself. What that meant back then, I have no idea.

In response to the same question, his wife R.B. (also a student from the same Delta school) said:

.....they would encourage, they would encourage you to get your lesson, not to encourage you to do better. They didn't have any suggestion as to what you could go into. That's what we didn't have you know. Where do I go from here, if I graduate high school, then what?

Those students that attended school in Apex, MS, in an urban district, they were exposed to both a liberal arts and industrial curriculum. It was interesting to hear the varied responses from these students who attended the same school. It appeared that some received more encouragement than others to enter college or a trade. Mr. G.G., when

asked what he was encouraged to do after graduation and which courses he chose to take he said:

You know, I don't think I ever got one of them lectures, you know what I'm saying? Uh, because I started out in a trade when I first when to high school. I was into brick masonry. And uh, I knew that wasn't gonna work, so I bailed outta that. I just got into junk then, just taking general subjects. Not really preparing for anything, just going to school because it was school. And I think....maybe in the, uh, and maybe I just didn't know enough about school at the time to even think about "ok well, I'm in English, I'm taking English, regular English, I ain't takin' nothing special, not no college prep courses, just general courses.

Despite the lack of direction that Mr. G.G. received, he ended up working as an employee on the local Naval Base and rising to an administrative position there.

Ironically another participant, Mrs. E.H., who attended the same school during the same time and who eventually became an educator herself, had this to say about her experience and what she was encouraged to with her education:

Ever since I was in, starting say the sixth grade, I'd always been placed in the academically challenged classes. And so, the teacher's that we had really pushed us, and motivated us, and stressed if we were going to achieve we needed to get an education....

Though she was placed in remedial courses in the lower grades, she went on to take

college prep courses in high school and was encouraged by her biology and chemistry teacher to study science at an urban historically black college in the state.

In the case of the urban school where both a general college prep track and an industrial track were offered, some students may have been encouraged to take certain tracks based on their interests, academic performance, or perhaps their relationship with their teachers. More importantly, according to the responses from interviewees, those that went to the urban school had a choice between industrial or college prep courses. Those that attended the rural schools in both East Mississippi and the Delta were offered a general curriculum that covered basic math, English, grammar, history, and in some cases, science. Unfortunately some indicated that upon entering integrated spaces, or when going to college, they felt unprepared. Mrs. RB had this to say:

When I left Mississippi, I was the top five in the class right....I got to Connecticut, and being I was staying with the white minister with the biggest church in Norwalk, the First Congregational Church on the Green in Norwalk, CT. Of course when he took me, he enrolled me in college preparatory courses. Two weeks, I went to back...I said I don't know what they talking about, I'm not prepared! I had to go back and reshuffle and make sure I got the main courses I needed to graduate and fill in the others with homemaking, pottery, and something else.

African American Centered Curriculum

Carter G. Woodson, the creator of Negro History Week, as well as W.E.B. Dubois emphasized the need for African American schools to offer a curriculum that centers the

rich history and culture of the African Americans and the diaspora. The participants in the study were asked if African American history was taught in their social studies courses and if discussions on racial tension or the Civil Rights Movement took place within their classrooms. Among the participants who were former students in my study, none reported to have any kind extensive discussions about race within the classroom. Mr. G.G., who attended the urban school in Apex, MS, said, “Race really was not a subject that ever got approached that much. You know, that I know of, that I remember anyway.” His wife, W.G. who attended school in the same county, but in a rural setting had this to say:

No I don’t remember, I just remember them talking about the Civil War and that stuff and history. But they didn’t more or less talk about the whites in that area. They just told us that we needed to work hard. ‘Cause we needed an education to be able to get anywhere, so.

When asked about the inclusion of African American history in the curriculum, many mentioned the observance of Negro History Week, but said that an extensive review of African American or African history was not included in the yearly curriculum. Mr. L.A., a retired teacher from the rural Small Stone school said “just regular history” was offered. Mrs. E.H. a former student and teacher in the Apex school district said this about the inclusion of Black history in their outdated textbooks, “As far as history, African Americans were not even counted, it was as if we didn’t have any history”. She did mention, however, that in spite of the lack of textual material covering Black History, during the celebration of Negro History Week, many Black teacher made up their own

curriculum. She carried this over into her own science classroom. During this week, many teachers highlighted the accomplishments of notable African Americans.

Mrs. R.H., a former student at Small Stone and a teacher in an adjacent rural community had this to say about both African American History and race relations:

I don't remember ever doing that.....Oh well we talked about the accomplishments It wasn't even called Black History Month back then it was call Negro History Week. We'd talk about Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver and their contribution then, you know. But race relationship, it was just uh, and accepted way of life I think it was.

The ideal of an African American centered curriculum as espoused by Carter G. Woodson, W.E.B. Dubois, and others seems to have never come to full realization for the participants of this particular study. This is not to say that there were no schools in Mississippi or the region that centered the cultural and historical experiences of African Americans. What this does suggest is a few things about the implementation of an African American centered curriculum. First, the lack of literature that summarized the accomplishments of African Americans may have contributed to the teacher's lack of knowledge concerning the subject. Second, there was a great cost associated with discussion race relations during this particular time. Finally, the emphasis on academic achievement ("getting and education") served as a hidden message about the importance of making their own mark on history and effecting race relations.

One respondent, E.H. mentioned the lack of material covering African American

history in their outdated textbooks. With very few texts that succinctly outlined the accomplishments of African Americans up to the mid-20th century being available, this would require many teachers to seek this information on their own. With no university departments dedicated to the study of African American people being formed until the late 1960s, this would require a great deal of effort on the part of teachers to find this information on their own. This is not to say that teachers did not share the knowledge that they had about Black history, but it does provide a reason why this subject was not discussed and infused into the curriculum year-around.

In addition to the dearth of information in general concerning Black History in general and race relations of the mid- 20th century available in the 1950s and 1960s, another reason for the lack of discussions on race could have been due to the cost associated with it. Mrs. R.H. mentioned how as late as the 1970s, teachers in her rural district were asked not to place on their license plates the phrase “I have a dream...”. All of the school districts in MS during this era were lead by white superintendents who often appointed principals and other administrators. Many teachers were prohibited from participating in any civil rights activities, while some took this risk and suffered the consequences. Being one of the few professionals in the community, their work as educators was highly supervised and scrutinized by the usually mostly white school board. Principals and other African American administrators in these schools often served as the liaison between the black and the white community. Anne Moody, famed author of “Coming of Age in Mississippi” provides an example of both an educator discussed aspects of the Movement and race and an administrator who was obliged to the white school

board. Anne confided in a teacher, Mrs. Rice who told her about the work of the NAACP. Because of her involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, Mrs. Rice was later fired. On the other hand, Anne's principle, Mr. Willis, valued his relationship with powerful whites in the community more than the assumed loyalty he would have with his own, and was rewarded for doing so.

Mrs. R.H., though she did not participate openly and significantly in the Movement in her rural community, she remembered a teacher who did. She recounted how he, as a social studies teacher, discussed issues of race and work openly with Civil Rights workers during the 1960s. He was beat up by a gang of local white men on his way home one evening for his involvement. Mrs. W.G. also remembered a confrontation that took place during the beginning stages of integration. She and her peers had been moved to the local white school and were the first class to integrate the school. When asked if any of the Black teachers from her segregated school were transferred to the integrated school she recounted this incident:

I remember one did, because he was a history teacher. And I remember I was in that desk and this white girl come through and pushed my books off on the floor and I refused to pick them up. I said "pick up my books I ain't do nothing to you!!!". She wouldn't pick them up. And he called on my to answer some question and I sat in my seat and say "I don't know!!!" [and he said] "That's a Zero Lewis!!". He called on me later on, I said "I don't know!!!" I said "You see my books on the floor and you ain't make her pick them up." And he saw it when she did it. And he's a black guy and I'm

thinking “is he scared of her too?”..... I never did forgive that man for that!!
..... it was just the idea: he should have said “pick up her books.” I guess he was scared they was gonna mess with him or something. It was a scary time back then. I can say they was burning churches left and right.

While this incident took place in an integrated setting, it was a pure display of racial discrimination and abuse on the part of the girl who knocked Mrs. W.G. books on the floor. Yet, the teacher still felt powerless and afraid. The fear of being *messed up, beat up, or fired* was a reality and may have prevented some teachers from risking their lives by discussing race openly within the classroom.

Finally, Black teachers, though they were undoubtedly aware of the racial tension that was gripping the state during the 1950s and 1960s, may have chosen to advance the efforts of the Movement in ways that did not require their discussion race openly.

Again, Mrs. W.G. responded to the question concerning race in the classroom with this:

No I don't remember, I just remember them talking about the Civil War and that stuff and history. But they didn't more or less talk about the whites in that area. They just told us that we needed to work hard. 'Cause we needed an education to be able to get anywhere, so.

Other participants mentioned how their teachers stressed the importance of school and getting an education (rather secondary or post-secondary). While they may not have offered advice as to what students should do after finishing high school, they emphasized

the need for them to grasp the material being taught. But why, and for what?

This emphasis on “getting an education” may be linked to the traditional African American philosophy of education. In her portion of the co-authored book *Young, Gifted, and Black: Promoting High Achievement among African-American Students*, Theresa Perry (2003) expounds upon the African-American philosophy of education. Drawing upon literary scholar, Robert Steptos’ phrase she sums up the philosophy in seven words: “freedom for literacy, and literacy for freedom” (Perry et. al, pp.12, 2003). Since slavery, freedom and equality was linked the literacy and education. Perry provides historical and contemporary examples of African Americans who were motivated by this philosophy and were thus able to overcome great adversity in order to obtain an education.

The eldest participants in this study started attending school as early as the 1930s. In addition to learning and teaching in dilapidated buildings with outdated textbooks and limited supplies, they were learning and teaching in a region where the education of students of color was highly opposed. The mere existence of public schools for African American students was highly contested by ruling whites since their creation. And yet these teachers continued their efforts to educate a population deemed unworthy of the effort. Teachers, parents, community members, and students believed in the power of literacy and education. The acquisition of letters and degrees was linked to eventual freedom. So while many of the teachers who taught the participants of this study may not have talked about race relations, the Civil Rights Movement, or African American History comprehensively, they instilled in their students the value of education- the key to freedom.

Teacher Relationship to Students, Parents, and Community

Students

One of the initial goals of this project was to discover the ways in which African American teachers interacted with their students and the communities in which they taught. Aside from managing to provide an education for students in the most dire and hostile environments, some scholars have noted the ways in which they cared for, and advocated on behalf of, their students. The study specifically endeavored to discover the ways in which the teachers associated with the interviewees put into practice any of the tenets of Beauboeuf-Lafontant's definition of womanist pedagogy, "an embrace of the maternal, political clarity, and an ethic or risk" (Bauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002)

The researcher was careful not to suggest that any of the teachers discussed in the interviews interacted with students in this way, rather all of the participants were asked to describe their favorite teacher and explain what qualities that made them so effective. Former teachers were asked if they mirror themselves after such educators in while in their own classrooms. A number of respondents specifically described some of their teachers as possessing mother-like qualities. One respondent, R.C., a student from Apex described one particular teacher as a "*mom away from home*". She went on to say how "It was nothing for a teacher to come to your house, call. They communicated!! They made their little home visits, it was more like family ". R.C.'s teacher "cared about all her students" and was "like a mother to all of them". Another respondent mentioned how she even at one point as a very young student, mistook her teacher for her mother. In many ways, however, this kind of relationship that these students had to their elementary teachers can

be observed in many classroom, of all kinds, across the nation today. What served as an indication of this type of relationship being intentional on the teacher's part was the responses I got from some educators themselves. One former educator in Apex, MS, Mrs. E.H. said:

The kids knew that during that 45-55 minutes, they were in an environment where they were safe, no one was going to attack them or hurt them in any kind of way. Because we had that environment, we were able to do a lot of things that other teachers were not able to do because I knew my students and my students knew me.

She intentionally created an environment where her student knew they at she loved and respected them and was in turn able to push them to great lengths in their study of biology and chemistry at the middle school level.

All of the teachers interviewed mentioned how they often times had to care for the needs of their students both in and outside of the classroom. They would find ways to help those who did not have enough clothes or food at home. Mrs. R.H. said that she tried to remain "*very sensitive*" and respond when she could to the needs of her students. But she was also very careful not to embarrass them. One student in particular she realized was in need of clothing, so she had the student perform odd jobs around the classroom in order to "earn" some of the things her teacher gave her. Mrs. R.H. recalls her own teachers at Small Stone trying to do the same thing. Others, like Mrs. A.B. described their teachers as "*loving*", "*kind*", and "*gentle*", but also very stern.

Community/Church

All of the former students and educators reported having a strong relationship with parents and community members. In all of the rural schools represented, students recalled that there were a small number of teachers who were actually from or permanently resided in the communities they taught. Most boarded with families in the area and often would return to their homes on the weekends and holidays. When asked if some of the teachers in these small communities attended church with their students, most often the answer was no. This was, in many cases due to some of the teachers being members of other denominations that may not have been represented in their communities. For example, if a teacher was Methodist and the only church in the community was Missionary Baptist, she or may try to attend a church in an adjacent community or back at home. This did not deter the church from opening its doors to the schools though. When the Small Stone school burnt down in 1949, it was the neighborhood church that allowed the school year to continue by permitting classes to be held in its sanctuary and lodge. Also, Mrs. R.H. recalls how the men of the community and church would provide wood for the school burner during the winter. They would decide to meet at the school on a certain day and cut wood for the wood-burning heater in the building. Many teachers and students recalled how invested their parents were in the neighborhood school and the work of the teachers.

In the urban district of Apex, however, most of the Black teachers resided in the city. Therefore they often attended church with their students and saw them at activities and functions outside of school and on the holidays. Mr. E.H. said this about herself and

her principal:

See that's a big difference between then and now....I had a very good relationshipone thing that worked for me, I guess I got this from my principal, she was very active in the church in her church. She knew a lot of the kids and a lot of the kids parents by attending the churches. And I was pretty active in my church.....A lot of the teachers that actually taught me, lived in the community and knew us and knew our parents, and after I taught for a while a lot of the children that I was getting. I taught either their mother or their father or I knew their grandmother through church. So it got a whole lot easier for me.....So we got to build that way...

Ms. R.C., also a student from Apex said that many of her teachers knew her parents, especially her father who was a carpenter and built most of their houses in the city. In many cases, teachers would be from Apex, and teach out in some of the rural areas like Small Stone during the week. With Apex being an urban area, they were fortunate to have a large portion of their teaching population residing and being apart of the city.

Parents

In the case of the Small Stone rural school, and perhaps the case of many segregated Black schools, it was the parents who advocated for the creation of the school in the first place. Their concern extended beyond making sure that their children's behavior to did not reflect badly on their parenting. As was stated in the introduction, the Small Stone School was established in 1920 as a one story, one-teacher type Rosenwald School.

Parents petitioned the district and the Rosenwald Fund for assistance in building a school. Though received financial assistance from the district (\$100), whites (\$200), and the Rosenwald Fund (\$400), they still had to raise \$1200 amongst themselves to build the small school. They also donated the land upon which the school still stands today (not the original building). Teachers and students recalled the strong support that school received from Parent-Teacher Association/Organizations (PTA/O).

The educators also recalled how concerned the parents were about the behavior of their children within the classroom. Mrs. R.H. said:

Just about all of them were quite interested in their children's behavior...it was much better then I think than it is now to some extent.... You had to go to school, and as they say 'not show out!'. They wasn't gonna have that". Mrs. L.A. of Small Stone also mentioned parental concern about behavior, "If I had problems with them at school, they come home, the parents would take care of it. We didn't have an problems like we have today.....

This emphasis on the student behavior and discipline was a theme that continued to surface during discussions with former teachers.

Chapter 8: Emergent Themes

Discipline

Some of the educators interviewed prided themselves on their sternness and low tolerance for misbehaving students. Others praised their former teachers for their no-nonsense approach to discipline and classroom management. The practice of corporate punishment was also common within pre-integration classrooms. Mrs. E.H. had this to say about her former science teacher and his influence on her own style of classroom management:

He cared about us....now you talk about tough, he was tough as nails. Oh, he didn't put up with any foolishness. When you went in his classroom, there was order....and he was the kind that when the bell rang and he would close his door, he would lock the door, so if you came in late, you didn't get to come in and you had to sit outside the door. So they didn't want to have to deal with him, so they would just sit there and not be late anymore.It taught us responsibility, it was just a lot of things he taught us that translated to when I started teaching.

Others talked about how they appreciated, and even admired, some of their most strict teachers. They mentioned how they remembered how much these teachers cared about their students and how well they grasped the material. Mrs. W.G. mentioned one teacher in particular whom she credits for helping her remember the Gettysburg Address:

Ms. Gladys Clark. She took time to talk to us and stuff, but she also

disciplined us. I remember her whipping me with that leather belt right across my back because we had to learn the Gettysburg Address and I got so far down into that I couldn't go no further. And she "whap, whap, whap". And I'm thinkin' 'why in the devil is she whipping me because I don't know this' (laughs). But...I still can start some of it off today (proceeds to recite Gettysburg Address).....And I guess its because she nailed it into me that day, it stuck. It stuck.

Mrs. W.G. went on to explain how she admired the way in which Mrs. Gladys carried herself and how she wished to model herself after her:

But she was a nice lady. And I always thought she dressed real nice and she used to have this nice smelling perfume on. I remember smelling and saying "oooh she smell so good all the time". And I sort of thought I wanted to be like her, but I guess I'm sort of teaching in a different way. But, I just liked her for some reason.

These teachers required the utmost respect and discipline from their students, but they also appeared to genuinely care about their needs and future outcomes.

Process of Integration

Nearly all of the participants, except four, eventually taught in or attended desegregated schools. Though the ruling of *Brown vs. Board of Education* was decided in 1954, schools in Mississippi were not completely desegregated until the early 1970s. Many participants recalled this tumultuous process and expressed the sense of loss they felt after having to integrate or consolidate.

Mrs. R.C. recalled how she struggled in the integrated setting she entered during middle school. When asked about her experience she said:

And when I think back to being in segregated schools, I know they say ‘time bring about a change’, what I was taught in the segregated schools, it stuck with me. I still remember that stuff better than the teaching that I got after the schools integrated...I kind of feel like I caught on better when we were segregated than after we were integrated.

Many students were given the option to integrate before the state mandated that all schools desegregate. Most recall both them and their parents being apprehensive about integration. Mrs. A.B. recounted how her parents reacted to her being selected to be one of the first Black students to attend the large white school in her county. Her principal:

... the majority of us chose not to. I remember the minister, Jason Killingsworth, coming to my parents home and encouraging them, you know, “let you children go.” And my mom said, ‘well, I can make them go but I can’t make them learn. And I don’t know what the circumstances may be for them, so I am not going to force them to, but if they want to they can.’ But many of us did not. But of course 1969 was the last year of the segregated schools.

She went on to explain how her principal was treated at the new school and how her old school was treated upon integration:

The principal of the school became what we called ‘the glorified janitor’. His responsibilities were reduced, and his ability to have any say in

anything was not there....

Mrs. C.R. was selected to be one of the first Black teachers to work at the white school closest to the Small Stone community in the 1960s. She recalls how she was not permitted to teach her class on her own but had to have a white supervisor in the room at all times. This measure was put in place in response to demands by the white parents in the community. Mrs. C.R. was eventually dismissed from this experiment and went on to teach in the still-segregated school located in the county seat. She recalled how the district maintained a segregated school system (despite state demands) by permitting black students to be bused to the white school at a certain hour for one or two courses.

Others recalled feelings of powerlessness they experienced when they were placed in integrated settings. For R.C. she felt that *“it was like they took over our schools!”* Prior to the integration of schools in the state and region, many segregated Black schools in urban areas offered a number of extracurricular activities to students (ex. band, basketball, etc.) They also hosted their own homecoming and coronation ceremonies. Students would vote on class officer, queens and kings, etc. At the onset of integration, many of these opportunities were lost as African American students were now the minorities in there learning settings. Mrs. W.G. recalls an incident that took place during her last year between Black students and their white principal:

WG: Now when we did change and went to WL (former segregated white school), it was hard for the black kids out there too. You know like they have elections of the King and Queen or the wittiest or something like that for the yearbooks? Well we couldn't win nothin'!! And it was because we was out

numbered.

GG: Yeah, ya'll was the minority.

WG: Yeah we was the minority. So it was a group of us- and I was in it, I don't know how many of us it was. Here we go up to the office to talk to the principal, say "We wanna talk. We'll never be able to be a queen or win any kind of class favorite because we outnumbered!!!" He didn't care. He said "Well that just the way things work now!!!" So he didn't give a stew, that was old Mister.....I can't remember what that mans name was. But he didn't, they didn't really care if we was winning any kind of class favorite or anything.

In both Apex and Small Stone, and some other surrounding communities, African American students were required to integrate into the formerly all white schools and their schools were eventually either abandoned or turned into lower level schools. The Small Stone School became a Head Start in the 1980s and eventually was abandoned, then refurbished and turned into a community center by alumni. The segregated school in Apex is today an elementary school and still bears its original name. According to Mrs. A.B, the small rural school she attended, located about 20 minutes from Apex, was abandoned:

Once integration took place our school was closed, and I understand our books were burned and our pictures and portraits were trashed. And that school was not used for some time. Now it has been renovated and it is the elementary school.

Former teachers and students mourned not only the loss of the school structure, but the relative comfort of their teachers and peers.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

In many ways the ideals set forth by early 20th century African American scholars and institution builders were not realized in the urban and rural schools represented in this study. But it is evident that some educators made an honest effort to reach these ideals with the limited resources they had. The debate between the effectiveness of a liberal arts or an industrial education fell short light of the inability of many of the rural schools to provide an adequate version of either. However, as was revealed in the interview responses, many teachers stressed the importance of literacy and receiving an education in general. They encouraged those whom they thought capable to go to college. These teachers drew a connection between education and freedom and thus instilled in their students the importance of achieving academically.

W.E.B. Dubois and Carter G. Woodson's vision of an African and African American centered curriculum has yet to be achieved in most classrooms today. Though the accomplishments of notable African Americans were celebrated at designated times, discussions on mid-20th century race relations rarely took place within the classrooms represented. With Mississippi being one of the most hostile environments for the Civil Rights Movement in general, teachers and students would be taking a great risk by discussing such topics openly, or engaging in activism. However, many like Mrs. R.B. from the Delta and Mrs. R.H. did take that risk.

The teachers represented in these responses endeavored to create positive learning environments for their students despite the dire conditions. They have been described not only as stern disciplinarians but as caring individuals who were concerned about their

students achievement. Parents within these communities, though they were often less educated than the children they were sending to school, sacrificed their money, time, and labor to establish and maintain the schools their children attended. These schools were the pride of their communities because of these sacrifices.

Chapter 10: Limitations

The fifteen teachers and students who participated in this study do not capture the experiences of the thousands of African Americans who attended segregated schools in Mississippi. They can, however, provide a glimpse into the ways in which the philosophies of early Black 20th century educational scholars manifested themselves in some rural and urban schools in the state. Future studies should include and recruit more participants from other regions of the state (Central, North, and Gulf, specifically). This study serves as a reference for future projects that endeavor to illuminate the teaching practices of African American educators in pre-integration Mississippi. It can provide a foundation for a project that considers the teaching practices of Black educators in the state today and perhaps the connection between pre and post integration teachers.

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